UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP
ON U.S. ARMY JUNIOR OFFICERS

By
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A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

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Abstract

Toxic leaders are like tumorous cells to any organization or institution. They can genuinely have a detrimental effect on followers as well as external partners. Studies have shown that leadership is relational, which means leaders must connect with internal and external stakeholders. The purpose of this phenomenological research project is to understand how or if toxic leadership is impacting the professional work-life of Millennial junior officers. The focus of this project is to inform U.S. Army curriculum designers with data needed to develop current and future junior officers. During the data collection process, all the participants reported they had encountered toxic leadership. Each subject also reported they did not receive adequate leadership education or training. Based on this data, the researcher is proposing that the U.S. Army integrate responsible leadership theory in all leadership curricula at the lieutenant through major levels to mitigate the effects of toxic leadership. The U.S. Army should also balance the amount of time given to leadership, technical, and tactical training to ensure young officers comprehend the meaning of being an effective leader. Such training is essential, as young officers are now required to engage more with local politicians and leaders as they work to create secure and stable environments for local communities. These Millennial officers must value negotiation and diplomatic skills. The Army must aggressively work to understand these junior officers and mitigate the impact of toxic leadership as these young officers become leaders in the 21st century.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, Millennials, professional work-life, toxic leader, toxic leadership environment, responsible leader, toxic leadership
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# UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP

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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE PROBLEM

Introduction and Background

During the first decade of the 21st century, corporate America experienced unethical conduct by senior business executives, thereby diminishing trust among followers as well as society (Johnson, 2015). Indeed, researchers such as Thiel, Bagdasarov, Harkrider, Johnson, and Mumford (2012) have shown that many leaders make unethical or irresponsible decisions merely because they fail to understand the inner workings of their business or operational environments.

Similar results can be seen in the United States Military. Between the years of 2003 and 2014, 129 battalion and brigade commanders were removed from their positions for transgressions or incompetence (Tan, 2015). Hence, it could be argued that the U.S. Military is not unlike corporate America in that it can be a victim to leadership gone wrong. As an example of the need to improve these results in the military, the previous Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General Raymond Odierno, commented that “...sometimes in the past we've overlooked character issues because of competence and commitment...” (2014). This focus led General Odierno to initiate a ‘Character over Competency’ campaign in 2014 to emphasize the importance of ethical as well as competent leaders and demonstrate a possible solution to leadership development.

Unethical, irresponsible, or incompetent leaders can have far-reaching impacts on their followers, especially in the ever-changing, increasingly complex environment of the U.S. Army. This dissertation in practice proposal is a plan to listen to the experiences of
Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army. The proposal will collect information and seek to gain insight on the possible impacts from toxic leadership.

**Statement of the Problem**

Toxic leadership is much like a cancerous cell; if untreated, it can overcome healthy cells and, in some cases, the entire body. Individuals who lead in a toxic manner can negatively affect an organization in this same manner. In her book *The Allure of Toxic Leaders*, Lipman-Blumen (2005) explained this very point: “Toxic leaders do indeed have poisonous effects that cause serious harm to their organization and their followers…” (p. 17). Regrettably, some superiors, peers, and followers of toxic leaders may turn a blind eye simply because these individuals obtain significant results for their prospective agency, firm, or populace, but at the detriment of their followers or other stakeholders. However, Reed and Olsen (2010) explained that technical competence does not overshadow emotional intelligence and interpersonal aptitudes. Leadership, at its core, is relational (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

Lipman-Blumen (2005) and Johnson (2015) associated several dysfunctional personal qualities and destructive behaviors that toxic leaders possess. Some of these dysfunctional traits are an inability to distinguish between right and wrong (i.e., amoral), a lack of integrity, a narcissistic demeanor, condemnation of others, and incompetence, to name a few (Johnson, 2015; Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Ultimately, toxic leaders radiate dysfunction and destruction through irresponsible behavior and sheer incompetence (Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

As illustrated previously by Tan (2015), the U.S. Military has had recent problems with leaders in their organization—leaders that could be characterized as
incompetent and irresponsible. This type of leadership is likely having an impact on the upcoming Millennial generation, and these are the future leaders for the U.S. Military.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological dissertation in practice study is to gain insight as to how Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army perceive toxic leadership and its impacts on their professional work life.

**Research Questions**

This qualitative, phenomenological dissertation in practice study seeks to gain insight on the experiences of Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army. As part of that discovery process, the following two research questions will be used:

- Research Question One: “Have Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army experienced toxic leadership?”
- Research Question Two: “How have these experiences impacted their perception about their present and future professional work experience as leaders in the U.S. Army?”

**Aim of the Study**

A basic tenet of phenomenological research is to seek an understanding of an experience lived by a certain group of people. In this study, the primary aim is to inform future research about the impact of toxic leadership on U.S. Army officers. A secondary aim of this study is to inform curriculum designers on essential information necessary for developing future junior officers.
Proposed Methodology

This qualitative dissertation in practice project will employ a phenomenological process design to gain insight into the lived experience of Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army. The researcher plans to conduct one-on-one interviews with several junior officers in the U.S. Army with prior Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Upon transcribing these interviews, the researcher plans to analyze and interpret the data using coding and themes, as discussed later in Chapter Three. The goal is to gain insight into what impact, if any, Millennial military leaders are experiencing as a result of toxic leadership.

Definition of Relevant Terms

This dissertation in practice study is focused on the lived experiences of junior officers in the U.S. Army. Specifically, it involves their experience with toxic leadership and what, if any, impact toxic leadership has had on their professional work life as a leader. The following terms are defined herein for this study’s purpose.

- **Leader:** An individual who lawfully exercises formal authority by virtue of rank or assignment (i.e., position) in accordance with the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).

- **Toxic Leadership:**
  - **Toxic leader:** An individual who engages in destructive behavior or exhibits dysfunctional interpersonal tendencies. Such leaders are incompetent, rigid, lacking in integrity, self-indulgent, callous, corrupt or unethical, and insular, just to name a few (Johnson, 2015).
o **Toxic Leadership Environment:** A culture of toxic leadership fostered by U.S. Army leaders along with the civilian governing bodies (i.e., U.S. Executive and Legislative Branches), consisting of law and policymakers that nurture destructive behaviors and dysfunctional personality traits throughout their institutions and organizations to achieve self-interest plus short-term objectives.

o **Destructive Behaviors:** Conduct that involves, but is not limited to, misleading followers with disinformation; subverting ethical structures and processes; suppressing criticism; fostering totalitarian methods of leadership; setting individuals against one another; engaging in scapegoating practices; and ignoring or promoting incompetence, cronyism, and corruption (Johnson, 2015; Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

o **Dysfunctional Qualities:** Personal characteristics that prevent individuals from establishing relationships, building teams, and operating in rapidly changing environments (Carson et al., 2012). These personality traits could include, but are not limited to, being selfish, impulsive, indecisive, passive aggressive, emotionally volatile, a risk averter, mistrustful, vindictive, rigid, and over controlling (Carson et al., 2012).

- **Professional Work Life:** The experience of junior officers in their paid, professional work life.

- **Junior Officers:** Officers defined as in the ranks of captain (O3), first lieutenant (O2), second lieutenant (O1), warrant officer (W1), and chief warrant officer
(W2). All are classified as company grade officers and the most junior officers in the U.S. Army.

- **Millennials**: Individuals born between 1979 and 1994 (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

**Limitations, Delimitations, and Personal Biases**

As the author began to undergo this phenomenological research project, he had several limitations. First, only seven individuals were interviewed. This was primarily because the author was conducting his field interviews while assigned overseas. Although the sample size is small, researchers such as Reed (2009) have suggested that most military personnel have, unfortunately, experienced some degree of toxic leadership, even at the senior echelon; thus, the researcher did not expect it to be difficult to find evidence of toxic leadership in a small group. Second, the investigator is an officer in the U.S. Army and will have a certain interpretation of the findings based on his professional work life experiences.

The primary delimitation within this study is the inability to accurately determine if today’s toxic socio-political environment is having or will have a severe impact on junior officers in the future. The current phenomenological design is intended to gain insight into the stories of junior officers in the U.S. Army, but the inability to show that the results apply to all members of the U.S. Military is important to note.

The researcher is an active duty colonel and has served in command positions at the company and battalion echelons. He has led several Millennial officers over the past 15 years, which required him to remain open and curb stereotypical thoughts about the targeted population while undertaking this investigative journey. Thus, as a professional
soldier, the author does possess some bias only because he is thoroughly embedded in the very thing he was researching as an officer in the U.S. Army.

The Role of Leadership in this Study

The researcher has been a professional soldier for more than 25 years. His leadership experience has included various roles within the U.S. Army officer structure. Just as a composer orchestrates their musicians, so too must leaders choreograph the efforts, ideas, and voices of their followers. Even though an individual is equipped with the scientific knowledge of leadership, they may lack the ability to harmonize the long-term actions of those they lead. To this end, the researcher has found that the act of leading in the U.S. Army is an art form that integrates scientific information, intuition, and personal features to motivate others to follow. Without the assistance or actions of followers, a leader’s vision is nothing more than a fantasy: “To lead people in different directions depends on telling them different things about what they value [and] what they care about…” (Haslam et al., 2010, p. 192).

This study, when seen through the lens of leadership, will help the researcher tell the story of younger officers and how their personal leadership styles and experiences are being influenced. Understanding the influences of toxic leadership, whether fostered by military or political leaders, on junior as well as future officers is a prominent subject for senior Army leaders. As a seasoned military leader, the author understands that the tone and tenor for any institution or organization are set at the highest echelon. If non-toxic leaders fail to act or are not compelled to responsibly counteract the pressures of toxic leadership, especially in today’s complex and interactive environment, then the actions of
the former top general in the U.S. Army, General Raymond Odierno, 38th Chief of Staff of the Army, to remove toxic individuals from leadership positions would have been a futile campaign.

It is pivotal that current and future leaders learn to perform a critical balancing act artfully. Today’s Army leaders must be operational tacticians while being skilled diplomats. Both positions require specific skills, along with vital personal traits. The Army’s operating environment calls for leaders to exhibit an intellectual ability to process complex situations from diverse and, at times, conflicting perspectives to formulate actionable humane and moral strategies in the interest of the host nation’s as well as United States’ national security interest. Indeed, these situations require responsible leaders with emotional, ethical, and relational intelligence (Maak & Pless, 2006).

However, in many instances, toxic leaders demonstrate questionable instances of integrity; at best, they fail to practice transparency and tend to disenfranchise segments of the indigenous society because they misdiagnose crucial issues. Such actions or inactions deteriorate the structural adhesion to any coalition, network, or leader-subordinate relationship: trust.

**Significance of the Dissertation in Practice Study**

Throughout an officer’s education process, starting at the Office Basic Course and, if fortunate enough, through the Senior Service College (i.e., War College), commissioned officers undergo hours of leadership training. However, the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program at Creighton University has opened the author’s eyes to the fact that there is much more to learn, especially as it pertains to becoming a
responsible leader amidst the toxic leadership experienced in the junior officer ranks of the U.S. Army.

This study is essential for three reasons. First, the findings from this study could help further the understanding of, as well as direct future research on, the impact toxic leadership has within the U.S. Army. Second, this study could help inform a recommendation for future training curriculum. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the study is essential because the researcher does not know what he will discover. However, what is known about this phenomenological project is the author must attempt to learn how toxic leadership manifests and appears through the eyes of Millennial junior officers followed by communicating this information comprehensively and descriptively. In short, as suggested by Moustakas (1994), the perceptions of toxic leadership from Millennials' perspectives is my primary source of knowledge. Therefore, this experiment investigates the appearance of toxic leadership.

Summary

Creswell (2013) suggested that qualitative research projects should seek to reform a specific behavior or alter the lives of those participating in the study. With this being the case, the researcher was attempting to provide a voice for the experiences of Millennial junior officers (those in leadership positions) within the U.S. Army who might be experiencing the effects of toxic leadership. To investigate the presented problem statement, the researcher presented a phenomenological approach to understand these effects. The researcher detailed key terms, limitations, delimitations, and personal biases with regards to this study. This chapter also presents a powerful case for the significance of this study while also detailing the role of leadership. The next chapter presents a
literature review, focusing on the following themes: toxic leadership, Millennials and their expectations surrounding authority figures, phenomenology in qualitative research, and understanding responsible leadership theory.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Modern day leaders operate in a global, multifaceted, ambiguous, and interconnected environment. This complexity is especially the case as U.S. Army organizations continue to engage with terrorist and insurgent networks. To counter the effects of terrorist and insurgent factions, Army commanders must function ethically and morally to win the hearts and minds of the affected populations. Their moral compass must radiate through the local community. In the absence of morality, terrorist and insurgent networks are sure to expose themselves. Many of these insurgent uprisings are bred in environments were violent, immoral, dishonest, and deceitful practices are prevalent (Department of the Army, 2006). Unfortunately, these are some of the same characteristics displayed by toxic leaders.

The conduct and personal characteristics of toxic leaders are unpleasantly similar to the behavior of political terrorists. Like terrorists, toxic leaders often employ intimidation tactics to achieve self-serving goals, just as terrorist leaders engage in violence as a means to obtain their strategic objectives. Although the level of intimidation is not equivalent to the violence used by terrorists, from a broader perspective, both tactics are utilized to implant fear and total compliance. For this reason, some researchers refer to toxic leaders as organizational terrorists because of their dysfunctional behaviors (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010).

Over the last several years, the U.S. Army has encountered a vast number of toxic leaders within its ranks. From 2008 to 2015, approximately 1,470 officers were removed
from their position or received reprimands, while 41 lieutenant colonels through generals were court-martialed (Tan, 2015). However, it must be noted that military leadership extends beyond uniformed officials to include political leaders. Some of these officers may have refused to alter their leadership style, reached their leadership plateau, lost their moral compass, or merely been wolves bearing sheep’s clothing. Whatever the case, toxic leadership has a tremendous effect on an individual’s employee experience and thus may have a negative influence on the Army’s ability to retain talented Millennial junior officers.

To gain a greater understanding of how Millennials perceive toxic leadership and to determine whether these kinds of leaders have an impact on Millennial officers, the ensuing research questions were crafted to help guide the study:

- “Have Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army experienced toxic leadership?”
- “How have these experiences impacted their perception about their present and future professional work experience as leaders in the U.S. Army?”

To answer these questions, the researcher identified three overarching pillars as a framework to assist in navigating through this investigative process. These supporting topics begin with recognizing (i.e., defining) toxic leadership, understanding Millennials, and introducing the idea of responsible leadership. American soldiers, and American people for that matter, deserve leaders who are sensitive to the environment in which they operate, whether at home or abroad.
Recognizing Toxic Leadership

The phenomenon of toxic leadership is a subject that has been studied extensively, to the point where the U.S. Army has chartered an organization to conduct leadership and leader development research as a means of mitigating the effects of toxic leaders: the Center for Army Leadership (CAL). CAL is a subordinate agency to the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center (U.S. Army, n.d.). Despite such efforts to investigate toxic leadership, according to an article by Vanden Brook (2017), at least 500 senior Department of Defense officials (i.e., generals, admirals, and senior civilians) have been investigated for misconduct involving sexual harassment along with other sex-related scandals since 2013. Such behaviors create hostile work environments for the entire organization. It is reported that many of these senior officials began to believe they were invincible (Vanden Brook, 2017). Not only has the military experienced toxic individuals, but the U.S. socio-political environment is also witnessing accounts of negative discourse and malicious styles of leadership. To emphasize this point further, many Americans today have very little to no confidence in the U.S. Congress (Williams, 2016). Toxic leaders can come in any form; gender, ethnicity, and nationality do not have any correlation with toxic leadership. However, researchers have identified specific indicators to assist in detecting these toxic individuals (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). For this project, the researcher will attempt to define toxic leadership in three parts: dysfunctional personality traits, destructive behavior, and toxic leadership viewed from a military perspective.
Dysfunctional Personality Traits

Senior officials investigated for sexual misconduct may have lacked some sense of integrity because they could appear as hypocritical. The question to ask is, “How many subordinates have these officials punished for questionable integrity or deceitful practices?” Many of these officials believed they were untouchable (Vanden Brook, 2017). Feelings of invincibility are just one of many characteristics presented by toxic individuals. Below are a few indicators (Post, 1993; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Johnson, 2015):

• Lack of or questionable integrity;
• Self-serving methods and disregard for any potential negative consequences of their actions or decisions;
• Inability to distinguish between moral and immoral outcomes;
• Unwillingness to confront individual shortcomings;
• Unwillingness to accept responsibility for failure (scapegoating); and
• Narcissism.

Since leadership is relational, the essence of any relationship is based on trust; a leader who consistently does not demonstrate a high level of integrity may fail to develop meaningful relationships with their subordinates, peers, and, in some case, outside stakeholders. Rath and Conchie (2008) suggested that “…integrity and honesty are the outcomings of strong relationships built on trust” (p. 84). Integrity is especially critical during counter-insurgency operations. During such maneuvers, the U.S. Departments of Defense and State must mobilize the goodwill of the local populace. To rally the necessary support from the surrounding area, the locals must feel protected, which means
that military deeds and remarks must be beyond reproach (Department of the Army, 2006). Nonetheless, researchers have shown that toxic leaders demonstrate little concern for the consequences of their actions or decisions, as long as the outcome meets their self-serving interest (Johnson, 2015; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Post, 1993).

Caldwell and Canuto-Carranco (2010) referred to self-serving leaders as well as their followers as organizational terrorists. These individuals undermine the effectiveness of the organization and, ultimately, destroy relationships, both internal and external to the organization. They also hamper an organization’s ability to achieve long-term objectives. From a military perspective, if these types of leaders remain in position, especially in areas like Iraq or other nations facing a manifestation of an insurgency, the U.S. Army, along with other governmental partners, may be fighting a two-pronged campaign. In other words, military and diplomatic leaders are fighting with a known or expected enemy (i.e., adversarial political insurgents) while, in some cases, encountering acts of terrorism within the organization or institution. In both instances, these individuals view others as a means to achieve a given objective with limited consideration and obligation to their society or employees (Caldwell & Canuto-Carranco, 2010). With this in mind, toxic leaders may have an inability to distinguish between moral and immoral outcomes.

The ability to make distinct differences between moral and immoral conclusions during the decision-making process is critical for maintaining trusting relationships with employees and indigenous societies. Contemporary military leaders must appreciate the importance of honing their skills into becoming a skilled tactician as well as a gifted diplomat. Again, one critical factor of being a successful diplomat and counteracting
insurgents is by forging trusting relationships with their particular host nation. Insurgents thrive in violent, immoral, distrustful, and deceitful environments, so leaders must set a climate that shields against moral complacency. Some studies suggest that overcoming such complacency requires a certain level of moral sensitivity and imagination (Moberg & Seabright, 2000). Moberg and Seabright (2000) described moral sensitivity as maintaining an awareness of how one’s actions could disturb the well-being of others. 

*Moral imagination*, on the other hand, is the process of analyzing options and weighing any implications, followed by considering their effects on other plans while taking into account any potential impacts on the interests and opinions of others (Moberg & Seabright, 2000). Global complexities may require decision-makers to possess some degree of moral imagination. However, moral imagination may not make a difference if they are unwilling or unable to confront their shortcomings.

Depending on a leader’s ego, he or she may become blind to their shortcomings (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Some leaders may believe their past attributes or successes will continue to thrust them towards bigger and better things. However, what they may not realize is that earlier strengths may become a weakness in later years (Lombardo, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1988). As an example, technical competence becomes less critical if the leader is unable to think comprehensively while being capable of shaping future events or outcomes. As discussed by Lombardo et al. (1998), the best leaders demonstrate a willingness to learn from all kinds of people (superiors, peers, and subordinates, alike) and situations. In counter-insurgency operations, military commanders must foster an environment that facilitates an open dialogue with all ranks to encourage a learning environment. Such climates allow experiences to swiftly
disseminate throughout the organization to ensure the unit is well adapted to new challenges (Department of the Army, 2006).

The U.S. Army counter-insurgency field manual (2006) mandates that leaders maintain a sense of self-awareness to allow them the ability to assess their limitations as well as capabilities. This means they must be willing to acknowledge their faults and shortcomings (Department of the Army, 2006). However, some leaders are incapable of conducting such internal evaluations because they may be caught up in their self-worth. While being concerned with their self-worth, these individuals may be displaying some degree of incompetence.

Because the U.S. Military answers to civilian leadership, the researcher also considered potential incompetence of political leaders within the Executive and Legislative Branches. Regarding the current socio-political environment, Way (2012) defined incompetent leadership as an individual’s actions or inactions threatening political or national security interests. He also suggested that hasty political or institutional change breeds incompetence because it makes it more difficult for leaders and organizations to conduct sound environmental analyses, such as identifying internal strengths and weaknesses, followed by the evaluation of known or anticipated external opportunities and threats. In the absence of thorough analyses, toxic leaders may eventually begin to blame others for their incompetence or shortcomings because they surround themselves with like-minded individuals. Regardless, given the complexities of the world today, military leaders must also be willing to take necessary risks.

The military profession is a hazardous occupation. Thus, military commanders must demonstrate a willingness to assume some amount of risks. As commanders
assume these hazards, they must feel confident that superiors will underwrite any
associated dangers, as long as the decision is ethical, legal as well as moral and will
minimize any excessive stress on the local population. Such confidence is promoted
through trust. However, if commanders determine they will be used as scapegoats, they
could become less willing to take necessary actions. Trusting relationships encourage
risk-taking. Lowney (2003) believed that successful organizations thrive in environments
that cultivate continuous learning, inspire innovation, support sound judgment, assume
responsibility for their actions, and demonstrate a willingness to take risks. However,
toxic leaders may stifle one or all of these concepts due to their dysfunctional personality
traits.

Lastly, another dysfunctional quality that is a leading indicator for identifying
toxic individuals is narcissism (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). Physicians describe a
narcissistic personality as an individual who possesses a grandiose sense of self-
importance while being preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success and power (Post,
1993), in addition to lacking a sense of empathy towards others. Many of these
individuals are suggested to have an emotional nature when it comes to criticism, which
may account for some leaders’ unwillingness to accept responsibility for failure.
Lipman-Blumen (2005) supports this idea: “…ego[s]…blind leaders to the shortcomings
of their own…thus limit their capacity for self-renewal” (p. 21). As a result, these toxic
individuals may turn to scapegoating measures. People with narcissistic personality traits
exhibit a high level of self-esteem, but they are fragile because of their constant need for
attention (Post, 1993). Researchers believe that because of their self-centeredness and
inability to show emotional empathy, their relationships will typically deteriorate
(Ronningstam, 2016). Eventually, many of these dysfunctional qualities will lead to destructive behavior, which is another element of toxic leadership.

**Destructive Behavior**

The actions or behaviors of these poisonous individuals can undoubtedly have a devastating effect on their organizations (Johnson, 2015). Therefore, destructive behaviors are yet another aspect of recognizing toxic individuals. Below are a few signs of destructive behaviors:

- Abusing leadership;
- Disinclining to accept criticism and imposing strict compliance;
- Misdiagnosing issues and problems (instituting unrealistic visions);
- Lacking transparency;
- Engaging in unethical or illegal deeds; and
- Failing to nurture followers.

Leaders who demonstrate a willingness to foster an authoritarian style of leadership could be seen as offensive leaders. Johnson (2015) reported that 90% of individuals responding to a survey stated they had experienced abusive or disrespectful bosses. Many of these leaders make inappropriate threats for not complying with directives, even if the instructions are immoral, illegal, or unethical. Thoroughgood, Hunter, and Sawyer (2010) advocated that abusive leaders foster a “get the job done at any cost” (p. 649) temperament. This type of goal-setting ultimately creates unethical environments, which may become counterproductive to the organization achieving its
strategic objectives. As a result of these leaders’ abusive style, they may become disinclined to accept criticism and could impose strict compliance.

A leader’s inability to take criticism or refusal to compromise demonstrates some reluctance to foster a learning and innovative organization. Such conduct also illustrates a certain level of recklessness, especially when encountering adversarial insurgents. Because insurgent organizations operation is small units or cells, military commanders must be prepared to decentralize authority to subordinates in the fight. Leaders engaged with this type of enemy must learn to develop nonauthoritarian interpersonal skills to allow themselves to enhance their intellectual and emotional adaptiveness when facing difficult challenges (Department of the Army, 2006), such as insurgents. From a political leadership standpoint, imposing strict compliance can have a devastating effect on national security interests. An example of demanding the utmost conformity was the planning efforts leading up to Operation Iraqi Freedom, which resulted in leadership’s inability to accurately diagnose the issues at hand.

As stated, toxic leadership can impact an organization’s ability to achieve long-term or strategic objectives. Before moving forward, an understanding must be established about why military actions are conducted, namely large-scale operations. The essence of a nation engaging in war is merely a means to achieve some political end. This conclusion was drawn by the renowned military strategist, Carl von Clausewitz, who wrote, “…the political object…will be the standard for determining both the aim of the military force, and also the amount of effort to be made” (von Clausewitz, 2009).

However, in the case of planning for Operation Iraqi Freedom, the former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, and other senior officials spent little time considering post-
war activities, which is the end game, and more time and effort on planning the operation (Dennison, 2007). Case in point, Pentagon planners spent nearly two years preparing for combat operations, whereas the planning staff only spent two months identifying post-war objectives (Dennison, 2007).

Not only did the planners lack ample time to prepare for post-war objectives adequately, but they did so without collaborating with Middle Eastern experts in the Department of State. In short, the planning effort was isolated to the Pentagon. Instead of working with State Department professionals, the Pentagon team was led by a retired U.S. Army general officer with little regional experience and absolutely no familiarity in nation-building efforts (Dennison, 2007). As a possible result of rigidness and unwillingness to analyze the full scope of invading or liberating a nation was the process of reestablishing governing activities, which might have been an afterthought. A decision was made at the highest levels of the U.S. government to remove all the technocrats and military professionals from the government of Iraq because of their affiliation with the Baathist Party, also known as De-Baathification (Pfiffner, 2010). Many senior military and intelligence officers opposed this decision. Due to leadership’s unwillingness to explore the full scope of invading Iraq, Vice President Dick Cheney communicated an unrealistic vision, “American troops would be greeted as liberators” (Knowlton, 2003). This is an example of lacking transparency.

Leaders that foster transparency throughout their organizations create an environment of trust, open dialogue, collaboration, and innovation. Transparency is an essential element for creating stability for any group or society (Rath & Conchie, 2008). Organizations or government institutions that practice a closed sense of transparency
often exhibit questionable behavior, and this allows for misinformation, along with deception, to circulate throughout their agencies or societies. As commanders attempt to establish stability for communities fighting against radical insurgents, they must maintain a climate of openness in addition to preserving a steadfast moral compass that echoes into the community. Indeed, transparency nurtures trusting relationships, but failing to practice suitable behavior will, eventually, form an atmosphere of unethical and illicit activities.

The Department of Defense has sanctioned over 500 cases of misconduct of senior military and civilian officials. It was reported that senior Department of Defense officials responsible for authorizing the investigations were not transparent when it came to the punishment these toxic leaders received (Vanden Brook, 2017). Subsequently, this created a perception that senior leaders were a breed apart from other service members and civilian employees, with different rules and little accountability (Vanden Brook, 2017). In fact, this appearance alone promotes toxic environments because others begin to believe these leaders have special legal privileges, which may cause them to become resentful. Thus, their actions may have had negative influences on their followers. It is important to realize that while these leaders were negatively impacting their organizations, they were also failing to nurture their followers, which is a significant element for supervising young Millennial officers. The reason for nurturing Millennial officers will be discussed later in this chapter, but the next section will review toxic leadership from several military authors’ perspectives.
Toxic Leadership from a Military Perspective

The Army defines leaders as, “…anyone who by virtue of assumed role or assigned responsibility inspires and influences people to accomplish organizational goals. Army leaders motive people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue actions, focus thinking and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization” (Department of the Army, 2012, p. 1). The former Chief of Staff of the Army, General Raymond Odierno, understood that today’s rapidly changing environment mandated that Army leaders appreciate the importance of adaptive learning, group collaboration, subordinate empowerment, open communication or transparency, and prudent risk-taking all to accomplish the mission.

Over the years, the U.S. Army has endorsed studies on leadership and the value of positive command or work environments. Army officers, past and present, have also written extensively about the subject of toxic leadership, whether as students in professional military education programs or as concerned leaders who love and value their profession. Many of these individuals have either worked for or served with toxic leaders, and they fully understand how such leadership can negatively influence our most cherished resource: America’s young sons and daughters. These authors also recognize that these young soldiers deserve competent, ethical, and professional leaders, given the hazards of the occupation. There are several points the researcher focused on while gathering information on toxic military leaders:

- Tough leaders versus petty tyrants;
- Mission first (all about the ends forget about the means);
- Leader intentions versus subordinate perceptions; and
• Technical competence above interpersonal connections with subordinates.

Although many Americans have tremendous confidence in their military leaders (Reed, 2015), the military, as an institution, is merely a subset of society and has faced many incidences with toxic leaders. However, some young soldiers mischaracterize strong leaders as toxic or petty tyrants. Because of the hazards associated with being a professional service member, leaders are required to balance their leadership styles based on the situation at hand. This is critical because the penalty for subpar performance can cost lives and result in mission failure. As Reed (2015) suggested, tough leaders set high standards while confronting poor performers with a host of appropriate authorities without degrading their subordinates or followers. In contrast, petty tyrants, also known as bullies, lead through coercion, are often oppressive and small-minded, and mistreat others who act and think differently (Reed, 2015). In many instances, they additionally lack emotional intelligence or fail to establish an interpersonal style of leadership (Reed & Olsen, 2010). For instances, in some cases, General George Patton is viewed as a charismatic field commander who achieves results. However, many view the manner in which he accomplished his missions as toxic.

General Patton was a bold, audacious, and intelligent tactician. However, he was viewed as an offensive leader (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). During World-War II, he understood his mission was to destroy the German Army, but he pushed his organizations no matter the cost. This can be detrimental to any organization. Reed (2015) asserted the following: mission accomplishment alone should not determine the effectiveness of an organization. He went on to say, “Leaders who fail to consider the long-term impact of a high operational tempo can run the best of units into the ground” (p. 54). Thus, the
theory of mission first is somewhat questionable simply because how a commander attains success is equally as important as completing the task itself—means and ends are equally important. Although a commander may have the best of intentions, his or her actions may be perceived as unfavorable by their followers.

The proof of quality leadership is determined by one followers’ willingness to act for a higher purpose (Department of the Army, 2012). Subsequently, followers must perceive that their leader’s intentions are seen as advancing the organization’s interest rather than a self-serving agenda. A commander’s conduct or decisions can make a difference in connecting them to their subordinates or followers (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011). If followers lack confidence that their leadership has their best interests at heart, then that leader’s ability to connect will be limited, and their capacity to influence will be greatly diminished. Haslam et al. (2011) made an excellent point when they categorized leadership as a group-based process of mutual respect and shared perspective. In the hopes of gaining reciprocal appreciation along with understanding with followers, leaders must value the essence of social connections.

Studies have shown that many upper-level leaders fail or plateau not because of their technical capabilities but for their failure to develop relationships and to possess some sense of emotional intelligence (Lombardo, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1988; Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). Reed and Olsen (2010) reiterated this point by suggesting that technical competence is not a substitute for interpersonal skills within the leadership arena. Given this idea, the Army believes the most effective organizations are led by competent yet respectful leaders who understand the importance of mission success and loyal followers (Department of the Army, 2012). Dr. Lieberman (2013) supported this
idea when he suggested, “…leaders who were strong in results focus and in social skills, the likelihood of being seen as a great leader…is 72%” (p. 2). Hence, leaders with deep connections with their subordinates have a more significant potential to influence and create enormous amounts of energy throughout their organizations (Maxwell, 2007). Leadership is far more personable than simply managing resources (e.g., people, money, time, material) (Burke, 2014). With all this in mind, military leaders must learn to connect with their personnel, particularly young Millennial officers.

**Understanding Millennials**

The Millennial generation, born between 1979 and 1994 (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010), are suggested to be the largest group in the nation’s history, along with being the most racially and ethnically diverse (Woodall, 2004). This demographic has been exposed to a multitude of complex issues because of rapid technological advancements, thereby providing them with greater access to information. Some may negatively stereotype this group by referring to them as needy, whiny, selfish, and disrespectful (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). However, others describe them as sheltered, confident, team-oriented, conventional, pressured, and achieving (Woodall, 2004). Despite some of these characteristics, Millennials have advanced capacities in such things as information technology, and because of their diversity, they also view problems and opportunities from fresh perspectives (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Moving forward, leaders must learn to gain a greater appreciation for tomorrow’s leaders. The following aspects will help to understand the next generation of leaders:

- World view;
• Career perspectives and expectations;
• Views on leadership; and
• Need for organizational relationships.

World View

Over the years, Millennials have witnessed the U.S. reputation diminish because of unpopular wars. For this reason, many of them may possess a reduced view of the United States’ superiority on the world stage (Gershman, Gjelten, Grebowski, Hayden, Muravchik, Rieff, & Zantovsky, 2014). Millennials began experiencing the world at an early age. Many have traveled extensively. Their travels range from family vacations to living, working, or studying abroad (Gershman et al., 2014). Not only do their travel encounters provide different perspectives, but they have also observed the nastiness of the U.S. socio-political climate and the sinking moral compass of many political leaders. Subsequently, Gershman et al. (2014) believed that Millennials may question whether the U.S. has the moral right to provide global leadership when her house is not in order.

Although Millennials question the United States’ current ability to lead the world, they are still optimistic. Many of these young adults believe the nation’s security depends on multilateral agreements with partner countries. They also firmly believe that, with these agreements, the U.S. should encompass her allies’ interests. Gershman et al. (2014) wrote that Millenials “….embrace a robust foreign policy with more…engagement beyond our borders” (p. 48). A possible reason for their desire to cooperate with other nations is because of their most exceptional generational trait: group collaboration, or
being team-oriented, which will be discussed later in this chapter. For now, the subsequent section will center around Millennials’ career perspectives and expectations.

**Career Perspectives and Expectations**

To ensure the U.S. Army retains the most talented young officers, senior leaders must aggressively learn to understand the motivators of the next generation. Some researchers (Maylett & Wride, 2017) have referred to these stimuli as *employee experiences*. Such experiences are described as the diverse opinions employees have about their interactions with their organization and its leaders (Maylett & Wride, 2017). Once these motivational aspects are discovered, only then can the Department of the Army develop strategies to ensure the right officers are retained and the right conditions are established to promote high levels of performance.

The first expectations that Millennials have from their employer are transparency and open communication. For commanders engaged in combat operations, open lines of communication are critical for outthinking and out adapting their adversaries, simply because counter-insurgent tactics are continuously changing (Department of the Army, 2006). Open communication facilitates information sharing and allows others to maintain a sense of situation awareness and understanding. According to Myers and Sadaghiani (2010), Millennials are less likely to accept “need-to-know” policies. Although they understand the security aspect of sharing classified information, they want to be kept in the loop as much as possible. In doing so, they obtain a clear understanding of their commanders’ intentions and the evolving nature of their environment. The following quote supports this idea, “…Millennials’ expectation that supervisors freely share information such as strategic plans while they are being formulated…” (Myers &
Sadaghiani, 2010, p. 229). Access to information is a necessity for the development of new order or change (Wheatley, 2006). Millennials seem to understand the flow of information is nourishment for any organization or society.

Not only do Millennials value the magnitude of information, but they also know the significance of meaningful work. It is reported that this generation is increasingly seeking employment in organizations whose values and mission go beyond earning a profit, thereby assisting society as well (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Investigations have shown that Millennials are willing to put in the extra effort to assist their organizations during stressful periods (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010). The question is, are leaders giving them insignificant tasks and are leaders living up to the Army’s core values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage?

By understanding some of the Millennials’ expectations, Army leaders must aggressively uphold its beliefs, also referred to as an institution’s operating system (Maylett & Wride, 2017), to influence how they think, which ultimately determines how they behave (Maylett & Wride, 2017). If commanders and leaders demonstrate their desires to have a positive impact on humanity, in this case, the countries in which soldiers are serving, along with challenging tasks, then Millennials are willing to go the extra mile (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010; Woodall, 2004). Essentially, commanders must communicate a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself (Maylett & Wride, 2017) to instill a feeling of accomplishment and gratification.

The idea of achieving societal triumphs is supported by multiple researchers, but Ng et al. (2010) wrote the most enlightening passage: “…Millennials are said to have a desire to ‘save the world’ and are likely to have high expectations for social responsibility
and ethical behavior on the part of their employers” (p. 283). This alone is a telling indicator of how Millennials view private and public leaders. Outside of this sense of leading a purposeful life, Millennials also firmly believe that if advancements and opportunities are unobtainable, they are unafraid to seek employment elsewhere (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Woodall, 2004). That said, leaders must attempt to foster a nurturing work environment for these young officers.

**Views on Leadership**

It is assumed that because of Millennials’ sheltered upbringing, they crave an encouraging and supportive work setting (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Woodall, 2004). However, some corporate supervisors and managers view these appeals as being high-maintenance. While this may be the perception at first glance, Hershatter and Epstein (2010) showed that many of these young adults grew up in an over-protective environment. At a young age, they were also encouraged to develop close relationships with their parents, teachers, advisors, and other adult figureheads (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). As a result of these early relationships, as these young adults enter the workforce, Millennials have continued this longing to engage with significant individuals of authority to provide guidance as well as constant feedback (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).

Because of their appetite for constant feedback, supervisors must become proficient at mentoring these sheltered but talented individuals. During Hershatter and Epstein’s (2010) research project, they suggested the following: “Instead of letting new workers crash to the ground and emerge bruised and frightened to try again, managers who slowly but surely take off the training wheels will find that when they eventually let
go, Millennials will ride on their own” (p. 218). This, in essence, is saying that leaders must become more tolerant and show a willingness to develop more of a coaching, or parenting, in some cases, temperament. Hershatter and Epstein (2010) went on to suggest that Millennials are loyal to and strive in organizations that offer sufficient career opportunities, provide professional development and training, and demonstrate a capacity to coach and mentor along the way: “…they are loyal to organizations that are loyal to them” (p. 220).

**Need for Organizational Relationship**

In addition to providing continuous access to supervisors and managers, another aspect of creating a nurturing atmosphere for Millennials is by assigning team-oriented tasks. Millennials view such projects as learning opportunities with respected colleagues and leaders (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). As external environmental factors (e.g., political, economic, social, technological, and ecological) become continuously unstable, thereby playing a tremendous role in influencing organizations’ activities, group-based assignments have become increasing fundamental. The pace of change requires that private corporations and government organizations alike become more cross-functional, cooperative, and synchronized, not just with internal departments but outside the organization as well.

Millennials are reported to contribute their best efforts when working in collaborative environments (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). It is because of their concerted nature that daunting issues do not appear to trouble Millennials. Instead, it seems to inspire them as they assemble their abilities to tackle the issues at hand (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). As the researcher attempts to analyze Millennials further, the following
section will highlight the research methodology used to investigate the experiences of toxic leadership and the influence it may have on young junior officers. Before closing this section, even though a broad assortment of information about Millennials is provided in this section, research had to maintain an open mind through this study to prevent biases along with negative stereotypes to overshadow the investigative process.

**Qualitative Research – Phenomenological**

Toxic leadership is not a new phenomenon. The history books are filled with leaders who displayed destructive and dysfunctional leadership styles as they governed nations or led private companies. Two leaders who come to mind are Niccolo Machiavelli and Bernard Madoff, respectively. These individuals were skilled at manipulating others for their ends while setting aside any consciousness of morality. Today, such individuals who engage in deceptive tactics are called Machiavellian leaders (Lipman-Blumen, 2005). This style of leadership can and eventually will have a long-term impact on the organization and, in some cases, the country (Williams, 2016). Lipman-Blumen (2005) and Williams (2016) went on to imply that firms and societies have a long history of promoting and electing psychopaths, narcissists, bullies, and autocrats who are dedicated to their egotistical goals. The U.S. Army has had its fair share of toxic leaders, as previously illustrated. The behavior of toxic leaders is extensively examined, but for this chapter, the question is, “What methods are used to study and understand how encounters with toxic leaders are experienced by Millennial followers?” The approach selected for this project is a qualitative design called the phenomenological research method.
What is Phenomenological Research?

Phenomenological studies are used to capture human experiences from those who lived through these encounters. Dukes (1984) stated, “Human experience is meaningful to those who live it, and its meaning is there to be ‘seen’, grasped directly” (p. 198). Another way to view a phenomenological inquiry is, probing the way experiences reveal themselves (Sanders, 1982). In short, phenomenological inquiry is the process of determining what influenced and directed the situation along with how it is perceived by the people being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). For this project, the phenomenon is toxic leaders and leadership, and the researcher was attempting to discover how it is experienced or observed by young Millennial junior officers. Dukes (1984) acknowledged that, to fully understand how Millennials experience toxic leaders, the researcher must spend extensive time with the participants to see the experience as they see it.

Preparing for and Collecting Data

Sanders (1982) claimed that the researcher must engage in thorough investigative sessions with a limited number of participants, three to six, as he or she tries to gain an in-depth appreciation of the experienced phenomenon, which, in this case, is the influences of toxic leadership. Nonetheless, new research has shown that ten to fifteen individuals makes sense, depending on the phenomenon (Vagle, 2014). The number of participants is dependent on the method of gathering information, such as interviews, observations, or a combination thereof and, subsequently, the availability of time.

Researchers, as well as their readers, must understand that phenomenological studies are not experimental, comparative, or correlative (Vagle, 2014). Instead, they are
potential opportunities to gather essential information about the phenomenon being investigated, which at times may require unstructured interviews to facilitate open and honest conversations (Vagle, 2014). Vagle (2014) stated that “The goal is to find out as much as you can about the phenomenon from each particular participant” (p. 79). Again, questions must be asked in such a way as to allow for full disclosure of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). As the interviews are being conducted a researcher must ensure the session is recorded to allow them to systematically present questions without being distracted by taking notes (Sanders, 1982). After the sessions, all interviews must be transcribed to facilitate data analysis.

Analyzing the Data

Once the interviews are completed and written into narrative form, Sanders (1982) describes four fundamental questions that should be asked when conducting phenomenological data analysis:

1. How may the phenomenon or experience under investigation be described?
2. What are the themes emergent in those descriptions?
3. What are the subjective reflections of those themes?
4. What are the essences present in those themes and subjective reflections?

Sanders’ (1982) questions are essentially designed to guide the researcher’s focus as they attempt to understand the meanings behind the information collected. Comparatively, Moustakas (1994) and Vagle (2014) also explained four critical points to guide data analysis. Although their wording was not the same, their approach or intention was similar:

1. Understand the moment in relation to the broader situation.
2. Focus on intentionality versus subjective experience.

3. Balance verbatim passages, paraphrased remarks, and author descriptions or interpretations.

4. Construct a description of the meanings and essence of the experience.

Before moving any further, intentionality must first be defined. From the author’s perspective, intentionality is the intimate connection between self and the consciousness of our environment. However, Moustakas (1994) described intentionality as “…recognize that self and world are inseparable components of meaning” (p. 28), whereas, Vagle’s (2014) view of intentionality was, “…the inseparable connectedness between [humans] and objects…in the world” (p. 27). However, the simplest term of reference is Sanders’ (1982) illustration: “…the correlation between the object and the appearance of the object to consciousness” (p. 354). To add, Moustakas (1994) continued to describe how intentional acts are substantiated while feeling acts can be refuted. He went on to suggest that, although the perception of the sky remains the same, the feeling of amazement may eventually fade.

Intuition is another essential aspect of phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). Through intuition, investigators are capable of obtaining an appreciation for the noted experience while refraining from day-to-day judgments (Moustakas, 1994). This act of suppression is also known as epoche. Sanders (1982) also referred to epoche as the temporary suspension of personal biases, beliefs, preconditions, or assumptions, all for the purpose of gaining a pure and unencumbered vision of what is primarily happening. Ultimately, this analysis will have a significant part to play in determining whether Millennials’ work experiences were abusive, destructive, and demeaning.
Responsible Leadership Theory

When it comes to toxic leaders and their alleged condescending, offensive, and dysfunctional encounters with followers or subordinates, a survey administered by the Center of Creative Leadership reported that respondents believed approximately 50% of the leaders or managers were ineffective or incompetent (Williams, 2016). Although ineffective leadership has not been previously mentioned, in The Academy of Management Journal, Brown (1964) categorized the actions of ineffective leaders as thoughtless, crude, and irresponsible while lowering morale, fostering hostility, and squandering valuable resources. Incompetent leaders are equally destructive. These individuals lack the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to achieve organizational objectives (Johnson, 2015). Given these details, both ineffectiveness and incompetence are also forms of toxic leadership, not responsible leadership. In the long run, what is at stake here is a leader’s ability to build trusting relationships within and beyond his or her organization.

What is Responsible Leadership Theory?

Responsible leadership theory is the relational and ethical experience that occurs between those who affect and are affected by leadership and have a shared sense of purpose when encountering problems and challenges (Maak & Pless, 2006; Pless & Maak, 2011). Furthermore, responsible leaders are characterized as individuals who act humanely and morally, demonstrate acts of authenticity and integrity, and are attentive to the needs and interest of others while harnessing emotional and ethical intelligence when faced with emerging dilemmas (Maak & Pless, 2006). Recognizing the value of this theory allowed the researcher to compare and contrast any findings noted in the study.
with the intention of reflecting on possible recommendations for mitigating the impact of toxic leadership if required. Toxic leadership is counter-intuitive in today’s complex and interconnected global society, especially as the U.S. Army continues to encounter insurgents in multiple locations around the world.

Because interconnections are a leading contributor to global complexities, current leaders must forge trusting connections with a multitude of stakeholders. Doing so will require leaders to consider the views and objectives of the partners when undertaking activities and planning processes. Such actions will demonstrate a significant degree of responsibility, both inside and outside of the organization. To reemphasize this point, counter-insurgency operations require commanders and their subordinate leaders to build strong relationships with the local government and surrounding populace, which calls for individuals in charge to possess a sense of emotional intelligence. Because of the inclusiveness of responsible leadership theory, this leadership style may assist in cultivating emotionally intelligent leaders for the future.

**Inclusiveness of Responsible Leadership Theory**

**Authentic leadership.** Concerning self-awareness and self-regulation, Pless and Maak (2011) have suggested that responsible leadership overlaps with authentic leadership. From a broader perspective, authentic leaders know and are true to themselves. Johnson (2015) reported four aspects of authenticity. The first characteristic is self-awareness. Individuals who practice self-awareness are keenly aware of their strengths and weaknesses, personal traits, and emotional patterns (Johnson, 2015). This idea is echoed in Army doctrine: “...self-aware leaders will learn from each decision and
action…” (Department of the Army, 2012, p.4). Self-awareness is also believed to be an essential skill required to succeed in foreign and challenging environments (Lowney, 2003). The second characteristic is the ability to remain objective when receiving information, particularly when the information conflicts with desired objectives (Johnson, 2015). This quality is critical for Army leaders facing ambiguous situations. Third, authentic leaders are capable of internalizing moral perspectives (Johnson, 2015). These individuals can align their values with intentions and actions, all the while influencing, energizing, and developing their followers (Pless & Maak, 2011). The final characteristic is relational transparency or possessing the willingness to expose one’s true self to others and openly express their thoughts and feelings at the fitting time (Johnson, 2015).

Comparable to authentic leadership, responsible leadership includes all the desired qualities of authentic leaders, but it also harnesses the importance of social capital (Pless & Maak, 2011), which is necessary to unite human networks and communities to make cooperative actions feasible (Maak, 2007). As with all other views of leadership, authenticity is based on perception.

**Servant leadership.** The idea that leadership is primarily concentrated on one’s constituents or followers, in this case, is a shared theme between servant and responsible leadership (Pless & Maak, 2011). Servant leaders put the concerns of their followers first (Johnson, 2015). Those who practice a servant style of leadership view themselves as protectors as well as nurturers of the organization. Servant leaders protect their organizations through empathic and listening skills (Johnson, 2015). They are also sincere about their obligations and responsibilities, yet they simultaneously view their
followers as partners rather than mere subordinates. However, responsible leadership differs from servant leadership primarily because it is not concentrated on serving others. Instead it focuses on responding to others’ interests and needs, which captures external stakeholders and society at large (Pless & Maak, 2011). The key phrase here is “responding to others” and not merely serving others. Responsible leaders demonstrate a broad sense of community, resulting in a comprehensive view of other stakeholders’ concerns (Maak & Pless, 2006).

**Transformational leadership.** In their study, Pless and Maak (2011) offered a resemblance between transformational and responsible leadership. Both are described as being visionaries, inspirational, intellectually stimulating, and excellent coaches or mentors. Transformational leaders are known to influence the higher order of needs: esteem, competence, self-fulfillment, and self-actualization (Johnson, 2015). Because of their ability to connect with others, transformational and responsible leaders tend to elevate their followers’ performance levels simply because followers are encouraged to forge trusting relationships with their colleagues (Johnson, 2015). Through these relationships, followers become more collaborative, committed, creative, and willing to take necessary risks, thereby maintaining a learning and innovative climate while the organization functions in a synchronized manner (Maak, 2007). Lowney (2003) agreed when he wrote, “…organizations perform best when team members…trust one another and sacrifice self-interest to support team goals and colleagues’ success” (p. 32).

Although the two styles are similar, there are some differences.

As suggested earlier, responsible leaders view their employees or followers as stakeholders who are encouraged to not only enhance the organization’s performance but
to mobilize one another in support of organizational and societal objectives (Pless & Maak, 2011). Responsible leaders accomplish this by focusing on the necessity to balance the interest of other stakeholders and establish goals through negotiation (Voegtlin, 2011), which, in the current U.S. socio-political environment, is non-existent. Through responsible leadership the idea of leading has morphed into a concept of networked relationships with multiple stakeholders, thus creating new social perceptions of leadership whereby the leader is the bridge builder of relationships with stakeholders throughout and beyond the organization (Pless & Maak, 2011).

**Summary**

In conclusion, the rationale of this literature review was to highlight existing research material on recognizing toxic leaders or leadership, understand Millennials, explore phenomenological research design, and familiarize readers with responsible leadership theory. Each one of these topics was essential for comprehending how Millennials experience toxic leaders or leadership and determining whether any leadership theories exist to counteract the influences of these experiences. Toxic leaders can have an overwhelming effect on their organizations or nations, which can, eventually, lead to devastating results for any country or institution. This point holds true for the U.S. Army. If toxic leadership does have a negative influence on Millennial junior officers, then the U.S. Army may experience tremendous difficulty with retaining the most promising young officers to lead the next generation of soldiers.
CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The goal of qualitative research projects is to change a specific phenomenon or alter the lives of those participating in the study. In doing so, the researcher must attempt to provide a voice for those affected, thereby increasing awareness and enriching the quality of life for those involved (Creswell, 2013). In most cases, and, as previously suggested, these discovery topics originate through personal experiences or “real life” issues (Creswell, 2013). This project explores whether toxic leadership is having an impact on young Millennial officers in the U.S. Army.

A toxic leader is someone who engages in destructive behavior or exhibits dysfunctional personality characteristics. In most instances, such toxic leaders also nurture climates of divisiveness and dysfunction throughout their institutions and organizations to achieve self-interest plus short-term objectives. To discover if toxic leadership environments are having an impact on Millennial junior officers, a qualitative research methodology was employed. The fundamental intent of the study was to explore what recommendations, if any, might be needed for the leadership development of young officers in the U.S. Army. As previously pointed out, because of the burdens of fighting in two prolonged wars, which generated enormous demands to increase the size of the force, the U.S. Army promoted several individuals primarily based on competence rather than assessing the whole persons. To carry out a comprehensive individual assessment, leaders must evaluate other personal qualities as well, such as emotional intelligence,
strategic thinking, temperament, trustworthiness, and whether they are a team player, just to name a few.

To compound the U.S. Army’s issue of toxic leadership further, civilian political leaders who are directly responsible for military actions and policies are also displaying forms of destructive behavior and dysfunctional personality characteristics. Today, world leaders are communicating misleading information and continuously playing on individuals’ emotions rather than conveying facts and practicing intuitive thought. If senior U.S. Army leaders do not identify methods to mitigate the potential effects of toxic leadership, whether by military-affiliated officials or within the current socio-political environment, the institution may confront the repercussion in years to come.

**Research Questions**

This phenomenological dissertation in practice sought to discover the effects of toxic leadership on the employee experiences of Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army aged 22 to 30. As part of that discovery process, the following two research questions were used:

- Research Question One: “Have Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army experienced toxic leadership?”
- Research Question Two: “How have these experiences impacted their perception about their present and future professional work experience as leaders in the U.S. Army?”

Since qualitative studies are inductive by nature (Roberts, 2010), the project was not attempting to test a particular hypothesis. Instead, the study was attempting to discover
and describe the experiences of Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army, as it pertains to toxic leadership.

**Research Design**

This study illustrates what is versus what should be (Babbie, 2014). To investigate if toxic leadership is adversely influencing Millennial junior commissioned officers, the researcher must interpret, evaluate, and communicate the events being encountered. In the course of this investigation, not only did the author utilize a phenomenological design, but he also used document analysis during the triangulation process to enhance the validity of the study. Using the two styles helped the researcher reduce the amount of ambiguity that readers may come across while viewing the study (Babbie, 2014). Initially, to capture experiences with toxic leadership, a survey design, more specifically, interview surveying, was applied. As highlighted by Creswell (2014), interviews are one of the four fundamental sources for qualitative projects. Based on questions presented to the participants, the researcher gained an in-depth appreciation of how each encountered and viewed toxic leadership, coupled with how these dysfunctional leaders influenced the leadership behavior of his or her subordinates. Both the document analysis and triangulation processes are discussed further in this chapter.

**Participants**

As the researcher began framing this phenomenological project, he understood the importance of selecting only Millennial officers within the desired age and rank groups. The target population was U.S. Army officers between the ages of 22 to 30, coupled with individuals in the ranks of second lieutenant (O1) to captain (O3) and warrant officer
(W1) to chief warrant officer (W2). However, the most critical individuals necessary to investigate the phenomenon of toxic leaders or leadership are those who have encountered such acts (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Vagle, 2014). From this standpoint, the examiner selected individuals within the targeted population, then through the in-person interview process he would ask the participants whether they had experienced toxic leaders or leadership while serving in the U.S. Army. As an illustration, the researcher posed the following question: “Have you ever experienced or witnessed toxic leadership behavior from any of your superiors, peers, or subordinates?” Once it was determined the participant had met the necessary criteria, which was experiencing toxic leadership, only then would the researcher continue with the interview process. The research took place within the “Green Zone” area of Baghdad, Iraq. On that premise, the participants were assigned to the U.S. Embassy or Coalition Forces compound, which was adjacent to the embassy. Because of mandated travel restrictions throughout Iraq, the researcher could only interview individuals from these locations.

When describing the essence of what groups have experienced and in what manner (i.e., how), it is essential that the author clearly define the shared phenomenon. To collect the necessary data, Creswell (2013) underscores the use of in-depth interviews. When conducting these interview sessions, the importance of identifying textural (what) and structural (how) descriptions cannot be overemphasized. This allowed the author to acquire a greater appreciation for the participants’ torments.

As described in Chapter Two, anywhere between three to fifteen participants is a sufficient sample size to gain an in-depth perspective of how individuals experienced toxic leadership. Even so, Creswell (2013) suggested that upwards of 25 individuals is
not uncommon, mainly if a participant-observation method is being employed. However, because of travel restrictions throughout the area where the research took place, field observations were not feasible. The interviews followed an interactive process whereby the researcher was attempting to extract information from participants via interviews, then required to analyze and interpret this data to formulate clusters of themes and meanings necessary to develop textural descriptions of toxic experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Given this information, time was a limiting factor, which means a sample size exceeding ten participants would have saturated the researcher’s ability to understand how respondents encountered toxic leadership.

Outside of gaining permission from Creighton University’s IRB to proceed with the research portion of the project, the only other permissions required were from the leadership of the organization where the study was being conducted, along with permission from the survey participants. Because the individuals were assigned to either the U.S. Embassy or Coalition Forces compounds. In light of this, the researcher gained permission from the general officer in charge of the agency. An explanation was provided to the official and, subsequently, authorization was given, and the researcher proceeded with the study. Once the approval was granted by the leadership, written permissions from each participant were essential before advancing with the interview. Within the consent form, individuals were informed that participation was purely voluntary and, whether they participated or not, this project would have no bearing on their military career. Other than the permissions mentioned above, no other consents were necessary, only because the selected population was not considered as a vulnerable group.
Data Collection Tools

Survey interviews were used to obtain a greater understanding of toxic leadership through the eyes of others. While conducting these interviews, the researcher had to remain flexible throughout the process, allowing the author to pursue unanticipated questioning paths (Babbie, 2014). Unstructured interviews are widely used in phenomenological studies because they tend to spur open dialogue and conversation (Vagle, 2014). However, the researcher had to refrain himself from agreeing or disagreeing with the participants’ comments. This act of restraint was to ensure the researcher was learning from the individual rather than the participants acquiring knowledge from the investigator (Vagle, 2014). Thus, the interview process, at times, appeared to be spontaneous discussions.

As queries were being designed, the interviewer had to keep in mind that interviews are primarily about asking the right questions rather than the answers (Babbie, 2014). Creswell (2013) also agreed with this concept of asking more questions: “The longer researchers…get to know the participants, the more they [the researcher] ‘know what they know’ from firsthand information” (p. 20). In view of this, there were eight general questions the researchers asked to break the ice, followed by 15 targeted questions focusing on encounters with toxic leaders, if needed. Two examples of the general questions are, “What is your current age?” and “Where did you attend college and what year did you graduate?” See Appendix B of this study for a further breakdown of the optional questions that were available. The first targeted inquiry was, “Have you experienced toxic leadership?” This initial question was the launch point for determining whether any further questioning was necessary.
Once the interview process was complete, the researcher had to reduce any potential causes of ambiguity. To eliminate or ease any doubts, researchers such as Babbie (2014) and Creswell (2013) suggested using triangulation to enhance a projects’ reliability and validity. Triangulation is the process of synthesizing multiple data sources, methods, researchers, or theories to acquire a corroborative picture of any toxic signals being provided to enrich the accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2013). To enhance the project’s reliability and validity, the author used multiple data sources, also known as data triangulation (Yin, 2014). These sources included not only structured interviews but open-ended questions and document analysis.

During the document analysis process, to examine if toxic leadership is having an adverse effect on future leaders and military operations, the examiner referred to U.S. Army Doctrine Reference Publications, field manuals along with articles and books written by current and former U.S. Army leaders as a means information to either substantiate or contradict any of the information provided. Other media sources were also used to capture examples of toxic socio-political leadership. Synthesizing information acquired from various sources increases the reliability of the information merely because the findings are theoretically more robust (Yin, 2014). Although several articles on military leadership were retrieved from peer-reviewed journals, the majority of the military documents were collected from other online sources: the U.S. Army Publishing Directorate, Center for Army Lessons Learned, and Amazon books. As for the U.S. Army publications, both databases were excellent sources of information and are extensively used throughout the Department of the Army for material about effective leadership and leader development. In addition to triangulation and document analysis,
the researcher used a qualitative data analysis software called QDA Miner. With this qualitative data analysis tool, the researcher could analyze interview transcripts, documents, journal articles, speeches, even entire books, if necessary, all to minimize validity concerns.

**Data Collection Procedures**

To assemble and archive the necessary data, the researcher ensured he audio-recorded each interview session and immediately transcribed the recordings. From this point, the researcher transcribed each session verbatim, then began to paraphrase specific remarks to formulate patterns and themes, as suggest by Moustakas (1994) and Vagle (2014). From these transcripts, Moustaka (1994) recommended undertaking the following steps:

1. Identify significant descriptions of the experience;
2. Record all relevant statements;
3. List all nonrepetitive and nonoverlapping statement to capture units of meaning (also referred to as, horizontalizing [Moustakas, 1994]);
4. Cluster all related invariant meanings into themes;
5. Synthesize the meanings and themes into a description of the textures of the experiences, including verbatim passages as examples;
6. Reflect on the textural descriptions to construct a structure of the experiences; and
7. Construct a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experiences.
By carrying out these steps, the researcher was capable of continuously reflecting on and interpreting the data to identify how each respondent may have perceived or experienced toxic leadership (Vagle, 2014). Only once the experiences were duly expressed could the researcher accurately triangulate all the collected information to strengthen the project’s reliability and validity.

**Ethical Considerations**

The first facet of conducting an ethical study is to ensure the research problem, if solved, has the potential to benefit those affected by its occurrence. Once this was accomplished, approval was granted by the university as well as the organizations selected as sources of information. Even though this project did not require parental consent, if it did, then the researcher needed to address the needs of any vulnerable participants (Creswell, 2014). The investigator ensured participants signed consent forms before proceeding with any interviews. A copy of the consent form is provided in Appendix C. Although consensus was critical, it was essential the entire population be treated equally. While maintaining fairness and equality was tremendously vital, it was also essential that the researcher practice transparency to preserve trusting relationships with all parties involved. Anonymity was another significant practice necessary for establishing trust and open communication (Creswell, 2013). Outside of anonymity, the researcher’s willingness to also informed the participants that their contribution, or not, would have zero impact on their military careers, further facilitated open discussion. Through open dialogue, the researcher gained more awareness for any incidences of toxic leadership and how it influenced junior officers, whether constructively or destructively. The goal was to ensure no participant was exploited because of this research endeavor.
To prevent episodes of manipulation, the researcher reassured participants that they would retain the ownership of their voices (Creswell, 2014) all the while informing them of any risks associated with the project. Plus, the researcher avoided any attempts to sharing personal experiences throughout the interview process. The sharing of personal thoughts could, inevitably, inject biases into the study (Creswell, 2013). At the conclusion of this study, the investigator’s aim was to communicate the design and findings in a clear and concise manner for the readers. In doing so, the audience can determine the integrity of the project (Creswell, 2014).

**Timeline for the Study**

As with any major construction or manufacturing project, proper organization and planning are essential for achieving success. Therefore, the author formulated a probable timeline to assist in remaining focused and maintaining a balanced lifestyle throughout his academic voyage (Roberts, 2010). Roberts (2010) also noted that such timelines are essential for sustaining creative momentum simply because they allow for reflective moments to explore multiple paths to strengthen the quality of the project. Given this view, an important aspect of this journey was the data collection effort.

To gather necessary information, the author conducted several face-to-face interviews with commissioned officers; see Appendix B for the interview questionnaire. The data collection process lasted approximately 60 days. However, it must be noted that data analysis activities were occurring as information was being gathered. Hence, the evaluation of data was concurrent with data collection procedures. A planned dissertation timeline is included in Appendix D. The real problem was indeed maintaining a feasible schedule that allowed time to uphold a balanced life. So, in
closing, on average, approximately four hours per night was committed to working on the project, which allowed for reflective moments through the investigation process. The following section is a prelude to some of the researcher’s reflective thoughts.

**Reflections of the Researcher**

As a service member for over 25 years and a former commander at multiple echelons, the author believes that retaining top performers requires that leaders value the magnitude of people and emotional intelligence while limiting the influences of toxic environments. With the assistance of the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program and as a strategic-level leader in the U.S. Army, the researcher has also come to realize that leadership is, in essence, relational. Leaders must learn to engage with others with a positive and caring attitude. Unfortunately, those who foster toxic leadership environments are negatively affecting the employee experiences of their subordinates, more particularly among their Millennial officers.

Toxic environments could potentially impact Millennial officers because of their inexperience in addition to the likelihood of being impressionable. From the researcher’s perspective, there are two possibilities that will take place. On the one hand, the brightest and most talented junior officers will leave the U.S. Army because of the toxic leadership environments they have faced. On the other hand, although technically and tactically competent, some very impressionable Millennial officers may, mistakenly, begin to emulate the toxic behaviors they have witnessed as a pathway to success, thus further exacerbating the problem. Subsequently, to retain the best and brightest young officers, senior U.S. Army officials must ensure these officers exhibit an optimistic view about their employee experiences.
From an employee perspective, Maylett and Wride (2017) described positive employee experiences as knowing that leadership and the organization has their back; leaders are as good as their word; calculated risk-taking and failure is okay; the best people rise to the top; and leadership also cares about their personal lives away from the job. As far as the researcher is concerned, if one were to observe these thoughts from a broader perspective, he or she could conclude that employee experiences are, somewhat, centered around a leader’s emotional intelligence.

By possessing the ability to perceive and understand emotions, leaders gain enormous advantages. Individuals must remember that leadership is merely about having the capacity to inspire others. To lead, leaders must capture one’s heart before their mind. Maxwell (2007) agreed with this idea: “You can’t move people to action unless you first move them with emotion…” (p. 113). Capturing the hearts of others also permits leaders to establish essential relationships. Then again, achieving such relationships is unrealistic in toxic environments.

One’s ability to build such interpersonal relationships is the cornerstone for creating a team culture. These teams encourage open communication, valuable collaboration, and a willingness to accept risks, all of which are essential for boosting innovation and performance. Why, one may ask? Simple: trust. Because of trusting relationships, organizational performance will eventually increase, and, as leaders, this should be their ultimate goal. A leader’s real power resonates from networks or relationships rather than knowledge (Logan, King, & Fischer-Wright, 2008). Maxwell (2007) further strengthened this claim with the following quote: “Build enough of the right kinds of relationships with the right people, and you can become the real leader of
an organization” (p. 32). To this end, the adage “it is not what you know, it is whom you know” stands firm, solely because one’s sphere of influence is multiplied by the network or relationships they have established. Nonetheless, toxic leadership environments impede collaboration, transparency, and innovation.

To ease the impacts of toxic leadership, the goal of this project was to inform future research about the possible effects of toxic leadership environments on Millennial U.S. Army officers followed by attempting to identify potential curricula enhancements or modifications for developing future, as well as current, officers. Indeed, emotional intelligence is a fundamental aspect of leadership, but senior U.S. Army officers must demonstrate leadership by upholding the institution’s core values along with enhancing the junior officers’ employee experiences to mitigate against toxic environments in the future. To enhance junior officers’ military experiences, thereby potentially retaining the most talented performers, a need to redesign the U.S. Army’s professional military education curricula may be necessary. The crux of the matter is, soldiers deserve competent and responsible leaders who are emotionally intelligent to boost their organization’s performance levels.

Summary

This phenomenological research project encompassed survey interviews along with document analysis. Throughout this voyage, information was collected from numerous sources.

After the respondents met the required criteria and all interview sessions were completed, which consisted of three to fifteen individuals, the researcher analyzed all transcripts to identify any statements that provided an appreciation of how the
participants experienced toxic leadership. Undertaking this technique allowed the investigator to single out different meanings shared by the participants while opening other angles of interpreting their encounters (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). These different meanings and angles were further scrutinized to detect cluster of meaning (Creswell, 2013) followed by patterns or themes among the responses. To assist with identifying different themes from the responses provided, the researcher used a qualitative data analysis software called QDA Miner.

Once themes were identified, the researcher used the triangulation method to draw connections and reduce the likelihood of inserting any biases. At this point, data was further analyzed as well as synthesized to accurately corroborate any evidence. The collection, evaluation, and fusion of essential material was a cumbersome and timely process; thus, it was recommended that the researcher take the time to establish milestones with specified deadlines. Not only did this instrument help the author to remain focused, but it allowed opportunities to take necessary breaks throughout the study. Remaining focused, with the aid of a glide path, created occasions to uphold a balanced lifestyle, thereby the researcher to enjoy the essential aspects of life: time with family and friends.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

This phenomenological research project was geared toward examining what impacts, if any, Millennial U.S. Army officers are experiencing because of toxic leadership. The author elected to organize this chapter based on the research questions previously posed. First, the investigator must determine whether the participants had experienced toxic leadership during their military professional work life. Secondly, it must be established whether these encounters had affected their perceptions about their present and future professional work experience as U.S. Army leaders.

In this chapter, the researcher will explain the information collected throughout this qualitative study. Initially, the author will provide a demographic breakdown of the participants along with how data was inductively analyzed in order to identify descriptive behavioral patterns and, subsequently, overarching themes, which corroborates data obtained through document analysis. From these patterns and themes, the author will then attempt to develop a description of these experiences later in Chapter Five.

Presentation of the Findings

This section will summarize findings and results. As suggested by Vagle (2014; 2018), there are three approaches when conducting what he calls whole-part-whole analysis. These three approaches are descriptive, interpretive, and reflective lifeworld (2018). On the one hand, the descriptive approach means the phenomenon has an invariant structure that can be described, whereas interpretive phenomenology is an act of interpretation. On the other hand, reflective lifeworld research allows the researcher to
remain open to the experiences of toxic leadership during the research process (2018). That said, for this project the researcher chose the descriptive approach as the most fitting to understand the phenomenon of toxic leadership and its relationship with Millennial junior U.S. Army officers. To minimize the likelihood of creating any ethical mishaps, thereby ensuring no harm is experienced among the participants, the researcher selected to use the phonetic alphabet to identify the participants (i.e., Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, Golf). The next section will provide a demographic summary of the participants.

**Demographic Summary**

In order to understand how, or if, toxic leadership is having an adverse effect on Millennial junior U.S. Army officers the research interviewed seven individuals. The demographic characteristics are listed below:

- **Average age**: 32 (oldest 36; youngest 29)
- **Sex**: Five males and two females
- **Ethnic diversity**:
  - Two – African Americans;
  - Two – Hispanic Americans;
  - One – Caucasian American;
  - One – Asia American; and
  - One – Sicilian American.
- **Source of commissioning**:
  - Three – Reserve Officers’ Training Corps (ROTC);
• Two – Direct Commission Program (designed for individuals with specialized professional degrees [e.g., Healthcare Providers, Lawyers, Chaplains, and Cybersecurity Experts]);

• One – United States Military Academy (USMA) (i.e., West Point); and

• One – Officer Candidate School (OCS)

• Officers with prior service or enlisted time: 3 of 7

• Military status (i.e., active duty, reserve component [mobilized])
  
  • Four – Active Duty
  
  • Three – Reserve Component (e.g., U.S. Army National Guard, U.S. Reserve)
    
    ▪ Two – U.S. Army National Guard; and
    
    ▪ One – U.S. Army Reserve

• Average time in service: nine years (longest time in service 15 years; least amount of time in service five years)

In the next section, the author will describe how the collected data was structured and scrutinized.

**Data Organization and Analysis Procedures**

As the researcher proceeded through this phase of the project, he carefully listened to each interview session several times, before and after the transcription process, to fully appreciate and describe each participant’s encounter with toxic leadership. As a result, he could focus on the intentionality of their encounters instead of the subjective experiences (Vagle, 2018), all of this guided his efforts in recognizing emerging patterns.
as well as themes. However, it must be noted, on several occasions, the researcher had to interpret some of the interviewees’ responses even after conducting follow-up interview sessions.

Once the investigator sufficiently recorded each session in its raw form, the investigator then paraphrased the data of each participant into a new document to assist his efforts in articulating the analytic thoughts of everyone, on an individual basis (Vagle, 2018). These actions were necessary for capturing the fundamental meaning of the responses, thus recognizing emerging patterns and themes. After analyzing the responses to each interview question, 15 patterns were detected, which were essential in associating the seven themes that were developed after conducting document analysis on Millennials and their career and workplace expectations (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010; Woodall, 2004). To capture these patterns the researcher used the MAXQDA software to assist in the organization, analysis, and presentation of the collected interviews as well as documents. Once the documents and text were imported into the program, the author could then categorize a word, sentence, or segment of an interview, which further allowed the researcher to identify patterns among the collected material.

The first column of Table 1 is initially for general questions necessary to gain an insight of the participants followed by the two overarching research questions. The second column shows the survey questions, while the third column lists responses, in paraphrased form. Columns four and five highlight the patterns and themes of the responses, respectively. The sixth and seventh columns emphasize the number of
occurrences along with a frequency type, as suggested by Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997).

Because of limiting factors, such as to ensure direct subordinators of the researcher were not selected to participate in the project, only seven individuals were suitable to participate in the project. Any responses given by only one participant were regarded as “Infrequent.” Any responses that occurred for two to four participants were characterized as “Random.” Responses that occurred between five to seven times were considered “Typical.”

Table 1 summarizes general information gathered during the interview sessions. The questions below allowed the researcher to gain background data about the participants to gain a greater understanding of the group. These inquiries included such questions as: Did you grow up in a diverse community or attend diverse schools; What were your influencers for joining the U.S. Army; and How do you stay abreast of current events? These questions were intended to create a relaxing environment for the participants, as suggested by researchers, such as Babbie (2012) and Creswell (2013).
Table 1

**Summary of Results - General Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Millennial Questions</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did you grow up in a diverse community or school?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>Comfortable w/ interacting w/ others outside of their ethnic group</td>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencers for joining?</th>
<th></th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Trust in institutions</th>
<th>Trusting</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Random</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In what way?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Career stability</td>
<td>Career Opportunities</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patriotism</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Trust in institutions</td>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source of current events?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mainstream media only</td>
<td>Communication / Information Awareness</td>
<td>Information Awareness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is your primary source for remaining abreast of current events?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Online &amp; mainstream media</td>
<td>Communication / Information Awareness</td>
<td>Information Awareness</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you tend to receive information from outlets that share your political views?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Shared &amp; opposing views</td>
<td>Analytical or free thinking</td>
<td>Potentially open-minded</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Typical</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 illustrates information obtained from Research Question One, “Have Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army experienced toxic leadership?” Because of this questioning, the investigator was able to gain insight into how interviewees defined toxic leadership through their eyes as well as afforded them the opportunity to articulate whether they had experienced toxic behaviors by their superiors, peers, or subordinates.
Table 2

Summary of Results - Research Question One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 1</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army experienced toxic leadership?</td>
<td>Define toxic leadership</td>
<td>Self-serving</td>
<td>Lack of consideration for others</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of concern for others</td>
<td>Lack of consideration for others</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unethical / immoral decision-making</td>
<td>Institutional mistrust</td>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Doesn't cultivates teams</td>
<td>Failure to foster social connections or team relationship</td>
<td>Team connections</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Negatively effects performance</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Failure to trust subordinates</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you experienced toxic leadership</td>
<td>Superiors</td>
<td>Institutional mistrust</td>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 presents data related to Research Question Two. As a reminder, the second research question focused on whether toxic encounters obstructed the participants’ perceptions about their professional work experience as a leader in the U.S. Army. As the data indicates below, the responses varied widely. However, specific patterns were identifiable.

Table 3

Summary of Results - Research Question Two (A)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 2</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Timely achievement of objective, mismanagement</td>
<td>Incompetence</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Failed to connect w/ others</td>
<td>Lack of emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Misuse of authority</td>
<td>Institutional mistrust</td>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Realized that wasn't someone I wanted to be</td>
<td>Institutional mistrust</td>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What possible changes do you relate with the experience? | Technically proficient but ineffective management skills | Incompetence | Nurturing work environment | 1 | Infrequent
---|---|---|---|---|---
Trust senior leaders would rectify the issue | Trust in institutions | Trusting | 1 | Infrequent
Bad leadership tends to remain front and center | Poor work environment | Nurturing work environment | 1 | Infrequent
Organization was in constant chaos | Poor work environment | Nurturing work environment | 1 | Infrequent
Did these experiences have a positive or negative impact on the organization? | Negative effect | Poor work environment | Nurturing work environment | 7 | Typical
Mistrust & indecisiveness | Trust in institutions | Trusting | 1 | Infrequent
Lacked interpersonal skills | Lack of emotional Intelligence | Nurturing work environment | 1 | Infrequent
Sheer incompetence | Incompetence | Nurturing work environment | 1 | Infrequent
Low morale | Poor work environment | Nurturing work environment | 1 | Infrequent
Lack of empathy | Lack of emotional Intelligence | Nurturing work environment | 1 | Infrequent
Lack of mentorship | Poor work environment | Nurturing work environment | 2 | Random
Do you believe toxic leadership was addressed adequately during military education process? | No | Insufficient coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training | Nurturing work environment | 7 | Typical
Was leadership, ethics, decision-making, and problem-solving covered sufficiently during PME? | No | Insufficient coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training | Nurturing work environment | 7 | Typical

Since Research Question Two entailed a vast amount of information, the author selected to split the tables. The information presented in this table focuses on the inspiration of the U.S. Army values coupled with discovering whether the experienced phenomenon had influenced the participants. Like the previous table, the answers were wide-ranging, but patterns were distinguishable.
### Table 4

**Summary of Results – Research Question Two (B)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question 2</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can the Army values uphold the Army's culture of inclusiveness?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Trust in institutions</td>
<td>Trusting</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Typical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Con’t) How have these experiences impacted their perception about their present and future professional work experience as leaders in the U.S. Army?</td>
<td>Didn’t receive appropriate mentorship</td>
<td>Insufficient coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As a 2LT, I didn’t know what it meant to be a leader or wasn’t a good leader</td>
<td>Insufficient coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Began to conduct assessments of my leaders</td>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Began to the practice of self-reflection</td>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understanding blind spots &amp; weaknesses</td>
<td>Self-reflection</td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Consistency of results.** Although triangulation was used, Vagle (2018) expressed that triangulation is not a necessity when corroborating data. Instead, he stated, “Sometimes a single statement, from one participant, at one moment in time is so powerful that it needs to be amplified” (Vagle, 2018). That said, if multiple participants articulate similar statements, then this should only strengthen the information corroboration efforts. So, based on the participant’s response, patterns were developed after which themes were formed. By undertaking such actions, the researcher could corroborate and triangulate a wide assortment of data.

**Recognizing patterns.** Based on the respondents’ answers, the researcher identified 15 shared patterns of behavior. These patterns were formulated after the author read through the interview transcripts on multiple occasions to obtain an understanding of
the participants’ experiences with toxic leadership. After reviewing the transcripts, the investigator was able to recognize noteworthy phrases relating to these experiences, which supported the formulation of meaning, therefore allowing the author to cluster these meanings into common themes (Creswell, 2013).

**Development of themes.** Themes are essential for understanding the Millennials’ experiences with toxic leadership, gaining their perceptual insight, and comprehending how these encounters affect their attitude towards leadership and the U.S. Army. Below the author will briefly describe each of the seven themes used in the study, which were, in part, formulated through document analysis. The research material described Millennials’ viewpoints about their career and workplace expectations.

- **Diverse** – Millennials are more accepting of other racial and ethnic groups than past generations (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010; Woodall, 2004).

- **Information Awareness** – Millennials are more advanced in communication and information technology (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), which makes it unlikely that they will accept “need-to-know” information policies within their organization (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010) unless the material exceeded their authorized security clearance level (e.g., confidential, secret, or top secret).

- **Meaningful Work** – Many Millennials believe they can make significant contributions to society, at large (Woodall, 2004). More importantly, many are seeking employment in organizations with values and mission statements that go beyond merely making money and exhibit ethical behavior and social responsibility (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010).
• Potentially Open-minded – Because Millennials have advanced appreciation for information technology and their ability to access data, Myers and Sadaghiani (2010) suggested, “[Millennials] have the aptitude to see problems and opportunities from fresh perspectives.”

• Nurturing Work Environment – Studies have suggested that many Millennials think employers should provide job security, a positive work atmosphere, and a family-like environment (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). They firmly believe that loyal organizations should offer continuous professional development and training along with constant feedback through coaching and mentorship programs (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010).

• Self-assessment – Based on several responses, participants emphasized the importance of conducting periodic moments of self-reflection as they progress through their career.

• Team Connections – Millennials have high regard for social connections in the workplace (De Hauw & De Vos, 2010). They prefer to work in group settings because it makes work more pleasurable and facilitates group-based learning (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010).

• Trusting – From childhood, Millennials have witnessed the federal government playing a significant role in creating safe zones in many aspects of their lives (e.g., cars, products, schools). For this reason, there is a tendency for many of them to have an inherent trust in large organizations and institutional structures (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Woodall, 2004).
Project Discoveries. This section will draw attention to the findings that emerged from the interview process. The researcher initially crafted 17 questions; however, as discussed in Chapter 3, there were times the investigator asked follow-on questions based on the participant’s response to gain additional clarity or understanding of their answer. From these accounts, the information in this segment will be solely presented in an objective manner. In doing so, the data is organized based on the themes listed above.

Diverse. One of the questions presented to the participants was, “Did you grow up in a diverse community or attend diverse schools.” Five of the seven respondents communicated they had grown up in diverse communities or attended schools with multiple ethnic and racial groups. Although two individuals stated they did not grow up in diverse communities or schools, they did state that during their undergraduate years they interacted and conducted group assignments or projects with students of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds.

Information awareness & potentially open-minded. To gain an appreciation for how Millennials received and processed current events, the following questions were presented: 1) “How do you remain abreast of current events” (i.e., do you acquire information from social media or mainstream news outlets); 2) “Do you acquire information from media outlets geared towards your political values (e.g., views) or do you gather information from multiple outlets with opposing views.” The majority of individuals stated they preferred to receive their information from mainstream media outlets. However, each replied the platform (e.g., printed magazine, newspaper, or online) was irrelevant. Subjects Charlie and Foxtrot voiced they did not trust social
media as a reliable resource of information, given today’s socio-political environment. That said, three respondents shared that if they noticed an unusual or worthy news article on social media websites, then they would conduct additional research to verify and analyze the material. As for the second question presented, six respondents showed their willingness to acquire information from outlets with opposing viewpoints.

**Meaningful work.** When asked about motivating influencers for joining the U.S. Army, four of the seven expressed patriotic reasoning. Subject Echo shared his father’s story of being a soldier in the Vietnam War fighting alongside American service members. At the end of the war, his family was granted asylum to the United States and relocated to the northern Virginia area. Subsequently, he joined the U.S. Army as a sign of gratitude to the U.S. Government and to assist others encountering situations reminiscent of his father’s. In contrast, Foxtrot wanted to continue serving after ending his initial enlistment in the U.S. Marine Corps while other individuals joined because their parents had served in the military, which could be interpreted as a patriotic family tradition.

**Nurturing work environment.** This theme covers multiple noteworthy patterns of behavior, which are listed below. Because of the abundance of information residing in these patterns, the researcher elected to display the data in a table format (see Table 2).

- Lack of consideration for others
- Incompetence or mismanagement
- Lack of emotional intelligence
- Lack of coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training
- Poor work environment
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP

- Negatively affects performance
- Failure to trust subordinates
- Scapegoating
- Bad leadership tends to remain front and center
- Organization was in constant chaos
- Negative effect
- Low morale

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Pattern</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-serving</td>
<td>Lack of consideration for others</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of concern for others</td>
<td>Lack of consideration for others</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negatively effects performance</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to trust subordinates</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timely achievement of objective, mismanagement</td>
<td>Incompetence</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failed to connect w/ others</td>
<td>Lack of emotional Intelligence</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Random</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scapegoating</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technically proficient but ineffective management skills</td>
<td>Incompetence</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad leadership tends to remain front and center</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization was in constant chaos</td>
<td>Poor work environment</td>
<td>Nurturing work environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Infrequent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to the number of responses the participants gave for toxic behaviors, such as failure to show consideration for other, lacking emotional intelligence, and sheer incompetence, these numbers were minimal. Case in point, subjects Bravo and Foxtrot stated their leadership demonstrated acts of inconsideration, while four voiced how their leaders lacked emotional intelligence or were incompetent. However, the number of responses give for two of the five sub-themes, (a) insufficient coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training; and (b) poor work environment, were extremely high compared to the other three.
After calculating the number of destructive behaviors experienced within the two sub-themes, 33 of 43 replies were negative in nature. Although this is a disturbing point, it is not surprising, especially after reviewing the Program of Instruction for the U.S. Army’s Transportation Basic Officers’ Leadership Course, dated 29 October 2015. The document showed that only 16 of 642 hours of instruction were devoted directly towards topics of leadership, which is less than 3% of the total training and education hours received.

**Self-assessment.** Throughout several of the initial interview sessions, participants began to discuss ideas centered around self-reflection and self-assessment. As a result, the researcher began asking the remaining participants about their opinions on the topic. Participant Bravo stated, “…every 90 days you should be doing an evaluation of yourself or reassessing of yourself to ensure you remain on your desired course or is there something that needs to be changed to become a better leader.” This was a profound answer given the individual’s rank and time in service. Ultimately, all seven participants believed that self-assessment activities are necessary to sharpen one’s leadership skills.

**Team connections.** There was only one individual, Participant Delta, who responded by referencing that their leadership failed to foster social connections or a team relationship. Delta reported how the group made several attempts to become an interconnected team, “…this leader that I had had a different personality from everyone. We [the subordinate leadership] became a cohesive unit before we deployed, so we were all when in sync, but he [the officer in charge] did nothing to integrate with us. We tried to relate to with him or engage in simple conversation just to make common ground, but it just wasn't happening.” As indicated by the officer’s response, this leader created a
toxic environment for his subordinates simply by refusing to connect with his organization. Based on Delta’s testament, the leader likely limited his capacity to influence, which is further supported by Rath and Conchie (2008). The researchers suggested, “Leaders are only as strong as the connections they make with each person in their constituency, whether they have one follower or one million” (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 79).

**Trust**. Of the 24 responses related to institutional trust, 13 revealed toxic behavioral patterns that could lead to Millennials mistrusting institutions or, in this case, organizations. On the one hand, the participants overwhelmingly exhibited a faith that the U.S. Army’s core values of leadership, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage could uphold the institution’s culture of inclusiveness. On the other hand, the data also revealed that toxic behavior has a lasting effect on young leaders. Subject Foxtrot made the following statement: “It [toxic leadership] just reinforces that you, more often than not, learn more from bad examples of leadership than you do from good.” This statement could be seen in a positive as well as negative light.

**Analysis and Synthesis of Findings**

Now that the author has articulated the findings of this project, in this segment the investigator will provide an analysis of the results, coupled with integrating any insightful thoughts about the examination. Based on the research questions, it is apparent all the participants have experienced toxic leadership and, subsequently, have worked in poor or toxic work climates while serving in the U.S. Army, which had a direct correlation with working for a toxic leader. As for these experiences having an impact on the perception about their work experience, each of the participants responded that they did not receive
adequate coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training as it pertains to
toxic leadership and understanding the significance of being a leader, especially during
their Officer Basic Course.

The U.S. Military has been engaged in constant conflict since 2001.
Consequently, senior leaders have placed tremendous emphasis on developing skilled
tacticians and technicians rather than arming these young leaders with the tools necessary
to become future commanders.

Research suggests that Millennials consider loyalty, from an organizational
perspective, as assuring employees with ample opportunities for professional
development and training (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). Furthermore, Millennials also
place significant value in continuous feedback from supervisors and managers (Ng,
Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). In principle, many of these young adults crave
organizations with active coaching and mentorship programs (Hershatter & Epstein,
2010). Hershatter and Epstein (2010) suggested that, while growing up, Millennials were
encouraged to develop and maintain a relationship with their teachers, mentors, and
advisors. As a result, they continue to seek relationships with their leadership.

Even though they have a strong desire for coaching and mentorship, without the
appropriate training or the science behind the art of leadership, many of these individuals
will struggle during their lieutenant years or even beyond. The U.S. Army allocates large
amounts of resources to researching the topic of leadership. There is even an agency
chartered with conducting such research projects: CAL. Because of these studies, the
U.S. Army publishes new or updates many of their leadership doctrines.
Five of the seven individuals interviewed previously served as company commanders. The other two possessed professional degrees (i.e., healthcare or law professionals), which does not require them to serve as company commanders for future advancements. Company command was a requirement for the other participants. These officers were, on average, promoted from first lieutenant to captain three years before assuming company command responsibilities. Were they fully equipped to with the science and appreciation of leadership? More importantly, were they really prepared to professionally develop, coach, and mentor the junior officers assigned to their organization to ensure they were foster a nurturing work environment for their subordinates, especially in today’s complex operating environment? These are critical questions given that participants Bravo and Foxtrot reported, as second lieutenants, they did not know what it meant to be a leader or, more troubling, “As a second lieutenant, I was a bad leader.”

Summary

This chapter highlighted the results of the data collected in support of this qualitative research project. The investigator employed interview surveys along with document analysis as data collection mechanisms. Because of travel restrictions in addition to ensuring the investigator was not in the leadership hierarchy over any of the participants, whether directly or indirectly, only seven individuals met the requirements to participate in this study.

The information gathered was inductively analyzed to identify behavioral patterns. Fifteen patterns were acknowledged after reviewing the interview transcripts several times. The rereading allowed the author to gain an in-depth appreciation of how
Millennials experience toxic leadership. As a result, seven themes were formulated from the responses in conjunction with information acquired through document analysis, which described Millennials’ career and workplace expectations.

From the material gathered, two sub-themes caught the researcher’s attention. These responses fell within the insufficient coaching, mentorship, professional development, or training and poor work environment sub-themes. However, on a positive note, data does signal that Millennials genuinely believe the U.S. Army’s core values will uphold the institution’s culture of inclusiveness. The author will provide additional commentary and recommendations in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The data presented and discussed in the previous chapter highlighted that every participant reported experiencing toxic leadership by a superior officer in the U.S. Army. They also conveyed their professional military education process inadequately prepared them to lead soldiers upon arriving at their units. This chapter focuses on the study’s aim and proposed solution to course-correct this troubling phenomenon. Once the author’s proposal is conveyed, he will discuss how multiple factors, as well as stakeholders, may influence whether the plan is adopted. Some of these implications may appear substantial. As with any other significant changes, leaders must overcome obstacles and resource constraints to achieve success.

To realize any enhancements in the U.S. Army’s leadership education and training program will require sponsors in critical positions. These supporters must construct a meaningful strategic messaging campaign that discusses the essential aspects of these changes. The author will cover these efforts comprehensively. Lastly, because of the size of the U.S. Army and, potentially, congressional requirements, the author will explain how implementing this proposed solution could become a multi-year project.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological dissertation in practice study is to gain insight as to how Millennial junior officers in the U.S. Army perceive toxic leadership and its impacts on their professional work-life.
Aim of the Study

The primary aim for this project was to inform future research about the impact of toxic leadership on U.S. Army officers. A secondary aim of this study was to inform curriculum designers on essential information necessary for developing future junior officers.

Proposed Solution

Toxic leaders are like a tumorous cell in any organization and could cause adverse effects on the group, at large. Many of these leaders possess dysfunctional qualities while demonstrating irresponsible behavior that may prevent them from distinguishing between right and wrong. Furthermore, these leaders may fail to exhibit the ability to retain moral relationships with others. This project aimed to determine whether this type of leadership is having an impact on Millennial officers.

To curtail the potential of toxic leadership and enhance the likelihood of effectively achieving strategic national security objectives, the U.S. Army should institute and cultivate responsible leadership theory to further enrich the U.S. Army’s mission command leadership philosophy. This philosophy allows subordinates to exercise initiative within their leader’s intent, thereby being able to seize the initiative and exploit opportunities at the tactical through the strategic level of operations (Department of the Army, 2016). According to Pless and Maak (2011), “…responsible leadership is based on inclusion, collaboration, and cooperation with different stakeholder groups” (p. 8). Not only is this theory based on group interactions, but it also mandates that responsible leaders are of high character who practice moral reasoning and imagination while
engaging in dialogue with all affected constituents, communities, or stakeholders (Pless & Maak, 2011).

Since the U.S. Army’s operating environment is so complex and entails a multitude of not only security considerations but also geopolitical factors, it mandates that officers at every level receive continuous leadership training, early and often, to instill a greater sense for developing enduring social and moral relationships. As a result, issues will be responsibly analyzed from an assortment of viewpoints that are interconnected among an array of stakeholders, both internal and external to the organization. This point is essential, especially since research has suggested that Millennials are interested in collaborative work efforts in addition to demonstrating a desire for being assigned meaningful tasks that positively impact society, at large. In essence, most Millennials aspire to work for organizations that exhibit a sense of ethical and social responsibility while undertaking meaningful tasks. Wheatley (2006) supported this concept, as she highlighted that most individuals join their organization with a desire to do something useful, to contribute and serve. The U.S. Army could potentially create such a non-toxic environment for these young officers.

The U.S. Army’s core values, coupled with the idea of teaching responsible leadership theory throughout its professional military education process, could assist in reducing the effects of toxic leadership and improve functioning in complex or unstable settings. Uncertainty is a continuous operating environment for the U.S. military. Leaders who exhibit toxic behaviors exacerbate ambiguous situations even further by treating their organizations like machines rather than a living system that must interact with its surroundings. The U.S. military is merely one component of the nation’s
instruments of power. For this reason, a military leader must understand that military operations are just a component of a broader national security apparatus, which means it must constantly obtain energy and, more importantly, information from its surroundings. The U.S. Army Combined Arms Center refers to this as the whole of government approach, which is the collaborative efforts of the departments and agencies of the U.S. Government to achieve a unified effort towards a shared objective (Department of the Army, 2008). After major military operations, whether combat or humanitarian, the U.S. Government’s strategic goal is to stabilize the country by creating a sense of normalcy for the local populace.

The feeling of stability is accomplished by maintaining a safe and secure environment, establishing or upholding the rule of law, preserving social well-being, supporting stable governance, and energizing the local economy (Department of the Army, 2008). However, in the fog of war or humanitarian operations, the atmosphere is exceptionally chaotic, complex, or unpredictable, thereby requiring leaders to possess some degree of calmness to ease the tension among their followers as well as external stakeholders. In 2006, U.S. Army doctrine writers recorded the following: “…dynamic and ambiguous environments…places a premium on leadership at every level…” (Department of the Army, 2006, p. 7-1). They additionally suggested that because of such conditions, these leaders must promptly adjust cognitively and emotionally to these problematic challenges (Department of the Army, 2006). The presence of dysfunctional personality characteristics and destructive behavior could degrade a leader’s ability to influence others while hampering subordinates’ capabilities to make sense of their environmental complexities. However, the problem is that the majority of such
information resides in manuals that many of these young leaders do not have the time to read because of all the responsibilities that have been bestowed on them by their superiors, especially at the company level. Instead, if the Army decided to adopt major components of responsible leadership theory, commanders as well as other leaders would learn to channel others’ creative thinking processes, through collaborative means, to see circumstances or phenomena from a multitude of practical, social, and political relationships with overlapping and interlocking objectives (Werhane, 2002).

Military commanders and leaders must influence a wide assortment of stakeholders as they balance warfare and diplomacy activities. Undeniably, military leaders must artfully manage their organizations’ energies. Without a concerted and visionary outlook, individuals are working in the here and now versus establishing a social sense of direction (Lowney, 2003) or creating synergistic efforts. Being collaborative, emotionally intelligent, and politically savvy is vital when coping in the interest of a wide range of stakeholders, especially when dealing with military commanders, indigenous populations, and U.S. and international diplomats along with other international non-governmental organizations. In a word, today’s leaders must appreciate that effective leadership is a form of art as they attempt to create synergy among multiple players. Therefore, the U.S. Army should build a bench of talented responsible leaders who possess the ability to foster a collaborative form of leadership with ethical problem-solving attributes to ensure stakeholder interests are considered in an impartial manner.
Support for the Solution

Building a contingent of responsible leaders is critical, especially since technology has allowed societies to become ever more connected. The U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (2014) agrees with this premise: “...the Internet and social media amplifies and accelerates interaction between people, governments, militaries, and threats” (p. 11). Because of this interconnectedness, or as suggested by Thomas Friedman (2016), interdependence, commanders and leaders must become skilled at communicating and at ethical negotiating practices, especially when engaging with critical stakeholders such as indigenous governments while deployed, rather than displaying a reluctance to cooperate with others. As previously suggested, officers at all levels must realize the importance of relationship and transparency to obtain shared understanding while functioning within a coalition.

At the junior officer level, officers must foster information sharing among critical partners, both internal and external to the organization. Doing so allows their agencies or units to build and sustain social capital. Maak (2007) referred to social capital as the collective actions of people with mutual understanding and cohesive, trusting relationships. With this frame of reference in mind, one could see why military leaders must appreciate the value of relationships, information sharing, and moral decision-making to achieve shared objectives, when operating in combat or stability operations (e.g., humanitarian support) in foreign lands.

Additionally, young leaders must value the magnitude of soft power as a means of influence instead of coercive methods that could effectually create a toxic environment for all stakeholders involved, thereby hindering the U.S. Government’s ability to achieve
specific strategic objectives. From a broader perspective, the U.S. Army, as an institution, should implement responsible leadership theory, which targets these toxic leadership concerns while simultaneously showcasing how the U.S. Army facilitates social responsibility, which is a focus area for the Millennial population, thereby possibly enhancing their professional work-life experience. Additionally, researchers such as Maylett and Wride (2017) suggest that to improve the work-life experience of young employees, mentorship and continuous professional development must be included in an organization’s overall retention and training strategy.

**Lack of leadership education and training.** Although participants of this project overwhelmingly communicated they did not receive adequate leadership education and training during the early and most impressionable years of their career, some scholars question whether leadership can be learned (Revell, 2008) or taught (Doh, 2003). Both researchers suggest, yes. However, the first question any potential leader should ask themselves is, what is a leader?

The U.S. Army portrays a leader as an individual who “…motivates people both inside and outside the chain of command to pursue action, focus thinking and shape decisions for the greater good of the organization” (Department of the Army, 2012, p. 1). Based on current operations, this definition is somewhat limited in scope, especially when one takes into consideration that counterterrorism operations aim to mobilize the goodwill of the local populace against the insurgent forces (Department of the Army, 2006). With this in mind, Army leaders must also consider the equities and needs of the indigenous populations. Therefore, the definition must include external partners. For example, Revell (2008) described a leader as someone who encounters problems while
operating under uncertainties to resolve the cognitive and emotional dimensions of group processes in addition to balancing trade-offs between order and creativity under competing demands and values. In essence, Revell (2008) believed a leader must be an emotionally intelligent, moral decision-maker and an orchestrator or collaborator who grasps the magnitude of negotiating.

Since counterterrorism operations are intended to be decentralized, the qualities shared above are critical for junior leaders to learn. After their deployment to Afghanistan, Guffey and Westphal (2013) wrote that junior officers “…have found it necessary to negotiate and build relationships with a wide variety of local tribal, government, and armed forces officials” (p. 9). As a result, Guffey and Westphal suggested that young officers seek to improve their skills of building and maintaining relationships with local officials. In the absence of such leadership education and training, leaders may intentionally or unintentionally make rash decisions that could create a toxic operating environment for their organization as well as the local population. Bottom-line, military leaders must gain the confidence of the local community while defeating and discrediting insurgent forces (Department of the Army, 2006).

Toxic leaders, on the other hand, may eventually impede their organization’s or network’s ability to realize its full potential primarily because long-term planning coupled with identifying and solving complex problems requires group interaction, innovation, and collaborative thinking (Wheatley, 2006; Bryson, 2011), which, as noted by some of the project’s participants, describes a number of the toxic leaders encountered.
Thomas Friedman (2016) has cleverly suggested that today’s demanding world requires a continuously evolving learning climate. As indicated above, the Army’s junior officers must possess moral decision-making and collaboration skills coupled with emotional intelligence. In addition to these qualities, young leaders must demonstrate critical and creative thinking attributes. Although the U.S. Army lists many of these ideas in the Army Technique Publication 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology*, the information is not introduced at the junior officer level.

Rather than focusing on the art and science of leadership, some of the officer basic courses tend to concentrate on the tactical and technical side of their career field. As a result, some young commanders are tactically and technically proficient, but they lack the necessary skills to connect, inspire, and provide direction to their subordinates, along with other critical partners, in the most effective and non-toxic manner. Given this, from a comprehensive perspective, senior Army leaders, especially the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, may ask if officers are considered as technicians or leaders, planners, and, ultimately, commanders, for a select few, who possess a thorough understanding of concepts and capabilities within their designated career fields. The Army’s professional military education institutions should be responsible for teaching young officers how to develop plans along with how to employ and manage critical resources within their designated career fields. Unit commanders, along with senior noncommissioned officers, are responsible for enriching these same junior officers’ technical and tactical proficiency levels once they arrive at their organization. For example, the U.S. Army’s Sustainment Center of Excellence, the academic institution for all U.S. Army logisticians, is attempting to cultivate technical and tactical experts rather
than educate young officers on the fundamentals of ethics, leadership, and problem-solving. Newly commissioned second lieutenants receive a wide assortment of training, ranging from history, to fundamentals of marksmanship, to logistics operations. While these courses are critical, young officers are not receiving adequate education and training related to basic leadership principles, ethics, decision-making, and problem-solving. So, again, is the U.S. Army attempting to cultivate future leaders or a robust bench of technical experts?

Based on the author’s experience as a former company and battalion commander, he appreciates the necessity for technical and tactical competencies. However, there is a delicate balancing act between institution education and unit collective training or professional development. Depending on how senior U.S. Army officials view the officers’ corps, whether planners and leaders or technicians, will govern course development for junior officers. Given the military’s operational complexities, should U.S. Army’s centers of excellence (i.e., academic institutions) focus more instructions on the science of leadership, ethics, networking, and collaborative planning while offering some technical and tactical training, thereby relinquishing more tactical and technical proficiency requirements to the brigade level and below? As for the art of leadership, individuals tend to gravitate towards real or practicing leaders (Doh, 2003).

For this reason, field commanders and leaders should serve as leadership coaches and mentors upon a lieutenant’s arrival to their unit. Would such education, training, coaching, and mentoring establish the appropriate foundation for future development? Doh (2003) and Revell (2008) believed so.
Although Doh (2003) and Revell (2008) believed that leadership can be taught, not everyone has the potential to be a leader because one cannot teach specific attributes, such as ambition. However, both suggested that teaching how to make collaborative and ethical decisions in addition to resolving conflicts, which is the science of leadership, may effectively enhance a young leader’s professional development. For junior leaders to appreciate leadership as an art, mentors must coach them, through deeds as well as behavior, in choreographing group decisions and efforts using techniques taught throughout their education process.

**Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Solution**

Despite the fact the author is recommending a shift in how leadership education and training is delivered, especially at the lieutenant and captain levels, the U.S. Army has an organization whose principal focus is to conduct leadership and leader development research. CAL is a subordinate entity to the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, which is a sub-command to the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command. This center is responsible for conducting studies, analysis, and assessments in support of the Army Leader Development Strategy while managing the Army Leader Development Program for the military along with Department of the Army civilian personnel. From this standpoint, the U.S. Army, as a professional organization, far exceeds many large private sector companies and firms.

The Department of the Army allocates vast amounts of resources to ensure the institution remains a professional force. Wheatley (2006) advocated that leaders must be responsive to influencers and needs beyond the boundaries of their organization. The Army’s counterterrorism manual (2006) alludes to this same theory when they highlight
the importance of building trusting relationships with community partners. However, based on the author’s experience, the preponderance of the adequate leadership education is not provided until the Preparatory Command Course. The biggest concern here is that the command course is only offered to officers and noncommissioned officers selected to serve as future battalion and brigade commanders or command sergeants major positions.

In most cases, these individuals have served, on average, 15 or more years in service, which is too late in one’s career. Nevertheless, the U.S. Army allocates vast amounts of resources to developing leadership publications. To date, there are approximately 17 manuals and handbooks geared towards leadership and leader development.

**Policies influencing the proposed solution.** Based on the author’s recommendation to implement concepts of responsible leadership theory coupled with introducing more leadership education and training at the lieutenant and captain levels, senior U.S. Army leaders must determine the appropriate balance between the amount of leadership, technical, and tactical training provided to newly commissioned lieutenants and junior captains. From a comprehensive view, each of these topics is equally important. For this reason, each area should be allotted one-third of the total time, but as discovered, some junior officers received approximately 16 of 642 hours of instruction devoted directly towards topics of leadership.

The education processes should build on one another. Because young officers are inundated with information stressing the importance of being a platoon leader and, later, serving as a company commander, leadership education is the foundation of molding a well-rounded officer. Following instructions on leadership, the next building block in
developing officers is technical skills, while continuously integrating leadership scenarios as well as practical and hands-on training exercises on specified equipment or systems. Once students demonstrate proficiency in their occupation-designated equipment, systems, and processes, then tactical training is introduced to provide them with a grasp of how to tactically employ these resources in support of offensive, defensive, or civil-military operations, all while instructors are injecting leadership vignettes into the blocks of instruction. Carrying out these changes would require significant changes to some of the U.S. Army’s education and training modules.

**Potential barriers and obstacles to proposed solution.** Evolving how leadership is taught throughout the Army will require the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command to modify roughly 17 Basic Officer Leadership Course programs of instruction along with approximately 13 Captain Career Course’s learning modules. Such efforts may take a considerable amount of resources (i.e., time, people, and money) to implement. Investing in future leaders’ abilities to adapt to complex situations will pay off significantly, whether in uniform or the corporate sector. It is a given that every second lieutenant will not remain in service to obtain the rank of colonel and serve as a brigade commander. However, every lieutenant will lead or manage subordinates along with other resources at some point in their professional work experience.

In addition to the time and effort required to enrich the U.S. Army’s leadership education and training program, some may argue that Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, *Army Leadership*, addresses aspects of responsible leadership. This doctrine states that leadership attributes and competencies are critical elements for developing authentic leaders. Leader attributes include (a) the values and identity of a leader (character); (b)
one’s outward appearance, demeanor, actions, and words (presence); and (c) the mental and social capacities used to lead (intellect) (Department of the Army, 2012). The doctrine states, “Good character, solid presence, and keen intellect enable the core leader competencies to be performed with greater effect” (Department of the Army, 2012, p. 6).

As far as competencies are concerned, the leadership doctrine asserts that leaders serve to lead while creating a favorable environment for developing others to achieve organizational goals (Department of the Army, 2012). Coupling attributes and competencies together illustrates that leadership requires thinking and doing, as implied by Doh (2003). The phrase “to achieve organizational goals” is somewhat narrowly scoped, especially after reviewing U.S. Army documents on complex environments and conducting counterterrorism operations. In contrast, responsible leadership is described as value-based, coupled with having ethical relationships between leaders as well as other stakeholders, both internal and external to the organization, to attain mutually shared objectives through a sense of meaning and purpose (Pless & Maak, 2011). In short, responsible leaders act collaboratively and make moral decisions while considering the impacts on others (Pless & Maak, 2011). Additionally, all the project participants communicated that they did not receive the necessary leadership education and training in the early years of their career.

**Financial/budget issues related to proposed solution.** Revising the U.S. Army’s leadership education and training methodology will come with a price tag. The most significant costs will be associated with reviewing doctrine publications. Although of the U.S. Army’s doctrines, manuals, and regulations are electronically distributed, the values are primarily related to manhours. Furthermore, additional cost could be
potentially associated with a more in-depth and broader study to determine the magnitude of toxic leadership on Millennials, coupled with analysis on leadership education and training. Recall, the U.S. Army has an organization chartered to conduct such assessments. To mitigate some of the costs, the project could be aligned with the center’s annual reporting requirements. Since 2005, CAL has published a yearly survey that captures assessments from the field about leadership and leader development throughout the department. Data obtained from the project allows senior decision-makers the opportunity to make necessary changes if required.

**Change theory.** Because of the rapid advancements in technology, an organization’s external environment will change much faster than it will. Leaders who are adaptive to change can learn and evolve while immersed in demanding circumstances, exercise sound judgment, and take calculated risks to thrive in a problematic environment (Burke, 2014). U.S. Army doctrine writers also agree on this with theory, “The [counterterrorism] environment changes continually; good leaders appreciate that state of flux and constantly assess their situation…commanders may need to accept substantial risk to de-escalate a dangerous situation” (Department of the Army, 2006, p. 7-2). The dynamics of operating against insurgent forces demonstrates how external energy will continue to cause the U.S. Army to evolve, which means their leadership culture must evolve as well. Like bacterium, the U.S. Army must perceive its surrounding, sense changes, and continuously adjust with its environment to enhance the overall performance of the force; in other words, “…organization change occurs primarily as a reaction to some change in the environment” (Burke, 2014, p. 308). U.S.
Army senior leaders are responsible for formulating, communicating, and implementing necessary leader development strategies to preserve the institution.

**Implementation of the Proposed Solution**

Because of the massive size of the Department of the Army, the feasibility of implementing the suggested changes to the U.S. Army’s leadership education and training program is highly unlikely within a six-month timeframe. However, to ensure the U.S. Army is capable of effectively fighting and winning the nation’s wars against a formidable and unpredictable foe who operates in the physical as well as the cyber domain, which adds to the complexity, requires leaders who are capable of functioning within multiple networks. Hence, change is necessary. Current and future leaders must interface and maintain relationships with others as they learn from, adapt to, and change with their environment. To undergo such change requires visionary leaders who appreciate the importance of responding to external environmental factors.

As with most significant changes in an institution of this size, senior leaders will desire additional research to allow them to learn more about itself (Wheatley, 2006). Burke (2014) shared this notion: “It is difficult to know what to do next if one does not know what the current situation is” (p. 25). Nonetheless, given the information about inadequate leadership education and training, there are critical champions and specific considerations necessary to realize the proposed modifications.

**Champions and Considerations Related to the Implementation of the Solution**

**Champions are necessary for implementation.** The first aspect of implementing any modifications to how an organization function is first to motivate
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF TOXIC LEADERSHIP

others to understand why there is a need for change (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016). The U.S. Army’s counterterrorism doctrine clearly illustrates why future leaders must nurture an atmosphere of communication, cooperation, and collaboration. In Matthews’s (2014) view, “…leaders must come to understand not only their enemy, but also the social ‘geography’ of where they are fighting, how to negotiate effectively with local leaders, how to use social media to win local support for their actions, and a myriad of other skills and capabilities” (p. 1). Framing the leadership crisis in this light illuminate the need for change is genuine and imperative. However, after conducting internal field studies, senior leaders can then acquire new perceptions from commanders and leaders serving in operational units with Millennial officers. From this analysis, senior leaders may seek out methods to integrate these viewpoints into the proposed solution in an effort to minimize possible resistance (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016).

Before employing any tuning efforts in leadership education and training programs, leaders must develop a sound communication campaign to ensure field commanders and leaders understand why such changes are necessary. Additionally, the communication plan should illustrate that any feedback provided from the field was assessed and integrated into the program if deemed appropriate. Lastly, senior leaders must articulate why and how the adjustments will enrich the U.S. Army’s ability to win the nation’s wars against conventional and unconventional adversaries. In Burke’s (2014) view, “If the [leader] discussed the survey with subordinates, particularly through group discussion, positive change typically occurred” (p. 37). It must be noted, the author’s proposed solution does not require current leaders to change their personal or
professional identities or skill sets, as discussed by Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols (2016), which should minimize some levels of defiance.

**Building support for the proposed solution.** Throughout the planning and executing phases, senior leaders must continuously evaluate the modifications to the leadership education and training program. The assessments should be drawn from education and training institutions as well as from operational organizations, which is where many of these young Millennial officers are assigned. Although some field commanders and leaders may initially resist based on the assumption that junior officers are not sufficiently trained on the technical aspects of their career field before being assigned to their units, senior leaders must effectively communicate that a balance must be reached.

As a senior leader and former commander, the investigator agrees with the perception that junior officers may arrive with basic technical knowledge of the systems needed to perform their duties, but research has shown that junior U.S. Army leaders must develop negotiation abilities as well, which requires interpersonal and communication skills. In his book, *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*, Burke (2014) supported this view: “At the lower ranks…technical and interpersonal skills are most important…” (p. 290). However, to fill the technical training void, unit noncommissioned officers are the answer. These changes will shift additional training responsibilities to commanders and leaders in the field. Then, unit commanders are required to conduct mission-specific training exercises at the lowest echelon, crew, squad, and platoon levels. These maneuver drills afford young lieutenants with opportunities to sharpen their technical and, ultimately, tactical proficiency levels.
Army noncommissioned officers are characterized as the “backbone” of the army profession. Also, they are the primary trainers for the force. Hence, young officers receive the majority of their technical training from their assigned noncommissioned officers at the unit level. That means technical proficiency is acquired via on-the-job training methods. For this reason, senior leaders must effectively convince leaders that addition leadership education is necessary to ensure these officers are equipped with the appropriate negotiating, collaborating, problem-solving, and ethical decision-making skills for the 21st century. A comprehensive communication campaign clarifying purpose and identifying any potential organizational impacts is essential for ensuring everyone is rowing in the same direction and on track to meet critical milestones.

**Evaluation and Timeline for Implementation and Assessment**

Establishing milestones throughout the implementation process is fundamental. As highlighted earlier, an undertaking such as this may take approximately one to two years from planning and full employment, so establishing milestones are vital. From the researcher’s conceptual perspective, the process should occur in four phases. Phase one begins with a broader analysis of the U.S. Army, at large. This allows senior leaders to fully understand the effects of toxic leadership on Millennials in addition to reassessing any perceived educational and training gaps. This process alone could take several months to collect and analyze the data gathered. Afterward, U.S. Army leadership researchers must determine any operational risks or misalignments between external environmental factors (i.e., geopolitical, social, and technological) and the status quo (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016). At this point, the process may exceed the six-month mark.
Once it is determined to accept this project’s proposed changes, phase two starts with CAL developing the framework or guide for the U.S. Army’s nine centers of excellence to follow. Then the nine centers’ course developers will further create instructional criteria for the 17 Basic Officer Leadership Course programs to follow. Once the criteria are introduced, each of the 17 leadership courses will construct programs of instruction to identify necessary resources required to begin balancing and fully integrating leadership education, technical training, and tactical exercises, which concludes phase three. As soon as the program has been put into practice, continuous assessment is essential. Constant evaluations allow for leaders to monitor the changes periodically and to make additional modifications to the program, as needed. These appraisal actions will permit senior leaders to institutionalize the newly developed leadership education and training program (Cawsey, Deszca, & Ingols, 2016).

Note that the appraisal process is ongoing. At specific points, tasks within the different phases can occur in parallel with one another. Based on this information, the timeframe for total employment is around the one-and-a-half-year mark. Finally, an effective communication campaign must remain active throughout the proposed solution’s lifecycle, “from cradle to grave.”

**Implications**

**Practical Implications**

Officers receive multiple hours of leadership training through their military career. However, the education aspect is somewhat neglected, especially at the company grade level (i.e., lieutenant, captain). Creighton University’s Interdisciplinary Leadership Program has influenced the investigator’s perspectives about being an effective leader in
the 21st century. Because of the rapid advancements in technology and the access of vast amounts of information, today’s leaders must appreciate the significance of knowledge management (i.e., processing information) coupled with being collaborative, whether externally or internally. Data gathered from this project indicates that Millennial officers are more cooperative in addition to valuing the magnitude of constant professional development. However, toxic leadership may hamper or prevent subordinates from effectively interacting with critical stakeholders while affecting the development of these individuals.

If Millennial officers are educated on the principles of responsible leadership, it could mitigate the impact of toxic leadership on young officers. To add, not only is the U.S. Army meeting their professional development appeals, but it also satisfies potential professional needs. Aspects of responsible leadership can be applied whether one is in or out of a leadership position.

In the past, many political leaders suggested that the U.S. Government is not in the business of nation-building. Although this idea is somewhat accurate, as a world superpower, the U.S. Government, with the military in the lead in specified locations, does support nation-building efforts to create secure and stable environments. As a result, junior leaders are required to operate in a decentralized approach, called mission command. Decentralization requires young leaders to gather information and make sense of their surroundings much faster than previous generations. Young leaders are also expected to possess some diplomatic skills as they interact with local political leaders.
Implications for Future Research

Before fully implementing any education and training modifications, the U.S. Army should conduct a more comprehensive study, as outlined above. In doing so, CAL should concentrate more on leadership education at the company grade level to determine whether young officers are being introduced to the leadership skills necessary to operate in the 21st century. More research on Millennials is vital, as these individuals are the future leaders. Projects such as this will give senior leaders an awareness or appreciation of their behaviors as well as influencers. As for toxic leaders and leadership, the U.S. Army conducts ample studies on this topic. The question is, do senior leaders understand the mindset of Millennial personnel? This understanding alone will shape how future leadership courses are designed, especially for leaders within the Generation X era (1966-1976).

As another point of issue, the U.S. Army, and probably the Department of Defense at large, should conduct a study to identify which gender displays toxic leadership qualities most often. An additional segment of the project should focus on the different personality and leadership characteristics that may exist between the two sexes. Personality traits and leadership characteristics are essential when investigating one’s toxic personality qualities. In their book, Though the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders, Eagly and Carli (2007) emphasized that workplace aggression is more common in men than women. Such behavior as verbally intimidating followers does not equate to leader effectiveness. Instead, this type of tormenting leadership has limited value. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), a bullying leadership style is more common among men.
Another difference between the leadership styles between men and women is the ability to build collaborative team environments. Studies have shown that women are more likely to possess a communal quality (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Women are more approachable, selfless, considerate, inclusive, and expressive. Women also express communication styles that facilitate collaboration while reducing hierarchical barriers: “…women may be less likely than men to impose their authority in a command-and-control style” (Eagly et al., p. 573). To remain a relevant force in the 21st century, the U.S. Army must foster leaders who are effective communicators, supportive, participative, and, more importantly, champions for team-based learning.

Millennials are distinctly different from previous generations. Research has shown that they have a different outlook on supervisor-subordinate relationships, cultural diversity, team collaboration, and ways information technology can enhance organizational performance (Myers & Sadaghiani, 2010). Because of these unique career expectations, coupled with female leadership qualities of being persuasive, empowering, collaborating, and partnering (Eagly & Carli, 2007), the U.S. Army must study this topic. The question is, “Are women more prepared or equipped to lead in the 21st century?”

To ensure future leaders are sufficiently equipped to lead in the 21st century, there is another implication for future research. The Department of Defense leadership researchers should investigate whether toxic leadership equates to the abuse of “hard power.” According to Johnson (2015), “hard power” is the use of formal authority, such as incentives, to threaten or penalize in order to influence others. On the other hand, Nye (2009) described “soft power” as the ability to motivate followers through attraction and contextual intelligence. According to this idea, toxic leadership is, in essence, grounded
in how a leader distributes rewards or coerces followers to conform to the desired outcome. However, the use of “hard power” may impede the flow of information and hamper necessary collaboration efforts needed to excel in the 21st Century (Nye, 2009).

The phenomenon of toxic leadership is much broader than how one pressures or rewards others. A leader’s toxicity levels are based on engaging in destructive behaviors along with displaying dysfunctional personality characteristics. For example, a charismatic leader, who is capable of influencing many, may conduct themselves in an immoral manner and lack the skills necessary to effectively lead others in the 21st century, which is toxic, as advocated by Lipman-Blumen (2005). Based on the previous example, this charismatic leader did not necessarily abuse any of his or her “hard power.” Rather, this particular leader engaged in destructive behavior because of his or her incompetence in addition to exhibiting a dysfunctional character flaw of being amoral. From this premise, toxic leadership does not equate to the abuse of “hard power.” This is an idea the Department of Defense should investigate further.

To effectively lead in the 21st century, which is becoming more uncertain and ambiguous because of globalization and technology, individuals must be mentally agile, adaptive, collaborative, innovative, and moral. The military must focus leader development on the importance of moral decision-making, emotional intelligence, technical proficiency, networking, and taking calculated risks. Nye (2009) also agreed with the essence of this idea: “The soft power of attraction and the ability to adapt to situations are the key to effective leadership that can be learned…” (p. 1). Nye (2009) further believed that women intuitively appreciate the significance of “soft power,”
whereas men gravitate more to the “hard power” of command. So, the question is, again, “Are women more prepared or equipped to lead in the 21st century?”

Just as retail firms conduct market research on specific demographics, the U.S. Army should conduct similar studies to determine how to lead and connect with the upcoming generation. The data shows that Millennials respond to different leadership styles compared to Generation X service members. The information also illustrates their occupational desires and motivators are distinctively different. Therefore, to enrich Millennials’ professional work-life experience, senior leaders must know more about Millennials in addition to understanding how gender may play a role in leadership style differences. Increased awareness is especially true, as Generation X officers are now becoming colonels and generals. U.S. Army senior leaders must understand what makes them tick.

Another possible research topic as we move further into the 21st century is to investigate whether rank-positional based authority is an appropriate means of defining someone as a leader or one’s leadership abilities. Rank-positional authority is a necessity for most organizations. Heifetz advises, “You can’t organize collective enterprise above the very small group of five to six-person level without an authority structure” (2009). The objective of these authority figureheads is to provide safeguards for their followers through direction, protection, and order (Heifetz, 2009). Heifetz (1994) expressed these safety-nets as:

- Direction is presented in the form of visions, goals, and strategies;
- Protection is given by maintaining awareness of environmental threats; and
• Order is rendered by designating followers to appropriate work assignments and locations in addition to maintaining organizational norms.

Such authority relationships are critical for undertaking routine tasks, but when mismanaged they can hamper productivity (Heifetz, 1994). Taking these responsibilities and relationships into account, individuals in these authority positions can solve routine problems based on expertise or intuition, also known as technical problems (Heifetz, 2009). For example, a manager, which is a position of authority, can sustain the organization’s direction by maintaining systems, processes, and procedures (Maxwell, 2007). These administrative techniques are also used to solve or minimize the effects of somewhat routine problems, but these actions fail to equate to leadership activities.

According to Maxwell (2007), a leader is an individual who effects change by recognizing and influencing intangibles (e.g., energy, morale, timing, and momentum). Such immaterials are, indeed, necessary when organizations are faced with complex problems with no technical solutions. Heifetz (1997) refers to these types of problems as adaptive challenges. Adaptive challenges are described as those problems that require stakeholders to alter their values, beliefs, or work habits (Heifetz & Linksy, 2004). Leadership is about influencing others to confront the challenge, adjust their values, alter their perspectives, and learn new habits based on collective intelligence from employees at all levels (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997). Given this theory, leadership focuses on involving others in leadership activities throughout the organization by being inquisitive, working collaboratively, and possessing emotional intelligence in order to solve complex problems (Leslie & Canwell, 2010). So, the activities of leadership are transformational, in nature, that requires creative and orchestrated efforts to achieve results whereas rank-
Positional authority is, somewhat, geared towards consistency. Although a person’s rank-positional authority does not equate to leadership, they must aggressively work to transform their authority into leadership. For this reason, the U.S. Army should consider future research on the subject as problems become more complex and interconnected.

**Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice**

As the world becomes more interconnected and interdependent, leaders must learn to influence a multifaceted audience. That is why future leaders must value relationships, networks, and social capital. They must navigate through a maze of uncertainty and a multitude of stakeholders. Their priority should be forging mutual understanding and trusting relations with all their stakeholders, thereby permitting them to become more sensitive to their environment (Maak, 2007). As the U.S. military operates in multiple areas around the globe, their leaders must respectfully interact with political leaders from diverse cultures and backgrounds. These interactions may occur at the local as well as the international level. In short, they must value the country’s political, economic, and intellectual norms to cultivate an environment of respect and, eventually, trust (Maak, 2007).

**Summary**

The overall intent of this project was to acquire awareness as to how U.S. Army Millennial junior officers perceive toxic leadership, followed by identifying its impact on their professional work-life experience. In the end, the aim was to inform future research about the effects of toxic leadership, coupled with advising course developers on essential data necessary for constructing leader development programs for future junior
officers. Since the U.S. Army’s operating environment is so complicated, unpredictable, and involves an assortment of security as well as geopolitical matters, junior officers should receive continuous leadership education and training to instill an appreciation for persistent social and moral connections.

Because of these complexities, the U.S. Army should institute and cultivate a responsible leadership style of leading. Responsible leadership in conjunction with the department’s core values could aid in mitigating the influences of toxic leadership. Categorically, toxic leadership behavior can intensify an unstable situation even further by displaying an unwillingness to interrelate with his or her environment effectively. Instead, leaders must artfully oversee their followers’ energies.

To successfully manage such efforts, it is essential that leaders become skilled at communicating and negotiating in the most ethical and moral manner. Today’s demanding world mandates a continuous learning climate. For this reason, the U.S. Army should implement responsible leadership concepts to enrich the professional work-life experience for Millennials and, again, to minimize the effects of toxic leaders. If applied, senior leaders must determine the appropriate balance between leadership, technical, and tactical proficiency levels.

Before any changes are realized, CAL should conduct an in-depth study, just as retail companies do market research on potential consumers. Changing how leadership is taught will mandate that 17 basic leadership programs and 13 career courses be modified. An effort such as this will consume enormous amounts of resources to achieve success. Nevertheless, this is a necessary investment. To employ this type of leadership education
and training change, or any adjustments for that matter, will mandate an effective communication campaign.

An extensive communication strategy must entail a reason why the changes are needed and to share any potential organizational impacts that may be encountered. Strategic messaging will ensure all players are moving in the same direction with minimal opposition. Overall, as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, current and future leaders must value relationships, networks, and social capital based on moral principles as they negotiate through a maze of uncertainty. For this reason, responsible leadership theory can assist in finessing through these complex issues with the assistance of reliable partners in addition to enriching Millennials’ professional work-life experience.
Reference


U.S. Army Transportation Corps. (2015). Transportation branch officer leadership course program of instruction.


Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Institutional Review Board
2500 California Plaza • Omaha, Nebraska 68178
phone: 402.280.2126 • fax: 402.280.4766 • email: irb@creighton.edu

DATE: May 10, 2018
TO: Dennnis Major, Ed.D.
FROM: Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral
PROJECT TITLE: [1185934-2] Understanding the Impacts of Toxic Leadership on U.S. Army Junior Officers
SUBMISSION TYPE: Response/Follow-Up
ACTION: APPROVED
EFFECTIVE DATE: May 10, 2018
EXPIRATION DATE: May 9, 2019
TYPE OF REVIEW: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Response/Follow-Up materials for this project. The following items were reviewed and approved in this submission:

- Application Form - Major - Application for Response to IRB Requests.pdf (UPDATED: 05/8/2018)
- Application Form - n/a (UPDATED: 04/16/2018)
- Consent Waiver - 416 Attachment G Waiver of Consent.docx (UPDATED: 05/10/2018)
- Letter - Social Behavioral Informed Consent Form - Track Changes.docx (UPDATED: 05/9/2018)
- Letter - Social Behavioral Information Letter (UPDATED: 04/18/2018)
- Other - IRBNetDocument.pdf (UPDATED: 05/8/2018)
- Other - Research Site Approval Letter - Signed.pdf (UPDATED: 04/18/2018)
- Proposal - PROJECT METHODOLOGY - Track Changes.docx (UPDATED: 05/10/2018)
- Proposal - PROJECT METHODOLOGY v3.docx (UPDATED: 05/10/2018)
- Questionnaire/Survey - Participant Interview Questions APPROVED.doc (UPDATED: 04/16/2018)

The changes to the documents and clarifications provided satisfy the concerns of the Board as expressed in the IRB letter. Therefore, this project is fully approved. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The documentation of consent has been waived, as per 45 CFR 46.117, with the following justification: That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context. Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements:

1. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must
continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

2. Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

3. All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPRROs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

4. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

5. This project has been determined to be a minimal risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. The Continuing Review or Project Termination form must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

If you have any questions, please contact Christine Scheuring at 402-280-3364 or christinescheuring@creighton.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Creighton University IRB-02 Social Behavioral's records.
Appendix B

Research Site Consent Form

OFFICE OF SECURITY COOPERATION
U.S. EMBASSY-BAGHDAD
6060 BAGHDAD PLACE
WASHINGTON, DC 20521-6060

April 15, 2018

Office of the Chief

Creighton University
Institutional Review Board
2500 California Plaza
Omaha, NE 68178
(402) 280-2126

Dear Creighton University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee:

We are familiar with Colonel Dennis Major’s research project entitled “Understanding the Impacts of Toxic Leadership on U.S. Army Junior Officer.” All interview surveys with junior company grade officers between the ages of 22-30 along with any observations around the organization’s areas of responsibility are approved.

We realize this research will be carried out following sound ethical principles, that participant involvement in this research study is strictly voluntary, and confidentiality of participants’ research data is ensured, in accordance with Creighton University IRB protocols.

Therefore, as the senior representative of the Office of Security Cooperation, I agree that Colonel Dennis Major’s research project may be conducted throughout our organization.

Any questions regarding this memorandum should be addressed to Colonel Kevin Powers, Office of Security Cooperation-Iraq at (301) 985-8841 ext. 3995 or PowersKM1@state.gov.

With warmest regards,

BRADLEY A. BECKER
Major General, U.S. Army
Chief, Office of Security Cooperation – Iraq
Participant Interview Questions

General Background Questions:

1. What is your current age?
2. How long have you been serving?
3. What was your source of commissioning and when were you commissioned?
4. Where did you attend college and what year did you graduate?
5. What were some of your contributing factors or influencers for joining the U.S. Army?
6. Did you grow up in a diverse community or attend a diverse school? If yes, please explain.
7. How do you remain abreast of current events? For example, do you acquire information from social media or mainstream news outlets? Additionally, do you acquire information from media outlets geared towards your political values or do you gather information from multiple outlets with opposing views?

Research Focused Questions:

1. What is your definition of toxic leadership?
2. Given the components of toxic leadership (i.e., destructive behavior, dysfunctional personal qualities), have you ever experienced or witnessed this type of behavior from any of your superiors, peers, or subordinates?
3. What aspects, events, and people intimately connected with your toxic experience stand out for you? What possible changes do you relate with the experience?

4. Did these leaders have a position or negative impact on the performance and morale levels of their subordinates and organizations?

5. What impressions were produced by the experience of toxic leadership?

6. What opinions stood out for you?

7. During your professional military education (PME) process, do you believe that toxic leadership was addressed adequately? Please explain.

8. Do you believe the U.S. Army’s core values (leadership, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage) can uphold the Army’s culture of inclusiveness?

9. Do you believe you received sufficient training on the fundamentals of leadership, ethics, decision-making, and problem-solving throughout your PME process to mitigate the effects of toxic leadership?

10. Have these experiences had a significant impact on your approach to leadership? Please explain.
Appendix D

Social-Behavioral Research Informed Consent

Project Title: Understanding the Impacts of Toxic Leadership on U.S. Army Junior Officers
IRB project number: 1185934-1
Principal Investigator: Dennis Major, Graduate Program (Doctor of Education)
Principal Investigators’: 405-200-8448 (U.S.) or dcmajor93@gmail.com
Research Coordinators: Dr. Wayne Young, Associate Vice Provost for Student Development

This research project is attempting to understand the impact of toxic leadership on tomorrow’s U.S. Army leaders.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary and will have zero bearing on my military career, whether I decide to participate or not. In addition, I understand the researcher, Dennis Major, will avoid any attempts of being coercive throughout the interview process. If, at any point, I feel pressured by the investigator, I can report the violation to the Office of Security Cooperation leadership or Creighton University IRB office. I further realize that I will not be paid for my participation.

2. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview. Plus, I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

3. At any point during the interview process, if I feel my experiences of toxic leadership has affected me mentally, physically or professionally, there are resources available (e.g., medical and/or mental behavior physician, unit Chaplin, or the Inspector General’s Office) to assist in dealing with such hostile experiences.

4. Participation involves being interviewed by a researcher, Dennis Major, from Creighton University. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and a subsequent transcript will also be made. Once a transcript is produced all recording will be deleted. However, if I don’t want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.

5. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.

6. Faculty and administrators from Creighton University will neither be present at the interview nor have access to raw notes or transcripts. This precaution will prevent my individual comments from having any negative repercussions.
7. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Creighton University. For research problems or questions, the IRB Office Staff may be contacted at (402) 280-3200.

Stanford University (n.d.)
Appendix E

Dissertation Timeline

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<tr>
<th>Task</th>
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<tr>
<td>Finish Chapters 1-3</td>
<td>Dec-17</td>
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<td>Proposal Approved</td>
<td>Nov-17</td>
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<td>IRB Approval</td>
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<td>Data Collection</td>
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<td>Data Analysis</td>
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<td>Complete Chapter 5</td>
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<td>Oral Defense</td>
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<td>Revisions and Committee Approval</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Revisions and Approval</td>
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Dissertation Timeline