

Beyond being the best: educating for
narrative repair in transition from
British Army to 'Civvy Street'

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a military to civilian transition (MCT) autoethnography to highlight the unique nature of military life and work, and how this can complexify a move back to 'Civvy Street'. It reinforces prevailing research indicating that the total career and life demands inherent in a military context can lead to the emergence of a profound sense of a covenanted military self, which, by definition, can fragment amid an experience of significant loss as military leavers (MLs) attempt to cross the civil-military gap; frequently accompanied by additional issues of trauma.

With a focus on enculturation into the British Army and how that can problematise attempts to construct a transition bridge, the narrative account at the centre of this thesis serves to exemplify not only the findings reflected in the pertinent literature but to illustrate how educating MLs, veterans and their families in the use of narrative review methods might assist them, with support, to co-construct their own transitions. The resulting recommendations are founded on the author's conceptualisation of a Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT; itself a metaphor based on existing military doctrine and a means of enabling those embarking on or undergoing MCT to harness their personal, situational and support assets to outweigh and manoeuvre around any liabilities. This supported self-assessment process can be adaptive to individual circumstances and can afford those undertaking it a vital sense control in their transition trajectories.

While the application of this approach would require adjustment to current MCT assistance in the United Kingdom (UK), such alteration need not be financially expensive. In contrast, the personal, social and financial costs of failing to provide effective support to MLs, veterans and their families can be dear for all concerned. The Manoeuvrist Approach to realising MCT benefits that this thesis proposes might mitigate many of those socioeconomic costs.

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KEY COLLOQUIALISM, ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
Civvy Street	Civilian, as opposed to military environment
CTP	Career Transition Partnership
DCMH	Department of Community Mental Health
ESLs	Early Service Leavers
MCT	military to civilian transition
ML	military leaver
MOD	(UK's) Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NHS	(UK's) National Health Service
RAEC	Royal Army Educational Corps
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UOTC	University Officers' Training Corps
US	United States of America
WIS	Wounded, injured and sick

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging episodes of our lives into stories.

(McAdams, 1993, p. 11)

In attempting to resurrect myself as a child and a young man I had a very personal objective: I wanted to discover how and why I became what I am, to understand the forces and emotions behind my present reactions. I tried to find them, not through a psychological analysis, but by calling up the images and sensations I had once seen and felt, and later on absorbed and re-edited.

I also had a general objective.

(Barea, 2018, p. 245)

Overview

As the above quotations imply, stories, synonymous with narratives, are universally employed across all human cultures to guide us in making sense of our lives. Where some might turn to clinical help when attempting to navigate their way through confusing experiences, others opt for narrative self-exploration. Nevertheless, while this study was initially inspired by that personal objective of self-discovery, its principal focus became the broader goal of enabling other veterans to consider the same approach as they transition from their former military lives and work back to the civilian context.

Despite a focus on the self (myself in this case), this thesis is founded on the view that the self only exists in relationship with the societal, cultural and environmental influences that conceive, nurture, surround and sustain it, underpinned by the philosophy that any sense of self is a co-construction forged by dynamic interaction with its surroundings (Frosh, 1991; Jenkins, 1996; Dominicé, 2000; Elliott, 2001). If the self is co-constructed in this context, the same forces can threaten its deconstruction unless the self is sufficiently strong and well-supported to remain intact or effect some form of reconstructive renaissance (Neimeyer, 2004; 2006; Loots et al., 2013). Based on that philosophical foundation, this study explored the process of co-construction,

deconstruction and reconstruction frequently experienced during and after a military career, centring predominantly on the United Kingdom (UK) and to a lesser extent, allied experiences.

As the next chapter illustrates, leaving the armed forces, at least in the Western context, can prove to be a confusing, disorientating and isolating experience, occasionally leading to tragic outcomes (Higate, 2000; Westwood et al., 2002; Castro, 2013; FiMT, 2017; Heaver et al., 2018; Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018; MOD, 2019a; Pedlar et al., 2019). Based on personal experience and motivation, this thesis sought to explain why and how this post-military disorientation arises, then considered how educationally supporting military leavers (MLs) and veterans in narratively examining their lives during military to civilian transition (MCT) might enable them to re-orient themselves in the frequently unfamiliar and confusing terrain of 'Civvy Street'.

Key terms and abbreviations

Accordingly, this study focused on the process of this particular form of MCT. Given its contemporary abbreviation to MCT in much of the literature considered in this chapter (see, for example, Cooper et al., 2017; Pedlar et al., 2019), the same abbreviation was adopted during the course of writing this thesis. Similarly, the term military leaver is employed and shortened to ML, used to refer to those who are preparing to but have not yet departed full-time service in their respective armed forces. This is in contrast to those who have left, officially referred to as veterans in the UK (MOD, 2017a).

Correspondingly, the term veteran was additionally adopted for this thesis.

For UK Armed Forces' personnel, at least when I was serving in the British Army, the term 'Civvy Street' was employed as a colloquial reference to any location outside the military community. This colloquialism was based on shortening the term civilian, itself used in an official capacity to refer to populations, objects, concepts and places that were non-military.

Justification and contribution

Definitions, theories, and frameworks are necessary for policy, programming, service delivery, and research, particularly when dealing with complex phenomena like MCT.

A *framework* is derived from a set of concepts drawn either directly from a theory (*theoretical framework*) or constructed from real-world observations in the absence of a theory (*conceptual framework*).

(Pedlar et al., 2019, p. 24; original emphasis)

While there is a consensus in contemporary literature that the ‘vast majority of military personnel transition successfully back into civilian life’ (Wessely, 2019, p. xi), along with their families, it is additionally known that a ‘substantial minority’ go on to experience ‘difficulty in transitioning from military to civilian life’ (Bergman et al., 2014, p. 60; see additionally Finnegan, 2016; Castro and Dursun, 2019; Moorhead, 2019; Wessely, 2019). With approximately 15,000 annual MLs and a 2 million-strong veteran population in the UK (MOD, 2019b; 2019c), nonetheless, the fact that a substantial minority encounter difficulty implies that something significant is occurring. Furthermore, the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) acknowledges that ‘anyone, regardless of status, rank, or social background’ can face MCT difficulties (2017b, p. 16), and adverse outcomes can be costly in human, financial and reputational terms, as the next chapter emphasises.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 has been unanimous in its view that a military career, vocation or experience requires complete personal commitment, frequently at significant personal risk and sacrifice, which makes it unique when compared to civilian employment and life (Castro, 2013; Pedlar et al., 2019; Truusa and Castro, 2019). In turn, this requires a targeted form of research into the nature of this military environment when conceiving of how to help MLs, veterans and their families transition away from it (Castro and Dursun, 2019). However, there is a relatively scant amount of empirical research on this MCT lived experience, hampered by a lack of consensus on how long an MCT process might last and a lack of a pervasive definition of how transition success can be judged and measured (Caddick, 2016; Cooper et al.,

2017; Pedlar et al., 2019). While this on its own can indicate a research gap, Mobbs and Bonanno (2018) have additionally determined that a theoretical framework to address MCT challenges is needed, the absence of which 'has impeded the development of new forms of transition programming' (p. 138; see additionally Pedlar et al., 2019).

Therefore, the aim of this thesis was to, firstly, broadly contextualise military experience and how it might complicate MCT for MLs, veterans and their families. Secondly, and more pertinently in terms of contribution, it aimed to determine whether any existing military or civilian transition models could provide a sufficiently flexible theoretical framework to address any identified complexity inherent in these MCT challenges. Crucially, it was additionally identified whether these models might signpost mitigating strategies since their understanding and implementation could assist transitioning individuals, with appropriate educational support, in shaping their own transition trajectories. In the event that existing models were judged as being unable to do this, a new or hybrid conceptual or theoretical model could possibly be more ideally suited to these aims, perhaps based on the real-world autoethnographic observations that this thesis presents, analyses and discusses (Pedlar et al., 2019, p. 24). In addition, the role that a narrative review may play in that process was considered as part of a framework that could be adapted to any individual's particular MCT situation and interpretation. This is the theoretical and conceptual contribution this thesis seeks to make, aimed not only at the academic field but additionally at potentially shaping MCT policy, programmes, services and individual action in the political, professional and personal arenas.

Scope

While a more detailed presentation of this study's limitations and exclusions is offered in the penultimate chapter, it should be emphasised at the outset that this research was primarily related to those transitioning from a full-time military role (and their families), as opposed to part-time members of what the UK Government defines as reserve forces (for further definitions, see FiMT, 2013; British Army, 2019). This

distinction was made on the basis that although much of the discussion presented here might be considered applicable to part-time military personnel, there were additional significant differences in conditions of service, which would have placed detailed consideration of reserve forces experiences outside the scope of this study.

Linked to this distinction, it is additionally important to recognise potential concerns regarding the treatment of all armed forces' members, roles, types and branches as a homogenous entity, or ignorance of research pertaining to them. For example, it is acknowledged that research conducted and published over the last decade has discussed issues pertaining to the length of full-time service and the nature of its termination, with several studies indicating that 'Early Service Leavers' (ESLs) (generally defined as those leaving with less than four-and-a-half years of service) are considered to be at risk of higher emotional and practical difficulties upon leaving the armed forces than those with longer service times (see, for example, Bergman et al., 2014; Duel et al., 2019a). However, this contrasts with the view that personnel who have had more time to embrace, absorb and consolidate a sense of military identity are particularly susceptible to a challenging MCT, with a more acute vulnerability occurring after 10 years of service according to Walker (2012). Additionally, Cooper et al. (2016) have indicated that those who are forced to leave the armed forces in traumatic circumstances, such as through illness, injury or disciplinary issues, are particularly disposed to experiencing MCT difficulty, which can significantly impact their sense of self and identity (see additionally Messinger, 2010; Haynie and Shepherd, 2011; Squire et al., 2014; Duel et al., 2019a; Pedlar et al., 2019). Divergently, however, research in the Canadian context has found that of those veterans who identify themselves as encountering MCT challenges, a majority (60%) did not leave for medical reasons (Thompson et al., 2016), which seemingly contradicts evidence pointing to the development of medical issues in service potentially leading to heightened MCT issues. This apparent disability paradox (Albrecht and Devlieger, 1999) is discussed in further detail in later chapters.

In light of the lack of consensus as to which cohort(s) of MLs might be most vulnerable to MCT challenges, and while a need for greater research into such issues is not

disputed, the purpose of this thesis was not to consider the heterogeneous constitution of the armed forces – in terms of role, gender, age, cultural background, reason for career end or any other variable – but to recognise that service in the armed forces might complicate an experience of MCT, irrespective of the cause or background. Furthermore, a means to recognise common origins and features across a broad range of MCT experiences was one objective, while providing an adaptive framework to analyse an individual's direct experience and interpretation of that experience was another (Pedlar et al., 2019). Notwithstanding this dual-faceted aim, this thesis does not claim that what is recommended does not require further research, testing and development, as these and other limitations and indications for further research are identified towards the end of the study.

Research questions

By way of summarising the above, the essential questions that guided this research and outcomes were as follows:

- Why might MCT be a challenge, and why consider this?
- Is there a model of transition that might help recognise and mitigate MCT challenges?
- What part might narrative review play in this recognition and mitigation, and how can this be conducted?

Outline of structure

The remainder of this thesis provides insights into the above questions, beginning with a critical review of the pertinent literature in the following chapter (Chapter 2).

Chapter 3 then presents the methodological research approach adopted in this thesis, which in turn serves as a prelude not only to the presentation of the autobiographical and autoethnographic narrative offered in Chapter 4 but additionally as a means to convey how narrative approaches might assist others in navigating their own MCTs, as

analysed and discussed in Chapter 5. From there, Chapter 6 offers conclusions and recommendations predicated on the preceding foundations. Chapter 7 provides several concluding personal reflections on how a narrative review process, as presented in this thesis, was personally beneficial.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Review focus and search strategy

Overview

This chapter begins by summarising the literature strategy before outlining the economic and moral rationales for providing adequate support to those embarking on and undergoing MCT. It is divided into two parts. The first part reviews the literature on the unique nature of the military sociocultural milieu and how that can give rise to MCT issues. The second part introduces and reviews both broader and military-specific transition theories and models.

Search strategy

Relevant references were initially identified by entering search terms into university library search facilities, journal storage databases such as JSTOR and Google Scholar. The keywords, which were used either individually or in combination, included: 'military'; 'armed forces'; 'army'; 'navy'; 'air force'; 'veteran'; 'health', and 'transition'. To these were later added 'career', 'narrative', 'identity', 'loss' and 'metaphor' among others, again either individually or in combinations thereof.

Military-focused journals such as *Armed Forces & Society* and the *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* were additionally reviewed to identify articles of relevance, as were centres of research covering these topics, including Anglia Ruskin University's Veterans & Families Research Hub and the King's College London Centre for Military Health Research. Where possible, electronic alerts were established to automatically signal additions to repositories, journals and databases as they occurred. Social media channels and contacts on LinkedIn and Twitter were established and monitored, proving to be a useful means by which newly published research could be revealed.

Another crucial reference portal, particularly in identifying valuable UK-focused MCT data, was the UK's Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT), a charity-funded commissioning body for research aimed at delivering 'long-term solutions to the challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community' (FiMT, no date). However, in keeping with referencing conventions guiding the production of this thesis, this organisation was only used as the reference when there were no named authors or primary research organisations credited. Where specific authors or primary research organisations were identified, albeit conducting research commissioned by the FiMT, their names were used as the reference. Given this, although much FiMT-commissioned research was considered in this thesis, the majority were cited by reference to their specific authors or primary research organisations (such as Deloitte, 2016; Rafferty et al., 2017; Brewer and Herron, 2018; Cox et al., 2018; and Heaven et al., 2018).

Much valuable literature additionally emerged in conversation with interested parties and through the identification of further sources from the reference lists of the accessed sources. This process only ended when it was determined that a sufficient quantity of literature had been reviewed to address the research questions and inform and challenge emerging views. While, as part of this process, considerably more literature was consulted than referenced in this thesis, what was included was used to contextualise and answer the questions posed, or to analyse how it could challenge, counter or alter my emerging views (Swetnam, 2004; Murray, 2011; Thomas, 2017; Hart, 2018).

Due to English being used as the sole language for this research, the search mainly revealed sources from, in order of volume, the United States (US), Canada and the UK. While initial searches in 2015 principally generated literature from the US and Canada, recent years have seen an increase in grey (non-peer-reviewed literature, such as reports from government and other organisations) and academic literature focusing on the UK. Given that the recommendations made in this study are intended primarily for the UK, this provided a welcome, if belated, surge. Finally, although the monitoring alluded to above continued up to the point at which this thesis was submitted, a decision not to include anything beyond the end of January 2020 was taken to

facilitate production. Ultimately, nothing of relevance emerged between that time and the time of writing in any case.

The literature search coalesced around several key themes which are reviewed in turn in this chapter. The following section provides a brief presentation and consideration of definitions beyond those covered in Chapter 1.

Outline of the economic, moral and political case for providing adequate military to civilian transition support

The differences between military and civilian life are under-estimated. Even for those that are well prepared, the cultural difference can come as a surprise.

(FiMT, 2013, p. 5)

[M]any soldiers find the transition out of service and assimilation back into civilian life unexpectedly protracted and complex. Exiting soldiers often find themselves unprepared for the instability of the initial phases of transition, and how this period may threaten their sense of self and self-worth. During this time, they may struggle with any number of interrelated concerns, including unresolved or prolonged grief and bereavement over fallen comrades, loss of their previous military identity, nostalgia for the order and purpose [and] a sense of moral injury

(Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018, p. 139)

The manner in which civilians are transformed into military personnel is so profound that this in itself is the source of resettlement anxieties.

(Wadham and Morris, 2019, p. 2)

An unsuccessful transition will be a burden on the social networks of the veteran and a burden for the community and for the state.

(Truusa and Castro, 2019, p. 9)

These quotations recognise that military service can exact a toll on the individuals that undertake it, and this can result in a difficult re-entry into civilian life and work.

However, most additionally leave with valuable skills, experience and training that make them an asset in future civilian contexts, particularly in the professional domain

(Deloitte, 2016; Truusa and Castro, 2019; Veterans Work, 2020). Therein lies a tension: how to ensure that the vast sums spent on training and developing military personnel (MOD, 2019a) not only yield benefit during the individual's period of service but additionally return them to civilian life as economically active and socially functioning assets, as opposed to liabilities. This, in essence, is what this thesis sought to explore. The effects of poor MCT support can result not only in economic underproductivity but additionally in further costs to the state that finds itself retrospectively addressing this lack of assistance in having to meet the needs of unemployed and infirm veterans and the family members caring for them (Castro et al., 2019). This economic inactivity or underachievement can additionally deprive a government of tax revenue from these individuals (FiMT, 2013; 2017). In the extreme, it can lead to veteran family breakdown, substance abuse, homelessness, criminal justice involvement and suicide (Higate, 2000; Westwood et al., 2002; FiMT, 2013; 2017; Heaven et al., 2018; Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018; MOD, 2019a; Pedlar et al., 2019). All of this entails not only a financial cost (projected to be £110 million in the UK in 2020 [FiMT, (2017)]) but less quantifiable personal, familial and societal costs as well.

In his review of MCT support, Ashcroft (2014) has warned that for the UK Government to be seen as inadequately investing in effective MCT and inadequately provisioning through-career educational opportunities, this can have a detrimental effect on UK Armed Forces' recruitment and retention efforts, given that these forces rely on voluntary recruitment and retention of their constituent human resource. This concern was recognised in the recently launched 'UK Defence Holistic Transition Policy' (MOD, 2019a), based on an argument that potential recruits might otherwise be dissuaded from joining the military if they perceive a suggestion of future professional, financial, personal, family and health disadvantage once they leave. In contrast, aspiring applicants may more readily be encouraged to join if they observe that their service is to be recompensated by comprehensive through-career support, which might stimulate retention in order to increase the benefit from this provision (Ashcroft, 2014). Thus, by investing in recognisably beneficial MCT and educational support, commensurate financial outlay on recruitment and retention schemes are likely to be

reduced by encouraging more willingly (and therefore more readily) recruited personnel to serve for longer.

Aside from these economic concerns, it is contended that the UK Government has a moral obligation to ensure veterans are well-supported in transition (Ashcroft; 2014; MOD, 2017b, Brewer and Herron, 2018), as recently recognised in the UK MOD's MCT policy (MOD, 2019a) and enshrined in a government published 'Armed Forces Covenant' introduced in 2012 (MOD, 2017b; UK Government, 2019a). Albeit with no legally-binding power per se (separate legal instruments apply to serving military members), the intention of the latter is to indicate the 'rights and obligations of the Armed Forces, the government, and the public in relation to the sacrifices made by those serving' (Hines et al., 2015, p. 694) while 'explicitly' calling on the 'nation to respect, support, and fairly treat those who serve' or have served in the military, along with their families (Duel et al., 2019b). In turn, this covenant, which is 'underpinned by the precedent that veterans should not face disadvantage' on account of their service (Moorhead, 2019, p. 88), has been reinforced by the publication of a governmental veterans' strategy (UK Government, 2018), of which the MCT policy is the 'centrepiece' (MOD, 2019a, p. i). This veterans' strategy aims 'to make the UK the best place in the world to be a veteran' within 10 years according to the ministers responsible (UK Government, 2020, p. 1). Doing so, it is argued, as a reward to veterans for their service to their nation while frequently being at risk in terms of life and health both during and after service.

An examination of that risk follows.

The unique nature of the military environment: significance, issues, tensions and implications

Differentiating the military environment: a tension between role, risk and regulation

Military service is a unique vocation. Unlike civilians, military personnel can be ordered into harm's way by their employer at any time, on short notice. Families often are separated for long periods of time by training and operational deployments.

(Pedlar et al., 2019, p. 29)

The primary purpose of an armed force is to field personnel who are trained, equipped and prepared to 'fight and to kill and to die'; and this implies potentially injurious, if not lethal, risk (Jolly, 1996, p. 3). While it is this characteristic that places the profession of arms outside of the routine civilian career environment, combat-related activity is not the only type of activity that can expose military personnel to jeopardy. A range of other more routine yet hazardous duties can additionally subject personnel to 'severely traumatic and sometimes unique, life-threatening situations', as can witnessing death and injury caused to others, and undertaking the training required to prepare for all eventualities (MOD, 2017b, p. 15; see additionally Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018, MOD, 2018a; Williamson et al., 2018; Aldridge et al., 2019; Caddick et al., 2020; Williamson et al., 2020).

One of the principal risk-mitigation measures adopted by a military force, as well as a means by which it seeks to exert force as efficiently as possible when needed, is predicated on the human 'behavioral [sic] enacting of the patterned expectations' (Merton, 1957, p. 368). Such behavioural enactment is accompanied by a focus on sustaining 'order and consistency' among those constituent members, which, in the case of voluntary membership of armed forces, makes for a delicate mix of coercion and voluntarism (Bruner, 1996, p. 30). This is accompanied by acceptance, on the part

of military personnel, that certain obligations and sacrifices form part of the covenant they undertake to honour.

One purpose in affording as much control as is achievable amid the chaos frequently inherent in military operations is to generate as considerable a sense of safety and security as possible in such unpredictable and frequently dangerous professional circumstances (Smith and True, 2014; Ahern et al., 2015), itself a vital dynamic in establishing a mutually-supporting covenant of trust and reciprocity. Such unit cohesion is regarded as a crucial factor in increasing the potential for martial success under the above conditions of stress and is founded on the same bonds of loyalty and collective trust (Smith and True, 2014; Pedlar et al., 2019). This dynamic is additionally predicated on the establishment of a collective military identity, further consolidating a sense of belonging, safety and security, which itself is dependent on the generation of an institutional self and associated individual identification with the military collective (Brewer and Herron, 2018). This issue of collective or social identity, in Pedlar et al.'s terms (2019), is revisited later in this section.

Prior to moving to this topic of collective identity, it is important to highlight that the above sense of order, security, safety and community is reinforced in the UK (and a majority of allied military environments) by the provision of a built-in social life, accommodation, schooling, medical care, shopping and other facilities and amenities, both for the individual members of the military and, frequently, their families (FIMT, 2013; Smith and True, 2014; Elliott et al., 2016; Pedlar et al., 2019; Truusa and Castro, 2019). Hence, military establishments, in many cases, can take the form and size of towns, whether they be physically located on land or in the form of floating towns on naval vessels. Additionally – given the need to ensure these establishments are secure, as well as provide the required space for training areas and aircraft runways for example – they can be both isolated in terms of their locations behind protective fencing and other barriers, but also in isolated locations (naval vessels as well are frequently extremely isolated, particularly when at sea). Consequently, based on this secluded and immersive setting, Castro (2013) has found that these environments can

become a totalising military world, within which inhabitants develop a sense of coherence, meaning and kinship that they perceive does not exist elsewhere.

Correspondingly, this military context makes for a curious, complex and multifaceted set of circumstances that are unlike most, if not all other vocational contexts (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011; Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018). The foundation of such context-dependent conditions begins with basic training, in which recruits are stripped of personal identity markers and possessions such as civilian clothes, while the donning of uniform is not only a practical measure but acts as an initial and then enduring means of reinforcing military identity (Ahern et al., 2015; Lovatt, 2017; Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018). This, in turn, creates and impels a veneration of the symbolised identity imbued in the uniforms recruits are eventually allowed to wear – but only once they earn that right, progressing via a staged process of acquisition of accoutrements such as beret and badges denoting entry into a military branch (Brunger et al., 2013; Binks and Cambridge, 2018).

Recruits are additionally routinely submitted to a boarding school regime, with limited spare time to themselves, in part designed to reduce the familial bonds to home while replacing that with a sense of a new military family (Castro, 2013; Pedlar et al., 2019). This provides an opportunity for ‘rapid acclimatization to an institutionalized lifestyle’ and indoctrination with military standards, behaviours, ethics and values designed to transform these former civilians into military personnel who are ready and able to fight and potentially kill and die, both for each other and for their countries and allies (Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018, p. 138). Central to this, according to Castro, is the ‘construction of military identity that presupposes and requires the deconstruction of previous “civilian” identity’, replacing it with the absorption of a military self (2013, p. 10).

Research has observed that military enculturation practices are not only designed to develop a spirit of loyalty to the institution but additionally to instil a sense of collective identification based on shared norms, values and beliefs (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011; Truusa and Castro, 2019). By virtue of this, military organisations

operate 'under a collectivist culture that revolves around interdependence, conformity, cooperation and communalism' to a much greater extent than exists in non-military organisations (Elliott et al., 2016, p. 1382; see additionally Cozza et al., 2014; Smith and True, 2014). Consequently, a frequent by-product is the formation of both an individual and collective identity that is perceived as different from that of civilian culture (Coll et al, 2011; Truusa and Castro, 2019), founded on a process that reduces any previously held civilian cultural values and norms secondary to those of the 'total military institution' (McGarry et al., 2015, p. 361). For, as Castro reminds us, to 'join the Armed Forces means, above all, *not to be a civilian*', while 'the opposition between civilians and the military is integral to the military identity' (2013, p. 9; original emphasis). This, as discussed next, can foster a sense of a seemingly impenetrable 'civil-military cultural gap' between military and civilian personnel and situations (Collins, 1998, p. 217), one that can persist long after termination of military service, at least as far as the veteran is concerned (Pedlar et al., 2019).

Tension two: the civil-military gap

Given such experiences of intense enculturation, as well as transitional issues over identity and interpersonal relationships, MLs and veterans can experience a form of culture shock when returning to civilian life (Bergman et al., 2014), which can be accompanied by the aforementioned sense of a vast civil-military gap. This conceivably presents a dilemma for policy makers, for, on the one hand, the creation of that gap is designed to allow a nation, state or other entity to field an effective fighting force by training, enculturating and qualifying a section of that society as its military component as effectively as possible. This takes time and resources. However, on the other hand, once individuals approach the end of their military careers, it is argued that the time and resources dedicated to preparing them to return to civilian society, particularly in terms of a shift from military to civilian identity, are not nearly as substantial (Ashcroft, 2014; Brewer and Herron, 2018; Pedlar et al., 2019; Truusa and Castro, 2019). As a consequence, veterans can find themselves in a state of flux and liminality as they are no longer officially members of the full-time military, nor do they see themselves as civilians (Herman and Yarwood, 2014). This, it is argued, results in

an inability to formulate an identity that integrates, straddles and consequently comfortably bridges both experiences (Brewer and Herron, 2018) – in turn yielding an identity-predicated loss-orientation (Ashforth, 2001; Demers, 2011; Haynie and Shepherd, 2011; Brunger et al., 2013; Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly, 2014; Herman and Yarwood, 2014; Kukla et al., 2015; FiMT, 2017; Albertson, 2019).

This sense of identity loss-orientation can be exacerbated by one or a number of other losses, which can include those triggered by the death or injury of colleagues (Pedlar et al., 2019) or injury caused to the individual in question. This, in itself, can induce a sense of bereavement and guilt (Coll et al, 2011) and potentially be further complicated by a sense of shame, remorse and regret arising from a conflicted sense of personally held morality from failing to prevent, witnessing or hearing of combat-related incidents of death and injury (defined as moral injury) (Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018; Aldridge et al., 2019; Williamson et al., 2020). Moreover, any or all of this can be incurred not only as a result of direct engagement in military operations but while, for example, partaking in training and other military activities designed to replicate the rigours of combat, as previously emphasised (MOD, 2018a; Williamson et al., 2018). Additionally, non-operational and non-training military stresses (possibly prompted or exacerbated by pre-existing physical and psychological issues) can similarly induce a sense of military-related loss (Coll et al., 2011; Buckman, et al., 2012; Williamson et al., 2018; Aldridge et al., 2019), which can exacerbate and provoke a sense of identity in conflict (Kukla et al., 2015; Elliott et al., 2016).

Furthermore, MCT adjustment and identity issues can arise due to disorientation caused by an acute change in both professional and lifestyle focus and routine. Once more, this can appear complex and interlinked and can be occasioned by the emotional impact of the loss of military rank and status and the absence of professional structure, purpose and excitement, as well as work, family and social routine (Adler, 1975; Hayes, 1976; Schlossberg et al., 1995; Jolly, 1996; Caddick, 2016; Finnegan, 2016; Heaver et al., 2018; Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018; Pedlar et al., 2019). Therefore, this juxtaposed yet complementary chaos and stability frequently inherent in military life can be both a source of excitement and stability, respectively, both of

which can be sorely missed, yearned for and mourned once an individual leaves that environment (Smith and True, 2014; Caddick, 2016; Elliott et al., 2016; Cooper et al., 2017). Additionally, altered family dynamics (in terms of a previously 'busy' military member's newly increased presence in the domestic environment) can additionally be stressful and problematic for all concerned (Jolly, 1996; Herman and Yarwood, 2014; Heaver et al., 2018; Fossey et al., 2019).

More than simply missing military work, structure and life, the nature of that essentially all-encompassing military professional and social environment can, according to Smith and True (2014), 'instill [sic] the feeling of being owned' by it (p. 158). Thus, when leaving it, veterans can be left wondering to whom and where they belong, while such existential questions can cause distress (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Ultimately, it is argued this can manifest itself in significant psychological disturbance (Smith and True, 2014; Ahern et al., 2015; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Moreover (and as previously alluded to), Friedman finds that the intense fellowship created within military units, particularly during deployment on operations, means that the unit becomes a de facto family, where mutual interdependence, trust and affection can alter a military member's sense of identity (2006, p. 587). Consequently, the instability inherent in military life, whether that be on operational or non-operational deployment, frequently distant from the parent nation and member's home area, means that a higher reliance on trusted sources of support is perhaps more pivotal and, hence, more of a priority than in other professions (Elliott et al., 2016). Accordingly, when it comes to the final move away from a military career, it is conceivable that some might rue the loss of these trusted support systems, which in effect, have become similar to family to them (Cooper et al., 2017; Pedlar et al., 2019). This loss can potentially result in an additional source of grief which can manifest itself in physical and emotional isolation having transitioned back to civilian life (Demers, 2011; Danish and Antonides, 2013; Herman and Yarwood, 2014; Caddick and Smith, 2017; Brewer and Herron, 2018; Pedlar et al., 2019).

In the UK environment at least, it is argued that a return to the civilian context can be further hampered by the provision of 'a hybrid mix of military and civilian

accommodation' on or near a majority of military establishments (Herman and Yarwood, 2014, p. 42). These facilities exist for many reasons, including the need to provide accommodation for personnel and families who are subject to frequent professional relocation, along with associated social, retail, medical and educational support for that community, as previously highlighted. However, Herman and Yarwood have argued that while this provision of lodging in or around a military establishment offers 'some domestic privacy', it is additionally suggested that any personal sanctuary it affords is 'never far from the military gaze' by dint of its proximity to the wider military community (2014, p. 42).

This observation has importance for three reasons in relation to this thesis. Firstly, an inability to entirely escape from the military community and its scrutiny can arguably create pressure among personnel to return to work unreasonably early when illness or some form of incapacitation strikes, and this concern can counteract the additional support offered by on-site medical and social support and care, as Chapter 4 attests. Secondly, despite variance in the literature concerning stigma acting as a barrier to care for military personnel, in part potentially due to differing definitions and assessment methodologies (Sharp et al., 2015), there is a general consensus that the inability to escape scrutiny potentially exacerbates stigmatisation associated with declaring physical or psychological ill-health, at least initially (Sharp et al., 2015; Rafferty et al., 2017; Williamson et al., 2019). This is seemingly acute in military environments that both demand and expect physical and psychological fortitude based on the frequently austere, dangerous and demanding nature of armed forces work (Iversen et al., 2011; Strom et al., 2012; FiMT, 2013; McGarry et al., 2015; Rafferty et al., 2017; Cox et al., 2018; Farrand et al., 2019).

Furthermore, as a study in the US highlighted, commanding officers can be afforded access to medical details concerning their subordinates' physical and mental health if clinicians suspect this may adversely affect military safety, security and efficiency (Strom et al., 2012, p. 73); the same can be true in UK military contexts as well. An initial effect of this is that such disclosure can create barriers to professional progression, as superiors (or their human resource staff) may well be prevented from

recommending such personnel for promotion and career-enhancing assignments while they are considered to be physically or psychologically unable to undertake associated roles (Walker, 2010). In many cases, such ill-health can end a military career entirely (Strom et al., 2012), as the case study in this thesis later reveals. Secondly, fear of disclosure leading to career fouling can trigger a stigmatised reluctance among military personnel to seek support when experiencing physical or psychological issues, at least initially (Rafferty et al., 2017). This is exacerbated by a tendency among both serving military members and veterans to regard help-seeking as a shameful and anti-military admission of weakness (Walker, 2010; Lovatt, 2017). This sense of incipient fear and shame can frequently delay seeking and receiving help (if sought or received at all) until some form of crisis strikes (Sharp et al., 2015), again as exemplified in Chapter 4. This is particularly acute when, by definition, a member of the armed forces is afforded the right to bear arms, a status symbol probably to be immediately withdrawn when mental ill-health is declared or suspected (Sharp et al., 2015).

The final reason that the blurred and porous boundaries between personal (including health) and professional lines can hamper MCT relates back to the issue of trusted sources of support and the impact this has when these are withdrawn at the end of a military career (Elliott et al., 2016). As the analysis of the case presented in Chapter 4 later reveals, not only can fear of stigma and an inability to recover from incapacitation in 'a place of sanctuary [and] emotional security' hamper recovery (Herman and Yarwood, 2014, p. 42), but the reliance on the trusted support offered by a military system can mean that when effectively ejected from that system, former members find it difficult to navigate their way in the much less composite civilian environment (Herman and Yarwood, 2014). This is despite a plethora of briefings, support guides and initiatives designed to prepare personnel for MCT, including the UK MOD's resettlement support, 'New Employment Model' and 'Future Accommodation Model' (FiMT, 2013; Ashcroft, 2014; MOD, 2018b; Parliament. House of Commons, 2019; MOD, 2020).

According to Jolly's (1996) research among UK veterans, efforts to mitigate the potential for the above-described multiple losses, which frequently coalesce around or

provoke identity issues, might benefit from a period of meaning-making in order to restore a degree of emotional equilibrium. Not only might this period of meaning-making help accommodate issues of trauma and identity, but similar techniques might additionally assist MLs, veterans and their families in coming to terms with and adapting to changing domestic dynamics occasioned by the removal of military-imposed norms and absences, which themselves can problematise newly-altered parental, spousal or filial relationships (Jolly, 1996; Ray and Heaslip, 2011; Fossey et al., 2019). If this period of meaning-making is not attended to, Jolly (1996) finds, such issues of loss and adjustment can remain on an individual's 'mental agenda as unfinished business', which can 'periodically surface in the conscious mind' (p. 19). This, in turn, it is claimed, can sap energy that could otherwise be applied to the business of effective transition (Jolly, 1996).

In contrast, Kukla et al. (2015) have concluded that veterans who are able to integrate their military sense of self into their newly-forming civilian self-concept experience 'a smoother and more successful reintegration into the civilian working world' (p. 486; see additionally Brewer and Herron, 2018). This process of reintegration is further assisted, Kukla et al. (2015) have argued, if those veterans additionally enjoy a stronger fit between their new civilian and previous military jobs, including their perceived skills and work preferences. If these conditions are met, then veterans are reportedly more likely to be able to match or increase the sense of meaning, purpose and value many were accustomed to enjoying during their military service, which, if absent, can represent an additional and frequently debilitating loss (Coll et al., 2011; FiMT, 2013; Ahern et al., 2015; Kukla et al., 2015; Finnegan, 2016; FiMT, 2017; Cox et al., 2018; Pedlar et al., 2019).

This issue of meaning-making and emotions-balancing, both prior to and during MCT, forms the basis of the narrative review work that is discussed and presented later in this thesis. Before and as a prelude to that, the next subsection continues to identify tensions inherent in enculturation into a military environment and their potential impact on MCT.

Tension three: risks of military institutionalisation

In addition to McGarry et al.'s (2015) reference to the military environment as a 'total institution' (akin to Goffman's [1961] depiction), various terms are used to describe the above process of enculturation in the literature reviewed, including 'indoctrination' and 'institutionalisation' (see, for example, Mobbs and Bonanno, 2018). However, the latter term, at least, is contested by Bergman et al. (2014), who have considered the term institutionalisation to confer a pejorative air with potentially damaging consequences for the serving military and veteran community. While the effects of a totalising military environment might more commonly be linked to concerns over the aforementioned creation of an overdependence and consequential lack of independence upon exit, Bergman et al.'s concern centres on the potential misconception this might create among a non-military public (see additionally Ashcroft, 2014). In this respect, Bergman et al.'s (2014) disquiet relates to a possible public perception that all veterans are institutionalised and consequently affected by their service to the degree that they are universally psychologically 'mad, bad or sad' (Deloitte, 2016, p. 4; see additionally Duel et al., 2019a; 2019b). This perception, in turn, it is contended, leads to a fallacy that discourages potential civilian employers from harnessing the skills, attitudes and experience a veteran might bring to a post-military professional environment. The same fear, it is argued, is based on a perceived risk that veterans might behave unpredictably due to the psychological effects of service, their military conditioning or an intrinsic temperament that made them suitable for military service in the first instance.

In contrast, the counter-argument is that the skills and experience veterans have garnered throughout their military careers can be of substantial mutual benefit in future civilian careers (as well as broader life), which civilian employers and contexts might miss to their disadvantage (Deloitte, 2016; UK Government, 2020). This, as alluded to in an earlier section, not only risks reducing veterans' future professional progress but can have a detrimental bearing on public finances, while leading to adverse and worsening personal, familial, fiscal, legal, health and social issues, as well as the tragedy of suicide.

Therein lies a fundamental and apparently unassailable tension: just as Bergman et al. (2014) have concurred with others as to the potential for military experience to complicate MCT, they have additionally raised concerns over the risk of potential and detrimental over-problematisation and pathologisation of veterans' psychological and physical states, the implicit impact on a wider public and professional perception, and by virtue of that on the individual veteran (see additionally Cooper et al., 2016). Thus, it is conceivably impossible to both recognise and promote veteran skill sets, yet simultaneously attempt to downplay and deal with potential challenges without potentially adversely emphasising them.

This is a tension that might not solely be driven by a sense of altruistic governmental moral obligation, but additionally, plausibly, by concerns over political reputation in the context of Western democracies. It is noted, however, that such political concerns can favour MLs and veterans in terms of public pressure ensuring that issues and support pertaining to MCT remain high on a government's agenda, therefore, stimulating governmental commissioning and funding of research, along with investment in the support offering (Duel et al., 2019b). Nevertheless, this, in turn, depends not only on popular awareness of military personnel and veteran issues but popular support for them (Duel et al., 2019b). While public backing for military personnel and veterans is currently assessed to be positive in the UK, despite the relative unpopularity of UK government-ordered deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan in the last two decades (Hines et al., 2015; Moorhead, 2019; Caddick et al., 2020), the dip in public support for US troops returning from Vietnam in the latter half of the last century demonstrates how popular support for military personnel and veterans can rapidly alter in Western democracies, potentially adversely impacting political and social assistance afforded to them (Duel et al., 2019b).

Conversely, another risk to the political and public profile military personnel and veterans currently experience in the UK, it is assessed, is an 'absence of [UK] military operations', which might lead to a reduction in public interest in the spectacle and plight inherent in UK involvement in conflict and, consequently, less pressure on political action (Duel et al., 2019b, p. 228; see additionally Gribble et al., 2014;

Ashcroft, 2017a). While the detailed discussion and mitigation of these risks were outside the scope of this thesis, the potential impact of reduced public and political interest and backing serves to underscore the potentially precarious nature of support for MCT, which in turn can give rise to the amplification of challenges in that process, with a commensurately increased likelihood of financial, social, legal and health issues. Ironically, in the event that this situation occurs, public awareness and political pressure could increase once more, as revisited in a later subsection.

Returning to issues of terminology, while not necessarily as concerned as Bergman et al. (2014) over the use of possibly negative-sounding terms such as institutionalisation, the use of 'enculturation' to attempt to identify the nature of the potential level and intensity of MCT challenge is favoured instead. This preference is founded on a belief that the use of the term 'enculturation' more effectively captures and conveys what is perceived to be the inflow effect of the military cultural processes described above while recognising and acknowledging their outflow influence as it concerns MCT. This, Bergman et al. (2014) have observed, gives rise to a sense of 'reverse culture shock' upon leaving the armed forces, manifesting in a sense of disorientation and confusion upon re-entering the civilian environment. Consequently, in recognising this experience of 'reverse culture shock', as well as in focusing on the cultural encounter inherent in that, the use of the term 'enculturation' to describe the inflow process of militarisation more adequately captures that cultural dynamic. While this might resolve a tension over which term to use to describe this inflow process, it does not reconcile a further concern over the choice of definition and quantification of MCT difficulty, as discussed next.

Tension four: defining and quantifying military to civilian transition difficulty

This fourth point of contention relates to defining what constitutes an MCT difficulty and quantifying what proportion of veterans experience difficulty or a set of difficulties. While Bergman et al. (2014) have indicated that only a minority of MLs and veterans experience such difficulty, there is limited indication as to the precise nature

and strategic mitigation of such MCT adversities, other than a discussion of the causes of the previously referred to 'reverse culture shock', which they suggest can lead to 'an increased risk of developing mental-health problems' (p. 60). Furthermore, the conclusion that it is only a 'substantial minority' that experiences any difficulty is considered open to question (Bergman et al., 2014, p. 60). For example, in making their claim, Bergman et al. (2014) have cited research on veteran mental health, which itself refers to 'limited existing evidence' suggesting that the majority of war veterans do well after leaving the armed forces (Iversen and Greenberg, 2009, p. 101). This, therefore, raises numerous uncertainties, centring principally on how this might accommodate the MCT experiences of MLs and veterans that have not experienced war while in service, as well as how war is defined in the first place. This is particularly relevant given UK military interventions since 2003 have not been officially declared to be wars by the UK Government, which suggests a need to address what constitutes a war experience (as mentioned but not defined in the Iversen and Greenberg [2009] report). The alternative is to broaden an examination of veteran mental health and exposure to trauma beyond war in order to arrive at a more convincing assessment of numbers regarding coping well during MCT (Bergman et al., 2014, p. 60).

Further debatable is an ability to arrive at a judgement as to what proportion of veterans encounter MCT difficulties not classed as clinically diagnosed mental health conditions (as appears to be the metric used in Iversen and Greenberg's [2009] research), which might consequently exclude a subjective assessment of difficulty and, in turn, miss a more holistic understanding of MCT issues. This doubt is raised in light of Herman and Yarwood's (2014) judgement that some form of loss is frequently experienced by MLs to one degree or another, including when individuals assess their transitions to have been 'successful' (p. 49). Furthermore, Mobbs and Bonanno (2018) have argued that 'many and by some accounts most veterans experience high levels of stress during the transition to civilian life', including grief-like symptoms upon relinquishing military careers, particularly when lamenting 'the loss of their military self [...] roles, values, and sense of purpose' (pp. 137; 139). As previously posited, this stress can arise irrespective of combat experience.

Given this, it appears hard to reconcile that only a minority of veterans experience any form of difficulty, albeit a 'substantial' minority (Bergman et al., 2014, p. 60). While this section has not provided any further clarification as to what proportion of veterans encounter MCT difficulty, nor what might constitute such difficulty, its purpose is to highlight that a supposedly objective conclusion might be as hard to arrive at as an attempt to define it based on subjective experience. While this indicates tension, it additionally signposts the importance of considering multiple sources of data and methodological approaches when attempting to understand both proportions and natures of MCT challenges. Such approaches ought to include analysis of subjectively interpreted lived experience to arrive at a more data-rich definition, if possible. Alternatively, we might simply have to accept that some veterans encounter some form of difficulty and that this in itself is significant. The focus would then pass to an assessment of what might cause and be considered as difficulties, and what might be done to mitigate their emergence or effect. This thesis aimed to do both, albeit not through the suggestion of providing a cure for all the challenges identified, including any emerging in the future. The primary goals were to identify and recognise their existence, or potential existence, offer strategies that could be applied to achieve their recognition and identification, as well as offer a means, in part at least, to ameliorate them.

Tension five: finding, defining and resolving military to civilian transition issues rather than overly problematising terminology

While accepting that terminology matters, concern in this thesis, therefore, centred more on attempting to determine qualitative significance of poor MCT experience and how that might be countered, rather than overly focusing on whether one term or another negativity conveyed and consequently had detrimental impact on MCT. There is consensus that issues of terminology and negative experience (or the perception thereof), can be linked. However, minimising ML and veteran challenges due to trepidations over their impact on public perception may additionally fuel the public misconception that all veterans are 'mad, bad, or sad' in the first place. This claim is made based on a concern that the effect of recognisably afflicted veterans, or publicly

available reports on them, appear to be the spark that ignites the fuel of public misconception, a view seemingly supported by Moorhead (2019) who has averred that media reports sustain 'public anxiety that military service is harmful' (p. 87). Accordingly, it has been assessed that if MLs and veterans were to be more ideally supported before, during and after transition, then the likelihood of adverse media reports focusing on their plight could be significantly reduced. Given that, this could additionally reduce the UK MOD's need to counter the slew of negative stories arising from the impact on personnel from deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, if not render that need entirely redundant (Deloitte, 2016; Moorhead, 2019; Caddick et al., 2020; Veterans Work, 2020). It is, therefore, a question of treating the cause, rather than the consequences, of poor MCT that should be the priority, thereby reducing public and political anxiety in the long-term by potentially significantly diminishing the likelihood of issues emerging and becoming newsworthy. Again, this would make the case for an initial increase in investment to provide augmented MCT support, thereby ensuring further future gain and cost savings. It would, additionally, more advantageously benefit all MLs and veterans, in place of attempting to mount a public relations campaign against the tide of public opinion.

Despite current UK governmental countermoves, no matter how questionable, the solutions do not appear to be simple, as the UK's Minister for Defence People and Veterans recognises (Mercer, 2020). The parliament he reports to, however, has made it clear that more research is needed (Parliament. House of Commons, 2018). This thesis, as stated in Chapter 1, stands in response to that call.

Section summary

By way of summarising these relatively lengthy last two sections, their purpose is to highlight that the peculiarities of military life and work create the conditions for a professional, personal and family context that is unlike a majority of, if not all, other career-life environments. While the creation of a civil-military gap might be conducive to an ability to effectively operate according to the requirements of the military milieu, it would additionally appear to present the possibility of a complex range of potential

losses, which can lead to cumulative and significant stress (Castro et al., 2019), with far-reaching fiscal and social consequences, occasionally leading to tragedy. Accordingly, this might not solely trigger tension in the private sphere of the individual veteran but can further affect the public ambit as well, which, in turn, appears to provoke a political conundrum. While increased investment in pre-release MCT support would not guarantee that challenges would be reduced to zero, a compelling economic and moral case converges on a consensus that more needs to be done.

In building towards the contribution this thesis presents in assisting in that effort, the following focus turns to both broader and military-specific theories of transition.

Considering a framework for military to civilian transition analysis: an initial assessment of generic and military-specific models

Rationale

The previous section emphasises that an MCT experience can be characterised as one of a potentially complex array of losses and change, frequently centring on issues of identity and propelling a veteran into a sense of liminality from which it can be difficult to emerge. This section extends this discussion by considering theoretical models pertaining to transition in general, as well as those focusing specifically on the military context, with the aim of locating subsequent analysis, conclusions and recommendations within an appropriate theoretical or conceptual and strategic framework.

This opening point follows McAdams et al.'s contention that while 'human lives are always in transition', several transitional trajectories, such as MCT, 'stand out as especially significant in the life course' (2001, p. xv). Therefore, while most military personnel understand and expect that they are to exit the military at some pre-agreed date upon reaching the end of their contracted period of service, nonetheless, this does not mean that they welcome the prospect, much less find it a simple process

(Castro and Dursun, 2019). While additionally acknowledging that not everyone experiences challenges during MCT and that many welcome and relish the opportunity to move on and build upon their military experience (Deloitte, 2016; Brewer and Herron, 2018), it is clear that by any measure previously considered, a proportion of veterans struggle in their post-military lives in some form or another. Accordingly, it is contended that a sufficiently pliable framework for understanding the unique and complex nature of MCT is needed in order to develop a programme of mitigation measures based on the understanding it offers (Castro and Dursun, 2019).

With this aim in mind, the following four potential frameworks, emerging over the last 50 years and covering transition theory in general, were selected: Adler (1975), Hopson and Adams (1976), Brammer and Abrego (1981) and Schlossberg (2011). The first three were selected for two reasons: firstly, the models they presented appeared to build upon each other, thus permitting the theoretical development to be traced; while, secondly, the same theory seemed to already reflect a portion of the literature examined in the previous section (for example Jolly, 1996); while additionally resonating with my own MCT experience to an extent. In the case of the fourth selection, Schlossberg (2011), the theoretical approach markedly diverged from the these first three, thus providing both an interesting and useful contrast to them, as explained later in this section.

Alongside the above models, Elliott et al. (2016), Cooper et al. (2017) and Pedlar et al.'s (2019) military-focused frameworks were examined in order to determine to whether they offered any extant and useful MCT-specific theory, along with an indication of pertinent mitigation measures in order to provide a basis for one of the chief contributions this thesis sought to make.

Generic transition models

Accordingly, and beginning with Adler (1975), his articulation of transition 'disorientation', as well as the accompanying sense of loss, isolation, inadequacy and anxiety (among other emotions portrayed in his second and third phases of transition called disintegration and reintegration respectively) could be linked to previously

considered literature relating to loss-oriented civil-military liminality, gaps, guilt and bereavement. While this model was redolent of Jolly's (1996) theorisation of periods of MCT entitled 'confrontation and disengagement', there were additionally significant divergences both among and between the transition stages when comparing the two representations. This made selecting the ideal aspects of each and then merging and overlaying them on a common MCT experience a complex undertaking.

This limited convergence not only prevented a precise overlay of Adler's (1975) broadly applicable model to the apparently more complex MCT context but additionally suggested that the framework was overly delimited, delineated and consequently insufficiently pliable in terms of accommodating the manifold and, therefore, potentially volatile practical and emotional challenges present in many MCTs (if not all transitions). While Jolly's (1996) work was more concerned with how MCT challenges might be mitigated (such as by undergoing a period of emotional equilibrium before attending to the practicalities of MCT), neither exposition offered an idea of the concrete strategies that might afford practical and emotional MCT management.

Thus, with the aim of seeking an appropriate theoretical and analytical framework, along with an indication of MCT challenge mitigation remaining unmet, the next broad transition model considered was Hopson and Adams' (1976) seven-stage transition progression framework (see [Appendix 1](#)). Interest in this model was driven by the inclusion of two more phases as compared to Adler's, thus an ambition that it might more ideally accommodate MCT complexity. However, despite these additions, and similar to Adler's (1975) before it, Hopson and Adams' (1976) framework appeared overly delineated and unrepresentative of the full MCT experience. It additionally did not suggest mitigation strategies. Consequently, attention was next turned to Brammer and Abrego's (1981) work, stimulated by the title under which it was presented ('Intervention Strategies for Coping with Transitions'), which indicated that transition management and challenge mitigation tools might be offered.

While, once again, this was not the case, what did emerge by cross-referencing subsequent citations of Brammer and Abrego's (1981) treatise, was an explanation for the apparent limitations in all models thus far considered. In responding to Brammer and Abrego's (1981) study, Hopson, a co-architect of the Hopson and Adams' (1976) framework, expressed antipathy to 'phase and stage theories and models [...] into which human experience must somehow be made to fit' (Hopson, 1981, p. 37). While surprising, this admission afforded reassurance that the intention behind Hopson and Adams' (1976) model was not to claim that each person's transition experience would necessarily conform to each stage they presented, much less that the apparent emotional complexity inherent in many MCTs would similarly follow the process indicated. The reason for the framework's development, Hopson (1981) emphasised, was 'simply because it did seem to help a wide range of people representing many transitions understand their experiences' (p. 37). The issue was, at least from my perspective, its ability to help me understand my own experience was limited. The search for a model that might have yielded a more substantial effect therefore continued.

Military-specific transition models

Accordingly, consideration next turned to models of transition specifically located in a military context, with the aspiration that they might more ideally reflect a broad range of MCT experiences and, therefore, resonate with MLs and veterans while affording emotional and practical benefit to them. The first military-specific model explored was Elliott et al.'s (2016), which indicated promise by way of reference to military enculturation processes and how these might lead to '[c]ulture shock' and '[g]rief & loss' upon relinquishing that career (p. 1378; see [Appendix 2](#)). In mentioning these terms, the framework appeared to have a foundation in broader transition theory, while additionally reflecting previously considered MCT issues, including the provocation of identity issues. However, and notwithstanding that Elliott et al.'s (2016) broader inquiry was focused on US military nurses and, consequently, not necessarily representative of the broader martial experience, their model provoked a by now familiar disappointment in terms of providing limited detail beyond a brief recognition

of probable emotional MCT challenges. Furthermore, while the last of Elliott et al.'s (2016) four phases was entitled 'Personal and Professional Reconstruction', covering the sub-element involving '[t]aking charge to set a new course', these initially enticing captions were not accompanied by guidance regarding how to achieve post-military personal and professional reconstruction nor demonstrate agency in setting 'a new course' (p. 1378). Thus, while the study contained beguiling headlines, the framework offered limited novel insight, despite its military context.

Despite these limitations, a fragment of reassurance arose by virtue of a diagrammatic acknowledgement that an emotional journey through MCT experience was not necessarily linear, similar to Hopson's (1981) recognition, as highlighted above. This indication, in contrast to all the other illustrated models (see, for example, Appendix 1), was depicted by using double-headed arrows to link the final three phases of Elliott et al.'s model (2016. p. 1378), thus, seemingly inferring a multifaceted and bidirectional (as opposed to linear) emotional experience when undergoing MCT (see Appendix 2). Although this might more suitably hint at the emotive complexity inherent in some MCT experiences, similar to other considered models, it was found to be overly simplistic to be of use in generating a sufficiently pliable and strategically useful framework for analysis in this thesis.

Consequently, the next military-oriented theorisation encountered was Cooper et al.'s (2017) 'Model of Transition in Veterans' (MoTiVe) (see [Appendix 3](#)). While emotional bidirectionality was not diagrammatically conveyed in this as it was in Elliott et al.'s (2016) model, Cooper et al.'s (2017) treatise did reflect contentions, raised earlier in this chapter, that intense institutional identification and 'peak' military experiences frequently conferred and offered a sense of excitement, purpose, value and esteem among those who served in the armed forces (Cooper et al., 2017, p. 54). Whereas it, therefore, reassuringly reinforced several previously considered issues, it did not provide insight into how, in this case, a sense of post-military purposelessness might be mitigated nor how excitement in civilian life might be regenerated. While acknowledging its aim was not to indicate such measures, this omission, in common with the previously considered models, limited its use for the purposes of this thesis.

However, reference was made to Cooper et al.'s (2017) MoTiVe model in Pedlar et al.'s (2019) review of 'military veteran life-course research' (p. 32; see [Appendix 4](#)), which separated the veteran life-course into three phases, all involving transition. The first, 'Life Before Service', suggested that experiences prior to joining the military might both influence a decision to join as well as affect the experience within and subsequent to a time period spent in the armed forces (Heaver et al., 2018; see additionally the discussion pertaining to childhood adversity and military experience in Iversen et al., 2007; Buckman et al., 2012; Bergman et al., 2014; Cox et al., 2018; Harden and Murphy, 2018). It, therefore, covered the period of transition toward a career in the military while implicitly acknowledging that prior experience could influence the two remaining transition phases. The second phase, 'Life in Service', itself indicated a need to adjust to military life, as well as a period of preparation for leaving it prior to the final 'Life After Service' phase, while the latter covered the transition to 'post-service life' (Pedlar et al., 2019, p. 26). While this model once more offered a broad acknowledgement of factors that could influence and affect the transition into and out of the armed forces, it did not present any indication as to how those transition processes could be managed, or any inherent challenges tackled.

Furthermore, the authors concluded that attempts to both model and mitigate MCT issues were prone to taking 'a blanket approach', which hampered an ability to theorise and support disparate and 'highly individual' MCT experiences (Pedlar et al., 2019, pp. 36; 40). Moreover, governmental approaches that attempted to do this were frequently predominantly focused on the more readily measurable goal of post-military employment acquisition, irrespective of whether an ML or veteran regarded that as a purposeful role (Pedlar et al., 2019), similar to findings Jolly encountered in the UK in 1996 and which remained evident until at least last year (FiMT, 2013; 2017; MOD, 2019a; 2019d). While the importance of attaining post-military employment was acknowledged elsewhere in the volume in which Pedlar et al., (2019) wrote (see Castro and Dursun, 2019; Castro et al., 2019), the authors highlighted other significant issues that could lead to a more or less positive MCT experience. These could include the degree to which an ML was prepared for their departure from the military, which itself

could be hastened by ill-health, thus, potentially truncating and complicating preparation further, and consequently rendering the MCT an emotionally, practically unwelcome and precipitous reality (Pedlar et al., 2019). These and other situational factors could influence how an individual managed MCT, which could additionally be positively or negatively influenced by the level of transition support afforded by the military or other organisations, as well as the level of preparedness of – or support available from – family members and wider society (Pedlar et al., 2019).

The acknowledgement by Pedlar et al. (2019) that ‘blanket’ approaches that did not take account of an individual’s circumstances could be less effective than those that did, while additionally suggesting that effective institutional support was crucial in enabling an individual (and their family when applicable) to more ideally adjust to MCT, offered reassurance that I was not alone in sensing that support should be focused on the individual, as opposed to the collective. However, without offering any further indication as to what form that support ought to take, the search for both theoretical and strategic foundations continued.

Schlossberg’s 4S model and its potential application to military to civilian transition

Finding the ‘4S’

While not directly yielding useful transition models per se, Morant’s (2018) thesis on US MCT experiences cited Schlossberg’s (2011) theorisation of the four ‘S’s’ inherent in any transition, those being as follows: situation, self, supports and strategies. This was found to be stimulating, particularly as the first of these four S’s, situation, appeared pertinent to Pedlar et al.’s (2019) concern that the context surrounding or leading to an MCT was of significance. Moreover, the second of the four S’s, self, suggested that Schlossberg (2011) recognised issues of identity could additionally be significant in transition terms, a concern that has emerged in much of the literature considered in the previous section. The third S, supports, underlined the potential importance and benefit of institutional, familial and societal support to a transitioning ML or veteran,

as noted by Pedlar et al. (2019), while the remaining S, strategies, hinted at the possibility of encountering hitherto elusive MCT issue mitigation means, a critical contribution this thesis sought to make. Accordingly, a decision was taken to explore Schlossberg's (2011) 4S further.

Potential applicability to military to civilian transition analysis

In opposition to the impression conveyed by models hitherto explored (see Appendices 1–4), and notwithstanding Hopson (1981) and Elliott et al.'s (2016) similar acceptance, Schlossberg (1981) averred that the emotions, challenges and phases these frameworks broadly associate with transition were frequently not experienced by all individuals in a similar manner nor necessarily in the linear and sequential order they depicted. Accordingly, her delineation, as presented in [Appendix 5](#), suggested a more fluid and multidirectional interaction among the aforementioned 4S transition regarded as pivotal to examining and potentially mitigating inherent challenges (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This more flexible approach was adjudged to offer the prospect of a malleable and pliable framework upon which the development of a model that could be applied to the context of MCT examination and support might be forged. While potentially applicable to a collectively arranged support programme, it additionally appeared to afford an ability to focus on individual situational circumstances, personal external support networks (including families) and educative and adaptive self-counselling strategies (Pedlar et al., 2019).

A brief outline of Schlossberg's (2011) 4S is now provided prior to detailed analysis of its potential applicability, presented in Chapter 5.

Situation

Under the '*Situation*' heading, Schlossberg (2011) proposed that the context surrounding a transition ought to be taken into consideration when attempting to explore and mitigate difficulties that could be encountered by an individual undergoing change (p. 160; original emphasis). These contextual concerns included the following: what triggered the transition and whether the trigger was anticipated or

unexpected, welcome or unwelcome; what the individual's assessment of the transition was; what control or perception of control the individual concerned had over events; and what additional stressors could have been present at the time (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

Self

Under the term '*Self*', Schlossberg (2011) referred to the transitioning individual's inner strength for coping with implied change, particularly their emotional resilience, which, it was argued, could be enervated under the situational stresses frequently implicit in transition (p. 160; original emphasis).

Supports and strategies

According to Schlossberg (2011), the 'support available at the time of transition is critical to one's sense of well-being' (p. 160), while Schlossberg et al. (1995) argued that social support was frequently crucial for navigating the stress of transition. While Schlossberg (2011) noted that there was 'no single magical coping strategy' (p. 161), it was additionally observed that 'the person with a repertoire of responses' was more likely to be resilient in the face of transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 72). Such responses could involve practical strategies (such as job-finding, as per the current focus of UK MCT support [FiMT, 2013; 2017; MOD, 2019a; 2019d; Pedlar et al., 2019]), but additionally 'emotion-focused' behaviour to mitigate emotional distress (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 74). This, arguably, could be achieved by paying greater attention to situational, individual, family and wider societal circumstances, as well as supporting individuals and their families (as applicable) in building strategies to mitigate transition stress, consequently, potentially enabling them to more effectively navigate their way over civil-military gaps and the potential sense of liminality that could emerge.

Further consideration

While, at this stage, it was assessed that of the above theoretical approaches, Schlossberg's 4S (2011) was likely to be the most useful in terms of analysing MCT narratives, the methodological underpinnings pertaining to the use of those narratives were still to be discussed and critiqued, as presented in Chapter 3. Secondly, my own narrative, which appears in Chapter 4, was used as an exemplar to test the applicability of this 4S framework. Given that, further critique of Schlossberg's (2011) transition model is reserved for discussion in Chapter 5, after the presentation of the relevant methodology and my narrative in these forthcoming chapters.

The British Army's emotional pathway information sheet

The final section in this chapter briefly examines a publicly accessible MCT guide produced by the British Army (2014; see [Appendix 6](#)) for three reasons. The first of these reasons is that the guide contains a diagrammatic representation containing themes not dissimilar to several of those examined earlier, hence suggesting an awareness or use of the above or similar theoretical constructs. Secondly, its public availability serves to indicate the range and complexity of information currently available to UK military personnel, in turn revealing gaps this thesis could fill. Finally, it succinctly draws together many of the issues previously identified and discussed thus far in this chapter, thereby providing a useful summary of them.

Launched over five years ago, the British Army's 'emotional pathway' transition information guide, aimed at MLs and their families, acknowledges the emotional aspects of transition to civilian life (British Army, 2014; see Appendix 6). Similar to many of the models and references previously considered, the guide indicates the prospect of experiencing anxiety and a sense of bereavement when a military career comes to an end. It additionally suggests the possibility for issues of identity to emerge, potentially exacerbated and accompanied by a sense of diminished value, purpose, status and camaraderie in civilian contexts. The information sheet acknowledges that these issues can impact close family members linked to the

transitioning military member, particularly as cohabiting family members are likely to be undergoing a period of transition as well. Furthermore, the information suggests that those who experience compulsory discharge (perhaps due to illness or injury) may be particularly prone to stress, a risk identified earlier in this chapter. Crucially, the guide contends that emotionally confronting and actively planning for the inevitability of transition may mitigate the likelihood of challenges emerging, while suggesting that support can be pivotal to effectiveness in this area (British Army, 2014).

Taken together, and aside from apparently drawing on theories reflected in the majority of models considered above, this British Army leaflet appears to be an acknowledgement of Jolly (1996), Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014) and Kukla et al.'s (2015) assertions that a period of emotional stabilisation is a necessary precursor to making sound, realisable and potentially rewarding plans when attempting to navigate transition, particularly if accompanied by some form of trauma or other emotional difficulty. Furthermore, it appears to conform to Schlossberg's 4S framework, doing so by firstly acknowledging the situational context by reference to the triggers, stressors and detrimental impact that a sense of lack of control can imply for an experience of transition. Secondly, in pointing to loss of identity through diminished purpose and status, thus 'not knowing yourself anymore' (British Army, 2014, p. 1), there is a connection to the second S of Schlossberg's (2011) framework: that of self.

Additionally, in exhorting those transitioning not to 'shoulder the burden of change in isolation' (British Army, 2014, p. 2; see Appendix 6), the leaflet alludes to the support element of Schlossberg's (2011) 4S. Finally, in discussing coping mechanisms, as well as stressing the importance of planning and preparation for transition, it indicates that strategies can be employed in developing transition stress mitigation measures, consequently consistent with Schlossberg's (2011) final S.

My assessment was, therefore, that the leaflet likely drew on broader research and theory relating to career or life transition. However, at only four pages long and with a commensurately brief acknowledgement of several emotional challenges that some might encounter when confronting and undergoing MCT, it offered no more than passing reference to mitigation strategies. While it was recognised that brevity was

likely the result of an attempt to compile a concise, accessible and not overly alarming synopsis (Connelly, 2018), this absence of strategy appeared to draw attention to the previously-accentuated need to develop an increased depth of support for the ML, veteran and associated family community.

In answer to that need, this thesis sought to develop a strategic offering based on supporting and educating individuals to conduct a narrative exploration of any evident or potential MCT issues, and identification of possible mitigation means, as exemplified by exposure and analysis of my own narrative in Chapters 4 and 5. In preparation for that, the next chapter discusses, critiques and defends the methodological foundations to this narrative review and repair potential.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

I and they: co-constructing learning and narration

The narrative that follows in the next chapter was self-penned and self-focused, and, following Schlossberg (2011), was motivated by a desire to examine my 'self' against the backdrop of my transition situation, and from there to attempt to identify support and other strategies that might enable me to emerge from perceived post-military loss-orientation. While, as this chapter later argues, what it taught me was not intended to be self-centred, it was, at least initially, deliberately about me (Brookfield, 2000; Lake, 2015). Similar to how I use the personal and possessive pronouns 'I', 'my' and 'me' to relate this story of selfhood in the next chapter, the same pronouns are increasingly featured from this point. This, once more, was a deliberate and conscious choice: founded on the centrality of my own autoethnography to this thesis. However, my self-narrative could only be created with reference to the people and surroundings that nurtured and continue to influence me, as my self was and is created and nurtured by them too. Therefore, this I, my or me is frequently connected to other people and my surroundings: entities represented by the word 'they' and other third-person pronouns, accordingly. Without these, there is no I. I do not, and cannot, exist in isolation. I never have done, and never will.

Our life, our possessions, our experiences and our selves are therefore created and co-constructed in unison with others and in accordance with our surroundings (Frosh, 1991; Jenkins, 1996; Dominicé, 2000). Consequently, to create and co-construct a future, we must understand the foundations upon which that future is to be built. To understand them, we must study; to co-construct them, we must be supported in learning about ourselves, others and our surroundings; to create them we must have a plan. The means to develop and communicate that plan are frequently conveyed in some form of a story, be that spoken, written or illustrated, and this process is commonly the result of cooperation. The past, present and future is, therefore, a co-construction, as is our learning; and we understand, acquire, develop and communicate that narratively.

Life, rupture and narrative: a socially co-constructed act of learning and renewal

Therefore, where there is human life, there is narrative (Bruner, 1990; Richardson, 1990; Squire et al., 2014). This natural inclination to use and respond to story begins when we, as children, are introduced to ‘myth, fable, short story, epic, history, tragedy, comedy, painting [and] dance’ and is evident across all time and cultural contexts (Richardson, 1990, p. 117). The advent of printed, audio-visual and now electronic media has amplified this ability (Richardson, 1990; Squire et al., 2014), but we, as humans, have always narrated our own lives and experiences to ourselves and others (Formenti et al., 2014). Such storying can serve as a means of transmitting and resolving issues of morality as well as making sense of encounters (Squire, 2013), or, perhaps in its simplest form, sharing ‘the day’s events with friends and family’ (Squire et al., 2014, p. 111). Moreover, stories of the self or autobiographical accounts can be deployed in an attempt to comprehend, make sense of, and navigate our physical and emotional existence (Horsdal, 2014) by narratively sequencing our lives (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). As such, we instinctively, and can deliberately, create a story around and about our lives in order to help us steer our way through it, in this way becoming both storied and storytellers (Formenti et al., 2014) and therefore the narrators of our own lives (Ricoeur, 1991).

However, there is frequently an indissoluble social interconnection, including in the event that we seemingly create a narrative solely for the purpose of private reflection. While only one individual might be both lead protagonist and narrator of the events they seek to reflect upon (Ricoeur, 1991), this positions them in two narrative dimensions: the first as the story’s subject and the second as the subjective storyteller. Nevertheless, for the story to be told, there needs to be a third social or objective ‘other’, including when that is an imaginary self (Squire, 2013, p. 50). For instance, if we record and reflect on events in writing or audio-visual form in an ostensibly private diary or journal (Rainer, 1978; Moon, 2006), then, by addressing the other as ‘Dear Diary’, we have created a form of audience for our accounts and reflections, despite

that other being an alter ego (Stake, 1995). Evidently, therefore, while a private externalisation of issues can help to resolve them or provide a form of cathartic release (White and Epston, 1990), rarely does acting as our own listener enable us to settle concerns as effectively as the 'intimate and concerted self-disclosure that typically comes out in interpersonal dialogue' (McAdams, 1993, p. 256). This, according to McAdams (1993), gives rise to psychotherapeutic relationships or recounting narratives in socially accessible formats such as published autobiographies.

Consequently, a majority of us are frequently 'pleased to be listened to' and can derive some emotional, if not practical, benefit when recounting our personal narratives (Stake, 1995, p. 64). In turn and with regard to MCT, this can lead to a degree of transformational self-actualization when managing transitional 'change events' (Dominicé, 2000, p. xvi). If what might be considered a welcome and relatively unfettered MCT continues to constitute a change event, which itself can present a form of challenge, then the potential complication of a causal or accompanying traumatic event might additionally benefit from posttraumatic growth after a narrative review (Neimeyer, 2004; 2006).

The range of traumatic events that Neimeyer (2004, p. 53) has referred to can include 'tragic bereavement, catastrophic illness [and] interpersonal violence', all potential features of an MCT as explored in the previous chapter and otherwise described by Riessman (2002) as some form of 'disruptive life event' that can fundamentally alter 'expected biographies' (p. 696). Such disruptive events can additionally, and commensurately, 'affect a person's experience of self and continuity' by rupturing previously perceived life plans and coherence (Squire et al., 2014, p. 89), in turn instinctively triggering narrative contemplation of life, self and identity, as that is 'the very substance that is disrupted by trauma and loss' (Neimeyer, 2006, p. 68). Whether instinctive, deliberate or both, narrative reflection is a reaction Bruner (1990) conceives as an attempt to restore normality after some form of life rupture, potentially triggering what Dominicé regards as a 'heightened readiness to learn' (2000, p. 6). This learning, as alluded to at the outset of this chapter, is dependent on

achieving a degree of foundational self-understanding, which itself is reliant on building an idea of the self in a socially contingent context.

Metaphorically unlocking and constructing understanding amid narrative rupture: using keys and lifelines to build transition bridges

The key to unlocking 'self-actualization' (Dominicé, 2000, p. xvi) might be found in the identification of 'narrative threads' (Squire et al., 2014, p. 89), a representation of enduring themes in our lives. In the event of a disruptive rupture of one or more of those threads, a narrative examination of the enduring theme or thread, and what caused it to be broken, might be the first step to achieving some form of posttraumatic growth and repair (Neimeyer, 2004; 2006). Alternatively, or alongside that, identifying enduring and unruptured threads might enable us to conceive of some form of comforting coherence and continuity in an otherwise disrupted life, ideally additionally suggesting foundations upon which we can build alternative structures in our lives, thereby bridging, avoiding or repairing the gaps left by disruption (McAdams, 1993; Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). In place of Squire et al.'s (2014) 'threads', I used the metaphor of 'lifelines' to help construct and guide me across my 'transition bridge' (Ashforth, 2001), as is discussed in depth later in this and other chapters that follow.

To accomplish this, I have additionally deployed a metaphorical device to construct, structure and make sense of the narrative presented in the following chapter, a deployment pivotal in simplifying previously impenetrably complex ideas, emotions and desires (Fox, 1989) by rendering them 'concrete' (Inkson, 2007, p. 13). This employment of metaphors is considered in further detail later in this and following chapters, both in terms of their use and benefit in my own case and in demonstrating, by virtue of that, how they may be deployed as part of a wider application of narrative MCT support tools. Accordingly, similar to how the use of narrative to explain and transmit meaning is ubiquitous across all human life and cultures, metaphor is as well (Richardson, 1990). Furthermore, the two can be powerfully combined to unlock and

illuminate self and social understanding, be that autobiographically or via autoethnographic exploration, as the remainder of this chapter discusses.

Autobiography to autoethnography

While the story offered in the next chapter is autobiographical, it is driven by a desire to understand my self in the cultural context of a perceived rejection from the military environment that provoked a sense of narrative rupture in my life. More than an autobiography, therefore, it is an autoethnographic oeuvre which seeks to consciously examine my interaction and relationship within that specific cultural grouping, with the object of learning and teaching me about myself; and to potentially help others do the same in the context of their own MCTs. In exposing an account of my own experience, the aim was, therefore, to offer a more 'holistic' understanding of both my own and the broader MCT lived experience (Stake, 1995, p. 43) by virtue of '*particular, nuanced, complex, and insider insights*' (Adams et al., 2015, p. 103, original emphasis), as offered by someone who might have more knowledge of the right questions to ask by dint of personal experience (Ellis, 1991). The objective was additionally, crucially, to offer a 'visible, tangible and public' research contribution (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 160). In its absence, this study would not have constituted a doctoral thesis: it would simply have remained an autobiography and thus, potentially be dismissed as an exercise in irrelevant and outwardly pointless self-indulgence, no matter how inherently revealing or interesting.

The forthcoming sections explain why my autoethnography delivers more than an introspective account, and why what it reveals can make a valid contribution to the MCT support field.

Autoethnographic case study

According to Ellis, autoethnography is 'research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical to the cultural, social and political' (2004, p. xix). Given that this thesis is a research endeavour founded on the written autobiographical story presented in the following chapter, which is itself an exploration of my cultural

experiences aimed at engendering social and political action among MLs, veterans and those charged with supporting them, Ellis' (2004) definition suggests that my approach was autoethnographic.

Consequently, what is presented and explored in subsequent chapters is a case study of my own experience of a life leading up to and beyond MCT, and the challenges I encountered as part of that. As has been highlighted, this experience is storied in narrative form in the next chapter, then used as a basis to explore, analyse and draw conclusions and recommendations thereafter. To conduct this exploration, and as a member of the military veteran sociocultural milieu in which this experience is set, I employed an autoethnographic approach (Lake, 2015, p. 682) while using personal experience to produce research evidence (Fraser, 2013; 2018) actively, scientifically and systematically in relation to a cultural group with which I identified (Riessman, 2002; Hughes and Pennington, 2017). The strength of this approach, according to Hughes and Pennington (2017), lies in its hybridity, which allows it to be applied as both a stand-alone methodology, as well as a complementary method for assembling and presenting qualitative research data, including data derived from narrative inquiry.

Furthermore, in the view of Thomas (2016), an autoethnographic case study such as this permits a 'deep immersion in the environment of the subject' (p. 148), which enabled me to render a thick enough narrative of my experience for self-analysis, with the further aim of extending sociological understanding (Geertz, 1973; Sparkes, 2000). To that end, I emphasised that I harbour a broader political, social, emancipatory and transformative agenda (Cohen et al., 2018), and aspire to pursue this by illustrating the personal, frequently hidden, occasionally painful nuances of my lived experience (Merrill and West, 2009; Squire et al., 2014; Douglas and Carless, 2016). In this respect, the primary target readership of this study includes policy developers in the MCT support arena (predominantly the UK MOD); therefore, my endeavour was politically, as well as personally motivated. However, I additionally hope that if those who find themselves in comparable circumstances read this work, that they may 'discern what is similar and different to their own situations' (Smith, 2018, p. 142), thus drawing reassurance that neither are their experiences uncommon nor are they alone in

experiencing them (Schlossberg et al., 1995). If that is the case, then they might be comforted by this knowledge, consequently, feeling less isolated as a result (Richardson, 1990). Additionally, these readers might observe several of the strategies discussed, which may be of further assistance to them in their own transition journey. Hence, what is written here might provide yet more succour in their own settings.

Moreover, as identified in the previous section, Ellis (1991) has qualified autoethnographers as those who might better know the right questions to ask and therefore 'make a better subject', frequently consumed as they are 'by wanting to figure it all out' (pp. 29-30). This figuring it all out, as alluded to, was a crucial motivation behind this thesis. Consequently, it can be argued that that my experience does at least help me conduct relevant and appropriate interrogation of my narrative. Therefore, in focusing on my own case study, I conducted 'an autoethnographic self-interview' (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 69) in order to tease out my own experience of transition as an ML from my vantage point within a culture I was exposed to for the majority of my life. Accordingly, the observations and writing presented here were based on my experiences as both observer and participant, with the aim of providing a valid, worthwhile and rich source of data upon which appropriate recommendations could be made (Stake, 1995). Correspondingly, I placed myself and an exploration of my experience at the heart of this research (Cohen et al., 2018) when constructing my 'narrative-in-context' (Georgakopoulou, 2006, p. 123).

Narrative and naturalistic generalisability

That said, I recognised that exposure of one case alone could not signal universal generalisability of resulting recommendations (Yalom, 1985), particularly given Schlossberg's (1981) acknowledgement that individuals react and adapt differently when undergoing transition (see additionally Pedlar et al., 2019). However, within that difference, it is observed that broad commonality can be identified (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Merrill and West, 2009; Schlossberg, 2011; Morant, 2018), which applies to the MCT environment as much as any other transition context (FiMT, 2013). Accordingly, I aimed to determine points of congruence by generating my account and analysing it in

relation to the literature examined in Chapter 2 (Yin, 2009), as well as with reference to my culturally-situated experience as drawn from my autoethnography.

As is explored in Chapters 5 and 6, the narrative recommendations made were shown to have the potential for positive individual effect. This is provided that narratives are formulated for and by the individuals concerned and consider their subjective selves and situations (Richardson, 2001). However, the underlying theories, strategies and techniques that guide the development of these narratives have general applicability in a framework that allows for educationally supported and adaptive self-counselling (Pedlar et al., 2019). While individual human experiences differ, as do the cultures we inhabit, our responses to the challenges we face, both as individuals and in the collective cultural ambit, 'have similarities' (Dominicé, 2000, p. xviii). It is this ability to help an individual identify and address what might be unique to them, but within a broadly applicable framework for generating understanding and offering guidance, that is central to the narrative approach this thesis explored and recommends.

While generalisability in mainstream social research might be judged in terms of 'statistical significance, standardised procedures, reliability and replication' (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 164), what I provide by way of this research is a degree of 'naturalistic' generalisability based on my narrative (Stake, 1978; 1995), or what Lincoln and Guba (2000) have defined as 'transferability'. The defining characteristic of naturalistic generalisability (the term used from this point), according to Thomas (2016, p. 204), is that it yields 'points of congruence and similarity – places of coherence', similar to my aspirations by exposing my own lived experience as highlighted above. While the burden of determining such generalisability or transferability rests with the reader (Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Gomm et al., 2000), the chances of the reader being able to accomplish this are increased by presenting a sufficiently dense, albeit single case study (Guba and Lincoln, 1989; Gomm et al., 2000). The responsibility for this rested solely with me. In turn, and following a 'constructivist view [that] encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing', it was my responsibility to render an adequately substantial description of not only experience but the places in which the events that shaped that

experience took place, along with the individuals that led me to and through them (Stake, 1995, p. 102). Therefore, in order to generate this naturalistic generalisability, my writing had to be such that it achieved a degree of verisimilitude in the minds of its readership (Creswell and Miller, 2000; Ellis, 2004; Merrill and West, 2009), itself predicated on rendering an account that appeared to reflect others' lives, or transported readers into the setting described (Denzin, 1989; Ellis, 1999; Creswell and Miller, 2000). While this is what I aspired to do in the next chapter, judgement as to my success or otherwise ultimately would reside with the reader.

Narrative probability, fidelity and truth

Narrative probability and fidelity

Generating naturalistic generalisability further relies upon propagating a sense of 'narrative probability' and 'fidelity' according to Adams et al. (2015). The first term, probability, depends upon an ability to transmit a sense of coherence, such that any narrative must sound convincing to a reader (Adams et al., 2015). Fidelity, on the other hand, relates to how well a narrative resonates in the mind of the reader, therefore how relevant it appears to them, a point echoed by Ellis (2004). If narrative probability and fidelity are achieved, this narrative is then more likely to be accepted and potentially incorporated into readers' lives according to Fisher (1984).

The foundation for generating a sense of narrative probability and fidelity, according to Reid and West (2011, p. 176), is 'narrative truth'. When applied to my case, this meant that my account had to not only be personally believable but additionally actionable when used as a means to make meaning and change in my own life, thus, 'capable of being put into practice' (McMahon and Watson, 2013, p. 18). To pass these tests of believability and actionability, McMahon and Watson accordingly maintain that a narrative must be clearly related to the life of the individual (2013), which requires a personal truth to be reflected in the resulting narrative; and a basis of a faithful recollection of events, responses and emotions (Ellis, 2004; Pelias, 2016).

Subjectively shifting truth

This would not mean that my personally truthful account, nor anyone else's, is not influenced by a personal interpretation of the events and experiences to which it relates. Neither would it mean that in cases of differing subjective interpretation of the same or similar phenomena, that one or other source is lying (Riessman, 2002; Squire et al., 2014) but that truth can be subjective. As Pelias (2016) reminds us, we each may interpret the same or similar phenomena differently, but as long as our personal account is faithful to the way we experienced it, then this can constitute a personal truth. In contrast, if we present claims that we know to be 'deceptive, corrupt, or fabricated', thereby deliberately and knowingly lying and falsifying information, then this can undermine not only others' confidence in our personal narratives (Pelias, 2016), but additionally, crucially, in the context of self-actualisation, our own confidence (Dominicé, 2000). This does not exclude a personal narrative from alteration, as the perceptions, meaning-making and understanding it engenders change and develop (Andrews, 2013). Such subjectivity, as Richardson (2001) argues, is not stable, fixed or rigid but shifting, particularly when we acquire additional insight and information that we might have hitherto lacked (Pelias, 2016). Moreover, the motivation to engage in narrative self-review is likely to be stimulated by a desire to transform personal perspective (Bruner, 1990; Mezirow, 1991; Dirkx, 1998; 2012; Riessman, 2002; Neimeyer, 2004; 2006; Horsdal, 2014), thereby triggering an emotional and perhaps practical change, similar to what happened in my case. Accordingly, a reworked interpretation of the originally held truth and what it meant and comes to mean for an individual, is commensurately additionally likely to be the goal.

Intrapersonal, interpersonal, professional and academic truth

However, an autobiographical account aimed at personal redemption might only need to appear truthful to the individual that constitutes its creator, narrator and social other audience (Ellis, 2004; Squire, 2013). Moreover, and once more depending on the intended outcome of the narrative, it might be an individual's ambition that their

account be perceived as truthful to external audiences. Again, using my case as an example of this desire for externally apparent truth, a personal motivation for this was an awareness that my account was likely to be read by members of my family who could corroborate (or otherwise) the personal truth inherent in it, thus deeming it more or less credible. While I was not concerned that they might publicly undermine my academic and professional aspirations due to concerns over narrative truth, I did wish it to appear personally truthful to my family for other reasons. A moderately restrained summary of these concerns was that I wished this account to stand as an acknowledgement of the probable impact of what it relates on them, while potentially attempting to explain and perhaps excuse that impact. While I knew this was a gesture they could tell me was unnecessary, to me it was both necessary and important that I attempt to communicate this to them in my narrative, doing so as faithfully as I could at the time of production. Moreover, as I believe this forthcoming account attests, I regarded my family members as a crucial lifeline; consequently, I sought to do them justice and convey credibility in that attempt.

Linked to this personal desire for externally apparent truth but shifting focus onto the professional domain, I additionally wished my account to authentically and credibly communicate with former colleagues, several of whom have expressed an interest in reading it. If my account were to appear to diverge from both the professional and personal truth as they perceived or experienced it (either by working and living directly alongside me or by experiencing similar professional contexts), then they might be dismissive of it as well. This, in turn, could weaken its credibility in the professional MCT support field I sought to influence, a field in which many of them continue to work.

Finally, there were additional academic motivations for ensuring that what I said was 'true to my experience' if it is to be perceived as a credible contribution to 'scholarly conversation' (Pelias, 2016, p. 388) and therefore, deemed worthy of acceptance by the academy. If not, then not only would what I wrote self-evidently fail to satisfy the requirements of this doctoral endeavour, but academic failure was likely to reduce my ability to bring influence to bear in the professional field, which could undermine

personal credibility among my family, while potentially damaging my self-esteem further. In short, I had to ensure it was credible in all respects, as far as I possibly could.

Given these aims, and following Bertaux (1995), I was conscious that 'every life story contains a large proportion of factual data which can be verified' externally, be that by family, friends, professional colleagues and the academy (p. 2). Consequently, as stressed above, there were numerous and interlinking reasons why I felt beholden to ensure personal, professional and academic narrative truth and probability.

The most compelling of these was my aim of encouraging other MLs, veterans and their families to consider using narrative review and repair strategies in their own 'transitional spaces' (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 164), or to influence those charged with assisting this community to offer the means. This, then, could possibly realise my ultimate goal of affecting a degree of personal, political, social, emancipatory and transformative impact. Nevertheless, I recognised that this thesis alone was unlikely to stimulate an outright policy change without further 'empirical test' (Gomm et al., 2000, p. 102). However, given that the literature reported on in Chapter 2 suggested that many of my own MCT challenges came up 'again and again' (Stake, 1995, p. 7), I was confident that what is presented here would resonate in that field, as well as intrapersonally, interpersonally and academically.

Autoethnographic accessibility, acceptability and validity

To bolster the chance of this effect, and aside from conveying narrative truth in fulfilment of my personal, professional and academic objectives, this inquiry's social and political aims additionally required me to write 'accessibly and invitationally' according to Tracy (2010, p. 845). Correspondingly, if the narrative, discussion and recommendations proffered were to appear compelling, a 'personal, authentic, vivid, engaging and evocative style' of writing was arguably more likely to encourage interest (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 297-298). To me, that involved writing not only truthfully but additionally 'from the heart' (Denzin, 2006, p. 422), in order to evoke empathy and

action in others (Ellis and Bochner, 2006). If this were to be achieved, then according to Merrill and West (2009), the social and political validity of my narrative would rest on its ability to create convincing connections between my own and others' experiences, while additionally providing the basis upon which appropriate theory and conceptual application could be built.

I recognised that basing the core of my inquiry on a subjectively generated narrative case study of one could appear 'too Freudian' to some (Anderson, 2006, p. 390) and thus cause 'epistemic anxiety' among their number (Squire et al., 2014, p. 112). This criticism could be justifiable were my thesis not aimed at any professional, political and social objective, which, in turn, could warrant it being 'castigated as liberal dilettantism, a self-indulgent form of speculation that makes no real difference to anything' (Brookfield, 2000, p. 143). However, by harnessing the analysis of my subjectively-mediated yet theoretically-underpinned case study to generate sufficient depth of understanding to 'inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action', the aim was to go beyond the self by using both individual and collective experience to assist others (Anderson, 2006). Correspondingly, I maintained that my autoethnography should not be dismissed as an exercise in 'common-sense or self-indulgence' (Lake, 2015, p. 684) but seen as an opportunity to publicly examine my personal concerns, link them to wider issues and prevailing theory, and from there, contribute and advance apposite professional, social and political understanding and educational support (Adams et al., 2015). If that were to be achieved, then I would be satisfied that my writing and ideas could not be condemned as Freudian 'or Rogerian, or new-age mystical' (Anderson, 2006, p. 390), as I would have struck an appropriate balance between personal concerns and intellectual and methodological rigour (Adams et al., 2015).

If I were to achieve this, then a focus on my own individual experience would not be considered invalid (Merrill and West, 2009), particularly as it was an experience that was lived and situated in the target 'socio-historical context', therefore likely to reflect aspects of that wider collective experience (Richardson, 2001, p. 35). Consequently, an examination of a single case study, such as mine, would not be rejected on account of

eccentricity, as single case studies could reveal representative insights as well, in turn, yielding learning and development of conceptual perspectives (Merrill and West, 2009). Given the potentially representative nature of my contextualised single case narrative, the aim was additionally to augment the 'collective story' of the 'social category' to which I belonged (Richardson, 1990, p. 128). In that way, I was confident that a sufficiently dense and rich presentation and analysis of my own case could add to the collective response to calls for more research into the MCT experience (Parliament. House of Commons, 2018). This is what I sought to achieve by conveying an absorbing, engaging, resonating and deep narrative richness, albeit via a case study of one (Merrill and West, 2009).

I believe, therefore, that this thesis has effectively built upon and added to the growing number of doctoral studies featuring MCT narratives, all of which aim to offer qualitative insight into associated experiences, and thereby contribute to social understanding and mitigation of challenges (see, for example, Walker, 2010; Caddick, 2016; Lovatt, 2017). In turn, I additionally believe that this study has provided a vital augmentation to broader academic inquiry into MCT in the last decade and a half, which, as noted by Samele (2013) and Lovatt (2017), tends to focus primarily on statistical analysis of serving members' mental health and psychological treatments for veterans (see, for example, Iversen et al., 2005a; 2005b; 2007; 2009; Osório et al., 2013; 2017). While I did not outright reject any other form of research approach, nor the contribution another approach could offer, such quantitative, statistical analysis in isolation would not answer the research questions underpinning this thesis. By combining it with the qualitative enquiry that is currently emerging, I assessed that I could not only answer the research questions posed but additionally make a valid theoretical contribution (Riessman, 2002; McMahan, 2007; Yin, 2009). The Latin root of valid – *validus* – means strong, powerful and effective (Merrill and West, 2009). I intended my story to render not only a strong and powerful response but effective recommendations as well.

Notwithstanding the utility of more clinically focused MCT inquiry, much of which was used to inform this present study, what primarily interested me was the 'noise' behind

the statistics such research tended to present (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2001, p. 2). Thus, I sought to use this thesis as 'a space for subjectivity' that could otherwise be omitted by 'scientific norms of social science' (Dominicé, 2000, pp. 26; 27), reassured that much academic investigation, similar to my own, was 'anchored' in and motivated by subjective experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 205). Thus, I was buoyed by a conviction that narrative noise was as valid and as important as statistical volume, while simultaneously energised by the prospect of an active rather than static writing form. This process of actively foregrounding my experience (Hughes and Pennington, 2017) seemed to contrast with that which I associated more with passive and static forms of 'mechanistic scientism, quantitative research, and entombed scholarship [requiring] writers to silence their own voices' (Richardson, 2001, p. 35). Where others could strive for a 'statistical [...] gold standard' (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 50), my goal was to explore, excavate and extract the rich seam of experiential gold, thence exhibiting the human wealth revealed to us.

Vulnerability with purpose: ethical considerations

However, I was aware that in seeking to present a subjective account, it was additionally one that was qualified. As an example of that, there were aspects of my experiences that I did not care to reveal out of concern that they could make both me and those implicated uncomfortable (Richardson, 2001), which was of particular concern to me as I realised that I would possibly never be able to retract what I wrote (Allen-Collinson, 2016; Pelias, 2016). Thus, I felt obliged to carefully think about what I did reveal, with the sole purpose implicit in this thesis in mind, particularly given that I could expose myself to risk of (enduring) harm by recalling the 'pain, loss, [and] messiness' I felt was intrinsic to my MCT journey (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 164). Therefore, albeit beholden to ensure I presented a narrative truth, this truth did not need to be comprehensive to the point where unnecessary pain would be caused; it only needed to achieve the aims I wished it to achieve while balanced against the risk of causing counterproductive distress. Hence, while personally honest, it was a 'partial, situated, and incomplete' account, while affording a subjective interpretation of the events and emotions I choose to include (Douglas and Carless, 2016, p. 84). No claim

was made otherwise, as my aim, after all, was to assist myself and others to move on personally. To do this did not imply exposing a candid and detailed confessional of my life, although parts of the narrative presented in the following chapter could appear as such.

Nonetheless, in considering revealing personally troubling aspects of my life, I accepted that there was a chance that I could render myself vulnerable to further psychological disturbance as a result (Richardson, 2001; Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016; Tullis, 2016). That notwithstanding, I was prepared to take the risk, which in any case, I did not assess to be high (Adams et al., 2015). Conversely, I calculated the danger in not attending to this to be higher, for aside from wider academic and policy impact aspirations, my personal wish was to prevent being stuck in loss-orientation (Jolly, 1996; Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly, 2014; Herman and Yarwood, 2014). My concluding chapter discusses whether I felt more psychologically disturbed in exposing these intimacies, but what is emphasised is that I believed there was more to gain than potential pain by exposing such vulnerabilities. However, I acknowledged that the risks needed to be considered and evaluated.

Aside from concerns over my own vulnerability, I was aware that in exposing my personal life story, I had a duty to consider how those close to me personally and professionally could react and be affected as well (Richardson, 2001; Cohen et al., 2018). This is because in locating my experience in a wider sociocultural context, I was, by implication, involving others. This was particularly important to me in respect to family members with whom my life was intimately shared (Richardson, 2001; Cohen et al., 2018). Albeit to a lesser extent, I was additionally mindful of the potential consequences for former professional colleagues (Richardson, 2001).

Dealing with the issue of family members first, my concern was that, in their estimation, I could be revealing uncomfortable aspects of their lives additionally, or risking exposing them to previously unappreciated painful aspects of my experience. Heedful of this, I was careful to ensure that where I implicated members of my family, it was only insofar as their background stories had influenced my own, or where they

had offered support; these influences are, in my estimation, frequently positive. Consequently, I was content they would perceive this as, on balance, a beneficial endeavour and thus, be content. I additionally anticipated those close to me would continue to understand why I conducted my research in the way that I did while continuing to support me, as they frequently had done. Additionally, in the closing stages of developing this thesis, I made my writing available to the two closest adult members of my family, neither of whom raised an objection. This reassured me that they were at least understanding of my motivations for undertaking this personally anchored research, apparently untroubled at my choice, other than concerned that I should make a success of it.

Where I implicated members of my former profession, I reduced the chance of individuals being identified as far as possible by, for example, revealing no names. I additionally only identified roles insofar as was critical for pinpointing how the organisation (the UK MOD) could have handled situations differently, and thus could consider alternatives in similar future circumstances. This, therefore, was not so much an issue of personality but one of organisational understanding and educational preparedness. It was this understanding and preparation that I sought to influence by way of this research contribution; hence, such professional background was necessary. Consequently, the motivation for it was not driven by vindictiveness but a desire that others have more effective support in their own MCTs, in contrast to my experience.

Having resolved any epistemic and ethical anxiety I could have harboured, my next methodological challenge lay in how to construct my narrative.

Constructing the narrative

A lengthy proportion of this thesis' development was spent on drafting and redrafting countless versions of Chapter 4's narrative for several principal reasons. Firstly, it was central to my inquiry; consequently, I wanted to ensure, to the best of my ability and judgement, that it was 'just right' (Stake, 1995, p. 20). Secondly, crucial to this sense of personal satisfaction was that the narrative evolution was additionally the vehicle for

my own meaning-making, hence 'a method of discovery' in its own right, therefore requiring it to make sense to me (Richardson, 1994, p. 516). Accordingly, before I could arrive at writing *up* my conclusions and recommendations, I needed to write *into* and reflect on my experience via the 'composition process' in order to know what they might be (Pelias, 2011, p. 600).

The third difficulty I encountered related to deciding at which point in my life story the narrative ought to start, and how to structure it thereafter. While I was convinced that the most significant source of personal concern, and therefore research interest, was MCT (as opposed to the illness that precipitated that), the question remained as to where, in terms of my lifetime, the narrative should begin and how it should proceed from there. While I harboured a sense that a major MCT challenge coalesced around the loss of military identity, it did not seem likely that beginning the narrative at the military career end would satisfy a desire to understand the nature and origin of that identity formation. I then considered using the day I joined the Army as the story departure point, but that led to further questions. These centred around deciding whether that ought to be the day I joined the regular or reserve elements of that (as I was a reservist for three years before committing full-time), or what drove me to consider either form of service in the first place.

As a consequence of this dilemma and desire to trace the beginning of the military identity thread, I returned to my earliest memories to determine when and where that might have begun, by articulating and exploring them in story form. Subsequently, I learned that Jenkins' (1996) considers a sense of identity to form from around three years of age, which reassured me my seemingly instinctive inclinations were not without foundation (see additionally Pedlar et al., 2019). This was bolstered by an understanding that exploring such early reminiscences typified an autobiographical and autoethnographic propensity to situate experiences within the context of an entire life (Dominicé, 2000; Richardson, 2001; Holman Jones et al. 2016), further confirming an innate, yet common human recourse to autobiographical review in times of personal challenge (Neimeyer, 2006). Moreover, reflecting on the where aspect of identity formation, I seemed to be, according to Stake (1995), inviting others

to vicariously share my experience by richly and evocatively describing 'physical space' as well as a chronology of events (Stake, 1995, p. 63).

Without realising it when initially drafting my autoethnography, my narrative framework developed chronologically from my earliest memories (Jenkins, 1996) and in accordance, it appeared, with an innate and defining human tendency to organise 'temporal orderings of human experience' sequentially (Squire, 2013, p. 50). It is this idea of chronicity, Squire (2013) posits, that is not only characteristic of our species but is what defines it. In contrast, in Ricoeur's (1984) view, this intrinsic special (as in of our species) quality only 'becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode' (p. 52), adding later that not only does this involve us recalling our lives narratively, but it prompts us to recount them in story form as well (Ricoeur, 1991). Moreover, by instinctively adding vivid detail, such as by describing 'landscape [and] its place on the map' (Stake, 1995, p. 63) (as in the opening passages of my story), I appeared to be innately aspiring to render my writing to be more interpersonally resonant, engaging, evocative and accessible by inviting others to vicariously 'see' my lived experience (Donmoyer, 2000, p. 63).

While I settled on the core narrative thread of military identity, as well as an organically evolving autobiographical chronology and writing style, I next found myself struggling to relate self to identity: two linked, yet different concepts according to the theoretical literature. Upon deeper consultation, this literature confirmed a seemingly innate sense that how I identified myself was linked to my self-concept but, additionally, that both were somehow linked to my background, life experiences and choices (Dominicé, 2000). While consequently recognising that selfhood is 'constructed out of the bits and pieces of experience and is in a dialectical relationship with social organisation' (Frosh, 1991, p. 31) another question concerned me: if my narrative review was to lead to identity repair as I understood and hoped it might – yet identity was derived from social interaction – I wondered to what degree identity was determined by the individual and, therefore, what control they had in the face of the centrality of social influence in that respect. Without any individual agency and influence in this generation of an individual's sense of self and identity, it seemed that

autobiographical review might only lead to an understanding that any control was impossible; hence, an acceptance that any form of self-actualisation might be similarly unachievable.

However, philosophical salvation appeared in the form of Elliott's (2001) view that while selfhood is 'interpersonally constructed', it can be 'personally created' and 'interpretively elaborated' (p. 5), offering hope that an individual might have a degree of creative ability in fashioning their own interpretation of selfhood and identity, notwithstanding external influences. Further reassurance was afforded by Frosh's (1991) contention that a sense of self is not forever fixed but can change and be developed based on further experience, reflection and learning, similarly bolstered by Loots et al.'s (2013) proposition that both self and identity can be 'continuously and multifariously constructed and reconstructed' (p. 110). These revelations suggested that an individual consideration of self and identity might not be fruitless when considering altering a personal perspective of both, commensurately reassuring me that an attempt at narrative review and repair might not be a wasted effort.

Nevertheless, I continued to struggle to clearly differentiate the two concepts until I arrived at Weenolsen's (1986) succinctly and accessibly stated notion that 'lives are the external aspects of our identity', while 'our selves [sic] are the inner aspects' (p. 2).

Guided by this clear and revelatory delineation, yet indication of self or identity interrelationship, the final challenge lay in how to relate this to my narrative and its salient theme of military identity development and rupture. The key to this, it transpired, lay in the use of metaphor, the specific nature of which occurred to me in eureka fashion while contemplating these issues of self and identity while in the bath.

My metaphorical construction

This revelation surfaced by conceiving of my sense self and identity as metaphorically akin to computer software and hardware respectively. Using this analogy, I perceived of my sense of self as software that was programmed according to my experience in this world, while being reprogrammed as a result of further encounters and potentially

enhanced and empowered by reflexively considering and learning from these encounters (see additionally Hofstede et al., 2010). However, that software suffered a malfunction in the allegorical form of a virus attack (representative of my cancer experience as detailed in the next chapter), which caused a fracture in the surrounding computer hardware as well (a figurative representation of my identity).

Nevertheless, and fortunately, this virus attack did not provoke a terminal failure. Similar to many information technology (IT) organisations, rather than switch off the entire system and its hardware entirely, or leave it in sleep mode, I determined that I should undergo a period of investigation and reflective learning in order to recover from the crash and improve both my operating system and hardware, while attempting to future-proof both as potential insurance against any forthcoming attacks. While my innate experience and IT instinct could take me to a certain degree in this respect, I sensed joining an appropriate external community and course might offer vital support in this area while affording me access to pertinent literature and research. By pooling my own experience with this collective experience, I hoped not only to develop the means to improve my own products but to add to collective advancement as well. This doctorate in education was that course and the thesis a representation of what I learned from it.

Use of these metaphors not only enabled me to simplify, clarify and begin to clearly express seemingly intractable concepts relating to self and identity, but additionally use this narrative expression as a basis to generate and articulate a 'harmonious and clear vision' (Fox, 1989, p. 234) for how similar methods might help other MLs and veterans in their own MCT trajectories. Accordingly, not only did I use the IT metaphor in my own narrative review and repair efforts, but I additionally explored how similar approaches could help others in later chapters, providing the basis for that in the next section.

Narrative and metaphor: wider application to the military to civilian transition context

In terms of preparing for post-military employment in the civilian context, the use of metaphor can yield benefit when 'thinking about a career', in McMahon's view (2007, p. 285). This advantage is both related to the use of metaphor to unlock meaning as described above and its ability to help build trust and rapport between a transitioning individual and those supporting them in a career counselling relationship. Once metaphor-assisted rapport is established, the client and their career counsellor can socially and narratively construct a 'connection between past and present and the discovery of connecting patterns and themes', according to McMahon (2007, p. 287), similar to what I attempted to achieve in my own narrative development work.

Not only might the use of metaphor in combination with narrative review be applicable to post-military career counselling but there is 'therapeutic' potential in its deployment as well (Fox, 1989, p. 234; after Billow, 1977), perhaps leading to posttraumatic growth as previously posited (Neimeyer, 2004; 2006). This, as is discussed and recommended in later chapters, can be collectively delivered in a peer-supported and expert-facilitated environment (Dominicé, 2000), which, as presented later, is valued in the MCT support context, be that inclusive of issues of trauma or otherwise (Ashcroft, 2014; Finnegan, 2016). This peer- and expert-supported environment is enhanced, research suggests, in the event that at least several of those peers and support staff have direct or indirect insight into the military experience of those they are supporting (Ray and Heaslip, 2011; Petrovich, 2012; Strom et al., 2012; Finnegan et al., 2014; Rafferty et al., 2017; Brewer and Herron, 2018; Farrand et al., 2019; Parliament. House of Commons, 2019; Pedlar et al., 2019).

These and other conditions and benefits surrounding the use of narrative and metaphor in the MCT support context are explored from Chapter 5 onwards. In order to offer an exemplar case study demonstrating applicability, the next chapter presents the story surrounding my own MCT and includes the use of the metaphorical device described above.

To the story

While I acknowledge that my experience is not identical to anyone else's and that my approach to sense-making is not the only approach, I am confident there are sufficient points of congruence (Yin, 2009; Thomas, 2016) to serve as an example worthy of consideration among both fellow UK MLs and veterans, as well as among those charged with supporting them. While I do not suggest this is a panacea nor applicable in each individual situation (Riessman, 2002), I offer them and the communities that support them my 'vulnerability' (Holman Jones et al., 2016, p. 22) with the intention that they might consider embracing the narrative approach to co-constructing their own transition bridges (Ashforth, 2001). They, similar to myself I contend, can use it as a means to educate themselves about their own lives and experiences (or help others do the same), to assimilate and apply this learning and its implications in forging their post-military identities, thence to look forward to potentially more resilient and productive future selves and lives. The story I offer in the next chapter might exemplify how.

CHAPTER 4: THE STORY

Building the internal software and external hardware

Early build: an outdoor, educational, international and military template

When I recall my earliest memories, they are of the seemingly endless and sunlit fields that abutted my first home, which formed a swathe of green that appeared to extend into the horizon beyond the coastal cliffs just a few hundred metres from our house. This house was provided to us by my parents' employers, the local police service, and it was located in a small town in East Kent, England. While my father continued to serve as a police officer, my mother was required to leave when she became pregnant with me, as were the regulations in 1970. However, given that my parents met and married while both serving as police officers in the local area, I perceive that it was this service, in part, that brought my parents together thereby leading to my arrival in this world.

I do not recollect much else of those early years, including my parents' divorce when I was 3 years old, although I am aware that we moved away from the coast not long before that, to an area just outside the City of Canterbury some 10 miles inland. While at first this move was also into a house provided by the police service, the breakdown of my parents' marriage soon after meant my mother and I were relocated by the local authority to a home in a village just on the other side of the city, where I lived for the next 13 years.

While I was conscious that money was tight for my mother, this was a time and location in which I recall prospering. The village setting – alongside what is described as one of the largest areas of ancient woodland in England – provided ample forested countryside in which to roam and build dens as a pre-teen, and then explore on a pushbike as a young teenager. Just as my earliest memories were of fields and sunlight, I feel I flourished as a youngster in those verdant fields and woodlands, while spending seemingly endless summers enjoying them.

Notwithstanding relatively scarce financial resources (and no doubt by dint of my mother's hard work), we did travel outside this rural idyll while I was still young. We were close to my mother's two sisters, one of whom lived with my cousins in London, while the other was married to a member of the British Army. I would spend some of the school holidays with my aunt and cousins in London while my mother was still working in Canterbury. Sometimes this would mean accompanying my aunt to her place of work in a primary school, where I joined her charges in the classroom. Thus, I was not only looked after, but also exposed to a family member's involvement in the profession of education, while recalling marvelling at my aunt's ability to command the attention of 30 young children and engage them in what appeared to be a passion for learning. Around the same time, my mother began work at a local university and, by virtue of that, created a family connection to the bustling campus barely a mile up a hill from our house. As I grew into my teenage years, this university would provide work not only for my mother, but also for me, along with exposure to a seemingly vibrant, buzzing and cosmopolitan environment right on my doorstep. As I approached my late teens, one of my cousins began his university degree in the north of England, evidently enjoying his experience. While I was not particularly well applied in my own scholastic endeavours at the time, it did occur to me that a university encounter would be beneficial in multiple ways. Attendance at university thus became a focus for me too, adding a belated impetus to attain sufficient grades in my final school exams to pursue this goal.

While my aunt and mother's involvement in educational institutions had an impact on me, and just as I was proud of my parents' police service, I also recall admiring the stories I was told of my maternal grandfather and uncle's military careers. This was accentuated by being able to travel to see another aunt and uncle in their military postings around England and Germany, consequently presenting me with what appeared to be the excitement of peripatetic life with the British Army and the opportunities for professional and personal satisfaction and progression that this offered. Aside from travelling around England and Scotland – with the addition of day

trips to France and longer journeys to visit my uncle and aunt in Germany via Belgium and Holland – I also ventured farther afield to southern Spain.

The latter came about by virtue of my London aunt's friendship with a woman originally hailing from a small rural village in the province of Córdoba, who invited us all to visit her there when I was 8 years old. The experience felt a world away from previous trips abroad, as the village was tucked away in the mountainous, yet seemingly endless and verdant olive groves of central Andalucía. In contrast to any previous aestival experience, summer temperatures reached well into the thirties and beyond, and all manner of new and heady sights, smells and sounds created an enduring allure, along with lasting acquaintances. From then on, Spain, and particularly Andalucía, has held a strong attraction for me, creating an impetus to learn more about this land and its people, history and culture.

Several trips back to the village and province followed, strengthening a desire to study Spanish at school and leading to securing a university offer to read Spanish and Latin American Studies after enjoying a gap year in the city of Córdoba. I had thus achieved my aim to both gain a place at university and study Spanish, while acquiring a degree of fluency thanks to the gap year in the country. As an undergraduate, I felt comfortable in a university environment and thoroughly enjoyed the course and locations in which I found myself. What is more, I also discovered that one of the extracurricular activities on offer at my university was a chance to join its University Officers' Training Corps (UOTC). This was (and still is) a reserve unit of the British Army centred on the south coast of England and affiliated to local universities, with an aim, as I understand it, to recruit future Army officers (alongside a number of other similar UOTCs and recruiting centres). However, a parallel aim, I believe, is to expose future employers, based on an assumption that some UOTC members will become employers, to the benefits of reserve service and thence to encourage and support both them and their employees to serve or continue to serve as reserve military personnel.

Accordingly, the university experience provided not only an opportunity to don a British Army uniform like my uncle, but also exposure to an aspect of the Army's work that appealed to me greatly. This was via an introduction to what was then the Royal Army Educational Corps (RAEC) and its broad educational and training development duties, including responsibility for delivering foreign language training to military personnel. My undergraduate degree also involved periods of study in Mexico, Portugal and Spain, which deepened my interest in the related languages and associated studies (as well as provided an opportunity to learn Portuguese). As I cast around for where this might take me beyond university, a career in the RAEC became increasingly attractive. The opportunities that the specific work in that corps – and the wider opportunities for travel that the Army seemed to offer – enticed me, and I suspect that my family background in the uniformed services, as well as my interest in language studies and travel had much to do with that. As an added incentive, I felt that this career choice would make my parents and wider family proud, while the opportunity for physical and outdoor activity inherent in Army life was an additional allure. I thus perceived that I could continue to develop both professionally and personally, while achieving this by engaging in a career that brought together my past, present and emerging future. It all seemed to make sense.

Given that the RAEC at that time was an all-graduate and all-officer corps, I consequently attended and passed the Army's officer selection process in the penultimate year of my undergraduate degree course, and I did sufficiently well enough to be awarded a bursary for the final two years of my studies. This funding tied me into attending the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst for officer training upon graduating – an obligation I willingly accepted with great anticipation for what I imagined lay ahead.

Further militarising the software and hardware

After graduating from university, I joined the full-time Army in 1993, emerging from training as the top officer cadet in my chosen corps. As a result, I was awarded a full 32-year contract directly from commissioning, as opposed to the more common short

service contract of four to eight years, and this was a condition that suggested to me that my chosen career and I were highly compatible. I was also enjoying the physical and mental challenges involved in training, and I felt a continuing pull to the professional aspects of my chosen corps in delivering language training and education. Moreover, within a year of graduating from Sandhurst, I deployed on a United Nations' mission in Angola, where I was able to use my Portuguese and Spanish, thus further convincing me that I had found my metier and purpose in both career and life. From there, I continued to work with other Spanish and Latin American military and government personnel throughout my early career, in addition to delivering and administering language and other training. I was also posted to Germany (where I had witnessed my uncle and aunt's evident enjoyment of their Army lives), and I engaged in diverse operational roles and numerous other gratifying, fulfilling and rewarding opportunities along the way. This included a posting to Italy to work with North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) nations, where I improved my nascent Italian and relished working in the multinational environment.

Like many who join the Army, I did not see my career as one based in an office and in one location, but as an opportunity to travel, learn and remain active and outdoors as much as possible. I was not disappointed in that respect, and while there were moments of danger and discomfort (which I accepted as part of the professional landscape, much like any member of the military), my chosen path in the Army was not one that routinely placed me in the firing line; however, it did, on balance, offer the professional and personal environment I sought.

Not only did the career offer me these things, but it also caused me to meet my wife and provided us with homes and facilities wherever it took us ('us' including, later, our daughter). That career, while it lasted (for almost 16 years), was a manifestly significant period of my life and one which fully engaged, motivated and absorbed me and my time.

However, that arcadia was soon to be shattered.

Virus attack

While I knew a military career involved risk of physical injury (even as an education officer), I never considered my confrontation with my mortality might involve cancer. That was until I began to experience symptoms of acute pain and discomfort in late 2006, with a confirmed cancer diagnosis arriving a year later.

I was serving with NATO and living in Italy when these symptoms presented themselves, but the many trips to the military medical facilities some distance away failed to diagnose the cause. This left me enduring excruciating attacks and incapacitation as a result of the unknown cause of the pain (often curling up on the floor of work washrooms clutching my belly in agony), while completing my military duties, including physical training and field exercises. When on field training, the inconvenience of using latrines every few minutes on account of racking abdominal pain and permanent diarrhoea was a particular challenge.

However, I was posted back to the UK the following summer, visiting the local doctor in September that year. Speedy referrals for tests in the nearby hospital followed and led to the diagnosis of a cancerous tumour in my colon. My immediate reaction at being told the likely cause, perhaps surprisingly, was one of relief. In retrospect, I think I had prepared myself mentally for that to be the case, and my relief came down to having an explanation for the cause of the acute discomfort at last, as well as how it might be resolved.

In the event, that resolution came in the form of having the tumour removed, along with a section of my colon, within a month of diagnosis. A mixed route to recovery then followed, which saw me given an ileostomy (an opening in the abdomen through which a section of the small intestine, the ileum, is diverted and empties faecal matter into a bag attached to the skin). While this was somewhat inconvenient, I accepted it was necessary to allow the resected colon to heal without waste matter infecting the area around the surgery. However, I did experience a post-operative infection, which delayed physical recovery and became more unbearably painful than anything hitherto

experienced (which not even morphine could dull). Recovery was also hampered by the need to repair a potential leak where the two remaining sections of colon had been joined together, therefore requiring a further bout of major abdominal surgery. The cancer fortunately appeared to be contained in the extracted tumour without spreading elsewhere, hence I needed no chemo or radiotherapy. Despite the initial setbacks, the cancer has therefore seemingly been cured.

Furthermore, throughout the whole clinical and surgical experience, I was determined to remain as physically fit as possible; encouraged to do so by clinicians under a regime of enhanced recovery. Part of the motivation was also driven by a desire to return to full physical fitness as quickly as possible in order to remain competitive for career promotion, hence I wished to demonstrate that I was fully fit to those who oversaw and influenced my career prospects.

This tactic seemed to work straightaway, as within just a matter of days of my first operation, I was informed that I was to be re-assigned from the job I was then undertaking in southern England, to Glasgow, in Scotland. This new job was one that was traditionally seen as leading to swift promotion for the incumbent, with an indication that the move was to take effect as soon as I was fit enough, underpinned by an insinuation that this be sooner rather than later. I consequently recall feeling significant pressure to comply as quickly as possible, resulting in attempts to maintain and improve physical fitness from initial hospital discharge, while still experiencing complications from the surgery that I had undergone.

The key annual physical tests in the Army at that time involved a speed run without weight (that is, without carrying military equipment in, for example, a backpack), accompanied by a longer march with weight, along with sit-ups and press-ups. Accordingly, I was attempting to maintain core strength and fitness, having had my stomach muscles cut open for removal of a section of my colon, with an ileostomy, along with the other effects of colon cancer and remedial surgery and treatment. Instead, as I have subsequently been told by clinical staff, I should have been resting, both physically and mentally, and I should have known this, or at least realised.

However, never having had cancer before and never having been committed to hospital other than for a bout of food poisoning aged 11 years, I had no idea what toll the disease would take on me and therefore what I should be doing to mitigate its effects. As far as I recall, no one advised me to do anything other than remain mobile and active post-operatively, with no caveats as to limits. I say this not to apportion blame, as this is not the purpose of this story, but merely to illustrate how I was experiencing the situation at the time and hence what I was thinking and doing as a consequence. Thus, in lieu of suggestions to the contrary, I perceived returning to full fitness as quickly as possible to be the best way to recuperate, particularly as I determined that there was a high likelihood my career would suffer otherwise.

Nevertheless, I was attempting to recover in a house provided by the Army, in the same base I worked in, only around a 3-minute walk from that place of work. Key personnel from that job would consequently see me leaving my home as I attempted to remain mobile and active. This activity included taking my daughter to the nursery school and visiting the medical centre for checks ups, both located in the same camp and even nearer my workplace. As far as I can determine, these visible signs of activity seemed to indicate that I was convalescing well to those who saw me moving around the small Army camp. In any case, I received visits to my home by work colleagues, including senior officers who not only directly managed my work, but also determined my professional future. The two most senior visitors put it to me that I should relocate to Glasgow, while a third requested to know when I would be returning to work in my current role. As I understood it from my wife (who had begun protecting me from these calls, having noticed a detrimental impact), the latter visit was to request I attend weekend meetings just days after my first major surgical operation. I recall that this prompted in me a substantial sense of pressure to return to professional duties as soon as possible, as I felt I was letting myself, my immediate colleagues, the wider Army and my family down. I also feared what impact an inability to comply with this apparent pressure would have on my career.

These visits occurred within three days of initial discharge from hospital and while I was experiencing an acute infection as well as the novelty of an ileostomy. Despite

leaving the house during the immediate aftermath of the first operation, as soon as I returned, I could do nothing but get back into nightclothes and either lie on the living-room sofa or return to bed owing to pain and tiredness. This was how visitors initially found me; not only that, but I was also frequently stained with the waste matter that was leaking from my ileostomy as I got used to managing it. While I received visitors in this state at first, I was beginning to notice that I found these visits stressful, and clearly so did my wife. As a result, she began to shield me from them in an attempt to allow me the space, time and conditions to deal with the fallout of the cancer; including its treatment and the follow-on implications. No one else seemed to get the message though, perhaps me included.

Attempted reboot

With the tumour removed, and once the infection had been treated and colon leak repaired, my ileostomy was reversed around six months after my first operation. There had been moments of concern and physical and mental stress, but despite the weakened abdominal muscles and other physical complications, I seemed to have maintained my fitness. The military medical centre that dealt with the wound left by the reversal of my stoma seemed unconcerned with that or any other issue. No one around me could see any physical evidence of the cancer or surgery; my attempts to feign, if not prove my return to corporeal and professional fitness hence seemed to have worked. Overall, I was confident that I would make a full physical recovery from the cancer, while not giving much thought to any psychological impact following its diagnosis and treatment.

My focus throughout this period was on the tumour being excised and, given that mercifully there was no metastasis, being patched up and carrying on as before; that is the point at which I seemed to be just over six months after diagnosis. Aside from the discomfort caused by visits from career-influencing individuals and the pressure I felt to resume my career as swiftly as possible, I do not recall much other psychological stress. There were notable exceptions throughout my illness, including when I had to break the news of diagnosis to close family members, and when it simultaneously

occurred to me that I might not see my daughter grow into adulthood if the cancer killed me sooner. Other than that, for the most part, I approached the early stages of diagnosis and treatment with an attitude that I and the hospital staff would beat it, not the other way around.

Accordingly, my recollection of that time is that I felt optimistic that I would make a full physical recovery, albeit with a portion of my large bowel removed, along with attendant surgical scarring and altered bowel habits. With that sense of optimism prevailing, I prepared to move jobs to Glasgow, while the family base moved back to where I had grown up, in East Kent. The new professional posting was located not only some 400 miles away from this new family home, but also the same distance from the previous Army base I lived and worked at when my cancer was initially diagnosed and treated, and therefore the same distance from the clinicians providing ongoing monitoring and care.

Although the Army provided housing close to the new role in Glasgow, the difference in educational systems between England and Scotland meant that my daughter, who had just gained a place in a local English primary school prior to potentially moving countries, could not do the same in Scotland until a year later. There were also no places available in local nursery schools in Scotland, thereby presenting practical as well as emotional concerns in relation to her educational and social development. Furthermore, my wife was established as a teacher in the English school system; therefore, a move to a differing educational delivery model would have interrupted her career as well. Accordingly, we made the difficult decision to provide for these apparently more pressing developmental needs when choosing where to establish the family base, which also afforded proximity to my parents and their much needed support at a time of change and concern, along with their help with our young daughter (their granddaughter), albeit at the cost of my being away from the family most of the time. While my cancer care could also have been transferred to a hospital nearer my new home or workplace, I did not yet feel ready to sever the bonds to the people and place that I credited with saving my life. I felt they knew me, and I them, and I did not wish to risk having to re-establish a relationship with a new, unknown

care team, particularly when, internally, I was increasingly sensing emotional and physical fragility, notwithstanding a desire to overtly demonstrate sufficient recovery for the purposes of professional continuity.

Thus, having been provided with a one-person apartment in central Glasgow, I was living on my own during the working week from June 2009 – just over six months after my cancer diagnosis and commencement of treatment, with the latter ending less than three weeks before. This was also, as stated, some 400 miles from both my family and the hospital providing the follow-up cancer and treatment reviews. All this meant frequent and tiring commutes back home and to hospital, while trying to get to grips with a new and extremely busy work schedule, which made no allowance for the recent disease and its aftereffects (as confirmed later by clinicians). In the event, I was only able to endure this for 5 months.

Software crash and hardware breakdown

11 November 2009 was Remembrance Day, an annual Memorial Day observed in the United Kingdom and some allied countries, falling either on 11 November and/or the closest Sunday to it. Its purpose, ostensibly, is to bring to mind members of the armed forces who have died in the line of duty, along with civilians who have lost their lives as a result of military action. However, I recall it most for reasons other than those traditionally linked with this day of recollecting past conflict. Standing in uniform and at attention in the midst of the ranks of assembled fellow soldiers, my hands began to tingle, and my mind raced and railed against the feeling of being trapped.

I have subsequently been advised by military clinicians that I suffered an episode of panic or anxiety triggered by the multiple and simultaneous stresses of ill-health, job change, house move and separation from support networks; none of which, in their view, was conducive to effective recovery from cancer and its treatment, nor advisable in the circumstances. However, no other military clinician nor human resources controller expressed a concern before assignment to Glasgow, and my superior officers offered, encouraged and hastened its commencement. Accordingly, never

having previously been diagnosed with life-threatening illness and undergone its remedy and effect, I had no basis upon which to weigh up the benefit or risk of refusing a lawful assignment order to the new job and location. I simply trusted that the organisation, with centuries of experience of similar human resources issues, had judged what was best for me. To reject a lawful, albeit retrospectively ill-advised order, would therefore represent an anathema to a well-drilled, loyal and trusting Army officer, who simply wanted to regain fitness and maintain professional progression. The result was that I complied, arranged my personal and professional life as best as I felt I could and eventually drove myself towards almost total emotional and physical collapse, manifesting itself on Remembrance Day 2009.

For some months leading up to that day, I had not been sleeping and eating well, all the while withdrawing from social contact. Furthermore, I was greatly concerned that I was walking into shops, picking items up and, while lost in what seemed like dreamlike fog, almost walking out without paying for them. The prospect of being arrested for shoplifting, no matter how excusable it might be given recent events, was not one that sat comfortably with my background as the son of police officers or as an Army officer trained and expected to act with integrity, honesty and virtue.

Although I remained standing throughout the parade, at its end I staggered over to a nearby bench, soon followed by my superior officer. I recall telling him that I could not go on as I was, having realised that I was verging on a major psychological and physical collapse. Self-preservation had taken over, but it had been a hard battle to fight. The Army goes to great lengths to instil selfless commitment, courage, discipline and loyalty in its members. By giving up, I felt I was lacking in all of those values.

The realisation that I had to give up in order to survive consequently weighed heavily, and was almost too long coming. However, to admit to experiencing problems would require 'reporting sick' in British Army terms – being classified as sick was often mockingly suffixed by colleagues with the words lame and lazy, accompanied by accusations of malingering. I did not want to be regarded as any of those things, so I simply tried to 'soldier on'. Military life requires that its people should be mentally and

physically robust enough to operate in arduous, extreme and dangerous conditions, particularly looking to those in positions of leadership, such as non-commissioned and commissioned officers, to set the example. That, after all, is what a nation pays and expects its armed forces to do, and commensurately what the armed forces require their members to commit to and carry out. The effect of this, in my case, was to resist admitting defeat and asking for help until I felt on the verge of a breakdown, and doing so seemed a more frightening prospect than the blow wrought by the cancer in the first place.

A reluctance to seek help was further induced by the professional environment in which I found myself: in the building I was assigned to in Glasgow, the entrance lobby contained a large screen displaying the casualty rate resulting from Army operations in Afghanistan at the time. Confronted with a daily tally of these combat-related deaths and injuries, bolstered by the then frequent images appearing in the media of repatriated flag-draped coffins, I felt that my experience with cancer was nothing as compared to them. To me, it was considered minor in comparison to any (and particularly any visible) form of battlefield injury.

My 'injuries' were invisible to anyone bar family and clinicians. I had scars on my abdomen, and I still have them, but they are covered by my clothing. Any stress, anxiety and depression that I was experiencing were similarly invisible, and none of these physical or psychological injuries were sustained in combat, as I had accepted might be the case. Accordingly, I felt there was no apparent heroism on my part, certainly not of the type lauded by an organisation that awards medals and commendations to those displaying tenacity and courage in the face of the enemy and much discussed in the nation's media and literature. Instead, as far as I was concerned, the cause of my disease was a body and mind turning on itself, which was far from the military ideal, much less heroic.

Furthermore, I was not only in a sedentary job far away from the battlefield, but also responsible for sending people to it. This compounded a sense of physical and mental inability to perform the same combat duties I was ordering others to undertake, in

turn provoking an internal psychological conflict exacerbated by immense guilt. Moreover, in trusting the Army to manage my career, as well as having faith in its attendance to my welfare needs and handling of my health concerns (as I believed it had covenanted, undertaken and committed to do), I also trusted that it had determined me to be fit enough to move to Glasgow and undertake the new job. I thus felt that my declining physical and mental state was my fault, further intensifying and amplifying a spiralling sense of failure and guilt.

As the fateful Remembrance Day of 11 November approached, I had discerned this decline and began to perceive the potential for a seemingly catastrophic psychological breakdown. Despite an idea of the likely professional and personal consequences, my reluctance to seek help was overridden by fear of mental collapse, thereby prompting me to seek medical help, albeit discreetly in an attempt to limit damage to my career. This, as highlighted above, was not only a difficult realisation to come to terms with, but also extremely challenging to keep quiet. I had been in the Army long enough, working within the human resources department for sufficient time, to realise that in exposing my mental health concerns, there was a chance it might have a negative effect on my promotion prospects, along with the visibly humiliating withdrawal of weapon handling status. By extension, I might also be removed from all current duties due to concerns over my ability to cope with the demands of work and to take appropriate decisions. If I were removed from duty, this would mean I was at a disadvantage when competing for limited promotion places as compared to my healthy peers. I would consequently slip down the quality rankings, jeopardising my place among the fortunate few rewarded with a promotion.

This was based on a selection process that saw all those qualified for promotion in terms of experience, courses, examinations and physical and psychological fitness forwarded to an assessment board based on their specialism, mine being Army education and training. What determined who among those would be awarded the limited promotion was their quality, as judged and ranked by members of the board. This was based on a quick review and assessment of each individual's annual appraisal reports, lasting only a few minutes, with the available promotions going to the top-

rated candidates until all places were allocated. Given that my role in Glasgow was to act as secretary and prepare files for these boards, as well as inform candidates of the results, I was fully aware of this process and thus the consequences of declaring my own medical concerns. I had observed the effect of this on others, and I hence had a clear idea of what the likely personal ramifications would be in the event I was medically downgraded. Accordingly, admitting to my worsening health concerns in the midst of a promotion-earning job (and supposed recovery) was an unconscionable prospect as far as I was concerned – until I perceived not doing so as much more threatening.

As this sense of threat grew, I attempted to subtly seek medical help, as mentioned above. However, I was initially prevented from doing so as my documents had not been forwarded to the local military clinic. ‘Local’ was 50 miles away in Edinburgh, while visits were further hampered by trying to inconspicuously accommodate and arrange an appointment without having to explain an absence of at least half a day spent in travelling. This occurred in tandem with my attempts to prove my fitness for work, which included telling as few of my new work colleagues as possible about my recent illness. I was at once simply tired of talking about it and aware that in not seeking help, I was likely to collapse physically and mentally, while petrified of public knowledge having a catastrophic impact on my career. I had to do something, yet wanted to do nothing – a frightening, intolerable and extremely stressful situation in which to find myself, I recall.

In the circumstances, it took me several days to locate my medical records in an administrative office in Glasgow and thence have them correctly sent to the clinic in Edinburgh. Without them, I was told I could not be seen, as I was effectively non-existent according to the necessary yet unavailable medical documents. These crucial records (containing the recent history of my potentially fatal disease) had been left on a shelf in an administrative building, instead of being sent to my new medical centre, and this experience began to undermine my faith that the Army regarded my current state of health with concern, much less that it was appropriately equipped and/or willing to help me deal with it.

When I did finally get to see a doctor in Edinburgh on 9 November, just two days before my Remembrance Day crash, records note a referral for psychiatric support. This was due to the aforementioned concern that I was under entirely inappropriate professional pressure when I should have been resting and recovering from the implications of a diagnosis of cancer and follow-on curative surgery – doing so with the close support of family and treating clinicians, according to these notes. However, this psychiatric referral did not occur before the eventual collapse, a collapse I saw as imminent, as mentioned. Given its occurrence on 11 November 2009, and shortly after recovering a degree of composure by sitting on the bench after having been dismissed from the parade, I contacted the clinic again to arrange another appointment. I subsequently discovered my boss had also been in contact with them after speaking to me while we sat on the bench, as he had come to recognise I was ill. That, at least, restored some faith that some elements of the Army appeared to care, with the instantaneous result that I was sent home on immediate sick leave, thus given the crucial time and space to recuperate with my family.

While being afforded this period of rest was a relief in many respects, the foreseen and feared consequence was the removal of my file from all promotion and appointment boards. Thereafter, I suffered the humiliation of receiving letters from my former boss each time a board was due to be convened, informing me that due to my medical ‘downgrading’, I could not be considered for promotion. I do not blame him for dispatching this correspondence; I knew he was simply complying with the procedural demands. However, it did suggest to me that the process was, at best, predictably unsympathetic and unyielding. I accept that an alternative view might be that the Army had come to realise that I was not fit for promotion, and it was therefore protecting both me and the organisation from associated pressure. However, to me, the withdrawal of my promotion chances signalled both a personal and institutional failure, and I have regretted not reaching the next rank since. The Army had instilled in me a desire to be the best, and circumstances had prevented me from continuing to strive for this. It was a Catch-22 situation: to have admitted to needing help earlier would have conceivably delayed or irreparably damaged my promotion prospects in

any case, even if I had remained in the Army. However, in not seeking support earlier, this possibly sealed my exit fate due to delaying help and subsequently worsening my condition. It seems I was damned if I did and equally (or more) damned by not doing so.

As a result, to this day, I have not been able to comfortably attend another remembrance ceremony. When I recall 11 November 2009, it feels as though I were attending my own funeral. Given that I spent the obligatory 2-minute silence not recalling the war dead, but my own potential demise at the hands of cancer, I simply do not now wish to be reminded of my mortality on an annual basis, much less my former, now seemingly lost identity and military self – at least not yet.

Attempted software and hardware repair

After 2 months' rest at home, in early 2010, the Army sent me on a 'graduated return to work' programme in an effort to introduce a paced rehabilitation, which involved travelling to London to work in a military role supporting fellow wounded, injured and sick (WIS) service personnel. This phased reintegration was managed by a fellow cancer survivor, who accordingly had insight into my circumstances, along with the need for appropriate professional pacing and sensitivity. However, despite enjoying and feeling comfortable in the role, I believe this manager noted that I was still struggling emotionally, and I was hence offered appointments to see an Army psychiatrist. I duly attended these, but rather than yielding any positive psychological effect as far as I could determine, my experience was that they were at best perfunctory, and more likely aimed at justifying termination of my military service on grounds of medical unsuitability – a decision that was entirely out of my control by this time.

When I was officially notified of the decision to end my career, the supporting paperwork cited a 'principal invaliding condition' of 'adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood', with 'Carcinoma of the Colon' stated alongside that, but nothing else to indicate why that meant I was beyond professional rehabilitation.

Nonetheless, with that decision taken, I was removed from the graduated return to work programme and placed into an Army administrative process in order for the discharge procedures to take effect. That meant I was once again sent home, with occasional visits from a welfare officer in front of whom I attempted to maintain composure while enabling him to complete his check sheet. Given that he had some very badly injured junior soldiers to deal with on his travels around the local area, I did not wish to complicate his work any further than I believed necessary, particularly as I felt others were much more deserving of his attention than I, just as in Glasgow.

Hardware disassembly

With the Army's discharge verdict reached and the ensuing dismissal procedure activated, part of the process required me to hand back my Army uniform – kit I had worn almost every day for nearly two decades. To me, the act of handing over this clothing felt like relinquishing not just a uniform, but part of my self and my identity. Just as the provision of military dress throughout a career is symbolic of entry, progression and success, to me the surrendering of this attire epitomised my failure to cope and act with the strength and resilience required of a British Army officer. Moreover, in handing over my uniform and accoutrements, it appeared as if I were offering up my soul – a soul that I realised had been lent to me by the Army at its convenience. In contrast to the initial and protracted process of enculturation, marked so often as it was by ritual, this humiliating and isolating 'decommissioning' experience was far from ceremonious.

This sense of bathos was accentuated by a peculiar twist: the list of all uniform and equipment I held and was required to return, was blank. Due to a technical glitch it seems, there was no record of anything on it, at least according to the sheet printed out by the storekeeper attending to the process. Apart from my name, rank and number at the top, the remainder of the sheet bore nothing but white space.

This storekeeper looked as confused as I did. After staring at the blank list for a few seconds, he informed me that I was not in possession of any issued uniform and

equipment according to his records; therefore, there was nothing to hand in. This was despite the evidence, based on the kit I had brought with me, suggesting otherwise. Having heard stories of the Royal Military Police (the Army's dedicated police service) scouring internet auction sites looking for serving or former military personnel attempting to sell uniform and equipment technically belonging to the state, I did not wish to be caught in possession of illicit items, so handed it all back anyway.

The metaphor of the blank list was not lost on me. It seemed to me as if any record of my service in the Army had been expunged even before I had officially left its service. I felt as if the blank record was a facsimile of my fast disappearing identity: it was already washed clean, all trace gone. There was little on the practically empty sheet to suggest what this identity had been, nor what it could be in the future.

To complicate matters further, the storekeeper appeared reluctant to accept the 'ghost' uniform and equipment, as he would have to go to the trouble of burning clothing that did not officially exist. The uniform was to be burned, I am told, as anything that has touched skin as intimately as uniform, is incinerated for hygiene reasons. So not only did I feel that I was being denuded in terms of handing back my officially non-existent clothing, but this very tangible trace of my Army experience was also about to be cremated, causing me to imagine my former self dissipating in a column of sparks and smoke, until I, and my identity, disappeared entirely. Where the cancer had not succeeded in eliminating me, the Army appeared to be doing a marvellous job of both deliberately and inadvertently purging any evidence of my having passed through it. Although I savoured the comedy of the situation, and still do, this heralded an extremely difficult transitional period.

From then on, with images of erased self and identity lingering in my mind, I have long reflected and ruminated on being an Army 'invalid' since 2011. Where I joined the Army some 16 years earlier – accompanied by proud family and friends and amid much pomp, ceremony, marching bands, horses, flags, uniforms and fireworks – I left it almost alone. My only companion was a black bag containing officially non-existent symbols of my time in it, which were to be consigned to a funeral pyre in any case. The

long since incinerated uniform bore the flag of my country and its international alliances, as well as the insignia and colours of my corps, branch and brigade. When wearing it, it also inscribed my name across my heart – literally. To me, it therefore bore the visual manifestation of what I believe I considered my identity, while encapsulating, sustaining and nurturing my sense of self.



Example features on a uniform:

Nation

Name

Brigade

Rank and regiment/corps/trade

Along with my kit, I also returned my identity card, which was regarded as property of the head of state. This card bore my picture, taken in the uniform it entitled me to wear. It also displayed the rank I had earned and my military number: numerals that indicated when I joined and hence how long I had served. Like most who serve in the armed forces, this number was committed to memory, having been so often required. Accordingly, it has not been forgotten, despite long since leaving. When I seek assistance from veterans' organisations now, I am still required to give it, along with my former rank.

The card I carried while in service also bore my name, my date of birth and my blood group. It therefore conveyed the essence of who I am, or was. Thus, perhaps more than any other item on that blank list of belongings that I owed the Queen, this card was the most difficult to give up and entailed the most disturbing experience of the entire process. If I had lost it in service, I would have been disciplined by the Army. But in losing my career, I was required to surrender a piece of plastic that encapsulated my sense of self as well as my identity, and this felt like the greatest punishment.



At 1 second past midnight on 12 August 2011, I ceased to be a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces and became a civilian and a veteran.

The institution with which I most identified left me in no doubt that I was no longer mentally or physically fit enough to be part of it, preventing me from striving to be the best in its embrace just as the Army recruiting posters had urged me to be. Furthermore, given the efforts the Army invested in differentiating itself from civilian society, I perceived that if I could not be the best in the Army, I was never going to be able to be the best as a civilian, given its apparently inferior status. That understanding heralded a long period spent pondering what I was, along with what I could be, other than a broken, veteran ex-Army officer and consequentially inferior being.

As a result, I believed I had failed not just myself, but my immediate family and parents. I also felt I had failed those I had been trained to support as a member of the Army. I also felt guilty that I felt terrible, as this suggested to me that I was ungrateful that I had survived a disease that might have killed me. My life had been saved; I had been given an opportunity to live in peace with my family, and I sensed that I should be grateful for that opportunity. However, I resented what the disease had done to my career, and this conflict of emotions provoked an immense sense of confusion, bewilderment, guilt, shame and humiliation. It caused me to attempt to avoid leaving the house and meeting people, in an effort to forestall having to explain why I was at home and not working any more. I simply could not bear to relate what had happened to anyone other than my wife.

Accordingly, while I remained a husband and father, I felt a shadow of the person I previously considered myself to be. I also felt unable to determine and see how my light might once again shine, much less project that light going forward.

Software rebuild

While Army pension payments bought me some time to try and find new work, also regarded then, as now, as a welcome financial and emotional cushion, they were and continue to be deemed insufficient reason to disengage from paid employment altogether – again, for reasons of economy and psychology. I thus had to find alternative income streams and professional occupations upon Army discharge. However, mindful of the damagingly precipitous return to work in Glasgow while in the Army, I paced and self-managed this civilian return to work by establishing myself as a consultant, thus affording myself an ability to manage my commitments and availability. This enabled me to undertake short-term contracts, which I found through former military colleagues who were now also independent contractors, or work in a university environment. The former engagements, supporting military exercises, implied assignments ranging from a few days to two to three weeks; while the latter saw me teaching as a visiting lecturer at a London university. Not only did this portfolio approach provide an income, albeit relatively small and infrequent, but it also obliged me to move outside the very small area of East Kent that had otherwise become my sanctuary, rather than to continue restricting my existence to it. In retrospect, this was a positive (although difficult) concept to embrace initially, as it forced me to broaden my horizons beyond my comfort zone. Despite this, I found doing so bodily and psychologically taxing, and I hence arranged this work in such a way as to be able to recuperate physically and mentally between work assignments when necessary, which I found I still needed to do.

As a result (and despite apparently incrementally increasing self-confidence), my wife has since told me that I spent much of the day in pyjamas during these rest interludes. When I did leave home at this time, my only direct company was our dog, Rolo. While much of this period appears a blur (possibly due to latent psychological stress,

consequently similar to my experience in Glasgow), I do recall that I continued to shun human contact outside my family as much as possible. Therefore, Rolo and I were frequent visitors to the nearby woods (the same woods I roamed when growing up) or to the calm of the local coastline. I felt both spaces enabled me to avoid the discomfort of too much human contact, while also soothing me through a sense of peace in nature, allied to a connection to a sanctuary that nurtured me when I was young (and possibly also redolent of environments I continued to enjoy while in the Army). I now understand this enforced isolation as indicative of depression, and the trips to these familiar and natural spaces might be considered an attempt to cope with it. Likewise, I perceive my return to – and decision to remain close to my childhood home – as an additional means to seek the comfort and familiarity of proximity to my parents and childhood friends, which yielded a sense of connection to more stable, reassuring and comforting times.

In terms of other means of coping with depressive symptoms, my previous visits to the military psychiatrist ceased upon leaving the Army. While the civilian medical system that diagnosed and cured my cancer continued to check that all was well in that respect, no referral was made to local non-military providers for any mental health support, so I looked to self-help in attempting to deal with these psychological issues. I also sense that I was reluctant to visit clinicians due to latent concerns over stigma and its impact on my future, as well as the previous administrative issues that prevented easy access to them while in Glasgow; I hence perceive that both issues acted to discourage me from requesting formal support.

In attempting to deal with psychological distress alone, I consequently became a frequent visitor to the self-help section of my local bookshop. However, none of the books and exercises I tried appeared to have any positive impact, so I next turned to using relaxation and visualisation applications (apps), which I had downloaded onto my mobile telephone. These were useful insofar as they enabled me to fall asleep – a condition otherwise impossible when my mind was racing with the anxiety-driven and instinctive attempts to resolve emotional turmoil. Being able to sleep was good, and being rested no doubt enabled me to better tackle the emotional turmoil; however,

similarly to the self-help books, these apps did not enable me to understand why I was feeling as I did, much less determine how to resolve my malaise in the long term. This was despite being urged to picture a prosperous, happy and positive (or whatever other) future I had selected them to assist me with. Try as I might, I could not seem to imagine these futures, which in hindsight, I suspect was because I had not dealt with the underlying emotional disturbance, disruption and dislocation wrought by illness and job loss. Therefore, without attending to an exploration and settling of this disorder, I believe I found it extremely difficult to project any sense of forward momentum. Any future I did try and visualise appeared to lack foundation and hence did not seem credible in my mind. In short, I did not trust my imagination, as it seemed to be basing plans on unfounded and thus unrealistic fantasy.

Where self-help had thus far failed, I felt compelled to seek alternative support. Despite previous experiences discouraging me from doing so, I relented and arranged a short programme of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) sessions through my local doctor. In attending them, I recall a sense of relief at the opportunity to talk about my feelings and emotions, along with what might be causing them. However, I found it tiring and an often emotionally painful process, particularly when having to explain the experience of cancer and military job loss to yet another practitioner. Moreover, the experience seemed to do nothing to answer any existential and ontological questions, just as the self-help books and apps had failed to do.

I consequently remained desperate for some insight into why I was feeling the way I did and, perhaps more crucially, into what I might need to do to stop experiencing emotional discord. I believe it was then that it occurred to me that my psychological dissonance might be bound up in mourning a lost military career. However, given a suspicion that issues of self and identity were implicated in that sense of grief, I felt I needed to explore more than just that career end in order to understand why I so keenly felt its passing. This led, I now believe, to an instinctive urge to trace my life story backwards and thence forwards again in order to determine why my Army career end affected me so much. Although I did not and could not define the process at the

time, I sense now that I was attempting to conduct some form of narrative review and repair.

I initially posted my nascent attempts at articulating my autobiographical exploration on the Internet in the form of a web log (blog) – perhaps, in part at least, inspired by a recognition that the previous CBT sessions had provided an opportunity to explore my issues narratively, with positive therapeutic effect. Not only do I now consider this to be an attempt to generate personal meaning-making and therapeutic relief, but by virtue of its availability on the public Internet, I also perceive this as an early effort to try and help others, just as I now wish this research to do. However, I soon abandoned the blog as I was unable to identify which aspects of my narrative to focus on, consequently hindering the meaning-making and preventing an ability to explain that to others. Any efforts at writing inevitably appeared utterly chaotic and muddled, just as my many previous attempts to understand the reasons for my emotional disquiet. I knew I wanted to say something, but I did not know what that was, much less how to say it. I was, however, seemingly a step closer to arriving at the point of undertaking this doctorate as a means to achieve the same ends – one that is scaffolded, supported and guided. By then I had apparently realised that I needed some form of rigorous structure to steer me in my own meaning-making and wider contributory endeavours, as well as to potentially forge a new identity as a civilian educator.

I also became aware that my then preference for short-term work and isolation was neither financially sustainable nor healthy, particularly as I sensed that this was causing my family concern. In response to this, I undertook a part-time role at a local university in March 2013, commencing the taught phase of this doctorate in education there in the same month. A year-and-a-half later, I moved on professionally to a full-time contract at a NATO headquarters, a role that took me around Belgium, Italy, Portugal and the Netherlands. My personal and professional horizons therefore began to expand once again, and I felt my confidence was returning. However, that did not mean I was free of the sense of disappointment and failure that accompanied my forced exit from the Army. I frequently awoke from fitful sleep recollecting that I had been ruefully dreaming of my curtailed military career, which reinforced a growing

perception that the Army job loss experience remained mentally unprocessed. This, in turn, suggested that my military career end was the primary cause of my unease. Thus, while my self-confidence appeared to be returning and my movements expanded beyond my immediate home area, I realised I was still struggling to determine who I was and what I was becoming in my post-military life.

In considering this emerging notion that the loss of military self and identity was central to my malaise, I also became conscious of the thought that revisiting and re-establishing myself in areas that held deep-rooted meaning for me were pivotal to a process of repair. Just as returning to my home environment continued to help me in that respect, I felt equally comforted by my work and studies in the university sector, which linked me to a formal learning environment once again, and this was bolstered by recalling positive experiences in that context as a youth and young adult. In addition, my family and I began to make much more use of the house we had purchased in Spain, which was located in the same village I first visited when travelling to that country aged 8 years. In returning there, I similarly felt I could relax. I also continued to enjoy using my Spanish, and I was soothed by roaming the Castilian countryside and historical monuments that maintained a fascination for me. Furthermore, travelling to my new educational and training development role with NATO enabled me to once again redeploy the prior experience I had accrued in the Army in an international, quasi-military and educational environment – a context I evidently greatly enjoyed and valued. An idea was thus emerging that I needed to explore the keenly felt loss of my military self and identity on the one hand and to examine other aspects of my life that I positively identified with on the other, doing so as a means to re-establish some form of positive coherence, as well as to provide the foundation for a purposeful, motivating and rewarding future.

In short, I realised I needed to reclaim and renew my sense of self and thence rebuild my identity and effect an escape from loss in the civil-military gap. To do so, this narrative yielded the data and material with which I could attempt to reprogram my software, construct my transition bridge and reconfigure my identity hardware.

What this revealed to me and continues to teach me not only serves as a personally focused self-help guide aimed at an audience of one, but also, I hope, as a means to indicate how supported, adaptive, co-constructed self-educational reflection might yield the same for others in their own MCT trajectories.

How this might take effect is the object of the remaining chapters, to which I now turn.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter introduction

At its outset, this thesis posed three research questions:

- Why might MCT be a challenge, and why consider this?
- Is there a model of transition that might help recognise and mitigate MCT challenges?
- What part might narrative review play in this recognition and mitigation, and how can this be conducted?

Literature considered in Chapter 2 effectively answered the first research question, while additionally signposting, in relation to the second question, a theoretical foundation that might help in recognising and mitigating MCT challenges (the 4S model). Based on the narrative of my own MCT offered in the previous chapter, my aim in this chapter is to isolate pertinent themes that might not only exemplify many of the issues identified in Chapter 2, but also, and more crucially, explain how they might indicate gaps in the current UK MCT support offering.

However, while my MCT experience may exhibit commonality, as indicated in Chapter 2, it has also been previously highlighted that no two transition experiences, or interpretations thereof, will be identical. This is likely to be true of my own MCT as compared to anyone else's, and it can also apply to a personal understanding and interpretation of an experience as perceptions shift by way of reflecting on it (and the same can apply to anyone else and their experience). Given this potential for a degree of commonality, individuality and personal flux, the overall aim of this thesis is to develop a commonly applicable model for understanding and potentially mitigating (at least some) MCT challenges, be they generally occurring, highly individual or a combination of the two. By virtue of that need to accommodate both common and unique experience, any MCT analysis or mitigation framework that is adopted must be

sufficiently pliable so as to be deployed on a collective programmatic basis, yet be tailorable to individual circumstances, as recommended by the FiMT (2013).

This chapter seeks to develop and present such a model, based on a narrative review and analysis of MCT and surrounding experience, before assessing the effectiveness and potential weaknesses implicit in current UK MOD MCT support policy. The aim is to recommend, in Chapter 6, how the resulting analytical model and allied suggestions might help to plug any identified gaps in current provision. In so doing, it is anticipated that all three research questions will be answered.

The narrative: an analytical approach

Systematic and sequential identification of 'big' themes

Based on the view that narrative life review can 'clarify the interdependence of biographical themes [and their impact on] major life transitions' (Dominicé, 2000, p. 6), I determined that the first step in analysing my account was to identify foci that appeared relevant to both my own and common MCT experiences, the latter as identified in Chapter 2. Based on the chronological structuring of my narrative (Squire, 2013), my analysis followed the same sequence by beginning at the start of the account and working through to its end, underpinned by an understanding that such narrative analysis frequently adopts a similar form (Riessman, 2002). This approach, it is contended, affords a systematic means to determine significant themes by virtue of their sequential recurrence (McAdams, 1993; Boenisch-Brednich, 2002). Furthermore, following Phoenix's (2013) suggestion that 'preoccupations' can be signalled by observing narrative occurrences of 'exculpatory' note, I consequently concentrated on identifying 'big' recurring themes and incidences of exculpation in my own story (pp. 72; 75; 77), which are discussed as this chapter progresses, with resulting conclusions presented in Chapter 6 and final reflections offered in Chapter 7. However, it is emphasised that not every 'big' theme I have identified in my narrative is exposed for consideration here (Phoenix, 2013), but just those relevant for the purposes of

charting and exploring the development of a conceptual framework for MCT analysis and planning.

According to Phoenix (2013), the identification of these 'big' issues stands in contrast to a 'fine-grain' analytical approach which considers the 'small' detail pertaining to how the narrative was constructed (p. 72). Thus, while my primary focus was not on the 'small' detail of narrative construction, one structural feature did strike me as significant: the use of the IT metaphor to organise the development of another 'big' theme, namely the evolution and fracture of my sense of self and identity. However, while this systematic process enabled me to identify significant themes, its utility in terms of further analysis, ended there. Accordingly, the second step in conducting this more detailed examination led back to Schlossberg's 4S framework, as outlined in Chapter 2.

Using the 4S analytical framework's assets and liabilities

Initial difficulty

Frustratingly, I encountered similar constraints to those experienced when examining all other frameworks considered in Chapter 2 when attempting to apportion themes identified in my narrative to one of Schlossberg's (2011) four S's: I found it difficult to allocate a theme to just one of the domains these models depicted. By way of example, when considering where to assign the issue of family succour, Schlossberg's (2011) third S, namely 'supports', appeared apposite. However, further reflection suggested that the support my family afforded me was also a facet of my overall MCT situation, as well as a positive buttress to my sense of self. Moreover, I also regarded the act of recognising, eliciting and embracing this support as an assistance strategy, all of which suggested to me that under detailed analysis, aspects of the familial support I benefitted from could cross into all four S's, thus problematising its allocation to a single category or at least its analysis in sole reference to one of those domains.

The same was true when considering the development and fracturing of my sense of self and identity: I assessed that both were nurtured and constructed within the

situation of my life, and both were fractured as a result of the situation of ill-health and job loss; therefore, they could not simply be apportioned to the second S: 'self'. It seemed to me, therefore, that many, if not all themes identified might permeate and influence all four S's, and vice versa.

Rediscovering 4S assets and liabilities

Accordingly, I returned to Schlossberg's (2011) 4S model, stimulated by recalling earlier confidence in its applicability and accompanied by a sense that I must have therefore misread, misinterpreted or forgotten its premise. Upon revisiting Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) presentation (see [Appendix 5](#)), I was reminded of the double-headed arrows linking all four S's, which suggested a mutually influencing co-dependence among them, consequently reassuring me that thematic leakage was both likely and potentially accommodable. Furthermore, and more crucially, I rediscovered the theory that an ability to cope with transition can be contingent on balancing individual 'assets and liabilities', and the 'opposing forces' between them, across all four S's (see an illustrative representation in [Appendix 5](#)) (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 48). This further suggested that if individuals are to effectively navigate their way through a transition, then they need to do so by identifying and harnessing available assets, while recognising and potentially outmanoeuvring any evident liabilities.

Tilting the 4S model towards its assets

Given this refreshed understanding, a process of reconfiguring aspects of the model was undertaken to better represent this interaction between all four S's and the associated implications of an appraisal of transition assets and liabilities, at least for the purposes of my own analytical application. The first step in this modification progression yielded an adjustment to Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) original representation of the 4S framework (see [Appendix 5](#)), as depicted in Figure 1:

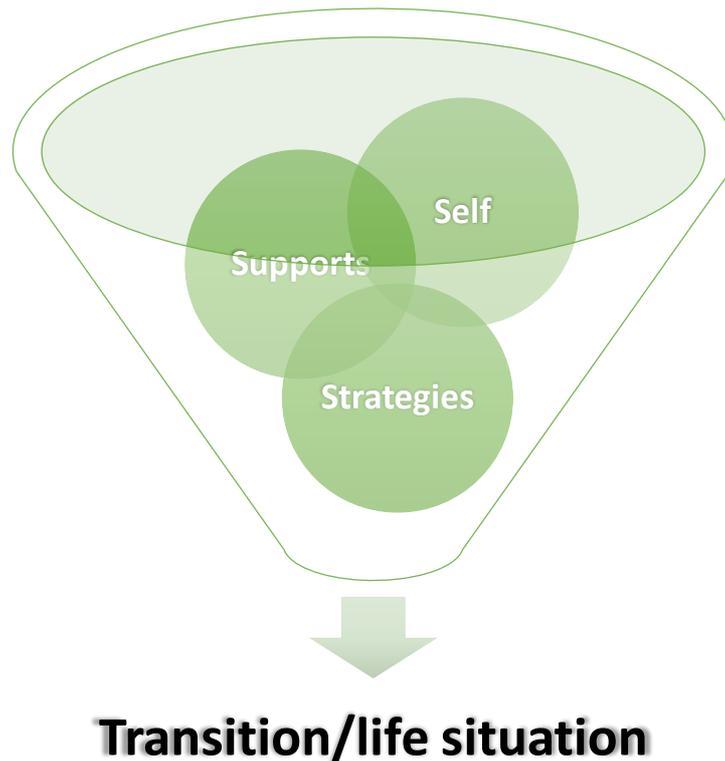


Figure 1: The interrelationship between situation, strategies, supports and self in transition (after Schlossberg, 2011)

In the first instance, this adaptation better conveyed to me an understanding of the mutually influential interrelationship between all four S's, initially represented by linking three of the four spheres together, thereby indicating porous and overlapping boundaries and the ability for transition themes to seep across them. Furthermore, the positioning of these three conjoined spheres is also significant: I regard support as a crucial asset that underpins an ability to refortify a sense of self, while a sense of self can potentially be buttressed by adopting a strategic approach to embracing the support that is available and is a form of support in its own right. By extension, and as depicted above, I view the first S, namely situation, as a pervasive domain that universally underpins the remaining three subdomains, as well as other contextual and emerging situational matters, including all assets and liabilities. Accordingly, the presence of transition assets and liabilities required recognition in the revised modelling: the next modification consequently needed to represent them, which presented another difficulty.

Whereas Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) representation, as reflected in [Appendix 5](#), seems to suggest that assets and liabilities exist equally across all four S's, my interpretation differed. This divergence in understanding rests on a view that the support available during a transition can only be an asset, while strategies, insofar as they are adopted in support of a transition, will similarly be assets. In the event that an individual pursues a strategy or means of support that worsens a transition situation, then this might be regarded as a mistake, consequently requiring review, adaptation or rejection as part of the overall assessment of the transition situation. In any case, if the effectiveness of a strategy or means of support is questioned, then it shifts to being considered a potential situational constraint, rather than, by definition, a supportive offering or strategy. Therefore, the only S spheres within which liabilities might be found are the remaining two domains: 1) 'self' (for example where a lack of self-confidence is seen as a liability) and 2) the keystone domain of 'situation'. Just as the critical review of a potentially failing strategy is considered to be undertaken within the situational domain, issues of self are also part of the overall transition situation. Figure 2 attempts to illustrate this revised understanding by overlaying the 'asset' and 'liability' labels where applicable:

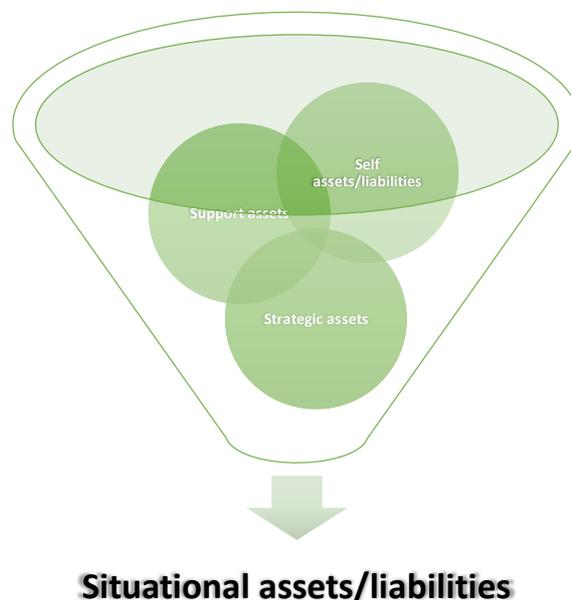


Figure 2: The interrelationship between transition situation, self, support and strategic assets and liabilities (after Schlossberg, 2011)

To contextualise the above characterisation of 4S interrelationships, orders, situational primacy and interlinked assets and liabilities, I draw on thematic examples taken from my narrative. In terms of my overall transition situation around the time I left the Army, many conceivable liabilities were evident. First, my cancer experience was clearly a physical health issue; however, it also caused emotional concerns as I attempted to come to terms with it and continue in my military career. When that attempt to remain in the Army was unsuccessful, more practical and emotional liabilities emerged, such as the lack of a job, reduced income and the emotive impact of these financial liabilities on my self-confidence, provoked by a sense of personal and professional failure. Cancer, therefore, was a situational liability, with implications also in the subdomain of self, thus straddling both S's (Charmaz, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Sparkes, 1996; Frank, 2013).

However, these domains, as well as the remaining two, can also contain assets. In my case, I perceive these to include the following: my family (a situational asset offering support and boosting my sense of self as a valued family member [Brewer and Herron, 2018]); an Army pension (a situation which provided a level of support and a degree of self-assurance); and several degrees in languages and education, along with related personal and professional experience. Just as with all these assets, the latter 'big' themes (Phoenix, 2013) of education and experience were also considered to be situational, support and self-assets (in that order of underpinning importance). Specifically, the situational assets of education and experience conferred an ability to promote myself as an 'internationally experienced defence training consultant specialising in [whatever specialism I was targeting]' (taken from my curriculum vitae), thus allowing me to find work, which in turn provided a supporting income while enabling me to begin re-establishing a sense of post-military self and identity (Brewer and Herron, 2018). In that sense also, I was harnessing the strategic assets of education and experience in order to deliver the above. Once again, therefore, these assets could all be considered to reside in the overall domain of a transition situation, but crossing over into other, if not all remaining subdomains.

Accordingly, the model depicted in Figure 2 could be viewed from the bottom up by reversing the arrow from an assessment of situational assets and liabilities and navigating through a transition by then determining how to strategically manage the situation. This strategic situational asset or liability assessment can include identifying and harnessing support available to help secure that upward transition trajectory, which might then boost a (re)developing sense of self or identity, thereby feeding that positivity back into the overall situation, including its subdomains. Although there is no guarantee that ‘bump[s]’ will not be experienced along that transition path (FiMT, 2013, p. 54), the chances of this positive and mutually reinforcing relationship between identifying and strategically deploying situational and support assets to bolster a sense of self might greatly increase the likelihood of reducing the adverse impact of any emerging bumps.

As a result, the model could thus be modified as depicted in Figure 3:

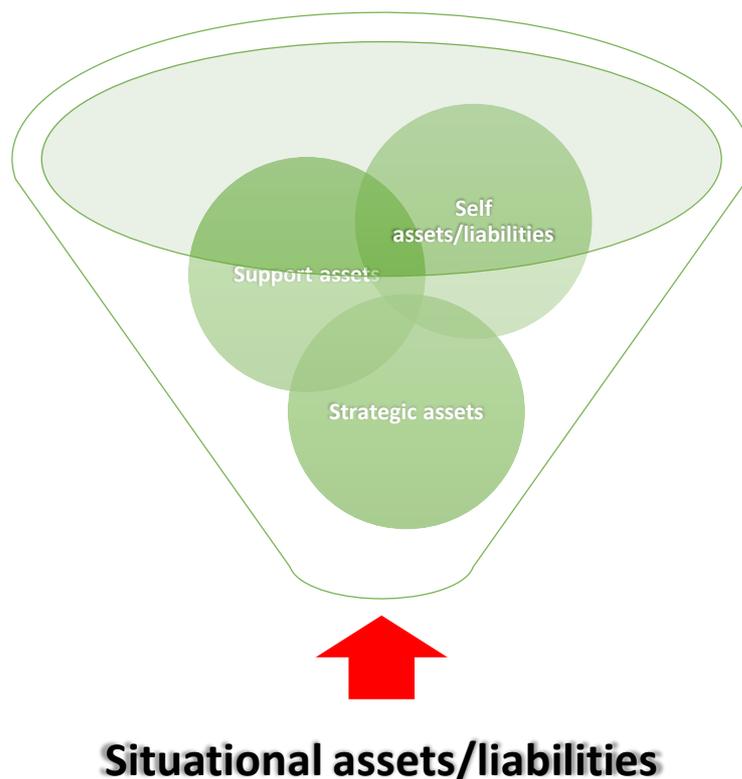


Figure 3: An upward transition trajectory based on underpinning situational circumstances

Therefore, and again based on my experience, the impact of an episode of significant illness might be mitigated by identifying and counterbalancing any attendant liabilities with assets – a situation reflective of Albrecht and Devlieger’s (1999) ‘disability paradox’ in which individuals facing physical and/or psychological adversity can still ‘experience a good or excellent quality of life’, often to the surprise of the ‘able bodied’ (pp. 977; 978). This would appear to support a notion that other WIS MLs and veterans might also be able to conduct similar asset and liability accounting processes with a chance of achieving an asset-focused disability paradox.

A further conclusion emerging at this point is that the identification of assets and liabilities is more important, in terms of buttressing the success of a transition, than deciding which of the four S’s they might belong to. What underpins this potential success also appears to be the development of the means to strategically plan how to limit the effect of liabilities while harnessing assets in a transition situation, which, as has been argued, is inclusive of the other three S’s. These assets can be deployed in an effort to not only mitigate liabilities, but also create positive transition momentum in other respects. As a consequence, and perhaps reflective of my own initial difficulty and subsequent effort to determine the interactive nature of the four S’s in Schlossberg’s (2011) model, I find that a simplified illustration that captures the asset and liability dynamic is much more useful, as depicted in Figure 4:



Figure 4: Balancing transition assets and liabilities (after Schlossberg et al., 1995)

I again use aspects of my narrative to add context to this simplified model, as well as to briefly recap the narrative creation and analysis process undertaken thus far. By creating my life account and conducting a subsequent identification of significant themes, I have begun to analyse whether these themes can be deemed assets or liabilities when undergoing transition. Once assets and liabilities are identified, I can then strategically determine the means by which to mitigate the latter by harnessing pertinent assets while also deploying additionally identified assets as part of my upward and positive transition trajectory, as suggested in Figure 4. In contrast, a downward and negative trajectory might result if my liabilities seemingly outweigh any assets, thus not only anchoring me to loss, but also potentially dragging me further into the abyss of the civil-military gap. While this did not occur in my case, Chapter 2 demonstrates that this dragging effect – already potentially destructive enough – can be accompanied by multiple forms of loss in the context of MCT, which when combined, can intensify a negative transition experience. Moreover, an experience of loss, or multiple losses, can not only further imperil an individual transition, but also trigger wider familial, social and economic problems, with sometimes far-reaching and tragic outcomes.

Again, as indicated in Chapter 2, this makes the case for careful preparation for MCT, which ought to begin well before an ML and their family return to the civilian environment – a point returned to in Chapter 6. For the purposes of ending this section with a comprehensive, yet simple representation of a model to summarise the assessment, planning, deployment and transition process outlined above, Figure 5 is presented:

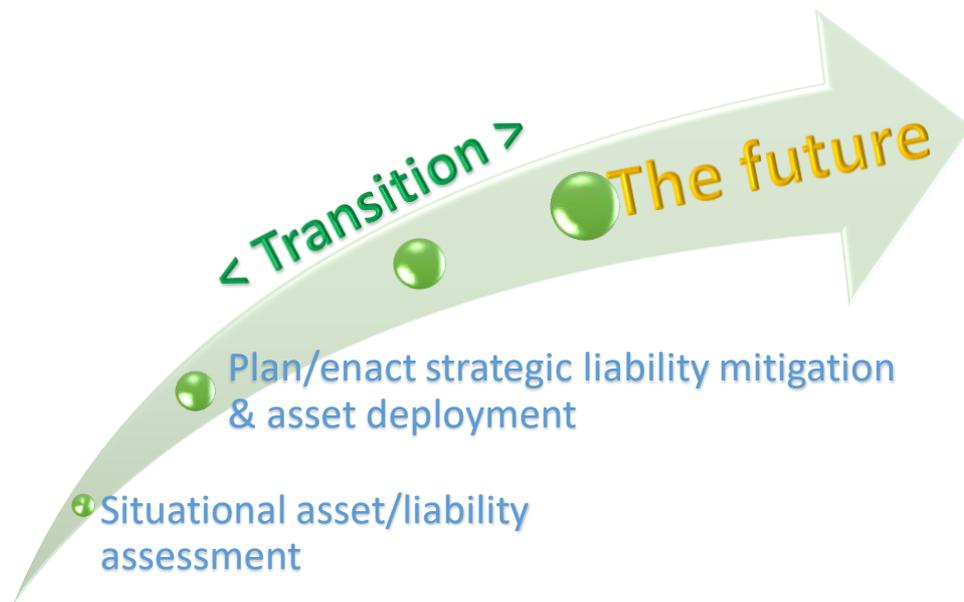


Figure 5: Strategic management of transition assets and liabilities

Introducing the Manoeuvrist Approach to military to civilian transition

Symbolically familiar structure

By revising Schlossberg's (2011) 4S framework, this chapter has so far indicated how 'big' themes (Phoenix, 2013) emerging from a transition narrative can be used to identify and potentially mitigate procedural 'liabilities' by harnessing the 'assets' available across all four S's (Schlossberg et al., 1995). This section seeks to build on the above to demonstrate how the identification of those assets and liabilities can be used to strategically plan this mitigation and to potentially advance an effective transition. With a view to couching this in terms that military personnel might relate to, I borrow from established military doctrine to develop and propose an MCT-focused planning process, which I define as the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT. Having emphasised the centrality of symbolism in the military context in Chapter 2, and exemplified its personal effect on me, along with the use of metaphor, in my own narrative in Chapter 4, the following representational device is based on a planning framework that is likely to be familiar to many currently serving and former members of the UK Armed Forces.

While this is not necessarily an approach that will resolve all MCT issues, nor one that might work for every ML or veteran and in all cases, it has worked for me in my UK MCT experience, and its beneficial effect is evidenced in work in the Canadian and US MCT contexts (as detailed later in this chapter). Accordingly, and despite potential concerns over cultural differences, it might be worthy of consideration for formal deployment in the UK MCT support arena.

Military manoeuvre and transition

Given its origins in the conduct of warfare, the term ‘manoeuvrist’ may not, at first glance, be considered applicable to transition. However, in military terms, the approach seeks ‘to apply strength against vulnerabilities’ when combatting an adversary, which in turn relies on ‘an attitude of mind and understanding’ of those ‘enemy’ vulnerabilities (British Army, no date, p. 5.1). This framework for assessing strengths and vulnerabilities is, in relation to this thesis, equated to Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) assets and liabilities appraisal, which, in turn, prompted consideration of the use of this ‘manoeuvrist’ metaphor to explain and define the recommendations I offer in the following chapter.

In the warfighting context, the ‘Manoeuvrist Approach’ (always presented with initial capital letters in the British Army doctrine to which I refer) advocates ‘seizing and holding the initiative’ with speed and momentum when attempting to outwit an enemy (British Army, no date, p. 5.1). This momentum depends on an agility of thought and action that can destabilise that opponent – which, in terms of applying the military ‘manoeuvre’ metaphor to MCT – might be seen as analogous to determining transition assets and using them to outweigh liabilities. The above-cited military doctrine asserts that the Manoeuvrist Approach is enhanced by the aforementioned ‘attitude of mind’ that seeks ‘original [and] unexpected’ solutions (British Army, no date, p. 5.1), which, when allied to a detailed and holistic understanding across the military equivalent of transition assets and liabilities, can enable one’s own forces to potentially act much more decisively and with greater cognitive and practical effect. When once again correlating this to a form of supported

self-manoevure in an MCT context, a similar potential for greater effect might therefore be predicated on a holistic understanding of available MCT assets and liabilities in order to ensure the former can be used to outmanoeuvre the latter as effectively as possible.

Just as manoeuvre in the military context is conducted as an 'Integrated Action [sic]' using all means at its collective disposal – and empowered by a holistic understanding of assets and liabilities (British Army, no date, p. 5.1) – so too, it would seem, might the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT. Success in martial manoeuvre depends on gathering comprehensive information pertaining to both enemy and friendly forces, as well as analysis, interpretation and communication of that intelligence. In transition terms, this might be considered the construction of an effective intelligence picture based on an assessment of the situation surrounding a transition, along with self-strengths and vulnerabilities and available support, followed by the advantageous strategic deployment of that information. In military operations, that intelligence picture is communicated not only graphically, but also narratively, generated as a result of collective effort. Manoeuvring in transition is consequently a socially-informed and supported yet individually led activity, while the means to plan and implement it are narratively conveyed. Just as that is true in the military 'battle' situation (British Army, no date, p. 5.1), it can also be so in the MCT context, as evidenced in Canada and the US (Westwood et al., 2002; 2010; Haynie and Shepherd, 2011).

Manoeuvrist appeal to the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD)

However, narrative approaches to MCT support do not appear to be widely deployed, if at all, in the UK MCT environment either by the MOD or by associated agencies and the third sector (charity) organisations with which it interacts (Cable, 2018; Eldridge, 2018; Veterans UK, 2018; Waters, 2018). Based on an effective use in my own case, and allied to the above-mentioned evidence drawn from the Canadian and US contexts (as detailed later in this chapter) (Westwood et al., 2002; 2010; Haynie and Shepherd, 2011), such narrative approaches to MCT support might be considered an unexpected

yet familiar-sounding framework for consideration as part of the UK MOD's holistic transition support offering (MOD, 2019a), particularly if presented under the guise of a Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT. Just as when applying the Manoeuvrist Approach to military operations, its conceptual transference to the MCT domain would also be dependent on 'expert' support (McMahon, 2007, p. 276), while being enhanced if delivered in a peer-supported environment. These conclusions are amplified in the next chapter.

Notwithstanding a potential unease over using martial terms and relating them to MCT, yet given their familiarity among the community this thesis seeks to influence, I argue that their use might prove an effective, familiar and germane metaphor in seeking to unlock their significance in the MCT domain. If such a metaphor had been used to explain and educate me in better meeting my own MCT challenges with thoroughness, speed, effectiveness and agility in my own post-military 'battleground', then I sense it would not have taken me until now to make this connection. Having done so, and allied to my conviction that it will similarly resonate with the ML, veteran and support field I seek to influence, I perceive it is an appropriate model upon which to promote the recommendations I make in the next chapter, particularly in light of an evolving UK MOD MCT support provision, as expanded upon in the next section.

Benchmarking and analysing current UK MOD holistic transition support

Chapter 2 referred to the UK MOD's recently launched 'Defence Holistic Transition Policy', aimed at supporting a governmental effort 'to ensure that [the MOD] transitions its personnel and their families properly' (MOD, 2019a, p. ii). According to the policy, MCT assistance will be 'delivered in tandem with a range of partners', thus constituting a 'new delivery capability' under the auspices of the newly formed 'Defence Transition Services' (DTS) (p. 1). A further stated aspiration is to 'prepare the ground' for greater synchronisation with other government departments across the UK, as well as with local authorities and the third sector, in order to provide for a

‘regionally coordinated support provision’ (p. 1). While this indicates an encouraging recognition that the current, relatively uncoordinated and diverse delivery panorama is wanting for greater harmonisation, evidence drawn from my own experience and subsequent research suggests that a great deal of improvement to this multi-agency MCT interface will be needed to ensure that gaps are closed and that veterans are clear about where and how to access support (Ashcroft, 2014; Rafferty et al., 2017; Parliament. House of Commons, 2019). Furthermore, recent news that a leading third sector provider of mental health support to veterans is facing financial difficulty underscores the precarious nature of current reliance on external partners, particularly those funded by charitable donations and those that fall outside MOD-endorsed accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms (Gribble et al., 2014; Ashcroft, 2017a; 2017b; Duel et al., 2019b; Parliament. House of Commons, 2019; BBC, 2020).

Accompanying the above concerns are observations that there is little ‘follow-up’ by the UK MOD once a former member becomes a veteran (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019, no pagination). In response to this criticism, the MOD acknowledged that it is ‘looking at the best way to follow up on support once an individual has left service’, recognising that care ‘can at times be a long and complex [...] which can span months and, in some cases, years’ (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019, no pagination). This analysis has seemingly resulted in a policy commitment to transfer MCT support for veterans with a need for ongoing assistance to the Veterans Welfare Service (VWS) (MOD, 2019a, p. 12), an arm of the MOD specifically providing a ‘professional help and advice service to veterans or anyone supporting a veteran, their families and dependants’ (UK Government, no date, no pagination). However, the DTS will also, according to the policy, continue to exercise a ‘central role once the individual has been discharged’ (MOD, 2019a, p. 18), permitting direct coordination for ‘two years after discharge’ in cases of ‘significant’ need, before ‘seamlessly’ transferring ‘casework into VWS for ongoing support beyond two years after discharge’ (p. 18). Therefore, the decision on whether to exercise direct support until departure from the armed forces or for up to two years after termination of service appears to rest on an assessment of ‘significance’.

Accordingly, and while policy progression is a welcome development, concerns persist. First, the use of 'business partners or organisations' (MOD, 2019a, p. 18), rather than intrinsic expertise (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019), will presumably include those in the third sector, exposed as they are to financial vulnerability and issues of quality as raised above. Such partner organisations will also, where ongoing health conditions require transfer to civilian health management, include the UK's National Health Service (NHS) (MOD, 2019a, p. 17). However, evidence, including from my own experience, suggests that transferring support to third parties is not always regarded as a positive experience by veterans (Ashcroft, 2014; Rafferty et al., 2017; Farrand et al., 2019; Parliament. House of Commons, 2019). As a result, continued reliance on partners to deliver MCT support will potentially perpetuate not only concerns over reliability and quality, but also fears that the continuance of a fragmented approach will still allow veterans to fall between support gaps (Ashcroft, 2014).

Second, while all MLs are eligible for some form of 'resettlement' or 'employment' support (MOD, 2019a, p. i), provided under an MOD/private collaboration known as the Career Transition Partnership (CTP, 2015; Right Management, 2020), the majority of this assistance is elective and thus not universally attended (FiMT, 2017; MOD, 2018c). Furthermore, notwithstanding a recognition that 'successful transition from military to civilian life is far wider than finding employment' (MOD, 2019a, p. i), it is notable that eligibility for supplemental holistic transition assistance, as defined in the recent policy (MOD, 2019a), is predicated on those who 'are identified as facing the most challenges when leaving the Armed Forces' (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019, no pagination). However, recent reports suggest that approximately 30% of MLs (FiMT, 2017) elect not to undertake any MCT support beyond a single 'mandatory resettlement briefing' intended only to provide 'advice and guidance on the resettlement programmes that will best suit the individual' (MOD, 2018c, pp. 6; 24). Thereafter, access to support is dependent on the willingness of the individuals concerned to avail themselves of available assistance, on their own or others' perceptions of their need or on their line managers' willingness to afford them the

time away from other responsibilities (Ashcroft, 2014). There is thus no guarantee that holistic transition support will be better attended.

However, while it is recognised that attempting to impose an obligation on MLs to attend broader MCT support sessions is likely to be counterproductive (FiMT, 2017) – for example where MLs have already organised post-military employment or other activities and judge themselves ready to transition – the UK MOD also acknowledges, as noted in Chapter 1, that ‘anyone’ can face MCT difficulties (2017b, p. 16) and that these can emerge over time (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019). Therefore, by electing not to undertake in-service employment assistance beyond an initial obligatory briefing or not being offered any holistic MCT support, or electing not to attend the latter, an ML might find that as a veteran, they encounter problems and are unfamiliar with how to tackle them. While sources of support do exist for veterans, and attempts have been made to consolidate the many hundreds of organisations offering differing levels and types of support to them (UK Government, 2018; MOD, 2019a), knowing which support to choose and how to contact the respective organisations might potentially still present a barrier to access, possibly exacerbated by a lack of awareness of the need and the discouraging effect of stigma and prior poor experience, as revisited later in this section.

In terms of identifying those who might encounter future challenges, the MOD’s transition policy indicates that this cohort might include those ‘who have served for less than four years’ (MOD, 2019a, p. ii) – otherwise defined as ESLs in Chapter 1 – and those ‘who have severe physical or psychological disablement **or** are considered as having transitional welfare related issues that will endure beyond the end of Service’ (p. 13; original emphasis). Given that, as identified in Chapter 1, ESLs and WIS personnel have been judged to be most at risk of experiencing adverse MCTs (and I note that I am included in the latter group), then inclusion of these cohorts would appear to be both predicated on evidence and welcome. So too, again based on evidence discussed in Chapter 2, is the policy statement that transition support can be extended to the ‘immediate family’ of the serving military member – defined as his or her partner and any children (MOD, 2019a, p. 14). Accordingly, this coverage sounds

'holistically' promising; however, in the case of disablement, a definition of severity, assumed to equate to a judgment of 'significance' as inferred above, seems to be predicated on the existence of 'complex multiple injuries' or injuries relating solely to the head, spine, amputations, sight and hearing, burns, degenerative and terminal illness, as well as mental ill-health (p. 16).

Notwithstanding this ostensive breadth, it is not apparent how 'severity' or 'significance' is defined and therefore judged under this MOD policy (MOD, 2019a). To exemplify the potential for disparity in the appraisal of these terms, the assessment of my post-cancer physical and psychological states and their implications for my medical discharge from the Army are instructive. First, my cancer was caused by a hereditary condition (according to a civilian geneticist) and recorded on my military discharge paperwork as 'other condition'. Given the genetic link, this carcinoma would not appear to qualify as a degenerative form of cancer (Rew, 1998), and it was never described as terminal, either verbally or on any written records presented to me. Therefore, without qualifying as a degenerative or terminal disease, I might not have been referred for holistic transition support under the current policy provisions. Second, my contemporaneously recorded 'principal condition' of 'adjustment disorder with mixed anxiety and depressed mood', which was not considered a 'major' psychiatric condition according to all three MOD medical experts who examined me, might also fall short of a definition of a 'severe' mental health issue, equally disqualifying me from this enhanced transition support.

However, cancer is regarded as sufficiently significant and severe to be classed as a disability under UK law, with no gradation regarding degenerative, terminal or any other attributes (UK Government, 2010a). Considering that these legal definitions were published almost a decade before the current MOD transition policy, the rationale for the latter's comparative divergence with this legislative categorisation is not clear. To indicate the potential and ongoing difference of opinion that this non-conformity and imprecision may precipitate, a review of my original 'non-major' psychiatric diagnosis was conducted by both an MOD-appointed clinician and an independent peer 5 years after my discharge, with the latter concluding it qualified as

a 'major' disorder – a claim rejected by the former, who upheld the original 'non-major' verdict recorded by two MOD clinicians in November 2010. Yet this 'non-major' condition was deemed sufficiently significant by the original two clinicians to warrant termination of my military service in 2011, thereby placing me within the bracket of '3 to 4% of personnel [who] are medically discharged as a result of a mental health problem' in 2010–2011, rather than the 'more than 70% of serving personnel who do present to DCMHs [and] are returned to full fitness and can continue a productive career' (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019, no pagination). Prior to my discharge decision, I attended several appointments at a military Department of Community Mental Health (DCMH), with the consultant psychiatrist whom I saw subsequently endorsing the termination of my career on the basis of a 'non-major' condition.

While I have drawn the above experiential reference from my narrative and regard it as a potential exculpatory theme (perhaps to voice a suspicion that the end of my military career might have been motivated more by prevailing political and administrative factors rather than just ill-health [see, for example, UK Government, 2010b]), a greater concern is the possibility that subjective interpretation of indistinct guidance might inadvertently act as a barrier to access to holistic MCT support, rather than the assumed policy intention of increasing the referral possibilities. If, as has been shown in my case, clinicians can hold divergent interpretations of significance and severity, and if non-major conditions can still be severe enough to warrant discharge despite that, then such divergence might indicate the risk of greater disbaring disparity of opinion in non-clinical settings.

This is an important point because, according to the MOD's policy (MOD, 2019a), referrals for holistic transition support can be made by any 'responsible tri-Service military authority', 'MOD Contractors/Partners involved in [the] discharge process', and an ML or their immediate family under a 'self-referral facility' (MOD, 2019a, pp. 13; 14). A referral for such transition support can consequently be made by a wide variety of individuals, including the ML and his or her family members, but an assessment of need is based on an imprecisely defined order of significance and severity. This imprecision would thus appear to add issues of ill-defined and therefore

subjective judgement to the list of risk factors that might lead to individuals failing to receive potentially much-needed MCT provision, either prior to career end or while a veteran. Hence, while I understand the policy to be well-intended (and I declare an additional exculpatory interest here: its primary author is known to me and is, as was I, an Army Educational and Training Services Branch Officer whom I judge to have laudable MCT aims), the breadth of referral possibilities might at once seem to cover all possibilities, yet potentially exclude many by dint of subjective judgement of significance, severity and/or other qualification.

By definition, MCT support coverage also depends not only on its intended recipients and referring parties knowing of its provisions, but also on their ability to comprehend and access them, along with a willingness to do so. While the policy document defines responsibility and communications protocols (MOD, 2019a), previous evidence, including my own experience, indicates that coverage, dissemination plans, directives and allocation of responsibilities do not alone guarantee effective application and comprehension of provision and procedure (FiMT, 2013; Ashcroft, 2014; Rafferty et al., 2017; Farrand et al., 2019). Moreover, in the case of self-referral, individuals must recognise that their situation warrants a self-referral, which again relies on them or their family members subjectively assessing or apprehending that to be the case (Sharp et al., 2015; Rafferty et al., 2017). As previously highlighted, even if an individual is referred by others and/or offered support, that individual is not compelled to accept it (MOD, 2019a), with refusals, along with a disinclination to self-refer, often motivated by fear of negative career repercussions and lack of privacy (as highlighted in Chapter 2) or prior poor experiences of similar interventions, frequently accompanied by a belief that individuals can help themselves (Iversen et al., 2011; Strom et al., 2012; FiMT, 2013; Sharp et al., 2015; Rafferty et al., 2017; Cox et al., 2018; Farrand et al., 2019).

To illustrate such barriers, I again return to my experience as exemplified in my narrative. When first diagnosed and treated for cancer, I underestimated its physical and psychological impact and did not seek early help in either respect, when doing so might have forestalled later career-ending complications (according to my medical

records). Then, when I began to suspect my health was deteriorating (or certainly not improving after surgery), fear of stigma and adverse career impact again discouraged me from accessing support until I felt I was nearing almost total physical and psychological collapse, similar to trends identified by Sharp et al. (2015) and Rafferty et al. (2017). Later, as a civilian, the poor impression of the support offered at my local military DCMH led me to delay seeking further psychological assistance, thus prompting me to attempt to self-help. Personal experiences of these help-seeking barriers suggest to me that I would not have consequently self-referred for enhanced transition support had this facility existed in 2010–2011.

However, while there was no self-referral policy at the time of my discharge (at least as far as I am aware), I do not deny that its implementation in the form of the current MOD policy (MOD, 2019a) appears a positive recognition of the need for MCT assistance beyond ‘employment support’ (p. i), if not yet infallible in terms of definition. I also concede that additional protocols, procedures and practical measures have been instigated by the MOD since my discharge, with the aim of reducing the impact of stigma and raising awareness of the importance of seeking mental health support if issues are perceived (MOD, 2017b; UK Government 2018; MOD, 2019a). Nevertheless, while these packages may have diminished the chances of my experience being repeated, they once again appear prone to vulnerability based on my own unawareness of the trauma risk management (TRiM) programme while in service. Despite its introduction into ‘many units’ before I left the Army (Greenberg et al., 2011, p. 184), I had not heard of this ‘peer to peer support initiative’ (MOD, 2017b, p. 30) until conducting this research. Equally, despite its aim being to ensure that personnel remain ‘functioning after traumatic events’ (p. 184) experienced during military operations or ‘other circumstances’ (MOD, 2017b, p. 30), and notwithstanding cancer qualifying as an emotionally as well as physically traumatic experience (Carlson et al., 2004; Strong et al., 2007; see additionally McDaniel et al., 2019), neither medical personnel nor my line managers or peers seemed to identify me as someone ‘who might need extra support’ in the face of the trauma (Greenberg et al., 2011, p. 185)

until I self-referred for medical assessment. This was too late to save my career, however.

In lieu of the above referral means for holistic MCT support, there would have remained three other potential triggers under the current policy (MOD, 2019a): being adjudged to lack the ability to manage healthcare, housing, financial and educational needs in the civilian context; being 'Non-UK Personnel [sic]'; or being discharged 'under very short notice' (defined as less than two months' warning) (p. 15). In my case, I suspect I would not have qualified under these criteria either: I had experience of civilian healthcare; I had a private house; I managed professional and personal budgets; and I held postgraduate qualifications. In addition, I am not a non-UK national, and my discharge process took effect over 9 months. Yet, despite appearing to lack qualification for holistic transition support under all measures as stipulated in the policy (MOD, 2019a), I struggled as a veteran. Just as in service, stigma, previous poor experiences of support and lack of awareness continued to act as brakes on help-seeking during my initial return to civilian life, and I am not alone in this respect (Rafferty et al., 2017).

Fear of stigmatised responses to the emergence of health concerns is prevalent in both serving and veteran communities, as help-seeking, particularly as regards mental health, appears to be an anathema to many military personnel or veterans based on a culture and expectation of mental and physical stoicism and resilience (Lawler, 2008; Walker, 2010; Iversen et al., 2011; Strom et al., 2012; FiMT, 2013; McGarry et al., 2015; Lovatt, 2017). Just as my own stigmatised fears were realised in my discharge, this justified to me my initial masking and/or denial of symptoms until I perceived imminent crisis (Sharp et al., 2015; Rafferty et al., 2017). According to medical notes made during my post-discharge assessments, that stigmatised suppression is likely to have weakened my mental health during the period I resisted seeking assistance (and it was further delayed by my search for my misplaced medical records), while earlier treatment might have arrested worsening symptoms, hence salvaging my career. The latent effect of this fear of stigma, allied to an impression that my DCMH experience yielded no positive effect on my mental health (or at worst was designed to facilitate

my discharge), discouraged me from seeking help once in 'Civvy Street', which may have also prolonged my recuperation as a civilian.

My poor impression of DCMH provision is not unique: Rafferty et al. (2017) also report a 'number' of veterans complaining of seemingly 'scripted' interactions with clinical staff, and 'therapists simply trying to place veterans in a box rather than actually listen to what was wrong' (p. 23). Therefore, evidence presented in the literature, as supported by my own experience despite the passing of a decade, suggests this reluctance to access support due to issues of stigma and poor previous experience still requires significant attention, notwithstanding the launch of the MOD's Mental Health and Well Being Policy (MOD, 2017b) and initiatives such as TRiM. As the MOD acknowledges, 'there is still some way to go' in this respect (MOD, 2017b, p. 5) – a position compounded by studies published last year that estimate 82% of UK 'veterans with mental health problems still receive no treatment', as compared to 63% of the general adult population (Farrand et al., 2019, p. 2).

Furthermore, similar evidence also indicates that veterans can find determining whom to contact and how to contact them a complex process when attempting to seek MCT support as civilians, despite briefings, support guides and initiatives designed to signpost such support (FiMT, 2013; Ashcroft, 2014; Parliament. House of Commons, 2019). In my own case, when I had ascertained whom I should contact and having spoken to them, I felt fatigued by having to describe the nuances of military work and life to non-military-experienced practitioners – a barrier and concern adjudged another significant demotivator in terms of veterans accessing MCT and mental health support (Petrovich, 2012; Strom et al., 2012; Finnegan et al., 2014; Rafferty et al., 2017; Brewer and Herron, 2018; Farrand et al., 2019). If, as discussed in Chapter 2, veterans are discouraged, disbarred or overly taxed when attempting to access required assistance – or simply unaware that they might benefit from it – then just as reported almost a quarter of a century ago (Jolly, 1996), this can sap energy that could otherwise be invested in bringing their skills and experience to bear in the civilian environment, including in the professional sphere (Deloitte, 2016; UK Government, 2020). Again, as reported in Chapter 2, this can have a detrimentally significant and

sometimes tragic effect not only on the individual concerned, but also on their wider family and societal constitution and finances.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, UK MOD 'employment support' (MOD, 2019a, p. i) is currently delivered by the CTP (CTP, 2015; Right Management, 2020). Just as in my experience, its focus appears to remain on the practical implications of career transitions (as the partnership's name would suggest), with success – and presumably the private partner's contract fulfilment – judged by whether a veteran acquires a post-military job and how quickly that is achieved (Ashcroft, 2014; FiMT, 2017; MOD, 2019a; 2019d). While I acknowledge and accept that the acquisition of post-military employment is 'an important building block' for most MLs (FiMT, 2017, p. 58), particularly as the average length of service is nine years (hence most will consider and need to continue working) (Ashcroft, 2014), the application of the above success criteria does not appear to include a measurement of the degree to which that job meets the broader emotional as well as financial needs of the individual concerned, except in the case of WIS personnel who are offered tailored employment support (Ashcroft, 2014).

Even with enhanced WIS support, and while employment assistance for all is laudable in its own right, this CTP provision does not appear to be aimed at aligning an individual to a specific job opportunity; instead, it focuses on offering advice 'on the type of work which may be suitable' for an individual or particular trade or experience-related grouping, along with providing guidance and training on how to target these jobs (Ashcroft, 2014, p. 53). This might therefore suggest a 'logical-positivist' (McMahon, 2007, p. 275) approach to prioritising an individual ML or a group of MLs' experiential traits and qualifications, and then using those to indicate career options that match those traits (Savickas, 2011). This, as Jolly (1996) infers, might then risk individual existential angst due to acquisition of a job that is not emotionally fulfilling, albeit apparently suitable based on logical-positivist inspired 'test-and-tell' techniques (McMahon, 2007, p. 275). However, existential fulfilment, as well as financial necessity, is deemed a crucial MCT 'success' factor (Cooper et al., 2017, p. 55), while emotional dissatisfaction can be particularly acute if an individual negatively contrasts

civilian circumstances with peak experiences enjoyed while serving in the military – the latter potentially derived more from emotional rather than purely functional factors (Cooper et al., 2017; Wessely, 2019).

A focus on the ‘functional and rational’ while ‘grossly under-estimating the importance’ of emotional aspects of transition (Albrecht and Devlieger, 1999, p. 987) is consequently argued to be one of the causes of ‘poor adjustment to civilian life in the medium to long term’ (FiMT, 2013, p. 16). Accordingly, if UK MOD MCT employment support could be expanded to ensure, as far as is possible, the acquisition of both meaningful and practical careers for all, then an enhanced and hybrid emotions-focused and functionally oriented employment support programme might better contribute to a more holistic adjustment to civilian life, just as the recently launched MOD policy aspires to deliver (MOD, 2019a). Better still might be to broaden that emotions-oriented endeavour beyond the sphere of employment, as the latter is recognised to be just one aspect, albeit a vital one, of the wider transition effort (MOD, 2019a).

It is reassuring then that the MOD recognises the ongoing need to develop and refine policy and practice ‘based on lessons learned’, with a view to including the insights revealed ‘within future iterations of policy’ (MOD, 2019a, p. 12). As previously emphasised, it is my aspiration that the MOD might take note of the educative output as articulated in this thesis and consider implementing the resulting recommendations as a consequence. These are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Chapter introduction

The previous chapter commenced by reiterating this thesis' three guiding research questions and indicating that the first of these had been answered in the course of Chapter 2. The second question was covered in Chapter 5, by the development of the 'Manoeuvrist Approach' to assessing MCT assets and mitigating liabilities. Responding to the final question is therefore the objective of this penultimate chapter. All three questions, to reiterate, are as follows:

- Why might MCT be a challenge, and why consider this?
- Is there a model of transition that might help recognise and mitigate MCT challenges?
- What part might narrative review play in this recognition and mitigation, and how can this be conducted?

In developing this response, the current chapter begins by proposing a form of rapid response to the assessed gaps and vulnerabilities in the current UK MOD's 'Defence Holistic Transition Policy' (MOD, 2019a). It then offers broader recommendations, based on a more detailed narrative analysis and mitigation exercise as defined under the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT concept, along with a suggested structure for doing so.

Rapid response to current UK military to civilian policy gaps and vulnerabilities

Extending 'HARDFACTS' to include self-appraisal of transition assets and liabilities

The last section of the previous chapter identified a number of potential points of failure in the current UK MOD MCT support policy (MOD, 2019a), including that the only mandatory 'resettlement' activity is a 'briefing' designed to indicate support available (MOD, 2018c, p. 6). While Chapter 2 acknowledged that not every transitioning ML and veteran will require detailed support during MCT, it is also evident that challenges can arise for anyone over time, irrespective of background. Therefore, it seems that a single 'mandatory resettlement briefing' (MOD, 2018c, p. 6) is unlikely to be sufficient to raise universal awareness of potential MCT problems, much less offer the support available to resolve them.

One way to alleviate this issue might be to use the existing 'HARDFACTS' checklist provided and detailed in the UK MOD's current transition support policy and used by third parties identified in the extant MOD transition policy to assess whether an ML might require MCT support beyond routine employment assistance (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51). This checklist is based on the eponymous mnemonic, as follows:

- H** Health
- A** Accommodation
- R** Relocation
- D** Drugs & Alcohol
- F** Finance & Benefits
- A** Attitude, Thinking & Behaviour
- C** Children & Family
- T** Training, Education, Employment
- S** Support Agencies

(MOD, 2019a, pp. 16-17; original emphasis)

As can be seen from the template provided in the MOD policy (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51) (see Figure 6), the focus is on assessing apparent MCT liabilities under the HARDFACTS headings:

OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE - PERSONAL (WHEN COMPLETED)

Part 3: Mandatory for all cases

Brief details of HARDFACTS assessment relevant to the referral

<p>Health</p> <p>(Any Health issues inc. specific injuries sustained in service)</p> <p>IMPORTANT: Only list injuries not causes</p>	
<p>Accommodation & Relocation</p> <p>(Crisis Accommodation, attempting to relocate to unfamiliar area of UK)</p>	
<p>Drugs, Alcohol & Stress</p> <p>Drug use including pain / prescribed medication, alcohol abuse and severe stress)</p>	
<p>Finance & Benefits</p> <p>(Armed Forces Compensation Scheme & War Pension Scheme, DWP benefit & Debt Advice)</p>	
<p>Attitude, Thinking & Behaviour</p> <p>(Mood negative towards discharge, attitude towards assistance, any negative behaviour or attitude)</p>	
<p>Children & Family</p> <p>(Children and Family situation that may require support. Family disability or separation)</p>	

<p>Training, Education and Employment</p> <p>(Will require assistance and support in order to gain employment. Lack of educational qualifications)</p>	<p>OFFICIAL - SENSITIVE - PERSONAL (WHEN COMPLETED)</p>
<p>Supporting Agencies</p> <p>(Crisis case - Immediate engagement with Local Councils, 3rd Sector Support or other Agencies)</p>	

Part 4: Enduring Welfare Need and Seriously Injured Leaver Cases

(Please refer to DTRP referral protocol guidance)

Discharge Details

Please supply any relevant information - **Do not include specific military details**

Figure 6: HARDFACTS assessment checklist (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51)

Additionally, the policy is unclear on the extent to which the subject ML is involved in the completion of the checklist. However, given its existence and apparent fundamental role in determining who might qualify for holistic MCT support (MOD, 2019a), it could presumably be expanded and repurposed to construct a more holistic appraisal of the individual's transition circumstances by inviting them to self-analyse (or co-analyse with a third party) not only personal and situational liabilities, but also assets, and covering both emotional and practical assets and liabilities under the HARDFACTS sections. This self-/co-assessment could be introduced as part of the mandatory resettlement briefing (MOD, 2018c), thus at least introducing an ML to an 'asset' and 'liability' audit process. Even if not deemed useful by the transitioning individual at the point of introduction, then early exposure to the technique might enable that future veteran to recall its use and potential value if encountering challenges in the future.

In terms of expanding and repurposing the form for use in this respect, the following might be considered:

- Under 'Accommodation & Relocation', rather than base it, as currently appears to be the case, on an external assessment of potential poor accommodation possibilities (a liability), an individual could be asked to self-assess their desired accommodation outcome (within the bounds of likely achievability, as indicated in Chapter 3). This then might provide them with an 'asset' goal on which they can base a plan and potentially motivate and incentivise its realisation.
- Having identified desired pecuniary goals under the 'Finance' section, those objectives could be linked to determining required 'Training, Education and Employment' means to achieve those financial assets.
- Under the 'Attitude, Thinking & Behaviour' section, rather than just focusing on the 'negative' liabilities as indicated on the extant checklist (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51), emphasis could also be placed on identifying positive and productive attitude, thinking and behaviour traits; which might then be considered 'assets'

to be harnessed in the achievement of desired employment and/or financial goals.

- Furthermore, the above process could be reversed by beginning with a focus on desired training, education and employment objectives, as opposed to determining career options first. This might consequently produce an emotions-focused version of a career, training and education plan that could be compared to the functionally oriented edition produced as above, thus yielding two for comparison. It might also result in a preference for an emotions-based version, or vice versa, or alternatively the production of a hybrid version of the two by using a mixed methods approach (McMahon, 2007). In so doing, this could generate a practically realistic, yet emotionally satisfying plan, which – as argued in Chapter 5 – might offer a more stable emotional and practical foundation for entry and progression in the civilian context by more strategically involving the ML in the MCT assessment process. Accordingly, the locus of control shifts to the ML (Schlossberg et al., 1995) as the expert in their own life, as opposed to residing uniquely with the third party ‘expert’ based on a ‘test-and-tell’ guidance approach (McMahon, 2007, pp. 275; 276).

This is a combined methodology that is likely to lead to both a broader career and a life ‘vision’ – one that might better engender the prospect of post-military purpose recognised as vital to ‘smoother, clearer and better-directed’ MCTs (FiMT, 2017, p. 73; see additionally Pedlar et al., 2019). This hybrid approach would also seem to focus not only on ‘employability’, but also on future ‘adaptability, emotional intelligence and lifelong learning’, which might make for more effective transition manoeuvrability and enduring resilience when future challenges arise (Savickas, 2011, p. 12). Crucially, it is this lack of current attendance to both ‘psychological and practical aspects of transition’ (FiMT, 2017, p. 58) that appears to be missing from current provision (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019). Accordingly, a UK MOD attempt to holistically counter these criticisms might benefit from a support process that not only indicates an array of traits-based jobs to which an individual might be suited, but also educates them about both their practical suitability and emotional preferences, as well as the

'assets' to be harnessed and the 'liabilities' to be mitigated, as considered extensively in Chapter 5 with reference to Schlossberg et al. (1995). This might lead MLs and veterans to both greater professional and personal fulfilment and hence a holistically focused transition and subsequently more settled future via a means that can be applied commonly across MCT support programmes yet is adaptive to an individual's particular MCT circumstances and aspirations.

As is developed in the next section, supporting an ML or veteran in this process is fundamental. Therefore, in the 'Supporting Agencies' section of the HARDFACTS checklist (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51), aside from identifying agencies that might help in a crisis, those that might also be harnessed as assets in achieving objectives recorded in other sections could be noted. Not only might this raise awareness of support means available, but the assistance on offer could also be factored into the above planning, thereby potentially enhancing the means to goal achievement.

Furthermore, the current HARDFACTS checklist (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51) focus on MCT liabilities may inadvertently compound a sense of stigmatisation among those it appears designed to help: a concern the UK MOD is keen to assuage as previously discussed. Given use of the form is in the public domain by way of its publication on the open Internet (MOD, 2019a), then MLs and their families who might consider using it might additionally be aware of its liability-laden emphasis and thus might associate stigmatisation with it. This could therefore strengthen an argument that the checklist ought to be repurposed and reconfigured to include an assessment of MCT assets as well as liabilities, which might afford it a more encouraging air and deliver greater practical benefit. In terms of applying a means to assess MCT assets as well as liabilities across the HARDFACTS areas of concern, a form of 'SWOT' analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) might be built into the checklist, as exemplified in Figure 7:

HARDFACTS	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Health				
Accommodation				

Figure 7: HARDFACTS SWOT analysis format example (after MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51)

While this approach will require development and testing (see later section on limitations and indications for future research), there are other conceivable avenues for augmentation, as the next subsection details.

Involving immediate family members

The ‘Children and Family’ section of the HARDFACTS checklist (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51) currently appears to be designed to focus third-party assessment on the support that an ML’s immediate family might need. By extending the above ML self-assessment concept to include immediate family members, or at least partners, both the ML and those family members could help to inform the needs analysis process. They might not only assist in identifying family-related MCT liabilities, but also indicate assets that the family might collectively offer. This extension, where applicable, might be considered crucial, as literature emphasises that MCT can detrimentally affect intrafamily relationships, while wider family members might be commensurately grappling with their own transitions from the military environment (Jolly, 1996; Ashcroft, 2014; Fossey et al., 2019). Furthermore, MCT can also imply an additional burden for family members who might find themselves intimately supporting an ML or veteran who is experiencing some form of transition or health difficulty (FiMT, 2013; 2017; Heaver et al., 2018; Castro et al., 2019). In response, direct immediate family member, or at least partner, involvement in MCT support programmes might help not only an ML in their own transition, but also their immediate family members, by affording all concerned a greater understanding of the potential transition challenges. In turn, this might

constitute a mutually reinforcing support asset to counterbalance a range of possible liabilities.

Peer support for military leavers and immediate family

In addition, this asset and liability self-assessment process, based on the HARDFACTS checklist (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51), might be facilitated or assisted by peers who have faced MCT challenges and successfully used a similar process of analysis and planning: a support offering akin to current mentoring programmes but on a shorter-term basis (see SSAFA, 2020a; 2020b). Not only might peers provide positive role models, but the literature also indicates that co-work among MLs, veterans, immediate family members and peers drawn from the same communities can reduce stigmatised barriers to self-disclosure among those attending peer-supported programmes (Westwood et al., 2002; 2010; Sharp et al., 2015; Finnegan, 2016). Furthermore, programmes dedicated to assisting transitioning family members to cope with their own and the related ML or veteran's challenges can benefit from peer work among military family peers who are further forward in their transitions (Turgoose and Murphy, 2019).

Section summary

While the aim of this introductory section was to indicate relatively straightforward rapid responses that the UK MOD might consider for rapid implementation and augmentation of current MCT support provision, the above-mentioned modifications could be extended towards a more comprehensive Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT, as the next two sections recommend.

Broadening the self-educative supported narrative

The essence of the Manoeuvrist Approach to military to civilian transition

The current HARDFACTS checklist includes a section on 'attitude', which indicates to those completing the form that they should consider an ML's 'negative' mood,

behaviour or attitude insofar as it might act as an MCT liability (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51). However, by also considering positive personal behavioural, attitudinal and mood attributes – and training, education and other support that might help develop these assets (as outlined in the previous section) – this shift in emphasis might render the process more akin to the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT introduced in Chapter 5. As detailed in that chapter, the ‘Manoeuvrist Approach’ in military terms is enhanced by an ‘attitude of mind’ that uses information and initiative to seek ‘original [and] unexpected’ solutions by exploiting success as well as understanding vulnerabilities (British Army, no date, p. 5.1). Therefore, to exploit success, positive attitudinal assets can be combined with other ascertained personal, situational and support assets, and then strategically deployed to counteract vulnerabilities in order to guide a successful MCT campaign. However, to do so, these assets and the liabilities that they seek to outweigh need to be identified and corralled into a coherent plan, which in turn will be based on a narrative review, while being articulated in written, spoken or schematic narrative form. This narrative asset and liability balancing, mitigation and exploitation operation is fundamentally a strategic method founded on supported self-education, in turn yielding a co-constructed plan of action.

Educere

One of the Latin roots of our English word ‘education’ – ‘educere’ – means to ‘draw out’ (Fraser, 2013). Accordingly, a co-constructed narrative approach to a career or life transition is a process of supporting and educating an individual to self-educate by drawing out meaning from their life experience, while recognising that life is socially lived. Therefore, while life experience and the learning derived from that is individually interpreted, it is also socially influenced and consequently always a co-constructed panorama. Given also that military life and work is a highly socialised environment, as discussed in detail in Chapter 2, working in communion with other peers and experts (McMahon, 2007) in developing a personalised understanding of individual wants and needs – based on an appraisal of both personal and practical attributes and experience – might unlock a greater and more holistic understanding of possibility and potential for that individual once permanently returned to civilian life. This can be emboldened

in an environment of trust and safety, as has been demonstrated in third sector-provided Canadian and UK MCT support contexts respectively (Westwood et al., 2002; 2010; Finnegan, 2016). In addition, where applicable, this could also beneficially include immediate family members, as highlighted in the previous section and again, as demonstrated in the Canadian context (Westwood et al., 2010).

However, creating an aura of trust and safety does not guarantee that MLs and veterans will find it easy to narratively and reflexively voice their experiences and concerns (Smith and True, 2014), nor is it necessarily the case that North American approaches to the deployment of narrative exercises in the UK MCT support environment will be directly culturally transferable, despite a vast body of self-penned stories of UK military experience in books, verse and film suggesting that it will not be an entirely alien concept (see, for example, Gareth's Invictus Choir, 2016; Fox, 2018; Jones, 2019; Lock, 2019; Wood, 2019). Accordingly, offering MLs and veterans support in this self-educative process will be crucial.

Narrative support

For narrative career counselling to be effective, Savickas (2011) emphasises that significant individual support is likely to be fundamental, as it is not guaranteed that those supported 'can think' on their own (Reid, 2016, p. 67). Even with assistance, initial attempts at narratively reviewing a life can appear 'jumbled' (Savickas, 2011, p. 40); individuals consequently need support 'to enlarge their vocabulary of self [which] increases their ability to story their own experiences, understand who they are, and communicate what they see' (Savickas, 2011, p. 38). Just as this is the case in this broad context of narrative life review work, so too is it true in a military context where reflexive inexperience can impede successful MCT (Brewer and Herron, 2018). Accordingly, and based on evidence offered by the literature, as well as a sense that my narrative might have been expedited with targeted support, the contention is that it is unreasonable to leave those experiencing transition to cope with it alone (Brewer and Herron, 2018). Holistic support to those approaching and undergoing MCT can therefore be decisive.

The Manoeuvrist Approach to military to civilian transition: professional, personal and posttraumatic growth

In the UK context, consideration of narrative counselling might be encouraged by an awareness of the potential for this type of counselling to contribute to both professional and posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Neimeyer, 2004; 2006; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010; Savickas, 2011; Reid, 2016). Notwithstanding cultural differences, work and research conducted among Canadian and US veterans might prove instructive in this respect. In the US, Haynie and Shepherd (2011) reviewed a veterans' transition programme which included narrative approaches to posttraumatic growth, as well as careers transition; the authors concluded that not only did these approaches enable physically and psychologically injured participants to develop 'future-orientated career strategies [...] positioned to confer meaning and purpose through work' (p. 501), but that success was also predicated on a narrative review and repair process first guiding those participants in reconciling their loss of military career and managing a degree of physical incapacity.

The basis of the programme involved participants leading their narrative reconciliation of situational and self-related assets and liabilities, but within the framework of a 14-month long 'online and resident training' programme (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011, p. 503). This was consequently a narrative repair process that was driven by the subject individual, but generated within a co-constructed and supported structure designed to enable individuals to recover sufficient emotional equilibrium prior to considering post-military careers – just as Jolly (1996), Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014) and Kukla et al. (2015) deem is necessary. Once a sufficiently robust platform of emotional equilibrium and understanding had been achieved, Haynie and Shepherd's (2011) subjects demonstrated that they were then able to build a plan for a realistic, actionable and motivating future personal and career trajectory.

However, despite 'medical evaluation' prior to course commencement – but given the traumatic experiences and injuries that participants were managing – the lack of any indication of in-programme clinical support is of concern (Haynie and Shepherd, 2011,

p. 503). This contrasts with similar courses delivered in Canada, where clinicians formed part of the course-support cadre (Westwood et al., 2002; 2010; Veterans Transition Network, 2018). This would appear appropriate given the potential for retraumatising the traumatised (Squire et al., 2014) and that narrative review and repair work should not 'be viewed as a therapeutic endeavour unless undertaken by suitably prepared practitioners for that purpose' (Howatson-Jones and Thurgate, 2014, p. 267). Accordingly, availability of clinical support provision where issues of physical and psychological trauma are indicated is regarded as crucial when facilitating the narrative review and repair work advanced in this thesis.

Military awareness and rapport

Research also suggests that serving and former military personnel favour MCT support delivered by practitioners, be they clinically trained or otherwise, who have at least some insight into the military experiences of those they are assisting. This is a factor that is additionally demonstrated to stimulate greater attendance rates on MCT and social support and health programmes for serving personnel and veterans, due to the sense of rapport, safety and security this can engender (Petrovich, 2012; Strom et al., 2012; Finnegan et al., 2014; Rafferty et al., 2017; Brewer and Herron, 2018; Farrand et al., 2019; Parliament. House of Commons, 2019). While, as indicated in Chapter 5, barriers to provision of support to serving personnel and veterans might be reduced by ensuring practitioners are cognisant of the military context, the employment of militarily aware staff echoes a broader cultural consideration indicating that staff with limited insight into the social context in which they seek to offer support can impede client self-disclosure – an issue particularly acute in professional contexts, such as the military, that share their 'own language' and tend to view the world 'through the lens' of their vocational culture (Dominicé, 2000, p. 131). Therefore, notwithstanding the ubiquity and cross-cultural characteristics of story (and any use of metaphor within that), the deployment of narrative counselling approaches ought to be adapted to suit the cultural needs of the social or professional group undertaking it (Dominicé, 2000), including consideration of national and professional culture.

Given this, it is reassuring that since 2015 (and according to the UK's NHS constitution), UK military personnel should be afforded access to 'health professionals who understand Armed Forces culture' (Moorhead, 2019, p. 88), thus indicating that the benefits of cultural specificity and adaptation are recognised in the UK MCT support arena. By extension, this might suggest that recruiting practitioners with at least some insight into the military background of MLs, veterans and related family members with whom they might co-construct narrative work might appear both appropriate and important. However, it is recommended that a preference for military-aware practitioners in any military or veteran support context should not exclude the employment of less-aware staff who might, however, bring vital expertise, albeit without deep insight into the military background of those they aim to assist. Rather, the objective should be to strike a balance, but always to ensure that a proportion of the staff are appropriately militarily aware. In this way, the sense of safety and security that MLs and veterans evidently relish and derive benefit from can be afforded to them, while those in supportive roles who do not have military experience can be mentored by those who do.

Summary thus far

The first half of this chapter sought to indicate how the UK MOD might consider rapidly augmenting current MCT support provision by involving an ML or veteran and their immediate family members in a peer-supported MCT asset and liability appraisal and planning process, based on expanding the existing HARDFACTS checklist (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51). Thereafter it indicated that appropriately experienced practitioner assistance ought to be considered in any intervention aimed at the military context, particularly where physical and emotional vulnerability is implicated. While this support should therefore be adapted to the specific cultural needs of the military community to which it relates, not all staff involved necessarily need in-depth military awareness, as long as a proportion do possess this familiarity. Benefits of this culturally adapted approach include affording a sense of security, safety and rapport to those being supported, which encourages attendance on assistance programmes and interventions, and self-disclosure while involved.

The next section considers peer-support benefits in greater detail after indicating how an MCT asset and liability narrative review process might be structured.

Co-constructing the narrative

The Canadian model

Rationale

While it is recognised that narratives can be generated and communicated using a variety of media (as indicated in Chapter 3), this section focuses on written and oral approaches as exemplified in the Canadian MCT support context cited above (Westwood et al., 2002; 2010). These courses have been selected as models because they amalgamate written and oral narrative work with appropriate peer, family and clinical involvement, which, as highlighted in this chapter thus far, might be crucial if considered for inclusion in the UK MCT support environment. To date, no similar programmes appear to have been delivered in the UK (Cable, 2018; Eldridge, 2018; Veterans UK, 2018; Waters, 2018).

Stimulating and structuring self-paced and controlled narrative disclosure

According to Westwood et al. (2002), the exemplar Canadian 'career transition' courses began with participants developing written accounts of aspects of their 'life story' (p. 225). If a similar approach were to be adopted in the event that equivalent courses were trialled in the UK, then offering a correspondingly structured means for the production of 'short autobiographical accounts on pre-selected' themes (Westwood et al., 2010, p. 48) might assist UK military participants in overcoming their broadly observed inexperience in introspective examination and storying (Jolly, 1996; Smith and True, 2014). While inexperience in narrative reflection is not unique to the military environment (Savickas, 2011; Reid, 2016), this 'systematic approach' in the example Canadian MCT-support context was designed to alleviate 'anxiety around self-disclosure' by affording individuals 'containment and control over [that] process' (Westwood et al., 2002, p. 225). Moreover, affordance of an ability to self-pace the

development and articulation of thoughts in written form might allow the narrator to ‘stop and think’ according to Moon (2006, p. 26) – a process that would appear pivotal in helping individuals to sequence (McAdams, 1993; Squire, 2013) and make sense of what might be viewed as ‘otherwise overwhelming and oftentimes chaotic’ experiences (Esterling et al., 1999, p. 85).

Consequently, written narratives can act as a powerful adjunct to discussing and reviewing issues orally (Baikie and Wilhelm, 2005; Pennebaker, 2004; Smyth and Helm, 2003). Not only can written work allow for greater self-pacing and self-administration on the one hand (L’Abate, 1991; Westwood et al., 2010; Bassot, 2016), but, on the other hand, it can also be attended to with a greater degree of flexibility and control by the individual concerned, rather than waiting for timed appointments and guided sessions. This might also permit the technique to be recalled and reused at any future point, with or without immediately available support. In addition, when allied to writing about traumatic, stressful or emotional events, this organising and structuring of ‘the traumatic memory’ has been found to result in physical and psychological health improvements (Baikie and Wilhelm, 2005, p. 342).

Irrespective of whether narratives are generated in writing, orally or in combination – or which method is selected first – another means to encourage, stimulate, guide and support others in generating their own narratives might be to offer participants exemplars (Dominicé, 2000). As indicated in Chapter 3, the publication of my own story in Chapter 4 serves not only as a source of evidence upon which to develop an analytical framework and conduct this study’s central analysis, but also as a model which might resonate with and stimulate MLs, veterans, family members and those who support them to consider adopting similar narrative review methods. That, at least, is the intention.

Other structural approaches might be drawn from McAdams’ (1993) work, in which participants are asked to divide their autobiography into ‘*life chapters*’, as if writing a book ‘in a quasi-chronological manner, with earliest chapters linked to childhood’ and progressing from there (pp. 256-257; original emphasis). An alternative might be to

base chapters on themes such as relationships and/or work, with participants alternating between a chronological and themed approach until they determine a preference (McAdams, 1993). Either way, narrative development might be focused on 'key events', defined as 'a specific happening, a critical incident, a significant episode' set in a particular time and place (McAdams, 1993, p. 257; original emphasis). The key to narrative richness and insight, according to McAdams (1993), is to describe in detail what happened, where, and with whom, accompanied by a recollection of thoughts and feelings. The result is that such 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) might elucidate the impact these events had or continue to have on a life course, thus indicating potential liabilities, assets and lifelines.

If needed, prompts for these events might include a participant's earliest memory; positive and negative childhood, adolescent and adult memories; 'high point[s]' and 'wonderful' life moments (resonant of Cooper et al.'s [2017] 'peak' experiences, as discussed in Chapter 2); corresponding 'low points' and the 'worst moment' in a life; as well as 'turning points' (McAdams, 1993, pp. 258-259). All should be recalled, according to McAdams (1993), in as much detail as possible, thus rendering a thick description with a focus on the significance of an event as regards the overall life narrative. During the subsequent analysis phase, these events might therefore help to isolate and identify the desired transition assets, liabilities, lifelines and sources of support, including significant people such as family members. This analysis then provides the foundation for planning and implementing the '*future script*', which is itself based on what motivates an individual, consequently affording a 'glimpse of the sense of an ending' and thus where the life story might take the individual, with whom and how (McAdams, 1993, pp. 260-261; original emphasis). This could be based not only on professional goals, but also on positive emotional stimuli, which together might outweigh practical and emotional liabilities, such as 'significant conflicts, unresolved issues, problems to be solved' (McAdams, 1993, p. 262). This would appear a far more holistic approach than the current staple of focusing predominantly on employment support in the UK MCT context.

In recalling my own instinctive recourse to narrative review and repair, as highlighted in Chapter 4, it seems I adopted a hybrid approach based on McAdams' (1993) indications. While I tackled developing my narrative chronologically from my earliest memories, I also focused on key events throughout my life, which, when I reached the analysis phase, helped me chart how I arrived at key decisions and junctures, along with an assessment of the impact and identification of enduring lifelines. While generating my narrative, I also found myself describing these events in vivid detail, not only so that my account might resonate with others, as explained in Chapter 3, but also so that this rich description might evocatively educe the insight I was seeking (Stake, 1995; Barea, 2018), thence allowing me to discern and learn from what this might tell me about the future (McAdams, 1993). While none of the above implies that a narrative review must constitute 'a full life history' (Dominicé, 2000, p. 171), an account does need to be sufficiently 'thick' so as to achieve the purposes its author aims to derive from it.

Moreover, when written accounts are amalgamated with the oral sharing of narratives, the possibility for instantaneous feedback appears to magnify their potential power, as Westwood et al.'s (2002; 2010) research in the Canadian MCT support context evidences.

Narrative discussion and development among peers and family members

Returning to the Canadian exemplar, once Westwood et al.'s (2002; 2010) participants had completed their initial written narratives, they then shared them in a group setting among other MLs and veterans, which provided a forum for encouragement, consolidation and development by facilitating mutual feedback – a process that Squire et al. (2014) suggest might afford the individual 'new interpretations and suggestions', as well as '*transforming individual experience into a collective experience*' (p. 90; original emphasis). This approach is also mirrored in Dominicé's (2000) course participants' development of 'educational biographies', in which individuals' initial narratives are 'submitted to a further interpretation by a small group of peers', thereby enabling each person to constitute 'both active partners and beneficiaries' in

the process of developing and co-constructing an interpretation of their narratives (p. 2).

Furthermore, the act of assisting others in the development and interpretation of their narratives can afford a sense of altruistic positivity among those offering their support (Yalom, 1985). This is evidenced by my own experience of working with WIS personnel, as described in Chapter 4, while philanthropic motivation also drives this research, as previously emphasised. Moreover, this altruism can fortify the individual offering the support by way of a 'curative' boost to self-esteem (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 205). Accordingly, benefit is afforded not only to the originator of a narrative, but also potentially to those with whom that narrative is shared. However, before exposure of personal 'vulnerability' (Holman Jones et al., 2016, p. 22), following Dominicé (2000), peer group members might agree to a social contract covering issues of confidentiality in respect to the exposure of intimate personal experiences, thus reinforcing any existing sense of safety and security.

While, in the Canadian context (Westwood et al., 2002; 2010), this narrative sharing practice appeared to only include MLs, it is assessed that the approach could be extended to include an ML's immediate family members, if appropriate, in that mixed ML and family peer group environment. The same model could also be used in discrete family peer group workshops, again following Turgoose and Murphy's (2019) observations.

Finally, an additional benefit in publicly sharing MCT narratives might be that in moving them from the 'private sphere', they can potentially be used, subject to ethical consideration and permissions, to inform a burgeoning social understanding and insight into the lived experience implicit in this form of transition (Squire et al., 2014, p. 90), just as I seek to do by way of this study. In combination with other forms of quantitative or mixed methods research output, this might more convincingly and effectively stimulate positive political, personal and social change.

Ongoing support

According to Dominicé (2000), an initial generation of written narrative reviews and subsequent peer group discussions need not take more than two to three days. While this period itself might yield a degree of asset and liability reconciliation and subsequent MCT planning, it should also provide the foundation for ongoing development and future use, if and when a need might present itself. However, just as the approaches themselves are unlikely to resolve all current and future MCT challenges that might emerge, a 3-day package of preparatory support may not be sufficient to enable beneficial effect without some form of access to additional counselling and support if required. If the UK MOD were to consider implementing any in-service narrative counselling approach, then it is assessed that continued support, if needed, should form part of any ongoing assistance offered.

The next section summarises principal recommendations made in this chapter in consolidated form, under the guise of the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT.

Principal conclusions and recommendations

Given the moral, financial and political case for providing effective MCT support in the UK environment (see Chapter 2), it is encouraging that the UK MOD is developing a more 'holistic' (MOD, 2019a) programme of assistance, including offering 'lifelong support to military personnel' (UK Government, 2019b, no pagination).

Notwithstanding that, even if possible, making universal holistic provision obligatory is likely to be counterproductive (FiMT, 2017), this study highlights concerns that the current selective basis for such support is unlikely to fully bridge the gaps in current provision. Moreover, the extent to which this might include families and peer support in the MCT assistance process is not clear, nor is it clear how clinical (where appropriate) and educational support might be integrated or how post-discharge support will be delivered, by whom and for how long. That is before other barriers to care, such as lack of awareness, stigma, and the fragmented post-discharge support offerings, are factored in.

However, providing individuals with at least some experience and opportunity to lead a narrative review of holistic assets available to them might mitigate any observed and experienced liabilities, thereby more intimately involving them in directing their own transition. This sense of greater control, allied to a more holistic understanding of their own ability to harness assets and manoeuvre around liabilities, can prove to be a powerful adjunct to current 'test-and-tell' (McMahon, 2007, p. 275) approaches to this career and life change. Any transition can be profoundly challenging (Schlossberg et al., 1995), but more so MCT, as discussed at length in Chapter 2. Therefore, in working with military-aware transition experts and clinicians as appropriate, along with the additional, ethically controlled support assets of peers and family members as applicable, MLs, veterans and their family members can be assisted in co-constructing a credible transition plan based on an assessment of past, present and future assets and lifelines in a supportive (and ongoing if needed) self-educationally adaptive framework that can be redeployed and adjusted as future challenges, events and desires emerge (Pedlar et al., 2019).

It is assessed that the basis for this framework could be easily and rapidly co-managed with MLs and their immediate family members as they prepare to move on from the armed forces, perhaps by using the HARDFACTS checklist as a foundation (MOD, 2019a, pp. 50-51). Support could also be expanded to assist these MLs and their family as appropriate in a more detailed narrative review and planning process. Both a rapid response approach, possibly founded on the HARDFACTS model, and a more comprehensive narrative review methodology could be delivered using universally applicable templates as previously exemplified. However, either approach would allow practitioners and transitioning individuals to subjectively consider their own experiences, situations and ambitions – an ability the UK Government (2020) judge crucial as no 'two veterans are the same and neither are their needs' (p. 1). Accordingly, and following the FiMT (2013) 'Transition Mapping Study' advocating the tailoring of MCT support to individual requirements, a personalised, yet supported narrative approach would appear to conform to this necessity. Specifically, in terms of military families, it is noted that 'little is known about [their] experiences' during MCT;

therefore, more research is required 'to improve outcomes for this important but poorly understood cohort' (Fossey et al., 2019, p. 209). This thesis hence joins others in calling for a more intimate inclusion of military family members in current and emerging holistic MCT support in the UK, and for allowing sufficient time for 'holistic' transition support to be undertaken (see, for example, Ashcroft, 2014; FiMT, 2017).

The 'manoeuvrist' narrative work proposed in this thesis, perhaps enhanced by the use of metaphors that resonate with military and personal experience, might accordingly provide a vital foundation in the co-construction of a 'transition bridge' (Ashforth, 2001) over the civil-military gap for MLs, veterans and their family members. If these MLs, veterans and family members find themselves oriented to loss in the depths of that gap, then the same approach might reveal lifelines by which they can haul themselves out. While, in the following chapter, I assess how successfully my own use of a narrative asset and liability review has enabled me to navigate my way out of post-military loss-orientation, I suggest that the same means might be employed by MLs, veterans and their family members – advocated and supported by those who seek to assist them.

In addressing a potential fear that the development, implementation and evaluation of such proposals is likely be financially expensive (at least in the short term), I point to Esterling et al.'s (1999) view that narrative review interventions can be cost effective and are likely to be far less costly than the moral, individual, social, financial and political implications of a poor MCT. By augmenting its current MCT-support provision, perhaps by implementing aspects of the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT proposed in this thesis, then the UK MOD might better 'meet the commitment of the Armed Forces Covenant', consequently fulfilling its role in what it defines as repaying the 'nation's moral obligation' to both serving and ex-military personnel (MOD, 2017b, p. 12). This is an obligation that the FiMT avers is not yet being taken 'seriously' (2017, p. 82); I hence join it in calling for a step change in the UK MOD's commitment to both its covenant and its desired provision of holistic MCT support.

Limitations and indications of future research

In Chapter 1, it was recognised that the UK's regular armed forces, comprised of the Royal Navy, the British Army and the Royal Air Force, and their various sub-cultures (Reid and West, 2011) are not homogenous. This lack of homogeneity also applies when comparing the British Regular Armed Forces to their Reservist counterparts, as well as to international military institutions. What is common among those national and international constituent elements is that all armed forces are comprised of a collection of individuals who, no matter how much they are collectivised, still remain individuals and retain individuality. While not all those who leave the armed forces will experience significant challenges, a sense of loss or multiple forms of loss are a common feature of at least some MCTs. It is this issue of a commonly applicable model for individual recognition and mitigation of such losses that this thesis has sought to offer. The Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT is therefore advanced as a framework that can be offered to individuals on a collective basis, yet is focused on an individual's situation, needs and desires, including for family members. The theory and philosophy that underpin it are based on the universal human trait of storying lives, events and possibilities, and communicating and learning from what these narratives reveal to us. Therefore, the fundamental principles should be applicable to all humans everywhere, irrespective of culture and nationality, albeit with lexical adaptation to specific cultural needs. Additionally, the potential positive effect of the narrative approaches espoused here are shown to be magnified by embracing the use of appropriate metaphor, as supported by employment in my own case and the literature reviewed (Fox, 1989; Richardson, 1990; Inkson, 2007; Farrand et al., 2019).

While it is accepted as unlikely that this thesis alone will convince the UK MOD to immediately implement all recommendations contained herein, what could help in terms of assessing the efficacy of narrative review and repair methods might be a longitudinal investigation (Pedlar et al., 2019) based on pilot studies and volunteer participants and thus in accordance with Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) view that:

The only way to understand people in transition is to study them at several points in time [to reach] a detailed conceptualization of what is needed to help people leave, let go, and reinvest.

(pp. 35; 45)

Furthermore, this form of longitudinal research and pilot might be focused on assessing whether narrative methods contribute to a more 'successful military to civilian transition', which itself would require a greater number of case studies (Cox et al., 2018, p. 104). It might also employ mixed methods and include quantitative as well as qualitative data, while also possibly being combined with other forms of research and on a cross-disciplinary basis, thus potentially delivering a more convincing evidence base to policymakers (Richardson, 1990; Stake, 1995; Riessman, 2002; McMahon, 2007; Merrill and West, 2009; Yin, 2009).

Nevertheless, as Caddick determined when considering the MCT-related narratives of his own veteran research participants, defining when MCT ends and what 'success' entails appears problematic given the inherent subjectivity of individual experience and variability of assessment (2016, p. 187; see additionally Brunger et al., 2013; Herman and Yarwood, 2014; Cooper et al., 2017). This could make for a potentially lengthy longitudinal study (Stake, 1995), so it is possible that defining research bounds and length might be equally complex. Therefore, as an alternative, an evaluation and, if necessary, cultural refinement of existing programmes in the Canadian and US contexts might provide a relatively straightforward and 'more reliable approach than creating new and untested' versions in the UK (Wessely, 2019, p. xi).

I also acknowledge that there are a number of civilian occupations that exhibit at least some of these characteristics of the military culture and experience that I discuss in this thesis (Cox et al., 2018; Goffman, 1961). These may include personnel involved in law enforcement and the emergency services (Westwood et al., 2002), particularly given that these professional contexts might be considered as sharing a similar ethos of uniformed public service and potential exposure to traumatising experiences. It might also, for example, be extended to professional sportspeople, for whom 'the formation and internalisation of this identity can be particularly strong' due to almost

total commitment to physical and mental stamina and excellence and involvement in collective and controlled living and working routines and environments (Cox et al., 2018, p. 81). As a consequence, many members of such professions can encounter similar senses of cultural dissonance and loss upon transitioning back into 'normal' life, accompanied by an apparent lack of support, and along with a sense of isolation, anger, guilt, betrayal, sadness, emptiness, hopelessness and 'lack of purpose and direction in life' upon exiting these environments (Cox et al., 2018, pp. 74; 82) – just as has been found to occur in MCT for many.

Therefore, as Neimeyer (2006; 2004), Savickas (2011) and Reid (2016) advocate, narrative review and repair is not just suited to MCT, nor is MCT the only context in which multiple forms of trauma and loss are experienced. It is, however, the context in which I encountered such loss, and narratively reflecting on that loss is a method of meaning-making, learning and growing to which I was instinctively drawn. Given that I am not alone in finding MCT a challenging experience, I therefore recommend consideration of the use of narrative review and repair tools by all who may benefit from it among the community in which I base this autoethnographic study. This means is encapsulated in the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT concept.

Research question review and concluding remarks

Progress is being made toward a unifying MCT theory and theory-based frameworks for shaping policy, programs, services and research. Comprehensive unifying MCT frameworks and theories are emerging that consider the complex factors operating on veterans across their life courses. These conceptual systems go beyond stereotypes to account for the diverse heterogeneity of MCT journeys.

(Pedlar et al., 2019, p. 45)

Chapter 1 identified the following research questions as the basis for this thesis:

- Why might MCT be a challenge, and why consider this?
- Is there a model of transition that might help recognise and mitigate MCT challenges?

- What part might narrative review play in this recognition and mitigation, and how can this be conducted?

Chapter 2 addressed the first question by evidencing why some MLs, veterans and their families experience difficulty in transitioning back into the civilian context, while justifying in moral, social, financial and political terms why considering the nature, provenance and mitigation of these challenges merits attention and investment.

Exposure of my own account of MCT challenges in Chapter 4, founded on a preceding methodological justification, then enabled the development of a model, in Chapter 5, that might be deployed on a supported programmatic basis, yet might also enable individuals, like me, to chart their own MCT assets and liabilities (including support available) and potentially mitigate the latter while forging an asset-rich future. Possible options for deployment of this framework for narrative review, analysis and planning were then presented in this chapter, thus answering the second and third research questions respectively.

With reference to the quotation at the beginning of this section, I hope that Pedlar et al. (2019) would agree that this study adds a progressive theory and evidentially based framework for shaping MCT policy, programmes and services. The resulting Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT is, in turn, a conceptually founded, theoretically informed and practically oriented model that might help individual MLs, veterans and their families holistically navigate an often extremely challenging re-entry into civilian life by offering an effective augmentation to their repertoire of transition responses (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

To provide a culminating exemplification of the potential benefits of the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT, the aim of the final chapter in this thesis is to indicate where the narrative techniques I employed to manoeuvre away from loss-orientation in the civil-military gap have conveyed me thus far.

CHAPTER 7: EPILOGUE

One of the important factors which demonstrates a successful transition is whether or not the ex-Service person feels they have been able to develop a new civilian identity. That is to say that their sense of identity and purpose is not rooted in the past, in their former service status, but rather based on their present civilian circumstances and their plans for the future. Because military identity and sense of purpose is such a powerful and all-encompassing feature of service life, this can feel like one of the greatest losses for those who strongly identified with it.

(FiMT, 2013, pp. 53-54)

Role exit is a process of disengagement from a role that is central to one's self-identity and the reestablishment of an identity in a new role that takes account of one's ex-role. Role exit is a process that occurs over time.

(Ebaugh, 1988, p. 23)

In Chapter 4, my narrative painted a picture of many forms of transition, for example from childhood to youth, from local to international cultures, from school to university, and from wellness to illness. However, for me at least, two passages stand out, and both, in their own way, were marked by rites. In the first transition, one could describe these as initial rites of passage, while the second might be considered as marked by last rites.

On 5 August 1994, I marched – in the uniform of an officer cadet at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst – up the steps and through the 'Grand Entrance' of Old College. This pageant marked my 'commissioning' as an officer in the British Army, and it was one in which I was surrounded by my fellow cadets, with whom I had spent the previous year engaged in totalising physical, tactical and academic training around the UK and Europe, and in Sri Lanka. It was also witnessed by close family members and friends, consequently affording a fusing of two families and friendship groups: my social family and friends from my home and university backgrounds, and the new Army family and friendship community I was joining.

However, I now question whether it really was a new fusing, or simply the continuation of a familiar life theme. I came, after all, from a family of soldiers, police officers and educators, and I was moving into a family of soldiers, police officers and

educators (my wider corps incorporated the Royal Military Police). Whether I stopped to think about it then (and I do not recall doing so), my retrospective reflection suggests I might have felt that my life's direction was coherent and preordained. Everything I remembered experiencing up to that point seemed to be leading to that point, and from that point, everything seemed to be mapped out, bar misfortune. The Army would post me to a variety of locations, many of which enabled me to continue doing what I had enjoyed doing in my youth (rambling in the countryside, travelling overseas and using foreign languages). It would teach me, afford me experience, house me, clothe me, pay me, promote me and present me with another family – forged from within it. It would then reject me on account of illness. I consequently left it accompanied only by black sacks of uniform and a blank piece of paper. I was unceremoniously stripped of my Army existence, no pageant in sight.

That void sheet with which I was presented, accompanied by another that spelled out the reason for my dismissal (adjustment disorder and carcinoma of the colon) became, until now, a symbolic metaphor for my new identity: an erased military self, replaced by one of a 'broken, ex-Army officer'. That exit experience constituted – along with the symbolic casting of my military uniform onto a funeral pyre – my last rites in the Army. The last time I wore that uniform was at a remembrance service recalling the war dead. Yet, unlike those I recalled, I had not died in war, nor had I died of cancer, but I felt as if part of me had perished. I was grieving for what I was missing, but I could not define it, and I felt guilty about grieving for a life lost, even though it was in exchange for a life free of cancer. I also rued the sense that my incapacitation was wrought from within my own body and by my own body, as opposed to being occasioned by heroic engagement on the battlefield. Therefore, in my mind, my non-heroic, non-combat provoked disease was hierarchically low and consequently less worthy of public attention and sympathy than the pain experienced by my combat-traumatised comrades in arms (Caddick et al., 2020).

Having retreated to the sanctuary of a home and family that had not rejected me (unlike my Army family), I knew – for their sake perhaps more than my own – that I needed to move beyond the prevailing sense of loss, guilt and shame. In searching for

that means of escape, I alighted on another environment I recalled with fondness and a sense of safety: my local university, and thus the genesis of this thesis.

This resultant meaning-making quest became my metier and my muse. It became and remains a key aspect in the development of my transitioning identity. I hope what it yields continues to help me renew my sense of self accordingly. However, I recognise that this sense of self and identity is only new insofar as it moves me beyond being stuck in the loss of my previous status as an Army officer. By reaching back to my earliest memories, I realise this identity emanates from a sense of self determined by lifelong background and experience. That background and experience, based on events that constitute it, can be viewed positively, negatively and with ambivalence, as Schlossberg et al. (1995) remind us. While I might perceive some recent events as negative, I cannot ignore them. In their own way, they have made me who I am, just as being an Army officer has made me who I am now and just as my past made me an Army officer. What I have been able to do – by way of this doctorate and the narrative review and repair work that it contains – is integrate that past into the present, while providing the platform to generate a coherent story of my life and the events within it. In achieving this, I feel that I have settled the emotions sufficiently well to now manoeuvre into a productive future, albeit by exposing my vulnerability to this purposeful end.

Where specifically this thesis might take me in professional terms, I cannot yet confirm, but I have plans, and they appear to be taking shape. It certainly fills me with an immense sense of satisfaction to have reached this point, although it has implied an immeasurable investment of time, energy and emotion, as well as financial outlay – just as, according to Stake (1995), many other doctoral and research experiences do. In taking me this far psychologically, however, I sense it has enabled me to achieve a degree of acceptance of negative past experiences as well as an identification of the positive, and I deem that to be immense progress; now, my autoethnographic learning continues, and I know it will never end. For, as Andrews (2013) reminds us, narratives are always incomplete. In that respect, we are always transitioning from one situation to another (McAdams et al., 2001), while – I hope – learning and fortifying ourselves in

the process. To do so, we can revisit our narratives and continue to make sense of experiences 'in light of subsequent events' (Andrews, 2013, p. 215), while persisting in telling ourselves and others that enduring life story (McAdams, 1993), and I am comfortable with that now.

At the time of writing, I have been working with NATO in Portugal. In reflecting on this, I also conclude much: I can locate and explain my return to that country by tracing a narrative thread through Spain to university and to Portugal – and by recognising my family's military background – I can explain my gravitation to the Army and thence to NATO. In contemplating this, I recognise an enduring sense of coherence and symmetry despite the unexpected nature of illness and its career and life impact. It is only by laying out my life story and tracing its enduring threads that I have been able to identify this sense of constancy and equilibrium and thence embrace and grasp these lifelines as I plan for the future and manoeuvre towards it with a sense of renewed purpose, motivation and optimism. In settling those emotions, I feel I am emerging into a redefined post-military identity and repaired sense of self, and this has been dependent on my narrative review and reconciliation process as exposed in this thesis.

However, this story only provides a beginning of sorts. Having related my account and come this far, I do not yet want the story nor the life it portrays to end. I have not found this process easy, and I recognise that I have only achieved this with a great deal of academic, peer and family support. Just as I have needed that educational, community and family structure to support my ongoing MCT, this thesis demonstrates that my fellow MLs and veterans can benefit from that too. While the scaffold supporting the construction of my transition bridge has been this degree, the cement and building blocks have been provided by the narrative review and repair work undertaken and the support offered by many in the process.

Poor MCT support can trigger feelings of rejection, bitterness and anger (Lovatt, 2017), often exacerbated by a process of being stripped of identity – almost literally so, as conveyed in my narrative (see additionally Brunger et al., 2013; Albertson, 2019) – and

this can lead to a sense of invisibility upon leaving the armed forces (Elliott et al., 2016). While I rejected the opportunity to mark my exit formally and thus opted for invisibility to a degree, this was, in part at least, motivated by guilt, shame and stigma as illustrated by the exculpatory themes identified in my narrative. Research conducted by Lovatt (2017) suggests I am not alone in experiencing these emotions, nor am I alone in experiencing a discharge process that appears uncaringly administrative, without the intensity of ritual that marked entry (Caddick, 2016; Lovatt, 2017). If nothing else, by identifying and exposing these exculpatory themes, I feel better. However, I also acknowledge that many leaving the armed forces may view their military experience instrumentally (Herman and Yarwood, 2014; Brewer and Herron, 2018) and hence might be happy to leave without too much formal attention; however, it is clear that others are not and that this sense of loss, guilt, shame and stigma can endure for years after discharge, as evidenced by my own experience and the literature considered hitherto.

The motto of my Army alma mater – The Royal Military Academy Sandhurst – is ‘Serve to Lead’, and the writing of this thesis is a form of service by which I seek to continue to lead the military community, but this time by pointing the way for more effective and holistic MCT support. I find I am deriving a positive and enduring sense of curative and altruistic energy from that, which I hope I can both sustain and continue to be sustained by (Yalom, 1985; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

In recalling the two quotations with which I began this epilogue, I now see them as follows: I believe I am developing a new – and crucial – civilian identity in my post-military world; therefore, I might now be more successfully transitioning into ‘Civvy Street’. However, this is a sense of identity and purpose rooted in the past, precisely because I have looked at that past and determined the assets and lifelines contained therein, and I have identified what, from within that past, I might harness as I manoeuvre in the present and towards the future. While my experience suggests to me that a loosening of past bonds of self and identity is necessary, it seems we need not – and cannot – cut them entirely, nor should we necessarily do so. However, I do feel it is crucial to acknowledge and manoeuvre over or around any liabilities, thereby

discarding those that might hold us back from manoeuvring with agility and strength in the future. We can learn from what recognition and an examination of liabilities might tell us about ourselves and our experiences, but we do not need to be bound by them.

As Wadham and Morris remind us, military personnel 'are made from the raw material of the civilian' and become military, and once military, that experience can never be erased (2019, p. 2). Many of the values that military personnel absorb during service follow them, deliberately or unconsciously so, as they re-join civilian ranks. Some may prove useful, but others may be a hindrance (Truusa and Castro, 2019). Some MLs and transitioning veterans and family members might grasp the first lifeline they see, only to find themselves 'drifting' on a liminal current (FiMT, 2017, p. 71). Others might cling to lifelines that tether them to an uncomfortable past. Better, I suggest, is to let go of those loss-oriented lifelines and identify those that might bear us on currents that will take us to safety and thence to a place where we can once again thrive. We need to be agile and informed in order to identify and seize these safe, secure and future-facing lifelines and thence manoeuvre ourselves away from the civil-military gap and on to our futures. That is the essence of the Manoeuvrist Approach to MCT.

It is an approach based on a theoretically underpinned conceptual model that enables an audit of assets and liabilities inherent in any transition, and it offers a methodological route to practical and emotional success and renewed purpose in post-military work and life, as evidenced by my own progress. On that basis, I commend it for consideration to my fellow MLs and veterans and their families, as well as to those charged with supporting them through this MCT journey.

As Goodley et al. (2004) contend, anyone can create a story. I have written mine thus far, and many veterans have written or otherwise recorded theirs. Just as I have found support invaluable in that process, appropriate assistance must also be offered to those who are confronting or grappling with their own MCTs.

While I continue to author my own future, it is their futures that concern me too. I wish them every success, and I seek to continue to help them in any way I can. If this

thesis, thus far, is of benefit to them and provides a springboard for support, then it will have achieved its principal aim.

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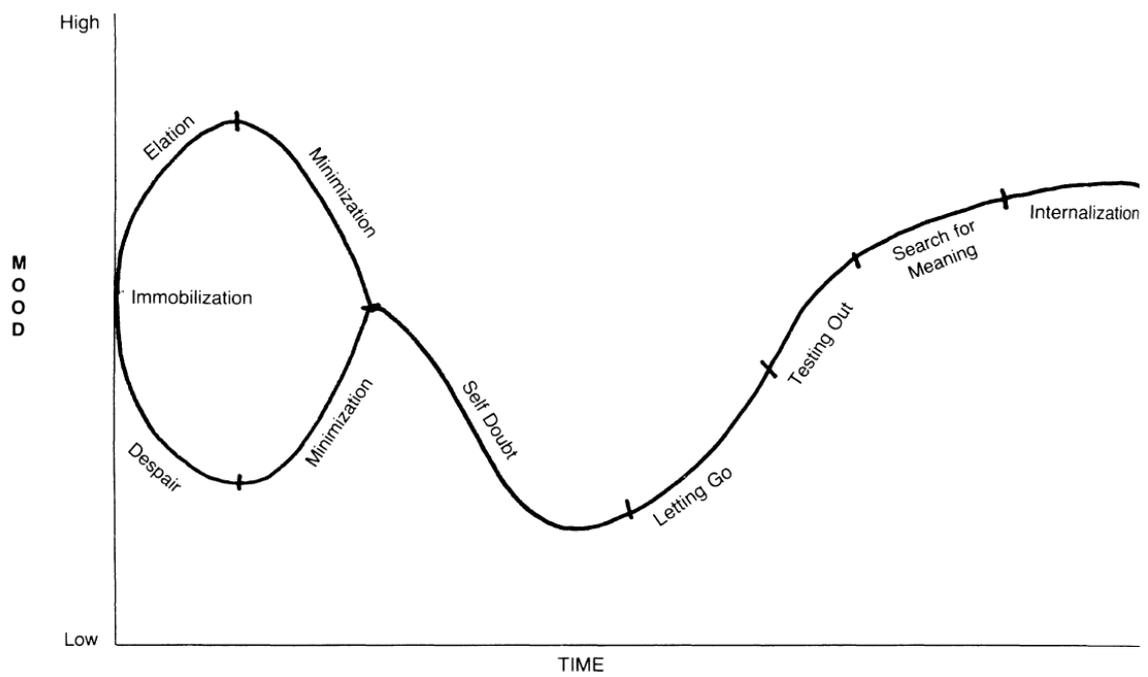
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Appendix 1: Seven-Phase Model of Stages Accompanying Transition

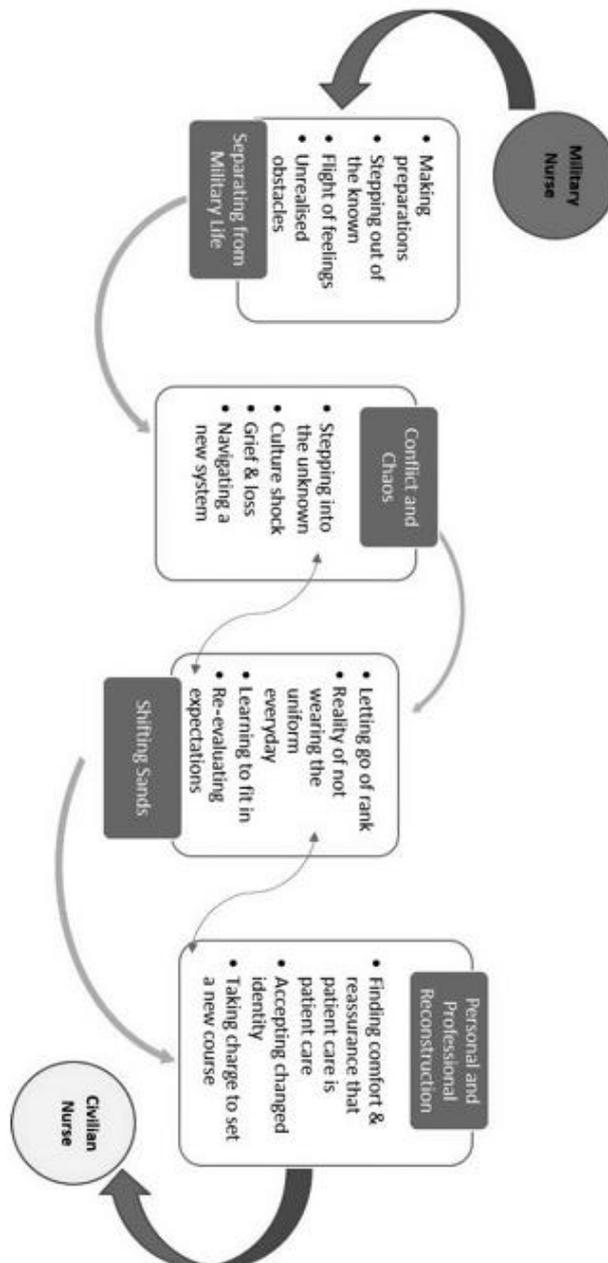
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(Hopson, 1981, p. 38)

Appendix 2: Military nurse transition to civilian nurse (model)

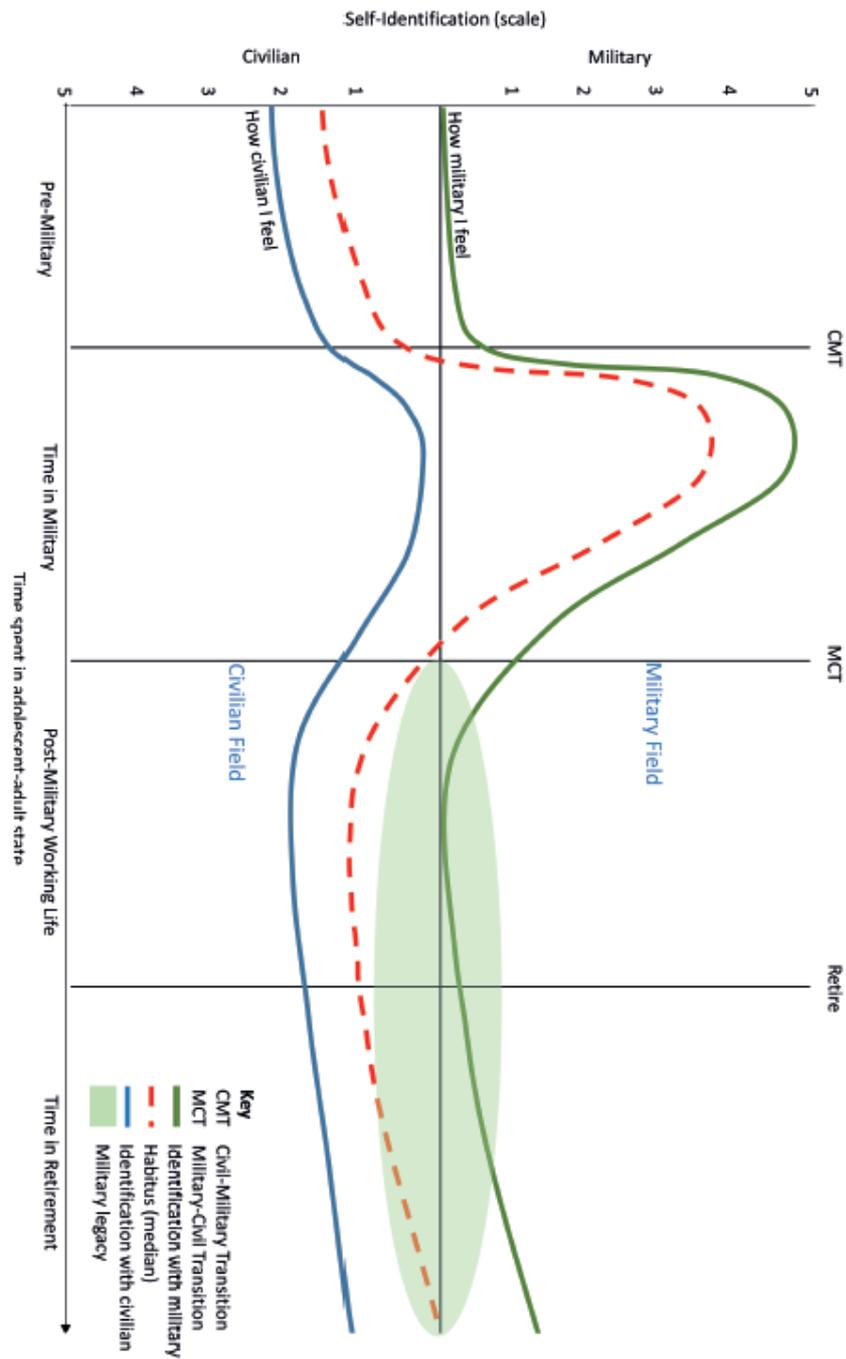
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(Elliott et al., 2016, p. 1378)

Appendix 3: Model of Transition in Veterans (MoTiVe)

(click [here](#) to return to in-text reference)



(Cooper et al., 2017, p. 58)

Appendix 4: Military-civilian transition in the life course of military personnel (framework)

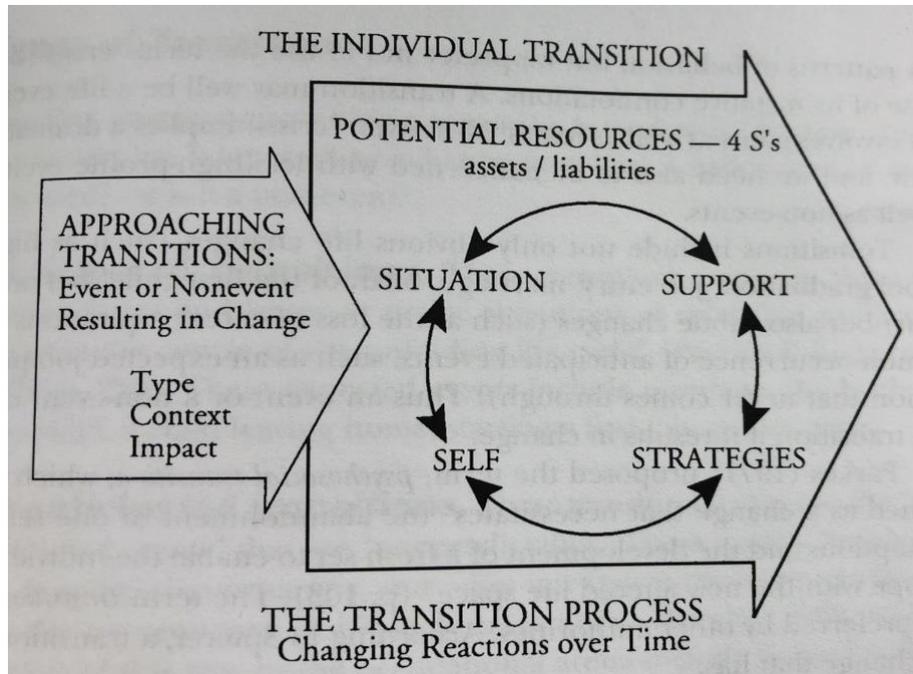
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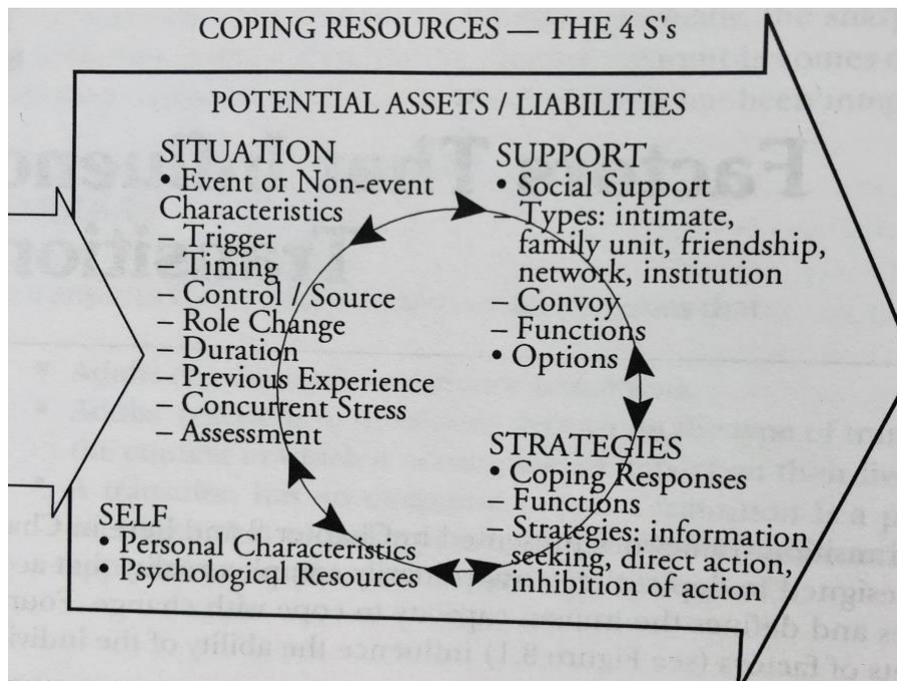
(Pedlar et al., 2019, p. 26)

Appendix 5: Schlossberg et al.'s Transition Framework

(click [here](#) to return to in-text reference in Chapter 2, and [here](#) for Chapter 5)



(1995, p. 27)



(1995, p. 48)

Appendix 6: British Army's emotional pathway information sheet

(click [here](#) to return to initial in-text reference)



ARMY

HEADQUARTERS SUPPORT COMMAND

Transition to Civilian Life

Information Sheet 2 'The emotional pathway'



Introduction

Regardless of length of service, everyone leaves the Army at some point. This can be a challenging time and involve a period of adjustment which can trigger a number of emotions from exhilaration to pain and anxiety. It may not just be the Service leaver who is affected; it may also impact upon family and friends. There is high quality practical support available to Service leavers undergoing their transition but there is little information or advice about what Service leavers and their families might experience emotionally. This Transition Information Sheet seeks to highlight some of the emotions that Service leavers and their families might experience and reassure them that this is quite natural and that in all but a very few cases life returns to 'normality' fairly quickly.

Emotions

Some Service leavers will leave the Army quite happily and their transition to civilian life will be completed without any great upset. Others who may have served a short engagement, a full career or been compulsory discharged may feel that their transition to civilian life is unwelcome which can make the necessary personal and family adjustment more difficult to achieve. Transition brings uncertainty and anxiety with many different emotions. Understanding this in advance of your Transition to civilian life may assist you and your family to cope with your transition journey. Some of these possible emotions are shown in table 1.

Feeling of loss (bereavement) for their military career	Not understood or appreciated by "civvies"
Not knowing yourself anymore	Loss of camaraderie
Fear of the unknown or the future	Feeling that "civvy" work is unfulfilling
Not feeling competent	Annoyance with "trivial" family matters
Lack of control	Financial worries
General anxiety and worry	Fatigue / Insomnia
Wanting to be alone	Feeling of not being valued
Loss of identity and status	Feeling of inadequacy
Loss of purpose	Temptation towards alcohol abuse

Change

Everyone experiences change throughout their life and have developed their own coping mechanisms. Coping strategies used in service may be helpful in transforming to civilian life. Knowing what might be experienced emotionally in advance and taking things a step at a time may make these challenges easier to overcome.

Stages of Change

Most people pass through a similar progression of stages when confronted with change. Having knowledge of these stages may help people cope and provide reassurance when they feel 'stuck'. Many accounts of change have 3 core stages as are shown in diagram 1.

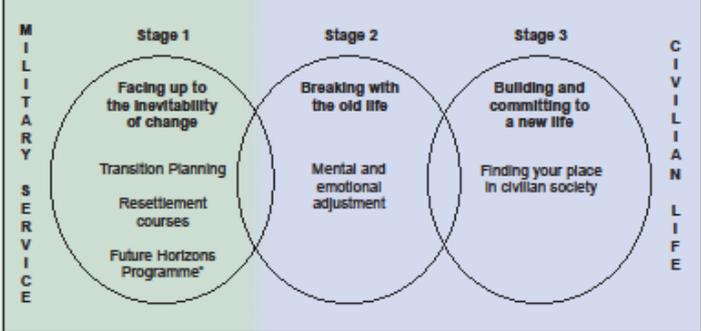


Diagram 1: "3 Stages of Change" showing the requirements for a smooth emotional transition from the military to civilian life.

*www.ctp.org.uk/futurehorizons

First Stage:

Develop your knowledge of how civilian society functions.

Be prepared to walk away from the emotional attachment and commitment to a military career.

Civilian life and work may offer different feelings of satisfaction. Stay positive.

Mutual support within the family unit.

Talk about the forthcoming changes.

Understand the processes and the support you are entitled.

Mark your departure with an event which allows you to move on.

“Facing up to the inevitability of change”

Continuing interaction with civilian society whilst in service will make the process of adjustment to civilian life easier. Ultimately it is up to the Service leaver and their family to manage their journey which may be made easier by embracing Transition preparation early and throughout their military careers.

Feeling of Loss and Fulfilment

A Service leaver, and to some extent their family, might feel they are losing their vocation, identity and status when leaving the Service to which they have been physically and emotionally committed. It may be perceived that civilian work lacks the same sense of purpose and fulfilment that a Service career provided. There may also be a feeling of isolation within new civilian surroundings and a lack of a common bond that existed on the ‘patch’ or in the block. Retaining links with civilian society and embracing transition preparation early may reduce this feeling of loss and assist the process of adjustment resulting in a new motivation and a sense of gratification.

Family Support

The Service leaver may not be the only person affected by this change. The instinctive reaction of the close family is often to want to protect and look after the emotional needs of the Service leaver who may be so swept up with their own emotions and actions to recognise their family’s needs. It is important that Service leavers or their family do not shoulder the burden of change in isolation and that the whole family is involved in both facing the future together and providing mutual support.

Communication

Communicating with family and friends is key in facing up to the future. Often Service leavers can avoid thinking about change by burying themselves in military work and duties until the last possible moment. Creating time to talk is vital so that everyone in the family can prepare themselves for the challenges and changes ahead. Talking openly and honestly about the inevitability of change with all family members, especially children, may prevent unnecessary worry about the future and reduce the emotional strain for all.

The Transition Journey

Service leavers are provided with Resettlement support based on entitlement as they transition to civilian life. These opportunities, and supporting processes need to be fully understood in order to maximise their benefits and discussed openly with the family and friends.

Discharge

It can often be helpful to begin the process of change by ensuring that the Service leaver has a chance to say goodbye or acknowledge the completion of their military service. A goodbye lunch or attendance at a last mess function provides a symbolic event to make a clean break and provide impetus to move on. This does not mean all ties should be suddenly broken. For most people change takes time. Keeping in contact with old friends and colleagues and popping back to “see how things are” can be an important way of coping with sudden change for both Service leaver and family member. However, an over-dependence on the military community can slow down the process of adjustment.

Second Stage:

Adjusting back to civilian life can take some time – be patient and understanding.

“Breaking with the old life”

Adjustment

There will be a period of the whole family adjusting to new routines and new ways of doing things. The Service leaver may be at home a lot more than previously experienced. While this may be welcome, it could also present a challenge to the family routine which might cause frustration. A way of dealing with this period of adjustment is honest discussion and compromise.

A feeling of insecurity is perfectly natural. Gain confidence by having a plan to achieve your goal.

The earlier you prepare for and accept your transition to civilian life, the smoother it may be.

In civilian business it can be all about you and what you deliver. Sell yourself and look out for yourself.

Family routine is good. Awareness and understanding is important.

Insecurity

Until a Service leaver feels established in civilian society, their life may appear uncertain and unpredictable when compared to the stability and security of life in the Services. This insecurity is perfectly normal. Again, talking routinely and regularly about the transition journey with all members of the family, friends and others who have experienced the 'journey' will share the burden and assist Service leavers and family members to work towards a common goal.

Progress

A sound Transition plan, reviewed and adjusted throughout your career and developed in detail around Resettlement should smooth your transition progress. This should allow the efficient use of time and resources and hopefully reduce stress and anxiety levels and provide confidence, clarity of thought, purpose and a positive frame of mind which may assist in the process of securing work. There is no set time to complete this stage. However, it is believed that the sooner a Service leaver considers 'breaking from the old lifestyle' the easier and smoother this adjustment might be.

Competition at Work

There may be a difference between career progression in the military and civilian employment which should be understood if the Service leaver is not to be disadvantaged. Career management in the military is undertaken by the chain of command with courses, postings and promotion largely based on annual evaluations with limited involvement from Service personnel. Competing with their peer group by excelling in their job and demonstrating potential is reflected in Mid Year Appraisals and annual evaluations. From a Service person's perspective competition is not obvious and is largely goal-orientated based on personal pride rather than seeking personal advantage over colleagues. Trust and confidence in colleagues, mutual support and an over-riding commitment to the task is the military way.

The civilian work place may be different in that job security may be dependent on meeting or exceeding individual targets and advancement is something that is achieved by the individual competing with colleagues on a daily basis. This culture of 'survival of the fittest' in a more ruthless environment is fundamentally different to the Services. This can cause surprise and alarm to Service leavers entering the civilian workforce.

Selling yourself at work and in interview is routine in a successful civilian career and understanding this in advance may emotionally prepare Service leavers to make the necessary adjustment.

Family Adjustment

Family members, who are embracing their transition to civilian life, might feel let down if the Service leaver is reluctant to make the necessary mental break from the Services. Family relationships are vital during times of tension and children especially appreciate stability and routine in their lives so maintaining domestic routines and family rituals can help in reducing stress levels. As with most things in life, the greater the preparation, awareness and understanding of known events, the easier they are to overcome. Full and early commitment to Transition throughout a Service career will ease the pathway to civilian life and reduce anxiety and emotional turmoil.

Third Stage:

Be flexible, review plans regularly and be realistic.

"Building & committing to a new life"

Flexible and Realistic

It often takes time to realize that change has been achieved and the period of uncertainty has all but passed. In Stage 3 the family and the Service leaver may have a clearer idea of where life is going. There may be some stability to life and the family seems more settled. Some agreed plans and ambitions may be achieved or progressing well, although progress may not always meet your planned timelines and may even include the odd backwards step. This too is common and should not be a reason for undue concern.

Use your personal and military qualities in the civilian workplace wisely.

The relationship with civilian work colleagues may not be as close and supportive as you have been used to.

The Person in the Military versus The Military in the Person!

Service leavers join civilian life with unique and valuable experience, transferable skills, discipline and personal qualities which distinguish them from the civilian workforce. There is a marked difference between bringing positive military qualities into the civilian workplace and a Service leaver behaving like a soldier in a civilian work place. Some employers, industries and sectors place great value on the military demeanor whilst others may use this 'difference' to reinforce preconceived ideas about the military and view it as a potential problem or reason why a Service leaver might not fit in. Being aware of this is important so that Service leavers can present themselves in the most beneficial way.

The workplace

Service leavers have left an institution with a unique culture and ethos, values and standards, a common bond and a commitment to the cause and to colleagues which is absolute. The civilian workplace can be different where few of the characteristics of military service might be present. Two points stand out which may cause Service leavers frustration and disappointment; first the camaraderie with work colleagues is likely to be different with a greater focus on individual achievement and personal satisfaction. The second, which is linked to the first, is that the level of mutual support may not be so apparent and the assumption that your colleagues 'have got your back covered' may be misplaced. This may require some time to understand and adjust to. It may also be the case that employers and colleagues may not fully appreciate the range of skills and experience that Service leavers have.

A simple list of Do's and Don'ts are shown in Table 2 below.

Do not...	Do....
Avoid planning change	Take time to reflect and think on the change and talk as a family about the changes ahead
Put things off till tomorrow	Accept that building a future is hard work so plan early & keep planning as you go
Stop talking – especially to family or friends	Remain flexible and open to change. You won't be able to control everything
Hide or disguise your thoughts or feelings from yourself or your family	Continue to believe in yourself and your abilities & try and think of change as an opportunity for you and your family
Drink too much - especially with those that are still serving	Take advantage of all the opportunities that your military resettlement package offers you & your family
Underestimate the change that you will have to go through. Transition to civilian life tests most people	Actively look after the health and well-being of you and your family
Think that the family will cope with change with no difficulty	Accept that new ways of thinking and behaving are required as well as new skills
Assume that everything will go to plan	Be open and listen and learn from those in your new civilian environment
Underestimate how different 'civvy' work and life can be and how competitive things are outside the wire	Recognize when you are "stuck" & don't be afraid to seek help
Expect to be settled in your new life quickly	Reflect and consider how you successfully have coped with stress before
Reject taking advice or learning from "civvies"	Reflect on your own experiences as a soldier and family. Recall what coping strategies you have used in the past
Judge people by military standards	Do not leave it too long to get assistance or advice if you feel you need support
Over-commit financially prior to discharge	Make financial provision so you have access to funds around your discharge date

Welfare Support

Welfare support for those in Service is provided by your unit and the Army Welfare Service if necessary. The MOD's organisation that supports veterans and their families is Veterans UK. Information on Veterans UK can be found at www.veterans-uk.info or via their 24/7 helpline in 0808 1914218.

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