# A Phenomenological Study of Identity Construction among Military Officers Promoted from the Middle Ranks to the Roles of Senior Leaders

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## Dedication

To my wife, Veronica, who provided me with tremendous support and love during our eleven happy years of marriage and who gave me the energy to complete my doctoral studies; and to my parents, Patrick and Priscilla, who inspired me throughout my twenty-nine year military career. Thank you so much. I could not have done this without you.

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Finally, I acknowledge the men and women of the U.S. armed forces, particularly the budding senior leaders who run the Army, as the saying goes. These senior leaders handle tremendous responsibility and have dedicated themselves wholly to the defense of our great Nation. I hope that this study adds to the professional domain of knowledge about helping prepare future senior leaders for the challenges they will face.

**Abstract of Dissertation**

A Phenomenological Study of Identity Construction among Military Officers Promoted from the Middle Ranks to the Roles of Senior Leaders

This phenomenological study investigated the lived experience of identity construction during a military officer's role change from the middle ranks to senior leader. This role change encompassed education, training, and work experiences over the course of several years between the initial selection for advancement and the first official duty assignment in a senior leader position. The inquiry focused on active duty U.S. Amy officers in the rank of colonel or lieutenant colonel (promotable) and the construction of their identities as senior leaders during this multi-year process. The officers' narratives provided insight into how the role change affected their self-concepts and how they coped with the challenges of ascending to a more complex environment with greater responsibilities to both the Army and the Nation.

The population for this phenomenological inquiry was purposefully sampled using a criterion-based selection. Interviews with the resulting twelve participants were conducted in accordance with Seidman's (2013) three-interview method. Through applying Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method of data analysis, eleven themes emerged, resulting in a composite textural and structural description that presented the meanings and essences of the identity construction experience.

The following three conclusions resulted from the analysis. The first was that the identity transition expected by the Army is only partially occurring due to a combination of organizational and cultural barriers. The second conclusion was that assuming the

mantle of senior leadership is an especially human endeavor, driven more by relationships, character, and mentoring than skills and competencies. The third conclusion was that the study of identity construction requires a more nuanced appreciation toward ambivalent reactions to the work situation and the various ways one may exit. Implications include potential enhancements to Kira & Balkin's (2014) model, recommendations for the Army's senior leader development process, and the potentially greater use of the Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method to capture data regarding the development of Army leaders through key role changes.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Overview of the Study

Turner (1990) defined *role change* as "a change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries" (p. 88). Role changes reflect a structuralist/functionalist perspective where it is assumed that a change in role naturally brings about a commensurate change in self-concept and behavior (Ashforth, 2011). Types of role changes can include the creation or elimination of a role, a "quantitative" adjustment such as the increase in duties and responsibilities, or a "qualitative" adjustment such as modifications to components of the role or reinterpretations of the role's meaning (Turner, 1990, p. 88).

If the role change is significant enough that one's self-concept is altered, a *transition* would take place. Bridges (1991, 2009) describes *transitions* as a three-phase process of letting go of one's old ways, going through an "in-between time when the old is gone but the new isn't fully operational," and "making a new beginning" (2009, pp. 4-5). These three phases overlap, such that the old is not necessarily fully dispensed with and the new not necessarily fully embraced (Bridges, 2009, p. 5). Ibarra (2005), suggested that the middle, or *liminal*, phase is characterized by ambiguity, confusion, and conflict, a "psychological state that occurs when a person loses or rejects an important aspect of the self without replacement in the same social domain" (p. 6). Individuals are as likely to either try to rush forward to embrace the new self-concept or hold on to the old one (Bridges, 2009, p. 41). Failing to resolve the conflict can lead to stress (Marcusson & Large, 2003).

One example of a role change results from *promotion*, "the act of moving someone to a higher or more important position" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Promotions can bring about both qualitative and quantitative changes to one's responsibilities (Jacobs & Jaques, 1990). Promotions to higher levels of leadership can involve transitions from one form of leader identity to another, more complex, one (Day & Harrison, 2007; Jacobs & Lewis, 1992) which may include greater emphasis on relational and collective roles (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Promotions accompanied by physical relocation, significant assumptions of new duties and responsibilities, and personal life changes can both increase the difficulty of the transition and reduce its valence, meaning how attractive or desirable the new role appears (Ashforth, 2001). Thus, inherent in accepting promotion from lower-level to higher-level forms of leadership is reaching that "point where different skills, relationships and styles are required" (Ibarra, 2004).

A possible outcome of a role change is a commensurate change in one's working identity (Ibarra, 2003). An *identity* is a "set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3). When an individual enacts the identity "I am an A," 'A' expresses a *role* that is a negotiated understanding between individuals (Ashforth, 2001). Assumption of a leader identity is understood as how individuals reach the conclusion that "Yes, I am a leader" (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009, p. 234), and the leader's salience and commitment to that identity is related to leader performance (e.g., Burke & Rietzes, 1981). Although individuals may experience *identity change* regularly over the course of one's life (Burke & Stets, 2009; Ibarra, 2003), the process of a deliberate assumption is called *identity*

*construction*, or "how an individual self-defines him- or herself changes in the context of organizational life" (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006, p. 237).

From a developmental standpoint, identity construction is a difficult challenge that has been identified as a weakness in leader development programs (Day & Harrison, 2007). Also, a resulting identity may not actually be a desirable one. For example, Johnson et al. (2012) showed how the assumption of a new leader identity can either be positive (e.g., resulting in transformational leadership behaviors) or negative (e.g., bringing about abusive leadership). Furthermore, identities are ordinarily resilient and resist change (Burke & Stets, 2009), and thus identity changes may be incomplete (Ashforth, 2001) or not undertaken at all (Ibarra, 2005).

Scholars have called for more research into the nature of identity construction in response to role changes. Ibarra (2005) noted that there had been limited research done on how individuals resolve challenging identity conflicts during transitions. Ibarra and Barbelescu (2010) called for empirical research into how the presence of multiple identities may lead to confusion or concerns over inauthenticity. Petriglieri and Stein (2012, p. 1230) argued that the "pace of organizational life" can lead to a counterproductive over-adaptation of one's self-concept, and that more research is needed into understand processes by which individuals assume desired self-concepts and dispensed with undesired ones. Kira and Balkin (2014) expressed concerns that the literature has overemphasized research into misalignment of one's identity with one's working environment and not enough on how they interact when aligned.

Entry into senior leadership of the U.S. military offers an excellent context to study the relationships between role changes and identity construction. The role change from

*mid-career officer* to *senior leader* is significant. Up to the point of reaching mid-career, the dominant patterns of an officer's career involved what the military calls *direct* and *organizational* leadership, exercised over small military units with well-defined duties and responsibilities, administrative functions that are similarly well-defined and reside deep within the overall military hierarchy, or as junior staff officers responsible for managing a well-bounded portfolio within one's established area of expertise (U.S. Army, 2012). While mid-career officers can serve as spokespersons, subject matter experts, or key figures, they do not represent or lead the military as a whole. Those functions are reserved for the military's senior leaders who, along with leading the armed forces to victory over the nation's enemies, must embody the military's professionalism, abiding by its calling to serve the nation and respect civilian authority (Snider, 2012a).

The military exercises a selection process that assesses its leaders' demonstrated performance and displayed potential for service at higher levels of leadership. Those selected are conferred both higher rank and the authorities and responsibilities, both legal and moral, that come with it. Yet, as explained by Jacobs and Jaques' (1991) stratified systems theory, this progression does not represent a linearly scaled increase of such authorities and responsibilities over time. Rather, it occurs via a sequence of dramatic role changes (Turner, 1990) that encourage military members to undergo commensurate transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) to new working identities (Ibarra, 2003, 2005). Role change without the accompanying transition is problematic for both individuals and organizations, as Bridges (2009) showed how transitions "start with an ending" and that failure to understand the "letting-go" of the old self will interfere with the

ability to gain the new (p. 7). The results can include reduced performance in the new role, increased stress, and possible burnout (Ashforth, 2001; Bridges, 2009).

However, transitions are not necessarily discrete phenomena tied to an identifiable change event. Schlossberg's *4S* model (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) depicts transitions as continuous cycles whereby individuals assess the situation, their self-concepts, their supporting relationships, and their strategies for coping and adjusting the situation. The model does not suggest a progression in the sense that these assessments lead individuals along a pre-determined desired path, rather the cycle can induce negative influences such as one's own liabilities and losses of interpersonal relationships (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). This study is focused on how new senior officers undergo such transitions as a result of changes in role from mid-career officership. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to create a better understanding of the experience of identity construction as a result of changing roles from mid-career officer to senior military leader upon assumption of their initial position of senior leadership.

## Statement of the Problem

From the U.S. military perspective, the shift from mid-career officer to senior leader is significant, representing the role change from direct and operational leadership to strategic leadership (U.S. Army, 2013). Approximately over the course of their first twenty years of service, mid-career officers have successfully performed as small unit leaders (e.g., platoon leader or company commander with authorities and responsibility to manage personnel and resources within in well-bounded suborganization), unit staff officers (e.g., officers with specific functional responsibilities such as operations officer or logistics officer within a well-bounded suborganization), or action officers (e.g., junior staff officers

with relatively narrow and fixed responsibilities within a high-level headquarters). They have developed working identities based on the nature of the direct and operational leadership tasks they performed, the working relationships they have established, and their working life histories (e.g., events and experiences) (Ibarra, 2003). The U.S. Army (2012) views role change to senior military leadership as a natural progression where authorities and responsibilities expand, although success at senior leader positions requires the exercise of potentially different conceptual, interpersonal, and technical competencies (e.g., visioning, negotiating, and systems understanding) from before (Gerras, 2010). Yet, assumption of the first assignment in a strategic-level position can be very disruptive should officers find themselves in military organizations unlike any they had previously experienced or where they cannot rely on their previous self-concepts to handle the greater responsibilities.

The role change to senior leader is initiated through the confluence of three separate events, commonly occurring in the following order – (1) selection for attendance at a senior professional military education (PME) program (CJCS, 2011), (2) selection for promotion to senior rank (i.e., colonel or Navy captain) (U.S. Army, 2005), and (3) assignment to positions designated for senior leaders (U.S. Army, 2010). While events (1) and (2) may occur in reverse order based on unrelated human resource considerations, event (3) normally occurs last. Once exercising the roles of senior leaders, these officers can expect to be re-assigned, approximately every two years, often to completely different parts of the military organization. Understanding the initial experiences of the transition to senior leader can provide an important lens with which to understand the on-going role change.

Ashforth (2001) suggested that newcomers to a role often frame their identity development according to the duration of their role occupancy, and that time compression can contribute to "incomplete role-learning and personal change" (p. 231). For the U.S. military, the assumption of a senior leader identity is viewed as extremely important for maintaining the military's professional standing, abiding by its calling to serve the nation and sustain the trust and respect of civilian authority (Snider, 2012a). However, Snider (2012b) states that a recent spate of high-profile ethical and competency failures among several senior U.S. military leaders indicates growing moral corrosion within the officer corps as a whole and raises questions regarding their identity development. Vermeesch (2013, p. 2) summarizes the implications:

> The threat of loss of trust is significant by itself, and is compounded by corrosion of professional identity in the segment of the officer corps entering its tenure as senior leaders. As the stewards of the profession, these leaders are now inhibiting their own ability to develop the future of the profession and socialize the next generation of soldiers and leaders.

In calling for corrective action, Snider (2012b) said, "the development of moral character and military competence are inextricably intertwined not only in battlefield effectiveness, but also developmentally through right understanding and living out of the services' ethics" (p. 3). Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey vowed, "If we really are a profession – a group of men and women who are committed to living an uncommon life with extraordinary responsibilities and high standards – we should want to figure it out" (Shanker & Bumiller, 2012).

But what constitutes the identities desired by the military of its leaders? Oh and Lewis (2008) stated that in addition to competent warfighters, senior leaders also must

serve as "executives, soldier-scholars, and soldier-diplomats … because they influence the ability of military leaders to mobilize for and execute wars effectively" (p. 657). A task force commissioned by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS, 2013a) developed a set of six "desired leader attributes" for senior officers across all the U.S. military services. Among them were abilities to respond to surprise and uncertainty, manage change, making ethical decisions, and understanding the security environment and contributions of all elements of national power (e.g., diplomatic, informational, economic, as well as military).

However, establishing such attributes does not bring about their automatic inculcation as changed identities. Ashforth (2001) showed that there are many factors that affect how completely identity changes occur, such as the individuals' incumbent self-concepts, the context and environment, and interactions with others within those contexts. It is also not necessarily a quick or direct transition according to Ibarra (2003), who said "we would like to think that we can leap directly from a desire for change to a single decision that will complete our *reinvention*. As a result, we remain naïve about the long, essential testing period" (p. 12, emphasis original).

Nor are the prescribed attributes necessarily the ones most desired. As Learmonth and Humphreys (2011) argue, prescriptions of identities expressed from organizational leaders take an inherently positive view and "effectively excludes many common experiences of work and identity formation" such as dissensus and conflict (p. 427). They argue that while leaders may view identity-developing experiences such as whistleblowing, routine forms of resistance, disidentification, and social networking as negative, they may contribute constructively to a desirable individual leader identity. As Snider (2012b)

assessed during the rise in attention given to the publicity over sexual harassment in the U.S. Army, it is better to develop officers to be whistleblowers rather than "careerist bystanders" who passively allow unprofessional conduct.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to create a better understanding of the lived experience of changing roles from mid-career officer to senior military leader upon assumption of their initial position of senior leadership. This research specifically sought to understand the identity change challenges facing nascent senior leaders having assumed their initial roles at senior military leaders. The study, which was at the individual level of analysis, contributed to the body of contextual knowledge in the transitions and identity transition literature through its focus on the role change from middle management to senior leadership.

This research had two primary objectives. First, the study enhanced understanding for practitioners and scholars about the experience of identity construction incurred during a major phase in a military officer's career, at the point of entry into senior leadership positions. The focus was specifically not on the PME program and its prescribed identity construction activities as this study is not intended to serve as a program assessment. However, participants in the study offered perspectives specifically derived from their PME experience that carried implications for the practice of military leader development. Second, the study revealed the lived experience of role entry into the first post-PME assignment. It offered a greater understanding of the internalization of the new role identity against retained salience and commitment to old mid-career identities (Stryker & Serpe,

1982) and what resources available to the officer through the role change experience were most salient in that identity construction (Schlossberg, 1981a).

These objectives were encapsulated in the following research question: *What is the experience of leader identity construction when undergoing a role change from a mid-career leader role to a senior leader role in the context of a professional military career?* A key subquestion of the research was: *What types of resources were used and how were they used?*

## Significance of the Study

This research offered contributions to knowledge for both scholars and practitioners alike. For scholars, the findings helped bridge a contextual gap on the experiences of undergoing role changes by researching the identity construction of mid-career officers as they move to roles of senior leadership. It specifically furthered the recent work by Kira and Balkin (2014) who proposed a theoretical model of identity construction and called for empirical study. As such, the study augmented knowledge about identity conditions during role changes in general. Additionally, the focus on the mid-career to senior leadership transition contributed to the literature on leader development programs for executive-level leaders (Ashforth, 2001).

Enhanced understanding of this topic may help Army leaders improve the harmonization of education and work experience to better foster identity construction among its future senior leaders (Day & Harrison, 2007; Pearce, 2007). It may also aid in the identification and removal of organizational or cultural barriers that might inhibit such construction. PME practitioners may similarly benefit from this research as the greater understanding of senior leader identity construction may contribute to the development or

improvement of its academic and extra-curricular activities. The greater understanding of role entry during the initial post-PME assignment may help those respective organizations develop more suitable and effective on-boarding programs.

## Conceptual Frame and Theoretical Perspective

Currently, the literature linking identity construction with leader development is diverse (Carroll & Levy, 2010). One stream has followed a functionalist trend (e.g., Conger, 1992; Lord & Hall, 2005) rooted in experiential learning theories (e.g., Kolb, 1984) that treat identity as a 'thing' to be built within a leader through experiences, ultimately bringing about new self-concepts (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Another is the constructivist stream (e.g., Kegan, 1982; Van Velsor & Drath, 2003) that analogizes identity construction with overall adult development, where the purpose of leader development is to determine at what stage one resides and to build a path to the next stage (Carroll & Levy, 2010). *Social constructivists* are more apt to pursue "emancipatory" identity construction in which individuals are exposed to the dominant discourses that drive their behaviors so to pursue alternative discourses (Carroll & Levy, 2010). This study may contribute to the discourse among these streams through the greater understanding of the lived experiences of identity construction employing their leader development activities as an available resource (Schlossberg, 2011).

As shown in the conceptual frame diagram in Figure 1.1, a psychological lens of "transitions" will be used to understand the relationship between a work role change and the subsequent changes in one's work identity.

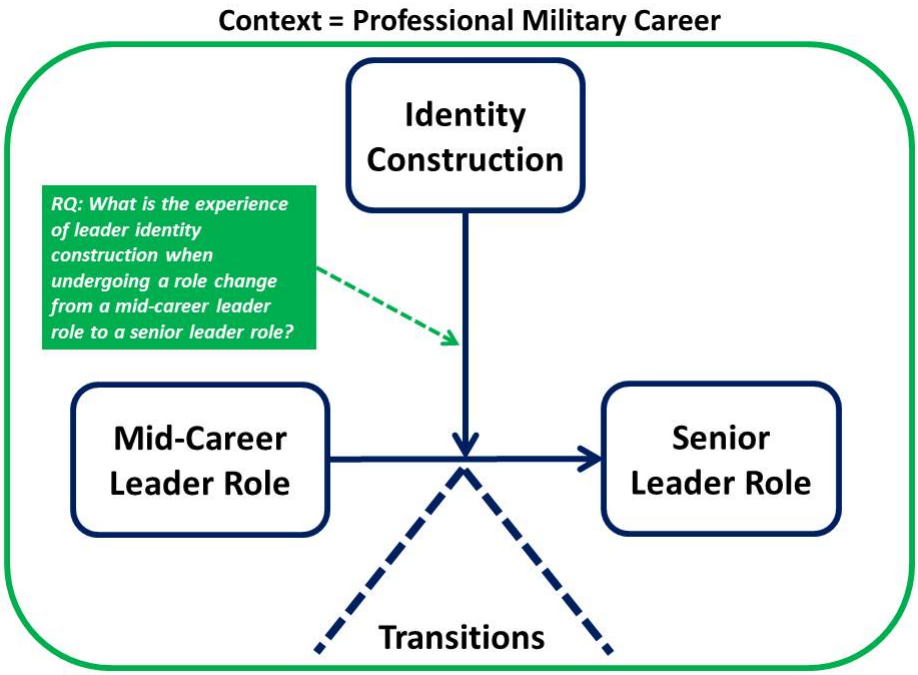


*Figure 1.1.* Conceptual frame

Scholars have used the terms *change* and *transition* in different ways, with some treating them as synonymous (see Bridges, 2009, pp. 6-7), so it was important to clarify the terms used in this study. The literature review will provide further background on the choices of definitions used. Bridges (2009) uses the terms to represent a single discrete occurrence whereby a *change*, or triggering event, results in a *transition*, or subsequent psychological phenomenon with a multi-phase "process that people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the details of the new situation [that] change brings about" (p. 3). Instead of "change," Schlossberg (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) uses the term *trigger* to describe events that "set off" a transition (p. 67). She describes *transitions* as ubiquitous events (or non-events) that causes an "alters one's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions" (p. 70). Bridges' (2009) use of the terms was

multi-level, focused on individual and organizational changes and transition, whereby Schlossberg's model was focused at the individual level of analysis. Therefore, this study will employ Schlossberg's use of the terms *trigger* and *transition*.

Specifically for roles, Turner (1990) makes a similar distinction between *role change*, meaning changes with a role held, and *role transition*, the movement from one role to another. Ashforth (2001, p. 7), on the other hand, respectively uses the terms *intra-role transition* and *inter-role transition* to describe physical and psychological phenomena accompanying a change of role, eschewing the terms *change* or *role change* altogether. Although Ashforth (2001) focused his work on *inter-role transitions*, he also said that "theories of socialization, work adjustment, personal and role change, turnover, and so forth are relevant" to the study of intra-role transitions (p. 7). Additionally, the distinctions between intra-role and inter-role transitions can be unclear, sometimes requiring the need to establish clear role boundaries (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000). For example, Cousins (2004) uses the terms "role change" and "role transition" interchangeably when describing the elevation of social workers to social work supervisors, who retained clinical duties but saw them change (intra-role) while acquiring new supervisory ones (inter-role) and subsequently experiencing adjustments in their relationships with others. Because this study addresses a phenomenon involving both the physical or functional change in role imposed by the organization through promotions and re-assignment and the cognitive transition undergone by the individual, this study will include both and therefore follow the distinction made in Turner (1990) such that role change signifies functional or structural change while role transition addresses the cognitive. Thus, the arrow between the two role

constructs in the conceptual frame represents the imposed role change under which the transitions literature will be used as the theoretical lens.

The literature suggests that work-related role changes, whether in isolation (Ashforth, 2001; Bridges, 1991; Kira & Balkin, 2014; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006; Schlossberg, 2011) or in the context of an entire career (Demick, 1996; Ibarra, 2005), can bring about subsequent changes in identity (Ashforth, 2001; Hall, 2004; Ibarra, 2005). However, it is not a causal relationship such that the assumption of a new work role necessarily brings about a congruent change in identity (Ashforth, 2001; Kira & Balkin, 2014). Kira and Balkin (2014), in particular, suggest that there are many ways in ways an individual's identity changes in response to how it is perceived to be aligned or misaligned with the environment. In the case of misalignment, Bridges (1991, 2009) offers three undesirable outcomes that could result: (1) individuals hold on to the old ways, (2) individuals make incongruent decisions on what to keep and what to change leading to inconsistency and confusion, or (3) individuals disregard the old entirely and "the baby disappears with the bathwater" (p. 33). In the case of alignment, Kira and Balkin (2014) suggested the results can vary between *thriving*, which is desirable, or *withering* in which individuals limit themselves to work activities that make them comfortable, disregarding the rest to potentially the individual's and organization's detriment.

Although through the course of one's working life, career changes and identity co-evolve (Ibarra, 2005), the conceptual frame for this study focuses on a discrete but multi-event role change that might precipitate a change in identity (Bridges, 1991; Ashforth, 2001) and therefore the need for identity construction (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). This leads to the context of the research which is the identity construction

experience of new senior military leaders assuming their first assignment in a senior leader role. For most PME graduates, the role change comprises both the attainment of professional certification that alters the future career path and the physical relocation to a new duty station.

The significance of the context is that mid-career officers, who have served approximately twenty years already, have well-established identities as organizational leaders and staff officers. U.S. Army (2012) doctrine differentiates three levels of leadership. *Direct leadership* encompasses immediate supervisory responsibilities exercised on a person-to-person basis over small homogeneous units. Direct leadership is associated with junior officers and is therefore not relevant to this study. *Organizational leadership* involves planning, team-building, and synchronizing the efforts of a larger, heterogeneous unit. Senior PME students typically will have spent much of their prior careers serving in organizational leadership roles. The role of a senior military leader, on the other hand, is to exercise *strategic leadership*, defined as the:

> …process used by a leader to affect the achievement of a desirable and clearly understood vision by influencing the organizational culture, allocating resources, directing through policy and directive, and building consensus with a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous global environment which is marked by opportunities and threats (Gerras, 2010).

Attendance at senior PME, promotion to the rank of colonel, and assignment to a senior military leader position are commensurate with the shift of one's responsibilities from organizational leadership to strategic leadership. Senior PME curricula are designed to present and inculcate knowledge and skills that are associated with the assumption of

strategic leadership responsibilities. The nature of these responsibilities will be presented in Chapter 2.

## Summary of Methodology

The methodological approach employed a phenomenological qualitative research design. The phenomenon under exploration was on-going identity construction by recent graduates of a resident senior professional military education (PME) program serving in their initial utilization assignment. Phenomenological inquiry was selected for two reasons. First, identity construction is treated as a prescriptive and inductive aspect of PME, but the actual psychological and transcendental experience of undergoing identity construction was not well understood and may not follow the prescription. Although senior officers may exhibit the attributes, values, norms, and behaviors ascribed in U.S. military doctrine (e.g., CJCS, 2013a; U.S. Army, 2012), the process and experience of undergoing the role change from mid-career to senior leader was not. Consequently, it was not well understood how senior leaders develop their new identities and make them salient such that they were enacted continuously through the remainder of their careers.

Second, it was not appropriate to use other qualitative methods to achieve the desired understanding. Despite the existence of prescribed standardized career paths in its human resources doctrine, PME graduates underwent individualized and generally unique career patterns, even among traditional combat arms officers whose pre-PME experience involved very similar patterns of alternating unit leadership and staff positions. Upon PME graduation, these officers were well distributed across the force and their circumstances could not be easily bounded as would be necessary for a case study (Merriam, 2009). Since an officer's transition from mid-career to senior leadership was a uniquely human

experience that cannot be easily measured, phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman 2013) was the best approach.

Phenomenological inquiry involved data collection, data analysis, and contextualizing the essence of the experience. This study involved a population in the latter stages of role change to senior military leadership, meaning that they had recently completed a professional military education program and were serving in a suitable utilization position, which would normally be held for approximately a twenty-four month period.

The population was purposefully sampled using criterion-based selection targeting U.S. Army graduates of one senior PME program, the resident U.S. Army War College program held in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and comprised twelve new senior leaders (fifteen were originally identified, but three withdrew). For each participant, data collection began between the third and fifteenth month in their post-graduation assignment. This allowed participation from two graduating classes and prevented exclusion of students who were initially placed in additional training or temporarily holding assignments with limited responsibilities. Additional important criteria to support this inquiry included: active duty U.S. Army serving in a "competitive category" (e.g., excluding specialized officers such as military doctors, lawyers, and chaplains), not having remained at Carlisle Barracks (e.g., under the Army's senior leader stabilization program) and therefore having had to undergo relocation, and having assumed a qualitatively different duty position commensurate with assumption of senior leader responsibilities.

The data collection method was interview-based using Seidman's (2013) three-interview approach, and included both face-to-face and telephonic interviews depending

on the participant's availability, which was often unpredictable. The intent was to conduct the interviews over the course of a one- to two-week period for each participant, but this again varied based on availability. The first interview served the purpose of developing rapport and establishing the participants' focused life histories. The second interview detailed the lived experiences of the role change. The third and final interview permitted the participant to provide reflection on the meanings of their experiences.

Data analysis and contextualization was conducted using a combination of Moustakas' (1994) methodology for phenomenological qualitative studies and Saldaña's (2013) affective and process coding techniques. Moustakas' (1994) four core processes are epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis, which serve to take the knowledge collected from the interviews and "make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience" (p. 84).

## Limitations

This inquiry focused on the transition of a mid-career officer to senior leadership during their initial assignment to a position of senior leadership. The sample size of a phenomenological inquiry inhibited generalizing the results across wider populations but could allow generalization among specific groups (Creswell, 2013), such as active duty officers (e.g., U.S. Army) who have graduated from their service's resident senior PME program (e.g., the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania). It was neither assumed that generalization could be extended to the broader category of senior PME attendees (each program's student body includes at least 25% from sister services, Reserve and National Guard components, Department of Defense and other government agency civilians, and international fellows attending from around the world) nor other forms of

senior PME programs (e.g., distance education equivalent programs and War College fellowships).

Additionally, the research question relied on participants to be both introspective and retrospective on their experiences of undergoing the role change, which according to Bridges (2009) may include retention of some aspects of their old self-concepts while developing new ones. The results of the inquiry are interpretive and are predicated on the researcher‘s ability to correctly assemble and analyze the data.

There are also delimitations to this study. This research inquiry only focused on active duty U.S. Army Officers who completed senior PME and had fully assumed the duties and responsibilities of their first post-PME assignment in positions of senior military leadership.

## Definitions of Terms

The following contains definitions that were critical for the conduct of this phenomenological inquiry and derive from the Conceptual Frame. For the military context, the definition of *organizational leadership* was equivalent to the exercise of a mid-career leader role while *strategic leadership* was equivalent to the exercise of a senior leader role.

- *Competence* – “The ability to apply professional knowledge … in relation to the requirement inherent in a situation which … is uncertain and unpredictable” (Illeris, 2014, p. 115).
- *Identity* -- “set of meanings that define who one is when one is an occupant of a particular role in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person” (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3).

- *Identity change* -- "the process of questioning, and eventually disengaging from, an identity that is central to a person's sense of self, while at the same time exploring, and eventually adopting, one or more substitutes" (Ibarra, 2003, p. 3).
- *Identity construction* – "how an individual self-defines him- or herself changes in the context of organizational life" (Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006, p. 236).
- *Mid-Career Officer* – Officers holding the military ranks of major or lieutenant colonel (lieutenant commander or commander in the Navy) who are serving in positions exercising primarily organizational leadership responsibilities (CJCS, 2011, p. A-A-A-1).
- *Organizational leadership* -- "[I]nfluence several hundred to several thousand people. … [E]stablish policies and the organizational climate that support their subordinate leaders. … [E]xamples [include] setting policy, managing multiple priorities and resources, or establishing a long-term vision and empowering others to perform the mission" (U.S. Army, 2012, p. 2-5).
- *Role* -- "institutionalized or commonly expected and understood designation" in a social structure (Ashforth, 2001, p. 4).
- *Role identities* -- "'parts of self', internalized positional designations [that] exist insofar as the person is a participant in structured role relationships" (Stryker, 1980, p. 60).
- *Role change* -- "a change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries" (Turner, 1990, p. 88).

- *Role transition* -- “psychological and (if relevant) physical movement between sequentially held roles” (Ashforth, 2001, p. 7).
- *Self-Awareness* – “The extent to which people are conscious of various aspects of their identities and the extent to which their self-perceptions are internally integrated and congruent with the way others perceive them” (Hall, 2004, p. 154).
- *Senior Leader* -- Officers holding the military ranks of colonel or general officer (captain or flag officer for the Navy) who are serving in positions exercising primarily strategic leadership responsibilities (CJCS, 2011, p. A-A-A-1; Snider, 2012b, p. 30).
- *Strategic leadership* -- “First, … [i]nvolves a comprehensive assessment and interpretation of the external environment which, if interpreted effectively, is eventually aligned to the organization’s vision. … Second, [involves the] need to build consensus across a wide range of stakeholders to prepared make and execute decisions. Third … is about leading and managing change to include the need to build a strategy and to align resources and priorities to realize their vision” (Gerras, 2010, p. 3).
- *Transition* – “A transition can be said to occur if an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships” (Schlossberg, 1981a, p. 5).
- *Trigger* – “an event that sets off a transition” (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 67)

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to create a better understanding of the experience of identity construction as a result of changing roles from mid-career officer to senior military leader upon assumption of their initial position of senior leadership. This research sought to understand the identity change challenges facing nascent senior leaders as they underwent the transition to senior military leadership. The study, which was at the individual level of analysis, contributed to the body of contextual knowledge in the transitions and identity change literature through its focus on the role change from middle management to senior leadership.

### Organization of This Chapter

This literature review is presented to explore the constructs and context shown in the conceptual frame along with established interrelationships. I will explore each construct from underlying theory to application. First, I will discuss the role change from mid-career leader to senior leader. This begins with Turner's (1990) theory of role change, followed by a discussion of various conceptions of role change to higher levels within a hierarchical organization such as stratified systems theory (Jacobs & Jaques, 1991). Second, I will explore the literature on my theoretical lens of transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, 1981a. Third, I will explore identity construction, beginning with a primer on relevant aspects of identity theory stemming from its social interactionist roots (Burke & Stets, 2009), followed by work-related identity transition which encompasses "aspects of identity and self-definition that are tied to participation in the activities of work … or membership in work-related groups, organizations,

occupations, or professions" (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010, p. 266), and concluding with the recent literature on identity construction (Kira & Balkin, 2014; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). Finally, I will present the context of the study, the assignments, responsibilities, and expectations of U.S. military officers moving from their mid-career roles of organizational leadership (U.S. Army, 2012) to senior leader roles of strategic leadership (Gerras, 2010). This review concludes with some key inferences from the literature that will contribute to the methodology detailed in the next chapter.

**Researching the Literature**

Each of the major elements of the conceptual frame warranted research into traditional scholarly literature. However, the context also required pursuit of non-traditional scholarly literature such as military professional journals and commentaries.

I will discuss the traditional sources first. Under *role change* came: role entry, role exit, career management, career change, and life-span management (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2003). Under *transitions*, I derived the following search terms: reinvention, development and renewal (Bridges, 2009; Ibarra, 2003). Under *identity theory*, defined as is the body of knowledge related to understanding of all such manifestations related to identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000), I derived the following search terms: identity salience and commitment, identity interruption, identity threat, and identity transition. For the subordinate construct of *work-related identities*, I added the following: non-work identity and leader identity. Finally, for the purposes of setting the context within the scholarly literature, search terms also included: military professionalism, professional military education, and military leadership doctrine.

The scholarly literature search included peer-reviewed publications stretching back to the foundational works within the constructs in the conceptual frame. For the theoretical lens of transitions, this meant going back 35 years to its roots in counseling psychology and Schlossberg's (1981a) initial model of human adaptation. Role change required going back 25 years to Turner (1990). For social interactionism and identity theory, the search went back 35 years to the foundational works of Stryker (1980). Although there were related older works found (e.g., Stryker's use of G. H. Mead (1961a, 1961b)), I only brought them in if they were cited in the foundational works and necessary for explaining more contemporary concepts. My focus was on contemporary understandings of these theories, as much of the identity transition research was published within the past fifteen years (since 1999), while the transitions literature grew significantly in the 1990s.

Several academic databases available through the George Washington University library were used, including ABI/INFORM Complete, ArticlesPlus, Business Source Complete, Dissertations and Theses On-Line, Emerald Library, ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, the Surveyor book database, and GWU's license for the Web of Science. Of these, I used the Web of Science the most as it facilitated following scholarly conversations (Huff, 2009) forward to find the most recent journal articles. For similar reasons, I also used Google Scholar and Google Books to search book chapters and trace scholarly literature citing them. Google Scholar also provided access to working papers from the INSEAD Business School, some of which are cited in scholarly literature. I only included cited works in this study.

Although some scholarly literature includes theoretical and empirical studies in the military domain, most of the contextual material for this study came from military

professional organizations. Primary sources included the U.S. Army History and Education Center's Root Hall Library, who operates a separate ProQuest license tailored for its military audience; the online Joint Education Library (Internet address http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/) and U.S. Army Publications Library (Internet address http://armypubs.army.mil/doctrine/index.html) for U.S. military doctrinal publications releasable to the public; and various U.S. military scholarly journals and publication such as the National Defense University Press, which includes *Joint Force Quarterly*, the predominant joint military journal, and the U.S. Army War College Press, that includes *Parameters*, its primary quarterly journal focused on landpower issues, and occasional papers and opinion-editorials from the Strategic Studies Institute (Internet address http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil).

For military doctrine and official publications, I limited my search to currently active works regardless of date. Most doctrine undergoes biannual or triannual review, so older active works can still be regarded as current and relevant. Regarding military published studies and journal articles, I only searched the past five years for literature germane to the current context of the study. Where key terms differed in definition between the military doctrine and scholarly literature, I either used the scholarly definition or qualified the term as expressly "military." An example, was "military leader" whose definition in the doctrinal publications (e.g., U.S. Army, 2012) are intended to be prescriptive, reflecting what the Department of Defense and the military services desire or require of those upon which the title of leader is conferred. This differs substantively from the scholarly definition of 'leader' which attempts to describe skills, knowledge, attributes, or behaviors of leaders derived from theory and empirical study (e.g., Yukl, 2011).

## Description and Critique of the Scholarly Literature

### Role Change

This section is built on two major themes. The first theme is the nature of role change in the abstract, originating with Turner's (1990) general theory. The theoretical literature on role change is fairly limited compared to the accompanying role transition literature covered in the next section. The second theme concerns modeling of the differences between mid-career and senior leader roles, based largely on Jacobs and Jaques's (1991) stratified systems theory. Included in the review will be more contemporary conceptions of such differences in leader roles including Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson's (2007) strataplex theory of leadership skills, Yukl's (2011) conception of strategic leadership and executive teams, and the military application of stratified systems theory (e.g., Jacobs & McGee, 2001). The purpose will be to present the prescribed nature of a role change from mid-career to senior leadership within an organization. This will provide the foundation for the contextual discussions on military leaders given later, and the construction of interview questions to be presented in the methods chapter.

**Turner's definition**. Turner (1990) defined *role change* as a "change in the shared conception and execution of typical role performance and role boundaries" (p. 88). Types of role changes include the creation or elimination of a role, a "quantitative" adjustment such as the increase in duties and responsibilities, or a "qualitative" adjustment such as modifications to components of the role or reinterpretations of the role's meaning (Turner, 1990, p. 88). He gave examples such as how both advancing age and shifting cultural attitudes and demographics of older people changes the role of grandparent, and similarly

on changes of gender roles within family units. His impetus for understanding role change includes encapsulation of the role-person misfit, and the presence of cultural, structural, or technological conditions can bring about such a misfitting situation bringing about the need for individuals to re-negotiate their roles with others. Turner concluded his paper with a model to describe the process of recognizing the misfit of person and role and the renegotiation of the new role.

Although *role transition* literature subsumed much of the subsequent scholarship on role change (this will be discussed in the next section), several scholars directly applied Turner's model and theory at the collective level. Turner's (1990) exploration of age-based role change at the individual level of analysis was furthered by Mahoney (1994) at the macro level of analysis to understand how culture can manifest role change across a demographic. Turner's (1990) gender example was further by Meleis et al. (1996) in a broad study on conflicting work and family roles among low income nurses in Mexico. On the professional side, Raes et al. (2011) used Turner's theory to discuss the dynamics of role change and negotiation in a co-evolutionary sense between top management teams and their middle managers. The context of Raes et al. (2011) is useful as the structural roles of the participants (i.e., their positions) did not change, but their roles changed based on interactions with others.

Key to the orientation of this literature is how the discussion of role change "focuses on the outcome that the change produces" (Bridges, 2009, p. 7). In commenting on the functionalist orientation of roles, Lynch (2007) said that "the conceptual bridge between social structure and individual role behavior is the concept of expectations" and that roles "prescribe [an] expected behavior attached to a position" (p. 382). These expectations can

bring about the conditions of misfitting such that “actors evaluate their own role behavior and that of the other party against their role expectations” (Raes et al., 2011, p. 108). Consequently, in cases where a role change results from some factor or condition present or emerging within a social structure, the nature of the change sets expectations on the individual or, based on Mahoney (1994), individuals among an affected demographic group.

**Role change from mid-career to senior leader**. Any promotion, “the act of moving someone to a higher or more important position” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), within an organization can constitute a *role changing* event (Ashforth, 2001). However, promotions can vary such that the quantitative or qualitative adjustments may be small or imperceptible, such that the adjusted role appears to be a continuation of the past role, or much more significant where expectations change and different skills, relationships and styles are required (Ibarra, 2004). This subsection presents on literature concerning the latter case, where upward movement within an organization generally involves a role change due to clear and measurable changes in behaviors and expectations of the promoted individuals (Guillen & Ibarra, 2009). While the theories in this subsection consider all levels of an organization, the focus will be on defining the role change from what may be called “mid-career” (or middle management, e.g., Raes et al., 2011) to “senior” (or top management team, e.g., Raes et al., 2011) leadership.

Managers and leaders progressing to higher levels of an organization see both quantitative and qualitative increases in their skill requirements (Guillen & Ibarra, 2009). Guillen & Ibarra (2009) said that promotion into senior management “entails a shift from look at plans and proposals functionally to gaining a business-wide perspective and long-

term view" and that both interpersonal and conceptual skills must "coordinate and integrate all the organization's activities towards a common vision or objective" (pp. 4-5). Lord and Hall (2005) affirmed that attaining senior leadership requires "more complex and diffuse processes which often depend on other individuals or groups and which take much longer to produce observable results. Team-building skills are but one example of such skills" (p. 604).

Yukl (2011) summarized four determinants of organizational performance that top leaders of organizations endeavor to influence – adaptation to the environment, efficiency and process reliability, human resources and relations, and competitive strategy. He deduced two key responsibilities for top executives as *external monitoring* and *formulating a competitive strategy*. The former, also known as *environmental scanning* (see Callan, 1986), provides the necessary information about people, conditions, and activities in the environment that potentially affect the organization and its members (Yukl, 2011, p. 297). The latter involves the development of a strategy that aligns the organization (and its strengths and weakness) with the environment, effectively communicating it within and outside the organization, and implementing it (Yukl, 2011, p. 298).

However, middle-managers contribute to the above, so the change in roles from middle-management to senior management must be carefully differentiated. The next subsections present models that attempt to capture the delta in terms of skills and orientation requirements at different organizational levels.

***Stratified Systems Theory (SST)***. While noting that the term *stratified system* seems like an oxymoron, Jacobs and Lewis (1992) said that most organizational systems are "differentiated, with various specialized functions according to the differentiated parts"

(p. 15). Asserting that the "system's complexity must match the environmental complexity," SST describes how as environmental complexity increases, the system complexity must increase in kind. As applied to organizational theory, SST also describes how hierarchical levels translate to vertical differentiation of complexity (Jacobs & Jaques, 1990; Jacobs & Lewis, 1992).

According to Jacobs and Lewis (1992), "SST specifies that requisitely structured organizations have no more than six levels of effective management discretion and no more than seven levels of vertical differentiation of function" (p. 17). SST divides the seven levels into three domains of production, organizational, and strategic systems, depicted in Figure 2.1 based on Jacobs and McGee (2001), which is the most recent conceptualization. As the figure shows, Strata I-III represent "direct" supervisory levels, IV and V are considered the "organizational" domain, whereas Strata VI and VII comprise the "strategic" systems domain of leadership. This study will not concern itself with strata I-III.

The organizational domain encapsulates the functioning of "strategic business units" within a corporate structure, such as a product line or process. The time span reflects the scope of the leader's decisions and impact, which at the operational level comes at about two to five years. Leaders at the strategic systems level have a much longer time horizon, ten to twenty years, and concern themselves with broader functions such as corporate culture, greater external focus, and resource acquisition.

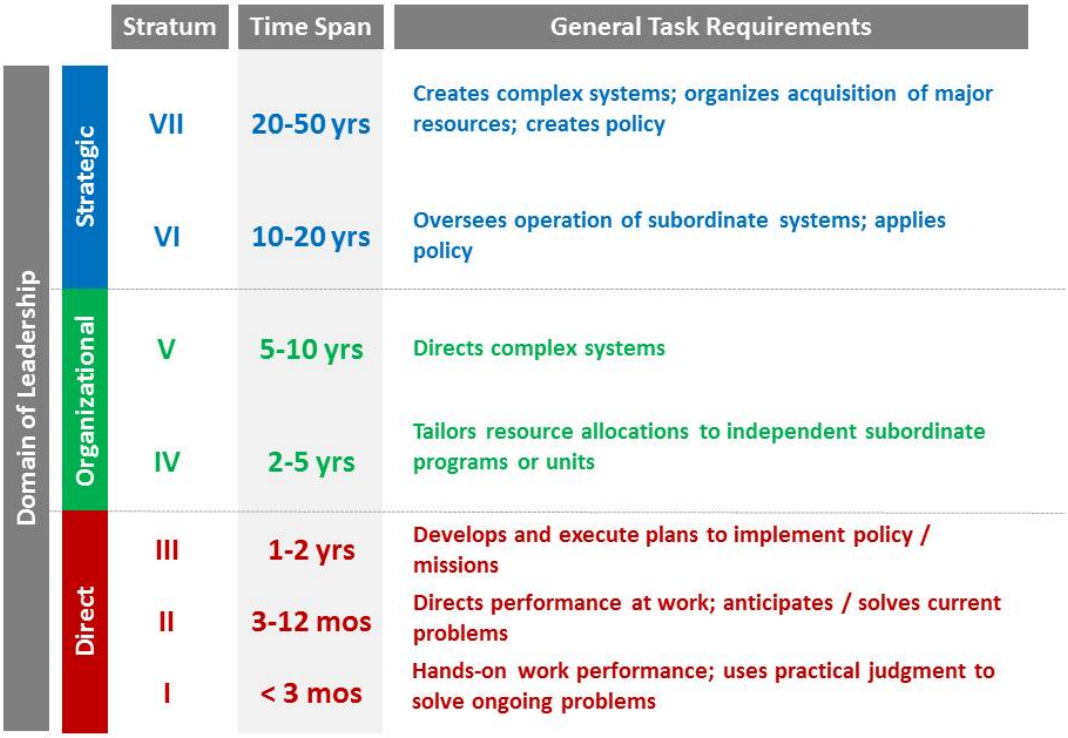


*Figure 2.1.* Stratified systems theory. Adapted from "Competitive advantage: Conceptual imperatives for executives" by T. O. Jacobs and M. L. McGee in *The nature of organizational leadership: Understanding the performance imperatives confronting today's leaders* by S. J. Zaccaro and R. J. Klimoski. Copyright 2001 by Jossey-Bass.

As Zaccaro and Horn (2003) noted in their review, SST has been used extensively to study leadership within the U.S. Army, especially ties between changes in the operational environment and leader performance. They also cited several quantitative and qualitative studies that provided supporting evidence that the move to senior leadership roles required the following capabilities and capacities different from junior roles -- "to (a) operate within relatively longer time frame, (b) be more involved in organizational policymaking, (c) interact more frequently with external constituencies, (d) engage in more

network development and network building, and (e) develop more complex cognitive maps than lower level leaders'' (p. 798). However, SST has not avoided criticism. Boal and Whitehead (1992), for example, argued that while SST succeeds in describing "leaders in bureaucratic organizations operating in a relatively stable environment" (p. 253), they charged that organizations modeled upon it were too slow to adapt to highly turbulent environments and did not explicate individual frame-breaking behaviors. They also argued that time is treated too linearly. Effectively acknowledging this criticism, Lewis and Jacobs (1992) suggested that one's abilities to satisfy the expectations of leadership at a higher strata was tied to one's capability to develop the capacity to handle more complex work.

***Leadership Strataplex Model***. Boal and Hooijberg (2001) acknowledged the utility of SST to capture the increased complexity and cognitive requirements as individuals assume higher-level roles in an organization. However Mumford, Campion, and Morgeson (2007) added that leadership skill requirements are often described as being stratified into a complex of multiple categories, and the degrees of importance across those categories change by organizational level. They therefore combined the two views into a *strataplex* that describes shifts in the skill requirements at different organizational levels. The strataplex is depicted in Figure 2.2, and provided below is the listing of the types of skills represented among the categories, in reverse order of importance in relation to senior leadership:

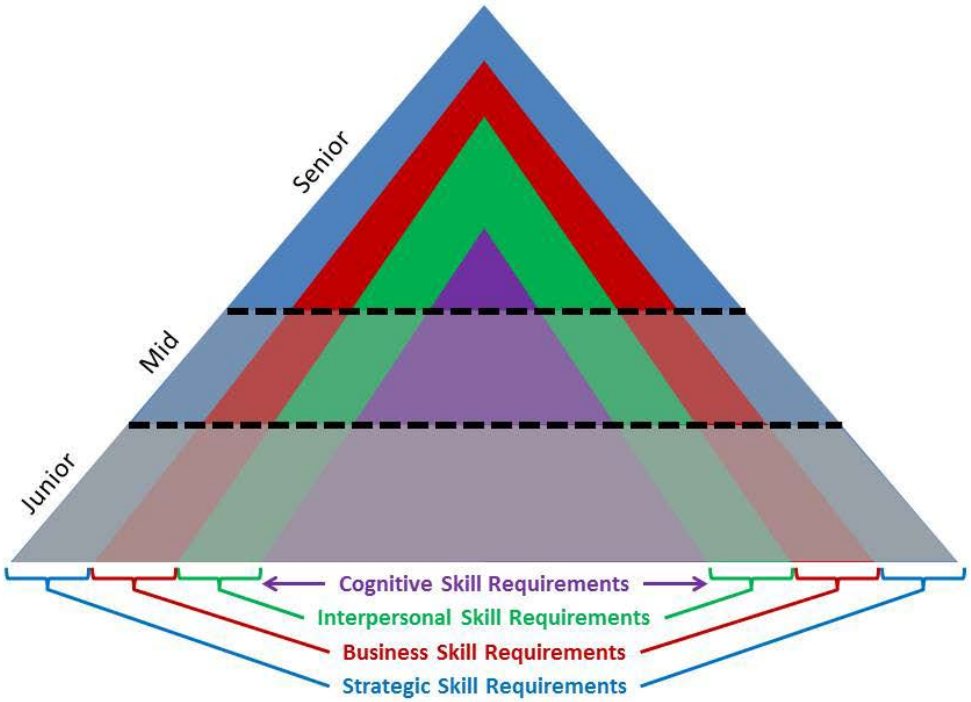


*Figure 2.2.* Leadership strataplex. Adapted from "The Leadership Skills Strataplex: Leadership Skill Requirements Across Organizational Levels" by T. V. Mumford, M. A. Campion, and F. P. Morgeson, 2007, *The Leadership Quarterly*, *18*(2), p. 156. Copyright 2007 by Elsevier.

- *Cognitive skills* -- speaking, active listening, writing, reading comprehension, active learning, and critical thinking
- *Interpersonal skills* -- Social perceptiveness, coordination, negotiation, and persuasion
- *Business skills* -- operations analysis, management of personnel resources, management of financial resources, and management of material resources
- *Strategic skills* -- Visioning, systems perception, system evaluation, identification of downstream consequences, identification of key causes,

> problem identification, and solution appraisal (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007, p. 159).

An important finding in the empirical research conducted to support the strataplex model was that while cognitive skills were associated more with direct leadership that the requirements for those skills did not decrease as individuals moved up the hierarchy. Rather, elevation to higher levels of leadership required quantitative increases in these skills along with the qualitative additions of other skill categories (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007, p. 164). Sosik, Gentry, and Chun (2012), for example, provided strong support for the increased quantitative and qualitative needs for interpersonal and strategic skills. However, they argued that the strataplex does not account for how leaders prioritize the skill sets they use in relationship to work performance (Sosik, Gentry, & Chun, 2012).

**Summary**. The above literature helps to model the role change that occurs as leaders move from mid-career to senior levels in a hierarchical organization. In the abstract, it provides a basis for understand how roles change, either through addition, deletion, or modification in a qualitative or quantitative sense. For the move to senior leadership, it provides this understanding across two dimensions – vertically as leaders are promoted from within to higher levels and horizontally according to different categories of skills required in the new role. The vertical move, modeled using Stratified Systems Theory, represents increased requirements to appreciate and work within higher levels of complexity, generally accompanied with the need to operate on longer time horizons. The horizontal dimension, explicated with the Leadership Strataplex Theory, helps describe the skill requirements that change quantitatively and qualitatively in the course of assuming

higher leadership, although the theory does not explain under what conditions or circumstances those skills are prioritized and used.

**Transitions**

In the context of adult development, a *transition* occurs when "an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (Schlossberg, 1981a, p. 5). Thus, a transition is not the change event itself. It is the psychological condition of undergoing the change (Ashforth, 2001; Bridges, 1991, 2009; Schlossberg, 1981a). For example, if one undergoes a change such as a promotion from line worker to first-line supervisor within an organization, the transition involves the individual's disengagement from the previous role of line worker and incorporating the new role as supervisor (Ashforth, 2001). The change is easy to define and express. The accompanying transition, however, is highly variable between and within individuals and depends heavily on context (Bridges, 1991, 2009). The same change might manifest itself differently (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) if it occurred when the individual differed in age, held a different occupation, or was located geographically elsewhere.

As applied to roles, scholars have differed in the ways that the behavioral and structural aspects of *change* is separated from the cognitive aspects of *transition*. Hence, it is important to clarify terms. Turner (1990) separates *role change*, meaning changes with a role held, and *role transition*, the movement from one role to another (p. 88). Ashforth (2001, p. 7), on the other hand, respectively uses the terms *intra-role transition* and *inter-role transition* to describe physical and psychological phenomena accompanying a change of role, eschewing the terms *change* or *role change* altogether. Although Ashforth (2001)

focused his work on *inter-role transitions*, he also said that "theories of socialization, work adjustment, personal and role change, turnover, and so forth are relevant" to the study of intra-role transitions (p. 7). Additionally, the distinctions between intra-role and inter-role transitions can be unclear, sometimes requiring the need to establish clear role boundaries (Ashforth, Greiner, & Fugate, 2000). For example, Cousins (2004) uses the terms "role change" and "role transition" interchangeably when describing the elevation of social workers to social work supervisors, who retained clinical duties but saw them change (intra-role) while acquiring new supervisory ones (inter-role) and subsequently experiencing adjustments in their relationships with others. Because this study addresses a phenomenon involving both the physical or functional change in role imposed by the organization through promotions and re-assignment and the cognitive transition undergone by the individual, this study will include both terms, following the distinction made in Turner (1990) such that *role change* signifies functional or structural change while *role transition* addresses the cognitive.

This section is organized as follows. First, I will present various conceptions of single discrete transitions in the abstract from its roots in counseling psychology in the late 1970s/early 1980s (e.g., Brammer & Abrego, 1981a; Brown & Heath, 1984; Hopson, 1981; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). I will then present Ashforth's (2001) model on the specific nature of role transitions, particularly properties of such transitions relevant to a role change such as difficulty and valence. I then conclude with a discussion of coping strategies, largely following the evolution of Schlossberg's (1981a) original theory of adaptation to the *4S* theory of coping with transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011).

**Early models of transitions**. Hopson (1981) noted that much of the early literature on coping in transitions failed to define the term *transition*. Rather, the term had been defined descriptively, such as Schlossberg's (1981a, p. 5) statement that a *transition* "can be said to occur if an event or nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships." Several scholars have stressed that the notion of *transition* is different than *change* and criticized other scholars for treating the terms synonymously (Bridges, 1991; Brown & Heath, 1984; Hopson, 1981). Hopson (1981) saw transition as additive from change given that it requires both "new behavioral responses" and "personal awareness" (p. 37).

Models of single transitions sought to capture the general sequence or cycle of emotional responses occurring after a discrete *event* resulting in either a desired or unwanted transition (Hopson, 1981) or a *non-event*, such as an expected promotion that did not occur resulting in a similar transitional response (Schlossberg, 1981a). The structure of such models has been in phases or stages laid out from the time of the event to an indeterminate future time when the transition is complete. Three such models are depicted in Figure 2.3.

However, each of the authors cautioned that the phase-based structure is not intended to be prescriptive. Brammer & Abrego (1981) stressed, "the sequence and clarity of the stages are questioned … [but] there is a predictable and identifiable process of experiencing the transition" (p. 20; cf. Hopson, 1981, p. 37). Bridges' (1991) model assumes that the phases overlap and that progression is rarely complete. It is also important to note that *time* is only depicted abstractly. There is no prescription to how long a

transitional response takes given any event. In fact, Hopson's (1981) model includes an immobilization loop in which the "length of time and intensity varies enormously" (p. 37). Brown & Heath (1984, p. 549) indicated that factors weighing into the initial responses include the degrees to which the event was predictable, expected, and how well prepared for it was the individual.

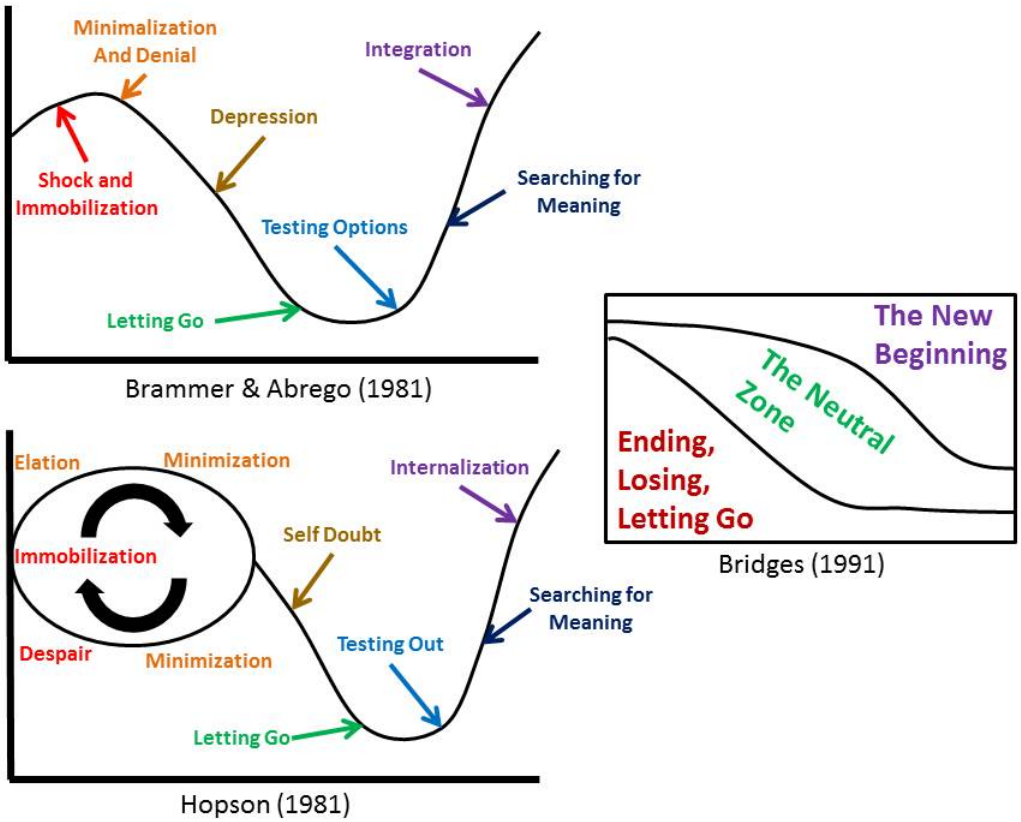


*Figure 2.3.* Three models of transitions. Adapted from (Upper Left) "Intervention Strategies for Coping with Transitions" by L. M. Brammer and P. J. Abrego, *The Counseling Psychologist*, *9*(2), p. 20. Copyright 1981 by Sage. (Right) *Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change* (3rd Ed.) by W. Bridges, p. 5. Copyright 2009 by William Bridges and Associates. (Lower Left) "Response to the Papers by Schlossberg, Brammer and Abrego" by B. Hopson, *The Counseling Psychologist*, *9*(2), p. 38. Copyright 1981 by Sage.

**Attributes of role transitions**. Ashforth (2001) defined the *role transition* as "psychological and (if relevant) physical movement between sequentially held roles" (p.

7). This is therefore an instantiation of the more general forms of transition in the previous subsection regarding individual change (e.g., Brammer & Abrego, 1981a; Hopson, 1981) or organizational change (e.g., Bridges, 1991). Ashforth (2001) stated that "part of what makes role transitions fascinating is the challenge they create for the individual" (p. 87).

While the earlier models presented general schemes of emotional responses encountered in the course of a transition, they did not address factors that make such transitions easier for some or under some circumstances and harder under others (Brammer & Abrego, 1981b). For this purpose, Ashforth (2001) derived a set of seven role transition attributes (shown in Figure 2.4) that contributed two perceptions of an impending transition – *difficulty* and *valence,* the latter defined as how attractive or desirable the new role appears. Ashforth (2001) proposed that difficulty and valence have an inverse relationship. The more difficult a role change appears, the less attractive pursuing the transition is likely to be. On the other hand, assuming a highly coveted new role will likely bring about an easier transition for the individual.

Ashforth's (2001) seven attributes contributing to the perceived difficulty and valence of a role transition follow, with each attribute rated on a unidimensional continuum. *Magnitude* reflects the degree to which the new role differs from the old, with a high magnitude change being more difficult. *Social desirability* represents how positive the role change is perceived by others. Desirable changes are less difficult. *Voluntary* changes are ones where the individual can exercise control and *predictability* provides knowledge as to when the change may occur, both of which reduce difficulty. *Collective* versus *individual* changes regard whether or not a change is done affecting a group of individuals who can share their similar subsequent transition experiences, reducing

difficulty. *Duration* is important such that shorter duration changes tend to increase difficulty. Finally, *reversibility* regards whether or not an individual can reverse the change and restore the prior role with minimal difficulty and minimal changes from the past. Reversible role changes tend to appear simpler and appear less risky.

**Role exit, liminality, and role entry**. Ashforth (2001) followed this model with a discussion of two key phases of transition. The first phase is called *role exit*, that calls for "psychological and usually physical withdrawal" from the previous role and "the cultural context and web of relationships within which the role is embedded" (p. 109). This brings about what Ashforth (2001) called the "exrole identity," the assumption of which causes an individual to embark on the *liminal*, or "ambiguous," phase of the transition (p. 131). The impact of liminality can differ according to how well an individual understands the new role to be entered (Ashforth, 2001, p. 136). It also offers opportunities for individuals to begin experimenting with their new roles or leveraging freedom from the old roles to exercise "frivolity" or rule-breaking behaviors (Ibarra, 2005, p. 24). On the other hand, liminality can also be stressful, as "we oscillate between 'holding on' and 'letting go,' between our desire to rigidly clutch the past and the impulse to exuberantly rush into the future" (Ibarra, 2003, p. 54).

The next phase is the *role entry*, the assumption of the new role, but of which Ashforth (2001) clearly separates the environmental from the personal factors involved. The situational context, particularly where the new role carries with it very strongly-defined behavioral expectations, can cause individuals to socialize or negotiate their new roles before identifying with them and incorporating them into their new self-concept (Ashforth, 2001, p. 172). The more strongly defined the behaviors are, the less latitude

individuals have (Ashforth, 2001, p. 150). Individual dynamics affecting role entry include capabilities, capacities, and motivations to learn the new roles and adapt them according to existing self-concepts (Ashforth, 2001, p. 186).

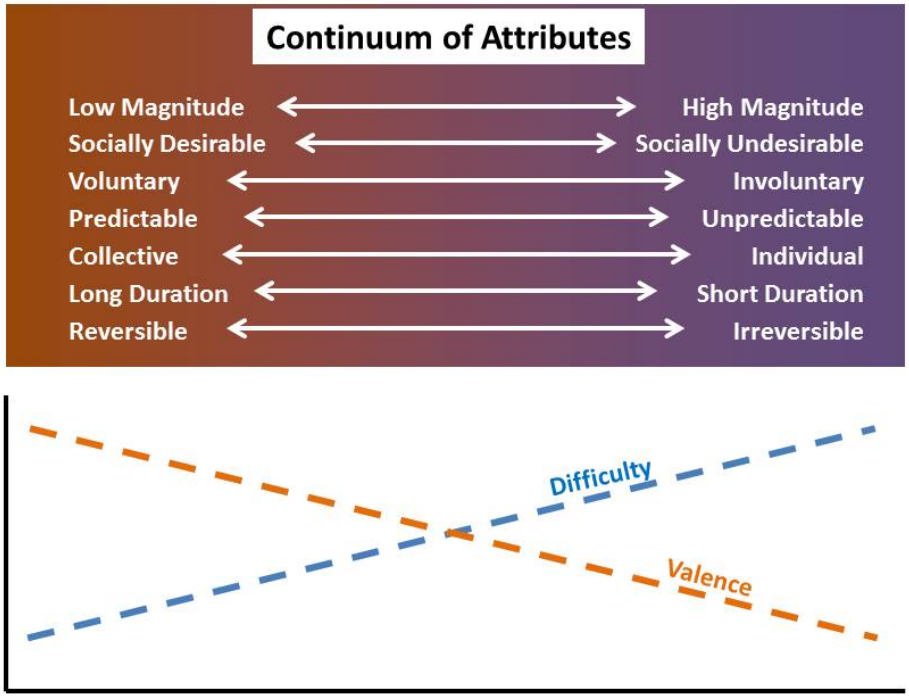


*Figure 2.4.* Difficulty and valence associated with role transitions. Adapted from *Role Transitions in Organizational Life* by B. E. Ashforth, 2001, p. 90. Copyright 2001 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

**Modeling coping strategies**. With the knowledge of the general emotional responses long a transitional path and the individual's perception of a role transition, attention now turns to coping strategies used by individual to navigate their way through a particular role transition. *Coping* is defined in Pearlin and Schooler (1978) as "the things that people do to avoid being harmed by life-strains … [assuming] that people are actively

responsive to forces that impinge upon them" (p. 2). A similar definition is found in Duckworth (1976), "the processes that occur as a person tries to satisfy his requirements in the face of obstacles, difficulties, and the requirements of other people" (p. 54). This section elaborates on discourse surrounding the term 'coping' in the late 1970s and early 1980s leading to the development of Schlossberg's (2011) model of coping with transitions.

Schlossberg (1981a) described the literature on coping as being rooted in crisis theory, and thus an important factor is the literature on coping is the assumption of a quest to minimize stress (Brown & Heath, 1984; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Brown and Heath (1984) summarized the consequences of undesired or uncontrolled life changes as "concurrent and subsequent incidences of physical illness and psychological disturbance" (p. 546). Pearlin and Schooler (1978) explored the "structure" of coping determining that there were three major types of responses to stressful "life-exigencies" – (1) those seeking to change the situation that causes the stress, (2) those seeking to control the meaning of the situation before stress is realized, and (3) those seeking to control primarily the stress level itself (pp. 5-6). Brammer and Abrego (1981a) deduced that "an individual's assessment of stress … is based on his or her evaluation of available coping resources" (p. 19). Such resources have been described as perceived control and perceived importance (Brown & Heath, 1984), cultural norms and social structures (Brammer & Abrego, 1981a), and interpersonal and institutional support systems (Schlossberg, 1981a).

Brammer and Abrego (1981a) described the coping process as one where the "both the person and the situation impact each other mutually" (p. 22) and conceptualized it as a cycle of appraisal and action until an overall outcome emerges from the transition, that is

new assumptions or behavior responses (Gould, 1981). Appraisal is the "central component of an individual's self-regulating system [and] consists of a continuously changing set of judgments about the significance of events to personal well-being (Brammer & Abrego, 1981a, p. 24). Brown & Heath (1984) described different types of coping processes depending on expectedness and preparedness. For example, unexpectedness or unpreparedness could result in increased importance to objects associated with one's former self-concept and an increased probability of engaging in an "attributional search" designed to explain the event (pp. 560-561). The contrasting circumstances of expectedness and/or preparedness would not, according to Gould (1981) necessarily require coping as the expectations can be normative.

The remainder of this section briefly traces the evolution of the particular coping model, that of Nancy K. Schlossberg, that will be used in this study. Her model is chosen because of its ambivalence toward progress along the transition, not assuming that progress is necessarily either beneficial or harmful (Schlossberg, 1981a).

***Schlossberg's (1981a) initial model of adaptation***. Schlossberg (1981a) pursued the development of a five-component *model of human adaptation to transition*, shown in Figure 2.5. Schlossberg's educational background was in counseling psychology and she devoted much of her published works on counseling people through periods of transition. She defined *adaptation* as "a process during which an individual moves from being totally preoccupied with the transition to integrating the transition into his or her life" (p. 7), with the movement serving as the outcome of the process.

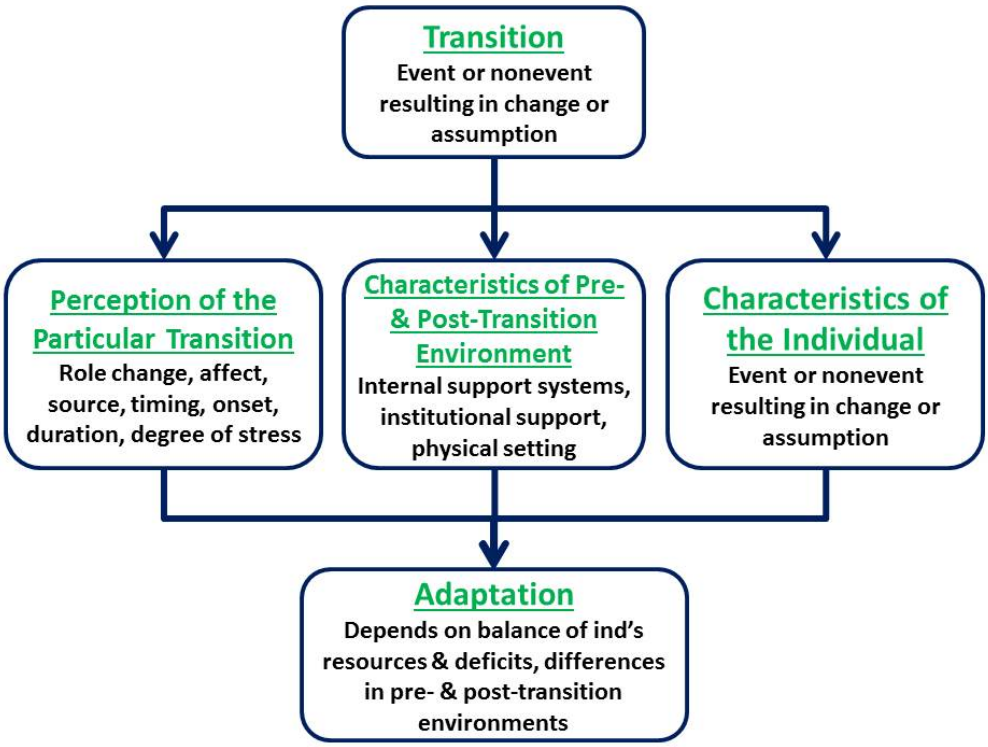


*Figure 2.5*. Schlossberg's model of human adaptation to transition. Adapted from "A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition" by N. K. Schlossberg, 1981, *The Counseling Psychologist*, *9*(2), p. 5. Copyright 1981 by Sage.

Schlossberg described the experience of coping as "ambivalent," since transitions can be positive or negative in affect, and thus can either present possibilities for growth or deterioration (Schlossberg, 1981a, p. 6). Thus, perceptions of the transition become very important as these perceptions may induce stress on the individual. Is the individual gaining (thereby deriving pleasure from the transition) or losing a role identity (and therefore, pain), or both? In describing some examples from her research, she found that the same individual may perceive the situation differently over the course of the transition (Schlossberg, 1981a, p. 7). The timing of the transition is also important as "most adults have built in social clocks" which determines whether certain life events are on-time, early, or late.

Schlossberg (1981a) listed the following as factors affecting adaptation in both the pre-transition and post-transition environment. *Interpersonal support systems* includes the networks of individuals (e.g., family, friends, and others) with whom individuals are associated and can lean on for support. *Institutional support* is a collective level equivalent, the network of formally or informally organized groups that individuals can access for help. *Physical setting* is the third factor and one that can easily be overlooked (p. 11). It includes, but is not limited to, climate and weather, living conditions, workplace conditions, and the social environment. Each of these can alleviate stress or be stress inducing or magnifying to individuals undergoing transition.

Certain characteristics of individuals affect adaptation, and Schlossberg (1981a) listed eight. *Psychosocial competence* are the attitudes of one's personality – self-attitudes (e.g., one's self-evaluation), world attitudes (e.g., optimism and hope), and behavioral attitudes (e.g., predispositions for adaptation). Characteristics of *gender*, *age*, *health*, *race/ethnicity,* and *socioeconomic status* may contribute to or inhibit one's ability to adapt based on cultural norms. Schlossberg gave the example of how an ethnic background rooted in the extended family may provide more interpersonal support capacity (p. 14). *Value orientation* comprises "an individual's basic values and beliefs" as factors in ability to adapt. Schlossberg (1981a) particularly cited religion and ideology as particularly supportive of one's ability to cope. Finally, *previous experience in transitions of similar nature* predicted future success.

There were criticisms of the model. Hopson (1981) challenged the use of the term "adaptation" as it connoted a "static normative concept," to which Schlossberg (1981b) acceded and renamed it "response to transition." Danish (1981) argued that models of

adaptation to transition need to be grounded in the broader literature on adult development theory. Finally, Gould (1981) distinguished two forms of outcomes in the terms *transition* and *transformation*, whereby the former was routinely experienced by individuals whereas the latter constituted a broader alteration to one's self-concept including "questioning, challenging, changing, or amending assumptions" and to forfeit one's "feeling of safety" (p. 45). These latter two challenges will be explored more fully in the discussion on Schlossberg's later theory of coping in the next subsection.

***Schlossberg's 4S theory***. Schlossberg's 4S theory of coping with transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) updated the 1981 model of adaptation, and is depicted in Figure 2.6. Key aspects of the 4S model included the incorporation of different types of transitions and more detailed modeling of the coping resources. The model described three types of transition-instigating events – *anticipated*, *unanticipated*, and the *non-event*. The *non-event* reflects a transition based on an expected event that does not occur such as "the promotion that never materialized" (p. 42). Drawing from Pearlin's works (1991; Pearlin & Schooler, 1987), *anticipated* transitions are the normative cases where there are often opportunities to prepare for and rehearse the oncoming roles, such as how teenagers can leverage babysitting experiences toward being future parents (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 41). *Unanticipated* events are non-scheduled, rare or infrequent, or otherwise not considered a routine occurrence in one's ordinarily life-span. Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg (2012) noted the importance of *perspective* in that one's anticipated events may be another's unanticipated, the context of the event such as political or socio-economic factors, and that the *impact* of the event

suggests the level of disruption to one's daily life and therefore how much coping resources will be needed to effect the subsequent transition (pp. 44-47).

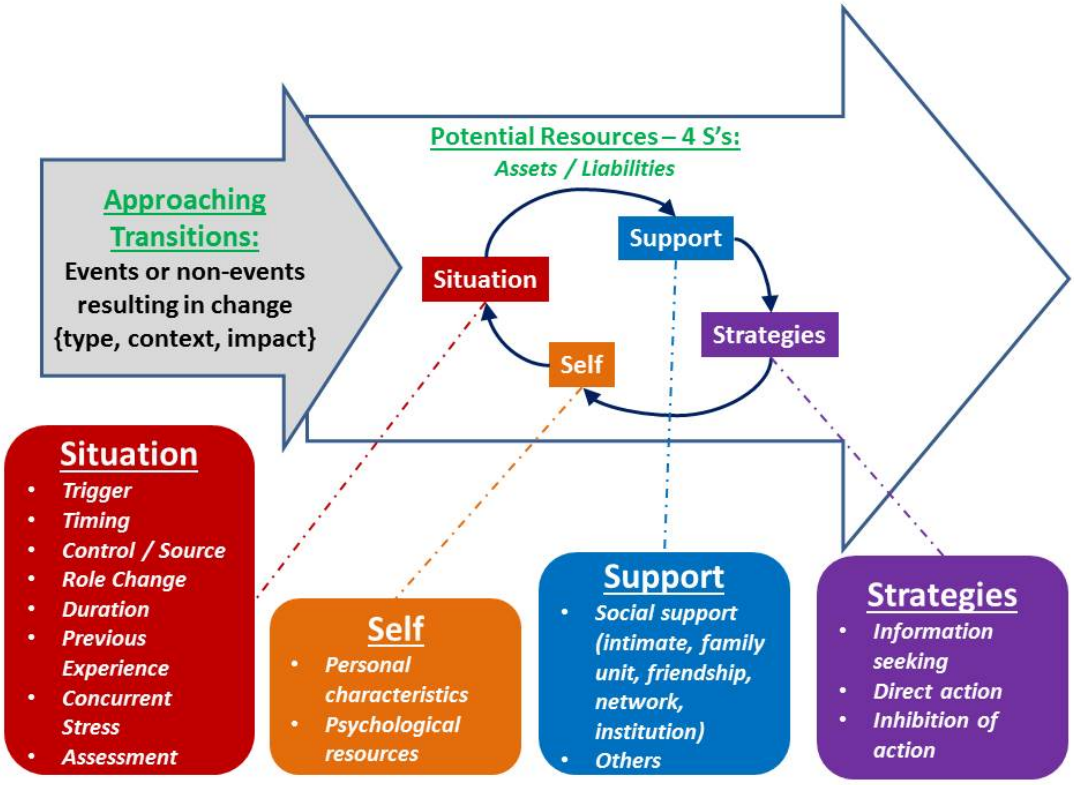


*Figure 2.6.* Schlossberg's 4S model. Adapted from *Counseling Adults in Transition* by M. L. Anderson, J. Goodman, and N. K. Schlossberg, 2012, pp. 39 and 62. Copyright 2012 by Springer.

"4S" represents four variables that indicate the coping capabilities of an individual. The first is *situation*, or the characteristics of the event or non-event. The second is *self*, or the personal characteristics and psychological resources available. The third is *support*, or the external resources available. Finally, there are *strategies* that constitute the specific responses, which can include both action and inhibition of action (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 62). These variables can represent both assets and liabilities and the model considers ratios of assets to liabilities as an explanation for why different individuals

undergoing the same transition will react differently (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 63).

**Summary**. The above literature shares a common perspective in that the models explicate the types, reactions, available resources, and responses of transitions by a single individual. They share several common themes in that the ability to navigate a transition involves the distancing ("letting go" or "role exit") from the past role and a related embracing ("assimilating," "integrating," or "role entry") a new role, while incorporating a middle or *liminal* phase that constitutes a sense of ambiguity or in-betweenness that can be stressful (Ashforth, 2011) or liberating (Ibarra, 2003, 2005). Each model incorporates the idea that variations in the experience of the same types of transition can be inter-individual, that is, different individuals can have very different experiences regarding the same type of transition, and intra-individual, that the context and timing of the transition can lead to different experiences and outcomes. Schlossberg's (2011) 4S model allows for the systematic understanding of how individuals react and respond to role transitions through a cycle of understanding the situation and the self, and mobilizing support and strategies.

## Leader Identity Construction

This section focuses on the outcome of interest in this study, that of an individual's leader identity that may be affected by the role change and associated role transition. One has assumed a *leader identity* when one has the ability to state "Yes, I am a leader" (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009, p. 234). But grasping how the literature treats the construction of that requires an understanding of *identity theory*, from which one can contextualize a leader identity. The first subsection summarizes the construct of identity and identity theory

from its roots in social interactionism. The subsequent subsections will review the literature on leader identities, identity change, and identity construction that could potentially occur as the result of a role change.

**Identity and identity theory**. Fundamental to the discussion of *identity theory* is the concept of an *identity*, which for the present study is defined as "the set of meanings that define who one is *when one is an occupant of a particular role* in society, a member of a particular group, or claims particular characteristics that identify him or her as a unique person" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3, emphasis added). Stryker & Burke (2000) differentiated this use of the term from other scholarly uses that focused more narrowly on components of this definition such as the conflation of "identity" with one's ethnicity or racial background, membership in a collective, or as participants in social movements. The definition of identity used here reflects a view that each individual carries multiple identities (Burke, 2003; Burke & Stets, 2009; Smith-Lovin, 2003; Thoits, 2003). These identities are not all continuously being operationalized, rather they are prioritized (Francis, 2003) and activated or de-activated based on the situation or social context (Cast, 2003). *Identity theory*, therefore, is the body of knowledge related to understanding of all such manifestations related to identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). It is defined as the scholarly effort "to explain the specific meanings that individuals have for the multiple identities they claim; how these identities relate to one another for any one person; how their identities influence their behavior, thoughts, and feelings or emotions; and how their identities tie them in to society at large" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 3).

This subsection will explore the evolution of identity theory from its roots in social interactionism dating back to Mead (1961a, 1961b) and then pursue several questions that

the theory has sought to resolve among individuals. These include understanding how individuals answer "Who am I?", "Who am I not?", and "Who am I when?" Embedded within these questions are studies into ambiguity and uncertainty of identities, identity salience and identity commitment, and organizational identification that may contribute to how role transitions are perceived by individuals. Following this is a brief overview of how identities change through Burke & Stets' (2009) three mechanisms of social learning, direct socialization, and reflected appraisal. This section concludes with a brief summary leading to the narrower focus on work-related identities that follows.

**Social interactionism**. Identity theory is rooted in *social interactionism*, especially the works of George Herbert Mead (1961a, 1961b). As Burke & Stets (2009) explained, Mead's concepts of *mind* and *self* are "embedded in society and developed through communication with others" (p. 19). Identity is a key feature of the *self* (McCall, 2003), as establishing one's identity to oneself is equally important to establishing that identity to others (Foote, 1951). This requires reflexivity, where the *mind* recognizes the *self* and regards it as an object in the environment and therefore acts upon it (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Mead (1961a) regarded the *self* as composed of *I* and *me*, respectively the subjective and objective components. Developing that *self* requires that an individual "takes the attitudes of the organized social group to which he [or she] belongs toward the organized co-operative social activity [to] develop a complete self" (p. 164). He referred to the process as a "game" between subject and object from which "an organized personality derives" (p. 166). As Burke & Stets (2009) described, the Meadian *I* initiates acts that the *me* subsequently handles or controls, thus the *me* is the "perceptive-observer aspect of the self" that analyzes action, environment, and their interactions to guide the *I* (p. 21). Mead

(1961b, p. 830) illustrated how this occurred by contrasting two games, hide-and-seek and organized baseball. The former had two very simple roles of 'hunter' and 'hunted' that a child could readily alternate. The latter, however, required much more effort. Each player "must know what everyone else is going to do in order to carry out his own play" (p. 830). This is not a discrete perception but a continuous one, as the *I* constantly acts while the *me* never ceases perceiving and informing (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 21).

Social interactionism ultimately divided between 'traditional' and 'structural' views. In the former view, the focus is on "how individuals' construct actions and how these actions are coordinated with others to accomplish individual and collective goals in interaction" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 33). Thus, social structure is highly dynamic, is constantly being reinterpreted and redesigned by individual members, and whatever order exists is considered transitory or temporary (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 34). The structural perspective views social structures as more durable and stable. Actors learn about those structures through socialization (Stryker, 1980). These structures can be formally named organizations or informal groups, networks, communities, and institutions that individuals join, interact with, or avoid based on their own preferences or goals (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 34-35). The structural view came to dominate much of the discourse in identity theory because it more readily models the "relatively fixed nature of social structure in its analysis of social behavior" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 33). The following subsections are organized along various questions that individuals may ask concerning their own identities, and from which emerge various strands of identity research.

**Concepts of identity theory**. The structural social interactionist view emphasizes a relationship between identities and roles (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009). Thus, to a

certain extent, individuals can name or categorize their identities into an "identity structure" (Hunt, 2003) that helps individuals answer the putative question, "Who am I?" (Burke & Stets, 2009). The literature shows that should be answer show alignment between the individual's self-concept and the overall situation, then identities can set boundaries and shape individual goals and motivations (Stryker & Vryan, 2003) and help to improve role performance (Burke & Rietzes, 1981). But, the question of "Who am I?" raises other questions regarding how individuals develop and internalize their self-concept. These include understanding how individuals answer "Who am I not?" and "Who am I when?" Embedded within these questions are studies into ambiguity and uncertainty of identities, identity salience, and identity commitment.

***The identity standard – "Who am I, absolutely?"*** Burke and Stets (2009) define the *identity standard* as one's "self-meanings of an identity" (p. 50). One's identity standard is dynamic, undergoing a continual feedback loop in which one continuously compares how one interprets the present situation with perceptual feedback from others and subsequently translates the difference into behavior (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 50). Much of this results in what Burke and Stets (2009) called *identity-verification*, the "process by which people act to change relevant meanings in the situation to bring them into alignment with the meanings held in their identity standard" (p. 175). In other words, one is likely to merely alter what one perceives in the environment so it remains aligned with one's own self-concept, rather than change the self-concept. Hence, the identity standard is generally resilient (p. 176). However, later subsections will discuss what occurs when such alignment is not possible.

***Apposition and opposition – "Who am I?" and "Who am I not?"*** McCall (2003) presented identity theory as a way of answering the questions "Who am I?" and "Who am I not?" Drawing from Stone (1962), McCall referred to these as functions of *apposition* and *opposition*, respectively. Answers to questions of *apposition* became *role identities*, defined as "one's imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and acting as an occupant" of a certain position (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 65). These role identities can be explicitly named or interpretive, as Burke & Stets (2009) demonstrated using used academic professors. They explained that roles of 'teacher' and 'researcher' would be explicit, whereas others would emerge through the way the professors behave, such as "friend to students" or "protectors of students" (p. 39).

The function of *opposition*, which McCall (2003) noted as the source of *NOT-me* roles, is to clarify which identities does the individual not perceive in oneself. These can be expressed in the form of a negative adjective (e.g., "I am rotten"), a noun modified by a negative adjective (e.g., "I am a rotten cook"), or a negative noun (e.g., "I am a slob") (p. 13). Taken together, these positive and negative "poles" (McCall, 2003) of identity serves to "situate the person as a social object … together with other objects so situated, and, at the same time to set him apart from still other objects" (Stone, 1962, p. 94).

***Ambiguity and uncertainty as to "Who am I?"*** The functions of apposition and opposition serve to clarity one's identities, whether that stems from purely internal self-conception or through membership of a collective (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). However, there are instances where identities can be ambiguous or uncertain (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009), with the difference being that uncertainty can be clarified with more facts

or data while ambiguity cannot (Feldman, 1991, p. 146), hence this subsection will focus on the nature of identity ambiguity.

The literature offers several ways in which identities can be ambiguous. The first way is a function of the number and qualities of attributes in the identity such as comparing the role identities of "mother" with the more variable and interpretive "good corporate citizen" (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009, p. 221). The second regards lack of clarity between the personal attributes of that identity and how that identity is socially constructed or contextually bound. DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton (2009) use "good corporate citizen" as an example to express how individuals may be torn between "raising concerns to other versus obeying organizational rules and regulations" (p. 221). The third regards clarity on when individuals should enact the identity, since some identities can produce inconsistencies, lack social consensus, or present contradictory beliefs or goals (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Many family-oriented identities (e.g., "spouse," "parent," "relative") are highly ambiguous due to the many different ways in which those identities can be enacted (Hunt, 2003; Thoits, 1992). Fourth, identities derived from organizational memberships can be ambiguous based on the members' status (Bartel & Dutton, 2001). Factors such as separation in time and space from the rest of the organization (e.g., teleworkers), confusing or unsettling features of the organization (e.g., lack of strategic direction), and the nature of membership (e.g., permanent workers versus temporary or contract employees) can contribute to this ambiguity.

***Hierarchies of multiple selves – "Which 'I' am I, and when?"*** Many identity theorists agree that individuals carry multiple roles (Burke & Stets, 2009; Hunt, 2003; McCall, 2003; McCall & Simmons, 1978) and therefore have investigated how and when

roles are enacted and how potential conflicts are resolved. McCall and Simmons (1978) presented the notion of a *prominence hierarchy* that considered how individuals organized their many selves in rank order according to wants, desires, needs, or relative importance. This resulted in a conception of the *ideal self*, the individual's preferred sorting of identities from the Meadian *I* perspective. However, as Burke and Stets (2009) state, "the prominence hierarchy is not the only determinant of behavior because prominent identities are not always activated in situations" (p. 41). Investigators have therefore proposed other *selves* or constructs to account for ways that one behaves differently from one's *ideal self*. One proposal came from Higgins (1987) who proffered two other selves, called the *ought self* which reflected "what others believe a person should or ought to be" and the *actual self* that reflected how one perceived the expectations of others (p. 320).

Another was from McCall & Simmons (1978) who proposed a second prioritization scheme called the *salience hierarchy* in which salience is defined as the likelihood that the identity would be enacted or put into action or behaviors. They proposed that an individual carried a *situational self* that reflected alternative identities to the *ideal self* that one would enact when perceived as more advantageous in particular circumstances (p. 41). Thus, the salience hierarchy invoked short-term behaviors. However, Stryker (1980) defined the salience hierarchy differently, making it something less transparent to the individual and suggesting that it more surreptitiously "influences the choices people make among behavioral options [and therefore] predicts longer-run behaviors" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 46). What influenced salience was *commitment*, or the "degree to which persons' relationships to others in their networks depend on possessing a particular identity and role" (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 286). The last of these frameworks, Stryker's (1980) *role*

*identities*, *salience*, and *commitment* has an important advantage in how it formulates Mead's original interactionist conception on how "commitment shapes identity salience shapes role choice behavior" (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

**Work-related identities**. Having looked at the various ways that individuals constructed their self-concepts, this subsection looks at the literature on an important component of one's identity standard. The *work-related identity* encompasses "aspects of identity and self-definition that are tied to participation in the activities of work … or membership in work-related groups, organizations, occupations, or professions" (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010, p. 266). This definition encompasses the varied perspectives that contributed to the literature on identity in the workplace since the 1970s, when Schein (1978, p. 157) used "professional identity" to describe the relationships between individuals' work-related identity and the collective identity of the group to which they belong. Ibarra (1999) drew from Schein (1978) and defined the "professional" identity as "the relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences in terms of which people define themselves in a professional role" (Ibarra, 1999, pp. 764-765). Research into work-related identity change studied newcomers and entry-level workers (Louis, 1980), individuals selected for advancement (Ibarra, 1999), and individuals joining new organizations (Beyer & Hannah, 2002). Ibarra (1999) noted the importance of this research thusly, "Because new roles require new skills, behaviors, attitudes, and patterns of interactions, they may produce fundamental changes in an individual's self-definitions" (p. 765).

The literature in work-related identities is quite diverse, and this review will touch on two dichotomies that present conditions, choices, and strategies for identity change: (1)

notions of positive versus negative work-related identities, where 'positive' means desired or constructive in some way and (2) relationships between work and non-work identities. This will be followed by brief context-specific reviews into investigations of leader identities and student identities.

***Positive work-related identities***. That identity transition could be purposeful and useful was explored in Gecas' (1982) discussion of the self-concept and the importance of self-esteem. He stated that, "The motivation to maintain and enhance a positive conception of oneself has been thought to be pervasive" (p. 20). Literature stemming from this work pursued the study of *positive work-related identities* (e.g., Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010, 2011). Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley (2008) said, "Individuals who can say 'I am A and it's important to me' want to feel positively about their membership" in a group (p. 329). Empirical studies on positive work-related identities found that they can be constructed among workers in stigmatized occupations (Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006), can increase work creativity (Cheng, Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008), and build resilience (Caza & Wilson, 2009).

However, this literature thread has been criticized for over-emphasizing a traditional interpretation of the word 'positive' at the expense of a proper accounting for the 'negative' (Learmonth & Humphreys, 2011). Learmonth and Humphreys (2011) stated that "workers can derive a satisfying (positive?) identity from reacting to managers in ways that [positive work-related identity research] would, perhaps, see as negative" (p. 426) and offered examples of research into routine workplace resistance, disidentification, and whistleblowing, among others. Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2011) responded to this critique by asserting that agency, and not organizational structure or goals, is the key

determiner of positivity or negativity felt in one's self-concept. Thus, one can be highly committed to an organization and yet committed to a cause that is "at odds with the dominant culture of the organization" (Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 586).

***Work-related and non-work-related identities***. The literature on the boundary between work-related and non-work identities, defined as "parts of the self traditionally considered outside the domain of work" (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013, p. 621), shows that the boundary, if it ever existed (Kanter, 1989), is both dynamic (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013; Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006) and disappearing (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013; Watson, 2008). Research into this phenomenon included focus on societal changes such as the ubiquity of e-mail (Barley, Meyerson, & Grodal, 2011) and social media (Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg, 2013), emergence of telework (Timmerman & Scott, 2006), and the phenomenon of anonymity (Scott, 1999) which are increasing the perceived porosity of that boundary (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). However, some non-work identities such as gender (Volpe & Murphy, 2011) and family (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2009) inherently affect how one approaches their work-related identities. Also, certain occupations such as business leaders (Sturges, 2013; Watson, 2008), professionals (e.g., Johansen, Holtedahl, Davidsen, & Rudebeck, 2012 on doctors and Nuciari, 1994 on the military), and emergency service workers (Cowlishaw, Evans, & McLennan, 2010) have long-standing traditions of work-related intrusion into one's non-work environment.

There have recently appeared two models of conditions and strategies relating to the boundaries between individual work and nonwork identities. Ramarajan & Reid (2013) offered a taxonomy of pressures and preferences to explain forces pushing from the nonwork into the work identity (Okhuysen et al., 2013). Pressures "influence both the

meanings people associate with their non-work identities and the enactment of those identities," while preferences reflects "people's own desires regarding the place of their nonwork identity vis-à-vis the work identity" (p. 627). Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard, & Berg's (2013) taxonomy matched the same preferences for integration or separation of these identities against self-evaluation motives of *self-enhancement*, or presenting oneself "in a positive and socially desirable manner" and *self-verification*, or in a manner that seeks to confirm "their own positive and negative self-views" (p. 650) Both can be inclusionary (boundary-spanning) or exclusionary (boundary-reinforcing). Individuals then offer various strategies individuals use when pressures and preferences come into conflict (pp. 627-628).

**Leader identities**. This section now reaches the specific type of identity of interest in this study, an instantiation of the work-related identity called a *leader identity*. Individuals internalize *leader identities* upon reaching the conclusion that "Yes, I am a leader" (DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton, 2009, p. 234). DeRue, Ashford, & Cotton (2009) state that a *leader identity* is ambiguous (Bartel & Dutton, 2001) because there are "no objective measures or indicators of whether one is or is not a leader" (p. 222). Rather, the ability to assume, and therefore internalize, a leader identity is contingent on a cycle of claiming and granting through social interactions (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). What is claimed and granted as one's leader identity can correspond to one's leader behaviors, whether that is positive (e.g., transformational leadership) or negative (e.g., abusive leadership) (Johnson, et al., 2010). Studies have demonstrated relationships between the leader's salience and commitment to the leader identity and leader performance (Burke & Rietzes, 1981).

**Identity change**. As indicated previously, identities are ordinarily resilient and resist change, and individuals are more likely to perceive the environment in ways that verify one's own self-concepts. But the meanings found in one's identity do routinely change, if sometimes imperceptibly or only over a longer period of time (Burke, 2006; Burke & Stets, 2009).

Identities evolve over the course of a life span, as individuals are likely to experience significant transitions through the course of their lives and careers (Bridges, 2009; Ibarra, 2005). Burke and Stets (2009) have identified four triggers to identity change – changes in the situation, conflicts among one's own multiple identities, conflicts between one's identity and behaviors, and as the results of self-verification with others. The first two represent discrepancies of meaning between, respectively, the external situation or internal self-concept, and the "identity standard" or one's "self-meanings of an identity" (p. 50). In the third case, the discrepancy occurs "because we don't have full freedom in choosing that behavior; situational exigencies exist that push us in one direction or another" (p. 187). The fourth does not present a conflict of meanings. Rather, it requires a mere adjustment to them (p. 187).

Burke & Stets (2009) also asked, "Where do the meanings that define an identity come from? How do they get to be part of the identity standard?" (p. 193). They proposed three mechanisms that could be used – *direct socialization*, *reflected appraisal*, and *social learning*. Alternatively, Ibarra and J. Petriglieri (2010) described two mechanisms or activities of *identity work and play*, which are analogous to reflected appraisal and social learning, respectively.

***Direct socialization***. Direct socialization involves formal or informal instruction by others, such as organizational leaders, seeking to inculcate what is expected among individuals (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 194). Burke & Stets (2009, p. 194) suggested that larger or more complex organizations are likely to rely on direct socialization for imparting change in the self-concepts of its individual members, such as through training and education, orientation programs, or performance counseling.

***Reflected appraisal and identity work***. *Reflected appraisal* is a process that develops meanings based on how individuals believe they are perceived by others (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 195). Meanwhile, G. Petriglieri and J. Petriglieri (2010) define *identity work* as "activities that individuals undertake to create, maintain, and display personal and social identities that sustain a coherent and desirable self-concept" (p. 45). These are especially important when one has just assumed a new role, such as a spousal role in the early days after marriage, as they help individuals determine their new self-concepts as spouses and internalize them (Burke & Stets, 2009, pp. 193-195). As the former spurs the latter as a key activity driving identity change, the following provides a more in-depth look at the literature on identity work.

Snow and Anderson (1987) proposed the concept of *identity work* to explain a process that encompassed:

> A range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept. So defined, identity work may involve a number of complementary activities: (a) procurement or arrangement of physical settings and props; (b) cosmetic face work or the arrangement of personal appearance; (c) selective association with other individuals and groups; and (d) verbal

> construction and assertion of personal identities (Snow & Anderson, 1987, p. 1348).

The components of this definition have been pursued separately, combined, or extended in the literature that followed. For example, Snow and Anderson (1987) encapsulated (d) as *identity talk*, which was further refined by Hunt & Benford (1994, p. 492) as "a discourse that reflects actors' perceptions of a social order." Phelan & Hunt (1998) referred to (b) as "symbolic self-completion" and studied how the symbology of cosmetic work (e.g., tattoos) contributed to the self-conceptions of prisoners and gang members.

A resonant theme in some studies has been the resolution between the self-concept, or personal identity, and the presentation of that self-concept to others, or social identity, advanced by Brewer (1991). Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep (2006) studied how the nature of identity work often required a balance between one's personal and social identities. Svenningson and Larsson (2006) investigated how middle-managers used "fantasy" to construct self-conceptions of leadership that exceeded their own responsibilities or capabilities. McCall (2003, p. 20) suggested that identity work can be either *proactive* or *reactive*. In the former, individuals pre-determine the need to present one-self as holding a particular identity, while in the latter, individuals are responding to other's conceptions of self rather than an external stimulus. He used former President Nixon's infamous quote "I am not a crook!" as an example of attempting to negotiate reactively the self-presentation of an honest leader in light of public opinion that acquired an alternate view.

Drawing from this, G. Petriglieri and J. Petriglieri (2010) conceive identity work as a continuous activity within individuals. However, it is intensified and concentrated when seeking to stabilize or reinforce their existing identities or undergo recognizable transitions

or changes (citing Van Maanen, 1998). A key outcome of identity work is "the importance of external (public) displays of role-appropriate characteristics" meaning "acting and looking the part, so as to be granted the claimed identity" (Ibarra & J. Petriglieri, 2010, p. 12).

***Social learning and identity play***. That the outcome of identity work is neither direct nor certain was the subject of much research into how individuals negotiated their identities socially (e.g., Swann, 1983; Higgins, 1987; Ibarra, 1999; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). Yost, Strube, and Bailey (1992) suggested that there were cycles of identity construction and testing of possible selves which differed from cycles of selection and retention. Ashforth (1998) asserted that, when undergoing identity change, individuals "played" with desired selves until they were actually ready to assume them.

According to Burke & Stets (2009), *social learning* encompasses two forms called anticipatory socialization and modeling. In the former, often ascribed to children, the individual practices and rehearses a potential identity with others before internalizing it. The latter, modeling, is to learn from observation of others who are like the individual in some way. Modeling can help individuals learn what to do, what not to do, and otherwise figure out how things are or should be done. This too involves some form of practice or rehearsal before internalization occurs.

Meanwhile, Ibarra and J. Petriglieri (2010) advanced the similar idea of *identity play*, defined as "people's engagement in provisional but active trial of possible future selves" (p. 10). Identity play provides psychosocial safety and room to experiment (Ibarra & J. Petriglieri, 2010), requires a distinct setting from that used for identity work (Kark, 2011), and is useful during role transitions (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & J. Petriglieri, 2010).

Identity play has been proposed as how positive emotions can help overcome work-related identity loss, such as through a downsizing or disability (Conroy & O'Leary-Malley, 2014). It was also studied among librarians undergoing identity reconstruction as a result of emerging information technologies (Sukovic, Litting, & England, 2011) and how managers construct their identities during leadership development (Kark, 2011).

**Identity construction**. This leads to the literature concerning *identity construction*, which differs from *identity change* in intentionality. Citing Van Gennep (1960/1905), Hall (2004) described the process of identity construction as rites of passage, where individuals deliberately forfeited their former selves and ultimately develop a new self. He subsequently proposed ways that organizations can aid in the development or change of an individual's identity, including formal ceremonies, developmental relationships, and "organizational holding environments" that contain "psychosocial safety, acceptance, and challenge, to nudge the person along in his or her development [that] operates away from the stresses of the everyday work environment" (pp. 169-170).

Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann (2006) described the literature on *identity construction* as explaining "how an individual self-defines him- or herself changes in the context of organizational life" (p. 236) and the process of identity construction involved the bridging of old identities ("antecedents") to new ones ("outcomes"). They presented a learning cycle model for the interplay between work role changes and identity changes, shown in Figure 2.7.

A key contribution of Pratt et al. (2006) involved the three types of identity *customization* proposed, shown in the rightmost box in Figure 2.7. In the cases where the *violation* or difference between one's identity and work role were small, the customization

was one of identity *enhancement*, which was a reinforcement of one's existing identity. When the violation was more significant, the customization involved one of two more drastic changes. The first was *splinting*, the importing of a previously held identity as a temporary relief (like a splint) until the desired self-concept was strong enough to be held on its own (p. 248). The other was *patching*, which is drawing on one identity for the purposes of covering "holes" or gaps in one's conceptions of the identity (p. 247).

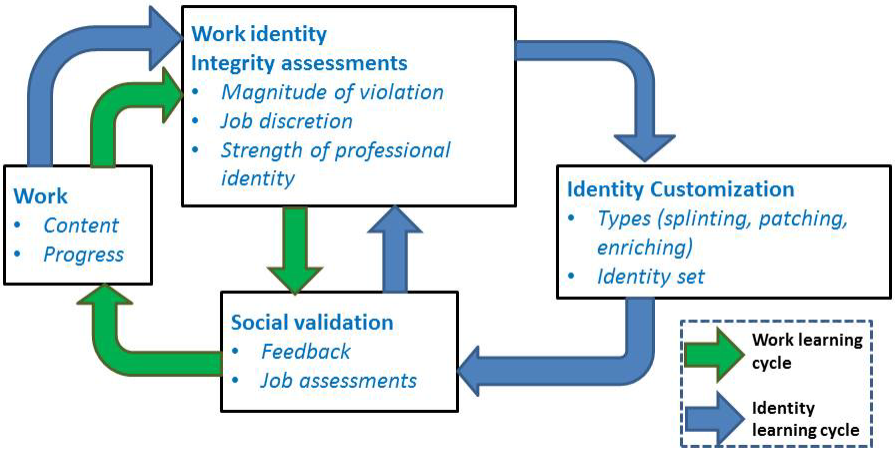


*Figure 2.7.* Interplay of work and identity learning cycles. Adapted from "Constructing Professional Identity: The Role of Work and Identity Learning Cycles in the Customization of Identity among Medical Residents" by M. G. Pratt, K. W. Rockmann and J. B. Kaufmann, 2006, *Academy of Management Journal*, *49*(2), p. 253. Copyright 2006 by The Academy of Management.

Kira and Balkin (2014) critiqued Pratt et al. (2006) on how they focused solely on how individuals coped primarily with the misalignment of identities. They argued that there was fertile ground for greater consideration about how identity construction occurred in cases of perceived alignment which could also produce negative outcomes. Incorporating much of the above cited literature on identity theory, Kira and Balkin (2014) developed an expanded model of interactions between work and preferred identities. This model is

depicted in Figure 2.8 and shows a learning cycle whereby individuals assess alignment, react to it in some way, and then realize outcomes as changes either in one's identity or in the work situation. Alignment is not necessarily a predecessor for a positive outcome, as it is possible for an individual to experience *withering*, where individuals adhere to those aspects of the work environment that conform to their self-concepts at the expenses of other aspects, which "can have negative individual and collective outcomes" (p. 136). Meanwhile, misalignment is not necessarily a negative, as the individual's reaction can include active engagement in identity work or in *job crafting* which involves transforming the work role.

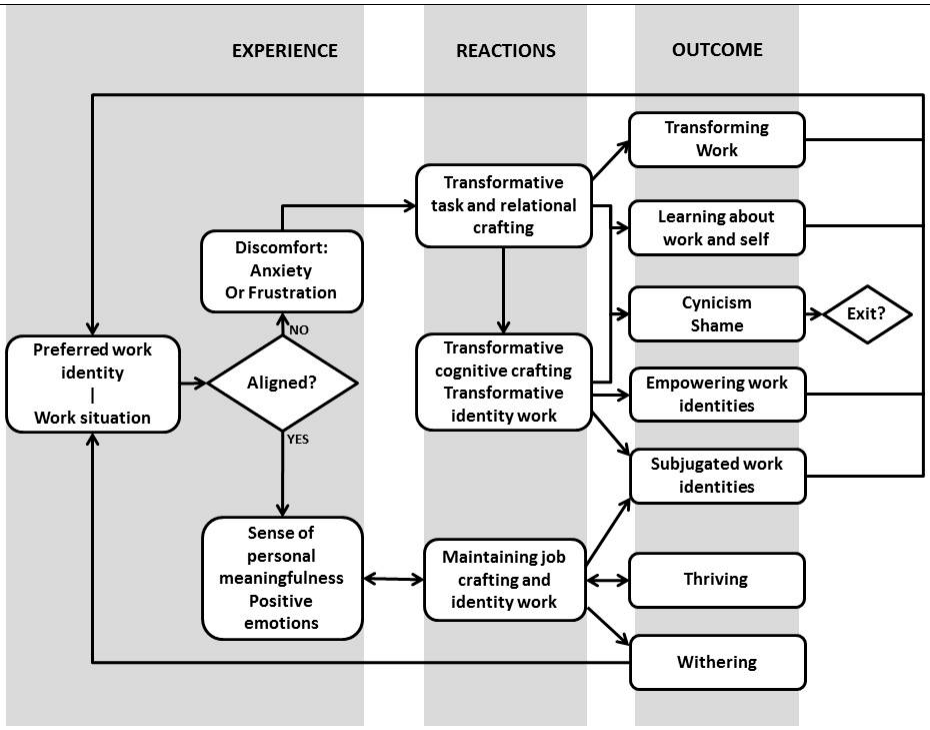


*Figure 2.8*. Interactions between work and preferred identities. Adapted from "Interactions Between Work and Identities: Thriving, Withering, or Redefining The Self?" by M. Kira and D. B. Balkin, 2014, *Human Resource Management Review*, *24*(2), p. 134. Copyright 2013 by Elsevier.

In terms of theoretical implications of their model, Kira and Balkin (2014) stated that "for the field of work and identity interactions is that more attention should be paid to employees' experiences of alignments between the two" (p. 140). They viewed the (mis)alignment as creating an important "active state" (p. 140) by which individuals maintain and strengthen such alignments.

**Linking identity construction with leader development**. Before concluding this section, it is important to note the literature that links identity construction to leader development. Several developmental theories have been used to model the learning that occurs as a result of changes and transitions and one's evolving capacities for such learning.

However, the literature linking identity construction with leader development is diverse (Carroll & Levy (2010). One stream has followed a *functionalist* trend (e.g., Conger, 1992; Lord & Hall, 2005) rooted in experiential learning theories (e.g., Kolb, 1984) that treat identity as a 'thing' to be built within a leader through experiences, ultimately bringing about new self-concepts (Carroll & Levy, 2010). Another is the *constructivist* stream (e.g., Kegan, 1982; Van Velsor & Drath, 2003) that analogizes identity construction with overall adult development, where the purpose of leader development is to determine at what stage one resides and to build a path to the next stage (Carroll & Levy, 2010). *Social constructivists* are more apt to pursue "emancipatory" identity construction in which individuals are exposed to the dominant discourses that drive their behaviors so to pursue alternative discourses (Carroll & Levy, 2010). As the context of this study will not pursue such emancipatory identity construction, this review will concentrate on developmental theories that Carroll and Levy (2010) associate with the

functionalist (e.g., Levinson, 1986; Kolb, 1984) and constructivist (Kegan, 1982) perspectives.

***Levinson's (1986) theory of positive adult development***. According to Levinson (1986), adult life is divided into age-defined *eras* comprising several *periods* reflecting different forms of development, with most periods lasting about five years. Each era begins with a transitional period, with early adult transition from childhood ("preadulthood") occurring at ages 17-22, mid-life transition from 40-45, and late adult transition from 60-65. Levinson's model ends at age 65, which assumed no further development. Each period marked some significant developmental milestone, whether it was meaning construction at the entry level of an era or the culmination of development in preparation for moving to a new transition period (Levinson, 1986, p. 7). Levinson's theory viewed movement across eras as producing qualitatively different structures created through a transformational process. He used the metaphor of *season* to reflect that one period leads to another, but that the subsequent period need not reflect a more advanced state.

Empirical support for Levinson's theories has been mixed. His theory has been criticized for its being founded on a very small and ethnically homogeneous male population, and therefore generalizability across genders and cultures has always remained questionable (Arnett & Tanner, 2009), In particular, studies among other racial and socioeconomic group have not supported the theory (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2011, p. 11).

***Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model***. Kolb (1984) presented an experiential learning model based on a continuous four-stage cycle of development (also called a "learning cycle"). The cycle represented "four adaptive learning modes – concrete

experience, reflective observation, active conceptualization, and active experimentation" (Kolb, 1984, p. 40). Using learning to ride a bicycle as a metaphor, Kraft (1978) explained how the concrete experience of attempting to balance, steer, and propel oneself is reflectively reviewed to understand the experience and why it occurred, which is then conceptualized into ways to improve the experience on the next attempt, followed finally by experimenting with the new concept in practice. The concrete experiences of this second attempt initiate the next cycle.

Kolb's (1984) model also proposes that certain pairings of learning modes constituted diametrically-opposed actions. One is the prehensive dialectic of apprehension and comprehension that represents opposing ways of grasping an experience. Apprehension represents the acquisition of sensory information from a concrete experience, in which the sensations are "so basic and reliable that we call them reality" (p. 43). Comprehension, on the other hand, is a way of summarizing a range of sensations which in the mode of abstract conceptualization. He used the sensation of sitting in a chair as an example, in which the various sensations created by sitting down constitute apprehension, while their synthesis into a conceptual whole of "chairness" exemplified comprehension (p. 43).

Another dialectic involved opposing transformative actions of *intention* and *extension*. Intention was the process of internalizing the difference between the pre-experience expectation and experiential result while in the mode of reflective observation. Intention is a transformation of the self's conception of the phenomenon (Kolb, 1984, p. 52). Extension then transforms the engagement with the external world while in the mode of abstract conceptualization. The combination of dialectics creates four forms of

knowledge which he ultimately encapsulated as four learning styles – *convergent* (preference for problem solving and decision making), *divergent* (preference for imagination and creating meaning), *accommodative* (preference for learning by doing and seeking new experiences), and *assimilative* (preference for ideas, abstract concepts, and theory development).

Kolb's learning cycle has been applied extensively in education and management, but its application in identity development is comparatively rare. Exceptions include a theoretical discussion on the use of identity play as an experiential learning activity (Kark, 2011), identity development of undergraduates in a course designed around reflective practice (Gilardi & Lozza, 2009), and identity development of newly graduated physical therapists (Plack, 2006). However, even these studies generally limit discussion of Kolb's model to the resulting four learning styles and limit discussion on the learning modes and dialectic actions.

***Kegan's (1982) theory of positive adult development***. Robert Kegan (1982, 2009) proposed a model that conceived of adult development in progressive transformative stages. Rather than basing these stages according to the individual's age, these stages represented "the person's encountering new situations that contain increasingly greater complexity" (Hall, 2004, p. 162). The five stages – *impulsive*, *imperial*, *interpersonal*, *institutional*, and *inter-institutional* – represent increasingly complex levels of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development. Those whose development progresses to higher stages gain abilities to understand, appreciate, and act in environments of higher complexity (Hall, 2004, p. 163).

Progressing through the stages is not automatic (Kegan, 2009, p. 51), rather, progressing requires a particular form of transformation. Kegan (2009) stressed that "not every kind of change, even important change, constitutes transformation" (p. 46). A transformation comprises two levels of epistemology, regarding both the way of *meaning-forming* and the ways of reforming the meaning-forming (Kegan, 2009, p. 44). The former "consists of a relationship or temporary equilibrium between the subject and object of one's knowing" (p. 45). In effect, the object is something else that the subject can be observe or manipulate. In the latter, the object to be observed or manipulated is the subject itself – which results in the reformulation of how the subject makes meaning (p. 45). However, not all adults progress through to the final stage in their life. Numerous studies show that only 20% to 30% of adults reach the fourth or institutional stage (Eriksen, 2006), in which the individual demonstrates "increased autonomy or a sense of self as distinct from others; self-authored and owned behavior; self-dependence; an identity that remains constant across contexts … [and] are able to balance their different roles rather than merely being subject to their roles" (p. 295).

Kegan's use of the word *identity* is different from identity theory, as evidenced later as "the 'self' is identified with the organization it is trying to run smoothly; it *is* this organization. The 'self' at ego stage 4 is … a person whose meanings are derived out of the organization, rather than deriving the organization out of her" (Kegan, 1982, p. 101). Transition to the final inter-institutional stage marks achievement of "the capacity to coordinate the institutional [that] permits one now to join others … as individuals - people who are known ultimately in relation to their actual or potential recognition of themselves and others as value-originating, system-generating, history-making individuals" (Kegan,

1982, p. 104). Eriksen (2006) suggests “no longer does the person perceive obstacles to transformation as threats but as ‘expressions of the very nature of the interaction among all systems’” (p. 296, citing Souvaine, Lahey, & Kegan, 1990, p. 250).

Kegan (1982) has been referenced in the identity development literature due to his promotion of the holding environment for transformational experiences (G. Petriglieri & J. Petriglieri, 2010) and of transformational learning (G. Petriglieri, Wood, & J. Petriglieri, 2011). He has also been cited in leader development literature as a lens for efforts to prepare leaders for greater responsibility (Day & Harrison, 2007), for understanding resistance to leader development programs (Hall, 2004), and for promoting leader self-awareness (Hall, 2004). Kegan (1982) has been criticized on several fronts, including understating the role of unconscious processes (Barrett & Harren, 1979), that the treatment of identity development is unitary, linear, and ordered (Carroll & Levy, 2010), and insufficient attention to emotional factors in transformation (Barrett & Harren, 1979),

***Applicability of adult development theory in this study***. The present study will not use adult development theory as a theoretical lens. However, because these theories have contributed to literature linking identity construction and leader development, these theories may provide insights when considering implications for leader development practitioners. Additionally, Levinson’s (1986) insights may be useful given that the target population of the participants will be mid-career officers aged 40-45.

**Summary**. The literature stream in this section covered considerable ground from identity theory and its roots in social interactionism to the more recent studies on identity construction in the workplace. This stream reveals some potential questions and tensions regarding their development. One question regards the notion of “preferred” identity and

whose preferences are more at play when role change occurs due to an organizational action such as a conferred promotion – is the preference based on organizational norms, the individual perspective or interpretation of those norms, the individual's sole preferences, or some combination thereof. Kira & Balkin's (2014) model is based on the individual's norms while accepting that misalignment can lead to powerful and sustainable growth, but called for more empirical work on the impacts of combining alignments and misalignments.

Another regards how one claims a leader identity, while the other regards the relationship or conflict between one's simultaneous identity as a student training to become a professional and that of the profession itself, such that the need to enact student identities due to academic requirements may overtake the desired development of the professional identity. Since identity workspaces and identity play are new to the literature, there is much room for empirical work. G. Petriglieri and J. Petriglieri (2010) identified several areas for potential research, such as (1) how business courses can serve as identity workspaces that facilitate or hinder identity work and (2) how do individuals harness identity workspaces. Regarding identity play, Ibarra and J. Petriglieri (2010) called for studies into how individuals bridged their experimental activities back into the real world and how identity play contributes to the ways individuals negotiate constant or recurrent changes of identity over the course of their personal and professional lives.

**Context of the Professional Military Career**

The final section of this review will present the context of the study, in which a U.S. military officer undergoes a role change from mid-career leader to senior military leader and presumably undergoes a commensurate role transition resulting in a new leader

identity. The conceptual frame suggests that this role change involves a role transition in which the officers exercise coping strategies potentially involving the letting go of their mid-career leader identities and eventual acceptance and internalization of their senior leader identities. This process can involve negotiation of these new identities with others. This section will review U.S. military literature to describe the contextual underpinnings of two key components of the conceptual frame. First is the *role change* from mid-career and senior military leaders, in terms of its three well-defined role changing events. The second subsection discusses the military view regarding the associated (or assumed) *identity construction.*

**Role change to senior military leader**. From the U.S. military perspective, the shift from mid-career officer to senior leader is significant, representing the role change from the direct and operational leadership to strategic leadership (U.S. Army, 2013). Approximately over the course of their first twenty years of service, mid-career officers have successfully performed as small unit leaders (e.g., platoon leader or company commander), unit staff officers (e.g., unit operations officer or logistics officer), or action officers (e.g., junior staff officer with relatively fixed responsibilities in a higher-level headquarters). They have thus constructed a working identity based on the nature of the direct and operational leadership tasks they performed, the working relationships they have established, and their *working life histories* (e.g., events and experiences) (Ibarra, 2003). The role change to senior leadership includes the assumption of authorities and responsibilities at the strategic level of leadership (U.S. Army, 2012), which invokes changes in the levels of complexity that officers must deal with in line with Jacobs and

Jaques' (1991) stratified systems theory and in the types of skills required in line with Mumford et al.'s (2007) leadership strataplex.

The role change is initiated through the confluence of three separate but related events, often but not necessarily occurring in the following order – (1) selection for attendance at a senior professional military education (PME) program (CJCS, 2011), (2) selection for promotion to senior rank (e.g., colonel or Navy captain) (U.S. Army, 2010), and (3) assignment to positions designated for senior leaders (U.S. Army, 2005). They are related in the sense that (1) and (2) both result on evaluations of performance and potential for future service such that many chosen for one are also chosen for the other. Also, under normal circumstances, (3) is initiated during (1), thereby reinforcing the notion that senior PME "prepare[s] students for positions of strategic leadership and advisement" (CJCS, 2011, p. A-A-5). A notable exception to this was during the mid-2000s when military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan necessitated waivers and deferments from PME to fill critical senior leader billets in the theaters of operations, a move heavily criticized (Scales, 2010). Under the common scenario under which the officer follows the prescribed career assignment timelines, this occurs as follows (see Figure 2.9):

1. All officers are notified via official message that a selection board will meet to consider officers for resident senior PME. The notification includes when the board will meet and may include an anticipated window when the results would be announced. During this period, most of the active duty Army candidates will be serving in a mid-career position.
2. *Event (1) occurs.* The selection board results are released (usually in late summer or early fall) and officers selected for PME are soon contacted by the

Army's Human Resource Command to plan for a one-year schooling assignment beginning the following summer. Under most circumstances, officers do not immediately change jobs or positions as a result of this announcement.

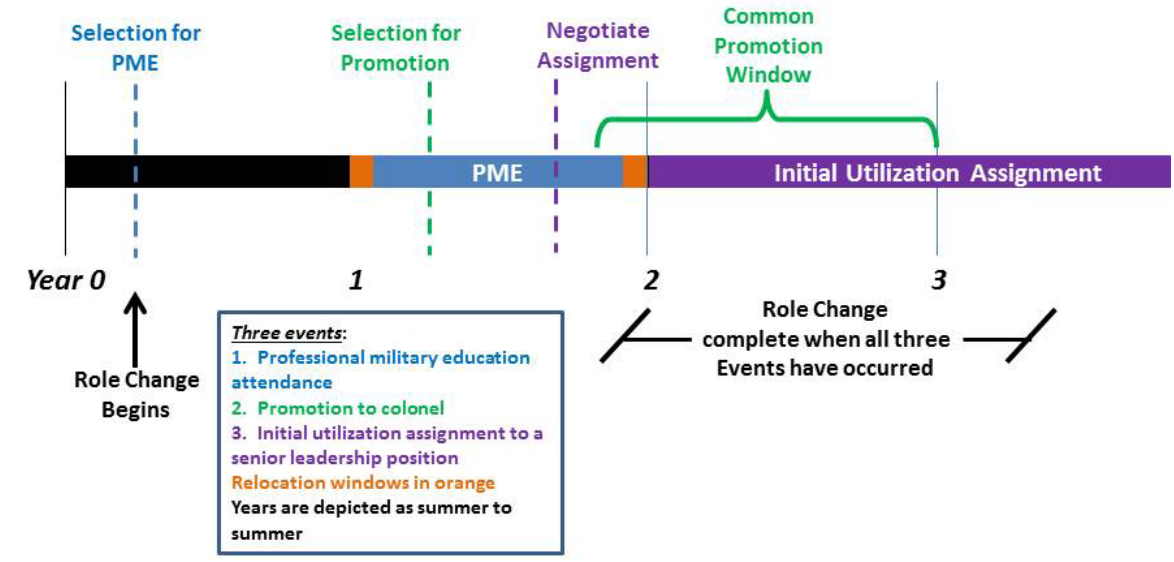


Figure 2.9. Typical sequencing of the role change to senior military leader

3. Officers eligible for promotion consideration are notified via official message of that selection board. Eligibility is determined by time in service at the time the board meets. Typically, U.S. Army officers must have served two or three years as a lieutenant colonel at the time of the board.
4. *Event (2) occurs.* While the officer is attending senior PME, the results of the promotion board is released, and officers selected are given a sequence number that will determine when promotion will occur based on authorizations. Officers continue to wear the rank of lieutenant colonel, but their ranks change

to “lieutenant colonels (promotable),” or “LTC(P)” for short, and the duty assignment process will often treat the officer as already promoted.

5. *Event (3) occurs.* During senior PME, Army human resource managers will negotiate follow-on assignments with students based on requests for PME-qualified officers from the field. Officer completes senior PME and reports to a designated utilization assignment as a senior military leader. This assignment normally lasts two years, but can vary from one to three years depending on the receiving headquarters.

This common scenario is only illustrative as the sequence will vary according to the individual officer. Assignments in certain duty positions or in deployed regions may take priority and therefore justify deferment of senior PME attendance. Many officers are selected early or late for promotion, which also alters the sequence of events (U.S. Army, 2010). Some officers may fail to realize the full role change because one of these three events does not occur, bringing about Schlossberg’s (1981a) non-event. For example, an officer may be selected for PME attendance early and be assigned to a senior leader afterwards only to be passed over for promotion, or an officer facing special personal circumstances must decline a senior leader assignment (see U.S. Army, 2010). Also, senior PME can be deferred extensively in times of war such as seen during recent operations in the Middle East, although critics suggest that the delays in acquiring requisite knowledge for senior leadership can stunt their development and inhibit readiness to ascend to higher positions (Scales, 2010). Under such circumstances, the officer does *not* fully assume the role of senior leader. Non-selection for promotion and declination of an assignment are

grounds for retirement from active duty (U.S. Army, 2010). The following subsections address the three role-changing events in more detail.

***Senior PME attendance***. Senior PME programs are responsible for aiding in the transition, or transformation, of officers from the mid-level to the senior levels of command, leadership, and management (CJCS, 2011). Although there are six such programs in the U.S. military, one in each service and two *joint* programs, all are governed until a single accreditation standard regarding the impartation of skills and knowledge associated with service as a senior military leader (CJCS, 2013a, 2013b).

Knowledge requirements are set in joint doctrine. CJCS (2011) establishes the accreditation standards for all PME schools including *junior* and *senior* PME. Junior PME is encapsulated in a set of standards called JPME Phase I, and is required for entry-level mid-career officers (e.g., new majors in the Army, Air Force, and Marines; new lieutenant commanders in the Navy) while senior PME is called JPME Phase II and applies to officers changing from mid-career to senior leadership. For their programs to be accredited for JPME Phase II, senior PME schools must provide a core curriculum for all students that satisfactorily addresses six established "joint learning areas" comprising twenty-six "joint learning objectives" (see CJCS, 2011, Appendix E to Annex E). Some of these are quantitative extensions of learning objectives from JPME Phase I while others are qualitative additions. Figure 2.10 illustrates the differences among PME levels within the U.S. military.

Senior leader competencies enable leaders to apply knowledge to perform their assigned tasks (Gerras, 2010), and senior PME curricula typically incorporate learning activities designed to help students develop these competencies. In addition to using the

curriculum to impact required knowledge, senior PME curricula provide opportunities to develop and improve competencies needed of senior leaders. Gerras (2010) presents these in three categories. *Conceptual* competencies include frame of reference development, problem management, and envisioning the future. *Technical* competencies include systems understanding, relationships across "JIIM" organizations (Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, and Multinational), and political and social competence. *Interpersonal* competencies include consensus building, negotiation, and oral and written communications.

It is important to note that there are substitutes for resident PME attendance, which I mention here but will not use in this study. Each senior PME institution provides a distance education program that is the equivalent of the regular resident PME program but geared for officers who either cannot attend the resident course (e.g., reservists) or do not wish to (e.g., to avoid moving the family twice within a year). I am excluding these officers because at the time of this study by law, and not by choice of the military, distance education programs cannot satisfy the JPME Phase II requirement. Distance students wishing to satisfy JPME Phase II must also attend a separate ten-week course at a special joint school in Norfolk. This introduces an unacceptable number of additional variables when seeking to understand the experience of role change from mid-career to senior leader. Also, Army officers have the option to attend a War College Fellowship, which is a ten-month program at a civilian institution or U.S. government agency that serves as an equivalent educational experience as JPME Phase II. The quality and nature of these fellowships introduces far too much variance for these officers to be considered.

***Promotion to Colonel (or Navy Captain)***. Department of the Army Pamphlet 600-3 (U.S. Army, 2010) says that, "attaining the grade of colonel is realized by a select few and truly constitutes the elite of the officer corps" (p. 19) and that the typically selection opportunity rate from any given pool of lieutenant colonels is 50 percent (p. 35). While the actual selection rate is driven by on-hand strength against established maximums from the Defense Officer Personnel Management Act of 1981 (U.S. Army, 2010, p. 35), it generally experiences a significantly lower selection rate than more junior officer ranks (p. 36).

Selection for promotion and the actual promotion itself are two different occurrences (U.S. Army, 2005). Because Congress sets a fixed maximum of officers by rank, upon selection officers are placed in a queue by "sequence number" based on relative seniority among the selectees (U.S. Army, 2005, p. 53). The number of officers promoted each month is therefore dependent on the availability to promote below the fixed maximum (U.S. Army, 2005, p. 10). Human resource managers will treat "promotable" officers as though the higher rank was already conferred. In certain instances, such as for commands, an administrative action (called *frocking*, see U.S. Army, 2005, pp. 36-39) will be invoked to provisionally confer the new rank, allowing the officer to wear the insignia while neither technically holding the rank nor being paid for it. The actual promotion, when it occurs, carries with it a formal ceremony, the ability to permanently wear the insignia, and salary increase (U.S. Army, 2005, p. 13).

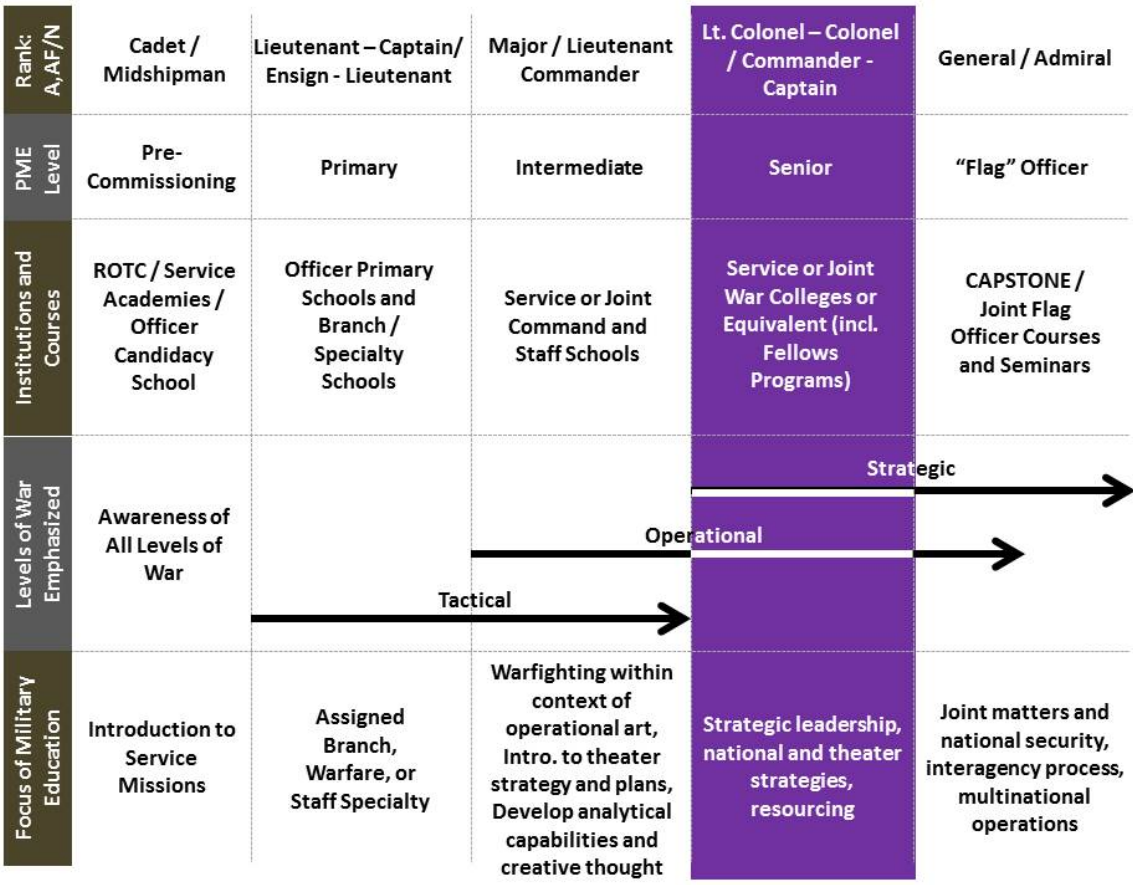


*Figure 2.10*. Excerpt of officer professional military education continuum. Adapted from *Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP)*, Chairman's Instruction CJCSI 1800.01D with Change 1 by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011, p. A-A-A-1.

***Initial senior leader assignment***. Each service is responsible for governing the assignment processes of its officers, including those serving in joint billets. DA Pamphlet 600-3 (U.S. Army, 2010) governs the assignment process for Army officers, and this process is consistent with those of other services. Army Regulation 614-100 (U.S. Army, 2006), paragraph 5-4e, governs utilization of Army officers upon graduation from a senior PME program. It states that "distribution priority is to maximize benefit to the Army of the … educational experience with a focus on troop units followed by the requirement to

increase experience on high level joint and service staffs" (p. 20). However, the number of colonel-level positions among 'troop units' is small, so high level joint and service staff positions constitute the majority.

This is illustrated in Figure 2.11, showing the distribution among PME students of their assignments immediately prior and immediate after PME attendance. "Tactical" represents traditional military units at brigade and below, which describe 84% of the assignments immediately preceding PME attendance, when officers would learn of their selection for PME. This reduces to 39% for the first post-PME assignment, while other types of organizations grow from 16% to 61% assignment rate, especially among the military departments (MILDEPT, that includes Department of the Army staff and related agencies), joint organizations, and other so-called strategic assignments such as liaisons and senior advisors. Thus, the role change includes a shift away from direct and/or routine contact with troop units to predominantly working in staff environments.

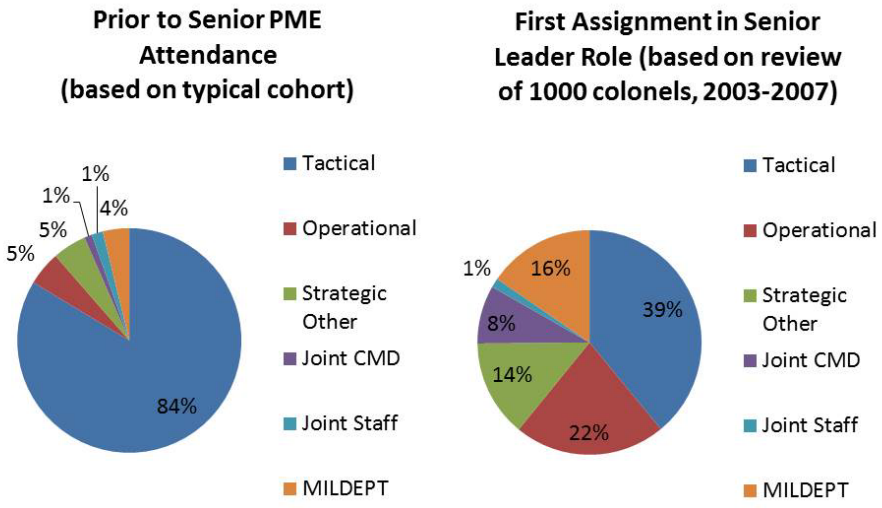


*Figure 2.11.* Assignments before and after attending the War College. Includes only active duty U.S. Army officers. Developed from unpublished data courtesy of the U.S. Army War College, May 2014. Used with permission.

As the 16% non-tactical pre-PME assignment rate suggests, many officers do receive opportunities to serve on one of these higher headquarters staffs. The inclusion of so-called "broadening" assignments in the Army Leader Development Strategy (U.S. Army, 2013) is intended to offer exposure to such staff assignments systematically, such as offering one two-year assignment to a joint command in the midst of a twenty-year experience leading to the mid-career role (p. 13). However, assignments in such commands differ greatly according to rank. Figure 2.12 shows a representative example of duty assignments color-coded by rank (using the Army convention) in a joint or MILDEPT organization led by a four-star general.

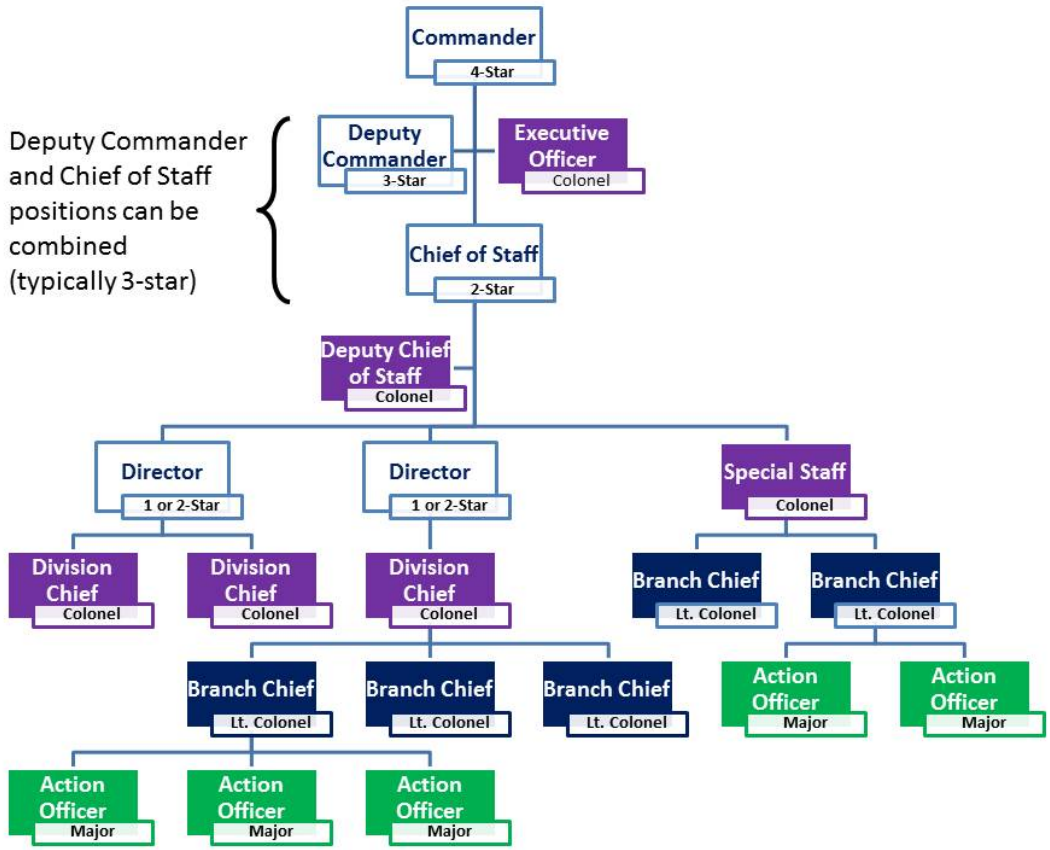

*Figure 2.12*. Typical joint or military department organization. Based on the *Joint Staff Officers Guide (JFSC, 2000)*, colored based on rank often associated with the position.

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The following list summarizes the responsibilities starting at the lower levels. It is important to note that no unified definition of the terms exist (CJCS, 2014) due to the tremendous variance of responsibilities. However, joint staff organizations normally abide by the relative hierarchical structures of directorate, division, branch, and action officer. At the lowest level, an action officer performs *staff actions* (e.g., official documents that provide information or propose recommendations, per JFSC, 2000, p. C-8) within a specified area of expertise "to develop, coordinate, and complete … required analysis; formulate recommendations; present the action for decision; and, ultimately, prepare a message or other correspondence implementing the recommendations" (JFSC, 2000, p. C-2). A *branch* is "a subdivision of any organization" (CJCS, 2014), but ordinarily in the context of a military headquarters, a *branch* comprises action officers and a *branch chief* is often a first-line staff supervisor. A *division* is normally comprised of branches and represents a full functional responsibility such as a planning group within a directorate or a separate so-called special staff office with unique roles and missions (e.g., public affairs, chaplain, staff judge advocate, and others). The term *directorate* (and its associated lead position *director*) is reserved for the major military organizational functions such as human resources (J-1), intelligence (J-2), operations (J-3), logistics (J-4) and so on (JFSC, 2000, p. 1-29).

There are also positions typically reserved for experienced staff colonels. For example, a *deputy chief of staff* is often a senior colonel with prior experience as a *division*

*chief* and who is responsible for coordinating activities across a staff. The four-star commander is authorized an *executive officer*, normally a senior staff-experienced colonel, to serve as the primary gatekeeper, manager of affairs, and supervisor of the commander's personal support staff and operations.

The important inference is that an initial assignment to a staff headquarters will tend to be determined by rank before experience. A tactical-only mid-career officer subsequently assigned to a staff headquarters as a senior PME graduate and colonel selectee will be assigned to a colonel billet despite having neither action officer nor relevant branch chief experience. Meanwhile, officers who have served multiple times in such staff headquarters organizations and thereby hold both action officer and branch chief experience will also find themselves placed in a similar colonel billet.

**Construction of a senior military leader identity**. Military leader development doctrine considers education as only one part of the overall developmental environment, the others being experience and training. U.S. Army (2013) defines *training* as "an organized, structured, continuous, and progressive process based on sound principles of learning designed to increase the capability of individuals, units, and organizations to perform specified tasks or skills" (p. 11) and *experience* as the "continuous progression of personal and professional events" (p. 12). Together, education, training, and experience help develop what one can "be, know, and do" (U.S. Army, 2013, p. 7).

In terms of "be," the Army establishes a single rubric of attributes to describe the preferred persona of its leaders, and *does not prescribe how they might differ between junior and senior levels*. The following are these attributes:

- *Character*: Army values, empathy, warrior / service ethos, discipline
- *Presence*: Military and professional bearing, fitness, confidence, resilience
- *Intellect*: Mental agility, sound judgment, innovation, interpersonal tact, expertise (U.S. Army, 2012, p. 1-5)

Operationalizing the doctrine among senior military leaders has been largely left to interpretation and commentary by military scholars. Moral development is one such area of interest (Snider, 2012a, 2012b). For example, senior military leaders assume guardianship of their respective service organizations and stewardship of the military profession (Snider, 2008, 2013). This brings about greater personal and professional responsibilities and greater scrutiny over their actions and decisions by those inside and outside the military such as Congress (Snider, Oh, & Toner, 2009).

Prescribed roles or responsibilities as a way of disseminating preferred identities is controversial as they largely derive from a dominant Army culture rather than inducing the dominant identities from the actual lived experience of members (Learmonth and Humphreys, 2011). Learmonth and Humphreys (2011) caution that such roles tend to be expressed as positive or conformist (i.e. what managers would prefer) when useful identity development can run counter to such forms. They gave examples such as whistleblowing and workplace resistance (p. 426), activities that may be warranted under certain conditions but would clearly be disruptive in ways not preferred by management. Consequently, the literature does not necessarily show a causal relationship between a prescribed work identity and its actual development within senior military leaders.

**Summary**. For the move from mid-career to senior leader along a professional military career, *role change* comprises three separate events – selection for attendance at a

senior professional military education institution, selection for promotion, and assignment in a senior leader position. Generally, these events extend over a period of time. Thus, the first role changing event (whichever occurs first for an individual) is the most significant and is establishes the non-occurrence of the other role-change events to constitute non-events. Meanwhile, the commensurate *identity change* is not directly discussed in military doctrine. Rather, the doctrine establishes a universal rank-independent descriptor of the identity that officers are expected to carry throughout their careers. Military scholars, however, have discussed moral development and stewardship of the military profession as very important for senior military leaders.

## Inferences for Forthcoming Study

This final section of the review will integrate the key outcomes that informed the methodology for the study. The purpose of the study was to better understand the experience of identity construction as a result of changing roles from mid-career to senior leader after attendance at a senior PME program. With a deepened understanding of the identity construction experience, the military can better enable it so its colonels are more likely to embody the roles of senior leaders.

### Organizational View of Change and Transition

A key inference is the degree to which the military context discounts or potentially assumes away the *role transition* to senior leader, essentially equating *role change* with *role transition*. This is shown by the lack of explicit mention within military doctrine regarding identity change or construction, and preferring only to specify universal properties of officers in general without consideration for the particularities of senior officership. This argues how the military takes a *structuralist/functionalist* view of

organizational behavior that permeates its treatment of *role change* where roles are "functional for the social system in which they are embedded" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 4). While officers may desire to achieve senior leadership, determination of preparedness for promotion, selection for education, and assignment to positions of senior leadership are largely outside the officers' control, instead occurring within the confines of a centrally-controlled officer management timeline. Under the structuralist/functionalist view, promotion to colonel inherently means assuming the identity of a colonel.

Meanwhile, *role transition* and *identity construction* follow a *social interactionalist* perspective. The social interactionalist perspective argues instead that individuals negotiate their identities in a social context, that being designated a colonel only sparks the beginning of the identity construction process, and that the meaning behind becoming a colonel is determined through interactions with others in the field. Such a perspective would presume that the experience of identity development might differ substantively between a new senior PME graduate assigned to the Pentagon vice to a major Army command overseas, or between two graduates assigned to different staff agencies within the Pentagon.

**Difficulty and Valence of the Role Transition in General Case**

The entering question within Kira and Balkin's (2014) model is one of alignment between the work situation and the preferred work identity, and perceived alignment/misalignment takes one down different paths. The question this raises is how one can articulate the sense of being aligned or misaligned. Ashforth's (2001) seven attributes of *role transition* that measure difficulty and valence will be helpful.

To illustrate, the following is a discussion of the seven attributes of role change from mid-career to senior military leader using military doctrine and practices for the

standard career officer. The results are shown graphically in Figure 2.13. First, the *magnitude* of the role change will tend to be high, but will vary, due to the elevation of responsibilities to the strategic level which constitutes a significant qualitative increase in the role (Turner, 1990). Even for officers with experience in the types of organizations senior military leaders will find themselves in, their specific functions within the organization will be at a higher level. For the typical Army officer whose career has been dominated by small unit and direct leadership, the shift to predominantly higher headquarters assignments may constitute a significant role change.

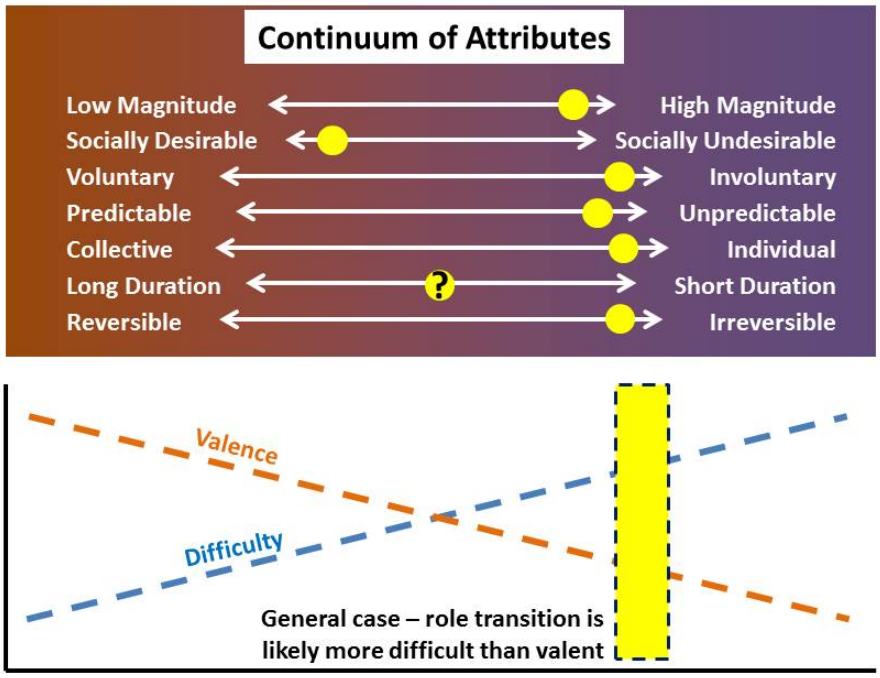


*Figure 2.13.* Difficulty and valence of role transition to senior military leader. Based on review of military doctrine and personnel regulations regarding the standard officer career, and is not intended to reflect the perception of any individual officer. Adapted from *Role Transitions in Organizational Life* by B. E. Ashforth, 2001, p. 90. Copyright 2001 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Second, this can generally be considered an *involuntary* role change. Ashforth (2001) described voluntary being "when an individual is able to exercise real choice in whether and when he or she exists a role and in selecting or agreeing to accept a new role" (p. 97). Although military culture considers active service to be a voluntary action and therefore promotion to the senior officer ranks as a voluntary act, the conditions under which this occurs are clearly driven more by organizational norms and processes than individual choice, and thereby under Ashforth's (2001) model constitutes an *involuntary* change. Timing of selection for senior PME and promotion to colonel is determined by a standard career management plan that individual officers cannot influence. While they can exercise some choice in terms of follow-on senior leader assignment, this too is restricted based on available positions and priorities set by the military.

Third, this is an *irreversible* role change. Once an individual begins the role change through the occurrence of the first role-changing event, the process cannot be reversed or undone without ending the officer's career. The officer also has no recourse to self-select out of the process due to the career management timeline that requires advancement.

Fourth, despite the predictable nature of the military career management process, under Ashforth's (2001) definition, the role change is actually *unpredictable*, the opposite of when "one is able to anticipate the date of the role exit, the onset and duration of the role entry period, and the nature of the events surrounding the exit and entry" (p. 99). If, for example, selection for senior PME is an officer's first role-changing event, it is not certain that the officer will experience a transition until PME attendance. Duties and responsibilities may not change whatsoever, and the need for transition may not become apparent until presented during PME.

Fifth, the role change is *individual* and not collective. Although it is possible that several officers within the same organization may be selected for advancement, they are treated as individual role changes and no inherent effort is placed on treating the selectees as a collective.

Thus, five of the seven attributes tend toward the high difficulty-low valence sides of their respective continuums. The sixth, *socially desirable*, weighs strongly toward the low difficulty-high valence side because selection for advancement is an honorable condition, a reward for outstanding performance and future potential. The seventh, *duration*, is ambiguous and may depend on the individual circumstance. That an individual will receive a long lead time between the first role-changing event and the last may not necessarily result in a lengthy transition to the role of senior military leader. Because, as shown by Guillen and Ibarra (2009), identities are resilient, it is possible that only the immersion in a senior leader position sufficiently initiates the true role transition, in which case the transition would occur during a short time.

**Role Exit and Role Entry**

The levels of prescriptiveness within the role change are high, as evidenced by the regulatory and doctrinal processes governing promotions and selections in the military. In accordance with Ashforth (2001, p. 150), this suggests that the latitude to exercise the transition according to an individual's discretion is probably low. When combined with the relatively high difficulty and low valence associated with the role transition in the general case, this suggests the potentiality that indicators of stress – role ambiguity, conflict, confusion, or ambivalence (Ashforth, 2001; Schlossberg, 1981a) – will be present.

## Conclusion

Given that the Army promotes its general officers entirely from within, it is its cohort of colonels that would subsequently undergo similar transitions in preparation for leadership at Jacobs and Jaques' (1991) strata VI and VII. Better understanding of the experience of identity development at the rank of colonel may further contribute to knowledge on the subsequent transition to general officer, whose senior leader responsibilities and impact on the military are even greater.

# Chapter 3: Methods

The purpose of the study was to create a better understanding of the experience of identity construction as a result of changing roles from mid-career officer to senior military leader upon assumption of their initial position of senior leadership. This transition was commensurate with the shift of responsibilities within the military from organizational to strategic leadership (U.S. Army, 2012) made manifest after selection and attendance at a senior professional military education (PME) program and selection for promotion to the rank of colonel. This chapter presents the research methodology used in this study, that of an interview-based phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2013). The chapter is organized into the following sections based on Cohen, Manion, and Morrison's (2010) framework for research planning: (1) orienting decisions, (2) proposed method, (3) role of the researcher as key instrument, (4) sampling plan, (5) data collection plan, (6) data analysis plan, and (7) ethical and human subjects considerations.

## Overview of the Methodology

### Qualitative Orientation

This study was qualitative, "interested in uncovering the meaning of a phenomenon for the participants involved" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). This study pursued how nascent senior officers "interpret their experiences … construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). This is called the *social constructivist* worldview, which involves developing subjective "meanings directed toward certain objects or things" (Creswell, 2013, p. 24; also Crotty, 1998), which in this study was the phenomenon of role change from mid-career to senior military leader. This worldview shaped the researcher's approach to the study's purpose, particularly in light of the apparent

contrast between the military's *structural-functionalist* orientation toward role change and the *social interactionist* orientation of identity construction.

The researcher sought to understand the lived experience among individuals undergoing a phenomenon. Creswell's (2013) definition of qualitative research, called for "the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes" (p. 44). Induction occurs through the detailed study of individual participants followed by building patterns and categories "bottom-up" until a "comprehensive set of themes" emerge (p. 45). Deduction serves to continuously check these themes against the data (p. 45). Creswell (2013) also suggested that qualitative research is best used when "a problem or issue needs to be *explored*" (p. 47, emphasis original). This study pursues "variables not easily measured" (Creswell, 2013, p. 48) or, in the case of identity change, "not noticeable" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 176). In addition, this study pursues a subject whereby "quantitative measures and the statistical analyses simply do not *fit the problem*" (Creswell, p. 48, emphasis original). The social construction of one's identity in the course of entry into senior military leadership is difficult to quantify because not enough about the experience is known.

**Phenomenological Inquiry**

According to Merriam (2009, p. 24), "phenomenology is both a twentieth century school of philosophy associated with Husserl … and type of qualitative research." In setting aside the scientific reduction of phenomena to "abstract laws," phenomenologists sought to bring out the "people's conscious experience of their life world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25). Of interest, however, were specifically those experiences that were meaning-

making, as Schutz (1967) differentiates between mere passive experiences that were "undergone or suffered" versus those that included feelings and constitution of values by feelings, whether these values be regarded as ends or means" (p. 54).

This study employed *transcendental phenomenology,* which according to Moustakas (1994) emphasized uncovering these experiences through a "systematic and disciplined methodology" (p. 45). Moustakas (1994) said that "the challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings" (p. 27). Nascent senior officers may have undergone *role change* in a definitional sense based on the activities of the military organization, but the feelings, values, and meanings generated from it that constituted a potential commensurate *identity change* was of greater interest. Pursuing that knowledge phenomenologically involved seeking knowledge "through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience" (Moustakas, p. 84). These descriptions would be both *textural* and *structural*, which were respectively "what the participants experienced" and "how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Combined, these descriptions provided "an overall *essence* of the experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80).

## Orienting Decisions

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2010) defined *orienting decisions* as those decisions setting boundaries or constraints on the research (p. 79). Among their questions were considerations over the customers or audiences of the research, the powers they have to influence the research timing and agenda, ownership of the research and data, and potential

ethical issues faced in its undertaking. They also included the aims and purposes of the study given in the previous section.

**Customer, Audience, and Ownership**

Creswell (2013, p. 217) said that "all writers write for an audience." The U.S. Army and its senior PME institution -- the U.S. Army War College (USAWC) in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania -- are the audiences for this research, and I classify them as "policymakers" according to Tierney (1995, p. 385), thus the study will be oriented toward having "clear policy implications for changing practice" (Tierney, 1995, p. 388).

The U.S. Army has both a doctrinal and a moral responsibility to develop its senior leader corps to lead the professional institution (Snider, 2012a; U.S. Army, 2013). Thus, there is great interest in better understanding how its senior leaders develop and what the U. S. Army can do to foster better developmental outcomes (Snider, 2012b; Shanker & Bumiller, 2012). The U.S. Army acknowledges the differences in responsibilities, tasks, and competencies between its mid-career and senior leaders (Gerras, 2010) and includes within the USAWC curriculum requirements to assist in the identity development of its senior PME students.

From a theoretical standpoint, identity change has garnered recent attention in the literature both with respect to individual transitions (e.g., Ibarra & Barbelescu, 2010; Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007; G. Petriglieri & J. Petriglieri, 2010; J. Petriglieri, 2011) and career-long identity development (Ibarra, 2003, 2005). Much of this literature is rooted in social interactionism (Stryker, 1980) that views identity change as a negotiated outcome between the individual and others or the environment. Hence the creation, vacation, and prioritization of identities are functions of an individual and not necessarily fully aligned

with those prescribed of the organization. Therefore, using Nicolai & Seidl's (2010) taxonomy of relevance, this study pursued *legitimative relevance* in the form of *rhetorical devices*, described as legitimating "a choice already available to third parties" (p. 1269). Through metaphors, stories, and frames, this inquiry will help identity theorists better understand a significant mid-career identity change accompanying a substantive role change. This identity change requires acquisition of more complex tasks and competencies along with a revised self-concept as a senior leader in a large diverse organization.

USAWC's only potential influence over the research was enhanced access to its graduates. At the time of the study, I had just retired from active service in the Army as a faculty member at USAWC who was subsequently re-hired on a one year contract as an adjunct faculty instructor with similar duties and responsibilities as before. The work on this dissertation was conducted in addition to and separate from my work duties as instructor. However, because some USAWC leaders expressed interest in the study and a current USAWC faculty member served on this committee, I enlisted USAWC faculty in helping to identify potential candidates. Otherwise, USAWC held neither any claim nor veto power over the research, and I own the study and all the data.

**Selection of Purpose and Research Questions**

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2010) expressed great interest in the boundary between the researcher and the audience, especially if the respondents had control over the structure or any parameters of the study. These concerns did not present themselves here. The purpose, objectives, and research questions provided in the previous section were entirely of my choosing. I therefore avoided serving hidden agendas or sanctioning of the research findings by the Army.

However, the audience did carry some indirect influence. Because USAWC was highly supportive of my attending doctoral classes and completing this study, I considered myself as having a moral obligation to satisfy a legitimate need of theirs, but did not consider their perspectives in the course of planning the study. I also recognized the potential that the research will indicate actual or perceived shortcomings in the USAWC program despite my explicit intent not to have to study serve an evaluative or diagnostic role. I mitigated such concerns by ensuring the study did not serve as any sort of evaluation of the program and instead focused solely on the experience of identity change among the participants.

I must note that this research was a spin-off of a related but separate project I undertook at USAWC regarding how the College articulates its objectives and desired outcomes. The project developed a list of eight role identities that served as exemplars for the students to enhance their self-awareness and visualize their future selves in senior leader positions. The main outcome of this report was the production of a required reading (Galvin, 2014) for all students during the opening lesson of the USAWC resident curriculum for academic year 2015 which will also be used for 2016. I will address the implications on my research later in this chapter when I provide my subjectivity statement.

**Time and Resources**

Neither time nor resources were significant constraints. My chosen methodology allowed for efficient data collection and tremendous flexibility given that the participants were very busy professionals with limited ability to control their own schedules. Cost was not a concern despite having to personally fund the majority of the research, and I did not seek any sponsorship or funding, therefore sustaining full independence.

## Method

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2010, p. 81) said that decisions related to the design and method establish the practicalities of the research, assuming it is feasible. Many of their questions focused on the choices of methodology and details of the data collection.

### Foci of Research Question

This research had two primary objectives – (1) enhance understanding about the experience of identity transition when transitioning from a mid-career officer role to a senior level officer post-PME, and (2) reveal the lived experience of role entry into the first post-PME assignment. The research question was: *What is the experience of leader identity construction when transitioning from a mid-career military officer role to a senior leadership role upon entry into their first senior leadership position?* The subquestion was: *What types of resources were used and how were they used?* The focus was singular – the *experience* of identity construction as the result of a work role change – and was clearly identifiable and operationalizable.

The research question served as a first step toward the broader aim of understanding a relationship between identity change and overall leader development of senior leaders (Kets de Vries & Korotov, 2007). With the better understanding of the phenomenon of identity construction in response to role change, scholars may be able to develop a clearer description of what activities in a leader development environment may be more effective or efficient at spurring identity change or what inhibitors may exist that leader development can overcome.

## Seidman's (2013) Method of Phenomenological Interviewing

In reviewing the writings of Schutz (1967) and other phenomenologists, Seidman (2013, p. 16) drew four themes from which he developed his phenomenological approach to interviewing. The first was the "temporal and transitory" nature of experience in which the challenge for a researcher was to capture what "is" true vice what "was" or "will be" . The second regarded the importance of understanding a person's experience from their point of view and not the researcher's. The third was to treat the lived experience as the foundation of the phenomena to be studied. The fourth was the emphasis on meaning and the meaning in context.

The resulting method was a three-interview process that seeks to draw out experiences in context and the meanings that participants attach to them. Seidman (2013) differentiated the purposes of each interview as follows. The detailed approach to each interview will be presented in the data collection plan of this chapter:

> The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them (Seidman, 2013, p. 21).

## Validity and Reliability

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2010, p. 89) mentioned the importance of content and construct validity in the research questions, respectively whether the questions served to address the fullness of the construct under study and if they encouraged inquiry into the purported constructs. Phenomenological inquiry concerns itself less with applying these

forms of validity to the research questions in advance than with planning for validation of data analysis (Moustakas, 1994); since the human experience is the focus for inquiry and the interview questions will be designed to draw out that experience (Seidman, 2013, p. 29).

Critical to the success of phenomenological inquiry is “freedom from supposition” on the part of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). To that end, Moustakas (1994) included *epoché* as part of the inquiry process, where “we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things” and “invalidate, inhibit, and disqualify all commitment with reference to previous knowledge and experience” (p. 85). Through reflective meditation, the process of epoché permits researchers to identify with and thereby disregard such biases. Researchers are therefore “ready to perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance and presence” (p. 89). I exercised *epoché* prior to conducting any interviews.

Respondent validation was one of two primary means of ensuring validity during data collection (reflexivity is the other, see below). Merriam (2009) described this as "solicit[ing] feedback on your emerging findings from some of the people that you interviewed" (p. 217). She called it the best way to avoid misinterpretations. Since identity change was cognitive and difficult to observe (Ashforth, 2001; Burke & Stets, 2009), I relied heavily on interviews. This served the study well, as military officers are culturally attuned to appreciate this sort of verification activity. Respondent validation also reduced the potential influence of my own biases (Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

## Researcher as Key Instrument

Krefting (1991) said that credibility of a qualitative study is established by "how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings based on the research design, informants, and contexts" (p. 215). Qualitative research describes people acting in real life and the research cannot be isolated from such experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). Thus, the researcher's personal position and the participants' positions on the phenomena under study is an important component of the investigation. My *subjectivity statement* helped mitigate researcher bias (Johnson, 1997) by presenting a reflexive view of assumptions and predispositions. Below is my subjectivity statement for this study.

I underwent *role change* from mid-career officer to senior military leader over a 3-1/2 year period between July 2004 and October 2007. This occurred in the following sequence. First, the U.S. Army informed me of my selection for senior PME attendance in July 2004. On or about January 2005, the U.S. Army formally ordered me to duty as a resident student at USAWC. I joined the resident class of Academic Year 2006, which ran from August 2005 until graduation in June 2006. In November 2005, while a resident student, the U.S. Army announced my selection for promotion to colonel, a promotion I would not realize until September 2007. In February 2006, the U.S. Army assigned me to a utilization post with the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM), headquartered in Germany. I reported for duty at USEUCOM in July 2006 where I served until October 2007. While at USEUCOM, the magnitude of my role change became evident as the second-order effects of my actions and decisions were far greater than before, the increased access to the senior-most leaders of the organization incurred greater responsibilities when dealing with other members within the organization, and my peer associations changed

significantly from action officers within the organization to division chiefs, supervisors, and a wide range of external contacts including non-Department of Defense agencies. I believed that I experienced significant changes to my self-concept during this time that carried me through my subsequent assignments until my retirement from the military in August 2014.

From this, I had three specific areas of concern which I monitored closely during the course of the study. The first was how I might have unknowingly projected my experience upon the participants. I did not assume that identity change will occur or be perceptible. Burke and Stets' (2009) reminder that identities are resilient suggested the possibility that I would find participants who underwent no identity change or resisted changes to their self-concepts.

The other two major points regarded the fact that throughout the study I was a faculty member of the same institution from which my participants attended. I served three years as a military officer there until May 2014, and was re-hired on a one-year civilian contract beginning 11 August 2014. In my initial tenure as faculty member, I led a project to develop a set of eight idealized role identities that graduates should acquire as they move on in their careers (USAWC, 2013). It reflected a "dominant cultural" (Learnmonth & Humphreys, 2011) view of role change. Though not intended to be prescriptive, it served to help USAWC students visualize their future selves as they entered the resident program and currently serves as the core of the first assigned article that resident students read. Although none of participants indicated any knowledge of my involvement in the project and none were my students at USAWC, they may have been aware of it. Therefore, I stated that I would not conduct the study as a representative of the school nor as a serving

Department of Defense civilian. Also, while some former military officers on the USAWC faculty referred to themselves as "colonel, retired" or "COL(R)", I referred to myself solely as "Professor," thereby emphasizing my approach as an academic professional pursuing an independent study rather than as a former military officer working under an Army umbrella.

Third, I happen to be somewhat skeptical of identity construction purported to be the result of USAWC resident program attendance alone, a negative bias I believe I overcame. This stemmed from both my personal experience as both USAWC resident program student and military faculty member. It has been my experience that some students, whose academic backgrounds were less strong than their peers, created temporary student identities for the purposes of completing the program rather than devoting their energies toward developing the target senior leader identities while at USAWC, a finding similar to that of Munby, Lock, and Smith (2001) for business school students in Australia (cf. Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). To the best of my abilities, I ensured the study did not represent either an evaluation of or indictment against the program, as the literature on identity construction made clear that the phenomenon manifested itself differently among individuals based on the environment (Burke & Stets, 2009; Kira & Balkin, 2014; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006). I believe that despite my service at USAWC during the time of the study, I presented myself solely as an independent researcher and mitigate this concern. In addition, having a serving USAWC faculty member on my committee helped ensure the mitigation of this bias as I executed this study.

## Sampling Plan

The sample for this inquiry was purposefully sampled using criteria-based selection (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). Creswell (2013) noted that in phenomenological studies purposeful sampling "works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 155). Maxwell (2013) noted that purposeful sampling provided the benefits of "achieving representativeness or typicality of the settings, … establish[ing] particular comparisons to illuminate the reasons for differences between settings or individuals, … [and to seek participants] that will best enable you to answer your research questions" (pp. 98-99). While the most popular sampling strategy in qualitative research was that of *maximum variation* that seeks the greatest possible diversity of participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 158), the use of criteria-based selection will kept manageable the range of potential participants (Seidman, 2013, p. 56). Yet, the sample was still quite diverse in terms of backgrounds, life histories, and experiences.

The criteria and rationale for participant selection were as follows:

- USAWC resident program graduate. This ensured that the participants had the same PME experience. Officers attending distance education, fellowship, or other senior PME programs may have had different educational experiences that would affect their perceptions of role change.
- Officer on active duty (either active duty commissioned officer or Active Guard Reserve (AGR) officer). The career paths of reserve component (e.g., Army Reserve or National Guard) officers are different from that of active duty officers and they vary to a greater extent in terms of their career paths

prior to senior PME. Imposing this criterion will help bound the range of potential perceptions of one's role change to senior leadership.

- U.S. Army officer. For similar reasons, it was necessary to set aside potential participants from the sister services and the corps of federal civilians whose career paths vary substantially from that of U.S. Army officers.
- Assigned to a position commensurate with senior leadership. The U.S. Army applies a special code to its billets designated for USAWC graduates (called "military education level" or "MEL" 1). Assignment implies that their placement in the position is permanent and not interim or in an acting capacity and therefore carries with it full senior leader responsibilities.
- Rank of Lieutenant Colonel (Promotable) or Colonel. Because promotability and not the actual promotion itself drives the U.S. Army reassignment process, it is sufficient to allow promotable lieutenant colonels to participate. Lieutenant colonels who have not been selected for promotion (or who have been passed over for promotion), even if assigned to a MEL 1 billet, may develop questions or doubts as to their future as a senior military leader.
- Assignment in a senior leader position for at least three but not more than fifteen months at the time of the first interview. This time duration is based on assignment norms within the U.S. Army that colonels will generally change jobs every twelve to twenty-four months, which then spurs the need to develop short-term occupation-specific role identities to cover that time

frame (Ashforth, 2001). The wide time frame affords an opportunity to understand the lived experiences during the early and later stages of assignment. Figure 3.1 shows where this window resides within the overall role change window.

- Was *not* a student of the researcher while at USAWC. This excluded students whom the researcher either taught during a core or elective course or for whom was the researcher's advisee for his or her term project (called a Strategy Research Project).

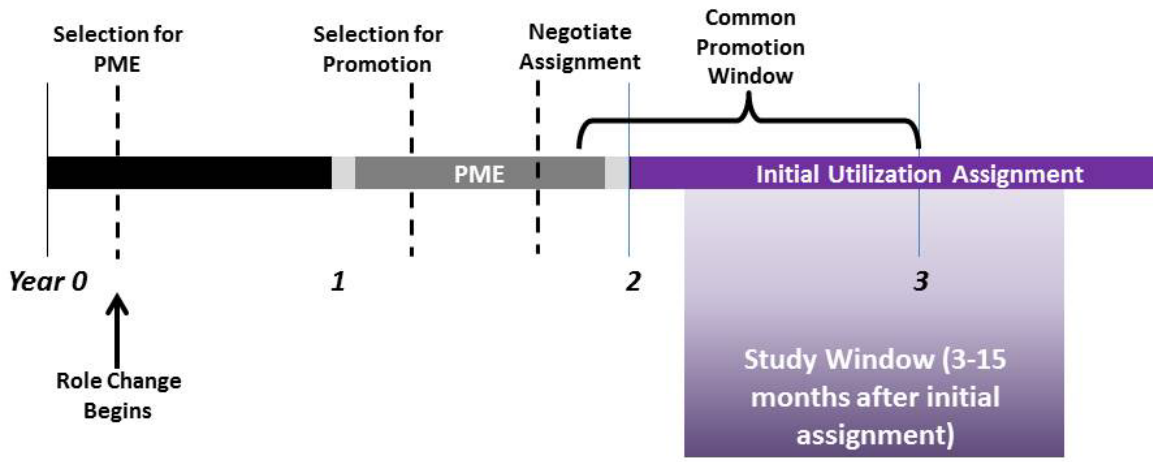


*Figure 3.1*. Overlay of participant selection window on the role change timeline

The study did not limit the population according to gender, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Instead, pursuit of maximum variation was done through considerations such as the diversity of the physical location (continental U.S. and outside) and types of assignments (such as institutional, joint, Army major command, and others). Officers from specialty fields such as acquisition, medical, and chaplains were not included. In line with phenomenological inquiry, solicitation of participants included the potential for snowball

sampling to encourage further participation (Creswell, 2013). As the initial contacts produced sufficient participation, I did not require further snowballing.

This study did not control for assignment histories, such as screening out officers who had early exposure to senior officers and their environments, because the official biographical data available to the researcher through USAWC databases did not provide sufficient context on how they influenced the participant's self-concepts to mid-career. One example is aide-de-camp, which is a junior officer serving as the direct personal assistant of a general officer. It was the researcher's experience that professional relationship between the general officer and aide-de-camp varied tremendously, with some aides being well-coached and mentored and others being employed only menially. Another was defense attaché, who is a key advisor on military matters to an Ambassador. The effects of the assignment varied greatly based on the relationship with the Ambassador and the political situation in the country assigned. Assignment histories also tended to neglect mention of temporary assignments which may have provided significant exposure. In fact, the use of Seidman's (2013) focused life history interview brought many of these factors to light and allowed for proper contextualization of the participants' backgrounds.

Sufficiency and saturation (Seidman, 2013, p. 58) were the standards upon which data collection concluded. I achieved *sufficiency* once the data reflected "the range of participants and sites that make up the population so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect with it," and *saturation* when I "[began] to hear the same information reported … [and] no longer [learn] anything new" (p. 58). These standards reflected when I had enough participants to get the broad range of experiences needed while not garnering merely repetitive responses.

For planning purposes, determining the appropriate initial sample size in any phenomenological study was a challenge, given Polkinghorne's (1989) demonstration that successful studies have included from three to 325 participants, with 25 constituting "mid-range" (p. 48). Several recent dissertations using a similar technique as this proposal achieved success using sample sizes of 10-12 participants (Hamilton, 2011; Lim, 2006; Rude, 2013; Savion, 2009) while another had 14 (Hope, 2012). Consequently, planning for this study was based on a target sample size of 12 but was prepared for a larger number.

The solicitation strategy involved snowball sampling, leveraging current USAWC faculty members (including the researcher) to elicit the help of recent students to identify potential participants. Such contacts were strictly informal and neither included nor inferred Army or USAWC sponsorship of the study. The solicitation e-mail is provided in Appendix A.

## Data Collection

As a phenomenological inquiry, the primary data source was interviews, and this study employed Seidman's (2013) three-interview approach for human subject data collection, supplemented with researcher observation in a couple cases. The three-interview technique called for three 90-minute interviews over the course of a two- to three-week period (p. 24). Ideally, all three interviews were to have been face-to-face, although Seidman's (2013) method allowed for variance in terms of separation and duration of interviews and in-person or remote contacts. In one instance, Seidman (2013) conducted all three interviews in the same day, although this was clearly not preferred and was to be avoided (p. 25).

Adherence to the prescribed method was preferred and pursued, but the significant geographic diversity of participants and the unpredictability of their schedules necessitated the use of remote means for twenty of the thirty-six interviews conducted. Three participants were stationed overseas, four served in the Washington, DC area, while the other five were located across the U.S. In addition, scheduling conflicts and other insurmountable challenges caused three other participants to withdraw after data collection began – two were stationed in the national capital region and the other in the western U.S. I conducted at least one face-to-face interview with seven of the twelve participants, and was able to exercise face-to-face for all three interviews with three participants.

I conducted the interviews as follows. I offered each participant an Informed Consent Form, the Institutional Review Board-approved final version is provided at Appendix B, that included all Seidman's (2013) eight parts of informed consent: purpose, risks, rights, benefits, confidentiality, dissemination, special conditions as applicable, and contact information (pp. 64-65). I requested their approval to use a digital voice recorder and used a commercial transcription service suggested by The George Washington University to convert the recordings to text for data analysis. The Informed Consent Document included references to the use of a transcription service to ensure their full understanding of how I would handle the data and protect their privacy and interests.

I crafted the interview questions following Merriam's (2009) guidelines, and I included a draft interview plan in Appendix C that covered my proposed approach to all three interviews. Merriam (2009) identified six types of questions to stimulate responses from participants, including experience and behavior questions, opinion and values questions, feeling questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and

background/demographic questions. For the first interview on *focused life history* in Seidman's (2013) three-interview series, background/demographic and experience questions predominated as I attempted to uncover both the participant's career path leading to the role change to senior military leadership and the commensurate evolution of the participant's identity.

In line with Seidman's (2013) structure, the second and third interviews were open-ended to pursue the participant's perspectives on the detailed experience of role change and subsequent reflection on its meaning. For the second interview on capturing the *details of the experience*, he specifically recommended avoiding opinion questions, and instead called for reconstructing the details of the lived experience (p. 21) through the garnering of facts and stories (p. 22). *Reflection on the meaning* was reserved primarily for the third interview, in which the participant can express opinions, values, and feelings which "address the intellectual and emotional connections between work and life … [but this can] be productive only if the foundation for it has been established in the first two [interviews]" (p. 22). However, because the topic of the research was one that the participants had reflected upon significantly during their USAWC experience, reflection on the meaning often permeated the other interviews, leaving the third interview occasionally redundant.

In structuring the questions, I adhered to Seidman's (2013) and Merriam's (2009) guidance favoring "how" questions over "why" questions, which were better served for gathering descriptive data. Merriam (2009) offered several ways to structure a question to encourage the participant to describe more thoroughly qualitative phenomena under study, and cautioned against multiple, leading, and yes-or-no questions as they inhibit or constrain

participant responses. Appendix C also accounted for the use of exploratory questions (Seidman, 2013, p. 84) to clarify responses or seek more information.

Proper handling of the data was critical given the over seven hundred pages of data produced. The key, according to Seidman (2013) was being organized, which included proper filing and storage of informed consent documents, recordings, transcripts, documents, contact information, and memoranda regarding key decisions in the collection process. Also, managing the data must also ensure security and confidentiality while also providing for opportunities to protect and recover data. I stored all hardcopy documents in a fireproof safe at my domicile. Storage of electronic records such as the recordings and transcripts was done using a primary and secondary external hard drive. The primary was connected to my home local area network while the secondary was disconnected and stored in a fireproof location at home, thus available in case the primary was damaged. No data was stored on a computing cloud service (e.g., Dropbox).

## Data Analysis

Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2010) stated that "the prepared researcher will need to consider how the data will be analysed" (p. 86). Two questions they asked related to the methods of data analysis and verification / validation of the results.

### Methods of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted inductively, as Seidman (2013) cautioned that researchers must "come to the transcripts with an open attitude, seeking what emerges as important and of interest from the text." The study investigated a commonly-experienced phenomenon within a single large organization in which the findings may be used to inform policy decisions by practitioners; hence an important outcome of the research was patterns

and themes that emerged from the collected data. Hence, Moustakas' (1994) major processes of phenomenological inquiry was the basis for data analysis.

Moustakas' (1994) four major processes of phenomenological inquiry were *epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences*. My use of *epoché* has already been described. *Phenomenological reduction* pursued the "complete textural description of the experience" through bracketing those phrases from the interview transcripts most relevant to the research question, identifying the textural meanings and constituents of the experience, and clustering them into a final description (Moustakas, 1994, p. 96). *Imaginative variation* expanded upon the resulting description by seeking possible meanings and approaching the phenomenon from multiple perspectives to develop "a structural description of an experience" (p. 98). Finally, *synthesis of meanings and experience* integrated the textural and structural descriptions into a unifying statement (p. 100).

In the process of exercising Moustakas' processes, I was also mindful of Saldaña's (2013) guidance on coding and categorizing the data, and ensured the capturing of "summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute[s] of the data" (p. 3) first before conducting thematic analysis that will produce descriptions of the experiences. I used MaxQDA, a commercial software package, to aid in bracketing and coding the transcripts.

**Trustworthiness**

Strategies to enhance credibility of the findings were critical to ensuring trustworthiness of a qualitative study (Krefting, 1991). I have already discussed *respondent validation* to ensure greater trustworthiness of the collected data.

*Journaling* was a reflexivity technique that I employed throughout planning, data collection, data analysis, and final reporting. Johnson (1997, p. 282) defined this as "self-awareness and critical reflection by the research on his or her potential biases and predispositions...." I exercised Krefting's (1991) use of a field journal to record my own behavior and experiences, thereby allowing for reflexive analysis as I prepared this report.

Regarding *theoretical triangulation*, Johnson (1997, p. 286) defined theoretical validity as "the degree that a theoretical explanation developed from a research study fits the data and, therefore, is credible and defensible." Theoretical triangulation was "the use of multiple theoretic and perspectives to help interpret and explain the data" (Johnson, 1997, p. 283). While Kira & Balkin's (2014) identity construction model was the primary theoretical lens for process coding, I employed other identity developments such as G. Petriglieri & J. Petriglieri's (2010) identity work and Ashforth's (2001) identity transition literature for triangulation purposes. This allowed me to cast multiple lenses on the phenomenon to seek alternative explanations (Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

Specifically regarding phenomenological inquiry, Polkinghorne (1989) asked five questions that address validity, listed below. In the final preparation of this report, I used these questions as an additional check for trustworthiness.

1. Did the interviewer influence the contents of the subjects ' descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects' actual experience?
2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?

3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those offered by the researcher that could have been derived? Has the researcher identified these alternatives and demonstrated why they are less probable than the one decided on?
4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?
5. Is the structural description situation-specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations? (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 57)

## Presenting and Reporting of Results

In addition to following the dissertation guidelines in the *Doctoral Handbook*, I intend to prepare one shortened report that would be available to both USAWC and the participants to be published after the final dissertation is approved and seek additional venues for publishing peer-reviewed journal articles and other scholarly reports. These reports would contain mainly excerpts of Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5. I will only include data and quotes from participants that were used in Chapters 4 and 5 and not from Appendix D. For the USAWC report, I will seek interest in it first before providing it.

## Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. The sample size of a phenomenological inquiry inhibits generalizing the results across wider populations but might allow some generalization among specific groups (Creswell, 2013), such as active duty officers (e.g., U.S. Army) who have graduated from their service's resident senior PME program (e.g., the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania). But, it is not assumed that

generalization could be extended to the broader category of senior PME attendees (each program's student body includes at least 25% from sister services, Reserve and National Guard components, Department of Defense and other government agency civilians, and international fellows attending from around the world) or other forms of senior PME programs (e.g., distance education equivalent programs and War College fellowships) is not assumed.

Additionally, the research question relied on participants to be both introspective and retrospective on their experiences of undergoing the role change, which according to Bridges (2009) may have included retention of some aspects of their old self-concepts while developing new ones. The results of the inquiry were interpretive and were predicated on the researcher‘s ability to correctly assemble and analyze the data.

A third limitation is that the sample was not demographically diverse. Among the twelve participants, two were racial minorities and there were no females. However, this is reflective of the overall active Army officer population in the War College resident classes for academic years 2013 and 2014 as twenty percent of the eligible pool of participants were minorities and females only comprised three percent. This limitation will be addressed in areas for future research in Chapter 5.

There were also delimitations to this study. This research inquiry only focuses on active duty U.S. Army Officers who will have completed senior PME in the summers of 2013 or 2014 and had fully assumed the duties and responsibilities of their first post-PME assignment in positions of senior military leadership.

## Ethics and Human Subjects Considerations

Human subject considerations were pivotal for the study. Using the CABLES model for assessing risks, the primary risk factor is affective, defined as "hazards of emotional distress both during and following participation in the research" (Office of Human Research, n.d.). Participants recounted both positive and negative experiences related to their identity construction during the role change to senior military leadership. The risks included identifying the participants, the potential for identifying third parties (e.g., by name or position), and distress to the participant.

I mitigated the first risk by maintaining a participant key, identifying participants solely by number, limiting the use of e-mail traffic, and always deleting e-mail traffic as soon as practicable. I mitigated the first and second risks by redacting all names or identifiable information from the transcripts using codes such as ::Name01:: and retaining a redaction key that was kept in a separate file to be destroyed upon approval of the final dissertation. Redacted information included names, locations directly related to the experience under study, and projects and activities that clearly identified the place of work. I also removed all use of third-person singular pronouns as some of the participants came from very small military subcommunities and the identification of male or female induced unacceptable risk of exposing the participants' identities.

The latter was mitigated within the informed consent process. I used Seidman's (2013) eight-component approach to ensure consent of the participants, including an understanding that the interviews could bring about distress. Appendix B contained the approved informed consent document that included measures to ensure confidentiality, privacy, protection from harm, and sustaining the rights of the participants. Since this was

an independent research study and not sponsored, endorsed, and/or directed by the U.S. Army or USAWC, participants had full rights to withdraw from participation at any time and refuse to respond to certain questions. Participants were free to restrict distribution of parts of the final study. I retained the right to edit out certain responses if I felt the participant is being untruthful, evasive, or going way off topic, however I felt that the participants were being truthful and focused. Only in one instance was there any display of emotion, which regarded the recounting of a combat experience during a focused life history interview, and during analysis I bracketed that particular vignette out.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology and methods planned for implementation of the study. It integrated the general principles regarding processes and validation of qualitative research expressed in Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009) with specific methods and methodologies related to phenomenological inquiry (Moustakas, 1994), phenomenological data collection through interviews (Seidman, 2013), and qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). This chapter also presented the researcher's subjectivity with respect to the research question and foci for the study, processes for identifying and accessing the population sample, and ethics and human subjects considerations.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter discusses the findings derived from phenomenological analysis of the audio recordings and written transcripts of the twelve participants' experiences of changing roles from mid-career officer to senior military leader. The findings were the result of interviews conducted over a two-month period following by three months of data reduction, analysis and synthesis.

The chapter will be divided into six sections. The first section briefly reviews the qualitative analysis method used in the study, Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analyzing phenomenological data (pp. 120-121).

The second section presents a detailed overview of key attributes of the twelve participants, showing the variation of their life histories gathered in the first interviews, whereby they were asked to "tell as much as possible about [themselves] in light of the topic up to the present time" (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). The purpose of this section is to situate each participant at the point of the beginning of the identity construction experience under study.

The third section presents eleven themes that emerged from horizonaling the data using Moustakas' (1994) method. Eight of these will be referred to as "core" themes and derived through analysis of the data related directly to the experience. Three additional themes drawn from the transcripts were the result of the study's emergent design (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). Data collection quickly evolved toward identifying and examining in depth the earlier role changes in the life histories of the participants because the lessons learned were often carried forward into the phenomenon under study.

The fourth and fifth sections provide the analysis. The fourth section presents a sampling of the individual textural and structural descriptions, while the fifth section presents the composite textural and composite structural description of the experience showing the meanings and essences derived from Moustakas' final step in phenomenological analysis. As all twelve participants articulated most core themes, choosing exemplars was difficult. Therefore the research chose the sample presented in this chapter based on greatest variation of the life histories. The remaining textural and structural descriptions, along with all focused life histories, are provided in Appendix D.

The final section presents a chapter summary.

## Review of Analysis Method

The primary research question for this study was, *what is the experience of leader identity construction when undergoing a role change from a mid-career leader role to a senior leader role in the context of a professional military career?* The key subquestion of the research was: *What types of resources were used and how were they used?*

The primary constructs used in the study were of identity construction using Kira & Balkin's (2014) model of negotiated identities between a self-concept, the "preferred work identity," and the work situation, and Schlossberg's (2011) *4S* model of coping with transitions that analyzes the resources used in navigating a transitional situation. The study used the qualitative method of phenomenology as it supported the study's goal of understanding a lived experience. The study involved twelve participants who were graduates of the resident program at the U.S. Army War College of the most recent two academic years and who were serving in their initial post-graduation assignment. Data

collection was conducted using Seidman's (2013) three-interview process of focused life history, details of the experience, and meaning making.

Analysis of the data involved both coding and thematic analysis. Coding was done using a composite of two first-round coding techniques from Saldana (2014) and was performed using MaxQDA. The first was *affective coding* that "investigate[s] subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgments)" (Saldaña, 2014, p 105). This form of coding fostering the identification of emotions and feelings participants experienced as environmental stimuli spurred assessments of alignment or misalignment between their self-concepts and the work situation. The second was *process coding* that sought to uncover the underlying structure of episodes and vignettes that exemplified Kira & Balkin's (2014) identity negotiation process in action. Process coding, also called *action coding*, "connotes action in the data" (Saldaña, 2014, p. 96) and was used to capture both activities and conceptual actions that participants undertook. These coding methods facilitated multiple re-readings of the interviews to better understand how the participants voiced their experiences and ensure consistency of coding across the transcripts.

Thematic analysis employed Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of analyzing phenomenological data (pp. 120-121) through phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. The process of phenomenological reduction involved *bracketing*, that identified solely those components of the data "rooted solely on the topic and question" of the research (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). Next was *horizonaling*, where each statement is treated with equal value and then repetitious or overlapping elements are removed (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). However, the researcher exercised a conservative

orientation toward horizonaling as the phenomenon under study spanned multiple years and duty assignments for each participant, and therefore Seidman's (2013) caution of erring "on the side of inclusion" (p. 127) seemed appropriate. Also appropriate was Seidman's caution of avoiding having pre-determined categories of which excerpts would be matched (p. 129). Thus, the process coding was used primarily to aid in bracketing the transcripts, but not horizonaling.

Imaginative variation included "recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon" and "searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structures" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). The researcher considered "possible structures of time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99).

With the themes, an individual textural and individual structural description of the phenomenon was constructed for each participant. With these, a composite textural and structural description was developed that synthesizes the individual descriptions "into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100).

## Profile of the Participants

Twelve U.S. Army officers volunteered to participate in the study who were all graduates of the USAWC resident program for academic years 2013 or 2014, on active duty in the U.S. Army, serving in positions commensurate with senior leadership, holding the rank of colonel or lieutenant colonel (promotable), assigned to their initial senior leader position, and who were not in any way a student of the researcher. Within these restrictions, however, there was notable variety in several factors relating to the

professional background and sequencing of events in the overall experience. These are summarized below and detailed in Table 4.1.

- Six of the twelve had served in the same branch since commissioning, constituting a *single-track career pattern*. The branches of these officers were infantry (2), armor (2), aviation, and logistics. The other six changed branches during their career. One was branch detailed, meaning that the officer served in one branch for four years (infantry) and then transferred automatically to the career branch for the remainder of service (adjutant general). Five followed the *functional area career pattern*, by which the officer served in a branch until between the six and ten year mark, then transferred to a specialized branch (called a functional area, or "FA") only available to career officers. The functional areas represented in the sample were space operations (FA 40), operations research and systems analysis (FA 49), nuclear and counterproliferation officer (FA 52), simulation operations (FA 57), and strategic plans (FA 59).

- The start point of the experience differed – six began the role change due to selection for promotion to colonel while six others began with selection to senior service college.

- Ten of the twelve were selected for the War College as primary attendees, whereas two were selected as alternates. Each of the alternates was activated for War College attendance in the late spring or early summer preceding the next academic year, thereby necessitating a rapid reassignment to Carlisle, PA.

Table 4.1

*Profile of the Participants*

| Participant[a] | 1 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Original Basic Branch of Service[b] | IN | AR | AR | AV | IN | FA | AR | AR | LG | EN | AG[c] | AV |
| Functional Area[d] | 49 | | | 57 | | 40 | 59 | | | 52 | | |
| Triggering Event was (P)romotion or (W)ar College | W[e] | P[f] | W | P | P | P | W | W | P | W | W | P |
| Activated from alternate list for War College? | | Y | | | | | | | Y | | | Y |
| Months between trigger and War College attendance | 6 | 9 | 12 | 18 | 24 | 32 | 7 | 11 | 20 | 7 | 11 | 9 |
| Graduate of AY13 or AY14 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 13 | 14 | 14 | 14 |
| Attended ASAP[g] | | Y | | | | | | Y | | Y | | |
| Type of Follow-on Assignment[h] | S | X | C | D | D | C | C | C | C | S | C | C |

[a]Participants 3, 5, and 11 withdrew early in the data collection phase.

[b]Basic branch codes: AG = Adjutant General; AR = Armor; AV = Aviation; FA = Field Artillery; IN = Infantry; LG = Logistics

[c]Participant 14 was "branch detailed" for first four years of service to infantry

[d]Functional areas: 40 = Space Operations; 49 = Operations Research / Systems Analysis; 52 = Nuclear and Counterproliferation; 57 = Simulation Operations; 59 = Strategic Plans

[e]Participant 1 had not yet been promoted

[f]Participant 2 was frocked to colonel (authorized to wear the rank prior to promotion).

[g]Advanced Strategic Arts Program – competitive program during the War College

[h]Follow-on assignment: C = Division Chief or equivalent within a large organization (note: such duty positions may be titled "director"); D = director or deputy director of a large organization; S = subject matter expert; X = Executive officer to a general

- Time varied from start point to War College attendance, ranging from seven to thirty-two months, with two participants having served multiple assignments within this timeframe.

- Eight of the twelve were graduates of the 2014 program, four graduated in 2013.

- Eleven of the twelve had been promoted to colonel, only one was still a promotable lieutenant colonel (Participant 1).

- While attending the War College, three of the twelve attended the Advanced Strategic Arts Program, a special program that accepts only a few of the top students for a separate curriculum conducted during roughly the second half of the academic year. The other nine attended the regular resident program.

- Follow-on assignments were of the following variety: division chief or equivalent (7), director or deputy director (2), subject matter expert (2), and executive officer to a general (1). The first two were difficult to differentiate as some division chief equivalent positions were titled as "director." For the purposes of this study, the term "director" applied only to centrally-selected or nominative command-equivalent positions as the head of a named organization, whereas "division chiefs" led interdependent subdivisions of an organization. Subject matter expert applied to functional area duty positions that focused on use of specialty skills or competencies and/or as advisors to senior leaders.

## Coding and Thematic Analysis

This section presents the findings of the coding and thematic analysis which produced eleven themes detailed in Table 4.2 and subdivided into two sections – eight core themes drawn from the experience under study, and three additional themes drawn from analysis of the life histories and other interview data.

The eight core themes were: (1) desiring to learn and be mentored on the meaning of the role change throughout the experience, especially early on even if tempered by the exigencies of the extent duties, (2) incorporating the change of rank into one's own identity more readily than from the educational experience, (3) needing to build and sustain relationships as an important part of undertaking the role change, (4) identifying a focus or cause to harbor a sense of personal change as an identifiable outcome of the overall role change, (5) valuing the importance of setting the tone early in the post-graduate assignment, (6) facing and confronting barriers stemming from conflicting signals between expectations set before and during the War College experience and norms and expectations in the post-graduation work environment, (7) associating the capacity to advise more senior leaders and represent one's organization or the Army with identity work toward senior leadership, and (8) desiring continued mentorship and development from more senior leaders. The eight are ordered according to where they generally occurred relative to each other within the role change experience.

Table 4.2

*Articulation of the Eleven Themes*[a]

| Participant[b] | 1 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Core Themes:* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Initial Re-Orientation & Learning | + | + | E | E | + | + | E | + | + | + | E | E |
| Effects of Promotion | | E | | | + | E | | | + | + | | |
| Importance of Relationships | | + | + | + | E | + | + | + | + | + | + | E |
| "Cause" or Transcendent Aspect | E | + | | + | + | + | + | E | E | + | + | + |
| Importance of Setting Tone | + | + | + | + | + | + | E | + | + | | + | + |
| Conflicting Signals in Work Environment | | + | + | + | E | | + | + | E | + | E | + |
| Change in Self-Concept Related to Advisory Capacity | + | + | | | + | E | | + | + | + | + | + |
| Desire for Continued Mentorship | + | | + | + | + | | | E | + | | E | + |
| *Additional Themes (From Life Histories and Other Interview Data)* | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Identity Construction During Job Withdrawal | E | E | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | E | + |
| Importance of Early Change Episode | + | E | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | E | + |
| Sense of Career Termination | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | E | + | E | + | + |

[a]Legend: 'E' = Exemplar (very strong articulation); '+' = Strong articulation.

[b]Participants 3, 5, and 11 withdrew early in the data collection phase.

Three additional themes, or insights, were drawn from the emergent nature of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 68) whereby the participant's focused life histories and other interview data were found to be important and informative, and therefore were analyzed concurrently with the bracketed data. As the participants recounted earlier role change experiences, some of which contextualized the participant's approach to the present

experience. The life histories presented additional theme to the phenomenon of identity construction during a role change, which the researcher thought could provide additional implications for theory and practice in Chapter 5. The additional themes are: (9) constructing one's identity during job withdrawal scenarios, (10) creating one's innate approach to coping based on the formative experiences of the earliest significant role change episode in the career, and (11) facing the inevitable termination of one's military career. The researcher chose to develop narratives of the life histories to accompany the textural and structural descriptions. These narratives are included in Appendix D.

**Core Theme 1: Desiring to Re-Orient and Learn … If Possible**

Beyond the initial euphoria and congratulations from others, participants quickly began reflecting on the meaning of the upcoming role change. Regardless of the triggering event -- whether it was selection for promotion or schooling -- participants were cognizant of the lower selection rates and many expressed some surprise at selection. For example, Participants 1 and 8 found the selection somewhat disruptive as they were considering retirement at about the twenty year mark. All participants saw the selection as a good thing, however, albeit one that would change their professional lives and align them with a wholly different set of peers, as expressed in these passages.

> In many regards, I was going to get out of my responsibilities to actually produce products and do the specific analysis, to be the worker bee. The Iron Major, for lack of a better term, was gonna shift. And now, where I was comfortable in the gratitude of my individual skills and performances – not the gratitude, but my individual abilities, skills and comforts, I was now going to be much more reliant on being able to guide others and just provide input. And I was gonna be kind of an overarching guide, manager,

> synchronizer, and much less of the guy or gal actually doing the work. [Participant 15]

> My real reaction making Colonel was almost one of - intimidation probably isn't the right word - but almost one where, "Holy macron, I'm a Colonel now." Ya know? And as I look at colonels those are those old guys who run around and they have all this wisdom. They impart this wisdom on people and overseeing all these other folks and it's kind of like, 'I hope I can carry that torch'. [Participant 7]

At the point of the triggering event, participants defined the roles of senior leaders on the basis of the positions and responsibilities held and the nature of the environment they operated in. The difference between a mid-career and senior leader was a delta between operating "at the strategic level and the tactical level," such as "having that leadership ability to see the bigger picture versus day-to-day activities" (Participant 6). Participant 12 noted that senior leaders were often defined by their duty positions as "at the higher levels, Army staff level, different command levels, in their responsibilities, in the work that they do, the recommendations they make for general officers to make the hard strategic level decisions." Participant 1 also included "knowledge of information outside the organization, as well as somebody who actively pursued issues outside the organization." Most participants did not see themselves aligned with their concept of senior leader. For example, Participant 8 said:

> I had some exposure to higher levels of the US government just from the jobs I had, but I had no fantasy, if you will, that I could operate freely or smoothly in those circles because I just hadn't been completely immersed in that level of commander leadership before. [Participant 8]

After the initial positive feeling subsiding, the majority of participants leveraged available time to figure out what being a senior leader meant through two ways. One was by observing senior leaders:

> I think I started paying more attention to the colonel level and above. I wanted to pick out good examples, reach out to peers – they weren't peers at the time, but the people I thought really nailed what it was to be a strategic leader. … [I] tried to see how they did things, whether it was counseling to in-briefs, how they briefed and how they handled themselves in senior-level forums. I did make a conscious effort to do that. [Participant 6]

> I was very fascinated by the idea of this kind of vision that a senior commander could have to transform this installation and lead cultural change in the Army. Because I think that's what they were doing. … So, I think it gave me a good insight into the senior leader role as a leader of cultural change. [Participant 10]

Another was through mentoring relationships, usually superiors, which the participants strongly appreciated and valued. For example:

> I received congratulatory notes from [general officers]. … But also, besides the congratulations, there were discussions about what this really meant and what the Army was saying by picking me up for Senior Service College, and then more importantly, what the Army was expecting for me to do at the Senior Service College and then beyond. This wasn't just way to go, that there's an expectation invested on their part and then outcomes, and what I could expect. [Participant 9]

> My senior rater was the G3 and I did have final counseling with him. And you know, the topic of discussion definitely was, you know, going off to the War College. My G3 was a Carlisle graduate as well and he kind of gave me his thoughts on what I needed to focus on or some things I should focus

> on while I was there. … [He said,] I should find something that I needed to work on and then focus on that as well. Take a… you know, something that needs a little attention, both professionally and personally and focus your energy on that. [Participant 1]

Some participants, due to the circumstances of their extant duty position, were isolated. For them, the desire to observe senior leaders and receive mentorship was there, thus lamenting the missed opportunity.

> I had what I would call few peers. I had some colleagues so I was assigned, as a reminder, to [an agency], with duty at [a separate non-Army location]. I was kind of an outsider on there. I had only been there well less than a year when I found out that I would be selected to attend the War College. … It was mainly Air Force officers, mid-grade Captains and Majors and those kinds of things so I had few, if any, peers, no other Lieutenant Colonels that were competitive for the War College. … [S]o it was a little bit of a vacuum as far as having a group to talk about it or share with or appreciate, and that kind of thing. [Participant 13]

A few also noted some friction surfacing from those who were not selected.

> Selection for [battalion] command may be a little bit unique among my peers but I never felt any sense of grief from peers. I did, now with selection for Senior Service College and promotion to [colonel], for the first time really in my career, experienced a little bit of the separation and a little friction with some peers who had not been selected. … I would characterize [it] as pretty subtle, a different response or the eye roll in conversation when something is mentioned. I think my wife, truthfully, from other spouses, probably got a little bit more direct comments from spouses of individuals that weren't. [Participant 14]

However for the most part during the extant duty assignment, there was little noticeable change felt. Few saw changes in their duties and responsibilities, with the notable exception of Participant 2 who was immediately given new supervisory duties. And thus for many participants, re-orientation and learning was deferred to the beginning of the War College, whose diverse seminar learning environment was eye-opening. Virtually all participants lauded the mix of the seminar that combined Army officers from all branches with reserve component officers, civilians, other services, and international fellows, as it immediately exposed them to other perspectives.

> The breakout of the group in the seminars… X number of Army officers, of X number of different branches, both active and then a reserve or guard guy in the room. One to two interagency, we had two. Three international officers, which was [great], and we had one air and one sea service. Our three faculty were first rate. And even early on there was a clear understanding or perception that they were not your average instructors, that they were clearly professionals in their own regard, and that they were invested in us and were prepared to go the long haul over that next year focused on our education. And so that part was very positive. Within the seminar, could not have asked for better, both the group dynamics and the faculty leadership. Tremendous. And that carried throughout the entire year. [Participant 9]

> You've got a small group of what is about 14, 15 people in there, and you realize that when you start here, people – the dialog in class, you have every walk of government service in there from civilians, guard reserve, other services. But you realize some of the foundation and understanding of your peers is beyond what you have, and you realize that there's a lot of things you have yet to learn and understand and get a strategic perspective of things. I guess that environment really opened my eyes to it. You had some

> really intelligent, well-founded, well-grounded officers in there that I learned a lot from in our discussion and dialogue. [Participant 6]

Recognizing this, participants devoted energy to recognizing how they were aligned with their peers and subsequently what it meant for their own development. The reactions were generally two-fold, a sense of belonging to a community that for some they had not considered themselves as belonging to and a recognized need to expand one's own aperture from the comparatively narrow perspectives of the communities (branches or functional areas) from where they came.

> What I will tell you is it was an amazing experience, whether they were Lieutenant Colonels or Colonels or civilians in the room – and we had it very dynamic and I was very lucky to have a very good seminar – but the level of discussion and the ability to challenge each other objectively, respectfully, professionally, and to build relationships…and to be honest with you, one of the things that I realized out of it was that I did deserve to be there. [Participant 15]

> There were a couple of guys in my seminar that I thought were wildly intelligent, I mean budding on brilliant, truthfully, including one of our international officers. While I didn't consider myself in the intellect stage to have that kind of horsepower, I felt like I could articulate my logic pretty well. My writing, I got pretty good feedback on my writing. My first feedback from my academic advisor was actually a little bit overwhelming and humbling that from his standpoint hasn't taught there as much as he did that he thought that I was that unique among my seminar. I don't know that I necessarily agreed with his perspective but it was exceptionally flattering. It made me feel pretty good about myself but then it also caused me to go back and maybe evaluate where I really was or why he thought that of me, what I had done. [Participant 14]

> The whole year I had a hard time opening my aperture away from thinking as a logistician. Because everything, every module, every class, we try to think alright, does it pertain to logistics. Even through the strategic thinking. And so I didn't do a very good job with that. So I could equate it to a combat arms guy trying to – when we were talking about defense enterprise, about logistics concepts, they kind of turned off and I got excited about it. And so when we were talking about Clausewitz, I kind of turned off and they were all excited about that. And so I struggled with that all year. But I did see the relevance towards the end of the cycle as to why are we talking about that. And I kept thinking I got to stop fitting myself in my box as a logistician, I got to open myself up as a strategic thinker for the Army, as a senior leader, so that I can contribute across all capabilities and functions versus just trying to keep myself in what comes natural to me. [Participant 12]

**Core Theme 2: Salience of the Change in Rank**

One event during the experience appeared to have a notable effect on the interactions the participants had with others inside and outside the organization, and that was the actual promotion to colonel. Pinning on the new rank brought with it a significant change with respect to contacts outside of one's organization, which to the participants reinforced the acquiring of the new role of senior leader. Promotion to colonel was seen as enabling for getting the job done.

> I did find that just the fact of being an O6 seemed to carry a little more sway than I expected it to when I showed up there. Got you into meetings, had conversations that were more frank than what I had anticipated if I was still a lieutenant colonel. … [E]ven though you were new to the command, by showing up as a [colonel] you were imbued, if you will, with a higher level of knowledge and skill set that made you part of conversations that had potential ramifications on organization of the command and where the

> command went in the future, that I just really hadn't seen until that point. [Participant 8]

> The mutual respect was there so putting on Colonel didn't change my relationships with anybody in the organization. [I]t did change my relationship with people outside somewhat because now they knew you knew how to deal with them … [P]eople just pop a little quicker. [Participant 7]

Participant 2 was "frocked" upon selection for promoting. Frocking was a practice whereby officers selected for promotion and holding duty positions at the new rank were administratively authorized to wear the new rank and use the title, while officially still holding the lower rank. A frocked colonel met in person or over the phone is indistinguishable from a fully promoted one, and thus Participant 2 experienced this:

> I became the senior rater and I was made to start a Major's senior rater profile. That's when I think you kind of really realize that you have significant … responsibility in terms of development, in terms of management - not just lieutenants and Captains. We're talking about people that are invested in the Army now, field grade officers, to include lieutenant colonels. Suddenly they come to you for advice and they come to you for mentorship even though I was younger than them. … The biggest adjustment though was external, and so by being known to be promotable and then becoming actually promoted, externally I found myself treated differently by those with whom I collaborated and communicated with, and I think that significantly made me more effective. So the last eight months of being a G3 I saw a significant bump up in what I could do. [Participant 2]

Internally, however, participants downplayed the implications of such a change within their own organizations as the extant relationships and responsibilities generally did

not change. As an example, Participant 12, who was promoted while on deployment, answered the following when asked whether becoming a colonel made a difference:

> It didn't with my brigade staff officers. I had four lieutenant colonels on the brigade staff. It didn't. I mean we worked together, and they understood my roles and responsibilities, but I think if I was a lieutenant colonel and asked them to do the same things they would've done it, or as a colonel. Where it came in handy was being a colonel when you're dealing with higher headquarters. That came in handy working with the division headquarters and the joint staff and our staff in Afghanistan. That paid a lot of dividends.

**Core Theme 3: Importance of Relationships and Networking**

The need for building and sustaining professional relationships was a widely articulated theme among the participants. The War College phase was often cited as a catalyst, particularly as a contrast to the way things were done as a mid-career officer:

> I can remember [a guest lecturer] came in. We had just had classes on … the importance of what type of leadership style you use at what level. It's not all about directing at this point; it's about building consensus and relationship type stuff, which I agreed 100%, but I'm not sure that I agree or look at it that way as deeply as I did when I got it, right? But then [the guest lecturer] came in and [said,] 'At this level it's all about relationships. It's amazing. You've got to build consensus. It's not about … because you can't just direct. You have got to identify your stakeholders. You've got to get with the stakeholders. You've got to get to the yes. Figure out their perspective. Give your perspective and then get that middle ground where you can build consensus and get things done, or else you're just not going to get it done at those levels.' … That really did resonate with me. [Participant 7]

> [T]he lessons learned – The importance of the need to build personal relationships. They tend to follow you through the rest of your career, and they certainly make solutions to challenges and problems easier when you have that network of trusted agents, if you will. [Participant 8]

> I think our ability to interact with senior leaders, almost from day one there, to have really personal, long term, from hour's long interactions, and to hear the same answers over and over that seemed to be simple and kind of flippant. It's all about relationships and it's about getting to know people and developing trust, and it can takes weeks, months, years to develop trust. It can take seconds to lose that. Those continual messages I think helped me appreciate that being a senior leader isn't about doing tasks, but it's about forming partnerships with other people and understanding that. It almost seems to me a dichotomy - what's the word I'm thinking of - not intuitive that the more senior you become it's almost a less authority you have because you, by default, are now working with a wider range of stakeholders, none of whom do you have any sort of leverage over other than that which you can create. [Participant 13, referring to a War College experience]

Participants found that peer networks become more ambiguous among colonels because of the breadth of experience among them, and negotiation and consensus building was needed to supplement positional authority.

> I think that becomes a much larger challenge and it becomes a harder challenge because you have that dynamic of colonels that have been colonels for seven or eight years and colonels that have been colonels for one year. In any other dynamic that would be a lieutenant colonel or a major and there would be a dynamic that really somebody with seniority is in charge. And now you can get to the point where you're in charge and you're much more junior or at least you're on a level playing field and you're much

more junior. You have to overcome the challenge of how to deal with that conflict. [Participant 15]

It was a little more difficult when you're dealing with peers. Not near peers. In many cases I'm dealing with people who aren't my peers in terms of … I'm probably one of two junior colonels in this organization. We've got guys that are coming up on the 30 year mark as a colonel, so just getting those guys on board, building that consensus in some cases, and in some cases being directive. You've got to have that balance like we talked about so you can't sway too far one way and too far the other. That's some of the challenges that I worked through when I first got into this job. [Participant 7]

Participants emphasized both quantity and quality of the relationships. Each new relationship had a purpose, whether it was to share information, broaden horizons, facilitate completion of a task or mission, or simply to talk through challenges and issues.

It's interaction with your peers, watching and observing them, especially the ones that have been here longer, seeing how they communicate. Because what you get a feel for is what they communicate, what they're committing to and then what you get is some experience and observations of what they're dealing with and how things change for them. And that gives you confidence in the fact that the environment you're working in affects everybody and you're dealing with it appropriately because that's how everybody has to deal with it. [Participant 15]

In [the Pentagon], at least the places that I needed to go or people I had to work with, every room has an access so no-one as – at least no-one at my level has all access to any building. It seemed too easy that if you couldn't get into a room X to not go to room X and knock on the door and find the people who you needed to find. And so I guess what stands out in my mind is not the projects, I was working on but the projects I saw people sitting

> next to me working on that just seemed to take forever. And it just seemed to me one of the reasons why they took so long was because there was no face-to-face interaction with the stakeholder, no relationship building. … And so going out and building those relationships was a necessity that maybe some of the longer term projects didn't have for other people. Once I learned that I applied it to every product I was given regardless of the timeframe. Again, if you don't go find the person, the stakeholder, that has an interest in whatever project you're working on and establish a relationship you're highly unlikely to get it done in a time relevant period. [Participant 8]

> Peers have been the most valuable and guys that did know me as a major and lieutenant colonel that I still have a pretty strong relationship with. As I went through growing pains, so to speak, I was able to reach out to them and have, you know have a personal conversation without any real concerns of what I told them. And even one peer here that, in the short time that I've been here, I've developed a pretty good relationship with. [Participant 14]

Relationships built at the War College were broadening in nature, as participants found themselves in a small group environment comprising officers from other services, senior civilians, and international officers from around the world. For participants with limited joint, interagency, or multinational experience, this would constitute a first opportunity to engage and learn about other military environments both professionally and socially. Participants exercised empathy and a greater willingness to accept other points of view.

> [A senior German officer] was inducted in the [War College] International Hall of Fame [and at the ceremony] I remember [him] telling us that multinational relationships matter and they may be formed in the latter part of your career, potentially at the War College or in your interaction in the

staff after the War College. But that interaction with multinational staff officers has an impact later on, after you leave the War College, and you can make things happen, you can break through barriers because of the interaction. … [In my post-graduation assignment, I bumped into him when he] walked up to a group of colonels standing around a table there at this reception and he began to ask us how long we've been in Germany and how much we knew about the German culture and so on and so forth. I turned to him and I said, "General, I remember when you came to talk with us at Carlisle and you talked with us about the development of relationships and the importance of getting to know multinational officers and maintain that relationship and how we work together to break through barriers across country boundaries, etc." He was chiding us at the same time for not being able to understand culture and understand the German language, and I broke into German with him. It was kind of rusty but I was able to articulate that, "Yes, I can understand what you're saying in German and I can speak to you as well." He looked at me and looked at the American officer standing there with me and said, "Well, okay, so apparently you've learned something." [Participant 4]

Name the event to where an international fellow was able to interface, and more specifically in that event or that particular environment, out of their comfort zone? … I was truly amazed at … I can only imagine how hard it must have been for that officer and their families to operate every single day, not the least of which some of these social events, softball, whatever it is, out of their comfort zone. I don't think people really can truly appreciate it unless they really think about it, and so my amazement is really a big salute to them. [Participant 2]

**Core Theme 4: Identifying a Focus or Cause**

In the process of learning about being a senior leader, participants typically zeroed in a single theme or cause that became the catalyst for identity work and was the measure

for separating themselves from their former mid-career peers. For many participants, this cause was identified during the War College through a course of guest lecture that resonated with the participant. For others, this focus was based on lessons learned in the life history that took on new meaning. .

This cause not only became embedded in the revised self-concept but it became an empowering aspect of it, transcending the work situation. Participants placed it high on their agenda, established 'red lines' from it that others dared not cross, or made it a theme in communications with their senior leader network. Where practical, participants defined new duty descriptions or responsibilities around this cause, regardless of the expectations of the organization. Participants often came up with a label for the focus which they internalized into their self-concept.

> When I went out with my team over the last couple of days, the one thing I said is that we can never lose sight of the fact that we're about delivering a quality product, to give a quality experience for these students and they can go out and lead ***culture change***. Let's not make a mistake here. We're not teaching them just a skill set. We're not teaching people to be advocates. You can get a book and learn how to do that. We're teaching, yes there is a skill set involved, but what we're really doing is shaping people and training people to go out and lead ***cultural change***. [Participant 10, emphasis added]

> One of the main things that has stayed with me since the War College was that your selection to [colonel] meant … you were now ***a steward of the profession*** and I think that's something that has resonated with me, and that as a steward of the profession, you have a responsibility to the profession. [Participant 1, emphasis added]

> I put myself in my job I have today, which we're at the ***strategic thinking*** level. If I had not gone to the War College would I be as effective or think

> the way that I do now? And I think I've been pretty effective in my job here. Would I have done it the same way? Would I have looked at things and understood what's going on here the same way? And the answer's no. [Participant 12, emphasis added]

Participants also recognized that it was important enough to include in messages for future senior leaders.

> If you truly want to be effective in your first year or two coming out of the War College, it bodes well to ***have a focus***. Something that helps focus your studies, focus your questioning and your thought process, and give yourself an approach to bounce a lot of these processes against. [Participant 15, emphasis added]

**Core Theme 5: Setting the Tone in Post-Graduation Assignment**

Armed with a War College education, the participants were eager to move on to their initial assignment as a senior leader. Participants were "Ready, excited, and – ready to get it going" (Participant 6). Some participants knew sufficiently well in advance where they were going, were well received, and enjoyed a successful turnover that permitted them to hit the ground running.

> I knew the job I had. … I had a great handover from the guy that had the job previously. He did a great job of organizing debriefs, giving me one-up on the activities, big projects that had been working, leading the senior leadership throughout, and then I got scheduled for pre-command course and go to attend that before I changed over, also. Very positive experience with the transition. [Participant 6]

> So fortunately the guy who was my predecessor here, he and I have been friends for probably the last six or seven years, and he was among those who advocated for me to come here. … because I knew the organization,

> and I knew him personally, he kind of set some conditions for my arrival. [Participant 9]

> When I got to [my current headquarters] in July of 2013, I spent probably the first 30 days understanding the environment, understanding all of the things that I was responsible for, … getting to know my team, getting to know the place where I work and the broader staff … over 1,000 people here. … It was an orientation and it wasn't a breakneck pace. [Participant 4]

Even when the turnover was rushed or had shortcomings, the experience of prior reassignments helped these officers cope with it.

> The individual I was replacing was equally on short notice orders to someone else. And so we really didn't have a lot of turnover, so it was a matter of trying to figure things out without any great continuity, even though the individual tried his best but he had priorities with moving his family and getting his kids in school and relocation. But that's not unusual. I had that many times in my career. [Participant 8]

As the positive feelings of entering the new position subsided and it was time to work, participants started to get a clearer sense of what was different about their environment and about themselves as holders of a senior leader position. Between the education and drawing back on mid-career experiences, the participants coped fairly quickly.

> It was a little bit daunting, very technical, but I wasn't too concerned about that. I focused on the organization, on the effectiveness of my boss, kind of more organizational attributes and behaviors. Despite it being daunting, and it still is some days with the technical pieces, it was not overwhelming. I've never felt at any given time, 'Boy, I'm just completely out of place and I'm

> lost' and I attribute that [to] the amount of time I served at Division G3. [Participant 2]

> For me, personally, as a harsh grader of myself - maybe a lot of us are - but it was overwhelming. The culture and the processes really dominated my initial experience here more than it had in other places. When I had gone to other organizations [previously in my career], they all have their own language; their own cultures and processes but this organization, … was even more process driven, particularly in the job that I'm in. [Participant 13]

> What was the experience like becoming the first [in my current position]? Difficult in that the position never existed so the organization had to grow to understand what the roles and responsibilities …were going to be. … So yes, there was some turmoil; it was a transition for everybody in the organization, I guess. So going in any new job that's just … it was a bit challenging to get on board and figure that type of stuff out. [Participant 7]

Easing this initial transitional period and affirming one's self-concept as a senior leader was the quick win, a tangible accomplishment that helped solidify the participant's standing within the organization. The source of the quick win was not always of the participant's choosing, but came about from an early tasking or a significant event or crisis that required action, where the participants tried to turn negatives into positives.

> The big thing that hit me the first day I walked in the door was I was told I was in charge of [a major Army-wide project]. And I walked in and July and said we're briefing the Chief of Staff of the Army. … It was very challenging. I mean we brought together, we did a week-long conference down in [location] where we had 150 people from every part of the Army. … And it all came together, and we got a very solid answer and recommendation to take to the Chief of Staff of the Army. [Participant 12]

> I accompanied my [boss to a visit to our parent headquarters]. … They articulated to him that [we] had a significant task that we needed to work on - and this is the beginning of October of last year - and that significant task was to write an assessment of [security force capabilities of a partner nation]. We had about 90 days to put it together and deliver it, so that hit us like a ton of bricks. … So that whole process where we were an army service component planning for really a multinational and interagency solution set, that was extremely revealing to me about the impact of a small staff on a very complex and wicked problem set. [Participant 4]

> Two other things – and unfortunately in both cases they were negative events – that helped me set the tone early on in how I approached this. The first one was that there was an ethical violation by somebody on the computer, kind of inciting, in ethical terms, of undermining current policy. … And I shut it down and I explained to people why I was shutting it down, and then I held those folks accountable. And so that set the tone. … And the second negative that happened was that within about a week-and-a-half of me assuming the helm one of the officers in [my organization] died. It was not an unexpected death – unfortunately he'd been battling cancer … .So it gave me a chance to show how I would empower people and espouse some mission command -- a little bit of trust here and there. [Participant 9]

Still, these early experiences showed participants that there was still much to learn. Undergoing self-reflection, transforming the work environment, or adjusting one's self-concept, participants tended to acknowledge that the mantle of assuming senior leadership was at least to some degree a work in progress.

> Probably the main thing I'll-, I'm still the same, my motivations are still the same but I don't want-, even just working here, I feel sometimes guilty if I don't-, it's hard to-, I feel I have this obligation to give back to the military and therefore they need to get their money's worth out of me and if I don't

> feel like I've put in a good day, the guilt is deeper than just me getting over on the taxpayers. [Participant 1]
>
> Still working on it. I wouldn't say I've overcome it. But probably better at delegation, better at focusing on the big picture or higher level areas where I'm needed at the higher level vice down in the weeds in the tactical level, decision-making and projects and things like that. I think I'm getting better at that, but it's still a work in progress. [Participant 6]
>
> Like any new job or anything you feel like you're struggling with a little bit or you may have an impression that you are, the longer you survive in it and the more you get done, the better you feel, the more confident you feel and the more you realize those limits and how to approach it. But I don't think there's necessarily – I do reading, I do professional reading and I read some of the senior leader's books and read some of the history if I can and you can glean some things from those – but really I think it's those three things and it's just practical application. I have an old saying. I used to say, "A picture's worth a thousand words, but an experience is worth a thousand pictures". So, really you just got to do it a little bit to really get there. [Participant 15]

**Core Theme 6: Conflicts Within the Work Situation**

It was commonly found that participants faced conflicted views of what constituted the preferred work identity of a senior leader, and this stemmed from expectations from the War College experience that were left unmet in the post-graduation work environment. Two particular conflicts emerged as emblematic. One was a conflict between the Army's work situation of its senior leaders being strategic thinkers and long-term visionaries against the work situation which viewed them as higher-ranking action officers, focused on efficient completion of administrative or bureaucracy tasks that participants felt was better suited for more junior members of the organization, or so overwhelmed with short-

term crisis activities that long-term concerns were consistently brushed aside. Some participants were told directly that their War College-based talents were of marginal use in their organizations. Others came to the realization during the course of day-to-day performance of duties.

> My first interaction with my boss, … he told me, "Take all that strategic thinking stuff that you learned at the War College and put it aside. You won't use it here." I thought he was joking but I realized over time that he really wasn't. … I realized what it meant is that …, we spend a lot more time dealing with the 'now' and solving today's problems than we do looking in a more holistic, long-term approach. We really do more [military decision-making process] than we do Operational Design. Even at this level, we're still in the close fight more than he believes we ought to be or I expected. [Participant 14]

> I know everybody believes Colonels are all doing all this strategic team leadership stuff, but I'll tell you a lot of my day is spent synchronizing efforts, manipulating calendars, making sure schedules are correct, getting people together, holding meetings to move forward on things that are more of the same type of stuff that I was doing as an S3. [Participant 7]

> Yes, there is a lot of reporting requirements here and so it's a lot of collecting data, assembling data, collating information from different offices into one unique document. That's more action officer level kind of stuff. I do a lot of that here and develop reports, summarize, feedback on particular contract performance. . … It's not satisfying. I don't enjoy just sort of consolidating information. I feel like, to be honest, that I have a little bit more to offer the organization, and that by doing those tasks it may potentially be limiting my ability to influence more important issues. [Participant 13]

> I think a lot of the work I did was – while it was extremely important, it was action officer work – staff officer work. And I don't see myself as a staff officer anymore. I see myself as a senior leader who articulates vision and leads change. … [H]ere I was dancing to someone else's tune. Even though it was all good work and God's work, but I wasn't – I wasn't leading it. [Participant 10]

This served to cause participants to draw back on their mid-career identities, which was in the comfort of most participants who therefore merely accepted it, albeit begrudgingly, and moved forward.

> Yeah, I mean it'd be daily, but if it's not daily it's close. I mean again, even though there's more of a people-to-people aspect to work at this level, they're still based in the military decision making process, at least for me as an Army guy. And so how I prioritize work, how I filter the information, that's all born out of my experiences well before becoming a colonel. [Participant 8]

> I found that… don't discard everything you've done in the past …, we talked about striking the balance. You've got to understand and be able to tailor your approach to the environment or the problem set that you're dealing with. There are cases that as a strategic leader… or you know, when you're a colonel, that you don't have time or you don't… or it's not the right approach to take this. [Participant 7]

> I think I reach back to it a lot. It's shaped who you are. You often hear the comment, that's what got you there. That's what got me here, right? The experience of those previous 21 years obviously worked most of the time, so it'd be foolish to disregard it all. [Participant 6]

A second was a conflict between the Army's espoused conception that its senior leaders work collaboratively versus what the participants experienced in their work

situations, including parochial interests or barriers to communication. Despite that parochialism was understood to be frowned upon by the organization, it was too deeply embedded within the culture such that participants had to expend energy to overcome it.

> The difference here, despite it being a Napoleonic staff is the fact that the staff here, the directors are all Colonels. So it's interesting, for the past 45 minutes we've been talking about what it means to be a strategic leader and how they can do more and you think of education; what I see is the collision of a staff of Colonels who are unable to capitalize that, and instead of harmony it's turned into the Tower of Babel in some ways. Instead of the collaborative environment it is disruptive because - I don't want to overstate this - a little bit of some agenda is being driven by ego and expectation, entitlement, those sorts of things, all the worst things that you hear about with senior leaders. I've seen a lot of that. [Participant 2]

> I think the hardest thing in some ways to come to terms with is, you know, the message of the senior service college is that "We're preparing you to be a strategic advisor. To be a decision-maker." And then you realize when you get out that really most of our senior leaders decision-makers have insulated themselves. Either self-insulation by virtue of "I got here by trusting my instincts. I know what's right. I know what right looks like. I'm going to tell you what to do." Or insulated themselves by – the system has allowed them to carry forward with them a group of people they are comfortable with and trust in dealing with. Who they rely on for advice and such. [Participant 10]

> I thought we would be a little more collegial and a little more empowered as directors to kind of act as a board of directors and sit down and work through school challenges. Put away some parochial side departmentally. But that hasn't always been the case. And so I found myself having to go back to that 'influence without authority' kind of thing of how do I shape

> events to support change or to build a narrative of teamwork and collegiality across some of the other department heads. [Participant 9]

Participants accepted that some conflict would be present. Some bureaucratic requirements were not of the Army's choosing, and the task needed to get done. Complex issues often pitted competing interests against each other, and finding solutions was naturally difficult. However, participants still found this to be an irritant, and either subjugated the self-concept to protect it from the bureaucratized work identity, or drew from their chosen cause and imposed themselves into the situation.

**Core Theme 7: Advising and Representing as Changing Self-Concept**

Participants judged themselves as having completed or significantly progressed on the role change to senior military leadership based on their ability to render professional military advice and represent their organizations to stakeholders. Ability to exercise these functions was also how participants compared themselves with their peers (i.e., other colonels). Through these functions, participants felt empowered as a trusted agent of others, especially leaders. Conversely, participants who were not able to exercise these functions expressed feelings of underutilization.

> It was a noticeable difference for me between this assignment and others, is having people look to you for real guidance on a variety of topics. …. People really started coming to me early on and looking for guidance on how particular things, processes, programs should work. That's kind of stuck out that, 'Wow, I guess I am a decision maker'. You have to understand that from day one and be confident, I think, in making decisions. [Participant 13]

> I seem to…my take-away from the war college was, as we talked about senior leadership, we talked about Colonels, that Colonels were kind of on

> the edge of senior leadership. And potentially really influencing strategic and national level issues through the recommendations that they made to the general officer or flag officer corps of the service. And I guess my advice would be the realization that not everybody operates in that role on a regular basis. [Participant 14]

The gravity of advisory duty was not lost on the participants, either. Recognizing the importance of relationships and the complexity of the issues faced, participants took their advisory roles very seriously and recognized that trust in the relationships must be maintained.

> Now, almost everything I say, everything that I provide to my boss today, almost like 90 percent would be for the purpose of advisement. It's the nature of personal staff versus being an organizational staff member. My thought before was on behalf of an organization and how I can adjust it and I'm the link between the Commander in the organization. I'm still helping as that link between a Commander in an organization but I'm seated now on the other side of the line. … I'm very comfortable with it but I warn myself often that it's still always wise to not talk too much. Listen as much as you can. Speak when you need to. I'm always very wary that I may be giving bad advice. [Participant 2]

> You're now getting to a level as an O-6 that when you say, "I'm doing that", you're committing to that. Having said that, the environment we are in is becoming much more of the [volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous] environment we talked about at the War College. Politics become involved at the National Command Authority level that can change on a dime. Funding shortfalls can come in, weather impacts, international, political or mil-to-mil engagement impacts; there's so many things that can impact what you're doing that you really, really give it your best judgment. [Participant 15]

Participants also became sensitized to the new role they played as representative of the Army to external audiences such as the public and the media. Participants had long understood that as professional Soldiers, they had an obligation to serve in the interests of the American public. Wearing the rank of colonel, however, took on greater meaning as they were now looked upon as representing the Army.

> In terms of public speaking engagements, making sure you go talk to your kid's school, attending Veteran's Day parades and things like that, you know. There's more to it than just going there. You know, like before I would go [just] to go, and now it's… you know, I need to go in my uniform because I have more of a responsibility to represent the military and the army than just going there to partake in the Veteran's Day parade. And that's a perspective that I did not have before. [Participant 1]

> [When you are] planning in Afghanistan and working for a two and then a three star, you recognize that tactical [standing operating procedures] on what you're going to do on an objective have to be rationalized out and thought through as to how those will play out in the media. And then how it also be seen by our political masters and our media watchers. But this job in particular I think just drove that home. [Participant 10]

**Core Theme 8: The Desire for Continued or Improved Development**

The role of professional development, particularly mentorship, was significant in the life histories of all the participants who either enjoyed the ability to receive quality mentorship or lamented its absence. Those who worked closely with senior leaders due to their position felt empowered and learned much from interaction and observation.

> I have a very good relationship with my boss. I'm glad because I'm 20 feet from his office. … I have a very good relationship with him. He's very candid. He has made it known many times that any time he has no clothes,

> when he isn't making sense he wants to know. I have the luxury that I have a boss who doesn't shoot messengers, takes bad news as well as he takes good news, right, so it makes it easy. So that relationship helps in what I talked about in terms of speaking truth to power type stuff. [Participant 7]

> I work with a lot of General Officers. Not that I'm thinking that I will ever be a General Officer but I am now much, much more sensitive to what they're thinking, how they're operating, how they're talking, how they are passing judgments, making decisions; all that. … I'm absolutely much more sensitive to the environment around my boss, the [deputies], the other bosses in partner organizations and the more senior leadership. My focus has changed significantly. [Participant 2]

> The people who have always kind of been there, GOs, to support me or to mentor me along the way, have even reached out even further now, and connect with me on a more frequent basis. Okay, how's it going? Are you seeing any challenges? We've been down this road before ourselves so here's a chance to help pay it back or pay it forward, if you will. [Participant 9]

As participants underwent the role change to senior leadership, they became uneasy with the reduced mentorship or growing separation or insulation from their superiors who became ever more busy people. Although participants enjoyed the autonomy that was granted as a result, several felt that greater transparency and effort to develop and coach subordinates were vitally important but unevenly executed functions of general officers.

> I think one of the things and I've seen those who do and who don't, is not only when you're involved in a briefing or something, is if you could take the time to maybe, you know mentor someone is why you did something a certain way. Why you made a decision a certain way, why you didn't do things? … You know I've had a few great mentors or coaches in the career,

but the problem is they're a few. … And a lot of times, I think it's because we're too busy, you know you're off on one meeting to another, or one task to the next and we just fight those tasks. But every once in a while try to go back and just talk about why something happened, you know kind of [after-action review] it with those people. [Participant 12]

I think the critical thing is to just ask my senior leaders or superiors to try to find the lunch date on the calendar to ensure the most effective translation of intent. I think if the Army or if the DOD moves to all mission-type orders – and the accordance of trust between superior and subordinate to execute those orders. They can't spend enough time making sure that your intent is not only provided but understood. [Participant 8]

[Y]ou'd think it's any easy one, but it's not, because everybody's so busy; but the mentorship aspect of it. If they are truly identifying talent, and saying, 'These guys are going to be a senior leader; i.e. colonel and above; then the senior leaders, existing senior colonels, and, you know, and general officers, need to align themselves in a mentorship role with those officers. That would be one piece. They've got to have a closer connection, because if they're truly trying to develop those folks to eventually take their place, that's one of the first steps they have to do. [Participant 9]

I use the example of the War College where you have the next generation of senior leaders and many of the [Army-level] leaders that came to talk to us treated us like we were-, they would give kind of the rah-rah speech instead of treating us as the people who are going to go out into the field and be the ones wrestling with the hard problems… . If you're process is selecting me for the right reasons and I'm here for the right reasons then you need to be able to trust me with that honesty in that issue. And don't just tell me everything is okay and give me the standard pitch of like I said the rah-rah speech. I don't need the rah-rah speech. I want to know

> everything about the rah-rah speech because I probably helped you write the rah-rah speech. [Participant 1]

**Additional Theme 9: Role Change During Job Withdrawal**

In discussing previous role change experiences in the participants' life histories, several discussed episodes by which they chose to exit their current work situation. If the situation regarded membership in a unit, the impetus was always a toxic leader or poor climate and the purpose was escape. In such cases, participants leveraged contacts or relationships with other leaders or their assignment officers within the human resource apparatus to find a more suitable duty position. In only one case did the officer leave the service, and in that case the decision was quickly reversed. In all instance, this showed the salience of one's identity as a Soldier and officer. For Participant 2, reassignment to another post was a way to escape a bad unit.

> [My subsequent assignment] was essentially to escape the 2nd ACR. … I thought the unit wasn't very good. It was little things – some of them big – that kept illuminating this idea that the unit wasn't very good. … It came as a mighty organization when it was on the Czech border, and then it moved to Fort Lewis for about a year, year and a half, where the flag was actually given to [another unit]. Then it became 2nd ACR again, and so it was just this mix of armor and infantry. … [Participant 2]

For Participants 1 and 4, whose significantly negative experiences occurred during company command, the critical career development job for junior officers, it was a matter of making it through and moving on. Participant 1 changed to a functional area, while Participant 4 persevered and stayed within the original branch.

> My biggest challenges were in my troop command, my battalion … my squadron commander and I, we definitely did not see eye to eye. So that

> was a growing experience, I guess, to have to deal with a boss that wasn't crazy about… you know, he definitely didn't take care of me or any of that kind of stuff, so. … … I think I realized that my career as an armor officer was over based on my experience with my boss. So with my evaluations that I had, I knew that I did not have a future in the armor branch, assuming that I was… you know, if I had high expectations for myself in that career. So I knew in the back of my mind I needed to figure out what I was going to do with my career because it most likely wouldn't be with operations. [Participant 1]

> I left company command after 18 months at company command in one company, in a condition set that really you don't want to be in …. It shaped how I deal with people, it shaped a lot of who I am, my character. I left company command under the regime of [Name], who was, let's put it this way, the original toxic leader I have ever known in the Army. [Participant 4]

Another situation leading to withdraw was either dissatisfaction with or culmination in one's branch or specialty and a desire to do something else. This was commonplace among the functional area officers who, as much as they might have enjoyed their assigned branch, made wanted a different challenge and felt they could make greater contributions to the Army in a different capacity. Participant 6 wanted to pursue an advanced degree and chose to enter into the simulation operations field. Participant 8 moved to space operations because field artillery appeared dead-ending. Participant 9's move was on the advice of a mentor who noted how the officer was far more comfortable in planning than leading units. Upon reflection, Participant 9 agreed and applied for the functional area.

Participant 14, who was the lone branch detail officer, had a different situation. Participant 14's was detailed from adjutant general (AG) to the infantry and developed a self-concept that was aligned with the infantry to the point of disidentification with the AG branch. Unable to reconcile this, Participant 14 left the service and took a civilian job in sales. However, the work environment in sales conflicted with Participant 14's self-concept as a team player and collaborator, attributes rooted from military service. Thus, Participant 14 rejoined the service as an AG officer and instead worked to transform the work environment to shape more of the infantry self-concept.

> I reverted back to my early understandings of an officer. I don't think it had changed that much. My business experience reaffirmed to me the importance of conduct that was beyond reproach, that was out for the organization, and I still believed an Army officer had to be both technically and tactically proficient to be able to fulfill the duties associated with their position. … I told my peers on more than one occasion, in an open forum, that I thought one of the biggest challenges of the AG Corps is that we don't teach pride in our regiment. We don't imbue a sense of pride in the AG Corps and what we provide to the military. If we don't man the force there is no force. The most important resource in the military is its people. The AG Corps is in the people business. And I don't think we ever explain that to anybody. [Participant 14]

Retirement at the twenty-year mark or soon thereafter was another possible withdrawal scenario. Family considerations were prominent for Participant 1, who had positioned the family at an anticipated terminal duty assignment before the surprise of selection for the War College.

**Additional Theme 10: Importance of Initial Role Change**

After the officer's initial entry to military service, the earliest significant role change experience often had a profound formative effect on the participant and set the initial self-concept in motion such that subsequent role changes either reinforced that self-concept or had to present a significant challenge to the self-concept to initiate identity work. If the self-concept was reinforced during this early episode, then regardless of their magnitude subsequent role changes were more likely to result in limited identity work. If the self-concept was challenged, the participant tended to describe higher-magnitude role changes and greater identity work later in the career. Yet, as participants underwent the role change to senior leader, the participants shared more in common among their experiences than differences.

The three participants (2, 9, and 10) who were enlisted prior to entering active duty tended to identity the role change from enlisted to officer as highly significant, regardless of commissioning source (i.e., the United States Military Academy, Reserve Officer Training Corps, or Officer Candidacy School), and that their enlisted time was greatly formative for their self-concepts, some vestiges of which ultimately surfaced during the present role change experience. Participant 2 was prior enlisted in the 75$^{th}$ Ranger Regiment who attended West Point, and who discovered during the transition to officer that the Ranger culture was more the exception and not the rule across the Army. Participant 2 recounted during several vignettes the challenge of distancing the self-concept from the enlisted persona, some aspects of which survived to the present experience.

Participant 10 began in a different profession and earned an advanced degree, but found it unsatisfying. After deciding to enlist, Participant 10 deployed to Desert Shield

and Desert Storm. During the extended down time awaiting offensive operations and afterward awaiting redeployment, Participant 10 noted how "idle soldiers hurt themselves. … So as a commander and the leader I've always tried to keep them busy no matter what the environment." This permeated into Participant 10's current self-concept that values professional character highly and pursues a cause of eradicating unprofessional conduct.

Participant 9's enlistment provided an important introduction to professional military education, attending both the primary and basic noncommissioned officers' courses prior to attending ROTC, and uncovering "an acumen for kind of planning and organizing and all that." These two factors, combined with a desire to contribute more to the Army than leading small formations, would manifest themselves in a career in both strategic plans and various professional military instructor capacities.

The other participants, who all entered military service as lieutenants and served according to the common junior career development plan of unit-level assignments defined their first significant role change at two different points.

The majority saw the first role change either at or immediately after company command. This was the due course case where the first four to six years was spent doing entry-level jobs within one's basic branch until company command, the key development position that most officers were required to complete successfully. After company command, standard career management practices then mandated a broadening assignment. Officers in this category were Participants 1 and 6 (functional area after company command), Participant 4 (doctrine writer after company command), Participant 13 (post-command assignment to the civilian-dominated Corps of Engineers followed by move to functional area), and Participant 15 (second command of a training team for the reserve

component). These five officers tended toward less pronounced role changes over the career, even for the functional area specialists for whom the transition to the specialty constituted a high-magnitude shift.

The other six had a notable role change prior to company command, generally during the lieutenant years. Participants 12 and 14 defined it as a move to a higher echelon staff position as a junior officer. Participant 7 moved to a combat environment (Desert Storm) as a lieutenant. Participant 8 experienced both the move to higher staff and a significant change of environment (exposure to joint training). Each of these were especially formative for the officers in either a positive sense (e.g., Participant 12's broadening that ultimately fostered a focus on strategic thinking) or negative (e.g., Participant 14's growing frustration over being branch detailed). These four officers would describe a greater number or higher-magnitude of role change episodes over the course of the career.

**Additional Theme 11: Sense of Impending Career Termination**

As a parting question, participants were asked where they saw themselves five years from now, and nearly all responses acknowledged that most of the participants were soon facing the end of their military service. For example, Participants 12 and 14 started with a one word answer, "Retired," elaborating on this only after prompting from the researcher.

Answers given to this question were similar across the participants, all noting that their status would change to retired. On the one hand, this indicated how military service was salient to the officers, such that the change in status rather than other measures of accomplishment were at the forefront of their self-concepts. On the other hand, participants acknowledged their limited (or non-existent) expectations for further promotion to general

officer. The variance among the responses regarded mainly how the retirement would come about. Participants 7 and 12, for example, were facing a mandatory retirement deadline (colonels can only serve up to 30 years active commissioned service). Participants 1 and 15 explicitly wanted the freedom to leave at own choosing rather than being told. Others were less specific, but indicated a willingness to serve as long as allowed to do so.

What one elected to do afterward varied among the participants. Participants 10 and 14, for example, had been discussing complete separation from the military and pursuing other interests that would be more personally rewarding. Participants 4 and 7 were among those strongly desiring to continue service in a new capacity, whether in the military or other government agency (e.g., Department of Homeland Security). The other participants were non-specific, leaving the answer at retirement or saying that they recognized a need to think about the future some more.

## Selected Individual Textural and Structural Descriptions

This section presents the textural and structural descriptions of four of the participants developed through phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation. The four participants were chosen on the basis of presenting a variety of the backgrounds and life histories along with their collectively strong articulation of the eight themes. The life history narratives of these participants along with the narratives and individual textural and structural descriptions for all other participants are provided in Appendix D.

### Participant 2

*[Participant 2 is a career infantry officer who served as commander, staff officer, and trainer of infantry units at several echelons, culminating as G3 (operations officer) in an infantry division at the time the present experience began.]*

Participant 2's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began around November 2012 upon the triggering event of notification of selection for promotion to colonel and went through to the summer of 2013 upon departure from assignment as a division G3. It was during this time, specifically April 2013, that Participant 2 was notified of senior service college selection through activation off the alternate list. The second phase was attendance at the U.S. Army War College resident program which ran from August 2013 through June 2014. The third phase was initial follow-on assignment as the executive officer to a commanding general of an Army service component command. In November 2012, Participant 2's conception of being a senior leader was of those officers actively participating in policy formulation and shaping organizations. This view was unchanged after the triggering event.

**Textural description of Participant 2's experience**. Participant 2 noted receiving accolades from peers over recognition that several candidates among the large post were passed over. Commenting on the 36% selection rate, Participant 2 said, "It's a fine line between someone who is in the 36 percent and someone that's at the 37 percent, and who knows where you fall." Support from superiors was overwhelmingly strong. Regarding family, Participant 2 said that it was not a subject of discussion as a strong separation of work and family was preferred.

Participant 2 was an alternate for the War College as primary selection would come five months later, however there were immediate changes to the work environment. The division leadership to immediately *frock* Participant 2, where frocking meant being placed in a job that required colonel rank and being allowed to wear the rank without officially being promoted for administrative or pay purposes (U.S. Army, 2005, pp. 36-39). In this

new capacity, Participant 2 gained responsibilities for "senior rating" majors in the command, which meant serving as the second-level supervisor.

Participant 2 detected a slight shift in "how I was regarded or addressed" among peers and supervisors due to the frocking, describing them as positive. However, Participant 2 also noted some change, referred to them as "subtle nuances," as some peers came forward for professional advice more than before. Being frocked also carried weight outside of the organization.

> You kind of really realize that you have significant impact to the development … [of] not just lieutenants and captains. We're talking about people are invested in the Army now, field grade officers. … Suddenly they come to you for advice and they come to you for mentorship even though I was younger than them.
>
> However, the impact with external relationships by being identified as a colonel was more noticeable, being "treated differently by those with whom I collaborated and communicated with, and I think that significantly made me more effective." An example cited included being seated "at the table" next to the corps G3 during a deployment-related conference, as opposed to being seated in the "third row" with the lieutenant colonels, and "the deference to opinion and thought from [others at the conference] was night and day."

With selection to the War College that spring and short-notice departure, Participant 2 said the following about being a budding senior leader:

> I would say that I was very ingenious in understanding how to be, in effect, a senior leader. I think I kind of fell into it, as I described in a couple of different vignettes, but that was just positional; it just happened. But the

> idea of how to combine authority, position, rank and entry in a smooth, sophisticated manner, I hadn't thought about that very much.
>
> Nor had I thought very much beyond my realization as a G3 to responsibilities, with mentorship, development and management; I hadn't really thought about what it meant in the context of in a number of future years, as a Colonel, you're going to have to continue to do this and you've got to really put your head around this and understand what the Chief wants out of senior leaders in terms of developing subordinates. That's why I used the ingenuous because I just wasn't developed. There wasn't a whole lot of formulation or thought. …

But in reflecting on areas where additional development was needed, Participant 2 said the following:

> I also didn't really at all have an idea in any way of how to engage senior leadership if you disagreed with something. Senior leadership in my mind, at that point as a Junior Lieutenant Colonel was to your Brigade Commander, and again, to his Division Commander. … [S]o how do formulate an idea and go, 'Hey, boss, I get it but I respectfully disagree; here is why'. I've never done that in my life. Never had to do it and that was the first time, and I would say that that was in part due to limited interface with senior Colonels, limited interface with General Officers at the time.

Moving to the War College represented big shifts both professional and personally as Participant 2 had just spent five years at one military post, which therefore presented a very familiar environment compared to the more diverse and unfamiliar Carlisle Barracks. In the early phases of the curriculum, Participant 2 remarked that the early lessons on strategic leadership resonated most strongly, saying that "It was exactly what I believed that I needed." A takeaway was a realization that senior leaders did not have to be masters

of everything to be successful, but "keep thinking about how you're going to develop yourself."

Because of the extensive operational experience and a desire to pursue the intellectual challenges of strategy and policy in depth, Participant 2 applied for the Advanced Strategic Arts Program. Upon acceptance, Participant 2 then moved to a separate curriculum for the remainder of the year, finding the environment competitive, disciplined, and filled with highly talented officers. The special events and trips that Participant 2 took during the rest of the year produced an 'a-ha' moment.

> We're all kind of cut out of the same cloth. … I'm talking about the capital 'W', 'We.' So whether it's a manager or partner in the business sector, whether it's someone in the interagency, kind of higher level, [or] Congress, … We're steered by our organizations, we're managing information, we're advising seniors, we have our own forms of leadership, our own forms of development. It's just labeled and it's executed differently. What I saw was a lot of commonality. And then what I also realized is that with effective communication, collaboration and so forth, you can bring that commonality and illuminate it and bring people closer together.

Another lesson learned concerned the international officer students and how they were able to work and live entirely out of their comfort zones due to language and culture. Participant 2 compared it to the experience of U.S. officer students who might be uncomfortable in the academic environment but were still in a military setting. "I'm putting on a uniform or coat and tie and I'm just doing my thing. … I don't have to think about it. … I can only imagine how hard it must have been for that [international] officer and their families to operate" through the foreign language requirement, social events, and other activities. One international officer in the seminar was a first from his country to the

War College, spoke three languages fluently but none were English, but "never shut down. He just kept trying." Another international officer was described as "fearless" in softball, swinging the bat as though "chopping wood" yet was "completely unafraid of embarrassing him or herself, right, but they're out there just nobly."

The follow-on assignment was as executive officer to a commanding general of an Army service component command aligned under a functional combatant command. The organization's functions were in a specialized area outside of Participant 2's expertise. Coping with it was found to be easy, however, as Participant 2 reached back on previous experience as a division G3 to establish roles as advisor, integrator, collaborator, and synchronizer. Participant 2 found this to be very helpful and useful as these organizational attributes were deemed lacking as the organizational members exercised more focus on the specialty skills and services. In Participant 2's present capacity, "I introduce tools, processes, methodologies into the organization … . I provided description and vision … From day one, I think I was of immediate assistance to the organizations and was able to help my boss."

The biggest challenge regarded peer leadership, but Participant 2 did not want this overstated. "The directors are all colonels. … What I see is the collision of a staff of colonels … and instead of harmony it's turned into the Tower of Babel in some ways" in part due to parochial interests and egos. Thus, Participant 2 has focused heavily on matters of culture by two strategies. First, is by taking on a role as agent of change by force of personality and introducing tools and processes, some of which have "stuck" and altered the way the organization functions. Second is by bringing in talent from elsewhere in the Army, mainly officers who Participant 2 knew in prior assignments. However, Participant

2 noted that the need to exercise caution as while the position carries influence, "I'm not the authority; nor am I the decision maker; I'm very, very cognizant of that."

In reflecting on the experience thus far, Participant 2 found that relationships were very important:

> Now, having worked for a number of months past the War College, as a colonel, …, I've reaffirmed this idea that it's all about the people and the relationships between the people that really make things happen.

Participant 2 noted that "learning, for me, is now really seeing things every single day at a whole other plane. I work with a lot of general officers [and] am now much more sensitive to what they're thinking, how they're operating, how they're talking, how they are passing judgments" while less inclined to focus on peers except on "if they are or not effectively moving on my boss' intent."

Participant 2 said that the experience brought forth significant change in terms of capabilities to aid and develop junior officers and soldiers and appreciation of how the Army functions, and particularly how those perspectives can conflict. Participant 2 felt that understanding and acting upon the latter was still a work in progress, and saw that mentorship from senior officers was an important enabler, saying that, "I think a self-learning, self-improving individual will get there, but they'll get there faster with a direct dialog, conversation, and yet experience-based education, you know, taught by the mentor."

**Structural description of Participant 2's experience**. Three were two structures to Participant 2's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader. The first was a *strong sense of self.* Participant 2's self-concept

was very strong and resilient, and although changes to self-concept were evident as a result of the experience, much of the effort Participant 2 undertook was in transforming the work environment to suit the self-concept. This was primarily evident in the efforts to shape the organizational culture of the follow-on assignment and bring in personnel from past assignments, but also evident in the War College environment when Participant 2 compared the self-concept with those of the international officers who were operating well outside their comfort zones, and in the choice to pursue ASAP as the added level of engagement and challenge were more enticing than remaining in the regular seminar environment. On the other hand, the same strong sense of self led to a situation in the early phases of the experience whereby Participant 2's environment was so familiar as to be "boring" or no longer challenging.

This structure was similarly evident in the life history in the early development of the disciplined self-concept formed as an enlisted soldier in the Ranger regiment, and how Participant 2 projected that self-concept through West Point and early assignments as an office. When the preferred work identity differed from the self-concept, Participant 2 raised questions and challenged the situation or, in the case of the armored cavalry regiment vignette which was a negative experience, chose to withdraw.

The second structure was *social learning*. Although Participant 2 often relied on self-reflection as a coping resource, much of the identity work performed throughout the present experience was socially learned. Early on, Participant 2 navigated the immediate changes to the work environment spurred by the frocking by seeing it through the eyes of others and then adapting accordingly. In the post-graduation assignment, social learning was helpful in understanding the organizational environment and dealing with the parochial

interests without having to master the specialty skills of the organization. Social learning was also key in the life history in multiple ways such as the beast barracks episode when Participant 2 removed the badged so as to foster interaction with other cadets. Thus, whereas Participant 2 came to the explicit conclusion about the important of relationships in the final phase of the experience, there was plenty of evidence of how adjustments to those relationships mattered to Participant 2 during the first two phases.

The interaction of these structures was evident at the beginning of the experience, whereby Participant 2's strong sense of self led to a situation whereby the work environment was essentially mastered, leading to feelings of boredom and lack of challenge. Thus, when selection precipitated the frocking, Participant 2 seized the opportunity to engage in social learning, beginning identity work and reviewing or renewing the self-concept, bringing about a willingness to challenge oneself through all three phases.

**Participant 12**

*[Participant 12 is a logistics officer whose career largely followed the single-track model, with several broadening assignments. Participant 12 served both as commander and staff officer of logistics units of different types and echelons, the last being as deputy commander of a sustainment brigade. Participant 12 was serving in the sustaining brigade in November 2010 upon notification of selection for promotion to colonel, which was the start point of interest for the present study]*

Participant 12's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began around November 2010 upon notification of selection for promotion to colonel and went through to the summer of 2012 upon departure from assignment in a sustainment

brigade. It was *en route* to the next assignment, around June 2012, that Participant 12 was notified of senior service college selection through activation off the alternate list. Thus, the second episode was attendance at the U.S. Army War College resident program which ran from August 2012 through June 2013. The third episode was initial follow-on assignment as a division chief within a major army command (MACOM). In November 2010, Participant 12's conception of being a senior leader included holding rank of colonel and above, focusing at the strategic level due to their responsibilities at Army staff level and higher commands, the nature of their work, and the "recommendations they make for general officers to make hard strategic level decisions." However, being immersed in preparations for deployment had Participant 12 oriented on tactical and operational concerns at that time.

**Textural description of Participant 12's experience**. At the time of selection, Participant 12 was preparing for service in a combat zone and was focused on the tactical and operational level. Participant 12 was "a little surprised, and pretty happy about" the selection. While feeling satisfied coming out of command, Participant 12 did not consider promotion a "sure thing" given the selection rates.

The pending deployment was more salient at the time, so the news of the promotion had little impact on Participant 12's peer relationships. "They were happy for me. I think I had set the tone as a peer that I was here to support the mission, support them, to get things done. I wasn't there for myself." Similarly, Participant 12 devoted little time in theater thinking about post-deployment concerns even though promotion would surely mean leaving the sustainment brigade. Participant 12 was promoted in theater in March

2011, and as the deployment neared the end, assignment orders came for service as a liaison officer from one MACOM to another MACOM.

Participant 12 noted that while the promotion had little impact on internally to the detachment, "if I was a lieutenant colonel and asked them to do the same things they would've done it," it had a greater impact in "dealing with higher headquarters." Participant 12 described the environment as follows:

> I was working peer to peer, because I was working with the RC South headquarters, which is a divisional headquarters. They had O-6s that were in charge, and I had to work with them. So as an O-6 to O-6, more peer to peer, versus if I was a lieutenant colonel having to work with them, because I saw how they treated anyone that wasn't a peer to them. So I guess it would get my point across more clear or invited to more meetings and listened to it a bit more, than if I hadn't been a peer. So it definitely paid off.

Promotion also affected the relationship with the brigade commander. "[H]e had a lot more confidence, and then he saw that I could interact at a higher level, than say, if had a [deputy commander] that was a lieutenant colonel." Subsequently, Participant 12 became much more involved with higher headquarters, which "opened my aperture to look above just the brigade's mission to look to what is the strategic mission within the theater." The increased exposure to general officers helped shape a "concept of the strategic picture" in Participant 12's mind, exemplified in a series of vignettes regarding relationships built with logistics counterparts of the other services, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, and coalition forces. "At the strategic level in Afghanistan looking to the bigger picture and how it all works together in an interrelated task and purpose behind it was something I hadn't seen before because I hadn't been at that level."

Participant 12 greeted the news of War College activation because attendance would help provide "a better understanding" of "operating at the strategic level," and there was recognition that serving as a colonel would necessitate this "institutional training; that understanding of what it means to operate strategically, how to think as a strategic leader." Participant 12 noted having attended the non-resident Command and General Staff College (CGSC), the "box of books" version, and "hated it." Participant 12 recalled that the small group phase, whereby students going through the non-resident program got together for classroom activities, was far more valuable than the regular distance education activities or readings and written requirements. Thus, Participant 12 elected to hold off on attending non-resident War College, hoping for selection to the resident program despite being placed on the alternate list.

The short notice change of assignment caused Participant 12 to attend as a geographic bachelor, keeping the family at the location of the original assignment. This was difficult given that Participant 12 had only been back from theater for a few months and then having to continue being separated from family, if only during the week (Participant 12 drove home on weekends when practical). Participant 12 described it as a "tough year," because the travel and separation impinged on the ability to think and reflect.

However, the War College was significantly broadening due to the diverse make-up of the seminar including other services and international partners. "As a logistician, I think as a logistician all the time, and the War College gets you to think broad." Comparing previous experiences at staff level, Participant 12 realized the staff officers tended toward the tactically-oriented "military decision-making process" (MDMP) which is highly rational, "you got an answer and you execute an answer. … [A]s a strategic thinking, it's

the 'wicked' problem type thing. There's no necessarily a right answer." Participant 12 credited building skills in strategic thinking as being important for the current duty position that involved routine contact with general officers and "Army-level concepts." Retrospectively, Participant 12 also noted that prior experiences working at service, joint, and combined levels as TWI intern and executive officer for the U.S. Forces Korea J4 were coming into context due to the education. Participant 12 also noted differences among seminar peers who had served exclusively at the tactical and operational level versus those with exposure and experience at higher levels who had developed strategic thinking. Participant 12 remarked the challenge of watching peers regress to tactical thinking in the course of tackling strategic issues during the War College year.

Participant 12 faced similar difficulties in a different way, admitting to having a "hard time opening my aperture away from thinking as a logistician. … I struggled with that all year. … I kept thinking I got to stop fitting myself in my box as a logistician. I got to open myself as a strategic thinker." Participant 12 recognized that colonels had to be "prepared to go in to do anything and represent the Army and move forward, not just in [one's] specialty," noting that combat arms officers tended to do this well and succeeding in jobs outside one's experience. This led to Participant 12 at graduation being able "to think differently [and] more strategically" going to the follow-on assignment.

Upon arriving at the next assignment as division chief in a MACOM, Participant 12 was immediately given a major project, one that would dominate for several months. The Project was an Army-wide study that required significant coordination and collaboration internally and externally to the MACOM, including Army Staff, assistant secretariats at the Army level, other MACOMs, and reserve component organizations.

Participant 12's team was due to brief the study results to the Army leadership in three months and not much had been done, although several on the team were involved in recent prior studies on related matters. The Project was completed and briefed successfully.

Participant 12's takeaways from that experience related to the strategic thinking skills. "What is the strategic implications to the Army on this? Not just here's widgets and we need to keep these, and these could probably go away." Considerations on changing quantities included effectiveness in deployment and employment, impacts on the defense industrial base, and the sustainment plan. But also, Participant 12 had to stand behind study results that went against the Army's pre-conceptions, leading to warnings from two- and three-star generals that Participant 12 could expect heavy criticism (e.g., "You're going to walk into a face smashing."), which occurred but because the results were defensible, the study was ultimately accepted. "It didn't feel good getting chewed out … because you put so much effort into it. I mean the level of professionalism and dedication to this project was just unbelievable by the whole team." However, Participant 12 recognized the Army leadership's perspective, noting that the Army was facing budget pressures and force cuts which led to the sensitivity over the results. "When you put it in that context, you take your beating, but you know you did a great job … . There was no parochialism, there was (sic) no rice bowls protected." Participant 12 would subsequently use this experience to contextual subsequent major projects with Army leadership visibility.

Participant 12 also noted how the MACOM leadership, and the leaders of the subordinate activity to which Participant 12 is assigned, engage with the organization, which is itself large and diverse. To Participant 12, the leaders have shown both

willingness to exercise strategic thinking ("What is in the realm of possibility? … That's all [the general] does. Think, throw stuff out there."), hosting town hall meetings, and sponsoring senior leader seminars, like guest lecturers at the War College. Participant 12 also appreciated the complexity faced by the Army leadership, who in briefings might "not even look at your slides and just starts talking. … I mean I come in with my little project and I just have an appreciation for their burden. And so I try to [shape] what it is that I'm doing to put it in a context … that's usable for them."

A key difference Participant 12 noted regarded how service in the present position can bring about conflict with the sustainment community. As one serving in an integration position, Participant 12's duties involve considering impacts of decisions across the Army, but the community sometimes expects Participant 12 to retain some parochial interest. "That's why I'm not a very liked person. Because I will challenge my own fighting function when I see things. And they don't like that. 'Hey, you're supposed to be on our team.' … 'Well, no, I'm here for the Army.'" Participant 12 coped with the unpopularity through self-reflection on the broader meaning of the work, which included a focus on the longer-term future of the Army beyond the immediate lessons learned from Afghanistan and Iraq.

As a result of this experience, Participant 12 exercised a mentorship role for lieutenant colonel subordinates. "Expand your base of knowledge and understanding. Read multiple documents. … [G]o to multiple news sources daily," and read the Army's latest doctrinal and policy documents. "Everything from the President's guidance to the Joint Chiefs of Staff." Participant 12 also valued mentorship from leaders, such as during briefings or other settings where "if you could take the time to … mentor someone on why

you did something a certain way, why you made a decision a certain way, why you didn't do things." Participant 12 noted that having a few great mentors was strongly positive but "the problem is they're a few."

When asked about five years from now, Participant 12's initial response was a single word, "Retired." Elaborating on this, Participant 12 hoped to continue service in a role similar to the current one, "not just an Army logistician doing logistics."

**Structural description of Participant 12's experience**. There were three structures to Participant 12's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader. The first and most dominant structure was *social learning*. Much of the identity work performed throughout the experience, reinforced by the life history, was socially learned. This was clearly evident from both the War College and follow-on assignment roles as Participant 12 identified needed changes in the self-concept through the examples of others including those factors to emulate, such as the perspectives of those with strategic experience, and those factors to distance from, such as the reliance on prior tactical or operational level perspectives and thinking. The interaction in seminar was central to Participant 12's ability to recognize the narrow self-conception as a pure logistician and convert exposure to the strategic environment into preparation for strategic leadership. In the present assignment, reliance on social learning was high as Participant 12 used it to navigate a contentious Project through a bureaucracy to conclusion with presentation to the Army leadership. Through this and subsequent Projects, Participant 12 learned and exercised the shaping of Projects to be usable by the ultimate recipient.

A related structure was *strategic orientation*. Participant 12's strategic orientation was evident through the first phase through a regular willingness to engage in unfamiliar environments and broaden horizons. As Participant 12 developed strategic thinking skills later on, Participant 12 reached back to make sense of what had occurred prior while tactically and operationally focused, while also being comfortable and willing to tackle large complex projects that would occasionally pit Participant 12 against the narrowly-focused sustainment community. In essence, Participant 12 was always about the bigger picture, the development of the skills at the War College put that picture into focus.

The third structure which connects the above two was *strategic thinking as the identified difference between senior and mid-career leaders*. Participant 12's development of strategic thinking as a focus area, became a key element of the new self-concept, one that was applied to relationships with others as well. The strategic orientation and social learning skills helped make Participant 12 cognizant of the differences between the strategic thinkers and the non-strategic thinkers, and sensing the importance of this, turned strategic thinking into the core of the new senior leader self-concept. This new self-concept brought about the translation of strategic orientation into action, and achieving success by empathizing with others even if it meant taking positions (the "cause") that were contrary to the preferred work identities of the logistics community with which Participant 12 originally identified.

**Participant 13**

*[Participant 13 is a nuclear and counterproliferation (functional area 52, or "FA52") officer whose career largely followed the two-phase specialty-track model. Initially, Participant 13 followed the common career path within engineer branch with*

*steady increases in scope of duties and responsibilities through assignment as company commander and follow-on in the Army Corps of Engineers, then elected to transfer to FA52 which included graduate school and subsequent service an instructor at West Point. Participant 13's career as nuclear and counterproliferation officer was variant in terms of scope and responsibilities. Participant 13 was serving as a research scientist with duty at a military institute of higher education in spring 2013 when notified of selection for senior service college, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.]*

Participant 13's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began around spring 2013 upon notification of selection for senior service college and went through to the summer of 2013 upon departure from assignment to a defense agency with a duty location at a military educational institution. The second phase was attendance at the U.S. Army War College resident program which ran from August 2013 through June 2014. It was during this phase when Participant 13 was selected for colonel. The third episode was as a nuclear and counterproliferation officer assigned to a U.S. cabinet department (i.e., outside the Department of Defense, thus hereafter referred to as an "interagency assignment"). At the time of notification, Participant 13's conception of a senior military leader was one who provided vision for an organization, defined as "establishing the direction that a group would travel in," whereas mid-level and junior officers would support achievement of the vision. At that time, Participant 13 did not feel to be in a position to provide such vision, and thus saw the selection as an opportunity to develop that capability.

**Textural description of Participant 13's experience**. At the time of the triggering event, Participant 13 was assigned to a Department of Defense agency with the duty

location at a separate military educational institution hosted by another service, which therefore meant serving remotely from the supervisor. Relations between the agency and the education institution were strained, with Participant 13 caught in the middle and receiving little to no support from the host. Additionally, the majority of the faculty and staff at the institution were junior in rank to Participant 13. Thus, although Participant 13 did receive congratulations and well wishes from others at the institute, there was no one that was a true peer, and thus "it was a little bit of a vacuum as far as having a group to talk about it or share with or appreciate" the news. Participant 13 contrasted this to expectations that fellow lieutenant colonels who served on a "large military base with many other Battalion Commanders or other staff members" would have gotten a more engaging reception.

A prior supervisor of Participant 13, who served in the same agency, had anticipated Participant 13's success and had taken time for mentoring beforehand. They renewed contact about a week after the selection. As Participant 13 prepared to depart for the War College, the following was the self-assessment in relation to being a senior leader:

> I hadn't been in some key leadership jobs and although I'd heard great things about the War College still had a hard time describing when people would ask family members and neighbors and things, 'What does that mean? What does it teach you'? I could kind of speak the general party line but I really hadn't internalized what that would mean or do.

Introduction to the War College environment proved surprising due to the student make-up. "I had anticipated that it would have been mostly former Battalion Commanders and infantry and combat arms folks, but those were in the minority." Only three or four among the seminar of 16 were former battalion commanders.

Participant 13 latched onto the early segments of the curriculum focused on organizational change and vision, but one part that challenged the self-concept regarded the role of senior leaders as advisor. "How do I know how to properly advise a senior leader?" became a matter of self-reflection. "It seems like a romantically enticing position, because you almost have a lot of authority but no responsibility being an advisor and not the leader." A related formative experience came in the form of the War College's public speaking requirement, which Participant 13 exercised to an audience of computer network engineers. One asked what it was like to serve as an advisor, a question Participant 13 was not prepared to answer and admitted it is a question that was difficult to answer. Consequently, it became an important area of focus, "I know what it means to be an advisor and how to know you're giving good advice, that I remember that."

Spurred in part by the strong academic background, including holding a terminal degree in nuclear physics, Participant 13 opted to join the Advanced Strategic Arts Program (ASAP), a competitive special program at the War College that ran during most of the second-half of the academic year. Participant 13's rationale was that "the government was now sending me on a taxpayer dime to the school and I think expected me to get all that I could out of it." The message that resonated most from the senior leader interactions was that "being a senior leader isn't about doing tasks, but it's about forming partnerships." This was because the ever-widening network of stakeholders meant that the more senior the leader was, the less true autonomy the leader had.

Participant 13 also recalled formative experiences during the War College's annual holiday tea with residents of the Carlisle area's assisted living homes, many of which house aging veterans. Seeing the "reverence and appreciation and respect that they had for a

senior leader" was very meaningful to Participant 13. Also, the ASAP staff ride to Washington DC included interactions with other federal agencies and international organizations, which exposed Participant 13 to the interagency environment where senior leaders had to "convince and cajole organizations and groups to" achieve the overall cross-agency mission set.

Participant 13's post-graduation assignment was again to a location relatively isolated from the military mainstream, serving in another U.S. government agency with no Department of Defense parent organization overseeing the officers assigned there. As graduation approached, Participant 13 was concerned about not having an established mentoring relationship with a senior leader, unlike fellow student. "Some of my colleagues … had strong relationships with three and four star General Officers … or retired people that had gone on to be senior executive in [the Department of Defense] … . I really didn't have that." Thus, in the absence of that, Participant 13 has tried to "talk regularly" with the present supervisor, a senior civilian, in the interagency assignment and otherwise reach out to former supervisors to build a network.

Assimilating to the interagency, however, proved "overwhelming. The culture and processes really dominated my initial experience here." Citing how many previous assignments had Participant 13 immersed in different cultures and jargon, this government agency was "even more process driven" because of the "multibillion dollar nuclear weapon renovation programs" that "naturally draws attention from Congress and the Department of Defense at a very high level." The processes related to fiscal responsibility, project management, reporting, and authorities, among others. This was all new to Participant 13 who felt intimidated about jumping in and asking questions during meetings, but elected

to do so and was pleased to find that no one was "upset or disappointed." But as Participant 13 has grown in the job, the supervisor has granted greater autonomy and others in the organization have come to value Participant 13's expertise. Meanwhile, Participant 13 has built rapport with budget analysts to better understand how decisions and responsibilities among individual programs align to "achieve an overall scope of work" across programs.

Two issues have presented challenges to Participant 13's preferred way of doing business. One is interpersonal, as Participant 13 deals with a disagreement from another military officer in the same agency but coming from a different service. The matter relates to different service perspectives on how to run programs. Given the lack of authority structure to engage on the issue in question, Participant 13 is taking a more consensus-building approach to seeking resolution, something that a "struggle" for an avowed "type A personality." The second issue regards transparency, or the lack thereof, in some of the budgetary decisions. Participant 13 would prefer to see collaboration and transparency at all levels, but has found that some program managers withhold critical budget data because of the risk of the data being mis-used by Congress or other decision makers to the stark disadvantage of the program. It is hard to "solve programmatic needs .. [while not] undercut[ting] business practices that this organization wants or needs to live by." Again, Participant 13's approach to dealing with this situation is building relationships from which "buy-in" for common solutions may be possible.

Elaborating on the process orientation of the job, Participant 13 mentioned the extensive "action officer" oriented tasks that are required such as collecting and assembling data, preparing reports, or developing performance reports on contracts. "It's not satisfying. I don't enjoy just sort of consolidation information. I feel like, to be honest, that

I have a little bit to offer." Regarding the advisory role that resonated during the War College year, Participant 13 noted that advising had not yet emerged as a task because of the limited expertise beyond technical knowledge. Participant 13 is hopeful for getting more involved in Congressional briefings and other external events later in the tour.

Assessing the overall experience, Participant 13 noted a change in orientation from "getting things done … getting them off your to-do list" to "developing processes … that don't have finite timelines and aren't simply crossed off." The result is greater patience and more use of self-reflection. The patience is also projected to others, as Participant 13 noted having formerly been "frustrated by leaders that don't make decisions earlier than they needed, … but now I'm understanding that sometimes waiting to a decision point … [is] valuable."

**Structural description of Participant 13's experience**. There were three structures to Participant 13's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader. The first structure was *ambivalence*. Most of the episodes during the experience represented a natural state of conflicting feelings toward two separate espoused values: (1) from the functional area to which Participant 13 belonged which prized independence, autonomy, and technical expertise, and (2) from the Army that placed strong emphasis on command, a traditional sense of authority, and combat experience. Consequently, even in positions where Participant 13's strengths such as technical expertise were important for successful duty performance, there was cognizance and sensitivity to how those strengths and overall work experience were different from peers following the standard career path, such as experienced in the run-up to the War College year. The identity construction experience was therefore positive, which also

appeared to be true for many role change episodes earlier in the career. The structure of ambivalence was also prevalent in the earlier episodes finding Participant 13 on the verge of withdrawing from the service due to negative work experiences, mostly personality conflicts. In each case, Participant 13 did choose to exit the particular work situation at earlier opportunity while staying in the military.

The second structure was a *transactional orientation*. Participant 13's recounting of the experience showed considerable drive to push oneself and succeed, and this drive came from an underlying belief in providing a maximal return on investment. This was a resonant theme in reflection upon selection for the War College, for choosing to enter ASAP, and for navigating through the unfamiliar interagency environment through engagements whereby Participant 13 and another party could trade expertise on areas of mutual interest. Given the sense of relative isolation and flatness of the organization that pervaded the duty assignments in the first and third phases, this structure explained how the latter experience has been generally successful, whereas the prior experience in higher learning was disastrous because of the inability to build rapport with an obstinate site leader who would not provide resources or assistance.

The third structure was *peer leadership*, a structure that helped Participant 13 transcend the flat organizational structures and accomplish the mission. This structure involved both the ability to influence peers and showing empathy. This structure was evident in one of the lessons learned Participant 13 provided:

> I think it's [important] to be agreeable and positive as often as possible. I'm starting to appreciate, to a limited degree, that people now look to me for guidance, and advice and inspiration, that's…I really haven't had that experience since leaving my job teaching at WestPoint with cadets …. But

> now you're in a position where employees look up to you for leadership and everything else and understand that quick comments that you may have given to a peer, and as you become frustrated, they saw you as a peer, it didn't really, sort of negatively impact their feelings or emotions as you can now with simple slightly negative comments that you really didn't intend to be offensive, can be offending and demoralizing. I think you have to be very careful about understanding that some people are working very hard and may provide you products or results that you didn't want. But you have to appreciate that your word carries a lot of weight.

While peer leadership and the transactional orientation were structures that guided successful mission accomplishment, ambivalence served a particular tempering function in creating a sense of one's limits of knowledge or experience and encouraging corrective action or withdrawing from the situation.

**Participant 14**

*[Participant 14 is an adjutant general ("AG", i.e., human resources and administration) officer whose career varied from the single-track model and included branch detailing to the infantry as a lieutenant. In August 2012 while in command of a battalion in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Participant 14 was notified of selection for senior service college, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.]*

**Textural description of Participant 14's experience**. Participant 14's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began in August 2012 upon notification of selection for senior service college through departure from battalion command in the summer of 2013. The second phase was attendance at the U.S. Army War College as a student in the resident program of academic year 2014, graduating in June 2014. The third episode was initial follow-on assignment as a division chief in a J-1

(personnel and administration office within a joint, a.k.a. multiservice, headquarters) of a geographic combatant command. As of the beginning of this experience, Participant 14's conception of a senior officer was "sitting battalion commander and above," because battalion command was the "benchmark of success" where "you separated a typical officer that had reached a level of achievement."

The news of selection was gratifying from a personal and family standpoint, but found that some peer relationships were affected, "for the first time in my career, [I] experienced a little bit of the separation and a little friction with some peers who had not been selected." The indicators were "subtle, a different response or the eye roll in conversation," and that Participant 14's spouse received similar but less subtle treatment from other spouses who were disappointed that their sponsor was not selected.

On the other hand, Participant 14 reported strongly supportive responses from superiors who had been taking the time to provide mentorship. Two in particular came forward to offer mentorship and advice on "what it meant to be a senior service college select and a budging senior leader," such as "being willing to say, 'No, sir. That's not right.'" Such conversations continued during the course of the year with full colonels whom Participant 14 encountered on travel to various sites, as Participant 14's command was geographically distributed among NATO facilities across parts of Europe. These conversations eventually led Participant 14 to rethink the meaning of senior leader. "I started to see the difference between a lieutenant colonel and a full colonel. From their perspective, I, in fact, was not a senior leader… ."

Participant 14's assimilation to the War College was smooth due to having already earned an advanced civilian degree and was therefore confidence in "intellect and writing

ability" and good quality interactions with the seminar during the early lessons. Participant 14 welcomed the camaraderie, noting how it contrasted the battalion command experience with its geographic dispersion that made difficult sustained peer relationships. Thus, Participant 14 relished the opportunity "to build my network again. Both my [spouse] and I are pretty social so the activities that we did away from the War College as a group helped to build that connection and some of that peer feedback that I think has been useful to me throughout my career."

During the early part of the War College year, Participant 14 was notified of selection for promotion to colonel. All those eligible within Participant 14's seminar were selected, so there was no repeat of the uncomfortable earlier experiences, "we didn't have to dodge anybody in the hall that was a non-select." But otherwise, the news did not alter Participant 14's experience as selection was anticipated.

Further into the War College year as the subject matter moved from leadership to national security policy and related matters, Participant 14 went from a feeling of familiarity to "a pretty steep learning curve." Recalling the career to that point, "I've been brigade and below," and therefore had little exposure to national security strategy documents or joint commands. This resulted in a shift away from thinking solely about the military element of power to all elements. Retrospectively thinking about the NATO experience, Participant 14 said "Not only is it not all about military power but … it is secondary to the economic element of power. … It's a bigger influencer in the world than military power." Participant 14 also appreciated the frank interaction with one- and two-star general officers from the field that was enabled by the non-attribution environment.

As the War College year progressed, Participant 14 was informed of duty assignment to a geographic command and was later promoted to colonel. Reflecting on the time of graduation, Participant 14 noted excitement about "taking the new knowledge … to the [next assignment], operational design and those sorts of things … . I was going to the exact place where I could apply that knowledge the quickest."

One of the first experiences in the new position, however, found Participant 14 receiving the following insight from the supervisor, "'Take all that strategic thinking stuff that you learned at the War College and put it aside. You won't use it here.' I thought he was joking but I realized over time that he really wasn't." From the early experience as division chief, Participant 14 would understand the meaning of that statement as the requirements facing the command were many in number while overwhelmingly short-term and tactically-focused. This tempered the ability to devote energy toward long-term plans:

> [W]e spend a lot more time dealing with the 'now' and solving today's problems than we do looking in a more holistic, long-term approach. We really do more [military decision making process] than we do Operational Design. Even at this level, we're still in the close fight more than [the leadership] believes we ought to be or I expected.

Participant 14 cited several practical reasons why this has occurred, including the number of on-going crises and short-term issues garnering attention at the national level, the extent of external permissions required to recommend courses of action to national leaders, and increasing bureaucracy, especially for a joint command who must socialize plans and activities across the service components. Participant 14 expressed ambivalence toward this situation, citing comfort in dealing with "the here and now because it's the [decision-making] model that I grew up with," so the response was equally one of

frustration and acceptance. The key coping mechanism has been relationship building, which Participant 14 has undertaken mainly internally to the command and was beginning to undertake among external stakeholders.

As a division chief, Participant 14 found it important to reach back to lessons learned in direct supervision, while recognizing differences between supervising junior officers and the current situation of supervising lieutenant colonels and civilians with extensive experience. "When I'm talking to my team, … I do find myself often remembering what I wanted from my colonels. … I just wanted room to run. Just give me guidance, and then let me run," while also providing "top cover" to provide support and underwrite mistakes.

Overall, despite four months in the role, Participant 14 is "still working through forming what I believe is required of this job, and how I'm going to operate at the [colonel] level." Summarizing the final evolution of role change to senior leader, Participant 14 said, "I felt like at the War College when we talked about colonels and senior leaders, we were really talking about colonels in their advisory capacity to general officers. I haven't done that here yet and I don't know that I [will] even if I stay here for a full three years." On self-reflection, Participant 14 felt that the core values and beliefs held strong through the experience, but that how one measured oneself had changed significantly.

> I'm not an action officer anymore. And my, what used to be, job satisfaction for me was accomplishing things, and now here at the 0-6 level I feel like I accomplish less because the problems are more complex and the solutions require a lot more staffing and activity at echelons beyond the [geographic combatant command] with the Joint Staff and [Department of Defense], which extends the timeline. And another realization that I manage more

> and I do less, you know just thinking about things and connecting issues across the staff or across different types of operations, or across the [area of responsibility] is not…doesn't generate the same type of short-term wins and satisfactions that maybe I was able to reflect upon that I was a Lieutenant Colonel and got home at the end of the day or the end of a week. …I think for me, maybe part of it is the realization that this is my career now, this is what's left of me in the military. And then if that's something that I really do come to terms with, and accept and enjoy, or if it's something that causes me to hang up my boots and retire maybe sooner than I thought I would.

**Structural description of Participant 14's experience**. Three were three structures to Participant 14's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader. The first structure was *purposeful engagement*. Participant 14 emphasized building trust and relationships throughout the present experience, but always emphasized qualities of those relationships over quantity. In discussing interactions at the War College, Participant 14 talked in terms of specific lessons and learning moments that spurred self-reflection and ultimately adjustments to the self-concept as budding senior leader. The result was a clear self-evaluation regarding areas for development, whether in the educational setting, the relatively isolated environment of battalion command before it, or in working through the challenges in the present assignment. Through the life history, Participant 14 faced many instances of being isolated or in some way different from peers, whether it was the AG officer branch detailed, the civilian job in sales, or the toxic environments in the recruiting and cadet commands, key to overcoming those challenges was an important purposeful relationship with a coach or mentor.

The second structure was a *strong moral compass*. Routinely citing foundational values instilled through upbringing, Participant 14's self-concept remained firmly grounded and resilient despite a myriad of complex challenges. This structure explains how Participant 14 addressed ambivalence toward certain aspects of the post-War College work environment, with expectations about functioning as a senior leader not been initially met, yet in recognition of the needs of the organization, Participant 14 has set aside the preferred self-concept in favor of getting the organization's mission accomplished, while continuing to develop the relationships and learn about self and work.

The third structure was *idiosyncrasy*, or the willingness to view situations through a contrary lens, expressing the existence of a delta between self-concept and preferred work identity as an acceptable state, which provided incentive and energy to transform the work environment. Examples of this structure included the discomfort of peer reactions to Participant 14's selection, initial reaction to faculty praise at the War College despite having felt confident initially in the academic arena, and the emphasis within the lessons learned of the delta between the higher-order expectations of senior leaders at advisors and visionaries and the constraints felt in the current duty position that limit Participant 14 to the "here and now."

## Composite Textural and Structural Description

As the final step in phenomenological data analysis, this section presents a synthesized textural and structural description that presents the meaning and essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100) of role change from mid-career to senior leader. This synthesis "represents the essences at a particular time from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive and reflective study of the phenomenon"

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). In undergoing this synthesis, it was important for the researcher to be mindful of own subjectivity given the personal experience expressed in the subjectivity statement in Chapter 3 about undergoing a similar role change to senior military leader nine years' earlier. As the additional themes were derived from outside the bracketed data, these descriptions were derived only from the eight core themes:

**Composite textural description**

At the point of the triggering event, these mid-career officers were very busy, working in demanding jobs at the operational or tactical level. Approaches to completing tasks tend to be rational, exercising the scientifically rational military decision-making process to analyze requirements and develop plans or recommendations that are pushed up to superiors. Participants with particular subject matter expertise may have some advisory capacity to provide that expertise, but otherwise the ability to render advice is limited outside of one's positional authority. The self-concept is largely defined in terms of doing, who one is became a matter of what and how much one can accomplish, and how fast.

When the triggering event occurs, the officer feels good about it, and others feel good for the officer -- offering hearty congratulations and some initial mentorship and guidance for the future. Although this subsides quickly and officers tend to return to the exigencies of the current job, if able they will reach out to others for further guidance and mentorship and begin observing the actions of colonels and general officers more closely. They will also begin the process of rearranging their career plans and they now have proof of a potential longer-term commitment to the Army. When they leave their jobs and embark to the War College, however, they will not yet have clearly formulated what being a senior military leader is about, and do not see themselves as being senior leaders yet.

At the War College, officers initially undergo a period of discovery as they are immersed in a small-group "seminar" learning environment that puts them together with students from other branches and components of the Army, sister services, civilians from the Department of Defense and other agencies, and international officers. They relish their initial academic experiences related to understanding the strategic environment and their role in it. They quickly learn about the importance of empathizing with the perspectives of others and building and sustaining relationships, and that negotiation and consensus would become an important part of getting the job done in future.

Yet, as these officers arrive having succeeded up to mid-career officership, their self-concepts are resilient and thus do not undergoing significant identity transition at the War College. Instead, they latch on to something – a topic to focus on or a cause to pursue – that transcends the current self-concept and becomes the core of what differentiates themselves in the senior leader role from that of mid-career, while keeping the remainder of the self-concept intact. This focus also provides the benchmark by which they compare themselves with other senior leaders. As the officer sees this focus as identifying a shortcoming or vulnerability in the self or as an important thing to develop, identity work begins.

Leveraging the programs and opportunities available, officers approach graduation feeling prepared and ready for the next assignment. As the transition occurs to the post-graduation assignment, the officers again go through a period of discovery as they seek to identify where they can make their mark as a new senior leader. They survey the new organization to determine the key points of contact and build relationships. They are given or form for themselves a key project or task to perform. They seek to become involved in

the organization as a whole and try to avoid confining themselves or being confined to their assigned duty position. The focus or cause that they have formulated is used as a basis or start point for transforming the work environment around them or undergoing further identity work, while other aspects of their self-concept continue to be resilient to change.

However, these officers begin to sense areas of conflict between their expectations of being senior leaders as espoused by the Army and promulgated at the War College, and how things are done in the new organization. They quickly realize that day-to-day demands, a volatile and unpredictably crisis-ridden global environment, or administrative tasks require significant attention, taking away time needed to exercise strategic thinking and visioning. Additionally, they learn that their particular project or crisis action is but one of many issues facing their superiors, whose spheres of interest are broader and whose available time is limited. Negotiation and consensus building on complex solutions is also more challenging than expected as parochial interests intercede in their relationships with peers and stakeholders. These conditions frustrate the officers who wanted to disidentify with being action officers, but succumb to action officer behaviors because that is what they are accustomed to and where their comfort zone still lies, in line with the self-concept held over from mid-career. On the other hand, the moment of promotion to colonel defined a significant and measurable change for officers as they exercised their external contacts. Referring to oneself as "colonel" vice "lieutenant colonel" in correspondence or phone conversation caused others to be more responsive, willing to listen, and possibly negotiate interests more readily.

As the role change experience draws to conclusion, the officers begin to recognize themselves as senior leaders commensurate with their granted capacity to render advice

and represent the organization. If sufficiently well established, these serve to overcome the conflicts and become significant parts of one's new identity. Also, the new senior leaders come to relish or expect the autonomy granted to them, but perceive that their very busy general officers are distant or detached. The officers still look up for mentorship and transparency, wanting to know how they are doing and why certain decisions are being made, but are not getting enough of that type of communication.

**Composite structural description**

Using imaginative variation, there were several structures from the composite textural description that were necessary for the lived experience of the role change to occur as it did. Many of the participants exercised similar structures in their individual experiences.

The first and most dominant structure was *social learning*. Most of the themes in textural description reflected the officers' tendency toward outward orientation and learning through others, even if their personality was introverted. The routine emphasis on team or group activities, relationship building, negotiation and consensus, desires for mentorship, and so on all represent an orientation toward measuring one's own self-concept through the actions and responses of others. This was true even to the extent that being granted autonomy was at least partially disorienting for officers, especially those accustomed to tight relationships in traditional units.

The second structure was *deliberate forward movement*. It mattered not the sequencing of events – whether the triggering event was schooling or promotion, whether War College attendance was sooner rather than later, or what the nature of the post-graduation assignment was – the cumulative effect of the role change was going to come

about at its own pace. The officers, already accustomed to an up-or-out type of career management system, accepted this, although begrudgingly to a degree. There were no ways to circumvent the process – even officers whose pre-War College experience was significantly longer or involved early promotion did not realize any significant change in their self-concepts until War College attendance.

The third was a dual structure -- *the resilient self-concept meets resilient work situation*. This structure forms a bridge to the past from both the self and organizational standpoints. The self is deliberately moving forward to exercise the role change at a prescribed pace, yet is holding on to what is familiar because it works. The organization is devoting time and energy to setting conditions for these officers to entire a work environment that leverages new senior leaders. Yet there is resilience on both sides by which the selves are only partially undergoing identity change and the organizations are only partially providing a work change. This brings about a state of conflict among expectations and reality, whether it is bureaucratization, parochialism, or lack of communication; but also tempers the ability for the officers' to overcome them wholesale. Rather, they pursue change where they can, such as in the form of the focus area or cause that is most important to them.

The fourth structure was the *moral framework*. Officers required motivation to undergo the role change in this deliberate and conflicted fashion, and that was a moral decision to continue service at a higher level. Officers would not be satisfied with a partial role change, promotion without attending the War College or vice versa, nor would they be challenged in a duty position that did not leverage the education received. Officers also did not feel comfortable abandoning the role change while in progress. As Participant 1

pointed out, once the process started, self-selecting out early required very high-level approvals because the Army had already begun investing in the officer. The role change had to be completed. The moral framework gave impetus to coping with the conflicts and engaging the relationships with full energy.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of the phenomenological data analysis of interview data collected by the researcher from twelve officers who underwent a role change from mid-career to senior military officer. In exercising the analysis, eight core themes emerged:

1. Desiring to learn and be mentored on the meaning of the role change throughout the experience, especially early on even if tempered by the exigencies of the extent duties
2. Incorporating the change of rank into one's own identity more readily than from the educational experience
3. Needing to build and sustain relationships as an important part of undertaking the role change
4. Identifying a focus or cause to harbor a sense of personal change as an identifiable outcome of the overall role change
5. Valuing the importance of setting the tone early in the post-graduate assignment

6. Facing and confronting barriers stemming from conflicting signals between expectations set before and during the War College experience and norms and expectations in the post-graduation work environment
7. Associating the capacity to advise more senior leaders and represent one's organization or the Army with identity work toward senior leadership
8. Desiring continued mentorship and development from more senior leaders

In the course of conducting data collection, the researcher uncovered three additional themes related to the phenomenon of the study regarding the focused life histories. Reviewing the participants' earlier role change episodes were informative and offered additional insights regarding the participants' contexts at the time of the triggering event or how they view their futures. The three additional themes were:

9. Constructing one's identity during job withdrawal scenarios
10. Creating one's innate approach to coping based on the formative experiences of the earliest significant role change episode in the career
11. Facing the inevitable termination of one's military career

Through the construction of composite textural and structural descriptions, the meanings and essences of the phenomenon became clear as officers underwent a lengthy learning process about the meaning of becoming a senior leader, yet with the resilience of their own self-concepts and the exigencies of the work environments, tended to limit identity work to addressing specific focal areas or causes that the officers found empowering while keeping the rest of the self-concept intact.

The next chapter will present the conclusions from the study, along with implications and recommendations for theory, research, and practice.

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## Chapter 5: Conclusions, Interpretations, and Recommendations

This final chapter discusses the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations that emerged from the phenomenological inquiry of the twelve participants' experiences of role change from mid-career to senior military leader. This chapter links the results described in Chapter 4 to the primary theoretical lenses in the conceptual frame, which were Kira and Balkin's (2014) model on negotiation between self and work identities and Schlossberg's (2011) 4S model of coping with transitions. Ashforth's (2001) theories on identity transitions in organizations will also contribute to the synthesis.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section contains a *brief overview* of the study. The second section presents an *overview of the themes*, whereby the eleven themes and the composite textural and structural descriptions from Chapter 4 will be synthesized with relevant literature.

The third section provides the *conclusions* drawn from the study. Three will be presented: (1) the identity transition expected by the Army is only partially occurring due to a combination of institutional and cultural barriers, (2) assuming the mantle of senior leadership is an especially human endeavor, driven more by relationships, character, and mentoring than skills and competencies, and (3) ambivalence is an important emotional response to consider in identity construction.

The fourth section will provide the *implications* for theory, practice, and research. The implications for theory will include two specific recommendations for modifying or extending Kira & Balkin's (2014) model regarding role withdrawal and role ambivalence. Implications for practice will include six recommendations regarding (1) how dialogue on the role change to senior leader sustain the holistic view of all educational and experiential

activities rather than narrowly on the educational period itself, (2) tighten the coupling on promotion and education activities toward a more reliable and consistent sequence, (3) continuing leader development and mentorship for new senior leaders, (4) the need to emphasize networking in the War College, (5) the use of qualitative methods, including phenomenological inquiry, as an alternative to reliance on surveys in the Army, and (6) focusing mentoring activities to assist junior officers through their early role changes. Nine implications for research will then be presented in three categories. First, five similar phenomenological role change investigations will be recommended to study identity construction among (1) officers undergoing senior service college fellowships at universities and government agencies as a substitute for resident program experience, (2) officers undergoing senior service college via distance education, (3) reserve component officers, (4) minorities and other officer demographics, and (5) senior Army civilians. Other areas of further research related to identity construction would include (6) follow-on investigations for the experience of officers two to five years after their War College experience, (7) officers reaching the ends of their careers, and (8) officers who were selected for promotion but not senior service college attendance. Implication (9) for research regards the need to study competence development in senior leaders to understand better skill and knowledge acquisition and placement into practice.

The fifth and final section will provide *concluding remarks* for this study.

## Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to create a better understanding of the lived experience of changing roles from mid-career officer to senior military leader upon assumption of their initial position of senior leadership. This research specifically sought

to understand the identity change challenges facing nascent senior leaders having assumed their initial roles at senior military leaders. The study, which was at the individual level of analysis, contributed to the body of contextual knowledge in the transitions and identity transition literature through its focus on the role change from middle management to senior leadership.

The experience studied was a complex multi-year role change undertaken by lieutenant colonels serving on active duty in the U.S. Army that included the following events: (1) selection for promotion to colonel, (2) selection for attendance to senior service college, (3) promotion to colonel, (4) attendance at senior service college, and (5) duty assignment as a senior leader. Although there was variance in some of the sequencing of these events, whichever occurred first of (1) or (2) served as a triggering event, beginning the experience of role change from mid-career role to senior military leader.

This study used a phenomenological approach of inquiry. The research conducted in-depth one-on-one interviews with the participants using Seidman's (2013) three-interview series of focused life histories, details of the experience, and meaning making. Given the challenges of the worldwide distribution of these officers and their busy and unpredictable schedules, most interviews were done by telephone, but as many were done face-to-face as possible. The twelve participants were purposefully sampled from a pool of U.S. Army War College graduates from the resident cohorts of academic years 2013 and 2014, who were U.S. Army active duty colonels or lieutenant colonels (promotable), were not a student of the researchers' either in class or as project advisor, were in their first post-graduation assignment performing appropriately senior military leader duties, and did not stay at Carlisle Barracks for their post-graduation posting.

This study developed a broader understanding of the role change from one level of leadership to another, along with entry into a more complex working environment, at the strategic level. All twelve participants were highly enthusiastic about the study and introspective throughout. The honor of continuing to serve against the challenges of taking on such monumental roles presented conflicting views and feelings regarding their self-concepts and their organizations' preferred work identities. The findings brought these challenges to light, along with various coping strategies used by the officers. The results were normative, with many common themes articulated by a strong majority of the participants. These themes are reviewed in the next section.

## Overview of Themes

The overall research question and accompanying subquestion in this study were essential to exploring the experience of identity construction during this role change. The research question was: *What is the experience of leader identity construction when transitioning from a mid-career military officer role to a senior leadership role upon entry into their first senior leadership position?* The subquestion was: *What types of resources were used and how were they used?* The focus was singular – the *experience* of identity construction as the result of a work role change – and was clearly identifiable and operationalizable.

Eleven themes emerged from the interview data. Eight of these were the result of the phenomenological reduction process after multiple re-readings and applying Saldaña's (2013) techniques of process and affective coding to help bracket and horizonalize the data. Three additional themes (themes 9, 10 and 11) were uncovered in the course of reviewing the life histories that included discussions of previous role change episodes in one's career

and the meaning making interview as officers were asked about their futures five years hence. The full wording of the eleven themes that emerged from the analysis in Chapter 4 are provided below:

1. Desiring to learn and be mentored on the meaning of the role change throughout the experience, especially early on even if tempered by the exigencies of the extent duties
2. Incorporating the change of rank into one's own identity more readily than from the educational experience
3. Needing to build and sustain relationships as an important part of undertaking the role change
4. Identifying a focus or cause to harbor a sense of personal change as an identifiable outcome of the overall role change
5. Valuing the importance of setting the tone early in the post-graduate assignment
6. Facing and confronting barriers stemming from conflicting signals between expectations set before and during the War College experience and norms and expectations in the post-graduation work environment
7. Associating the capacity to advise more senior leaders and represent one's organization or the Army with identity work toward senior leadership
8. Desiring continued mentorship and development from more senior leaders
9. Constructing one's identity during job withdrawal scenarios

10. Creating one's innate approach to coping based on the formative experiences of the earliest significant role change episode in the career

11. Facing the inevitable termination of one's military career

The researcher chose to develop narratives of the life histories to accompany the textural and structural descriptions.I will explain each of these themes by applying Kira & Balkin's (2014) model of identity negotiation and Schlossberg's (2011) 4S theory of coping with transitions along with other identity construction and transition literature, especially Ashforth (2001).

**Theme 1: Desiring to Re-Orient and Learn … If Possible**

The first theme, wanting to learn about the role change, directly follows from the transitions literature. Schlossberg's (2011) 4S model shows the triggering event resulting in a change to the *situation*, that the officer is heading along an upward moving path. However, there is a lag time between the selection and the next event on that path, and for many that lag time was at least seven months. The officer's *support* structure kicked in with congratulations and some mentorship, followed by some *strategies* of information seeking in the form of watching other colonels and generals more closely and *self-reflection*. For those with the time and desire to transform, the cycle repeated until the next role changing event. For others, where the exigencies of the current situation overshadowed the beginning of the role change, the cycles moved slowly or stalled.

Even with aggressive learning about the new role, there was generally little identity work done. Using Kira & Balkin's (2014) model, shown in Figure 2.8, the announcement triggered only a partial sense of misalignment, that things were going to change, but they hadn't changed much yet. Whatever misalignment occurred triggered a mild level of

anxiety that quickly subsided but ultimately led to "learning about work and self" in which one's self-concept could remain intact, sticking with task and relational crafting, or undergo some cognitive crafting. Otherwise, officers' stayed focused on the current self-concept and its alignment with the work identity. Thus, they often *thrived.*

**Theme 2: High Salience of the Change in Rank**

The second theme, the effects of actual promotion to colonel, presented a wild card scenario for certain stages of the role change, which likely explains why it was articulated only by a fewer number of participants. However, the few articulated it very forcefully. Selection for promotion to colonel was seen as an important event, one that generated lots of response from family and peers, but by itself did not result in a measurable change in the officer's work environment. The pin-on (or in Participant 2's case, frocking) did, as the officers thus referred to themselves as colonel, and the presence of the rank caused other to react differently. Using Schlossberg's model, the same coping cycle played out except the promotion brought with it a much more marked change to the situation, and therefore the responses of support, strategies, and self are more pronounced.

However, the distinction between internal and external perceptions of the individual present a case of "multiple selves within the social structure" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 139), and salience and commitment of these disparate identities come into play. The officer is now in a situation whereby one identity (the lieutenant colonel) is preserved through sustained social interactions with known colleagues, while a second identity (the colonel) has become immediately expressed to others. The pinning on of colonel did not automatically make the identity of colonel salient, that is, some participants were quite content to keep things the way they were locally as their present duties had not changed.

That others were more respectful and responsive to the rank meant that the officers were more likely to feel empowered and socially validated, thus more likely to commit to that new identity. Using Kira & Balkin (2014), the lieutenant colonel identity was no longer aligned with what was preferred and was therefore being allowed to wither away, rather than seeing the new colonels assert themselves on their old peers. The unique instance of Participant 2 having been frocked intensified the strength of this argument as the rank merely had to be worn without having been technically conferred to spur the identical reaction.

**Theme 3: Importance of Relationships and Networking**

In reviewing the use of the term "relationships" in the results, there were actually two types of relationships discussed, although there were no clear indications that the participants noted or were concerned with the difference between them. At the War College, relationships within the seminar provided a means for fostering a suitable adult learning environment that presented diverse views and encouraged dialogue. However, the relationships built were transitory. Schlossberg's model of work transitions referred to this as a "moving through" type of transition as the students were on a "fast track" through the ten month program on the way to something else (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 184). Thus, the relationships provided a convoy of social support (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 86) that helped the officers establish temporary student identities (Munby, Lock, & Smith, 1989) to make it through the year.

Relationship building in the post-graduation assignment appeared more purposeful, oriented on having options available if needed. This is analogous to Pearlin and Schooler's (1978) response by modifying the situation to eliminate anxiety (p. 6) or gain confidence

in the ability to work through complex problems, such as the big initial project that Participant 12 faced or the negotiations Participant 7 undertook in codifying a new position within an organization that did not necessarily understand its purpose. The multiple references to guest speakers at the War College talking about the importance of these types of relationships reinforces how networking serves to socialize individuals into the new work environment (Ashforth, 2001, pp. 162-164).

Among the participants in this study, there emerged no specific instance where relationships established in the War College were specifically leveraged for coping with the new work environment. Rather, the relationships cited were separate and duty-oriented. If past relationships were leveraged, it was from a previous duty assignment. Participant 8 was the best example as the pre-War College relationships in the Department of Defense were the same ones used in the post-graduation assignment in a combatant command.

**Theme 4: Identifying a Focus or Cause**

This core theme exemplifies drawing on the *self* to cope with role change. It provides a balance between resilience of the self-concept and the display of adaptability (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, p. 174). In other words, it was a way of demonstrating a sense of change without having to necessarily reform the self-concept.

The theoretical explanation draws back to Burke and Stets' (2009) discussion of the *identity standard*, embodied in the question, "Who am I, absolutely?" The role change to senior leader, as judged by the euphoric and anxious responses to the triggering event by most participants, is seen as significant. The U.S. Army as an organization has professed a view that the role change requires new skills, competencies, and perspectives (e.g., CJCS, 2011; U.S. Army, 2013) which many participants acknowledged. Yet the role

change was divided into several event-driven short-duration phases, the first of which spurred only limited identity work because the work situation generally did not change. Moreover, the sequencing of events was unpredictable because the two selection events were independent of each other and the timelines for actual promotion and War College attendance varied. In line with the previous discussion about "moving through" transitions, it was not until the post-graduation work environment that having to re-assess one's alignment with the expectations of senior leadership became clearer. In the meantime, the individual was more likely to take a more guarded approach to the self-concept, re-verifying the existing identity (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 175) and holding identity work in suspense unless something subsequently necessitated it.

The participants, however, appeared cognizant that there were expectations of a change and felt a need to make it manifestly visible. Participants 1, 2, and 9 referred to a sense of investment by the Army, for example. The specter of an *ought self* (Higgins, 1987) arose, meaning that there was some other self that the Army expected to see coming out the other end of the role change pipeline. If the role change was not successful in spurring the necessary cognitive transformation on its own accord because the officers' identity standard had not yet been challenged, then embracing a particular focus area or cause can serve as a substitute. Using Participant 1 as an example, the revelation of being a steward of the profession became the manifest change to the self-concept. As with all the focus areas and causes identified, the theme of stewardship was borne out of direct socialization (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 194) and became empowering. Participant 1 applied it in the post-graduation environment to transcend a bureaucratic work environment where the theme of stewardship was not as central a driver in the organizational culture (Kira &

Balkin, 2014, p. 139). The empowering aspect of the cause serves to protect the self-concept from factors that limits one's ability to function at work and provides "better opportunities for individuals to operate in present and future work contexts" (Kira & Balkin, 2014, p. 139).

**Theme 5: Setting the Tone in Post-Graduation Assignment**

The desire to set the proper tone is the pursuit of *social validation,* which "normalizes one's role identity in the sense that it helps enable one to feel comfortable or natural in the role" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 215). While similar to Core Theme 2 on promotion to colonel, social validation plays an even more important role here because the officer is taking deliberate action to show commitment to the role of senior leader. In the case of promotion, it was the organization that conferred the rank without decisive involvement on the part of the officer, making validation more incidental than intentional.

Social validation is not a one-sided affair. That is, the organizational culture serves an active role in fostering social validation and setting a proper welcoming tone for an incoming officer. With respect to role entry, Ashforth (2001) suggested several factors that helped ease one's ability to learn a new role. Two were role attributes and sources of support (p. 189). Regarding role attributes, Ashforth noted that "the more complex the role, the more difficult it is to learn." Recognition that the liminal phase (Ibarra, 1999) of transitions is difficult and complex provides incentive for both the Army and the individual to mitigate it. The Army's approach includes professional military education which, as shown in Figure 2.10, extended throughout the career. On sources of support, the Army also promotes organized sponsorship of incoming personnel, which was seen as successfully executed for some of the participants.

### Theme 6: Conflicts Within the Work Situation

Ashforth (2001) stated that a role occupant "is said to be *ambivalent* about the role identity if he or she at least partly identifies *and* disidentifies with that identity. … *Most people are at least somewhat ambivalent about each of their roles*" (p. 78, emphasis original). Structurally within an organizational culture, if the work environment presents an inherent conflict, such as espousing one norm but enacting the opposite (Schuh & Miller, 2006), the potential for ambivalence is high. Two conflicts uncovered in the study stemmed from contradictions created by the organization. Officers underwent an Army professional education program for the expressed purposes of developing knowledge and competencies related to strategic leadership, yet the exigencies of the post-graduation work environment often demanded lower forms of leadership at the expense of a strategic orientation. This introduced strong feelings of ambivalence among the participants who felt they should no longer be doing action officer work. Similarly, the emphasis on collaboration and relationship-building stood in direct contrast to the presence of parochial interests and personality issues in the course of conducting business. In such cases, the conflict manifested itself as the espoused value of senior leadership being violated, but the self-concept which still had a well-founded organizational leadership concept became the coping mechanism. When in doubt and the mission has to get done, officers returned back to the old tried-and-true ways of doing things.

### Theme 7: Advising and Representing as Changing the Self-Concept

Stratified systems theory (Jacobs & McGee, 2001) and the leadership strataplex (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007) offers structures by which one can examine how the skill requirements of officers change as they move up the hierarchy. Among the skills

that become more important at the strategic level of leadership are systems evaluation, solution appraisal, and identification of key causes (Mumford, Campion, & Morgeson, 2007, p. 157). Zaccaro and Horn (2003) added that strategic leadership involved more involvement in policy and interactions with external stakeholders. The emergence of this theme constitutes the participants' recognition of enacting the advisory and representational roles and therefore has begun the process of incorporating them into their self-concepts (Ashforth, 2001; Kira & Balkin, 2014).

**Theme 8: The Desire for Continued or Improved Development**

This core theme emerges from a perceived disruption to the availability of a convoy of support (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012) that had been previously available through the officers' careers. Mentorship and leader development activities were routinely cited as important for these officers throughout their life histories. Mentors, generally supervisors or other higher-ranking officials, provided career advice, insights, and encouragement. However, as the pool of available mentors moved to the general officer ranks, they recognized that those officers were extremely busy and had little time to devote to mentorship. This produced anxiety. Participants experienced liminality and were not necessarily prepared to find a substitute information resource. Substitutes might not have helped much in the cases where participants expressed anxiety about not understanding what their boss wanted or how the boss made certain decisions.

This emphasizes the social nature of identity development and identity verification (Burke & Stets, 2009). Being accustomed to having a social context to negotiate one's identity and respond to the expectations of the work environment, this sudden inability to employ familiar methods for negotiating the new senior leader identity did appear to

present a constraint on participant desires to engage in identity work and play (Ibarra & J. Petriglieri, 2010). Thus, something was missed.

**Themes 9 and 11: Job Withdrawal and Impending Career Exit**

These two themes will be discussed together as they both relate to how Kira and Balkin's (2014) model presents explicitly only one form of job exit, that of a misalignment creating irreconcilable anxiety and discomfort, leading to cynicism, shame, and ultimately withdrawal. During the focused life history interviews, this study uncovered episodes of that nature, such as how toxic leadership or dead-ending led to participants changing specialties or getting out of the military. However, job withdrawal and impending career end suggest that there are other ways that exiting from the work situation can occur from an identity negotiation standpoint.

One involved voluntary withdrawal on good terms, drawing from theme 9. Participants 1 and 13 were considering twenty-year retirement due to personal reasons. Retirement in the case of the twenty-year officer is actually more a case of *job loss* (Ashforth, 2001, p. 138) as those officers likely have enough time left in their working lives to pursue second careers. Because neither actually retired, it is not possible to know what emotions would have emerged, but according to Ashforth (2001, p. 139), the literature on job loss suggests that the emotional response would have depended on how the individual framed the role exit, which could feel as different as being discarded or a wonderful opportunity to pursue other interests. Certainly in Participant 1's case, whereby the officer selected a terminal assignment, had initiated a job search, and mapped out expectations for the limited time left on active duty, the success of starting a new civilian career could have produced positive emotions at role exit, which might have come about

by withering away one's military work identity just to get by until the retirement date. This form of withering might have occurred as a gradual reduction of the scope of influence to only that which fit the self-concept (Kira & Balkin, 2014, p. 137).

The other situation is the involuntary role exit, and this is more aligned with theme 11 regarding the participant's views of where they would be five years hence. Most of the participants answered primarily on expectations of being forced into mandatory retirement, which would be at thirty years of commissioned service for colonels, or possibly face selective early retirement boards. Although it is not possible to know how the individuals will frame the actual retirement when it comes, at the time of the study they expressed a wide range of feelings about it – having a date set and thinking about the future career in government or outside, or not having spent much time on it and even not wanting to think about it just now. Ashforth's (2001, p. 143) expansion of Ebaugh's (1988) involuntary role exit model seems to provide a useful lens, as some of these officers recognize the imminence of mandatory retirement and have essentially already begun exercising the weighing of alternatives while others are not yet at the starting point. A key difference from Ashforth's assumptions is how in the military context involuntary role exit is less stigmatizing. Retirement brings about significant financial benefits, prestige, and the honorable label of *veteran*. Also, the declared retirement date is known years in advance and even if the officer is asked to retire early, it is accompanied by a mandatory transitional period of at least six months. The researcher, for example, was granted seven months when informed of selection for early retirement.

The prospect of mandatory retirement assumes plateauing at colonel, and by U.S. military regulation most colonels must retire at the thirtieth year of active commissioned

service. Although none of the participants expressed that they expected to be competitive for general officer at the time of the study, this does not mean that none will be selected. But, the selection rates are very low, and most colonels will recognize well in advance of their mandatory retirement date that no further promotions are forthcoming. For most, there will be a couple years between their final year of eligibility for selection and their mandatory retirement and will have certainty that their days on active duty are numbered. How this may translate into Ashforth's (2001) role exit or Kira and Balkin's (2014) subjugated work identities or withering was beyond the scope of this study, but the participant's answers suggest that how they cope with career exit will soon be an important question for them to reflect upon.

**Theme 10: Importance of Initial Role Change**

According to Walsh and Gordon (2008), individuals create their self-identity through "first comparing themselves with one another and then classifying themselves and others into different social groups" (p. 48). The initial work identity is delineated similarly, "through consciously determining the work groups, such as their organizations and occupations, whose membership most enhances their self-concept, as it relates to their work and career" (p. 48). After this initial work identity is established and a triggering event arises that provides a challenge to it, the choices and expectations that emerge from the role change include the emotional reactions, responses and outcomes of the identity work that followed.

Because these initial episodes occurred early in the participant's military careers, whether as enlisted or officer, the outcomes became embedded in the *identity standard* (Burke & Stets, 2009), which Ashforth (2001) called the *global identity.* According to

Ashforth (2001), the global identity "shapes its own destiny" and provides a "self-fulfilling template" for subsequent behaviors. As such, the formative role change experience carries extra weight (p. 36). If an officer's initial role change was positive and affirming to the self-concept, subsequent ones might be similar. If it was negative, and marked by anxiety or discomfort, then that may cause subsequent ones to be viewed negatively.

## Conclusions

In synthesizing the above eleven themes with the relevant literature, three overarching conclusions can be drawn. These are presented in Table 5.1.

### Conclusion 1: Barriers Foster Partial Identity Construction

This appears to be a counterintuitive conclusion given that the period of role change covers multiple years and spans both work experience and education, each ostensibly suited for spurring transformational change in the officer. That many of the participants did not go through the experience feeling as though their self-concepts had changed and that they acquiesced to their mid-career identities is notable, given the Army's view that the purpose is to develop leaders who operate at a higher level of leadership and are expected to exercise different skills and competencies as they lead the Army. However, 'notable' is not intended as a value judgment, as these participants are succeeding in their post-graduation assignments and the literature acknowledges the resilience of the self-concept. The officers studied do recognize that the role change in environment is meaningful to them and that the Army expected some sort of change to occur. Otherwise, why invest in a full year resident education program?

Table 5.1

*Conclusions of the Study with Subconclusions*

| |
|---|
| Conclusion 1. Barriers Contribute to Partial Identity Construction |
| Subconclusion 1A. Two Role Changes, But Only One Identity Transition |
| Subconclusion 1B. Bureaucracy as a Perceived Barrier |
| Subconclusion 1C. Role Entry to Senior Leader Role Can Be Optional |
| Conclusion 2. Assuming Senior Leadership is a Human Endeavor |
| Conclusion 3. Ambivalence as an Important Emotional Response |

However, what is happening is not a full role exit from mid-career officer to accompany role entry into senior leadership, but rather the creation of a second role of senior leader. Subsequently, there is competition between the roles during the course of the multi-year experience. Ashforth (2001) said that role identification "occurs when one defines oneself at least partly in terms of the role identity … the role occupant imports the role identity as a (partial) definition of self" (p. 280). It is clear from Theme 1 that identification with the role of senior leader either does not occur or is in the beginning stages. Therefore, role identification as a senior leader generally does not begin until either promotion (Theme 2) or attendance at the War College (Theme 3). Still, neither the War College nor the post-graduation assignment is bringing about role exit (Ashforth, 2001, p. 111) of the mid-career identity. Thus, in the post-graduation assignment, two role identities are present and competing in the salience hierarchy of the officer, which governs the "readiness to act out an identity across situations" (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 46).

Ashforth (2001) said that "disengagement" is necessary for role exit to occur, "for psychological and usually physical withdrawal from the role and the cultural context and

web of relationships within which the role is embedded" (p. 109). As shown in Chapter 2, this role exit is classified in Ashforth's (2001) view as an *involuntary* role change, because the officer has limited to no control over when the selection processes occur, when the triggering event occurs, or what happens afterwards. Thus, the phenomenon is best explored with Ashforth's (2001) expansion of the Ebaugh (1998) model governing involuntary role exits that include escalating doubts, seeking and weighing alternatives (Ashforth, 2001, p. 143), and creating an "exrole," a role of former mid-career officer that is qualitatively different from never having been one at all (Ashforth, 2001, p. 131).

The context of the senior leader role change is a little different from the one Ashforth (2001) used, which relied on a firing or downsizing scenario bringing about heightened shock and distress for the individual. In contrast, involuntary exit from the mid-level ranks is not entirely unwelcome or stigmatized, but instead is a desirable outcome. The prestige (along with the increased pay and benefits) of becoming a colonel is very attractive. That did not mean that "shock" and some "distress" (p. 143) were absent as the selection announcement came with little advanced warning and was not a transparent process, thereby creating conditions of surprise felt by several participants. Also, while one might presume that the meaning of selection would be well-known and therefore role identification would be simple or automatic, that did not appear to be occurring due to the lag time while in the extant duty position.

Ashforth (2001) indicated that "individuals often must exit one role with no clear alternatives in sight" in involuntary role exits. In the case of this study's participants, it might have been clear that the role change was about to occur, but its meaning was held in suspense until the effects of the selection, promotion or War College attendance,

manifested themselves. The result was that the old mid-career identity was not exited throughout the process.

Role entry to senior leadership also bears elaboration using Ashforth (2001). The U.S. Army employs very strong *institutionalized socialization* techniques (p. 163) of which the War College serves the primary role of providing an environment that does five of the six tactics that follow Ashforth's (2001) model: (1) segregates the budding senior leaders from the cohort of colonels in the field, (2) imparts the skills and attributes of senior leaders through a formal program (e.g., the War College) that (3) culminates in readiness for the next assignment in the field, (4) operates on a fixed schedule (e.g., the officer will be ready in ten months), and (5) includes coaching and mentoring from faculty.

The sixth tactic is one of *divestiture*, which would be characterized as not only causing mid-career habits to be forgotten but "unlearned" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 166). Total unlearning in the case of senior leader role change may not be desirable because the post-graduation requirements of colonels still place demands on mid-career predispositions such as task accomplishment. This is consistent with the progression of skill requirements depicted in Mumford et al's (2007) leadership strataplex showing only gradual and not dramatic changes. Divestiture is more applicable to retirement or other more dramatic form of role change (Ashforth, 2001, p. 163). Therefore, based on the study results, socialization does succeed in fostering role identification because the participants did come out of the War College feeling ready for the next duty assignment. The early steps to role entry through the War College do appear to be occurring as desired. However, the challenges presented in theme 6 suggest that the post-graduation environment is presenting barriers to the subsequent role entry.

The three subconclusions below explore three facets of this phenomenon that are either induced or exacerbated by the organization, thereby permitting incomplete role exit and entry.

**Subconclusion 1A: Two roles are changing, but only one spurs identity construction**. This facet looks at the structure of the role identities in relation to the overall role change and suggests that mid-career to senior leader constitutes changing more than one identity. The argument begins through the apparently most powerful triggering event, actual pin-on to colonel (Theme 2). The presentation of rank met two conditions that Burke and Stets (2009) suggested triggered identity change, a change in the situation and self-verification through others. Both were present for those participants who articulated this theme, although the self-verification was primarily realized in external contacts and not within the organization. The result was a more demonstrable divestiture (Ashforth, 2001, p. 166) of association with the rank of lieutenant colonel. Although the overall role change to senior leader remained on-going, these participants did inculcate the rank of colonel into their self-concepts as a result. For those whose pin-on to colonel occurred while attending the War College resident program, none of Burke and Stets' (2009) four triggers, which included conflicts of multiple identities and conflicts between identities and behaviors, were present. As indicated by the participants, all students were treated as equals regardless of rank.

This suggests that part of the challenge of role exit is that there are multiple identities involved within mid-career leader and senior leader, one defined by rank and another defined by responsibilities. Using McCall and Simmons' (1978) prominence hierarchy, participants are placing the role identity associated with rank as more prominent.

That the new rank serves as a basis for the construction of a new colonel identity is predicted by Hall (2004), as there are formal ceremonies and changes of relationships accompanying military promotions, such that the creation of an exrole from lieutenant colonel (Ashforth, 2001, p. 143) is readily achieved. The same conditions for identity construction are present for constructing a new identity along the changes of responsibilities through the education and experience, with formal graduation ceremonies and the subsequent assignment. However, the assignment places the officer is only in the beginning stages of identity construction (Pratt et al., 2006), and if rank identity is more salient and the self-concept is misaligned with the work environment (Kira & Balkin, 2014), then one might expect that an officer's prior ways of doing business would emerge as the officer's preferred approach.

**Subconclusion 1B: Bureaucracy as a perceived barrier**. Ashforth (2001) described "entry shock" as "predispos[ing] newcomers to situational influence" (p. 149), and in a "strong situation" where "there is a clear consensus on the right way and wrong way to behave" (p. 150), officers are prone to respond by following the consensus. Additionally, because of the high salience and irreversibility of the rank identity, officers who are promoted by the beginning of the post-graduation assignment may have very high expectations for the new work environment, which may fuel greater disappointment when those expectations are not met (Ashforth, 2001, p. 158). The two conflicts that emerged in Theme 6 related to doing action officer work and dealing with parochial interests were therefore irritating to the participants.

The participant's reactions to bureaucracy are unsurprising, given that the War College curriculum includes formal education on the tensions that exist between

professionalism and bureaucracy, as also discussed at length in Snider (2005, 2012a). While participants did not notably articulate their expectations about the balance of professionalism and bureaucracy going into the post-graduation assignment, their expressions of disappointment of being required to perform action officer-level work was strongly articulated. These participants' are not realizing the expectations developed at the War College regarding their expected roles as thinkers, stewards, and visionaries. Coping with this, given the entry shock, included subjugating their preferred work identities to the situation (Kira & Balkin, 2014), embodied in Participant 7's putative message to self, "Get over it," or using focus areas and causes (Theme 4) or advisory and representational duties (Theme 7) to empower themselves and transcend the environment (Kira & Balkin, 2014).

**Subconclusion 1C: Role entry to senior leader can be optional**. Some of the attributes along Ashforth's (2001) continuum differ between the rank and responsibility-based identities, which potentially opens the door for individuals to delay or suspend role entry into senior leadership. Indicators of optioning out were evident in the interviews. One attribute is magnitude or the degree of "role contrast" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 89). The rank identity change (Theme 2) is low magnitude as the assumption of the role of colonel is one step higher and the differences in stature are incremental increases. The responsibility-oriented change is higher magnitude as it involves qualitative differences such the exercise of different skills and competencies per Jacobs and McGee (2001), and is therefore more difficult (Ashforth, 2001, p. 90). Another attribute is social desirability (Ashforth, 2001, p. 103). The rank, and therefore the rank role identity, is highly socially desirable (related to Themes 3 and 5), while the responsibility-based identity is arguably less so as shown in Theme 6 regarding conflicts. Also, the salience of such an identity is

driven by external factors such as the work environment (Theme 5) and the particular duties performed (Theme 7), adding to the involuntary and irregular characteristics of a more difficult and less valent identity transition. Thus, using Ashforth's (2001) continuum of attributes, one can assume rank identity is far less difficult.

Combining this with the sense of impending career termination identified as Theme 11 brings about an available option of not having to undergo a full identity transition to senior leader. A partial change will do. In other words, officers can choose paths in Kira and Balkin's (2014) model leading to minimal identity work. Instead, the officer can focus on transforming the work environment or subjugating oneself to it. Each of these threads leads to strong retention of the original self-concept.

The question this surfaces is whether or not there is sufficient *investiture* (Ashforth, 2001, p. 165) in the new role to offset how officers can go through their time as a colonel without having necessarily constructed a new role identity as a senior leader. Two themes suggest this is not occurring. The first is Theme 1 (learning about the role if possible), whereby the newly-selected budding senior leader sees a lag in organizational response to selection. The other is Theme 8 (desire for continued development), whereby the senior leaders do not receive "affirmation … [of the] specific role identities and attributes" due to lack of available senior leader mentorship (Ashforth, 2001, p. 164).

**Conclusion 2: Assuming Senior Leadership is a Human Endeavor**

Most of the themes regarded the importance of social activity, especially Themes 1, 3, 5, 7, and 8. Interactions with others were considered critically important during all phases of the experience from the initial responses to selection, through War College

attendance, and into the post-graduation assignment, plus all the relationship and network building throughout.

Schlossberg's 4S theory of coping with transitions modeled the coping capabilities of an individual, and each of these variables interact in a cycle (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; also see Figure 2.6). Included within each variable were a variety of "potential assets/liabilities" among coping resources (p. 62). Overlaying the resultant themes of this study on Schlossberg's model shows how socially-oriented resources were continuously at the forefront, and possibly gives indications why. The *situation* was the first resource and included are questions regarding the onset of the triggering event, particularly previous experiences with transitions and the assessment (p. 68). Theme 10 showed how important the initial role change was for many participants, and often established patterns of role change behavior through the life history. Also very important was the *support* structure (p. 84) which tended to include a complex array of social contacts – including upbringing, peers, superiors and mentors, and other contacts – although this was more robust for some participants than others. These resources functioned throughout the life history to provide a range of emotional support including admiration and respect, affirmation of doing right by serving in the military, and aid through coaching and teaching (p. 85).

As applied to the present experience, the participants looked for similar support structures to continue to serve these functions as the officers moved through to senior leadership. They wanted the ability to learn about their new roles from their existing mentors (Theme 1), build and sustain networks oriented to their future selves through the

role change (Theme 3), seek quick social validation of their new status (Theme 5), and receive the same kinds of mentorship in future roles (Theme 8).

By and large, participants strongly articulated their supporting structures as central to the role change experience, noting both presence and *absence* of them. Despite the War College being an educational experience that sought to impart skills and knowledge relevant to the strategic art, its students related mostly to the seminar learning environment and interactions with the peers both inside and outside the classroom (Theme 3). The stories about initial projects and quick wins in the post-graduation environment emphasized the interactions with the network of stakeholders or more senior leaders engaged, and less about the application of skills and knowledge (Theme 5). This is aligned with the perceived importance of *socialization* by the organization, which "is the process through which individuals learn the values, beliefs, norms, skills, and so forth that are necessary to fulfill their roles" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 162).

The importance of this conclusion is in the situational shift leading to Theme 8 (desiring continued development) due to the lack of *reflected appraisals* regarding how an individual perceives the view of others reflected on him or her (Burke & Stets, 2009, p. 194). This valuable identity construction tool is manifested in the military context through mentorship and coaching. Lacking such appraisals led to questions by the participants during their post-graduation assignments concerning how well they were doing and understanding their supervisors' intentions and thought processes (Themes 5 and 8).

**Conclusion 3: Ambivalence as an Important Emotional Response**

The positive emotions of alignment between self-concept and work identity and the negative emotions of misalignment present a one-dimensional continuum of responses

based on the officers' ability to perceive the state of alignment. Ambivalence potentially occupies a middle ground between alignment and misalignment, where identification and disidentification occur simultaneously (Ashforth, 2001, p. 78). Ashforth (2001) addressed five forms of ambivalence, and two were commonly articulated by participants in this study as they faced organizational and cultural barriers to their identity construction (Theme 6).

The first was *interrole conflict*, whereby individuals are "answering to diverse and often conflicting demands" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 78). For participants in this study, the conflicting demands emerged from contradictions at two organizational levels, where the Army espoused one manifestation of the role of senior leader regarding strategic leadership but local practice espoused another role of senior-ranking action officer. Although the former role is viewed favorably, the latter risks becoming salient due to its alignment with the mid-career persona.

The second was *protection of dualisms* which regards how cultures tend to favor one value (e.g., for the military, stewardship of resources) but retain the capacity for enacting its opposite (e.g., protect budgets at the expense of stewardship), thus offering individuals the "temptation to address *both* endpoints" (Ashforth, 2001, p. 79, emphasis original). The contradiction of the espoused value of collaboration against the enacted opposing value of parochialism exemplifies such dualistic conditions. Officers become ambivalent toward the resulting role because the enacted value may produce ethical dilemmas or cause them to behave inauthentically (Ibarra, 2015).

The emotional responses stemming from ambivalence may differ than that of alignment or misalignment of self and work in Kira and Balkin's (2014) model. In interrole conflict, the emotional responses may include anxiety and discomfort, but also frustration

and annoyance of being placed in a state of contradiction (Theme 6). In the case of protection of dualisms, the pressure to act against espoused values even when justified by organizational norms can produce guilt or other emotions that might encourage the officer to quit or otherwise leave the work situation (Theme 9).

## Implications

The three above conclusions, with associated subconclusions, offer a number of implications for theory practice and research. These are provided in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2

*List of Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research*

| | Recommendations |
|---|---|
| Theory | 1. Expand Potential Paths to Role Withdrawal |
| | 2. Account for Ambivalence in Role Change |
| Practice | 1. Sustain Holistic Conception of the Role Change |
| | 2. Tighten Coupling of Education and Promotion Events |
| | 3. Review Development and Mentorship for Senior Leaders |
| | 4. Consider Greater Attention to Networking at War College |
| | 5. Consider Greater Use of Qualitative Research Methods |
| | 6. Focus Mentorship Activities on Role Change of Junior Officers |
| Research | 1. Study Role Change Among War College Fellows |
| | 2. Study Role Change Among Distance Education Students |
| | 3. Study Role Change Among Reserve Component Officers |
| | 4. Study Role Change Among Minorities and Other Demographics |
| | 5. Study Role Change Among Senior Army Civilians |
| | 6. Conduct Analogous Study for Role Change to General Officer |
| | 7. Study Role Exit Toward Retirement |
| | 8. Study Impacts of Incomplete Role Change to Senior Leader |
| | 9. Study Competence Development in Senior Leaders |

**Implications for Theory**

As of this writing, Kira and Balkin's (2014) model has yet to see direct empirical support, thus this study presents an opportunity to provide such support and constructive critique. Overall, using the model was greatly helpful to the study as it greatly aided in understanding the identity construction processes used by the participants, in particular

when misalignments led to positive overall outcomes such as empowering identities and helpful transformation of the work environment. However, this study presented some areas where further elaboration of the model may be warranted, and Figure 5.1 shows where these questions reside.

**Recommendation 1. Expand potential paths to role withdrawal**. This study suggests that there may be many paths to exiting the work situation, and there may be utility in accounting for them in the model. This study provided some empirical evidence to support the linkage between cynicism or shame and exit as depicted. It also provided some evidence to suggest a linkage between withering and exit which could be accompanied by different emotional responses such as indifference or quietude. Thriving and exit is also possible given the desires expressed by some participants to exit on conditions of their own choosing, leading to responses such as pride. Including these additional paths to exit can provide a more complete understanding of how individuals conclude the negotiation of self-concept against the work situation and move on to a new setting.

**Recommendation 2. Account for Ambivalence in Role Change**

The discrete emotional responses associated with an ambivalent response to role alignment suggest that a third arrow should be added to the initial decision box of Kira & Balkin's (2014) question of alignment. By characterizing separately the frustration or guilt of facing simultaneous identity and disidentity, the model could consider ways that task crafting and cognitive crafting serve to address the source of the contradiction in addition to or concurrent with responses toward misalignment of the self against the work identity. This does not necessary suggest outcomes not already explicated in the model, only that the paths to those outcomes may differ.

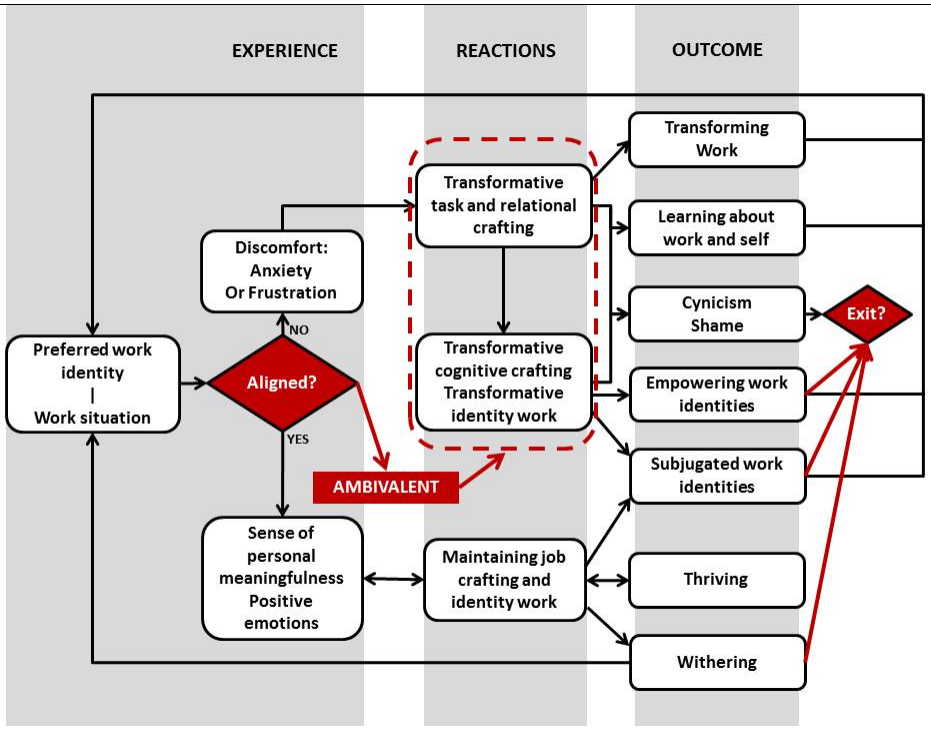


*Figure 5.1*. Implications of this study on the Kira & Balkin (2014) model. Adapted from "Interactions Between Work and Identities: Thriving, Withering, or Redefining The Self?" by M. Kira and D. B. Balkin, 2014, *Human Resource Management Review*, *24*(2), p. 134. Copyright 2013 by Elsevier.

## Implications for Practice

The study offered a glimpse into the education and work experiences of officers undergoing role change to senior military leader. The findings suggest areas where the Army could consider improvements or adjustments to the manner in which it prepares officers to assume senior leader responsibilities.

**Recommendation 1. Sustain holistic conception of the role change**. As indicated in Chapter 2, the dominant discourse regarding the development of senior military leaders has been narrowly focused on the ten-month resident program at the U.S. Army War College to the general exclusion of all other phases of the role change as currently

practiced. When considering policy decisions about the development of senior leaders, the Army should address a much wider time frame. The time period studied here – from initial notification of selection to immersion in a senior leader duty assignment – should be the minimum time frame for consideration. The effects of the post-graduation assignment on role entry to senior leader are very important and are lost in the discussions about academic rigor (e.g., Ricks, 2012). Using this wider perspective, dialogue on matters such as the role of mentorship following initial selection, frocking policies or similar actions, and designation of duty positions for War College graduates would be more meaningful. Career management policies would also be more comprehensive.

Unfortunately, literature published since completion of this study continues to exercise the narrow view. For example, *The Human Dimension White Paper* (U.S. Combined Arms Center, 2014) presents a strategy for the U.S. Army to improve the development of its human capital, *optimizing human performance*, through organizational change efforts aimed at professional military education, training, and doctrine. However, not mentioned was the work environment, which this study suggested may provide barriers to optimal performance of new senior leaders. Its exclusion makes sense considering that the *White Paper* focuses mainly on activities under the purview of the authoring organization, which became a source of criticism (e.g., Ricks, 2014). Similarly, Lamb and Porro (2015) answers a synthesized critique of senior service colleges through the National Defense University's (NDU) "education transformation plan" that focuses on changes to the resident program but does not address the broader aspects of the role change to senior leader. The question these documents raise is who would pursue the broader perspective, addressing the officer's progression from initial selection to full utilization of senior leader

skills and turning that into a strategy that integrates or harmonizes professional education with field experience (Hoffmann & Berg, 2014)? Also, would such a strategy potentially change those governed by the training and education communities, possibly rendering some proposed activities unnecessary? Placing these questions up for dialogue could potentially bring solutions to the kinds of barriers faced by this study's participants.

**Recommendation 2. Tighten coupling of education and promotion events**. The sequencing of the role change events should reflect a vision of how the Army expects officers to cross over from mid-career leadership to senior leader. If the intention is that officers exercise construction of a new identity in conjunction with the increased rank and responsibilities, then sequencing events from mid-career to senior leader should foster that.

The first step is to determine a stable sequence and timing between the educational activities and promotion activities, so the pin-on to colonel does not overshadow all other potential identity construction opportunities. If in the general case it is preferred to have education precede promotion, which is this researcher's recommendation, then the overall effect of the holistic role change should mirror a series of rites of passage (Ashforth, 2001, p. 172). Excellence at the mid-career level should continue to serve as a rite of passage to War College selection. Resident attendance and initial job experience should then constitute rite of passages to the senior leader ranks. Only if the officer has demonstrated the *competence*, that is "the ability to apply professional knowledge … in relation to the requirement inherent in a situation which … is uncertain and unpredictable" (Illeris, 2014, p. 115) to assume the full role of senior leader should they be considered for promotion.

The second step is to make the rite of passage sensible by clarifying and making consistent the correlation between the duties and activities of post-graduation positions to

demonstrate the ability to move up from Jacobs and McGee's (2001) stratum IV to stratum V. This includes addressing some of the barriers noted in this study's conclusions. For example, positions identified as requiring a War College education should be qualitatively different from other positions designated for colonels. Such positions ought to contain advisory and representation duties that participants in this study closely identified with being appropriate for senior leaders. This may involve redefining the role of division chief in a higher headquarters or other roles to de-emphasize administrative functions more appropriately performed by more junior officers. In effect, the goal is to cause organizations to view the performance of action officer tasks by colonels as improper and acceptable only by exception. Clearly, any structural changes in these assignments would also require organizational norms to change in kind through emphasis by senior Army leaders.

It is recognized that doing this is much more difficult than it appears. The limited time that lieutenant colonels currently serve before consideration for promotion plus the difficulties of making senior service college opportunities available for all make such sequencing very complex and difficult. On the other hand, several participants felt that the War College education comes too late in the career, a view shared by Scales (2010). Regardless of any Army decision on the timing between education and experience, it should be accompanied by a sensible strategy to foster the overall desired outcome of the role change, to transition mid-career officers exercising operational leadership to senior officers exercising strategic leadership.

**Recommendation 3. Review development and mentorship for senior leaders**. As noted in this study, participants recognize that their general officer superiors are very

busy and have limited, if any, time to devote to mentoring. One would anticipate that general officers are already cognizant of the desires to further develop their colonels, and may themselves be frustrated at the inability to control their own calendars, carve out the necessary time, and in some cases physically see their subordinates on a sufficiently regular basis to provide the desired mentorship. The supply-demand mentorship imbalance may require creative solutions, such as organization-run senior leader professional development activities such as conducted in Participant 12's current organization. Not addressed in this study were self-developmental activities, although some participants did engage in forms of self-development beginning earlier in the professional life. Although research into the details of this problem may be needed, this concern would have to be addressed as a matter of policy to set conditions whereby mentorship is given greater priority.

In an article published since this study was completed, Ibarra (2015) said that "people learn – and change – who they are through experience" and called for leaders to experiment with different styles which would cause them to "grow more than … through introspection alone" (p. 55). Role modeling, or copying leadership styles and behaviors from a diverse set of others, is offered as a viable strategy for addressing challenges of leading in unfamiliar roles (Ibarra, 2015, p. 58). As a strategy, this could provide an alternative to reliance on mentorship and also help guide officers on dealing with anxiety or ambivalence due to conflicting or contradictory cues in the workplace.

**Recommendation 4. Consider greater attention to identity construction at War College.** The high value that participants placed on networking and relationships suggests that opportunities for social development should be an important part of the role change. The War College offers such an opportunity through its seminar learning environment and

diverse resident student body. However, the War College has been under pressure to conform to more rigorous academic standards (Kelley & Johnson-Freese, 2014) which could bring about further emphasis on mastering curricular materials at the expense of networking.

Scholars such as Golde (2008) have emphasized that identity development should be an integral part of any professional education program. He described the need to exercise *apprenticeships of identity and purpose* with emphasis on "feedback, coaching, [and] self-reflection" (p. 20). Golde (2008) suggested that the pedagogies of identity development are different from those of imparting skills and knowledge, but such pedagogies are necessary to develop the professional judgment, ethical foundations, and social responsibilities associated with professionalism.

It was clear from the participants in this study that military professionals entering the senior ranks still desire and need those forms of mentorship and development during this role change. However, the challenge is that due to limited resources and emphasis on academics, the War Colleges enact this apprenticeship mainly as subject matters taught in the seminar environment using the same pedagogy as other skills and knowledge such as strategic planning and theories of war. Competition for time to cover the wide range of subjects that students may require in their future assignments tends to overcome the ability to provide mentorship, self-reflection opportunities, and social development while undergoing the resident program. Although CJCS (2013a) effectively calls for the incorporation of such an apprenticeship to foster the character development of officers across the U.S. military, operationalizing that in terms of restructuring War College curricula, for example, has not yet occurred. This study suggests the need to vigorously

pursue such an apprenticeship idea at the War College given the lack of commensurate opportunities apparently available in the post-graduation environment.

**Recommendation 5. Consider greater use of qualitative research methods**. It is the researcher's experience that the Army has an affinity for using quantitative surveys, often of the Likert scale variety, to collect data on a wide variety of subjects related to the state of the Army profession, the health of the officer corps, and other workplace-related matters. Quantitative surveys of students are also the tool of choice for collecting data on the performance of the U.S. Army War College resident program. This seemingly contrasts with the findings of this study whereby human interaction is highly valued, and tends to produce more narrative forms of data that provide more robust explanation of phenomena under study. At the end of the interview process, most of the participants expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to talk through their professional life histories and make meaning of their careers, something that quantitative surveys would have difficulty achieving. Much of what constitutes a professional identity, which is a type of work identity, is socially validated (Ashforth, 2001), which is difficult to measure objectively. Jones (1995) said the following about qualitative research, which:

> Attempt[s] to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. Qualitative research begins by accepting that there is a range of different ways of making sense of the world and is concerned with discovering the meanings seen by those who are being researched and with understanding their view of the world rather than that of the researchers (Jones, 1995, 2).

Peytchev (2013) showed that quantitative surveys in general are facing steadily increasing nonresponse rates, requiring survey designers to add more complex designs and

various statistical methods to ensure confidence in results, which actually increases their expense with dubious increase in accuracy. When studied in an educational setting, Tschepikow (2012) found that survey fatigue was an issue in declining response rates, which "threaten the effectiveness of survey research at institutions of higher education" (p. 461).

For research questions that are social in nature, such as those explored or raised in this study but also professional military educational outcomes, qualitative methods may be much more suitable. The phenomenological method used in this study, Seidman's (2013) three-interview method is simple yet elegant way of achieving for deeper understanding of the lived experience of a phenomenon using only a small sample. I found it flexible enough to accommodate participants with dynamic and unpredictable schedules. The level of introspection provided by the participants in this study allowed most interviews to be completed well under the recommended ninety minutes while still collecting a wealth of data.

While as a qualitative method, Seidman (2013) is not intended to produce the certainty of results that one aims for in a quantitative survey, capturing one's lived experiences provides thicker descriptions (Geertz, 1973) of the meanings and essences that could be more informative and useful for organizational purposes. Other forms of practitioner-centered methods such as action learning (Marquardt, 2011) can be used for localized problem-solving through the use of coaching, analogous to the type of learning sought within War College seminars facilitated by the faculty. These methods should be explored as alternatives to quantitative data collection for studying the impacts of the War College experience on the overall role change to senior leader.

**Recommendation 6. Focusing mentorship activities on role change of junior officers.** Theme 10 described the important formative function that the first role change episode played in the participants' approach to later role changes. Contrasts between the first and second duty assignments or between service as an enlisted Soldier and as an officer were significant among the sample and left lasting impressions. The ability to endure and ultimately transcend the liminal stages of that transition affects how well officers would in the future being able to shed old roles and assume new ones (Ibarra, 2003), such as the role change to senior leader. Thus, the Army should consider investing energy toward successful identity construction commensurate with an officer's initial role change episodes.

## Implications for Research

This study constitutes only a first step in understanding the role change to senior military leader. It was expressly limited to active duty U.S. Army officers, which only make up a percentage of the U.S. Army War College's student body in any given academic year. There are other populations of resident students and other students whose experiences may be different, which can only be determined through further empirical study. Additionally, there are other populations of colonels and general officers whose experiences in role change may be important for policy discussions and adjustments to leader development activities.

**Recommendation 1. Role change among War College Fellows**. While participants expressed concerns that fellowships might not produce the same outcomes in fostering the role change to senior leader, those perceptions would have to be empirically tested. Two outcomes are equally plausible, that (1) the fellowships do not provide the

same forms of social validation as the resident program, thereby limiting identity construction, or (2) the increased exposure to a non-military environment is beneficial in spurring changes to the self-concept. An analogous study of officers who have completed a fellowship and are serving in their initial post-fellowship assignment could help the Army better understand the relative differences in the experiences of the resident program and the fellowship.

**Recommendation 2. Role change among distance education students**. In a similar fashion, it would be helpful to better understand the impacts that undergoing a distance education program *in lieu of* resident War College attendance has on identity construction. Such a study would have to consider only active duty Army officers to provide a proper comparison, as the War College's distance education program includes a greater percentage of reserve component officers and far fewer international fellows. Such a study would help understand if the process of socially validating the role change differs from the resident students, and whether or not the differences are important. Follow-on work could include a quantitative study aiming at comparing aspects of role change between the resident and distance programs.

**Recommendation 3. Role change among reserve component officers**. This study was limited to active duty U.S. Army officers. This bounded the role change to allow for a clear analysis of the phenomenon given the general tendency for the triggering events to occur at a consistent point in the officers' careers and for the post-graduation assignments to reliably occur in a proper utilization assignment. Reserve component officers, whether Army Reserve or National Guard, experience far greater variance in terms of their seniority at the time of War College. They also vary in their post-graduation assignments which may

include returning to their previous duties without opportunities to utilize their education. Such situations occur because the reserve components manage their officers differently, especially the National Guard officers who are managed by their states. Studies analogous to this dissertation applied to reserve component officers would help understand both the experience of identity construction and the differences in how these officers define and enact the role change based on the conditions of their peculiar work situations.

**Recommendation 4. Role change among minorities and other demographics.** Based on this study's limitation that the sample had limited minority representation, future research designs should consider a more diverse sample according to race, gender, and other recognized minority groups. Foldy (2012), for example, showed how private sector organizations can contribute to race and gender-related identity construction among its members. Future research should also consider other categories of officers excluded in this study such as the specialty branches of chaplain, medical service corps, staff judge advocates, and acquisition officers. Many of these are dual-professionals, whose path to senior leadership includes a balance between the requirements of serving simultaneously in the military and in a different profession or specialty area. Also, sitting brigade commanders were not included in the sample, and they constitute a subpool of officers with enhanced potential for further promotion to general officer. Many of these officers begin their command tours very close to War College graduation and thus do not enter staff assignments until two years after their peers. Consequently, future research could examine the particular effects of a role change from brigade command into their initial post-command assignments.

**Recommendation 5. Role change among senior Army civilians.** The U.S. Army has been undertaking a significant transformation of the career management practices of its civilians. Until recently, civilians were managed by position only and promotions only occurred when they were hired into new positions rated for higher grades. Civilians who attended the War College often simply returned to their former positions and granted only marginal increases in pay and no guarantee of utilization of their new skills. The on-going transformation efforts is seeking to establish career progression patterns similar to active duty officers and better utilization of professional education. Research into this population could help understand how civilians undergo identity construction to senior civilian positions and identify other barriers to that construction, which could thus inform the continued efforts to transform civilian management.

**Recommendation 6. Analogous study for promotion to general officer**. Promotion to brigadier general is a very significant honor that only a small percentage of colonels realize. It represents the advancement from Jacobs and Jaques (1991) strata V to strata VI that involves greatly increased complexity along with significant personal demands of the officers and families. Officers are generally eligible for board selection to general officer after about three to five years of service as a colonel, which would appear to be enough time for them to have resolved or coped with the challenges and contradictions associated with entry to the senior ranks. An investigation into the phenomenon of identity construction during role change to general officer would have some similarities to this study in its design, but would assuredly have to include considerations of the boundary between work and non-work identities.

**Recommendation 7. Role exit toward retirement**. If allowed to serve to mandatory retirement, colonels generally spend seven to nine years at that rank, midway through which they learn that they will not be further promoted. Through the lens of Kira & Balkin (2014), the range of possible outcomes includes withering away and avoiding risks to feeling liberated and empowered, perhaps pursuing the chosen focus or cause to its fullest. One would assume the Army would prefer the latter, and might benefit from a study into how identity construction occurs across this lengthy plateau. The implications may include ways to better incentivize transformative work behaviors.

**Recommendation 8. Incomplete role change to senior leader**. As an addendum to some of the above proposed research studies, it may be worth learning whether Participant 15's "limited duty colonel" case of selection for promotion but non-selection for schooling is truly problematic for the organization. A similar role change investigation could contribute to an understanding if non-selection for schooling affects identity construction, particularly if it leads to a lack of or reduced social validation for assuming the role of senior military leader.

**Recommendation 9. Competence development in senior leaders.** Competence development is embedded in Army leadership doctrine as it combines skills and knowledge with dispositions to put them into practice (Gnahs, 2011). Although this study was focused on identity construction, I had expected to hear more from the participants in the areas of competence development during dialogue on their post-graduation experiences. I was anticipating that a majority would identify subject matters and skills learned at the War College that were demonstrably put into practice. That the data lacked such evidence does

not mean that competence as senior leader did not develop, but that gaining a better understanding of it requires future research.

It is possible that such competencies need more field experience to become manifest. This study selected officers three to fifteen months after graduation, which may not have been sufficient. Research into competence development of senior leaders should therefore consider officers with more experience, such as three to five years after graduation.

## Concluding Remarks

In an all-voluntary force, senior military leaders do more than just winning the nation's wars. They are responsible for running the Army organization and embodying its values. The inspiration for conducting this study came from the many positive examples of senior leadership among the general officers I served for and with during ten years as a special assistant, whereby I performed duties of speechwriter, special projects officer, and internal consultant (Galvin, 2015). I witnessed firsthand the tremendous impacts that these leaders had on the culture and transformation of their organizations and external perceptions of the organizations by stakeholders. The power of effective senior leadership is tremendous. The detrimental effects of poor or toxic senior leadership are equally great.

The challenge for large and complex organizations such as the U.S. Army, which must grow its senior leaders from within, is encouraging an appropriate transition from the mid-level ranks. Declaring the role change in terms of promotion and schooling is not sufficient. Officers who excel at the senior levels have implanted seeds for growth and development in managing complex processes and activities, leveraging civil-military relations, and preparing the total force (e.g., active and reserve components and associated

infrastructure and services) for the next conflict, whatever and wherever it may be. This study took one small step in understanding what those seeds are, when they are implanted, and how they can be inhibited from growing to their fullest. The findings of this study suggest that the initial senior leader work experience plays a critical role, and the disjunction between that experience and expectations set in the senior service college environment deserve further study for the purposes of informing policy.

The twelve participants who volunteered as subjects for this study are all incredible professionals who have commanded units, become masters of importance subject matter expertise, and excelled in difficult and demanding staff roles. They each showed a tremendous gift of introspection, seeing that the time and energy devoted to making sense of their environments was worth setting aside an incredibly busy schedule and constantly filled inboxes to devote three interviews on the subject of their development. Having been in their shoes and lived the same work-driven experiences, I appreciate very much their willingness to do so, as it has provide a robust set of data with which to understand the holistic experience of their journey to new senior leaders. I cannot thank them enough.

For the U.S. Army War College, which has been the subject of external criticism, this study offered evidence that the seminar learning environment is fruitful, and that the College is doing its part to set conditions for the intended role change, particularly in its emphasis on human elements – relationship building, diversity of perspectives, and critical thinking among them -- that are being carried forward into the post-graduation environment.

In closing, I salute the senior leaders of the U.S. Army for their professionalism and dedication to duty in the face of today's dynamic and global environment. I am reminded

of the mentorship I received when I was promoted to colonel. The eagles that signify the rank weigh thousands of pounds when first pinned on, causing one's knees to buckle. Joining the ranks of colonel indicates the high regard that the Army bestows on an officer based on character, performance, and potential. However, serving as a colonel was well described by another mentor and general officer who told me it was like "doing a marathon during a sprint." The selfless service and sacrifice that the Army's cohort of colonels exhibits is tremendous. I honor them for taking on this responsibility and leading the U.S. Army into the future.

## Appendix A: Proposed Solicitation E-mail

Are you interested in participating in research that is looking into how officers transition from mid-career to senior leadership?

I am in the process of recruiting U.S. Army War College graduates for my dissertation research study. I would like to invite you to participate in this interview based study if you meet the following criteria:

You are: An active duty officer at the rank of colonel or promotable lieutenant colonel, graduate of the resident U.S. Army War College class of 2013 or 2014, and currently serving in a combatant command, a service component command, Army or joint staff or equivalent, major Army command, or other position of strategic leadership in the Army. However, you are *not* a former student of mine, either in a core or elective course or as an advisee for the Strategy Research Project.

The purpose of this research study is to explore and understand the experience of officers transitioning from mid-career to senior leadership. The study is being done as part of a doctoral dissertation at The George Washington University.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. The study will involve three 90-minute interviews over the course of two to three weeks and these are scheduled to begin sometime in the Fall of 2014. The interviews will be strictly confidential and no personal information will be collected, and any published results of the research will contain no identifiable information about you or your organization.

There is no payment for taking part in the study, but your participation may benefit future generations of new senior leaders within the US Army. If you are interested in

participating, please contact Tom Galvin at tompgalvin@gwmail.gwu.edu or call 717-462-0498 for more information.

## Appendix B: Informed Consent Document

This informed consent document was approved by the Institutional Review Board on 10 September 2014.

1. Introduction. You are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to be part of this study, you need to understand the risks and benefits. This consent form provides information about the research study. I will be available to answer your questions and provide further explanations. If you agree to take part in the research study, this document advises you of your rights. This process is known as an informed consent. Your decision to take part in the study is voluntary. You are free to choose whether or not you will take part in the study. Your employment status will not be affected in any way should you choose not to take part or to withdraw at any time.

2. Purpose. I, Thomas Patrick Galvin, am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Human Development of The George Washington University, and my purpose is to conduct research to understand identity construction during the transition from mid-career officer to senior officer. The Research Team comprises two individuals, myself as the Researcher and the Principal Investigator, who is Dr. Michael Marquardt, a member of the George Washington University faculty. His contact information is marquard@gwu.edu or call 717-726-3788.

3. Procedure. The research will be conducted at a location that is convenient to you. You will be asked to participate in three (3) ninety-minute interviews. You will be asked to describe your experience as you changed roles to senior military leadership after attendance at a senior service college and upon assumption of a position as a strategic leader. Particular attention will be focused on any resources you used to assist in the transition, initial experiences as a senior leader, and how those experiences have shaped you. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript and make corrections for accuracy of the transcription. The dissertation will be published and the transcripts may be used for subsequent studies, however at the conclusion of this study the audio files will be destroyed and no information linking you to a particular subject will be retained. At no time will you or your organization be identified. All the data will be reported anonymously. No information will be provided to your superior officer. You will be one of approximately twelve officers participating in the study.

4. Possible Risks. Your participation will have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. You may experience emotional distress when talking about your role change to senior leadership, particularly regarding experiences related to relocation, senior service college, and your current senior leadership assignment. Please let the researcher know at any time if you would like to stop the interview or if there are any questions that you would like to skip. There is a very small chance that someone not on our research team could find out that you took part in the study or somehow connect your name with the information that we collect about you. However, your records will be private and confidential. No one will know except for the researcher and the transcriptionist that you are part of this study. Only your first name will be used during the interview taping. The transcription will identify you by a number only, and any identifying names or locations that surface during the interview will be redacted in the final transcript used in the study. Only the researcher will be able to associate your full name with your number. The tapes and the transcriptions will be maintained under the researcher‘s personal control in a locked safe.

5. Possible Benefits. You will not receive any tangible benefits from taking part in this study. As a result of your participation, you may have an increased understanding of the transition process and an increased awareness of your personal values and attitudes.

6. Costs. There are no costs associated to you for taking part in this study.

7. Compensation. You will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

8. Right to Withdraw. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide to not begin or to stop this study at any time.

9. Confidentiality and Privacy of Research Records. Your records will be private. No one will know except for the researcher and the transcriptionist that you are part of this study. Only your first name will be used during the interview taping. The transcription will identify you by a number. Only the researcher will be able to associate your full name with your number. Neither the U.S. Army nor the U.S. Army War College will have access to the research records, however they will be offered de-identified summary reports excerpted from the final dissertation. Your research records may be provided to The George Washington University Office of Human Research and/or Committee on Human Research. Except for these entities, research records will be kept confidential unless you authorize their release, or the records are required to be released by law (i.e., court subpoena). You will not be identified by name in any reports or publications of this study. The tapes and any notes taken by you and the researcher will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the

researcher‘s office which only the researcher has access to. All audio files and any identifiable documents will be destroyed upon successful defense of the dissertation.

10. Questions. If you have questions, concerns, complaints, or think you have been harmed, please contact the Research Team. You can contact the Principal Investigator by e-mail at marquard@gwu.edu or call 717-726-3788, or you may contact the Researcher Tom Galvin by e-mail at tompgalvin@gwmail.gwu.edu or call 717-462-0498. For questions regarding your rights as a participant in human research, call the GWU Office of Human Research at 202-994-2715.

11. Agreement. By proceeding with this interview, you are agreeing to participate in the research.

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

Moustakas (1994) stated that the phenomenological interview "involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions" (p. 114). Seidman (2013) called for active listening and proper follow-up the participants' responses, including seeking clarity on terms and ideas that the researcher does not understand. Seidman also recommended using open-ended questions, encouraging the participant to tell stories that illuminate their experiences, and having them reconstruct their experiences vice remembering them.

The following interview questions are divided into three sections, one per interview using Seidman's (2013) method. The first section provides questions that establish rapport and context, mainly from the point of when the participant experienced the first career role-changing event. The second section is geared on describing the lived experiences of the completed role change and the potential identity change. The final section provides questions that allow the participant to make meaning of the experiences. Each question includes a set of initial follow-up exploration questions (as Seidman (2013) does not prefer the term 'probe').

### Interview 1. Focused Life History

1. Please tell me about significant role changes that occurred during your career until you were first informed of your selection for [promotion | senior service college].
2. For each role change:
    a. [Alignment] What was your reaction to being in that situation and why?

b. [Situation] What triggered the experience? How long did it last? What other stressors were present?

c. [Self] What factors contributed to your assuming that role in this instance?

d. [Support] Who else was involved? What were their roles? What interactions did you have with them?

e. [Strategies] What actions do you take? What actions did you decide not to take? How did your assumption of senior leadership affect these decisions?

f. [Outcome] What did you learn from the experience? How did that learning shape you as a leader?

**Interview 2. Current Experience – focus on *role change* and *transition***

1. Please tell me about your learning that you were (selected for senior PME attendance or selected for promotion to colonel).
    a. What position did you have at the time?
    b. What responsibilities did you have?
    c. What was your reaction to the news?
    d. What was the reaction of your family?
    e. What was the reaction of your peers?
2. Please tell me about your subsequent attendance at senior PME.
3. Please tell me about your subsequent promotion to colonel.
4. Please tell me about your current duty position.
    a. How long have you been in the position?

b. What responsibilities do you currently have?

c. What role do you currently play in the organization?

5. Please tell me about your overall experience of changing roles from mid-career officer to senior leader.

    a. [Alignment] What was your reaction to being in that situation and why?

    b. [Situation] What triggered the experience? How long did it last? What other stressors were present?

    c. [Self] What factors contributed to your assuming that role in this instance?

    d. [Support] Who else was involved? What were their roles? What interactions did you have with them?

    e. [Strategies] What actions do you take? What actions did you decide not to take? How did your assumption of senior leadership affect these decisions?

    f. [Outcome] What did you learn from the experience? How did that learning shape you as a leader?

6. Please tell me about a recent experience that exemplifies your taking on the role of senior leader. {similar subquestions}

7. Please tell me about a recent experience where your new role as senior leader presented [difficulties | conflicts | stress]. {similar subquestions}

8. Please tell me about your experiences in your present job where you relied more on your prior mid-career experience. {similar subquestions}

**Interview 3. Meaning Making -- focus on *identity change***

1. Do you believe that the transition from mid-career to senior leader changed you in any way?
    a. To what would you attribute this change most?
    b. Would those who knew you beforehand describe you differently?
    c. Was anyone particularly helpful? What did they do?
    d. What conflicts did you experience? How did you overcome them?
2. What advice would you give to the next cohort of senior military leaders (lieutenant colonels pending notification about War College selection or promotion to colonel) about the transitioning experience?
3. What advice would you give to the Army War College about how to help budding senior military leaders through the transitioning experience?
4. If the Army Leadership asked you how to help others transitioning, what would you tell them?
    a. What would you suggest the Army do to help those transitioning?
    b. What, if anything should the Army stop doing to help those transitioning?
5. Where do you see yourself five years from now?

## Appendix D: Life Histories, Textural, and Structural Descriptions

### Participant 1

#### Participant 1's Background and Life History

Participant 1 is an operations research and systems analysis (ORSA) officer whose career largely followed the *two-phase specialty-track model*, whereby the officer followed a standard career path in one of the traditional branches (armor, in Participant 1's case) through company command, then enters a specialty area (e.g., ORSA) and thereafter takes assignments only within that specialty. As an ORSA, assignments were broad in the sense of including duties in institutional (e.g., Center for Army Analysis) and operational (e.g., a corps headquarters) organizations. Participant 1 was at serving in a corps headquarters in February 2013 when notified of selection for senior service college attendance, which therefore served as the triggering event for this study.

From entry on active duty through February 2013, Participant 1 identified six defining role change episodes: (1) assuming troop command as an armor officer, (2) designation as ORSA and subsequent pursuit of master's degree, (3) initial ORSA assignment at the Center for Army Analysis, (4) assignment to a joint command overseas, (5) assignment to a Department of Defense agency, and (6) assignment to a corps headquarters which included plans to retire at twenty years of service. After the first episode, these role changes did not represent a steady progression of increased scope and responsibilities. Instead, each duty environment was unique and provided its own learning opportunities. Participant 1 noted that the decision to transfer to ORSA was directly related to a negative experience in troop command, specifically a conflict with the supervisor.

Participant 1's response was to exit the situation by leaving armor branch and switching to ORSA, which was admittedly termed "an impulsive decision." The next four episodes exposed Participant 1 to flat organizational structures with significant numbers of civilians and contractors. Participant 1 experienced direct exposure to senior leaders as a briefer or advisor, and served as project leads and leant subject matter expertise. Participant's 1 coped with these changes generally consistently through a strong mentoring relationship with a father who was also retired military, developing peer networks, and broadening perspectives, particularly at Department of Defense level and in coalition environments. Participant 1's math and science background aligned well with the ORSA environment and considered each of the duty assignments highly satisfying.

For both professional and personal reasons, Participant 1 elected to pursue retirement and viewed the corps headquarters assignment as terminal. Identity work began toward a new self-concept in the course of pursuing subsequent employment and providing for the family. February 2013 saw Participant 1 initially planning for retirement ("I submitted resumes") when the selection for senior service college was announced.

**Textural Description of the Participant 1's Experience**

Participant 1's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began in February upon notification of selection for the War College and went through to the summer of 2013 upon departure from the assignment to a corps headquarters. The second phase was a student at the U.S. Army War College, joining the resident class of academic year 2014 from August 2013 to graduation in June 2014. The third phase was the initial follow-on assignment as a senior ORSA officer in the Pentagon. It was during the third phase that Participant 1 learned of selection for promotion to colonel.

At the time of selection, Participant 1 differentiated colonels as "senior military leaders" based on "key billets" within the organization. Primary staff officers such as "G3, Chief of Staff, or G2" would be considered senior whereas "other primary staff officers … [or] division chiefs" were not. The differentiation was based on levels of interaction outside of the organization, and Participant 1 viewed the former group as exercising those interactions more prevalently than the latter.

Participant 1's reaction to the selection was to re-evaluate the situation with the family, given that the move would have to occur in less than six months and the specific senior service college had not yet been determined (designation of the U.S. Army War College was determined later). Thus, there was limited opportunity for self-reflection on the meaning of the selection. Participant 1 noted little or no changes in duties, relationships with peers and superiors, or other contacts. Participant 1 did receive an exit brief from the senior rater which included guidance on approaching the War College year, including that Participant 1 should "find something that I needed to work on and then focus on that as well." Acclimation to the War College environment was not difficult. "It seemed like a typical transition for me. … I am very familiar with the academic environment. … I've got my Master's since I joined the Army, and so I wasn't really concerned … ."

Early in the War College year, Participant 1 was struck by a particular guest lecturer who spoke of the military as a profession and the responsibility of officers as stewards. It was "one of the main things that has stayed with me since the War College":

> As a steward of the profession, you have a responsibility to the profession. And whether it's developing your subordinates, whether it's championing the causes of the profession and ensuring that, you know, at this time… and when I went, the… one of the issues in the news and everything is kind of

> the trust and confidence that the American people have with the military with the whole sexual assault things and the suicide issues and some of the inappropriate behavior that was going on in theater. And that that was no longer just a headline, it was something that, as a steward, you were the ones who were going to be solving those problems, or the ones… you were 'them'. You became 'them'.

Participant 1 also reported, "I definitely did not see myself as a steward," but through introspection grew to develop its meaning. As a mid-career officer, Participant 1 said that matters that did not pertain directly with assigned duties were of lesser priority. "I thought I was somebody who was good, not necessarily somebody who was doing what they should be doing." As the year progressed, Participant 1 developed a new view that "a senior leader is, at a minimum, every O-6" and this meant getting more connected with the American people as "I have more of a responsibility to represent the military and the Army than just going there to partake in the Veteran's Day parade." Retrospectively, Participant 1 regretted not having held "every O-6" to the same stewardship standards in the past.

Participant 1 also came to value "different perspectives" and "communication skills," both being "not optional" for success as a senior military leader but as self-critique identified both as key areas for self-development. A couple vignettes highlighting this were offered. During the resident class staff rides to New York City and Washington, DC, Participant 1 gained "a greater appreciation for how complicated everything is" through interaction with a Fortune 500 company and "politicians." What developed was a change of perspective on being an officer and representative of the U.S. Army:

> I have a very good perspective of, you know, what I think I am when I put my uniform on. But I did not have as much of appreciation of what I actually might represent to other people. Where I might represent, you know, the

> entire military or the government, for that matter, or even the United States to some, just by putting on my uniform. And it identified the importance of making sure I understood what I was saying and not to misrepresent the… whatever I was saying.

In the third episode, Participant 1 reported to the Pentagon in July 2014 and was notified of selection for promotion to colonel a month later. Reporting there gave Participant 1 a strong sense that the senior service college education would be put to use, and there was an obligation to engage on issues and not be reluctant to ask questions. "I need to voice my opinion. That what the Army is paying me to do. … Challenge the status quo, and that's how I am, not matter what I am doing." Participant 1 also engaged in work transformation, noting that the predecessor was "a senior lieutenant colonel who was retiring" and regarded "the space I was given when I got wasn't big enough for me," and therefore in the first few months was engaged in self-driven efforts to redefine the roles and establish relationships with other colonels.

Overall, Participant 1 continues to see stewardship as the dominant change to the self-concept during this experience, but this new identity is still under development. Meanwhile, Participant 1 also felt the Army (as a whole or the War College in particular) needed to explore further the meaning of professional stewardship because "we need to police ourselves" and improving self-regulation of the profession required much further study and a more proactive stance (at the time of these interviews, the Army was facing a series of scandals involving high-ranking officers). In making meaning of the experience, Participant 1 said:

> I feel I have this obligation to give back to the military and therefore they need to get their money's worth out of me and if I don't feel like I've put in

> a good day, the guilt is deeper than just me getting over on the taxpayers. The Army has an expectation from me and they're making decisions with that as the assumption that that is what I'm providing. And therefore if I'm not providing that then that could invalidate assumptions they are making and there could be other problems that I'm not aware of versus just my day being fuller. Even something like-, am I working on the priority of the organization? It's not okay for me just to go do what I want to do and do a good job. I need to be supporting the organization as a whole and doing what the organization wants me to be working on.

Participant 1 intends to continue service for five or six more years, but some of the personal considerations that contributed to the previous decision to withdraw could precipitate an earlier decision.

**Structural Description of the Participant 1's Experience**

Three were two structures to Participant 1's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader. While the first may have been evident in previous role changes, the second clearly emerged in the current experience. The first was *personal-professional balance* across self, work responsibilities, and family. Throughout Participant 1's life history and particularly emphasized throughout the present experience, personal and professional considerations were being considered equally in decision making. In discussing the newfound self-concept as a professional steward, Participant 1 described it both in broad terms concerning representation to the American people and to the daughter's school during patriotic celebrations. This structure led Participant 1 to involve family considerations in most professional decisions, although highlighted were instances when deployments or other military responsibilities (such as the unforeseen selection for senior service college) altered those plans.

The second structure was *pursuing a cause*, which became evident only during the present experience. Participant 1 experienced an "a-ha" moment when the topic of stewardship was presented to the War College class, and stewardship became the cause that drove significant introspection and identity work during the remainder of the War College year and into the subsequent duty position at the Pentagon. This focus became the basis of a new empowering self-concept that emerged through the experience and shaped the approach to the follow-on assignment. It also shaped the way Participant 1 compared self with other colonels, as expressed in the following passage:

> The group at the war college are all colonel and soon to be colonels. The military views every one of the them as the stewards of the military profession. Only if all of them (me) are stewards, can the military cover every aspect of the military (from tactical to strategic, reserve/active, and across the entire globe). I do not think colonels view it that way. They have been successful by making the best decisions for their unit and themselves up to [this] point in their careers. Opening up that aperture and now putting the profession above their organization and themselves is a huge paradigm shift. You would hope there is alignment between what is good for an organization and what is good for the profession. Being a steward raises the source of the answer to the 'why' questions up to the profession. This drastically increases a colonel's responsibilities beyond their day-to-day duties. It also raises the time horizon and impact of their decisions to the that of the profession, answering questions like what is best for the health of the Army, not just for my brigade during my deployment.

The ambivalence that Participant 1 felt during the first phase of the experience was a by-product of the structure. As Participant 1 considered retiring due to family considerations, the desire to continue service was present in not withdrawing from consideration for senior service college (one must explicitly withdraw one's name,

otherwise one is considered automatically eligible), and there was continued conflict in reconciling the result. This partly related to the immediate burdens it placed on the family situation, and partly regarded an unwillingness to go back to the chain of command and request withdrawal and immediate retirement. Without a focus to build a new self-concept around, ambivalence was a dominant response to the situation until the a-ha moment occurred.

The two structures were clearly at play in the earlier career as well, particularly regarding the switch from armor to ORSA. Participant 1 was ambivalent about joining ORSA, rather the cause was withdrawing from an unacceptable situation that impinged on both professional and personal lives. Similar interactions between these two structures also explained other career decisions as Participant 1 moved across a wide array of ORSA jobs and building a new self-concept as an ORSA.

## Participant 2

*Note: Participant 2's textural and structural descriptions are provided in Chapter 4.*

### Participant 2's Background and Life History

Participant 2 is an infantry officer whose career largely followed the *single-track model*, serving as commander, staff officer, and trainer of infantry units at several echelons, culminating as G3 (operations officer) in an infantry division at the time the present experience began. Participant 2 was prior enlisted, including service in the 75th Ranger Regiment, before attending the U.S. Military Academy (USMA) at West Point and subsequently earning an officer's commission. As an infantry officer, Participant 2 served in airborne, Ranger, and light infantry units, along with a short stint in an armored cavalry squadron. Broadening assignments were generally within the infantry community or high-

level staff positions, including duties at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk, LA, and in the G3 shop of U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army in Germany. In November 2012, while serving as a division G3, Participant 2 was notified of selection for promotion to colonel, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through November 2012, Participant 2 identified the following defining role change episodes: (1) transition from enlisted to lieutenant, (2) cancellation of initial assignment overseas and re-assignment to the armored cavalry regiment, (3) "re-bluing" back in infantry through the rank of major, (4) assignment as staff officer to an overseas Army service component command headquarters, (5) assignment to an overseas airborne unit, (6) observer/controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center in Fort Polk, and (7) assignment to an infantry division that included battalion command and subsequent assignment as division G3.

Participant 2 enlisted in the Army and joined the 75th Ranger Regiment, progressing through noncommissioned officer, before expressing a desire to pursue a commission. The platoon leader then took steps to get Participant 2 accepted in the USMA Prep School, which was then followed by attendance at USMA proper. Participant 2's self-concept as a soldier was largely defined by the highly-selective and strongly disciplined Ranger community, and during the course of attending both the prep school and USMA, Participant 2 was quickly exposed to a different Army community. "50 percent of the prep school was made up of essentially reservists who were civilians that became a reserved soldier, 50 percent were previous soldiers, none came out of the Ranger regiment. … Who are these yahoos that are out of shape, bad haircuts all that?" Participant 2 credited the master sergeant and captain serving as the "TAC" team (i.e., stewards of the class of cadets) for

the necessary orientation and counsel to gain empathy for soldiers outside of the special operations community. Meanwhile, Participant 2 overcame challenges with the academic requirements and the looser social structures compared to the small unit environment through self-reflection and self-awareness. As Participant 2 moved on to USMA and underwent the initial "beast barracks," the six-week long equivalent of boot camp for West Point cadets, the enlisted experience allowed Participant 2 to endure the experience easily and help other cadets through. Additionally, Participant 2 elected to keep the "Ranger tab, badges, all that stuff" off the uniform. "I just was anonymous. That was very helpful."

Participant 2's conception of officership evolved mainly during West Point as there was little prior exposure to officers while enlisted. As described below, it took time to cease viewing peers through the lens of the Ranger culture.

> So I think I kept looking through a lens of the infantry junior officer, lieutenant captain, because that is what made the indelible impression on me in my formidable years in the Army. And I'm not saying that's right or wrong. I'm saying that was the measure against which I judged – and I use the word judged – the officers that I observed around me. In their defense – are you kidding me? They are non-Ranger qualified – I'm not going to talk to them. I mean I guess I have to salute them. So for about the first couple or three years at West Point that really stayed with me.
>
> I think what changed is towards the latter part, my last year or two at West Point, I think it changed because I finally had enough volume of density of seeing the other branches that I started to change my opinion about what I wanted to do and who I wanted to be.

As graduation from West Point approached and cadets began the selection process for their initial specialty branch, Participant 2 had intended to go into the Medical Service

Corps, but was not high enough in the class ranking to get it. Participant 2 thus took the second choice, which was Infantry.

The first assignment, however, did not pan out. Participant 2 was slated for an airborne unit in Panama but had to withdraw due to an injury, and was thus reassigned to an armored cavalry regiment in Fort Polk. “I’m not real happy that I’m there.” The unit was suffering through an identity crisis, having proudly served on the front lines of the Cold War but moved and realigned multiple times during the post-Cold War drawdown, leading to a “mix of armor and infantry,” poor discipline, and an unclear mission. During this time, Participant 2 “probably carried myself as an NCO in lieutenant’s clothing … because I thought I had to.”

In the subsequent assignment to a Ranger regiment in Fort Lewis, Participant 2 felt “it was like coming home” but admitted retaining “still a lot of NCO-isms.” What helped shape the self-concept as an officer was strong leadership within the unit at captain and field-grade levels, along with the personal example of the regimental commander who adhered to and enforced a strong organizational culture. The officers had “enormous ability and enormous strength of character and leadership.” Participant 2 spoke of the impact of working with such high quality leaders.

> It was what they did that we learned from as an example because they did it every day. You were part of this little terrarium, so how could you not kind of start to walk like them, talk like them, etc. – absolutely incredible. I'll put it this way. Three of those captains are division commanders right now. All but one of them became general officers. I mean, really, that's abnormal. So when you're part of that and you're in the left lane of the highway. You just keep going. You're part of the slipstream.

By the time of assignment in Headquarters, U.S. Army Europe (USAREUR), Participant 2's views of the officer corps were very positive having served multiple assignments with "some really, really capable people in this Army." As a brand new major, Participant 2 was serving in the G3 shop working directly for a two-star general, during the early days of combat operations in the Middle East with heavy support from the U.S. Army's European presence. This was Participant 2's first direct exposure to general officers on a regular basis, and the lesson learned was that general officers "are really, really hard working." Through a consistent regimen of late-night pizza delivery, red-inking decision briefs and papers in the G3's office, and dealing with a massive volume of high-level staff work, Participant 2 came to realize, "I was pretty good at this. Just hard work and drive will get you … it doesn't matter what the mission was. You just go all in." Additionally, USAREUR was where Participant 2 noticed that the vestiges of the former NCO persona had finally lost salience because of the "white-collar and organizational leadership attributes necessary to function on [the USAREUR] staff."

In discussing subsequent assignments to the airborne brigade, JRTC, and an infantry division post to serve as battalion commander and division G3, Participant 2 noted that the environments were familiar due to prior assignments or pre-existing relationships with the leaders. The connection between the tactical mastery needed to serve as observer/controller at JRTC led Participant 2 to become "extremely astute doctrinally," which contributed to a high state of preparedness for battalion command.

As the promotion board results approached in 2012 and Participant 2 was approaching the fifth year of assignment at the infantry division post, Participant 2 "was almost getting a little bit bored." The pace of work was high and the interactions with

general officers, brigade commanders, and peers were rewarding, but no longer challenging in the sense that Participant 2 was pretty much able to handle any issue that arose. Participant 2 also noted that the first performance report as battalion commander was disappointing in that it did not reflect Participant 2's self-assessment of performance. That made Participant 2 "take pause of what I was doing, who I was, what I believed in. So that lasted about a week." Overcoming that and being successful was through self-reflection on the tremendous leaders that Participant 2 had previously worked with.

## Participant 4

### Participant 4's Background and Life History

Participant 4 is an armor officer whose career largely followed the *single-track model*, serving as commander, staff officer, and trainer of armor units at several echelons, culminating as battalion commander in an armored division at the time the present experience began. Broadening assignments were generally within the armor community and included duties at the U.S. Army Armor Center, Fort Knox, KY and the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA. Participant 4 also was a graduate of the School of Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth, KS. Participant 4 twice served as a direct report to a senior general officer, as an aide-de-camp at Fort Knox and as executive officer to a corps commander overseas. In June 2011 while nearing the end of battalion command, Participant 4 was notified of selection for senior service college, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through June 2011, Participant 4 identified five prominent role change episodes: (1) initial assignment on brigade staff, (2) assignment to Armor Center as doctrine writer, (3) aide-de-camp, (4) initial assignment as a field grade officer to a division staff, and (5)

assignment as plans officer on a corps staff. Despite having had numerous different assignments, Participant 4 considered most to be minor role changes as they constituted also steady increases in scope of duties and responsibilities and commensurate growth of peer networks and relationships. Participant 4 coped with these changes generally consistently through professional relationships with peers and senior mentors, leveraging of opportunities available for self-development, and active interests outside of work such as family and hobbies. All these were evident in Participant 4's self-assessment of June 2011 while moving from battalion command to serve as a corps plans officer.

The outcomes of these episodes were strongly positive. In the majority of cases, Participant 4 encountered situations where self-concept and preferred work identities were aligned, and therefore was able to maintain the self-concept. This was helped through the building of a strong professional reputation that made Participant 4 a 'go-to' person in the organization. The cases of misalignment were personality-driven, such as a change of supervisor with a starkly different approach to leadership or service under a "toxic leader," but Participant 4 largely persevered through these episodes without changing the self-concept.

**Textural Description of Participant 4's Experience**

Participant 4's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began in June 2011 upon notification of selection for senior service college which was immediately followed by assignment as a corps plans officer through the summer of 2012. The second phase was attendance at the U.S. Army War College as a student in the resident program of academic year 2013, graduating in June 2013. The third phase was initial follow-on assignment as a senior plans officer in an Army Service Component Command.

At the time of the study, Participant 4 had served in the command approximately fifteen months, had been selected for brigade command, and attended the pre-command course in-between the first and second interviews.

At the beginning of the experience, Participant 4's conception of senior military leader was based on a view that successful battalion command meant success as a career officer, and was not focused beyond that point. Participant 4's assignment as corps plans officer was a surprise. "I was thinking, I was just a combat battalion commander, I must be king. I am going to go do something great and wonderful, maybe a special project. But, I was told, 'no, you are going to get right back in the boat and row.'" The assignment was dominated by a corps-level "Warfighter" exercise, which for the command was going to be the first of its kind, and "a significant challenge because heretofore everybody on the Corps staff was very focused on counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan." In contrast to the immediately preceding assignment as battalion commander, Participant 4 was a more junior member of the team focused on this effort. He had to lead his peers and convince many senior Colonels to contribute to the effort he lead. As the Warfighter became a success and Participant 4 began preparing for the War College, Participant 4 summed the feeling as follows:

> When I got done with the Warfighter exercise, I felt like a big burden - a big cross was lifted off my back. But,… in many ways I was addicted to the amount of effort and the energy I applied to something like that. I had to make a significant transition going into the War College. I was moving at Mach 1 to going to Carlisle, but when I got there, it was like being in Jello. … I felt the same way leaving battalion command. I was the prince of my domain one day, and the next day I looked around and wondered what happened to all my responsibilities and my authorities.

However, after a peer suggested Participant 4 go online and read up on the War College, Participant 4 reported watching videos taken of "colonels describing themselves as strategic leaders and I thought, 'That's really strange; a colonel isn't a strategic leader.'" This view would change early in the War College experience as faculty members taught how colonels "helped general officers articulate positions, policy, strategy." Participant 4 admitted that this was difficult to grasp at first, but over the course of the first few months he had come to recognize the impacts that colonels have on national-level policy and strategy. Guest lecturers and other senior leaders reinforced this message. In reflecting on this and the career path to this point, Participant 4 admitted:

> Because I'd never served in the Pentagon before, because I'd never served on a staff above the corps level, I think I was rather blunted in my development to that point. I didn't understand the gravitas of what we do as colonels in that we have an impact at the theater-strategic, or national strategic level; I didn't understand all of the inputs that colonels can provide in policy and strategy.

However, recounting this experience also led Participant 4 to offer another vignette from service as executive officer to a corps commander. With the transition of Chief of Staff of the Army, the Army sent a questionnaire to the general officers asking for inputs on issues and potential solutions. Participant 4 provided much of the corps commanders' responses, and would soon learn that Participant 4's words were appearing on slides being delivered by the Chief of Staff of the Army to the Army leadership. At the time, Participant 4 recounted how "astounding" it was to realize that "ideas that had come out of a major's head … were now being promulgated as policy… ." With the War College experience,

Participant 4 revisited the meaning of that vignette and would later convert it into a mentoring lesson for other junior officers.

The desire to make an impact and broaden horizons permeated the remainder of the War College year. Participant 4 would participate in an extra-curricular project to capture best practices and lessons learned in the integration of conventional and Special Forces. The Washington DC staff ride was also transformative to Participant 4's views of other U.S. government agencies.

> It always seemed curious to me that another department may be designated as the lead on a project in a combatant command AOR. But, those other departments just didn't have the resources to bring to bear, to lead and to solve problem effectively. [The military would] come in with not just the resources, but with the intellect and the experience to develop solution sets for problems that I thought were outside of the military domain. But I learned … that it's not for the lack of resources and it's not for the lack of energy and initiative in the State Department, that sometimes we just can't get things done as quickly as we want to or we'd like to in a military context. But it's that the State Department pays attention to a much broader … political, diplomatic context that sometimes we military officers think through.
>
> I began to get a realization … sometimes patience to develop solution sets with the other departments is actually something of benefit rather than something that we should disparage. Getting beyond just the tactical patience, but getting to the patience of understanding diplomacy and understanding that we're not going to solve things overnight when it comes to large complex, wicked problems that became much more apparent to me … .

Moving to the follow-on assignment was initially intimidating, as this was Participant 4's first assignment to the Army service component command (ASCC) level. Participant 4 prepared mentally by identifying two key responsibilities – to "change the course of the command using the Commanding General's intent and guidance" and "to coach, teach, and mentor my team and help develop the officers and the civilians on my team to essentially replace me one day."

Participant 4 would learn several key lessons during the first six months. The first regarded how senior military leaders use time. Early in Participant 4's assignment, the ASCC faced a crisis in their area of responsibility and crisis action planning began. Participant 4 noted a big difference in perspective in observing the Commanding General and G3 (also a general officer), who despite the seemingly centrality of the crisis response still only spent a "portion of their time worried about anything that may have been happening with regards to the situation I was planning." The result was a realization that the use of time by senior leaders was different and their priorities, based on what their bosses are concentrating on, may be different than that of the staff.

Another key lesson regarded communications. Participant 4 became involved in drafting some of the Commanding General's correspondence. In doing so, Participant 4 was reminded of advice specifically given by War College faculty that "how we articulate solutions and then write them very succinctly, means a big deal to senior leaders." This lesson was reinforced in a subsequent project where Participant 4's planning team had to develop a concept plan for a second crisis situation. Although the plan required significant involvement of the parent command and other government agencies, conditions required a certain amount of discretion that disadvantaged the staff, yet the ability to successfully

articulate a position that proved helpful at the interagency and multinational level was highly satisfying.

A third lesson came out of an Army tasking related to a third issue, in which the ASCC was to develop options for deploying a force to meet a requirement in theater. The timeframe to develop the options was extremely short, but the requirement was met with a report containing several well-thought and self-contained options. To Participant 4's dismay, however, the higher headquarters wound up picking and choosing from pieces of multiple options that were not designed to be considered together, causing the headquarters to "backward plan" how the resulting force would be employed to meet the mission requirement.

In reflecting on these lessons, Participant 4 found a "tension" between the stated responsibilities and capabilities of the planning team and "the things that we are asked to do that are outside of my expectations of how I and my staff should be utilized." This was exacerbated by instances where members of the planning team were being tasked to perform missions unrelated to their stated duties because the requirement was for intellectual energy on a complex problem. In learning to cope with this, Participant 4 drew from the initial counseling from the boss who brought up that broad utilization was to be expected.

During the assignment, Participant 4 was designated for brigade command and attended the required pre-command course. The lesson for Participant 4 was to begin planning the way ahead. Participant 4 indicated that the pre-command course had a "significant beneficial impact on my internal motivation and understanding" and wished

that more officers had the opportunity to spend some time doing "intense, self-reflection and an experience of examining for personal purpose."

In reflecting on the journey to become a senior military leader, Participant 4 offered this vignette on both the personal experience and in relation to the Army:

> I was always taught at a very early age that as a Major you had a lot to be able to say and people respected you for that. As a Lieutenant colonel, all the more so, especially as a battalion commander. And when a Colonel, said, 'based on my experience', that really meant a lot to his subordinates, peers, and more senior leaders.
>
> My perception is that in the past 12 years of war, … we have removed a lot of the authority for field-grade officers, and especially Colonels to affect change. …. I think the army needs to reexamine what kind of responsibilities and authorities it gives to our colonels, the graduates of the war college and our Army's senior leaders. Part of the challenges is that we've got colonels…who are really working, if you ask me, in a lieutenant colonel role. In a role that is not as a strategic leader. And that is not helpful to both the individual, as well as the organization. There's a lot of horsepower, a lot of intellect that I think is being tied down into menial tasks that really could be better exploited.

Changing this, according to Participant 4, would involve better development of officers to broaden their experiences at earlier periods, strong emphasis on mentoring relationships, and encouraging self-reflection "upon what we want to achieve in our organizations, what we want to achieve for ourselves. We can't let the everyday situations drive us to an end that is unanchored from an objective forecast for ourselves, forecast for our organizations."

**Structural Description of Participant 4's Experience**

Three were three structures to Participant 4's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader, and each was evident in earlier role changes. The first was a *rational worldview*. This contributed to the strength of response to the presence of alternative perspectives as Participant 4 went through the War College year, and the reaction to the divergent work environment at the ASCC. One example was the preconception of the ineffectiveness of the State Department due to a comparative lack of resources and restrictions on their use, and how "curious" it was that the lead agency for international matters had to rely on the Defense Department for resources to perform its core missions. Another example was the series of vignettes concerning misutilization of people and misuse of staff work while in the current environment. Together, these presented an orientation toward having missions, resources, and control of those resources stay closely aligned, which Participant 4 found to be less the case. The result was continued learning through transforming work and broadening horizons while looking forward to brigade command which would reaffirm the self-concept or looking forward to leaving the current job, albeit with a tremendous amount of satisfaction and accomplishment. This structure was evident in prior experiences where Participant 4 was working as a comparatively junior officer within higher-level staffs facing similar circumstances of increasing complexity and personality dynamics. Also, the rational worldview was evident in Participant 4's message to the Army about the need to re-establish proper utilization of colonels.

The rational worldview was also evident in the life history, as Participant 4 approached career progression in a systematic way, keeping close adherence to the

prescribed assignment time lines and expressing temporary anxiety during periods that deviated slightly, those these were quickly overcome, leading to positive outcomes through transforming the work.

The second was *action orientation.* This was event in both the second and third phases of the experience. Participant 4 noted a prior tendency toward taking action and getting involved, such as the example of the special forces-conventional force integration project that fell outside of the War College curriculum. Another example regarded how Participant 4 valued the role of drafter of senior leader correspondence, saying "I really began to see the impact [when] I were to be tasked, *or on my own initiative*, develop a [piece of correspondence] … that that would actually get a lot of traction" (emphasis added). The inverse effects of the structure were also evident in the present experience as Participant 4 expressed discomfort at the State Department regarding the need for "patience to develop solution sets" rather than taking immediate action, and with the requisite levels of secrecy required of a project in the present assignment that precluded Participant 4's preference for active engagement with stakeholders. However, Participant's 4 self-concept generated from this structure evolved through the identity construction experience as evidenced by the last statement of the final interview, "The day-to-day work will drive you a certain way, but it's paramount that you should reflect occasionally on what your objectives are for yourself and your organization. Otherwise, you cease being a strategic leader and we devolve to what we were before."

The third structure was *pursuing mentoring relationships.* Participant 4 was very detailed about the impacts that supervisors, instructors, and peer mentors had on shaping the self-concept and navigating the various work environments. In turn, Participant 4

expressed multiple times the intent to establish mentoring relationships with subordinates in the upcoming brigade command assignment. Participant 4 also felt that this must continue even at the senior ranks, saying, "I think a lot of times the perception is that a colonel can't learn. … But I think it's important that … senior leaders understand that colonels are fertile ground for being developed."

The interaction of these structures explains the successful evolution of the self-concept during the present experience, despite the continued challenges to it that make the subsequent assignment preferable. Participant 4's action orientation and rational worldview produced energetic approaches to complex problems and made Participant 4 a go-to person for difficult tasks. The mentoring relationships were catalyzing as they helped Participant 4 stay connected with his bosses in a rational sense and allowed the actions to produce results in ways that his bosses could articulate their positions through the chain of command. This appeared to Participant 4 to be the preferred way of doing business, and expressed discomfort over the fact that the overall work environment (expressed as the "twelve years at war") inhibited similar development among other colonels.

## Participant 6

### Participant 6's Background and Life History

Participant 6 is a simulation operations (functional area 57, or "FA57") officer whose career largely followed the *two-phase specialty-track model*, whereby the officer followed a standard career path in one of the traditional branches (aviation, in Participant 6's case) through company command or up to junior major, then is selected for entry into a specialty area (e.g., simulation operations) and thereafter takes assignments mainly within that specialty, albeit in Participant 6's case there was variance in this regard. While

an aviation officer, Participant 6 followed the common career path with steady increases in scope of duties and responsibilities through assignment as company commander and subsequent service as assistant battalion S3 before rebranching as FA57. After earning an advanced degree, Participant 6's career as simulations officer similarly followed a steady progression of increased scope of duties and responsibilities but with broadening assignments in the human resource management field and as chief of training in an army service component command. Participant 6 was serving as deputy director of a simulation directorate in the aviation 'Center of Excellence' (organization that manages knowledge, doctrine, training, and other institutional functions within a specific domain of knowledge associated with a branch) in December 2011 when notified of selection for promotion to colonel, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through December 2011, Participant 6 recounted six defining role change episodes: (1) decision to rebranch after company command, (2) attendance in graduate school, (3) initial assignment in utilization tour as FA57, (4) service as assignments officer for FA57, (5) service with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency, and (6) service at the Army Aviation Center of Excellence. Participant 6's initial professional experiences as an aviation officer, particular as a platoon leader, were positive through a supportive squadron commander who supported Participant 6 after a range fire incident and good relationships with the warrant officers in the company, although noting counseling received about keep those relationships appropriately professional. However, in a subsequent assignment overseas, Participant 6 had the opposite experience, facing toxic leadership amidst a time when the Army was drawing down and fellow junior officers were leaving the service. Participant 6 interviewed for a civilian job, but this actually reinforced the love of the

Army, of "being a leader," and "being in charge." At the time, Participant 6 had not served as company commander, a job Participant 6 coveted. Company command proved a more positive experience due to having a different battalion commander with whom a better relationship grew.

Although Participant 6 had a long-standing goal of pursuing an advance degree, it was in business and finance, not modeling and simulation. The latter occurred because that was the only available option offered by the Army, and Participant 6 had no experience and questionable interest. FA57 was a new specialty branch and simulations centers were growing or being founded in various places in the Army, but the Army had not yet developed its own indigenous simulations training capability (Participant 6 attended a Navy program). Consequently, as Participant 6 moved on to FA57 assignments, a critical coping resource was mentorship by supervisors who provided Participant 6 was key opportunities to apply modeling and simulation in new and untested situations and help define the role of an FA57 in the Army.

This became a resonant theme when Participant 6 was assigned as an FA57 in a division preparing for combat, as duties and responsibilities of FA57s in the institutional Army were well-defined, but the roles within traditional fighting units were not, particularly in a combat zone. "Now we had to figure out, 'What does a 57 do downrange?'" Through discussion with the division G-3 (operations), Participant 6 took on the role of running the Division Tactical Command Post (DTAC), a responsibility that ordinarily catered more to Participant 6's aviation background but afforded an opportunity to introduce modeling & simulation capabilities to division operations when appropriate. Participant 6 also had a role in building wooden mock-ups of vehicles integrated with

various virtual and constructive simulation training tools to aid in convey training at a time when combat convoys were facing the increasing threat of improvised explosive devices. In discussing the struggles that FA57 had in defining its institutional role amidst the long-term Army commitment to combat operations, Participant 6 relayed his stance as, "There was so much discussion about what a 57 should do. I just said, 'Guys, you need to get over it. You need to do whatever the boss needs and quit worrying about what your specialty says you're supposed to be doing."

Opportunities to define roles permeated subsequent assignments. Participant 6's duty as functional area assignments officer catered to an affinity for solving the difficult problems of finding suitable and satisfying assignments for the FA57 officers while also managing the need to share the deployment load. The following assignment to the Defense Threat Reduction Agency provided an opportunity to become involved with creating a new modeling and simulation division, and therein provided needed leadership to a team of engineers and scientists. By the time of eligibility for promotion to colonel, Participant 6 had moved to the Aviation Center of Excellence where both aviation and simulation operations expertise could be put to use.

Participant 6's self-assessment in December 2011 was as an officer confident in professional capabilities, in leading, and with people skills.

**Textural Description of the Participant 6's Experience**

Participant 6's identity construction experience included four phases. The first began around December 2011 upon notification of selection for promotion to colonel and went through to the summer of 2012 upon departure from assignment at Fort Rucker. The second episode was a one-year assignment to an army service component command as

chief of a training division, during which time Participant 6 pinned on the rank of colonel and was notified of selection to senior service college. Phase three was attendance at the U.S. Army War College resident program which ran from August 2013 through June 2014. The fourth episode was the initial follow-on assignment as director of one of the Army's simulation centers.

At the time of selection for promotion, Participant 6 saw being a senior leader as one "able to discern between the strategic level and the tactical level," and that Participant 6's focus had been almost exclusively at tactical and operational levels to that point. Prior to promotion, Participant 6's supervisor gave counseling on the future, recounted as follows:

> He said, "What got you to this point isn't what we need from you from this point forward." Meaning, you're being rewarded for how well you did in the tactical and operational domains. … You've probably managed some projects or whatever, but now you have to think strategically on guiding longevity, big organizations, visions, and how you will steer the organization from the top level versus getting day-to-day business done and being rewarded for that.
>
> He also mentored me on the rank of colonel. He says, "People are going to look at you differently as a colonel than they did as a lieutenant colonel." You don't realize that until you get promoted.

Participant 6 also reported "paying more attention to the colonel level and above" during the remaining time in the assignment. "I wanted to pick out good examples, reach out to peers, … the people I thought really nailed what it was to be a strategic leader." However, as Participant 6 had come out as an alternate on the senior service college list

and not a primary, selection for promotion drove the Army's human resource apparatus to order a move.

In the second phase at the army service component command, Participant 6 took on a colonel's position, subsequently pinning on colonel a couple months later. In the initial phases, Participant 6 felt underutilized as the duties and responsibilities were not scoped to those expected of a colonel, and instead felt like a job appropriate for a lieutenant colonel. Consequently, Participant 6 took on the initiative of finding tasks and missions that were more challenging and identifying the "shakers and movers" within the organization to build the type of networks of which Participant 6 was accustomed. One peer was noted for being "very energetic, visionary" and together they collaborated on a major exercise where Participant 6's role was significant and outside of specialty. The experience was strongly positive, with the primary lesson learned acclimating to an environment of working directly for general officers as a member of a team of peers, guiding senior leader decision making, and working in joint, defense, and interagency arenas.

It was immediately before the exercise that Participant 6 was notified of primary selection for senior service college and therefore moved on to the Army War College in the summer of 2013. Upon the news, Participant 6 was energized "that the Army was going to invest in me to understand [senior leadership] from what the Army sees versus what I was thinking what strategic leaders should be." This statement was commensurate with Participant 6's early experiences in the academic environment learning about being "stuck" in the tactical and operational-level mindset. "I thought I understood being a strategic leader better than I realized when school started. … It really enlightened me a little bit … that I wasn't as close to being one as I thought I was." Participant 6 credited

the adult learning environment, the diverse make-up of the seminar, and "80%" of the guest lecturers in helping shape understand of being a senior leader. Participant 6 was less enamored with some of the academic writing requirements as they conflicted with the kinds of writing projects for general officers that senior leaders would do in the field, and felt that academic-style papers had little chance of being read and therefore less chance of making an impact on the force.

Some of the events in the second half of the War College were also formative. During the Washington DC staff ride, Participant 6 was struck by the relative "disconnect" between Congress and the military and what it meant to communicate with civilian leaders as a senior military officer:

> It was interesting to note the level of understanding of various congresspeople dependent upon the financial relevance to their district and their political party. You go into that environment thinking you're able to talk to any member of Congress about the value and importance of military service, not to the Army, and what we do and our capabilities in accordance... And there's just really a political vibe in it and a disconnect there with what we do and value, and how we have to operate. …
>
> You have a perspective of how it is on Capitol Hill, and then when you see it for real, it really takes you back – messaging and influence with Congress to get our message across of what we do and how they understand and see things.

The final event at the War College, the National Security Seminar, was also formative as Participant 6 enjoyed the opportunity to "reconnect with America. With such a small percentage of our population serving in our military, the ability to hear … how they view the military and to interact with them … was very enlightening." Participant 6

reported approaching graduation feeling "energized" and "refreshed, recharged, ready to go."

Reporting to the present assignment, Participant 6 had a highly effective transfer of authority with the predecessor that included updates on all major activities and projects. The biggest challenge that Participant 6 faced in adjusting to the new role was the situation of having "colonels working for colonels," meaning that Participant 6 had direct reports of the same rank and there relied on positional authority. Participant 6's assessment was of handling it well, but that it was a situation not previously experienced, noting that it was rare for majors to work for majors or lieutenant colonels to work for lieutenant colonels. The organization was also civilian-heavy and had no enlisted personnel which also was different from Participant 6's experience.

The greatest challenge for Participant 6 in the present assignment related to the "level of bureaucracy at this level" which meant:

> How little time we take as senior leaders to reflect, engage in open dialogue, and discussion about where we want to go. … It seems like we spent so much time in the now and so little looking to the future. … I think so much of my time is spent as an extension … of the staff of my next-level [general officer].

At the time of the interviews, Participant 6 was still at the point of understanding how the organization functions and making steady progress on the organization's strategic plan. Participant 6's assessment of the experience was that the meaning of a senior military leader had evolved slightly to being "a leader able to influence a large organization internally and externally towards goals and visions that you set for the organization" and to changing the culture to align with the needs of the environment. The self-assessment in

relation to that definition included committing both personal and organizational effort toward a long-term vision while recognizing the energy required addressing here-and-now requirements. Participant 6 emphasizes similar sentiment when addressing implications for the Army, that senior leaders needed to "think about cultural change," which included re-thinking how the Army chooses senior leaders. "I don't think they necessarily only come from infantry and armor branches. … [O]ur focus right now is to do a better job on talent management and identify the up-and-coming strategic leaders."

**Structural Description of Participant 6's Experience**

There were three structures to Participant 6's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader, and each were evident in earlier role changes. The first two are distinct but closely connected, these were a *practical orientation* and *idiosyncrasy*. There was significant evidence throughout the experience to suggest a willingness to move outside the mainstream or take stances contrary to perceived organizational norms while focusing those efforts and energies toward tangible solutions to problems, particularly in defining both the self-concept and preferred work identities where there was a void. Together, these contributed to a response to underutilization that included redefining work to suit one's self-concept of budding senior leader, and to find a project with which to pursue that self-concept to practical benefit for the organization. Similarly, these structures arise in Participant 6's discomfort with bureaucracy and preference for exercising vision and initiative, which was equated to development from tactical and operational orientation to the strategic. These structures could also be seen in previous episodes of defining the role of FA57s in a combat environment and in taking jobs outside the specialty when needed by the organization.

The third structure was *social learning*. In addition to the regular emphasis Participant 6 placed on network building, the accomplishments were often expressed in terms of how received by others, in essence demonstrating that Participant 6 is a social learner. While many of Participant 6's vignettes included solo efforts, they were defined, implemented, and assessed through the eyes of teammates or customers. Mentoring relationships, such as the supervisor offering advice on becoming a colonel during the first phase and the strong transfer of authority in the fourth, were particularly important. Meanwhile, Participant 6's past rebuke to the FA57 branch on defining its combat role was another example of social learning as Participant 6 injected into a broad conversation concerning the direction the branch was taking.

All three structures came into play during Participant 6's concluding assessment of the identity construction experience, particularly in comments directed to the Army about talent management and professional military education. Participant 6 felt that the functional area branches were underrepresented in considerations for senior leadership, with too many coming from the traditional infantry and armor branches – a view that incorporates an idiosyncratic view of the preferred work identities of senior leaders, a practical view of the value of functional area expertise. Meanwhile, the structure of social learning was present in Participant 6's belief that Army senior leaders should attend the resident War College program at Carlisle over the War College Fellowships that provided equivalent professional certification in other venues. Contrary to the supposed prevailing view that Fellowships were being considered more professionally rewarding and coveted amount peers, Participant 6's view was that the fellowships did not provide the opportunity to develop the relationships required for senior military leaders to operate effectively.

## Participant 7

### Participant 7's Background and Life History

Participant 7 is an infantry officer whose career largely followed the *single-track model*, serving as commander and staff officer of infantry units at several echelons, the last being as deputy G3 of an armored division. Broadening assignments were generally within the infantry branch, with two tours as observer/controller at the National Training Center, Fort Irwin, CA and as the "senior command" G3 which was a dual-hatted position while also serving as the armored division deputy G3. As senior command G3, Participant 7 responsible for the integration of the division relocated to a new home base under direction from the Army. Participant 7 also served as commander of a recruiting company in addition to command of a rifle company in the 1st Cavalry Division. Participant 7 was in garrison G-3 capacity in July 2011 when notified of selection for promotion to colonel, which served as the triggering event for the study.

Through July 2011, Participant 7 identified several defining role change episodes, of which the following had the greatest impact on identity construction: (1) entry-level schooling as a lieutenant and quick deployment to the Gulf War, (2) reassignment to support platoon leader, (3) recruiting company command, (4) rifle company command, (5) division training officer in Germany, and (6) senior command G3. Each of these role changes presented overall steady increases in the scope of duties and responsibilities, with commensurate growth of peer networks and relationships. At entry level, Participant 7's conception of an officer was one who led "from the front, … setting the example for everyone to follow," but mostly executing orders from above and not exercising much autonomy. Participant 7 self-concept largely aligned with this view, seeing self as one who

"was going to lead the 36 [Soldiers]" and as one who adhered to the Army values of integrity, character, and so on.

For the first assignment, Participant 7 reported to Fort Stewart as the division was in the middle of deploying for Desert Shield. Participant 7 would soon also deploy and take platoon leadership in theater. The platoon leader had been relieved and the platoon's equipment had not yet fully arrived. As platoon leader, Participant 7 "inculcated in that environment. … I started learning how to work with individuals who were much older than me and had more experience." Participant 7 also had to learn to distance self from the Soldiers, which was difficult "when living with them 24/7." This arose out of the growing denial among the Soldiers while waiting for orders to move, "living out of the back of a Bradley for seven months … in the Saudi Arabian desert" necessitating the need to remind the unit of the need to stay ready. However, Participant 7's perspectives on non-commissioned officers were "tainted" through the need to fire the platoon sergeant and seeing how other NCOs in the squadron were "causing numerous issues in the platoon."

After combat operations concluded and the unit redeployed, Participant 7 remained platoon leader for a period of time, noting that the garrison environment was markedly different. One contrast regarded how good field Soldiers could become "bad garrison Soldiers," which Participant 7 did not accept and did not agree with others underwriting bad Soldier behavior based on success in combat.

The next significant role change was as support platoon leader, which Participant 7 noted was leadership of a much larger unit with a more diverse mission, including transporters and cooks who were "all great Soldiers, different mindsets, and different responsibilities to the Army." Leading them required "a different mindset" than that of

leading infantryman, as the support Soldiers might not respond to the same "'hooah, hooah' type mentality." Additionally, as support platoon leader, Participant 7 was dealing at an "operational" level through the execution of decisions that affected other support units in the division.

As Participant 7 took on the role of recruiting company commander, the dispersion of operations across a 350-mile radius and no turnover with the previous company command suggested a need to "loosen the strings" and taking on a decentralized approach. Participant 7 found this difficult. Self-described as an "ultra Type-A" personality "in terms of controlling" and still carrying the negative experiences of NCOs from the Gulf War, Participant 7 showed great anxiety. "Holy Crap, this is going to really suck." The fact that the recruiters were constantly gone and could not be easily reached meant Participant 7 "had to trust that they're doing the right thing." However, Participant 7 was concerned about the lack of cohesion, "I showed up and everybody was about themselves." Recruiters were not sharing contacts with each other and consequently opportunities were being missed. Participant 7 believe this resulted to reduced overall numbers of recruits. Reorienting the environment to emphasize team success improved morale and led to the company achieving the top rating in the battalion.

On the other hand, Participant 7 felt that the battalion "leadership wasn't always trusting us," experiencing micromanaging behavior from above. Also, higher headquarters' focus was always on the short term. Participant 7 described their message as, "What have you done for me lately? I got that you were number one company last month but this is the first day of the new month, so how come we don't have anyone in our Army?" The distance to headquarters provided a situational buffer zone. "I was never able to

overcome it. … [But,] you could only get chewed out so much over the phone because they were 250 miles [away]."

The experience of recruiting command would change Participant 7's view of noncommissioned officers and increase the level of trust placed in others. This became important in the role change to second company command, of a traditional rifle company. For the first time, Participant 7 was leading other officers "and so now I had a responsibility to develop the future officer corps, that I had never had before." Through self-reflection, Participant 7 took on this responsibility by "look[ing] at how I was shaped, and what was good, what was bad about that, and how do I take the good and discard the bad." Participant 7 therefore systematized the integration of new lieutenants into the company through professional and social events. Participant 7 considered it successful given that several of the lieutenants stayed in the Army and launched successful careers of their own.

The next significant role change occurred after completing the key developmental roles of battalion S-3 and executive officer and reassignment as the division training officer of an armored division in Germany. Important differences in the environment included the "span of interaction" that included the joint training center in Germany and a U.S.-based corps headquarters preparing to deploy to combat. Participant 7 also had to brief and advise generals, as opposed to roles as captains or lieutenants whose general officer interactions were limited to escorting.

Beyond briefing and advising, however, Participant 7 learned the importance of "shaping" what general officers thought. In one instance, a general officer wanted the terrain at the training center altered to force units to do river crossings out of a conviction that this was going to be important in an upcoming combat deployment. Participant 7

described the approach as, “Just being able to understand why he thought that, and then kind of make the cogent argument of why we only have so much that we can do, why ‘that’ probably isn’t as important as ‘this.’” In similar fashion, Participant 7 addressed concerns of another general officer who wanted quality convoy training but was against doing anything off-post “on the German economy,” whereas the training community wanted to use an autobahn rest stop as an improvised explosive device site with an ambush to reinforce how “security is important in all places.” By empathizing with the general’s perspective, Participant 7 was able to convince him why this course of action was beneficial, and the off-post event proceeded.

The final major role change episode came as Participant 7 left squadron command and was assigned as the deputy senior mission G3 at a U.S. installation that was in the process of rapid growth in preparation for welcoming an armored division relocating out of Europe. What was beforehand a small training post for the air defense artillery was significant changing. The armored division’s leadership determined that the division staff could not handle both the internal responsibilities of running the division plus coordinating of the installation activities needed to ensure the facilities and services were adequate and available. A “senior mission G3” position was created to take on these other roles.

“It was absolutely ill defined.” Participant 7 had to wrestle with clarifying the scope and responsibilities over the installation activities and reconciling the “terms of reference” with the division G3. On the installation side, “I was the guy … that was synchronizing, coordinating, and really had the authority over all of these entities, yet they didn’t formally work for me.” Participant 7 had to build consensus with the leadership of these other entities so that the division commander, in whose eyes Participant 7 was singularly

responsible for the installation activities, could issue taskings and trust that the work would be completed. "It was rough, that first few months."

Participant 7 would be in the position for about three months when the Army announced the selection list for colonel. At that point, Participant 7's self-concept as an officer was the following:

> I would say that my foundation has not changed in terms of what I thought an officer should be and do. … What I think an officer should do, by this time I had definitely transformed that thought into an officer as a… 'creative thinker'. Thinking out of the box to solve problems, number one. But really my big transformation as an officer has been I have now established in my mind that "Hey, you can't do everything on your own. Even though you're in charge doesn't mean… yes, you take charge but it doesn't mean you have to want that being in charge in people's faces type stuff." …. You're going to get more done … with honey than vinegar. So you've got to [know how to] Rheostat your leadership style. You had to understand your audience to be able to adjust your leadership style to that audience. …

**Textural Description of Participant 7's Experience**

Participant 7's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began around July 2011 upon notification of selection for promotion to colonel and went through to the summer of 2012 upon departure from the division G3 assignment. Participant 7 was notified of senior service college selection around July 2011 and was promoted in March 2012, therefore serving the final four months in this assignment as a promoted colonel. The second phase was attendance at the U.S. Army War College resident program which ran from August 2012 through June 2013. The third phase was initial follow-on assignment as the military deputy to the director of an activity within an

Army major command. In July 2011, Participant 7's conception of being a senior leader was properly conferred at two-star general officer and above, "I didn't consider Colonel at the time a senior officer." Participant 7 saw senior leaders as "visionaries … as guys who kind of set the tone, gave you their vision and then let you run with it, so innovative, … initiating change … not worrying about the details."

Participant 7's reaction to the selection was both happy but anxious. "'Holy macron, I'm a Colonel now.' … As I look at colonels, those are the old guys who run and they have all this wisdom. They impart this wisdom on people and overseeing all these other folks and it's kind of like, 'I hope I can carry this torch.'" Reactions from peers and family were prideful and congratulatory, but not one of surprise despite the lowered promotion rates that year.

During the remaining months as senior mission command G3, Participant 7 noted no difference in role change or relationships within the organization, even after being promoted. "My interactions with people … were the same. … They had already been very open to discussions, courses of action, my opinions, my recommendations. The mutual respect was there." However, there was a change external to the organization after pinning on colonel. They "were much more responsive than they had been before. Not that they weren't responsive but when you call, it's a colonel. … People just pop a little quicker." Still, Participant 7's self-concept remained unchanged through this period.

Expectations going into the War College was the ability to "sit back and reflect on some things and then really expand your knowledge of the profession." The experience of joining the seminar was:

> So my first few months - going to the War College is almost like going … whenever you get a group of peers together and you stick them in a classroom environment it's almost like everybody reverses back to their Lieutenant days. It's grab-ass type stuff; it's buddies that's joking around. It's not a room of intellectual senior managers that are … that you would think a bunch of Colonels - you know this - a bunch of Colonels who are all deep thinking every minute of the day. It was a great experience. Good camaraderie, good team building.

Relationship building was reinforced during one guest lecture, a three-star general officer who talked how "at this level, it's all about relationships. It's amazing. You've got to build consensus. … You've got to identify your stakeholders. … You've got to get to the 'yes.'" Reflecting on the meaning of this, Participant 7 that, "it resonates more even now as I see how things work when we work with [the Department of the Army]." Participant 7 also noted lessons learned on "interpersonal skills, … critical and creative thinking, … [Y]ou've got to understand your perspective when you're dealing with senior leaders, so you understand your biases." Participant 7 came to understand a difference between the lieutenant colonel role and that of a colonel as shifting from "getting things done" to "consensus and looking at the broader picture."

Another formative experience came during the Washington DC staff ride, when meeting with one Congressman began with a call to, "Speak truth to power." The Congressman explained that there were issues with military officers telling the uncomfortable truth to their leaders, "and that's something that as a leader you need to do." Participant 7 interpreted this as ensuring senior leaders understood the "second and third-order effects" of decisions, and that from the Congressman's perspective, the Army does not do this well. "We go with the flow rather than tell them 'the power' is wrong."

On the other hand, another engagement in Congress engendered the opposite reaction, that "some people who are in Congress aren't thinking very strategically," which generated from comments demonstrating a lack of understanding of the military organization and culture. "This is a [Congressman] who is making decision for our nation, … and [the Congressman] has that kind of perspective. It's just amazing." The takeaway for Participant 7 was that "you've got to watch what you say. … You can't say things like that when you get to that level. … A lieutenant saying that or a private saying that is a heck of a lot different than a colonel saying that."

It was in December that Participant 7 was informed of the follow-on assignment. Having "been operational my entire career … division and below," Participant 7 identified a need to become more familiar with acquisition and subsequently took an acquisition elective. "I need to worry about capabilities, requirements." Also, Participant 7 learned that the military deputy position was new, as the gaining commander had a senior civilian as deputy.

Thus, the experience of becoming the military deputy was defining roles and responsibilities and establishing "terms of reference" with the civilian deputy. The following experience regarding manning exemplified the negotiation of the role, which Participant 7 described as "not that hard."

> So in terms of manning my initial take was military manning I'm going to be all involved in, the civilian deputy [will] be doing the civilian type management and evaluation, I'll be doing the military ones. We all come to find out that we had to talk through that because it didn't really make sense for me to be involved in the military manning. The reason being is the continuity really lies with the guy who has been here 15 years.

Participant 7's role in managing external contacts of the organization on behalf of the director was "a little more difficult." As a comparatively junior colonel in the organization, Participant 7 had to build consensus with other colonels with more experience while having to explain the new role. "People are used to dealing with the civilians, … and now there's this [military deputy] coming and taking over, so who do we respond to?"

> What I had to do there was I had to get on the phone and open lines of communications and it started with just contacting them, finding what their issues are, build those relationships, and now they're comfortable coming to me and building their trust that I'm going to make things happen when they have issues. Those are the things I had to work through at that point.

A vignette exemplifying how Participant 7 built this trust came about as a result of a pending Army decision to cut funding for a program, but the activity responsible for the program was in the dark and not getting information. "So I had to call and I had to talk to them, talk them off the ledge on what was really going on and that we were going to help them. … 'What they were getting was, 'Hey, you're getting cut.'… No rhyme or reason." Participant 7 responded by opening lines of communication with capability managers and others to help seek a compromise or alternative solution and allowed inputs from the affected activity.

Participant 7's self-concept throughout this assignment was little changed from before and reinforced previous views about the role change to senior leadership.

> I know everybody believes Colonels are all doing all this strategic team leadership stuff, but I'll tell you a lot of my day is spent synchronizing efforts, manipulating calendars, making sure schedules are correct, getting people together, holding meetings to move forward on things that are more of the same type of stuff that I was doing as an S3. It's amazing the scope

> that you have. On one side you're dealing with [Department of the Army] on funding for a program, one side you're dealing [with a program manager] in terms of capability development, why we need concurrency on something, versus why we don't need concurrency and how that affects the entire product line.

However, there was also some frustration regarding the types of work that Participant 7 expected to be doing coming out of the War College.

> Every day I think, "Man, I signed up to be a Colonel and still do this nug work," but it is what it is. I do think that quite often. It probably goes back to what I just said but most of us are programed in a way of, "Okay, got it. Get over it. You can't freaking roll up your sleeves and wring your hands. I've got it, you're a Colonel, you're doing slides. Get over it, get it done." …
>
> I would love to have the time to go and sit back and pontificate and think, what were we talking about … deep thinking; I'm thinking that you guys are actually executing, but I'm thinking. But I have yet to run into a lot of Colonels, at least that I deal with and maybe that's because we're a bunch of extended staff officers who have the opportunity to do that. Most of them are guys who are down in the weeds.

At the end of the experience, Participant 7 differentiated the role of senior leader from the role of 'colonel,' the latter of which had evolved in the following way.

> I see Colonels as people who are making things happen at a higher level, who are helping mentor and develop junior officers at the Lieutenant Colonel level and Major level more because of their experiences, but then most of them are still ACTOs who have the responsibility though because of their position. The truth to power; to take that forward. … [Y]ou have more leverage with the senior leaders than you did at the lower ranks, so it's

> your responsibility to bring those items forward when the emperor has no clothes. …
>
> I really see that dealing with peer, near peer, and even leading or interacting with seniors, you really have… it's all about building consensus through relationships in order to influence the people to get at what needs to be done. You can't do it all on your own. When you're [at the unit level], … you've got pretty much your microcosm of a world that you are directing, but here at the higher levels, … you always have to take the stakeholders and [other] consequences into consideration before you do something.

**Structural Description of the Participant 7's Experience**

Three were three structures to Participant 7's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change, which from Participant 7's perspective was defined as from mid-career lieutenant colonel to colonel. Both were evident in the life history.

The first structure was *purposeful engagement.* Participant 7 described the experience throughout in terms of relationships with others, from the consensus building as senior mission G3 to the major takeaways from the War College and finally to the formation of a new role through negotiation with others. The vignettes of the experience demonstrated that these relationships were purposeful, and that engaging in them served a particular need even if the purpose was to build a bridge to be used later. Purposeful engagement was also evident throughout the life history, as many episodes were contextualized in the human dimension from the experiences in the desert to team building in the recruiting command and consensus building as a division staff officer. This established a pattern by which Participant 7's self-concept as a socially-oriented professional transcended the present experience well aligned with the espoused value of a consensus builder as expressed in the War College lecture. It resonated with Participant 7

because it was already embedded, exemplifying an experience that was positive from an identity construction standpoint.

The second structure was *action orientation*. Throughout the experience, Participant 7 noted an affinity for or tendency to act. The self-described "ultra-Type A" brought energy to the purposeful engagement to force action and achieved outcomes, essentially carrying forward much of the mid-career persona from being in a division G3. Thus despite expressing disappointment with the 'action officer' orientation that remained in the current experience, there was a willingness to subordinate an acquired self-concept of wanting to exercise strategic thinking in favor of "get[ting] over it" and getting the task done. Thus, the identity construction outcomes of this structure were negative. This contrasted with the action orientation within the life history, as there were numerous episodes and vignettes of successful task completion that were positive and indicated a thriving self-concept.

The third structure, which connected the first two, was *a strong sense of self*. Action orientation alone did not explain the resilience of Participant 7's self-concept during the present experience, whereby the new circumstances and complexity of peer networks could have spurred identity work. Instead, Participant 7 drew back from the experiences of senior mission command G3 to shape the approach to defining a new position and commensurate new relationships with the organization. That is, in both the first and third phases, Participant 7 transformed the work environment with only marginal adjustment to the self-concept regarding strategic thinking, which was imbued in the War College phase but ultimately set aside. The strong sense of self was also key in conducting purposeful engagement, as there were numerous references throughout the experience to having to

build trust. With the action orientation, Participant 7 built trust by demonstrating the value of relationships through action, such as the handling of the proponent of a program facing budget cuts. With a strong sense of self, Participant 7 was able to inject self into the situation, get people talking, and bring about a more constructive environment conducive to finding meaningful solutions.

## Participant 8

### Participant 8's Background and Life History

Participant 8 is a space operations (functional area 40, or FA40) officer whose career generally followed the *two-phase specialty-track model*, whereby the officer followed the standard career path in one of the traditional branches (field artillery, in Participant 8's case) through company command or junior field grade, then is selected for entry into a specialty area (e.g., FA40) and thereafter takes assignments only within that specialty. Participant 8's assignment history as an FA40 had some variance outside or peripherally involving space operations. Participant 8 was serving in a geographic combatant command headquarters in November 2010 when notified of selection for promotion to colonel, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through November 2010, Participant 8 identified the following defining role change episodes: (1) initial assignment to Korea as platoon leader, (2) movement to brigade staff, (3) assignment after Captain's Career Course to an airborne artillery unit, (4) assignment to the aviation center to teach fire support, which included transition to FA40 (5) initial space operations assignment at Dahlgren, Virginia, (6) post-CGSC and SAMS

assignment to V Corps as space operations officer, (7) shift to corps deputy chief of plans, and (8) assignment as space operations branch chief in a combatant command.

The role changes while a field artillery officer followed a relatively consistent growth in scope of responsibilities, leading to largely positive outcomes in identity construction. The initial duty assignment to Korea included stints as maintenance officer, ammunition platoon leader, and firing platoon leader. In addition to the broadening experience of serving in multiple roles in a short time frame, Participant 8 found the experience interesting of working with the Korean Augmentees to the U.S. Army (KATUSAs, as they were known). KATUSAs were embedded in the U.S. units, allowing Participant 8 to gain "formative" experiences through "interaction and trust … with the foreign partner." The intensity of the North Korea situation also pervaded. "If the launcher went down on Christmas Eve we were working Christmas Eve and Christmas Day to get it back up. Everything over there had a time sensitive component to it, a criticality." Also, being a "single battalion on a single installation" provided a "great environment for the building of teamwork and trust" across the unit.

Subsequent reassignment to a stateside assignment to a field artillery brigade brought about a role change to brigade staff and an environment change to a big installation that was overcrowded due to Army-wide realignment that was on-going, with units moving on to post faster than leaving. Duties on brigade staff was "an expansion of responsibilities," and that serving as assistant brigade S-4 (logistics) and comptroller required a "whole new skill set." Participant 8 relayed a vignette about noting irregularities in the unit's fiscal report which ultimately led to the investigation and punitive action of installation personnel for fraud. "I was just the one that found the discrepancy, and so I

highlighted how I came about finding it and what I thought was wrong. And apparently they agree with me [Laughs]."

As the initial obligation period concluded, Participant 8 affirmed a commitment to continue service, and the next role change episode in the corps artillery at Fort Bragg largely confirmed the existing self-concept. The "immediacy of need and urgency of keeping equipment up" mirrored the Korean experience. Participant 8 also enjoyed the "deeper sense of camaraderie in the airborne unit" than seen in the previous assignment. On the other hand, Participant 8 served as brigade maintenance officer and brigade S-4 first and was developing a concern about being "pigeonholed" as a unit logistician, but subsequent movement to the battalion S-3 shop allayed that concern. It also "tracked me into command of a firing battery." With a successful command, Participant 8's self-concept leaving Fort Bragg was one of high confidence "in going on to even greater levels of responsibility and authority. … The Fort Bragg environment was not an easy one to succeed in. I guess I was proud of myself."

Subsequent assignment to Fort Rucker as a fire support instructor for the aviation school was enlightening for Participant 8, who taught both officer and warrant officer courses. In the latter case, Participant 8 remarked how different the warrant officer perspective was, such as the comparative lack of experience in understanding terms and symbols that commissioned officers learned during entry-level training. Upon discovering this, Participant 8 revamped the lesson plan and walked the warrants through the "basics" early on before getting them into "the graduate level coordination and maneuver of fires."

However, a turning point arose as Participant 8 reflected on the future in field artillery and drew the following conclusion that led to the transfer to space operations.

> I loved the artillery, but I looked at the – at the time I thought I was looking at the longer range piece, which was its physics, and physics isn't changing. So I successfully commanded a battery, but the weapon systems, while they may get newer, and they certainly have, and accuracy is improved, but the challenges, I didn't see that they were going to grow exponentially. So I looked at a career field that I thought was new and in cutting edge technology and would present new and different challenges.

Separately, Participant 8 was also caught up in the implementation of a new Officer Efficiency Report (OER). Whereas previous OERs under the old system were 'outstanding', the new OER found Participant 8 under a new senior rater who gave everyone a 'good' rating so to preserve 'outstanding' ratings for certain blocks of officers working key instructor positions. Participant 8 followed-up with the senior rater, but given the rationale said, "That was a significant professional development moment for me."

Participant 8's early experience as a new space operations officer was "Daunting." Dahlgren, Virginia was a navy base, and Participant 8 did not have the opportunity to attend schooling prior to reporting for duty. Instead, Dahlgren allowed Participant 8 to receive schooling on a temporary duty basis. Subsequently, Participant 8 worked up to crew commander at the base's space operations site, and was the crew commander for a significant national mission, one that the post had been wanting to run for years, according to Participant 8. "Which I found interesting as an Army [officer] in a Navy installation. … The first time they were allowed to [run the mission], I would have expected a Navy person to have the honor, but I got it." 9/11 also provided a formative experience as Participant 8 was sitting in the operations center as the events unfolded. "The experience opened my eyes a little bit to the need to think through reaction. … [The first response] was to clear the base of all people not considered essentially, and all that did was the roads up. … Man,

what a target that would be… ." Finally, Participant 8 had to contend with remote leadership as the Army boss was 2,000 miles away. Absent modern connectivity, the only solution was to spend a lot of time on the telephone.

Coupled with exposure to the sister services allowed Participant 8 to self-assess as "more rounded than I had been up to that point in my career." Also, the subsequent SAMS experience was highly beneficial, "an absolutely critical school for everything I've done since then. … I use it today."

Joining V Corps, Participant 8 found that the SAMS experience was more immediately applicable, and thus was assigned to the corps plans shop. FA40 work would be limited, especially as the corps' focus was on an upcoming deployment to Iraq and there was a six-month overlap with the incumbent FA40 on the staff. However, Participant 8 brushed this off, "What I found during that time and through, again, the time in Iraq, that if I excelled at what the boss needed done then I was afforded the opportunity to promote or inject space into operations. In other words, I gained 'street cred,' if you will." Indeed, as the deployment came nearer and the corps staff faced turnover in personnel, Participant 8 was working "five jobs," that helped build trust and gain access to the command group doing 'non-space' things. This became important in Iraq as the FA40 duties required Participant 8 to work with the interagency, e.g. agencies outside of the Department of Defense.

Another key lesson learned from this time and upon subsequent redeployment was the experience of working with U.S. Army Europe, whose involvement with V Corps while deployed was limited and who was still meeting service component command requirements from their higher, but which conflicted with the corps' priorities in theater. "When I was

actually in the last week in Iraq I'm getting e-mails from USAREUR tasking me to comment on their training plan. … 'I've got other things to do, guys!' [Laughs]" Upon reflection, however, Participant 8 had it "instilled in me the need that despite where you are or what you mission is you've always got to keep a glance out toward what's going on [elsewhere]."

Participant 8's subsequent experience in the geographic combatant command was similar, as the command needed someone to lead the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance team (ISR) more than a space operator. This duty position put Participant 8 outside of any expertise, either plans or space operations, yet it was "rewarding" because of the importance and high-priority of the ISR mission as Participant 8 saw in the Iraq experience and the exposure to higher interagency levels (the Deputies and Principals' Committees) than before. Participant 8 also faced a leadership challenge given little prior experience in ISR overseeing a team comprised of mainly air force reserve personnel who had been working these issues in an active duty status over the previous six years. Participant 8 quickly worked to flatten the learning curve, "The first thing I did was just start diving into everything I could read and get my hands on so that I had the skill sets necessary to make the right recommendations."

Participant 8's self-assessment as an officer as the promotion board results approached was as follows:

> I think at this time the experience I had prior I think set me up for success at CENTCOM. But then I was happy with the ability of self-improvement, to learn new mission areas and new capabilities and how to integrate them into a COCOM level fight. I wouldn't have thought I was capable of that ten years earlier. [Also during my early career,] I had a son and daughter

born, and the family's still doing well, so it's professionally rewarding to be able to balance your personal and professional life, in my opinion.

**Textural Description of Participant 8's Experience**

Participant 8's identity construction experience included four phases. The first began in November 2010 upon notification of selection for promotion to colonel and went through to the summer of 2011 upon departure from the assignment in a geographic combatant command. The second phase was two consecutive one-year tours -- as an assistant G-3 at an army service component command and as a policy analyst in the Office of the Secretary of Defense. It was during the latter assignment that selection for the War College occurred. The third phase was a student at the U.S. Army War College, joining the resident class of academic year 2014 from August 2013 to graduation in June 2014. The fourth phase was the initial follow-on assignment as a division chief at a functional combatant command. In the first phase, Participant 8's conception of being a senior leader was one able to inspire, shape organizations in response to the environment, and operate at the upper echelons of the government. Participant 8's self-concept was one that was not yet ready to operate smoothly at that level due to not yet having been "completely immersed" in it.

Participant 8 was surprised at selection, expecting to have been done at lieutenant colonel and considering the possibility of retiring at twenty years. Selection did not bring about much change as the job responsibilities and peer interactions were unchanged, and Participant 8 was already due to rotate during the summer.

It was during the second phase that the role change began to manifest itself, partly because promotion occurred between assignments. Participant 8 noted right away that

"being an O-6 seemed to carry a little more sway than I expected … . Got you into meetings, had conversations that were more frank … ." This became important as Participant 8 received taskings that required higher levels of coordination across activities (service, joint, and defense) or were special research projects from the commanding general. "Once you've proved yourself, you get greater and greater levels of responsibility. … I was proud that he had that amount of trust in me."

The assignment was only one year, however, because the colonel position in OSD became open and it was a priority fill, and Participant 8 had not yet been selected for the War College. The year in the Pentagon was also formative, as a significant policy project requiring extensive collaboration across departments and agencies exemplified the following lesson learned.

> [G]oing in I really didn't know how much impact someone could have on DoD or the military departments, from that level. It's just always a preconceived notion of bureaucracy, but I found that you could actually make a fairly near term impact, even if you're on OSD Policy staff. And that kind of goes hand in hand with how things were accomplished, and it's just amazing to me that there's some people in that building who spend their entire time there in a cubicle but if you want to get anything accomplished you've actually got to get up from your desk and get out and go visit the stakeholders for whatever issue you're working on and building relationships. You can't compete without doing that in that building. … I think it really solidified that regardless of what your basic branch is or your functional area you can succeed at a completely or fairly completely different set of paths and requirements if you've got the will to do so.

Participant 8 was also involved in the Defense Space Council, where "the vast majority of issues that came up were approached from a consensus building perspective

first, rather than a problem solving perspective." This "went hand-in-hand with relationship building" and required different communication skills.

At the War College, participant 8 enjoyed the seminar environment, citing its diversity of perspectives, "some who had never worked at the strategic level, others that had … our international officers were exceptional. … It just seemed like our seminar rapidly became a team." Some particular takeaways included the Washington DC staff ride that included Congressional visits, where it was found that the overall level of military knowledge was less than expected, and the Jim Thorpe Sports Day when Participant 8 was able to reunite with former colleagues attending the National War College. The latter reinforced how "the world gets smaller and smaller the longer you stay in and you keep running into the same people over and over again, which reinforces the need to build strong relationships."

The follow-on assignment was not determined until after graduation, and Participant 8 essentially had to find the job. Part of this stemmed from the very small pool of officers in the community and the smaller number of positions available, and "it just didn't seem to be a priority for SLD (the Army's human resources activity for senior officers) to find me a [non-space operations] job." A sudden departure of the incumbent within a combatant command allowed Participant 8 to take the current job, but there was very limited turnover.

Participant 8 remarked that the breadth of the command's mission was "amazing" and space is involved in all of it. However, because of the combatant command's complex organization, Participant 8's again dealing with remote leadership. However, the video-teleconferences involve a number of the same personnel Participant 8 worked with at OSD,

albeit two echelons lower, and working many of the same issues. This allowed Participant 8 to quickly become attuned to the responsibilities of the position and make an impact.

Participant 8 assessed that the role change to senior leader did not result in a change to the self-concept. While there was enhanced understanding and knowledge of strategic level issues, Participant 8 felt that the identity was comparatively unchanged. In giving advice for future senior leaders, Participant 8 stressed the importance of relationships, broadening one's scope outside defined roles, and "remain mindful of downstream effects or impacts from decisions you make." Self-development was also important. For the Army, Participant 8 suggested that broadening assignments at all levels of officership needed to be done earlier than the current career development plan allows.

**Structural Description of Participant 8's Experience**

Three were three structures to Participant 8's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader, each of these were exemplified in the lessons learned for budding senior leaders and were also evident in the life history. The first is *versatility*. Participant 8 was clearly not one to be defined by specialty code as evidenced by the various episodes throughout the career of working outside of specialty or adapting to new environments such as the two pre-War College jobs.

The second structure is strongly connected to the first, and that is a *strong sense of self*. Participant 8's identity was deeply resilient to all the changes of environment and pressures associated with what was a highly variant career pattern. Rather than subordinate the identity to the preferred one of the organization, Participant 8 was more inclined to transform the work environment to suit the self-concept, generally a consistent string of

positive outcomes while not requiring significant identity work. Self-development and self-reflection were resonant themes throughout the experience as well.

Underlying the other two structures was the *importance of relationships*. Relationship building was a central theme throughout the life history. The best example of its benefits was found when in the current assignment Participant 8 was immediately able to leverage existing relationships to reduce the learning curve of being in an unfamiliar organization, assigned last minute with significant influence from Participant 8, and with minimal turnover. In the final phase, this fact led Participant 8 to essentially thrive with little effort.

## Participant 9

### Participant 9's Background and Life History

Participant 9 is a strategic plans (functional area 59, or "FA59") officer whose career largely followed the *two-phase specialty-track model*, whereby the officer followed a standard career path in one of the traditional branches (armor, in Participant 9's case) through company command or up to junior major, then enters a specialty area (e.g., strategic plans) and thereafter takes assignments mainly within that specialty. However, Participant 9's assignment history included a *concentration in professional military education* serving as instructor and later a director in multiple military schools.

Participant 9 was prior enlisted before being commissioned through the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program. Once rebranching as an FA59, assignments were broad in the sense of including duties in institutional (e.g., instructor in a professional military education setting and the Combined Arms Center) and operational (e.g., a multinational corps and a joint headquarters, both in combat) organizations. Participant 9

was at serving as an instructor in January 2013 when notified of selection for senior service college attendance, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through January 2013, Participant 9 identified ten defining role change episodes: (1) career decision to enlist, (2) early commissioning in armor and immediate deployment as a lieutenant in the Gulf War, (3) attendance at the captain's course and subsequent assignment to teach at ROTC, (4) two consecutive company commands, (5) assignment to a concept development group in an Army battle lab, (6) promotion to field grade, (7) transition to FQ59 and assignment to a corps staff, (8) first combat assignment, (9) second instructor position, (10) combat assignment with a joint headquarters. While an armor officer, Participant 9 generally followed the standard career path with steady growth of duties and scope from through unit staff and company command, followed by a post-command broadening assignment in a battle lab. As an FA59, Participant 9 would alternate between field and schoolhouse assignments, with much of the field time on deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan serving in high level headquarters. The schoolhouse assignments followed a progression from instructor to director of a teaching department.

After enlisting and working up to noncommissioned officer, Participant 9 chose to become an officer after growing "a quick passion for the Army," noting affinities for the leading small teams, problem solving, and "an acumen for planning and organization" that suggested a future as an officer. In ROTC, Participant 9's enlisted experience was valuable in taking on a mentoring role for others, thereby receiving highly favorable peer review ratings. However, the same experience meant Participant 9 was commissioned early to a reserve unit and would be pulled from school to deploy to the Gulf War, and thus was sent to the officer basic course ahead of peers. A pattern would follow whereby Participant 9

was in situations of having practical experience through prior enlisted or reserve time but lacking technical skills, whereby being among lieutenant peers without the unit experience but with the technical skills. Participant 9 dealt with these situations through introspection, building relationships with the peers, and being willing to mentor and listen as the situation dictated. Participant 9 also cited supportive unit environments and leadership who were willing to underwrite mistakes, such as a "bad gunnery" that could have sunk the officer early on.

Sustained relationships were very helpful in many of Participant 9's early role change scenarios. Instances when relationships were difficult or slow to develop led to discomfort. One example was Participant 9's first company command when a desire for a "quick win" led to a poor decision that alienated the unit early, causing Participant 9 to devote a lot of energy "catching up." The command tour was ultimately successful, however, and Participant 9 was encouraged to take a second command.

A key mentoring relationship led to the decision to move to FA59. As Participant 9 moved up to the first corps staff assignment as a junior major, adherence to the armor branch career path meant completing a qualifying job such as battalion S3 or executive officer before progressing on. Participant 9 was surprised to find little interest in competing for those jobs, which were unit-level and heavily tactical and administrative in nature. Instead, the present duties of being a plans officer were more exciting. The corps G3 recognized this and encouraged Participant 9 to leave armor and pursue FA59 instead, where the skills and experience could be more beneficial to the Army. The switch was made, and Participant 9 quickly went to Iraq, citing that as the "most professionally rewarding time in my career." This was partly due to a strong desire not to be a "FOB-

bit," meaning a staff officer who willingly stays on the base doing administrative work and spending no time off-base gaining a first-hand perspective.

In the remaining assignments, Participant 9 would become a go-to person for new initiatives or by-name requested (i.e., asked of the human resources command by a general officer) to fill key billets, including Participant 9's second combat tour. A key theme in these later role change episodes and vignettes was "leading without authority," which Participant 9 described as "influenc[ing] peers, senior, to get them to do the things that needed to be done to synchronize." Duty as a subunit G3 in the Combined Arms Center exemplified this, as the G3 had to deal with "twelve major organizations with 10,000 people" yet was junior to and had no supervisory role over many counterparts in those organizations. Leading with authority became a resonant theme in a later phase when Participant 9 had to dual-hat as the unit's Chief of Staff with even greater responsibilities, and subsequently joining a joint headquarters in Afghanistan as the deputy J5 working plans with both service and coalition partners.

**Textural Description of Participant 9's Experience**

Participant 9's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began around January 2013 upon notification of selection for senior service college and went through to the summer of 2013 upon departure from assignment as a professional military education instructor. The second episode was attendance at the U.S. Army War College resident program which ran from August 2013 through June 2014, during which time Participant 9 was selected for promotion in October 2013 and pinned on the rank of colonel in March 2014. The third episode was the initial follow-on assignment as director of the same group that Participant 9 was serving in prior to the War College.

At the beginning of the experience, Participant 9's conception of senior military leadership was that colonels "run the Army on a day-to-day basis" and "it is that point that the Army says you are a senior leader and then they're investing you in that capacity." Selection for senior service college was a "humbling experience … recognizing what I'd done in the past, … that I still had what it took to take on increased levels of responsibility." As a PME instructor selected for higher PME, Participant 9 noted the strongly supportive reactions of the students, in addition to congratulations from peers and superiors.

Participant 9 noted the response from superiors and past senior mentors who sent congratulatory letters, e-mails, and phone calls. Several took the time to discuss the meaning of the selection for Participant 9's future. One general officer talked to Participant 9 about possible ideas for the strategy research project based on related schoolhouse requirements. Another talked about the switch from instructor to student. Both provided recommendations to Participant 9 on what to concentrate on, which included national security policy and strategy which Participant 9 had little direct experience. Participant 9 also reported "keenly watching both my friends who were full colonels and then general officer in general" to understand better "how they led in organizations, transparency, and all that," following such encounters with dialogue when possible to ask how the War College prepared them for such situations. Family considerations caused Participant 9 to attend the War College as a geographical bachelor.

The experience of the War College was initially "heady" as Participant 9 said of the first couple weeks, "Wow, I really am at Carlisle and I am that guy that people always talk about, there's a War College student." Also noted was how well the treatment was as a War College student whose "proven your mettle" vice being one of the "1,500 students

that plodding through" CGSC. In other areas, Participant 9 drew closer comparisons between the school environments, such as the seminars being comprised of a diverse mix of other services and agencies, plus Defense and non-Defense civilians. Participant 9 described how many of the students saw familiar faces among the class, and through the "six degrees of separation … we rapidly gained a pretty solid social network." This carried on through a very active social agenda that included programmed War College activities such as the annual "Boatyard Wars" at the inaugural picnic and the softball competition, but also get-togethers and family events outside. The learning environment was also very strong, according to Participant 9, with lively but respectful discussions. Participant 9 also cited the direct in-class and out-of-class social involvement of the entire faculty instructor team "contributing outside of their departmental responsibilities. … It kind of showed a different level of commitment to us as well."

A negative experience for Participant 9 regarded the impacts of changes to the curriculum made during that academic year to strengthen academic rigor, which led to mixed messaging over the way students would use their time. "I was a geo bachelor and there were nights that I was up till 10 or 11 reading, and I was not screwing off." Similar challenges arose in the writing requirements, which some seminar mates struggled with, so Participant 9 and the seminar worked as a group to internally distribute the reading load and review each other's course paper drafts while staying within the bounds of academic ethics.

Participant 9 recounted a number of formative experiences going through the early core curriculum that helped develop a self-concept as a senior leader. Examples included studies of leading change in organizations that spurred self-reflection on prior change

efforts where Participant 9 was involved; theories of war and strategy which included similar seminal works as CGSC (e.g., Clausewitz), but was being presented through a different 'strategic' lens vice the operational lens; and the course on national security policy and strategy which elevated Participant 9's thinking above the tactical and operational levels. This was not difficult as Participant 9 already had multinational and joint experience, but the lessons of "being comfortable with ambiguity" help shift the "mental focus to why things occurred instead of how to make them work or occur."

On the other hand, Participant 9 recounted the following experience during the Washington DC staff ride when meeting with non-Defense officials and agencies. "It reinforced some view I already held about our senior civilian leaders. … Even though they say great things on TV, it's kind of a platitude and we were patronized, in a way." However, reflecting on the encounter, Participant 9 reconsidered, "What that really told me was … if I'm going to be in that realm it's incumbent upon me to bridge that civil/military relations gap. … That kind of jolted me back that maybe I could be perceived as part of the problem. … So I took that on as a new responsibility."

Participant 9's selection for promotion and pin-in ceremony both occurred within the War College year. While both were exhilarating, both events were only reinforcing to Participant 9's on-going experience. Reflecting on graduation from the War College and preparing for the follow-on assignment, Participant 9 said:

> I now realized that we always talk about the 'we' and 'they', and now I was the they or them, and that okay, I had this year of schooling, and just as when you were – we talked earlier about me being a res[ident] graduate from CGSC and kind of an already high expectation coming in but also a different level of trust, here you go, you're a res[ident] guy. Same thing

> coming out of the Army War College. … I was prepared from an educational standpoint to go and assume this mantle that I had been offered.
>
> The flipside of that was now I knew that the expectations of me were significantly higher, and so there was a little bit of self-inflicted pressure put on me. Because whether the institution was exerting that pressure or I perceived it, there was a little bit of okay, now it's time. You've had your chance to reflect, you've had your year, it's time to perform. And that was okay. I mean that's part of the fray. But you need to just get out there and get after it. And as I've found coming into this current position, all that confidence came back again because I realized I was pretty well prepared.

Because Participant 9 was returning to a familiar work environment, albeit in a higher capacity, the transition to the follow-on assignment was smooth. Participant 9 leveraged long-standing friendships and relationships with the predecessor who was stepping down and the civilian deputy director who Participant 9 had previous worked for but who was all too willing to accommodate the reverse supervisory relationship. Key for Participant 9 was the tone-setting actions of the predecessor who engaged the department and made the transfer of authority well-understood and seamless. Participant 9 reported that this flattened the learning curve, and thus avoided making "a bunch of wholesale leadership changes early on." However, Participant 9 did feel the pressure of high expectations because of being familiar with the environment.

Participant 9 noted significant two events, both unfortunate, which proved to be important developmental experiences. One was an ethical violation of the Army computer policy over e-mail, which spurred Participant 9's immediate action to shut down the e-mail thread and hold the perpetrators accountable. This turned a negative event into a positive through, as Participant 9 described, "(a) asserting myself as a leader, and (b) a standards-

based approach. … I didn't hammer so their careers would be over, because I wanted them to recognize it's okay to make mistakes, … because I'd been the beneficiary of that many times."

The second event was a death within the department after a member succumbed to a long battle with cancer. "It gave me a chance to show how I would empower people and espouse some mission command – a little bit of trust here and there." Participant 9 was *en route* to the hospital when the patient passed away. While staying with the grieving family, Participant 9 recounted the steps taken by the department to energize the casualty assistance effort and lend support. In retrospect, Participant 9 described the response as "foundational." "How we handled that whole episode, because now the department – it's like a death in combat. Everybody knows the person, it affects them." Ultimately, it became a positive growth experience for team as it showed "how we as a team were compassionate and we took care of each other, how I empowered people."

Externally to the department, Participant 9 found the terrain more difficult to cross. With about a dozen peers in the school organization, Participant 9 expected more collegiality and empowerment. Parochial interests should have been set aside for the benefit of the school. Unfortunately, the opposite was more the case, "and so I found myself having to go back to that 'influence without authority' kind of thing of how do I shape events to support change." Participant 9 worked through these issues by identifying those among the peers who were perceived to be 'team players' and "used that as a catalyst to try and effect change." The parochial interests have, however, remained difficult to overcome. Participant 9 also found a different relationship with superiors. Whereas in several earlier assignments, Participant 9 was the go-to and had close personal interaction,

the present position created a more distant relationship which was found to be "refreshing" for the autonomy and trust granted to guide the department in a desired direction.

Participant 9 described the overall identity construction experience as producing "a significant maturity over time," guiding one who acted impulsively or "[shot] from the hip" to "be a little more introspective and look at things from multiple angles." Participant 9 was more apt to trust others, "to get away from 'Man is inherently bad and you've got to manage them' to 'Man is inherently good, trust people to do the right thing." Participant 9 reported being more apt to see "the forest for the trees, to step back and look at the much bigger picture, and look at all the different aspects … ." Otherwise, Participant 9 felt that the self-concept had not changed drastically – remaining humble and a team player – thus what changed was how it was "projected in a different manner." Participant 9 credited both the senior mentoring relationships and professional military education, specifically the Army War College, in fostering identity construction. In terms of advice to budding senior leaders and the Army, Participant 9 emphasized the following: (a) recognizing the investment being made in future colonels and establish mentoring relationships, (b) broaden perspectives, (c) show more trust in subordinates, and (d) demonstrate the same investment in challenging subordinates that was provided to oneself.

**Structural Description of Participant 9's Experience**

There were three structures to Participant 9's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader, and each were evident in earlier role changes. The first was *pursuing a cause*. There were numerous instances in the present experience that suggested the personal and professional boundaries were porous in Participant 9's world, and therefore each professional challenge presented both a task to

be completed and a cause to be pursued. This is not to say that the challenges were taken 'personally,' but that there was a deep sense of personal investment into those challenges and that devoting maximal energy toward accomplishing the mission was both expected from others and expected from self. This was evident in the way Participant 9 addressed the difficulties that teammates faced in meeting the War College's increased academic requirements and the two early challenges in the follow-on assignment. Getting the job done was only half of it, it was important to ensure that others were able to get the job done. The structure was evident in the life history as well, given Participants 9's self-description as the "Energizer Bunny" leading to intense and regular pursuit of task accomplishment. It was also evident in the transition from armor to FA59, when Participant 9 found the passion to following the armor career path unattractive, and in concentrating on schoolhouse assignments that Participant 9 could develop a passion for based on a desire to teach and mentor future leaders. Thus the outcomes of the identity construction experience were positive as there was continuous learning about self and work when addressing uncomfortable challenges and thriving during periods where Participant 9 felt immediate beneficial effects of pouring oneself into a task.

The second structure was a *porous social-work boundary*, and was related to the first. At several instances, Participant 9 used terms like 'friend,' 'mentor,' and 'supervisor,' somewhat interchangeably, while being careful to emphasize the boundary. This suggested that the recognition of the boundary felt artificial, a coping mechanism for a standing delta between self-concept, which viewed colleagues as friends in a professional setting, and the enacted organizational values that defined individuals according to rank, authorities, and responsibilities. Participant 9 clearly adapted well to the challenges this

brought about, and leveraged it well in the latter stages of the experience when the two negative events called for a human touch to ensure positive lasting effects for team cohesion. It also partially explains an orientation to cultivate peer relationships and work comfortably in horizontal settings, expressed through the phrase "leading without authority," and consider parochial interests as a negative.

The third structure bounded the first two, and that is a *sense of investment*. The Army, which Participant 9 grew to love very early on, provided the purpose by which Participant 9 devoted all the energy pursuing causes and relationships. Participant 9 used the term "invest" regularly when describing the meaning of the role change to senior leader and describing what to do. The impetus behind Participant 9's actions were therefore to pursue causes that benefitted the Army and leverage the "investment" that the Army had placed in Participant 9's development, such as professional military education and increased responsibilities. The impetus behind the relationships with others was to foster active mentorship, which appeared to be quite robust given the outpouring of responses to Participant's selection for senior service college. Absent this bounding structure, it might have been more difficult to effect changes or rally support within the organization – resistance against the cause would have been too easy due to parochial interests. Also, the social—work boundary would have been less fruitful, as Participant 9 might have been less successful at turning negative events (e.g., the death of a team member) into a powerful and unifying episode for the organization.

## Participant 10

### Participant 10's Background and Life History

Participant 10 is an armor officer whose career largely followed the *single-track model*, serving as commander and staff officer of armor units at several echelons, the last being as battalion command and subsequently deputy chief of staff in an armored division. Participant 10 was prior enlisted during which time served in Desert Shield/Desert Storm. Broadening assignments while an officer included company command of a recruiting company in the eastern United States and secretary of the general staff at Fort Leavenworth prior to attending the Command and General Staff College and the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). Participant 10 was serving as the aforementioned deputy chief of staff in an armored division in July 2011, which was the start point of interest for the present study.

Through July 2011, Participant 10 identified the following defining role change episodes: (1) career decision to enlist, (2) war experience, (3) departure from combat zone and immediate deactivation of the unit, (4) commissioning as an officer, (5) assumption of recruiting company command, (6) assignment as SGS, and (7) elevation to division staff as division and joint task force planner in combat. As the enlisted time presented dramatic role changes and formative episodes, the professional history below is subdivided into enlisted and officer phases.

Participant 10's decision to enlist came after already having begun a different career, acquiring an advanced degree in the process. The greater age and higher level of education compared with other privates resulted in Participant 10 feeling like "a fish out of water" among soldiers in the unit, preferring intellectual pursuit vice partying off post.

Being stationed overseas added to a sense of isolation. Participant 10 coped through "good social skills and humor."

Desert Shield and Desert Storm became a defining event as Participant 10 quickly moved from a large and well-established military presence in Germany to the austere environment of the Saudi Arabian desert preparing for the offense where the unit was disorganized and "just a shambles," to the "most exhilarating, amazing" experience of the combat action, to several months afterward sitting around waiting for orders to return home. The last of these led to soldiers undertaking questionable behaviors and actions, which Participant 10 summarized as "idle soldiers hurt themselves." Therefore it was important to "keep them busy no matter what the environment." Despite the camaraderie and mission success, however, the unit was immediately deactivated on return to Germany due to the post-Cold War drawdown in Europe. Participant 10 found this "disillusioning." On the other hand, the experience cemented Participant 10's desire to stay in the Army and thus applied for Officer Candidacy School.

In relaying the professional experiences as an officer, Participant 10 often presented episodes of questionable moral or ethical climates which included improper utilization of personnel, toxic leadership, untreated alcoholism, insubordination, and underwriting ethical failures. In some cases, Participant 10 coped with these through introspection, a support structure of trusted noncommissioned officers, and mission focus; generating positive outcomes in developing an ethical self-concept and transforming the work environment to suit. In others where the latter appeared not possible, particularly as commander of a recruiting company, Participant 10 exercised "situational ethics" to cope

with an environment that clearly operated outside of the self-concept, subsequently feeling "liberated" to return to a traditional unit environment afterwards.

Participant 10 harbored a competitive spirit, pursuing the toughest assignments when available but also taking it harder when those assignments did not come through. At the beginning of the experience in question, Participant 10 had just been passed over for the highly competitive role of brigade command and several other nominative assignments, and rather than push forward with other nominative assignments, Participant 10 elected to "take a knee" and accept the division deputy chief of staff position.

**Textural Description of Participant 10's Experience**

Participant 10's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began around July 2011 upon notification of selection for senior service college and went through to the summer of 2012 upon departure from the division chief of staff assignment. The second phase was attendance at the U.S. Army War College resident program which ran from August 2012 through June 2013. The third phase was initial follow-on assignment on the Army Staff. At the time of the interviews, Participant 10 was in the process of a short-notice reassignment to take over as director of a special project team.

Participant 10's response to selection for senior service college was positive but muted as this was not seen as an immediate stepping stone for role change to senior leadership, which Participant 10 felt was really the domain of general officers. Separately but concurrently, Participant 10 was questioning the direction the career was taking given non-selection for brigade command and the nominative assignments. Additionally, Participant 10 was disappointed with the supervisor's lack of support for the nominative assignments and lack of mentorship. However, despite the deputy chief of staff position

not being perceived as career-enhancing, it did provide a tremendous opportunity for learning due to its ill-structured nature. Essentially, Participant 10 handled whichever matters the chief of staff delegated. Participant 10 also used the opportunity to observe the post commander exercising his role in transforming the organization and "lead[ing] cultural change," which would later become an important theme in Participant 10's own role change experience.

War College attendance proved to be easy due to Participant 10's extensive love of knowledge and strong academic background in both civilian and military education, especially SAMS which is a highly selective school. During this time, Participant 10 came to realize preparedness for entry to senior leadership began at SAMS based on the skills and practical experience garnered there, while finding the War College experience mainly reinforcing but also enjoyable through "interacting with fifteen intelligent peers every day." Also, Participant 10's conception of senior leadership evolved to "being able to think about complex problems and come with solution sets." However, the overall experience was negative, in which Participant 10's self-concept was aligned with the preferred identity of the academic environment yet coming away not feeling "like my eyes were opened to anything at the War College."

The current assignment came about via by-name request of a general officer for whom Participant 10 previous served. The requirement was for an officer with planning experience to help with an important high-profile Army program whose staff was under resourced and overwhelmed, and Participant 10 expressed great interest in both the program and continuing the professional relationship with the general officer. In the course of pursuing the program, Participant 10 highlighted a number of achievements which

included hosting an Army summit, publishing doctrine, and personally briefing numerous senior Army leaders. A particularly important episode was due to the program's high-profile nature, which caused numerous senior Army, joint, and defense leaders to issue direct taskings to the staff, who did not feel to be in a position to say 'no' and who had developed a culture of talking about things but having little to show in terms of tangible accomplishments. Through experience with planning, Participant 10 was able to instill a different culture oriented on deliverables, the success of which brought about the next duty assignment to stand up a new "center of excellence" related to the program.

This final episode was positive as evidenced by the evolution of Participant 10's self-concept and critique of unrealized organizational values espoused by senior leaders. These included the following points: (1) the importance of exercising long term vision versus being trapped in the day-to-day, (2) developing a "nuanced" understanding of the "optics of activities" which was described as being seen as superficial to typical officers but directly related to Congressional support for military budgets and the trust of the American people, and (3) the disconnect between the message of the War College regarding its purpose in preparing officers to become strategic advisors and decision makers versus the common practice of senior leaders insulating themselves from such advising. Participant 10 showed a tremendous passion for his current program and related future duty assignment an important direction toward "leading cultural change, and the cultural change is essentially operationalizing the Army values."

Participant 10 plans to retire after serving in the next duty assignment through 2017. Afterward, Participant 10 plans to withdraw from the military arena, "preferably in culture or the arts, doing something that I love for whatever amount of money that it makes."

**Structural Description of Participant 10's Experience**

Three were two structures to Participant 10's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader, and each were evident in earlier role changes. The first was a very strong *moral compass*. All three of Participant 10's episodes, as with the formative role changes in the early career, emphasized assessing the situation and making decisions based on a deeply-seated value system. Evidence of this included: (1) being self-described as an iconoclast who saw senior leaders are individuals first regardless of rank, (2) often emphasizing on character as more important than competence or that competence drew from character, and (3) routinely being self-deprecating and hard on oneself. The last was especially evident in the first phase from 2011-2012 where two important career-long values, always pursing the tough jobs and establishing relationships with one's supervisor, were set aside. In Participant 10's view, this move led to receiving a lesser evaluation report, which subsequently closed doors. Overall, Participant 10 would overcome this after finding an important and empowering cause in the present duty assignment that transcended the standard role identity of an officer on the Army staff.

The second structure was related to the first, and that was *idiosyncrasy*, which appeared to provide a powerful source of energy for pursuing solutions to moral, ethical, and cultural challenges. Despite following the common tactically-oriented career path and clearly showing success, Participant 10 routinely highlighted the differences rather than the similarities between the self-concept and the organization's espoused values. Several vignettes pitted Participant 10 in opposition to the prevailing view, whether professional (such as related to the aforementioned iconoclasm or pursuant to the cultural change) or

social (being the sole voice or actor to oppose certain unethical or non-professional off-duty behavior). In instances where Participant 10 took action, the reaction from the organization or individuals (including some very senior military leaders) was not always positive, but idiosyncrasy allowed Participant 10 to be comfortable or accepting of such a response and therefore emboldened to take a stand. Participant 10 was also sharply self-critical in instances where a prevailing undesirable situation was allowed to continue. The seeds of this structure were sown during enlistment through the differences in education and maturity levels, and grew through a pattern of continuous self-development through reading, study, and introspection.

These two structures were important both in understanding Participant 10's successful identity construction experience and in explaining how Participant 10 avoided some potentially negative outcomes from the identity work. In making meaning of the experience, Participant 10 said that "I've always seen leadership as servant leaders that are there to serve the unit," which exhibits both the structures of the moral compass and idiosyncrasy given the military culture's view of the commander as authoritative figure. Meanwhile, although the War College experience proved to be negative, this was in part due to the officer's extensive educational background (including SAMS) and self-developmental orientation which rendered much of the curriculum redundant. The dominant path of identity construction remained one of empowerment, using the self-concept to transcend situations and shape the work environment.

These two structures on their own could have produced severely negative consequences, so Participant 10's use of them in tandem was important. Participant 10 gave several examples of how taking the moral ground proved unpopular and isolating, while

idiosyncrasy on its own could lead to disruptive behaviors that are unhelpful to an organization. Together, the moral compass had a tempering effect on the idiosyncrasy, allowing Participant 10 to be disruptive in helpful or important ways consistent with espoused organizational values, useful for pursuing a mission of leading cultural change in an enormous organization such as the U.S. Army.

## Participant 12

*Note: Participant 12's textural and structural descriptions are provided in Chapter 4.*

### Participant 12's Background and Life History

Participant 12 is a logistics officer whose career largely followed the *single-track model*, with several broadening assignments. Participant 12 served both as commander and staff officer of logistics units of different types and echelons, the last being as deputy commander of a sustainment brigade. Broadening assignments included internship at a defense industry corporation under the Army's Training with Industry (TWI) program, a joint assignment as executive officer to the J-4 (logistics) in an overseas joint headquarters, branch chief in the Army G8 (resource management and comptroller) and battalion command of a special troops battalion overseas. Participant 12 was serving in a sustaining brigade in November 2010 upon notification of selection for promotion to colonel, which was the start point of interest for the present study.

Through November 2010, Participant 12 identified the following defining role change episodes: (1) from platoon/unit experience as lieutenant to division staff as captain, (2) internship under TWI, (3) utilization tour in a corps support command, (4) executive

officer to a general officer in an overseas joint headquarters, (5) assignment in the Army staff, and (6) battalion command.

Participant 12's initial tour was a four-year stint at Fort Campbell, KY, serving exclusively at the company level with multiple assignments as platoon leader and one year as a company executive officer. Participant 12's self-concept as an officer was grounded in a broad array of developmental assignments as a lieutenant, leading to being fully prepared to serve as a company commander or on a battalion-level staff.

However, upon completion of the Captain's Career Course and reassignment, Participant 12 was instead assigned directly to a division staff as a junior captain. But, rather than go to the division G-4 (logistics) as a subject matter expert working with other logisticians, Participant 12 was instead assigned as a member of the division plans "shop." Participant 12 had no planning background and the shop was lightly manned. However, expectations for the plans shop were high, and as a junior captain Participant 12 was working as the G-4 representative to the division plans team that was populated with graduates of the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) course and other field grade officers. In discussing the planning effort for a major division exercise, Participant 12 felt overwhelmed but was greatly aided by a major from the G-3 (operations) who "instead of cutting me down, actually helped me and assisted me so I learned a great deal from him … [N]ow he is a two-star general so I always thank him when I see him." Working there still was a challenge due to the lack of experience and familiarity with the terminology. "There were frustrations at times … with my lack of understanding what they were asking. They wanted things quick."

In addition to the mentorship, Participant 12 learned to "always pay attention to things that aren't maybe directly related to you." As a lieutenant, Participant 12 would visit other platoons and sections in the battalion to learn what others did, and carried this forward to the division staff experience. After 18 months in plans, Participant 12 took another high-level assignment as "general supply officer" responsible for the supply support activities that managed various types of equipment and repair parts across the entire division. These two division level jobs left Participant 12 fully prepared for company command in the main support battalion, the primary logistics support unit in an infantry division, "I knew the mission. I knew the roles. I felt confident as a leader … . I was able to take my company for two [National Training Center] rotations. .. [My confidence] just grew over time."

Participant 12 took an internship with Training With Industry (TWI), one of the options available to captains who completed company command. TWI was an Army program that allowed officers to work as interns at a major defense industrial corporation, which would benefit the Army by exposure officers to the complex materiel acquisition process. Upon reporting for duty at a large defense contractor, Participant 12 found the assignment "tough" at first, particularly regarding the relationship between defense contractors and the Army staff. "I knew nothing about the Army staff. I didn't know how it was organized, its roles or anything." However, employees of the firm who were retired military officers with logistics experience stepped in, gave Participant 12 some homework, and made Participant 12 "an active participant." A success story was advising the firm on development of a new tank engine, providing expertise on possible fuel savings, operational impacts, and the like, based on Participant 12's own knowledge about fueling.

Additionally, becoming familiar with how the Army staff functions and engaging with and learning about the roles and functions of key Army acquisition leaders (e.g., program managers and program executive officers) were "beneficial."

TWI incurred an obligatory utilization tour back in the Army, so Participant 12's reported to the 1st Corps Support Command at Fort Bragg, which was the next significant role change episode. Unfortunately, Participant 12 was slated as the deputy Automation Management Officer, one of "two jobs I never wanted in the Army." The CSS AMO, as it was called, was a technically specialized job that according to Participant 12 typically drew Signal Corps officers. Participant 12 described the experience as follows, "I was very lost there for quite some time and even the year I spent there, I mean there were certain things I was able to contribute to but that was definitely a job that I was ready to move on from." Participant 12 drew from the TWI experience of working with program managers to deal with the Y2K conversion, but felt like a non-participant in the corps level exercise. The frustration with the job, combined with being a new major and needing to compete for key developmental (KD) assignments, contributed to a strong desire to leave CSS AMO when the year was up. The result was moving to the corps support command's G-3 (operations) shop, which was more in Participant 12's comfort zone.

The KD assignment called Participant 12 to Korea, serving as the S-3 (operations) of a division main support battalion, same type of unit served as a junior captain, while the family lived in family housing in Seoul. Apart from the unfamiliarity with the Korean environment, Participant 12 was very comfortable with the duties and responsibilities. 9/11 occurred very soon after Participant 12's arrival. The unit's real-world responsibilities included the provision of armed guards and patrols in the event of a contingency situation.

From Participant 12's previous experience in a division main support battalion, dealing with this situation "came pretty natural[ly]." Participant 12 left the Korean experience "prepared for the next level of promotion" and confident that "I'd be a very successful battalion commander."

Participant 12 took a third year in Korea, but originally was going to serve on the Eighth U.S. Army staff as a branch chief in the G-4, which would have united Participant 12 with the family. However, upon learning from the predecessor that the "It's really a 9 to 4 job. I'd easy, laid back." Participant 12 decided not to accept it. "A lot of my jobs that I had were very high intensity, high optempo, extremely challenging. … I felt that [the G-4 job] would not benefit me or the Army." Learning that the U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) J-4 was interviewing for an executive officer ("XO"), Participant 12 pursued and was offered the job.

The USFK J-4 "wore multiple hats" (served in several distinct duty positions) – Eighth Army deputy commander for support, and deputy C-4 for the United Nations Combined Command were the others – which gave Participant 12 exposure to interactions with Army ("G" staff), joint ("J" staff), and combined ("C" staff) officers and operations. The toughest part of the duties was that the J-4 did not have an aide, so as XO, Participant 12 managed all the responsibilities of a general officer front office. Thus, as a senior major, Participant 12 had to deal with the colonel leads of the G-4, J-4, and C-4 staffs, all of whom competed for time with the general for matters such as the major combined exercises. "Having to juggle that was a challenge, learning how the general wanted material presented to him, what were his priorities." Participant 12 also learned of a dislike for protocol matters. While the general was accustomed to "represent[ing] the command at formal

functions .. Give speeches and do things like that," Participant 12 did not see it as "high on my priority list" but acknowledged its value. "I learned a great deal from those [events], and especially the level of engagement at the high level that he interfaced with."

Participant 12 was especially appreciative for the J-4's mentorship:

> He didn't just beat me up which he did constantly but he took time to mentor me and I am extremely grateful for that and I would not be where I am today without him doing that. I mean he would talk to me when there were briefings and he'd go through after them and he would sit down and ask me what I thought about it. He would explain why he did something or why he did not do something.
>
> One of the things he did, of course, he had a lot of time on the Army staff and he served on the Joint Staff at high levels and he would talk to me about that because he would tell me, "[O]ne day you'll be there and you need to consider this and do this when you go there." And when I did eventually a few years down the road, go to the Army staff, it paid off amazingly. It was a great assignment, wasn't one I would want to do again but because of him though, he took time to mentor me. He took the time out to help develop me and I'm extremely grateful for that.

Coming out of that role, however, Participant 12 wanted a second KD position going into the lieutenant colonel board and got it in the form of assignment as S-3 of a petroleum "group," a brigade-equivalent organization. Having served at the higher echelons and at the tremendous pace of a general officer front office, returning to a unit level was "a different environment. … [W]e go back down to … junior captains, you're dealing with lieutenants, NCOs, enlisted soldiers at a tactical level." While the adjustment was quick, Participant 12 recalled instances where expectations were of high-quality staff products but realized that the battalion S-3s were much junior officers who lacked the

experience. "Once I stood back and realized that and then went on to help him understand what he needed to do then we all got along much better."

A key vignette from this timeframe related to the rotation of detachments this group sent to Iraq. As one returned, Participant 12 was directed to reconstitute the unit and subsequently lead it during an upcoming deployment. After "building the team from scratch," Participant 12 deployed the unit, who operated in dispersed two- to three-Soldier teams, while learning the role of theater-level petroleum manager on the job. As a result, Participant 12 reinforced, calling it a "building block," previous lessons learned on collaborating at service and joint levels.

The next role change was to the Army staff, but Participant 12's duty assignment changed *en route* from petroleum operations in the Army G-4 to a new logistics automation branch with the Army G-8 (resource management and comptroller). The reassignment was the result of a reorganization of logistics automation responsibilities within the Army staff, with a commensurate movement of a position, and Participant 12 was tabbed due to the prior automation management experience at tactical level. It was a "painful" experience with a "steep learning curve." Although Participant 12 drew from the TWI experience and attended some of the Army staff training programs,

> It's a dog-eat-dog world out there. They look for new people who don't understand the thing and within the first few weeks I lost three million dollars out of one my programs; I don't even know how. I learned and then I took five million from somebody else later.
>
> The thing about that is they throw you in there and they don't give you much direction where, like I said, in LMI they took time to mentor me and to explain things. When I got to the G-8 from what I saw at the Army staff level, no one takes time to explain. They expect you to know it and if

> you don't know it, it's a sink or swim type mentality. So I sank a lot. I learned the hard way. Like I said, it goes back to my time working for that general. He helped prep me. He told me some things. He said "When you go into a meeting, everyone has an agenda and if you can find out what their agenda is before you walk in you'll be more successful." So I took that to heart.

Participant 12 said that an important part of assimilating into the position was to cultivate relationships with others. "There were some folks that after you've been there a while and you … show your worth then they'll give you the time of day. If you can't … they're not going to help you."

Participant 12 took command of the special troops battalion of an army service component command. Special troops battalions provided Army support functions such as training, personnel, logistics, and security for personnel in a high-level headquarters staff. Participant 12 would then take the deputy command of a sustaining brigade that was readying for deployment. As November 2010 and selection for colonel approached, Participant 12 said that "I felt that everything I'd done in my past had done nothing but prepare for me for this position and everything that we were doing with our rapid train-up in preparation for deployment."

## Participant 13

*Note: Participant 13's textural and structural descriptions are provided in Chapter 4.*

### Participant 13's Background and Life History

Participant 13 is a nuclear and counterproliferation (functional area 52, or "FA52") officer whose career largely followed the *two-phase specialty-track model*, whereby the officer followed a standard career path in one of the traditional branches (engineer, in

Participant 13's case) through company command or up to junior major, then is selected for entry into a specialty area (e.g., nuclear and counterproliferation) and thereafter takes assignments mainly within that specialty, although with some variance. Initially, Participant 13 followed the common career path within engineer branch with steady increases in scope of duties and responsibilities through assignment as company commander. Subsequently, Participant 13 took a broadening assignment with the Corps of Engineers, then elected to transfer to FA52 which included graduate school and subsequent service as an instructor at the United States Military Academy at West Point. Participant 13's career as a nuclear and counterproliferation officer was divergent in terms of scope and responsibilities. Participant 13 was serving as a research scientist with duty at a military institute of higher education in spring 2013 when notified of selection for senior service college, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through Spring 2013, Participant 13 recounted six defining role change episodes: (1) company command, (2) assignment with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, (3) graduate school concurrent with transfer to FA52 and subsequent assignment to West Point, (4) service as consequence management officer with a defense agency, (5) assignment to Los Alamos working in nuclear weapons and (6) assignment as research scientist with duty at a military institute of higher learning.

Prior to the first episode, Participant 13 recounted a strongly positive experience as platoon leader in Korea with an outstanding platoon sergeant and solid mentoring relationships with the noncommissioned officers. They encouraged Participant 13 to get the "hands dirty" and do some Soldier-level work to gain appreciation and respect from the troops and be in a better position to engage the company commander. Particular 13

recounted the measure of success being how the troops referred to "my lieutenant" in conversation. However, Participant 13 noted difficulties with the prescribed separation between professional and personal relationships, wanting to be everyone's friend and struggling with how to sustain professionalism. Company command proved to be a contrast as Participant 13 had a poor relationship with the first sergeant who was more hands-off, a company executive officer who failed to follow guidance during preparation for an overseas exercise, and an episode where Participant 13 had to enforce a regulation that was personally disagreeable. These experiences initially caused Participant 13 to question the desirability to continue service, thus the post-command assignment with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was intended to foster a smooth separation and entry into civilian life.

However, the Corps of Engineers assignment proved to be a solid fit for Participant 13 who quickly assimilated into the civilian-heavy environment and enjoyed working major construction projects and leading teams with extensive expertise. While intimidating at first, the environment provided the collegiality that fit with Participant 13's self-concept. Participant 13 also found inspiration in how officers "could successfully lead operations on topics they knew nothing about solely because they could ask the right questions." The positive leadership environment also helped Participant 13 come to a realization that the frustrations experienced earlier "would not go away by transitioning to the civilian world." Coming out of the experience, Participant 13 said that "The military is held in a different light, and I liked that. I did not want to give that up."

However, Participant 13 was quickly caught in a tussle as the Corps of Engineers position was suddenly deleted and the assignments officer was attempting a short-notice

move to a hardship location overseas. In response, Participant 13's senior supervisor interceded and encouraged Participant 13 to consider taking advanced civil schooling and transferring to FA52 with follow-on duty at West Point. The District Engineer was a former West Point instructor who noted Participant 13's post-graduate degree in nuclear physics which was a rarity among military officers.

Duty as an instructor was fulfilling for Participant 13 who enjoyed teaching cadets, yet tried very hard to keep the rank factor down, "I tried to defuse the whole 'I'm a major, you're a cadet' kind of thing." However, the supervisor was a long-time West Point faculty member and had a particular preferred way of teaching that Participant 13 was in conflict with. Through perseverance and demonstrating commitment to the cadets, Participant 13 was given increased responsibilities for managing coursework, but the supervisory relationship remained problematic and a source of frustration. In retrospect, Participant 13 indicated that at the time, "I tended to take things personally," and "I became too emotionally caught up in trying to advocate my approach."

Participant 13 then moved on to two FA52 assignments in Defense Threat Reduction Agency activities – the first in consequence management and the other in nuclear weapons. Participant 13 experienced far greater autonomy in these positions than before, which was intimidating at first proved to be tremendous growth experiences through the exercise of self-reflection and a series of successful initiatives. The nuclear weapons position was extremely competitive given the relatively small number of scientists, each of whom was highly successful and a "Type A" personality of a different sort. It was a horizontal organization. Project groups would be formed but there was no identifiable positional authority among the scientists.

Participant 13 was reaching the twenty-year mark and considered retirement, and therefore pursued a doctoral degree in preparation for a follow-on career in nuclear physics so to "start a second career at a preeminent national laboratory. That was my plan [except] I didn't retire." Upon reflection and counsel from a mentor who was also a retired colonel, Participant 13 reflection upon the contributions made in the current position and found that the ability to analyze problems, exercise decision making skills, and direct people was valuable, especially in a flat organization. Participant 13 earned the degree but stayed in the military so to continue making an impact.

Unfortunately, the final episode before the present experience, which was a research scientist position with duty at a military institution of higher learning, proved to be a strongly negative experience because of a combination of circumstances that rendered the positions ineffective – the positions' deletion from the parent agency's books and subsequent transfer to the Army staff, a severe personality conflict with the on-site professor to which Participant 13 was working with, and the related lack of support (office space and resources) from the institution, which produced tremendous frustration and resulted having "wasted about 11 months." It was in the middle of this episode when Participant 13 was notified of senior service college selection.

As of the spring of 2013, Participant 13's self-concept was as a "technical asset with some leadership experience, and having transitioned from being a leader to an advisor." However, Participant 13 was concerned about the lack of true supervisory experience, limited to the West Point assignment of having managed some faculty members but otherwise neither having had traditional command or leadership positions after company and also not having deployed to either Afghanistan or Iraq.

## Participant 14

*Note: Participant 14's textural and structural descriptions are provided in Chapter 4.*

### Participant 14's Background and Life History

Participant 14 is an adjutant general ("AG", i.e., human resources and administration) officer whose career *varied from the single-track model* and included *branch detailing* to the infantry, a *short period of separation from the service*, and several broadening assignments outside of specialty. As a branch detailed officer, Participant 14 served two stints as platoon leader and one as brigade S-1 (personnel and administration). Subsequently as an AG officer, Participant 14 immediately took command of an adjutant general company but elected afterward to leave the service and took a civilian job in sales. After finding that job unsatisfying, Participant 14 returned to active duty and thereafter assumed a wide range of AG across both institutional support and combat arms units, along with broadening assignments as secretary of the general staff (SGS) and commanding general's (CG) executive officer (XO) in the U.S. Army Cadet Command. As senior major and lieutenant colonel, Participant 14 served three years as Professor of Military Service in an ROTC program in the central United States, and as battalion commander in a NATO organization when the present experience began. In August 2012 while in battalion command, Participant 14 was notified of selection for senior service college, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through August 2012, Participant 14 identified eight prominent role change episodes: (1) assignment as lieutenant to serve as brigade S1, (2) conclusion of branch detail and assumption as AG company commander, (3) separation from the service and taking a civilian job, (4) returning to active duty and re-establishing career as an AG officer,

(5) SGS and CG XO in the U.S. Army Cadet Command, (6) service as aviation brigade S-1 in combat, (7) professor of military science, and (8) battalion command in NATO. Many of these role changes were qualitatively different from each other.

Participant 14's father and grandfather both had military experience and this shaped Participant 14's initial view that officers would be "somebody that would command the respect of my father. … [S]omebody beyond approach, somebody whose actions are always for the good of the organization and its people." The experience as an infantry platoon leader reinforced the self-concept while also including important development experiences, one in dealing with discipline problems but another involving a soldier who was suicidal. In this episode, Participant 14 recounted efforts to engage professional help who all cleared the soldier despite Participant 14's intuition that all was not well. Ultimately the soldier did commit suicide, and upon self-reflection Participant 14 learned to trust one's own instincts. "It reassured me that I know more than other people might believe I know."

Participant 14 was ambivalent about the first role change episode, not wanting to be elevated all the way of up to brigade-level as a lieutenant and being selected as the S-1 (a.k.a., the battalion personnel or human resources officer) due to being branch detailed from AG when Participant 14 had no practical experience. However, the brigade leadership ordered the role change. Participant 14 coped with the significant transition by seeking mentorship from the brigade command sergeant major and reading up on AG-related doctrine. In doing so, Participant 14 uncovered a special duty of S-1 officers which was to serve as the "adjutant," defined as "personal confidante of the brigade commander." Later, during a meeting, the brigade commander (rank of colonel) made an offending off-

hand remark, one that he knew to be inappropriate. The only lieutenant in the room, Participant 14, performing the role of adjutant, confronted the brigade commander in private. "I didn't really understand the risk I was taking at the time," Participant 14 recalled, but the brigade commander accepted the counsel and encouraged Participant 14 to continue providing it in future. Otherwise, however, the tension between the infantry-inspired persona yet serving in an AG position as a soon-to-be AG officer conflicted within Participant 14 and affected peer relationships. Some of the infantry officers on the brigade staff were "particularly hard on me" and some "gave me a lot of crap." Thus, Participant 14 was reminded of the pending role change to AG despite being inculcated into the infantry world – including having earned the Expert Infantryman Badge and Ranger tab (both highly demanding and well-respected honors).

The role change to AG was contentious. On paper, it occurred on the established date when the branch detail period ended, and Participant 14 was automatically transferred to post Personnel Group's books. Despite Participant 14 not having any AG training or education, the Group offered a company command, but the infantry brigade's deputy commander opposed the move and refused to release Participant 14. The brigade commander interceded and worked a deal with the Personnel Group commander to permit the release. It was finally then that Participant 14 switched insignia from infantry to AG, or "tanks and Bradley's and gunnery to paperwork and computers and personnel files." Participant 14 recounted the experience as follows:

> I didn't like it. I felt great within my peer group because I felt like I knew a lot more about the military that the AG folks didn't get because they had never been in a line unit, or what we refer to as combat arms unit, a fighting unit. I had a hard time even at PT running in front of my platoon with my

> company guidon, because it had an AG shield on it instead of infantry rifles. I was in command and I knew all the infantry guys on Fort Hood and probably half of the armor guys, because I had been in the First Brigade. It was almost like I had a stain on me and I didn't want anybody to see it. …
>
> I think it was indicative of the Army culture. We don't teach AG folks to be proud of being AG, we teach them to be the shield of shame in the rear with the gear. And king of the battle and queen of the battle isn't ashamed to remind them of that. And I had a hard time with that as a part of my personal identity … .

The result was deciding to leave military service after 15 months in command. Participant 14 took a sales job in a financial corporation and moved to a large U.S. city, but uncovered several factors of the corporation's culture that differed from the self-concept: (1) sales was a cutthroat environment and there was no sense of teamwork, camaraderie, or "brotherhood," (2) the singular focus on making money, and (3) the instability and insecurity surrounding the next paycheck, despite the overall increase in Participant 14's salary. After being rebuked for showing consideration to a colleague, Participant 14 realized that "I might never make it in this business, because that doesn't make sense to me."

Participant 14 returned to military service thereafter, and quickly resumed the identity of a military officer. During the Captain's Career Course, Participant 14 told peers that a big challenge for AG was that "we don't teach pride in our regiment." In espousing the pride, Participant 14 reported reaching back to the infantry persona. Participant 14 also leveraged expertise from the civilian job, earned a securities license, and offered financial advice to others.

The subsequent role change episode to a recruiting battalion S-1 and later as SGS and CG XO to the Cadet Command were positive overall, but each exposed Participant 14 to discomforting situations. In the former, the recruiting battalion commander allowed Participant 14 to listen in on an expletive-filled tirade over the phone by a general officer, one that the battalion commander admitted to being a monthly occurrence. In Cadet Command, Participant 14 witnessed similar behaviors by a general officer in person during thrice-weekly "command huddles." In the latter case, Participant 14 recalled going back to the office and "staring at the computer screen wondering why I ever took the job… ," but the command sergeant major offered encouragement and counsel that helped when Participant 14 became the target of similar tirades later on, surviving the environment until the general officer left. Participant 14 served as XO to the new general officer, who instilled a very different climate, to which Participant 14 reacted as "Like you can be a General and still be nice? Who knew? … To me that was kind of the idea, that you can bring the best out in your people without scaring them to death … ."

As a captain serving as the CG's XO, Participant 14 had a lot of dealings with majors and lieutenant colonels across the geographically dispersed command, but felt some did not confer the respect to Participant 14 because of rank, despite Participant 14's positional authority as the CG's XO. Afterwards, however, Participant 14 noted that "the rank isn't what matter, it's about your influence and your ability to do things that you ought to be doing … ."

The remaining role changes generally produced positive experiences. Participant 14 recounted the brigade S-1 assignment in combat where installing a new personnel delivery construct greatly enhanced the ability to provide full human resource management

capabilities in theater, greatly enhancing the "sense of our net worth" and building high-level with the brigade leadership. Subsequent assignment as a professor of military science provided valuable lessons learned in "being the face of the Army in a small community," and being personally involved with the development of future officers. As battalion commander in a NATO command, Participant 14 learned about the U.S. role in the alliance, which was found to be "broadening" due to not yet having experience or exposure to the elements of national power.

At the time of senior service college selection, Participant 14's self-assessment was as follows:

> To me being an officer carries with it a significant amount of responsibility that I thought affected me and my family. My family understood that and supported it. I felt like I had achieved everything I wanted to in my career. I found it a lot easier to be selfless and to focus even more on my troops or the good of the unit, without some artificial concern.
>
> And I felt more empowered to tell people what I really thought it meant to be a service member. And there the catch phrase became we're not just officers, we're ambassadors for the United States. Because we interacted with all of our allies, and for many of them we were, other than what they saw on TV, US TV shows exported to Europe, we were what they thought America was. So then it became even more significant than just being an Army Officer, but I was a representation of a typical American citizen. And it was important to me that we conducted ourselves in a way that brought honor onto what I thought of the American way of life and the American values.

## Participant 15

### Participant 15's Background and Early Career

Participant 15 is an aviation officer whose career largely followed the *single-track model*, serving as commander and staff officer of aviation units at several echelons, the last being as deputy command of an air cavalry brigade in combat. Broadening assignments were generally within the aviation community and included duties at the U.S. Army Aviation Center, the combined Headquarters, Multinational Corps – Iraq (MNC-I), and Joint Staff J-8 (comptroller) in the Pentagon. Participant 15 was in the J-8 in November 2012 when notified of selection for promotion to colonel, and thus was the start point of interest for the study.

Through November 2012, Participant 15 identified five defining role change episodes: (1) assuming first company command, (2) assignment to active/reserve command, (3) attending the Command and General Staff College resident program, (4) initial combat experience, and (5) assignment to the joint staff. Each episode presented steady increases in the scope of duties and responsibilities, along with commensurate growth of peer networks and relationships. Participant 15 coped with these changes consistently through self-awareness (especially drawing from values developed at upbringing), independent learning, strong mentoring relationships with supervisors and, particularly in the later stages, recognition of personality dynamics and their impact on mission performance at the higher echelons. All these were evident in Participant 15's self-assessment of November 2012 while performing duties at the Joint Staff J-8, which included the need to exercise empathy and particularly the statement, "[I]t taught me, more than any other job, [that] everybody has an agenda to include me."

The outcomes of these episodes were positive. In the majority of cases, Participant 15 encountered situations where self-concept and preferred work identities were aligned, and therefore was able to maintain the self-concept. Two of episodes presented identifiable misalignment challenges: (1) the active/reserve command that raised concerns about being side-tracked from future commands, and (2) assignment to the J-8 that presented Participant 15 with the challenges of overcoming parochial interests. In these cases, Participant 15 was more inclined to sustain the self-concept and transform the work environment with positive results in task accomplishment and satisfaction in both professional and personal lives.

**Textural Description of Participant 15's Experience**

Participant 15's identity construction experience included three phases. The first began in November 2012 upon notification of selection for promotion and went through to the summer of 2013 upon departure from the assignment at J-8. Participant 15 had been placed on the alternate list for senior service college but the Army activated the officer (moved from alternate to primary attendee) on or about June 2013 with short-notice reassignment to the resident class of academic year 2014, constituting the second phase which concluded upon graduation in June 2014. The third phase was initial follow-on assignment as a senior operations officer in an Army Service Component Command.

The initial reaction to selection for promotion was a "pleasant surprise" due in part to the significantly reduced selection rate for that year. Participant 15 reported immediately engaging in identity work stemming from recognition that future duties and responsibilities were going to require less hands-on task accomplishment ("The Iron Major, for lack of a better term, was gonna shift.") and more indirect forms of leadership ("I was gonna be kind

of an overarching guide, manager, synchronizer … .") in environments outside of expertise or experience. Participant 15 began paying more attention to what other colonels did and how they operated. However, having been placed on the alternate list for senior service college had a dampening effect, leading to the notion of being a "limited duty" colonel with higher rank, as without the education, further promotion was likely out of reach. The late-notice activation for the U.S. Army War College was unexpected and surprising, bringing about a tumultuous move that left no time for reflection on the meaning of being selected.

The senior service college episode was positive, as Participant 15 cited a strong seminar with diverse membership and quality dialogue throughout the core curriculum phase. Participant 15 did not identify specific episodes or vignettes that were singularly formative, but rather noted a cumulative effect through day-to-day interactions and self-reflection, leading to realizations that, "I've developed and it's appropriate for me be at this rank" and "For the first time as [a colonel] I felt like I probably deserved to be there." During the latter half of the year, Participant 15 identified the class staff ride to Washington, DC as particularly informative, as interactions with Congressmen and other non-defense agencies reinforced prior lessons learned concerning the presence of personal agendas and the need to manage personalities, but that doing so as a senior military leader would require a greater degree of comfort doing so. Participant 15's self-assessment at the end of the year showed signs of identity work, including greater acceptance of operating in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment; greater use of critical and creative thinking; nuanced communication; and serving as a representative of one's organization to a wider array of external stakeholders.

The third episode, assignment to current duty position, saw Participant 15 engaging in representational roles requiring greater autonomy, where expectations for meaningful contribution means not just taking notes and checking back with the commander later. This required a greater degree of knowledge about capabilities and limitations of the command and adherence to commander's intent, which Participant 15 initially found "intimidating," but through identity work reframed as "comfortable being uncomfortable" while satisfying stakeholders requirements based on knowledge at hand. Participant 15 noted that the amount of information that senior leaders dealt with was great and can be overwhelming, "As a senior leader, you have to kind of look for the right details, but you cannot stay in all the details." Participant 15 noted that coping resources employed during this phase remained consistent with those of earlier in the career – peer networks, senior mentors, and introspection.

The outcome of the overall identity construction experience was positive. Throughout, Participant 15 indicated that only "minor changes" occurred to the self-concept, as indicated in the following passage:

> I think the changes were more about an understanding and a cognizant realization of my approach, my responsibilities, the scope and scale and impact of what I do and how I do it and my interactions with people. But I don't think merely by this transition … they have changed me as a person.

Participant 15 also does not appear to anticipate further identity change. When asked about advice to give to others, some responses aligned with the coping resources employed throughout the career – recommendations to find a "staple of counsel" for mentorship and identifying a supportive peer network. But most strongly recommended was to relocate so that the promotion would not occur in the same work environment which

might inhibit development. Relocation in conjunction with promotion would serve as a forcing function for the necessary introspection and identity work. As for the future, Participant 15 recognized eventually retiring but preferred to see that event as "my choice" despite the potential for force reductions causing the Army to request an earlier retirement.

**Structural Description of Participant 15's Experience**

Three were three structures to Participant 15's identity construction experience that were evident in the role change from mid-career to senior leader, and each was evident in earlier role changes. The first was *resilience*. This came through multiple references to Participant 15's upbringing -- being the progeny of small business owners, developing strong values and empathy, and having other military members within the extended family. The strong sense of self allowed for a straight navigation through a single-tracked career pattern with regular success and development without perceived changes to the self-concept. This was also evident in concerns expressed about duty assignments falling outside of the standard path, such as the active-reserve component assignment. In the role change to senior leadership, this strong sense of self acknowledged the changed environment but, through the continued use of peer networks and mentoring relationships, Participant 15 navigated the environment head-on without having to re-engineer the self.

The second structure was *purposeful engagement*. This too was seen rooted much earlier than the present experience, as Participant 15 routinely emphasized the important of relationships in tangible terms. In essence, the relationships were valued for their qualitative benefit, and not measured quantitatively as names and e-mail addresses collected. In the present experience, purposeful engagement served a coping function for

dealing with the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environment faced in the new capacity as senior leader.

This was evident in all three episodes. In the first episode of the present experience, Participant 15 described the sense of accomplishment after one year in the Joint Staff as "very rewarding when you walk away in a year and look back at the three or four things you got done that people didn't think you could get done in that time frame." The task orientation gave Participant 15 focus to cut through the personal agendas and drive toward solutions. Similar purposeful engagement was evident in the War College year as the growing peer network in the seminar was in active dialogue over issues and ideas rather than being passively going from one lesson to the next. In the current assignment as senior staff officer and representative of the organization in higher-level forums, Participant 15 devotes energy toward understanding the perspectives of others so to understand interactions between the command's actions and activities and those of the wider community.

The third structure connected the first two. This was *having a focus,* or a central idea of importance to a senior leader. This helps budding senior leaders "focus your studies, focus your questioning and your thought processes, and give[s] yourself an approach to bounce a lot of these processes against." Participant 15's used such a focus to provide energy for the strong sense of self and to guide in the exercise of purposeful engagement while undergoing the role change to senior leadership – perhaps from a prior orientation toward the command track to now pursuing the future of Army aviation or the interests of the present Army service component command.

These three structures are important both in understanding Participant 15's successful identity construction experience and in explaining how Participant 15 avoided potentially negative outcomes from the identity work. Staying narrowly focused only on what fit one's self-concept could have resulted in ineffectiveness, something that Participant 15 specifically warned against in advice to budding senior leaders. Purposeful engagement and having a focus helped foster Participant 15's introspection and empathy, thereby keeping ideas fresh and relevant to others. Thus, Participant 15 avoided becoming jaded by the personal agendas and appreciated how general officers managed overwhelming amounts of information.

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