



## Building effective networks for the transition from the military to the civilian workforce: Who, what, when, and how

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### ABSTRACT

Servicemembers leaving the military and entering the civilian workforce are often encouraged to network to identify and obtain civilian employment. However, there are few resources that offer insights into how to build an effective network when transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce. Based on extant literature, we present a *Guiding Framework for Building an Effective Network for the Military to Civilian Workforce Transition* to answer questions of who Veterans should include in their professional and personal networks (“Who”), what social resources are available from network contacts (“What”) at which phase of the transition (“When”), and how to build relationships with network contacts that may facilitate the transition from the military to civilian workforce (“How”). This framework identifies four types of network contacts that Veterans may include in their networks: family members, other Veterans, civilians, and formal resources persons. Furthermore, we describe the social resources they are likely to receive from these contacts (e.g., love/friendship, information, services, status, money, and goods) at each stage of the transition (e.g. approaching the transition, managing the transition, and assessing the transition) as well as practical suggestions for Veterans to connect with these network contacts. Additionally, we explain how the resources provided by network contacts enable successful role/identity transition. Finally, we discuss practical implications of our framework for service members, and we propose directions for future research on Veterans’ networks and the role that they play during Veterans’ transition from the military to the civilian workforce.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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**What is the public significance of this article?**—We present a *Guiding Framework for Building an Effective Network for the Military to Civilian Workforce Transition* to answer questions of who Veterans should include in their professional and personal networks (“Who”), what social resources are available from network contacts (“What”) at which phase of the transition (“When”), and how to build relationships with network contacts that may facilitate the transition from the military to civilian workforce (“How”). Additionally, we explain how the resources provided by network contacts enable successful role/identity transition. This framework not only lays a foundation for future research in this area of inquiry, but also offers more specific, practical guidance for Veterans and career counselors.

The transition from the military to the civilian workforce poses several challenges for Veterans, including feeling unprepared for acquiring civilian employment, difficulties translating military skills and qualifications into civilian equivalents, and navigating credentialing and licensing requirements (U.S. Chamber of

Commerce Foundation & George W. Bush Institute, 2014). Indeed, a common challenge Veterans experience as they transition from the military to the civilian workforce is obtaining their first post-military job (Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, Stewart, & Fisher, 2014; Kleykamp, 2010). Approximately 75% of Veterans transitioning into the civilian workforce spend time unemployed after leaving the military, with almost one-third of these Veterans spending 6 months or more looking for a job (Pew Research Center, 2019). Obtaining civilian employment after military separation not only provides financial stability, but also a sense of purpose and meaning, which helps foster a new identity as a Veteran *and* a civilian (Kintzle & Castro, 2018). Conversely, a lack of employment following military separation is associated with poor mental health, increased stress, and financial insecurity (Paul & Moser, 2009; Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015).

To assist with Veterans’ integration into the civilian workforce, the United States military has instituted a formal transition program called the Transition Assistance Program (TAP; see Faurer, Rogers-Broderson,

& Bailie, 2014; Simpson & Armstrong, 2009). Although TAP leads to employment in the civilian workforce (Faurer et al., 2014), it often fails to cater to the unique needs of different Veterans (Hart, 2018). As such, many Veterans report that TAP offers insufficient guidance for transitioning into the civilian workforce, especially regarding cultural differences between military and civilian workforce and supporting the necessary identity shift that cooccurs with the transition (Keeling, Ozuna, & Millsap, 2018; Troutman & Gagnon, 2014). Indeed, approximately two-thirds of Veterans report difficulties adjusting to civilian life and that they do not know where or who to go to for assistance (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015). This lack of assistance is problematic because Veterans who feel supported during their transition report more successful transitions than those who lack support (Lancaster, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018).

To assist with the transition out of the military and into the civilian workforce, transitioning service members (TSMs) must often rely on their networks of personal and professional contacts (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Hall, 2017; Moton, 2016; Spiegel & Shultz, 2003). For instance, in a study of 371 Navy admirals, approximately 55% reported networking as their most preferred method for preparing for the transition; and of those 55%, most reported successful transitions into the civilian workforce (Baruch & Quick, 2007). As they leave their communities for training and service, TSMs likely have “dormant ties”, or network contacts that they have not spoken with in at least 3 years (e.g., friends from high school). However, this is not necessarily a disadvantage, as reaching out to dormant ties is an effective strategy for accessing support resources that may ease the transition (Levin, Walter, & Murnighan, 2011). Furthermore, “weak ties” (i.e., network contacts with whom one has had limited interaction) tend to be sources of unique, non-redundant resources, such as novel information about job openings (Granovetter, 1973, 1995; Van Hoye, Van Hooft, & Lievens, 2009). In fact, approximately 70% of jobs are never advertised – rather they are filled via word-of-mouth, which makes networking imperative for finding civilian employment (Kaufman, 2011). Indeed, in a qualitative study, James (2017) found that 10 out of 10 Veterans reported networking as pivotal to securing civilian employment. Finally, the transition from the military to civilian workforce not only involves the transition to a civilian employment role, but also a transition to an integrated, military-civilian professional identity (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2007; Kintzle & Castro, 2018). During this time of uncertainty and identity expansion, network contacts from different social circles can have a significant impact on one’s professional identity development by providing

emotional support and unique resources that help TSMs clarify their emerging civilian professional identity (Dobrow & Higgins, 2005). In sum, TSMs’ networks of personal and professional contacts play a pivotal role in the transition from military to civilian workforce, providing the support needed for Veterans to transition into civilian employment and create an integrated identity with both military and civilian aspects.

Despite evidence that network contacts provide resources that facilitate the transition from the military to the civilian workforce, TSMs have few recommendations for *who* they should approach for *what* resources, or *when* during their transition they should reach out to their existing network contacts or begin building new relationships. The purpose of this paper is two-fold: First, we seek to provide a useful summary of the components of an *Effective Network for the Military to Civilian Workforce Transition* (see Table 1). We identify four types of contacts who can assist TSMs (“Who”), the types of support resources available from those contacts (“What”), and at what stage of the transition (“When”) to connect to these contacts. Furthermore, we draw from academic and popular press articles to offer practical recommendations for “how” Veterans can build relationships with each type of network contact. Second, we draw from vocational psychology to better understand the psychological nature of the military to civilian work transition and the influence that network contacts have on professional identity development. More specifically, we use the professional identity development and role transition literatures to elucidate the impact that network contacts have on the creation of an integrated military-civilian identity and successful integration into the civilian workforce. Our paper provides a foundation for researchers interested in understanding how different types of network contacts facilitate this unique transition, as well as insights for career counselors and TSMs as to how they may more effectively leverage their personal and professional networks to facilitate a successful transition from the military to the civilian workforce.

### **The dual nature of the military to civilian work role transition**

The process of transitioning from the military to a civilian profession involves both role transitions – in which one exits a military role and enters a civilian role – and identity transitions – in which one expands one’s identity to not only include a military identity but also a new professional identity in the civilian workforce. Role transitions often prompt identity transitions because people typically define themselves by the discrete roles that they play in society (Ashforth, 2001). In

**Table 1.** Building effective networks for the military to civilian workforce transition.

	Family	Veterans	Civilians	Formal Resource Persons
Approaching the Transition	<p><b>Love/friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional Support</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Career Types</li> <li>- Job search strategies</li> <li>- Job openings</li> <li>- Appropriate dress and behaviors</li> <li>- Civilian work norms</li> </ul> <p><b>Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Resume review</li> <li>- Shadowing at work</li> </ul> <p><b>Love/friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional support</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Housing</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civilian jargon</li> <li>- Appropriate dress and behavior</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job search strategies</li> <li>- Network building</li> <li>- strategies</li> <li>- Expectations for employment, salary, and civilian interactions</li> <li>- Civilian jargon, dress, and behaviors</li> </ul> <p><b>Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introductions to hiring managers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job openings</li> <li>- Job expectations and requirements</li> <li>- Company culture</li> <li>- Career overview</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Career options</li> <li>- Career strengths</li> <li>- Salary expectations</li> </ul> <p><b>Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Translating military experience into civilian terms</li> <li>- Resume writing</li> <li>- Interview Coaching</li> </ul>
Managing the Transition	<p><b>Love/friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional support</li> </ul> <p><b>Financial Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Housing</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civilian jargon</li> <li>- Appropriate dress and behavior</li> </ul>	<p><b>Friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional support</li> <li>- Camaraderie</li> <li>- Acceptance</li> </ul> <p><b>Respect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding and support for Veteran status</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Career overview</li> <li>- Job opportunities</li> <li>- Civilian norms</li> <li>- Realistic preview of civilian workplace</li> </ul> <p><b>Friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional support</li> <li>- Camaraderie</li> <li>- Acceptance</li> </ul> <p><b>Respect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Understanding and support for Veteran status</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Career overview</li> <li>- Job openings</li> <li>- Civilian norms</li> <li>- Realistic preview of civilian workplace</li> </ul>	<p><b>Friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional Support</li> <li>- Connection</li> <li>- Acceptance</li> </ul> <p><b>Respect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for Veteran status</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job tasks</li> </ul> <p><b>Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mentoring</li> <li>- Provide affirmation</li> <li>- Feedback</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Company practices, procedures and policies</li> </ul> <p><b>Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employment paperwork</li> <li>- Mediate conversations with co-workers and supervisors</li> </ul>
Assessing the Transition	<p><b>Love/friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional support</li> <li>- Acceptance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job openings</li> <li>- Job expectations and requirements</li> <li>- Company culture</li> <li>- Career overview</li> <li>- Job fairs Social Networking Sites</li> <li>- (Facebook, LinkedIn)</li> <li>- Asking for informational meetings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional Support</li> <li>- Connection</li> <li>- Acceptance</li> </ul> <p><b>Respect</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support for Veteran status</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job openings</li> <li>- Job expectations and requirements</li> <li>- Company culture</li> <li>- Career overview</li> <li>- Job fairs Social Networking Sites</li> <li>- (Facebook, LinkedIn)</li> <li>- Asking for informational meetings</li> </ul>	<p><b>Friendship</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emotional Support</li> </ul> <p><b>Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Job opportunities</li> </ul> <p><b>Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Evaluate current work role</li> <li>- Skills training and development</li> </ul>
How do you develop relationships with them?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Phone calls</li> <li>- Email</li> <li>- Social Networking Sites (Facebook, LinkedIn)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community-based Veteran organizations</li> <li>- Job fairs</li> <li>- Social Networking Sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Together We Served)</li> <li>- Asking for informational meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Transition assistance office on base</li> <li>- VA (if eligible)</li> <li>- Community organizations that employ career counselors (e.g. AMVETS)</li> </ul>	

the US military, new recruits are socialized into military culture, adopting the customs, habits, practices, norms and policies that dictate their behavior during service (Smith & True, 2014). This process typically leads to service members internalizing military values, behaviors, and attitudes, and thus developing a strong military identity that often strengthens as one's length of service increases (Kintzle & Castro, 2018). Exiting a role necessarily involves disengaging from a central, behaviorally anchored identity, exploring other potential identities, and finally creating a new, integrated identity (Ibarra, 2007). Within the context of the military transition process, this means disengaging from a military identity and subsequently creating an integrated military-civilian professional identity, in which one defines themselves not only by their (former) military role, but also their emerging civilian professional role (Ibarra, 2007). Thus, the transition from military to civilian work roles necessarily involves concurrent role-identity transition processes (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 1999).

### **Building effective networks for the military to civilian work role transition**

Military transition theory recognizes that TSMs maneuver through three stages as they exit the military and enter civilian life: Approaching the transition, Managing the transition, and Assessing the transition (Castro & Kintzle, 2014). During each stage, TSMs can reach out to four types of network contacts to provide access to support resources that ease the transition: Family, Veterans, Civilians, and Formal Resource Persons. First, one of the most important circles of people for TSMs to utilize during their transition to the civilian workforce is their family (i.e., parents, aunts, uncles and cousins) because access to stable, long-term personal relationships eases the transition (Baruch & Quick, 2009; Bennett et al., 2015; Wilson, 2015). Indeed, approximately 50% of Veterans return to their home of record, many of whom do so to be close to their families (IVMF, 2016). Second, fellow Veterans, including former colleagues or friends from the military (James, 2017; Szelwach, Steinkogler, Badger, & Muttukumaru, 2011) and other Veterans who have successfully transitioned into a civilian job (Ahern et al., 2015), offer useful perspectives and experiences that provide guidance to TSMs. Third, TSMs may incorporate civilians into their networks, especially civilians that are supportive of the military, such as friends or family of other Veterans, as they are more likely to understand Veterans' experiences and to offer support during their transition and appreciation or regard for their service (Fucci, n.d.). Additionally, civilians can provide helpful information

about industries or companies that TSMs are interested in seeking employment. Finally, formal resource persons may facilitate Veterans' transition into the civilian workforce, including employees in the TAP office on bases, the office of Veterans' affairs (VA), and professionals trained in helping Veterans transition into civilian professions.

Below, we discuss which of these network contacts ("Who") TSMs should approach for support resources ("What") at each of the three stages of the transition ("When"), and we discuss how those resources aid in the identity-role transition. We draw from Foa's resource framework to identify six broad types of resources network contacts may provide to TSMs: Love, status, money, goods, information, and services (Foa, 1971). Love – which we refer to as friendship – refers to the expression of affectionate regard, such as camaraderie, acceptance, and emotional support. Status – which we refer to as respect – is an expression of evaluative judgment which conveys high or low prestige, regard or esteem, such as demonstrating respect or appreciation for TSMs' Veteran status. Money – which we refer to as financial resources – refers to any type of currency either loaned or gifted. Goods are tangible products or support, such as providing business clothes for job interviews or a place to stay before a TSM secures housing. Information includes advice, opinions, instruction or knowledge about relevant topics such as job openings, job search strategies, or civilian employment. Lastly, services refer to actions or labor that one person does for another, such as reviewing the service member's resume, providing interviewing coaching, lending a car to get to interviews or a job, introducing the service member to useful contacts, or sponsoring the TSM by recommending them for employment.

While some types of contacts may be more or less helpful at different points during the transition, we propose that contacts from these social circles is capable of providing valuable resources at each stage of the transition. Indeed, a critical attribute of networks that makes them beneficial is the degree to which they provide access to a wide variety of resources (Burke, Bristor, & Rothstein, 1995; Higgins & Kram, 2001; Kram & Isabella, 1985). TSMs may be tempted to reach out only to those closest to them because it reinforces their military identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010); however, doing so may limit TSMs access to a range of support resources (Granovetter, 1973). To access the full range of support resources useful for the transition, TSMs should connect with a variety of network contacts from all four of the social contexts we highlight: Family, other Veterans, civilians (including potential employers and coworkers, former friends and acquaintances), and

formal resources (such as professional associations and community organizations; Dobrow & Higgins, 2005; Higgins & Kram, 2001). In some instances, multiple types of network contacts provide similar types of resources, suggesting that Veterans who are unable to connect with every type of contact may still access the resources necessary for a successful transition. However, the specific types of resources each contact offers (e.g., information about civilian work norms from Veterans versus civilians) plays a different role in facilitating the transition into a new civilian role and a new, integrated military-civilian identity.

### **Approaching the transition**

In the first stage, TSMs “approach the transition”, a time when the TSM is still in the military but knows that the military career is coming to an end. This stage varies in length depending on how far in advance a SM knows they are transitioning out of the military. Preparing for the transition well in advance (approximately 1 year before separation) can significantly reduce the difficulty of the transition (Ahern et al., 2015). Indeed, in a qualitative study of 18 Veterans from all branches Keeling, Ozuna, Kintzle, and Castro (2019) found that the longer service members had to plan their transition, the easier the transition into the civilian workforce. Although preparation facilitates a successful transition, many TSMs report that they do not take the necessary steps to find employment after separation, and approximately 75% of TSMs leave the military without having a job lined up (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014; Castro et al., 2015; Castro & Kintzle., 2017; Keeling et al., 2019; Kintzle, Rasheed, & Castro, 2016; Pew Research Center, 2019).

Once military members decide, or are notified, that they are leaving the military, they can utilize their remaining service time to explore options for civilian employment and think about which options would be a good fit for them and their current skills. TSMs may research civilian jobs, prepare their resumes, or interview for employment (if permitted). During this process, TSMs may also decide that further education or training programs are necessary for their desired civilian career and subsequently pursue educational opportunities (Rausch, 2014). TSMs may also begin anticipatory identification during this phase of transition (Ashforth, 2001), whereby the TSM begins to internalize the attributes that define occupants of the civilian work role. In other words, TSMs can use this time to learn civilian jargon, dress and behavior, and begin integrating these aspects of civilian life into their own. Although many TSMs are unsure of the type of civilian work they want to pursue (Prudential Financial Inc, 2012), anticipatory

identification (with civilian life in general) can prepare the TSM for future role-identity changes (Khapova, Arthur, Wilderom, & Svensson, 2007). The “approaching the transition” stage typically ends when the TSM completes employment with the military (Ashforth, 2001).

During this stage, TSMs may rely heavily on family, fellow Veterans, civilians, and formal resource persons for information and services related to transitioning into the civilian workforce post-military. Using all four types of contacts to gather information concerning civilian careers is likely to ease stress around deciding on a civilian career, obtaining employment, and learning what to expect in the civilian workforce. Indeed, a qualitative study of 18 Gulf War era II<sup>1</sup> Veterans from all service branches, both employed and unemployed, demonstrated that obtaining information about civilian careers prior to leaving the service eases the transition and lessens the time unemployed after separation (Keeling et al., 2019).

### **Family**

Family members offer *love/friendship, information, and services* during this stage of the transition. First, TSMs may reach out to family for love and friendship during this time. Receiving emotional support lessens the stress and potential for mental health problems as the TSM prepares for the transition from the military to the civilian workforce (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011; Lemaire & Graham, 2011). Indeed, emotional support from family can make the transition to the civilian workforce much easier (Baruch & Quick, 2009). At the same time, we recognize that not all TSMs are transitioning on their own, as approximately 50% of them are married (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). A Pew Research Study (2011) found that 63% of unmarried Veterans reported an easy reintegration into the civilian workforce, whereas only 48% of married Veterans reported an easy reintegration into the civilian workforce. The difference in successful reintegration between unmarried and married Veterans may be due to changes in family dynamics (e.g. the TSM may be spending more time at home) as well as the need to find spousal employment (Blackburn, 2017; Keeling, Borah, Kintzle, Kleykamp, & Robertson, 2020). Thus, it may be important for TSMs and their spouses to reach out to extended family for emotional support during this time (e.g., parents, cousins, siblings), as TSM spouses may also require similar forms of support (e.g., information about job opportunities, emotional support) to cope with the uncertainty of the impending transition (Keeling et al., 2020).



Second, family members may offer information related to types of careers, job search strategies, job openings, and appropriate behaviors and dress for job interviews and civilian work norms. For instance, TSMs leaving the military without a clear career plan may ask their family members about their jobs and careers to gain insider knowledge about what their jobs entail (Abrams, Faulkner, & Nierenberg, 2013). In addition, family members may give Veterans a realistic preview of their jobs by allowing the Veteran shadow them at work or give them a tour of their workplace. Such experiences may help Veterans decide what type of work they would like to do, which would help them determine the type of preparation that is necessary for their career or job (Abrams et al., 2013; Blore, 2015). Furthermore, family members may discuss what behaviors and skills are necessary for success in the civilian workforce, which may encourage TSMs to explore an integrated military-civilian identity. Finally, family members may provide services to TSMs, such as reviewing their resume to ensure military experiences are adequately translated in civilian jargon or introducing them to people at potential employers.

### **Veterans**

Veterans who have gone through the transition are better able to relate and understand the perspective of TSMs, offering access to both *information* about the transition to the civilian workforce as well as *services* that enable TSMs to find employment (Blore, 2015). First, connecting with Veterans provides TSMs with opportunities to obtain information about job search strategies and encouragement to “find the right networks to explore given their interests and skill sets” (Baruch & Quick, 2009, p. 279). Additionally, Veterans can provide information aimed at setting realistic expectations for employment, salary, and interactions with civilians (Keeling, 2018; Keeling et al., 2018). Furthermore, Veterans who are gainfully employed in the civilian workforce can provide insider information about the companies they work for, enabling TSMs to navigate the application and interview process more easily (Fucci, n.d.). These Veterans can also provide information about the civilian workforce such as civilian jargon, dress, and behavior, that may enable TSMs to explore new possible identities.

Second, Veterans may offer services to TSMs, such as introducing TSMs to influential people (e.g., hiring managers) or providing strategies for obtaining a job (e.g. where to look for jobs, interview techniques, dress and appearance). In fact, Veteran-friendly organizations may use Veteran employees to find new Veteran talent, which makes networking with other

Veterans all the more important. For instance, in 2011, J.P. Morgan and several other large companies made it their mission to hire 100,000 Veterans before 2020. To fulfill this goal, these companies utilized Veteran employees to assess Veteran candidates because they better understand how military training and skills translate to the civilian workforce (Hall et al., 2014). For many TSMs, Veteran contacts were sometimes the only reason they obtained employment: Based on interviews of 16 Veterans and Veteran service program directors, Szelwach et al. (2011) found that half discussed the usefulness of Veteran connections in finding employment.

### **Civilians**

Networking with civilians has the potential to provide access to *information* that may facilitate their entrance into and success in a civilian organization. For example, networking with civilians offers access to information about job openings, job expectations or position requirements, and company culture (Delbourg-Delphis, 2014). Connecting with civilians before TSMs leave the military can help them learn about career paths, decide on a career path, and learn appropriate behaviors and jargon that enable exploration of possible identities and subsequently a smoother role-identity transition. TSMs may also build relationships with civilians in the organizations or industries in which they want to work as a means to learn more about those organizations or industries; civilians may also provide information about when the organization is hiring and work role requirements (HirePurpose, 2016).

### **Formal resource persons**

Formal resource persons can provide *information* and *services* to TSMs during the “approaching the transition” stage, which makes the transition to the civilian workforce more manageable for many Veterans, who are accustomed to the military’s more structured career path and work environment (Bennett et al., 2015). Career counselors are one type of formal resource person who work with Veterans to identify their career-focused strengths and weaknesses (Reppert, Buzzetta, & Rose, 2014; Simpson & Armstrong, 2009; Troutman & Gagnon, 2014) and their most promising career options (Blore, 2015; Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011). Such information provides a firm foundation for Veterans to build from so that they may more effectively shoulder the responsibility of their own career management. In addition, career counselors help Veterans translate their military experience into civilian terms so they can more effectively illustrate their relevant expertise on resumes and in interviews with hiring managers

(Baruch & Quick, 2009; Delbourg-Delphis, 2014; Troutman & Gagnon, 2014). Finally, career counselors help Veterans set realistic expectations regarding salaries (Simpson & Armstrong, 2009) and career goals (Reppert et al., 2014). Connecting to formal resource persons before separation enables TSMs to determine the type of civilian work they want to pursue, determine the necessity of additional training/education, and learn about strategies for applying to and interviewing for jobs.

### **Managing the transition phase**

The second stage is “managing the transition”, which refers to the period where the TSM searches for employment while adjusting to civilian life and/or begins civilian employment. The most useful contacts and resources during this stage may differ based on the TSMs’ plans for employment. TSMs that do not have a job lined up post-separation will likely benefit from connecting with network contacts for the resources described in the “approaching the transition” stage. Considering that only approximately 25% of Veterans have a job lined up immediately following separation from the military (Keeling et al., 2019; Pew Research Center, 2019), the majority of Veterans will enter a “liminal stage” (or an in-between stage; Ibarra, 2007) in which they either search for employment during this period or decide to pursue training or education. During this liminal stage, TSMs have exited the military and therefore are in the process of redefining their professional identity; without a job lined up post-separation, they do not have a professional role to base their identity on and are likely to feel disconnected from both their military identity and a future the civilian professional identity (Bridges, 2009). This disconnection is often associated with poor well-being and mental health (Ahern et al., 2015; Mares & Rosenheck, 2004). Thus, connecting to network contacts may be especially important for these TSMs to decrease the likelihood of poor mental health and bolster TSMs’ self-esteem and persistence when making their next career decision (Hachey, Sudom, Sweet, MacLean, & VanTil, 2016; Kintzle, Barr, Corletto, & Castro, 2018).

For those that have a job lined up post-separation, the “managing the transition” phase is primarily focused on their successful reintegration into the civilian workforce and creating an integrated military-civilian identity. These TSMs are less likely to need information about job openings, job search strategies, and resume writing (because they have secured employment), but they are more likely to need love and friendship, information about working in the civilian workplace, and regard for

their Veteran status, especially since they likely have reduced access to the friendship and camaraderie of their fellow service members.

Once a Veteran secures employment, or enters education, managing the transition includes, but is not limited to, learning new a language, new ways to dress, and even new ways to refer to oneself as a member of the civilian workforce. For instance, one no longer refers to oneself by rank and last name but by first name (Hale, 2017). When beginning their new role, TSMs may explore what it means to be a Veteran in the civilian workforce, which informs their decisions about which aspects of their new professional role they identify with. Indeed, new roles require new skills, behaviors, attitudes, and patterns of interpersonal interactions, which may produce fundamental changes in a person’s identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Because service members tend to develop a strong military identity, it is unlikely that a Veteran will completely shed their previous military identity – indeed, up to one-third of Veterans continue to identify with the military as their dominant identity (Kelty, Woodruff, & Segal, 2017). Instead, it is more likely that Veterans will seek to reconcile their military identity with their emerging professional identity, which ultimately results in an integrated military-civilian identity (Ibarra, 2007).

### **Family**

During the managing the transition phase, family members are likely to be key sources of four of the six support resources: Love/friendship, financial support, goods, and information. First, family members often provide love and friendship that promotes resilience and positive feelings during the transition (Baruch & Quick, 2007). These close relationships can also mitigate the fear and self-doubt that many Veterans experience during the process of securing civilian employment (Moton, 2016). In a qualitative study of 300 former Navy admirals, family members were reported as the greatest source of emotional support (Baruch & Quick, 2009), which is important for TSMs to explore their new military-civilian identity (Grimell, 2017). Creating an integrated military-civilian identity can be a disorienting process in which the TSM is unsure of who they are or how they fit into their new environment (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra, 2007). Family members can aid TSMs during this process by recognizing that the TSM is changing, while also grounding the TSM as they explore their new professional identity (Grimell, 2017; Ibarra, 2004). It is important to note that in some cases, especially for those TSMs that have seen combat, family members will make major efforts to provide support, but TSMs may have difficulty accessing that support due to feeling disconnected from

those that may not truly understand their military experiences (Ahern et al., 2015). Thus, connecting with family may require effort from both the TSM and family members for the TSM to reap the benefits of emotional support. In short, family members are a key source of friendship and emotional support, but the accessibility of such resources depends upon the TSMs circumstances.

Second, family members may also provide TSMs with financial support and goods, such as a place to stay following separation. Such resources are especially important if the TSM experiences unemployment following separation from the military and does not have adequate savings (Robertson & Brott, 2013). Indeed, approximately half of military members planning to separate from the military in the upcoming year had less than 5,000 USD in savings (Blue Star Families Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 2018), which may not be sufficient to cover a Veteran's expenses for an extended period of time. Thus, having family members who are willing to provide a tangible support during the transition can be a key factor in promoting success. Finally, family members can provide TSMs with information related to integrating into the civilian workplace. For instance, family can provide information about civilian jargon, behavior, and dress to ease the TSMs transition into the workplace and aid in identity development.

### Veterans

Fellow Veterans provide TSMs with three types of resources during this stage: *Love/friendship*, *respect*, and *information*. First, and perhaps most importantly, connecting with other Veterans provides a sense of friendship and respect that new Veterans may miss after separating from the military (James, 2017), easing the stress of the transition. Many Veterans lament the lack of camaraderie when they leave the military because most civilians do not understand the military lifestyle or the mental and physical toll the military has. Conversely, fellow Veterans can provide appreciation and respect for the TSMs' previous experiences in the military. Indeed, it is easier for Veterans to feel comfortable being genuine and to create an integrated military-civilian identity when they interact with other Veterans who have successfully transitioned into the civilian workforce (James, 2017); fellow Veterans can serve as mentors and role models to provide support as TSMs navigate their new environment and disengage from an identity based solely on their military experience (i.e. civilian workforce; Hall, 2017). Furthermore, connecting with other Veterans enables new Veterans to navigate their civilian identity without entirely losing their military identity. In a qualitative

study of 11 male Veterans, those who maintained some sense of their military identity by connecting with other Veterans, while also creating a civilian identity, tended to fare better in the transition than those that did not (Brunger, Serrato, & Ogden, 2013).

Furthermore, experienced Veterans assist new Veterans by providing information about careers, job opportunities, and civilian norms. For instance, Veterans who have transitioned can offer a realistic preview of the civilian workplace. New Veterans may expect everyone to work hard, know their duties, and support one another, which is not always the case in the civilian workplace (Schmaltz, 2011). Many Veterans (especially those with combat experience) struggle to take their civilian counterparts seriously when they complain about seemingly mundane issues, and experienced Veterans can help new Veterans come to terms with differences in work cultures. Furthermore, these more experienced Veterans also help new Veterans learn how to interact with civilians (i.e. which behaviors are or are not appropriate), how to speak to civilians (the restroom is no longer referred to as "the head"; some women do not like being referred to as ma'am), and how to react when someone asks difficult questions ("Did you kill anyone?"; Blore, 2015; McAllister, Mackey, Hackney, & Perrewe, 2015; Woodworth, 2015).

### Civilians

During the managing the transition phase, civilians offer access to *information*, *friendship*, *respect*, and *services*. Upon entering a work role, civilian coworkers may provide information about job tasks and emotional support (i.e. friendship), which facilitates TSMs adjustment in the organization and helps to develop their more integrated military-civilian identity (Baruch & Quick, 2007). In fact, new civilian acquaintances are perfectly positioned to enable TSM to disengage from their military-centered identity, as well as explore and develop their new, integrated military-civilian identity because they do not hold any preconceived ideas of who the TSM was before and can accept the TSM as they are now, following exiting the military (Ibarra, 2004).

Furthermore, networking with civilians helps create common ground between Veterans and civilians. Most civilians have little understanding of the military lifestyle or culture, making the transition to the civilian workforce frustrating (Robertson & Brott, 2013). Building relationships with civilians provides opportunities for Veterans and civilians to understand one another better (i.e. respect; Hammer, Wan, Brockwood, Mohr, & Carlson, 2017; James, 2017); Veterans share information about the military culture and lifestyle, and civilians share information about the civilian workforce (James,



2017; Woodworth, 2015). This exchange of information helps lessen Veterans' feelings of alienation and build connections with civilians (Ahern et al., 2015). Finally, civilian coworkers may provide services by mentoring TSMs, providing affirmation and positive feedback as the Veteran adjusts to the civilian workforce (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011), which can encourage TSMs while they create their military-civilian identity.

### **Formal resource persons**

Formal resource persons offer access to *information* and *services* to help TSMs adjust to the civilian workplace. Once a TSM secures civilian employment, they may no longer need a career counselor but instead rely on human resource personnel to provide information about company practices and procedures as well as help to complete employment paperwork or navigating healthcare or other benefits (if applicable) (SHRM, n.d.). Learning company practices and procedures ensures that TSMs know what is expected of them and helps them begin (or continue) internalizing civilian jargon, behaviors, and appearance to create an integrated military-civilian identity. Additionally, human resources personnel can help TSMs navigate uncomfortable conversations with coworkers and supervisors (e.g. "Have you killed anyone?" Blore, 2015).

### **Assessing the transition**

During the last stage, Veterans "assess the transition", where they evaluate whether the new role and new identity works for them. As Veterans begin to settle into their new professional roles, they likely also begin settling into their new, integrated identity. They continue to learn about the expected behaviors, attitudes and interpersonal interactions required for their role and begin to routinely enact these expected behaviors; they start to internalize them, and they become part of TSMs new identity. Conversely, since many TSMs do not have employment upon separation (Keeling et al., 2019; Pew Research Center, 2019), many are primarily concerned with finding employment for financial security (Bowes, Ferreira, & Henderson, 2018). This can lead to Veterans taking jobs they are over-qualified for or uninterested in, leading many Veterans to search for another civilian job. In fact, a survey of 1,248 Veterans found approximately half (43%) had left their first civilian job to find something more suitable with the first year of employment (IVMF, 2016). In sum, this stage allows Veterans to reflect on their current role, adjust to the civilian world, and make adjustments to their civilian professional roles and/or identities if they are not content with their

transition process. Those that decide to change jobs or careers may revisit connecting with network contacts for the resources described in the "approaching the transition" and "managing the transition" stages. Indeed, the military to civilian workforce transition is not a linear process, and it often requires continual learning and reflection until TSMs find a professional role (and network support system) that is appropriate for their skills and preferences.

For many Veterans, the military to civilian role-identity transition tends to be quite difficult. Indeed, several surveys report that almost half of Veterans rate their transition to the civilian workforce as "difficult" or "very difficult" (e.g. Pew Research Center, 2019). The military and civilian workforce, while potentially similar in work tasks, offer vastly different guidelines on what is acceptable behavior, with the military governed by strict rules, hierarchy and collectivism and the civilian workforce governed by individualism and less rigidity (Baruch & Quick, 2007; Brunger et al., 2013). Often, Veterans indicate that their military identity conflicts with a civilian identity (i.e., "Veteran-civilian career identity conflict/strain") because of these stark differences in work culture (Stern, 2017). Due to these challenges, many Veterans continue to transition into an integrated identity for years after obtaining civilian employment (Brunger et al., 2013). Failure to create an identity that integrates both military and civilian aspects is associated with difficulty transitioning into the civilian world (Castro & Kintzle, 2014; Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2009; Lancaster et al., 2018; Smith & True, 2014). Indeed, identity conflict is a limiting factor in maintaining gainful and productive employment (McAllister et al., 2015). Thus, the most important resources during this phase are those that enable TSMs to successfully create an integrated military-civilian identity.

### **Family**

As TSMs settle into their new role, family provides access to *love/friendship*. Indeed, love and friendship during this stage may help the Veteran feel more connected to their new professional role and identity, which is important to transition success (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020). Family members may continue to provide emotional support as TSMs settle into and/or reevaluate their new professional roles and provide acceptance of their new integrated military-civilian identity.

### **Veterans**

Veterans who have successfully navigated the military to civilian workforce transition can provide *friendship*, *respect*, and *information (advice)* to TSMs. Only a fellow Veteran will truly understand the experiences

TSMs face in both serving and transitioning into the civilian workforce; thus, Veterans can provide support and advice as TSMs assess their current situation and determine whether it is the right fit. Veterans can also provide the sense of camaraderie that many Veterans miss after leaving the military (Keeling et al., 2019) which reinforces the military aspect of their identity. Finally, because Veterans truly understand the military experience, they are more likely to respect others' military experiences and Veteran status.

### **Civilians**

Civilians provide *friendship*, *respect*, and *information*. Although civilians may not fully understand a TSM's military experience, they can still provide emotional support and friendship based on other commonalities. For instance, civilians and TSMs may bond over favorite sports teams or interest in similar activities (James, 2017). These friendships can enable TSMs to deepen the civilian aspect of their identity through exposure and support. Furthermore, public support for the military is high and many civilians respect the sacrifices made by service members (Pew Research Center, 2011). Thus, while not the same form of respect as experienced in the military, civilians can respect and accept TSMs' Veteran status which allows TSMs to retain aspects of their military identity in their new environment. Finally, civilians continue to offer information about career paths and job opportunities for those TSMs who are reconsidering their first job, and who are seeking alternative employment.

### **Formal resource persons**

While potentially less needed during this stage, formal resource persons, such as a career counselor or job coach, can help TSMs evaluate their current work role and decide whether it is a good fit. If the work role is not a good fit, then TSMs can utilize formal resource persons for *information* and *services* related to finding and obtaining new civilian employment (as noted in the "approaching the transition" stage above). Conversely, a job coach can help Veterans learn and develop additional skills necessary to succeed in their civilian role (Prete, 2020). Finally, human resources personnel can provide *friendship* (i.e. emotional support) by making transitioning service members feel valued at their job and bolster TSMs' self-confidence, which in turn can help Veterans further develop their integrated military-civilian identity (Carpenter & Silberman, 2020).

### **How to connect**

In general, people dislike asking others for help for fear that they are an inconvenience or demonstrating

incompetence (Lee, 2002). This may be especially true for TSMs since they are trained to solve issues on their own and networking is considered 'brown-nosing' in the military (Kranke, DeShone, & Gin, 2018). Furthermore, if one cannot contact someone with relative ease, they are less likely to ask for help from that person (Small & Sukhu, 2016). Thus, we offer practical suggestions for TSMs to increase the accessibility of useful network contacts.

### **Family**

Connecting with family members is typically as simple as reaching out to ask for assistance (Hall, 2017; Woodworth, 2015). Similarly, reaching out to dormant ties (i.e., old acquaintances or people whom a TSM previously had a relationship) can be relatively simple and require little time commitment. Indeed, dormant ties – those with whom one has not had contact with in the past 3 years or more – are typically willing to provide information or advice (Levin et al., 2011; Walter, Levin, & Murnighan, 2015). Thus, TSMs may reach out to family via phone, e-mail or social media sites to reconnect.

### **Veterans**

There are three primary ways new Veterans can connect with other Veterans. First, for friends and former colleagues, connecting may be as easy as making a phone call or sending a message on social media platforms like Facebook or via e-mail (Szelwach et al., 2011); former connections tend to be easily accessible and ready to provide support (Levin et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2015). Second, Veterans can network with other Veterans at Veteran-specific job fairs or via professional social networking sites like LinkedIn (Szelwach et al., 2011; Weinburger, Strider, & Vengrouskie, 2015). For instance, the Veteran Mentor Network on LinkedIn has over 150,000 members for transitioning service members to connect with and get help from; however, preliminary data from a content analysis of this LinkedIn group suggests that it may be more useful for getting advice about the transition in general and working in the civilian workforce than obtaining information about job leads (Biggs, 2014).

Finally, Veterans might connect with other Veterans through Veteran-focused community organizations (Blore, 2015; e.g., Team Red, White and Blue<sup>2</sup>) or community organizations that cater to specific Veterans, such as those with disabilities (e.g., Disabled American Veterans<sup>3</sup>), or those with specific interests (e.g., Combat Veteran Motorcycle Association<sup>4</sup>). Many large Veteran organizations are well-connected in the community and

can introduce new Veterans to a network of people who can provide career guidance, job leads, and support through the transition (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation & George W. Bush Institute, 2014). These organizations connect Veterans to companies and organizations looking to hire Veterans and connect Veterans with mentors who can help them transition into the civilian workforce. Some examples of these types of organizations include Veterans in Business Network<sup>5</sup> for those that want to start their own business; American Corporate Partners<sup>6</sup> which pairs Veterans with a mentor to help them find and transition into civilian employment; Heroes Linked<sup>7</sup> which connects service members to those with expertise in their desired field that can assist in finding civilian employment; Together We Served<sup>8</sup> which connects Veterans with similar service experiences or interests; and Foundation for Veteran Employment Transition Services<sup>9</sup> (VETS) which connects Veterans with employers. With over 45,000 Veteran service organization and programs nationwide (Guidestar, 2015), Veterans may feel overwhelmed when choosing a Veteran-focused organization; the National Resource Directory (nrd.org) can help Veterans find organizations in their hometown and that cater to their needs.

### Civilians

Much like the methods used to network with Veterans, new Veterans can use networking specific events (e.g. job fairs), social networking sites and community organizations to build relationships with civilians; although networking with civilians differs from networking with Veterans in that it requires one to connect through shared interests (e.g., music, food, or sports) as opposed to a shared military experience (James, 2017). Specific networking events (e.g., job fairs) provide the opportunity to explore career options and meet recruiters or hiring managers face-to-face, which may help Veterans convey their previous experience more effectively than a resume (Abrams et al., 2013). In addition, social media sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, are often used by Veterans to identify job leads (Hall, 2017). The more LinkedIn connections a Veteran has, the more likely they are to receive information about a job. In a study of 393 US Navy Veterans or transitioning Navy service members, Weinburger et al. (2015) found a positive correlation between number of LinkedIn connections and job information received. Although many older Veterans believe that social networking sites are reserved for younger Veterans, they use them if they find it necessary (Weinburger et al., 2015). Military Officers Association of America (2018) suggests spending

10 minutes a day on LinkedIn, making at least one new connection, and setting up two informational meetings with contacts to learn more about their job, company, and career path.

### Formal resource persons

TSMs may connect with formal resource persons while on active duty by visiting their base's transition assistance office (also referred to as transition assistance center, transition readiness office, or transition service office), which is typically housed in the military and family readiness unit or the fleet and family support center. All TSMs, regardless of discharge type, are entitled to career counseling services through the transition assistance offices (Department of Defense [DoD], 2019).

TSMs interested in educational and career counseling through the VA must meet eligibility requirements, such as having an other than dishonorable discharge or qualifying for education assistance.<sup>10</sup> Eligible members can access these benefits by applying online (<https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/education-and-career-counseling/>), by mail using VA Form 28-8832, or by taking their VA Form 28-8832 to their nearest regional office. Once the office has verified qualification, transitioning service members can set up an appointment to receive career counseling services at the VA. Finally, TSMs still on active duty or those who have already separated may connect with Veteran service organizations that offer career counseling. For instance, AMVETS offers free career training and employment assistance to all Veterans and their spouses, including help obtaining licensing and certification, teaching interview skills, and resume writing.

### Discussion

Although interpersonal relationships have been identified as important sources of social support during the military to civilian workforce transition (Baruch & Quick, 2007), hardly any research addresses how different types of network contacts or the resources they provide facilitate this transition. To offer fresh insights into this issue, we provide a framework that identifies *who* Veterans should approach for *what* resources and *when* during the transition. Specifically, we identified four broad types of network contacts that Veterans may pursue as they build (or maintain) their networks – Family, Veterans, Civilians, and Formal Resource Persons – and we specified the resources provided by each (e.g. love/friendship, respect, money, goods,

information, and services) across the three stages of the military to civilian transition (i.e., approaching the transition, managing the transition, and assessing the transition; Kintzle & Castro, 2018). Furthermore, deepening our understanding of the role of networks in facilitating a successful transition, we discuss how the resources provided during each phase enable successful role-identity transition. Finally, we provide suggestions for *how* TSMs can approach these network contacts to build effective personal and professional networks.

### **Practical implications**

The framework presented offers practical implications for both TSMs, career counselors, and network contacts who want to support TSMs. First, TSMs should begin evaluating, and building, their network well in advance of their military separation (if possible) to ensure access the resources necessary for a successful transition. Indeed, the military life cycle planning tool used in the military suggests that military members should be thinking about their civilian career from the beginning of their military career (U.S. VA, 2018). If, like many service members report, they do not have the time to prepare for their military to civilian workforce transition, TSMs can utilize this framework to know *who* to reach out to for *what* resources and at which stage (*when*) in their transition. Utilizing this framework will enable TSMs to have a smoother transition to the civilian workforce and be better able to create and integrated military-civilian identity which is crucial for success. We suggest that reaching out to a variety of contacts at each stage enables a more successful transition; these contacts offer resources that reinforce TSMs military identity, transform TSMs' professional identity, and help TSMs find and adjust to civilian employment. While networking is touted as an important activity to obtain civilian employment, few resources suggest *how* service members connect with network contacts. We suggest that TSMs utilize phone calls, e-mail, social media, office visits, and community organizations to connect with important contacts.

Second, formal resource persons can utilize this framework to help TSMs identify and fill gaps in their network. People tend to reach out to those closest to them because it reinforces their current identity, but formal resource persons, specifically career counselors, can utilize this framework to encourage TSMs to engage in behaviors that build these contacts throughout the transition process. Furthermore, this framework enables formal resource persons to help TSMs access the resources necessary for a successful transition by identifying which network contacts to approach for what

resources. Finally, those who wish to support TSMs could utilize this framework to offer targeted support to TSMs based on their stage of transition. More specifically, family, Veterans, civilians, and formal resource persons can be proactive in offering the necessary resources to TSMs to alleviate the burden of networking.

### **Theoretical implications**

We also offer theoretical insights into the role of network contacts in the military to civilian transition by more directly identifying *what* types of social support resources (money, goods, service, status, information and love) Veterans may access through their personal and professional networks. Although much of the literature did not explicitly identify the resources or type of assistance provided to Veterans, we identified specific types of resources that Veterans may access from their network connections based on our knowledge of the networks literature and existing resource frameworks (e.g., Foa, 1971; Ibarra, 1993). By specifying these resources, we provide theoretical insights for research on the role of networks during the transition from the military to civilian workforce by elaborating upon how different types of network contacts influence the success of Veterans' transitions – both role and identity transitions.

### **Limitations and future research directions**

Despite these benefits, our paper has two limitations. First, we did not explore how leaving the military with physical or mental health issues may influence with whom or how a Veteran should network. Considering that approximately 30% of post 9–11 servicemembers report mental health issues (Zogas, 2017), there is a need to understand how such considerations influence Veterans' ability to build effective networks as a means to integrate into the civilian workforce. However, this diverse and broad literature was beyond the scope of this initial framework. Our goal was to provide an initial framework that future research may develop further to explain how TSMs with specific circumstances can build and leverage their personal and professional networks for the transition. Second, we did not differentiate between active-duty personnel, reservists, or national guardsmen because the majority of extant research has focused on active duty Veterans. Although our framework is pertinent to all three groups, many reservists and national guardsmen hold civilian jobs while serving in the military and therefore, likely have less difficulty transitioning into the civilian workforce after separating from the military (Burnett-Zeigler et al., 2011).



While our framework offers a useful first step in identifying the resources derived from these relationships, we suggest that additional research is needed to empirically validate our suggested mechanisms. For instance, future research may assess Veterans' networks structure as well as the types of resources derived from network contacts in order to evaluate whether certain types of network contacts and resources are more or less useful for the transition. Additionally, most of the reviewed studies adopted qualitative methods that relied on relatively small sample sizes or were based on case studies of a few people. While these studies lay an initial foundation for understanding the military to civilian workforce transition, there is an opportunity to empirically and systematically investigate the role of networks in the transition as well as contingencies on the utility of networks for different types of Veterans (e.g. rank, time in service, military job). Although not directly addressed in the literature, we suggest that future research investigate whether and how Veterans' military experiences (e.g., years of experience, rank, type of discharge) impact how they build networks and what types of resources they seek from their network contacts. For example, a one-term enlisted servicemembers may rely on their family more heavily (i.e., parents) due to their age (typically 21–24 years) and limited financial resources. Further, as they are likely to have not completed any post-secondary education, they may choose to go to school after leaving the military. Indeed, approximately 50% of TSMs pursue education after separation (U.S. VA, 2018). These are all factors that likely influence type of network they build. In contrast, one-term officers may have many civilian contacts from college, which would enable them to more easily connect with civilians. Finally, Veterans who have served a 20-year career may find it more beneficial to use a career counselor to identify transferable skills while also using proactive, individually driven networking with former colleagues and friends who have successfully transitioned out of the military to provide advice and job leads.

We found that Veterans connect with other Veterans because they can relate to one another based on their shared experiences and shared identity as a former servicemember (Demers, 2011), which suggests that the military is central to many Veterans' identity. Prior research on professional identity has asserted that one's professional connections have an impact in reinforcing and shaping one's identity (e.g., Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Integrating insights from these two lines of research, we suggest that future research may consider how Veterans' networks facilitate their professional transition into civilian life by reinforcing their military identity or not. For instance, the degree to

which Veterans' networks are composed of fellow servicemembers versus civilians may differentially influence their success during the transition. It seems that a mix of both Veteran and civilian network contacts would be optimal: Fellow Veterans may help in reinforcing Veterans' military identity and understanding their perspective, whereas civilians may help in shaping or creating the Veterans' civilian, professional identity. Additional research is needed to understand the relative influence of these two types of network contacts, how they influence the development and maintenance of Veterans' identities, and whether their influence is beneficial for the transition to the civilian workforce. On a related note, it may be important to consider whether Veterans no longer desire to associate with the military (e.g., due to a challenging experience), which would influence their decisions to connect with Veterans and therefore, the type of advice they receive about how to successfully transition into the civilian workforce.

Finally, much of the literature on the role of networks in the military to civilian workforce transition addresses how Veterans identify and obtain employment, but there is very little that addresses how their networks are useful once they obtain employment (i.e., when they are a member of an employing organization). In a recent study of 26 organizations that sought to hire 100,000 Veterans, two of the organizations reported that Veterans scored higher than their civilian colleagues in performance reviews and received more promotions; however, the other 24 companies did not track the performance of their hired Veterans (Milan, 2015). We suggest that organizations should consider tracking how Veterans perform and adjust to their new jobs and employing organizations, which may provide evidence in support of hiring Veterans and help Veterans overcome stereotypes associated with having seen combat (Hall et al., 2014; Milan, 2015). Not only this, but research is needed to better understand how Veterans use their networks to acclimate to employing organizations. Literature in human resource management and industrial psychology addresses the role of networks in employee socialization broadly (e.g., Fang, Duffy, & Shaw, 2011), but there is hardly any research addressing how this process may be similar or different for Veterans. Indeed, we suggest that it is important to connect not only to fellow Veterans, but also civilians in one's employing organization, because those people can share information about the social norms, political climate, and work-related advice. Empirical research is needed to investigate the generalizability of these arguments to the Veteran workforce. We expect that the framework we developed here will be useful for future empirical research that seeks to better understand how Veterans build effective networks

for their transition; however, we emphasize that empirical research is needed to investigate what types of network connections are most important, why (i.e., verifying the underlying mechanisms for the usefulness of different types of network connections), and when during the transition.

## Notes

1. Service members who served after 9/11/2001.
2. Team Red, White, and Blue is a national organizational with 217, 557 registered members that connects Veterans to other Veterans and their community through planned social activities. More information at <https://www.teamrwb.org/>.
3. Disabled America Veterans (DAV) is a nonprofit organization that provides a lifetime of support to Veterans wounded or disabled during service with honorable discharges. DAV helps Veterans find meaningful employment. For more information visit <https://www.dav.org/>.
4. Combats Veterans Motorcycle Association is a national, registered Veterans nonprofit organization for Veterans of all branches who enjoy riding motorcycles as a hobby. Membership is open to those who have served in combat as well as those who have not and spouses. For more information visit <https://www.combatvet.us/>.
5. <https://www.vibnetwork.org/>.
6. <https://www.acp-usa.org/>.
7. <https://heroeslinked.org/>.
8. <https://www.togetherweserved.com/>.
9. <https://www.foundationforvets.org/>.
10. Qualifications are that one served at least 90 days on active duty on or after September 11, 2001, or received a Purple Heart on or after September 11, 2011 and were honorably discharged, or served for at least 30 continuous days on or after September 11, 2011 and were honorably discharged with a service connected disability.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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