Abstract

The purpose of the qualitative, case study research was to explore leadership and retention factors associated with Marine Corps officers the Marine Corps desired to retain until retirement eligible. The objective was to explore the views of Command and Staff students who were at the mid-point of their career and faced with retention decisions. The study incorporated a comprehensive document review focused on leadership and retention, Marine Corps precepts involving promotion and retention policies, Marine Corps leadership and retention archival documents, and participant interviews using semi-structured questions to obtain insight into the research questions. The study involved the dynamic relationship between the leader and subordinate and focused on theories and factors influencing leadership and retention decisions. Five thematic themes were generated and explored: 1) a leader’s level of engagement with subordinates impacts retention decisions, 2) Marines want leaders to lead through their actions and desire mentoring, 3) leaders must allow subordinates to do their job – avoid micromanaging, 4) leaders desire opportunities for increased responsibility and want to be challenged, and 5) provide a path for stellar Marines to be promoted faster, and path for mediocre Marines to be discharged without discrimination. The results of the study provide insight on leadership theories and influence of variables in retention decisions. Recommendations are provided for modifying promotion and retention policies, active pursuit of a leadership to subordinate mentorship program, and insight on the value of a family’s quality of life program on retention. Further study is recommended on leadership and retention issues focused by gender, occupation, and leadership and retention factors associated with Marine Corps officers who have achieved a terminal rank.

Keywords: leadership, retention, Marine Corps
A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS IN MID-LEVEL MANAGER SIN THE MARINE CORPS

by

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father who is both my best friend and life’s role model. My father provided the daily example on how to live a Godly life. My father’s life purpose was to pursue a path in service to God and a plan higher than his own. Thank you Dad.
Acknowledgments

A sincere thank you to the faculty and staff at Liberty University who serve with a divine perspective. To my wife, thank you for your never ending support, love, affection, loyalty, and believing in me in spite of my many shortfalls. I love you.
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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

This research explored the impact of several theories on retention and leadership in the Marine Corps. The components include behavior, engagement, commitment and trust, as well as motivational factors impacting the retention decision of middle managers in the Marine Corps. The United States (US) military is required to defend the US from all adversaries and is the guarantor of its security and independence. The function of the US Armed Forces is to embody the highest values of American society and serve under the civilian control of the president, the commander in chief (Joint Publication 1 [JP 1], 2017). Given the crucial roles and high standards required to serve the US, this study intends to identify those factors which have the most significant possible impact on leaders to accomplish their mission and impact attrition.

This study has the potential to aid in better understanding the significant variables impacting this decision-making process and assist in developing policies and training programs to impact how leaders interact with middle managers. The research contributes to the facilitating a greater understanding of these factors impacting retention decisions and ensure the Marine Corps retains the best and brightest Marines to accomplish its mission (Marine Corps Order, 1130.76D [MCO 1130], 2017).

Background of the Problem

Negative attrition for mid-level managers in industry, results in increased costs and organizational inefficiency. As the global market and technology increase the opportunity for greater competition, research has shown a corresponding increase in industries attempting to adapt through organizational changes to stay ahead of their rivals (Marsden, 2016). These changes create turbulence in the workforce often manifesting in higher negative attrition. As a result, the industry is focused on research to slow turnover and maintain a workforce to meet its
current and emerging needs (Spreitzer & Mishra, 2002). The demand for professional labor in the civilian market has increased dramatically from 1995 to 2010, from 18% annually to 35% (Carrera, Luss, & Wang, 2015). The increase in hiring activity represents a challenge for most organizations.

The military is no exception combating negative attrition in its mid-grade force to meet its war and peacetime obligations. All Department of Defense (DoD) policies related to promotion are based on United States Code (USC) Title 10. Title 10 codifies regulations governing officer personnel management within the armed forces. The mission of the officer promotions branch of the Marine Corps is to provide staff assistance to administer laws and regulations governing officer promotions (Manpower Promotion Branch [MMPR-1], 2018). Since 1990 the rate of promotion for officers has increased dramatically due to higher than anticipated attrition; often a result of numerous deployments and options for officers to leave the armed forces to seek civilian work opportunities (McHugh, Potter, Quester, Samuelson, & MacLeod, 2006).

Negative attrition is defined as a reduction in the workforce, without management taking overt actions to minimize its effect (Longo, 2007). The Marine Corps utilizes a vacancy-driven promotion model with end-strength capped at each rank. As an example, a major leaving the armed forces creates a vacancy and opportunity for a captain to become promoted. This vacancy creates a chain reaction throughout the ranks to keep end-strength at mandated levels through each rank (McHugh et al., 2006). The increase in officer attrition is expensive and is creating a faster promotion track resulting in younger officers assuming positions of responsibility earlier in their career than in the previous 15 years. From 1990 to 2005, the average time in service for an officer in the Marine Corps to reach the rank of major was approximately 15 years (Gonzalez,
2011). From 2000 to 2005, the average time to reach the rank of major decreased to just over nine years (Secretary of the Navy, [SECNAV 1412.9B], 2006). The costly increase in attrition and lack of experience in the officer ranks of the armed forces may have adverse consequences impacting the ability to maintain the high standards directed by the Joint Staff as seen in Joint Publication 1 ([JP 1], 2017).

**Problem Statement**

The general problem to be addressed is the high attrition rate for mid-level business managers resulting in reduced organizational effectiveness. Negative attrition results in a loss of corporate knowledge and experience which takes time to regenerate and is both a time and monetary burden to the industry as leaders attempt to retain qualified managers to meet its needs (Marsden, 2016). In a 2016 study, adverse attrition for mid-level managers resulted in the average manager having 50% more direct reports and less time to perform tasks than in the previous decade resulting in inefficiency and higher costs to an organization (Tyler, 2016). Many firms are left with few options except to fill vacancies with inexperienced leaders before they are ready to assume positions of greater responsibility (Bhardwaj & Singh, 2017). Witters and Agrawal (2015) stated the problem of high attrition in middle management and cite poor leadership and a lack of engagement by senior leaders as significant contributing factors for negative attrition. The specific problem to be addressed is the high attrition rate in mid-career Marine officers that results in inefficiencies and increased costs to retrain capable officers to meet peace and war-time missions.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the reasons why mid-level managers are choosing to leave the Marine Corps before retirement eligible and what leaders can
do to influence this decision. This larger problem is explored through an examination of various theories, and an in-depth study of mid-level managers in the industry. The target audience are Marine Corps leaders responsible for establishing policy and guidelines, while the target population are Marine Corps command and staff students who represent a population sample inside the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps students consist of proven leaders selected to attend a graduate level program who have demonstrated based on successful past performance and the potential for future advancement (MCO P1553.4b, 2008).

The perception of middle management leaders in the Marine Corps on leadership and job satisfaction are explored through interviews. The interviews intend to determine areas the Marine Corps is successful in developing its current leaders but also areas the Marine Corps can enhance leadership training and or development of senior leaders to improve mission performance and reduce negative attrition. Furthermore, this research may have ancillary benefits by guiding promotion and retention policy recommendations governing the Marine Corps and its middle management. The benefit of this research has the potential to provide for a better understanding of how to develop middle managers to meet both personal and corporate goals on the future needs of the Marine Corps to accomplish its objectives.

**Nature of the Study**

A clearly defined method for exploring the research problem is required to facilitate both data collection and interpretation. By providing a clearly defined method and design in the beginning stages of research, the project was able to yield the information required to address the research questions.
Discussion of Method

In examining the nature of this study, I considered three primary types of research methodology and settled on the qualitative design approach as most appropriate. Creswell (2014) stated the three research methods as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods which is a combination of both the quantitative and qualitative research methods. Some research allows for both qualitative and quantitative features to aid the research which can help explain observations leading to better understanding (Creswell, 2014).

Quantitative method. Quantitative research is a method for testing a hypothesis by gathering data through a variety of means then examining the causal relationship among the variables. This type of research measures the relationship mathematically through statistical procedures and help the researcher explain the magnitude and influence variables have on an independent variable (Mendenhall & Sinchich, 2012; O’Dwyer & Bernauer, 2013). A quantitative approach is often used in studying a large sample population to lower the probability of bias. A hallmark of quantitative studies is the ability to replicate the results of a study by another researcher (Babbie, 2010).

The primary quantitative methods include experimental, descriptive, correlational, and quasi-experimental. Each method is distinctive, yet shares a common objective to help explain why. The experimental design attempts to measure changes in a relationship between the independent and dependent variable to validate the assumptions and measure the change in the relationship between the variables. The descriptive method is a similar quantitative approach that measures the data collected without any manipulation of the information. This method is typically faster than the experimental design, however, this method may lack robustness since it fails to measure the significance or magnitude of the relationship between variables and may
produce skewed results. The correlational method looks at a minimum of two or more variables in a group to determine a causal relationship between or among variables to explain questions in a researcher’s study. The quasi-experimental method is similar to experimental design, however, it lacks random assignment typical with experimental design. This method typically examines a group against a baseline of a similar test group to compare similarities or deviations (Creswell, 2014).

There are specific limitations in using each of these quantitative methods in this research, such as a lack of flexibility in discovering themes, attitudes, and an examination of behavior by the research subjects. This lack of detail results from the lack of options to address issues and concerns found in surveys, pools, and questionnaires (Singh, 2007). This study did not include the testing of a hypothesis through statistical procedures nor did it involve precise numerical findings commonly found in quantitative methods. According to Creswell (2014), the testing of an objective theory through statistical procedures is a condition for a quantitative method, therefore, the quantitative approach was not appropriate for this study.

**Qualitative method.** The qualitative method involves observing human behavior, gathering information, and interpreting the results to better understand attrition and leadership behavior (Stake, 2010). This type of research is a useful means for discovering and understanding the meaning of a human or social problem by individuals or groups. Qualitative research is an ideal method to explore human behavior and relies on the researcher’s subjective interpretation of data (Alase, 2017; Lictheman, 2014).

The qualitative research method was used to study mid-level management attrition and leadership factors in the Marine Corps. This method obtains insight through the discovery of meanings (interpretive) and allows the research to unfold naturally in a real-world setting
(naturalistic). These factors are two essential elements in qualitative methods of research (Stake, 2010).

**Mixed methods.** The mixed method attempts to include the use and benefits of both quantitative and qualitative research for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2014). The mixed methods approach can provide an opportunity to obtain numerous targets of information by triangulating the results to depict or obtain a more accurate result (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2010). The mixed method approach attempts to add robustness to the data collection by providing additional data points in the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This research was not a method available based on the limited quantitative data available to complete this study and therefore was not selected.

**Discussion of Design**

The types of qualitative types of research design include case study, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, and ethnography (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The nature of the study chosen is the qualitative case study design, which is one of the five design approaches used for exploring a research problem. The significant features of a case study involve analyzing actual situations to gather information, learn, and help explain a situation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2002) described the case study as a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. The research consisted of extensive data collection from multiple sources for analysis and themes generated for lessons learned and to help explain the “how” or “why” (Yin, 2002). The use of this qualitative case study research design focused on understanding the influences of leadership on adverse attrition in the Marine Corps from a variety of perspectives and of similar ‘bounded’ subjects focused on a central theme (Stake, 1995).
**Phenomenological.** The phenomenological design was first conceived by Husserl in the early 1900s and used this design to describe the experience of a phenomenon and locate a universal truth based on experience approach (Bawalan, 2017; Husserl & Dahlstrom, 2014). The experiences associated with a phenomenon are best uncovered through direct observation and interviews and often attempt to explain the meaning behind a lived experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). The phenomenological style of research focuses on understanding perceptions, or feelings rather than uncovering more specific findings, therefore, the phenomenology approach was not appropriate for this study.

**Grounded theory.** Schwandt (2016) stated that grounded theory is most appropriate for studies where little is known about a phenomenon and is best used to inductively generate a theory which can emerge from data. The grounded theory design focuses on attempting to discover or generate a theory to explain an action or process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodology focus on building a theory distinguishes its approach from other designs (Merriam, 2009). This research was not attempting to build new theories, therefore, the grounded theory approach was not the most appropriate design for this study.

**Narrative.** The narrative design is another method not selected because it typically involves a chronological story of an event or someone’s life often utilizing the first-person stories of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher becomes immersed in the complexity of events and stories being lived by individuals glean information to explain meaning to experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To achieve conclusions on more than personal accounts, discussions and interviews are required resulting in the narrative method failing to meet the purpose of this research and therefore was not an appropriate design for this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
**Ethnography.** Ethnography is the last method considered and is often associated with social sciences as both a method and product (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Ethnography consists of a systematic study of cultures and people which is important and may yield illuminating data for study, however, the data collected are over a short period of time as opposed to a long-term study. Therefore, the ethnography method is also an inappropriate methodology for this research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Nature of the Study**

The qualitative case study research design consisted of interviews and discussions with students at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College (MCCSC) to highlight how leadership impacts attrition as well as evaluate the context and factors influencing the research data. The selection of a sufficient population size of MCCSC students to survey captures a distinct population of mid-level managers known for confronting complex and uncertain security environments (MCO P1553.4b, 2008). Stake (1995) characterized the case study as having ‘bounds’ meaning a defined population is selected for research. This target population profile and research scope fits both Stake and Yin’s criteria for quality control and Creswell’s case study requirements by providing a large population bounded by a specific time, place or boundary (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). The qualitative case study is a “comprehensive research strategy” (Yin, 2002, p. 14) which can assist leaders to better understand leadership factors influencing adverse attrition and provide recommendations for leaders in the Marine Corps on how to influence retention on Marine Corps officers the Marine Corps desires to retain until retirement eligible.

**Research Questions**

RQ1: Why are mid-level managers staying in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible?
RQ2: Why are mid-level managers choosing to leave the Marine Corps before retirement eligible?

RQ3: How can leaders best impact the decision by mid-level managers to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible?

RQ3a: How can leaders inspire mid-level managers to want to stay in the Marine Corps?

RQ3b: How can leaders reduce mid-level managers’ desire to leave the Marine Corps?

**Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework examines the relationship among ideas and constructs by drawing upon research, theory and experience (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The conceptual framework for this study was based on the premise that a process exists for policies and programs which can be modified by leaders, or there exists enough flexibility in the military culture for leaders to influence mid-level manager attrition (MCO 1130). The research explored several theories and factors pertaining to behavior, engagement, commitment, and motivation and how they may influence why mid-level managers choose to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. The theories discussed explored the factors impacting attrition and leadership influences and attempt to contribute to a greater understanding of this knowledge gap in officer attrition.

The illustration below (Figure 1) highlights the intersection and commonality of these theories with leadership and the impacts on a mid-level manager’s decision to remain in the Marine Corps.
Figure 1. Relationship between theories and variables.

**Discussion of behavioral theory (BT).** According to Yukl (2013), the BT of leadership focuses on the behavior and actions of a leader and not on specific traits. BT is unique; it suggests leaders can learn which specific behaviors are likely to lead to successful outcomes meaning leaders can adapt behaviors to specific situations to maximize opportunities for success (Yukl, 2013). BT proposes an individual can over time grow, mature, and develop skill sets to better lead subordinates in an organization.

The Marine Corps trains Marines to specific standards for both tasks and situations one is expected to encounter. How to respond to situations is often dictated and the behavior is often predictable. This behavior is consistent with behavioral theory of reasoned actions which considers the environmental conditions influencing behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010). Understanding attitudes, norms, and an individual’s perceived expectation for authority can impact the development of desired behaviors in leaders (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005). Figure 1 illustrates how the leader is the initiator; they are the one whose actions incite a positive or
negative response by the follower. Based on BT, the actions of leaders are often measured and can reveal levels of organizational performance and the status of an organizational climate (Yukl, 2013).

Northouse (2016) distinguished trait theory from BT with an emphasis that BT focuses on what leaders do and how they can develop their capabilities. Hall (2013) theorized that it is easier to modify a leader’s behaviors and define what works as opposed to developing an individual’s traits. An added benefit of BT is the ability to identify how certain behaviors can contribute to a breakdown in organizational effectiveness, an employee’s efforts and adds an additional layer of understanding to what actions work in shaping employee outcomes (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

The Marine Corps espouses leadership, as the key ingredient that sets Marines apart from other services and organizations (US Department of the Navy, 1995). Leadership traits are published for Marines to learn and apply as values and include factors such as dependability, bearing, courage, integrity as well as many others. The Marine Corps also lists leadership principles which include knowing one’s Marines and looking out for their welfare, keeping one’s Marines informed, and others as well (US Department of the Navy, 1995). The concept of discipline, commitment, trust, and often sacrifice is embraced and even celebrated as evidence of espousing the virtuous nature of being a Marine. The perseverance and commitment to duty are ingrained as morally right and part of the identity of being a Marine.

The Marine Corps starts its leadership development by requiring officer and enlisted to memorize and recite these leadership traits and principles as part of its indoctrination on how to achieve success on the battlefield. The use of principles and traits supports a trait-based theory of leadership, however, it is of little value unless tied to objectives to influence behavior as
leaders develop skills and obtain experience to fulfill their responsibility as officers and accomplish their assigned tasks.

**Discussion of engagement theory (ET).** ET is studied to reveal the practice and science involving human behavior inside an organization and the necessary environment conducive for employees to thrive (Potnuru, Sahoo, & Sharma, 2018). Figure 1 illustrates the impact this theory has on both the leader and follower. Engagement involves the conditions in an organizational environment that encourages personnel to thrive and deliver their best (Albrecht & Marty, 2017). ET fosters providing a path that also finds ways to support employee participation and ownership in an organization. Research has shown that engagement can be built through early and often communication with employees and by developing supportive attitudes between superior and subordinates (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). Barriers to engagement include sensing a lack of support from superiors and an employee’s feeling of instability (Beasley et al., 2018). An organization focused on ensuring engagement will often result in an increase in productivity, reduced employee absenteeism, and higher rates of retention (Albrecht & Marty, 2017).

ET involves a continuum of stakeholder participation and buy-in. It starts with employee commitment, followed by engagement, and ultimately results in employee empowerment. This transformation occurs based on the actions and attitudes of our leaders and establishes the organizational climate. The US Department of the Navy (1995) stated that those in society whom desire to become a Marine, must allow their attitudes and beliefs to be transformed into something greater than themselves. The Marines make a conscious decision to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) and exhibit these in every aspect of their life. This transformation is similar in how one might describe a person coming to know Christ. We put on
the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16, NIV), where we are transformed by the renewal of our mind (Romans 12:2, NIV). As a follower of Christ or as a Marine, we have to choose to be different, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, mentors, and leaders committed to helping us grow, we become part of a family with roots. This engagement serves as an impetus for successful behavior and outcomes. This study focuses on the impact of engagement in retention and the factors most important to understanding mid-level managers’ decision to remain in the Marine Corps.

**Discussion of commitment-trust theory (CT).** CT was postulated by Morgan and Hunt (1994) and focused on ensuring an on-going effort to build trust and commitment through communication, transparency, and developing a cooperative relationship between parties. CT is part of a conscious decision to remain steadfast to a course and not deviate from a path or duties despite of hardships or even the opportunity to change one’s circumstance based on options available to the employee. Figure 1 demonstrates that commitment is a variable that influences both the leader and follower’s actions. This action is measured in the level of effort and perseverance to accomplish tasks. Commitment is a requirement to ensure predictable behavior in the face of fluctuation in desires and interests. Commitment in the labor force is the force making employees perform the action they would otherwise not perform (Michael & Szekely, 2018).

In a study by Hashim and Tan (2015), an employee’s satisfaction has a direct influence on the ability to trust its organization and is positively influenced by team member’s continuous practice of sharing knowledge. CT focuses on building a long-term relationship with members in a team focused on a mutual understanding of expectations and goals (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Likewise, the concept of trust is a term often used by Marines. Secretary of Defense Mattis is
noted for telling his Marines that operations move at the speed of trust and as a leader, without trust, leadership is obsolete (Proser, 2018). This concept of commitment and trust is part of a Marine’s ethos and impacts a Marine’s decision to serve and remain in the service. This theory is also examined on its relevance to retention.

**Discussion of motivational theories (MT).** The MTs considered for this research include Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory and Herzberg’s Motivation Theory. Figure 1 illustrates MT as a variable influencing action on both the leader and follower. MT’s focus on a sense of belonging and the human need for acceptance in a group (Udechukwu, 2009). Maslow believed humans aspire to a self-actualized state. Maslow (1943) developed a motivational theory consisting of a pyramid of human needs. These five human needs follow a hierarchal order that defines the progressive responses resulting from human motivation (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow’s theory starts with the basic need of obtaining physical needs (e.g., shelter and food) and progresses up the hierarchy to include safety, love or a sense of belonging, esteem, and ultimately self-actualization (Udechukwu, 2009). Maslow’s theory for basic human needs parallels the same needs employees seek in a work environment. Maslow’s level two represents safety. A parallel in an organization is an employee’s perception of job security and is based on achieving expectations. An employee will attempt to move into the next hierarchy need of belonging and interpersonal relationship. An employee’s desire for acceptance in an organization relates to actions by leaders, their sense of commitment, and their trust in an organization. Maslow’s theory supports the importance that needs are met in achieving superior performance, developing future leaders, and retaining the right workforce.

Herzberg’s motivation theory highlights two main factors that influence job satisfaction as either hygiene or motivation (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Hygiene refers to
pay, benefits, work-place environment, and the general satisfaction employees have for their work (Herzberg et al., 1959). Motivation factors include job satisfaction, personal achievement and other factors related to increasing an employee’s commitment. Spector (2013) discussed how job satisfaction is simply how employees feel about their jobs and the aspects of their jobs. Intrinsic satisfaction reflects the experience of an employee having feelings of accomplishment while extrinsic satisfaction reflects satisfaction with the rewards of a job which may include compensation or job-security (Udechukwu, 2009). Herzberg and Maslow’s MT support this study by recognizing the impacts and importance of a leader’s behaviors as it relates to employee performance and desire to remain employed in an organization.

**Relation of selected theories to study.** The relation of the selected theories informed expectations in the following ways. First, the research demonstrates the positive and negative effects a leader’s behavior can have on subordinates and its ability to impact performance (Yukl, 2012). Conversely, research also highlights the negative impacts a leader’s behavior can have on subordinates (Northouse, 2016). A purpose of the study included examining the impact leaders can have to effect mid-level managers to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. The question was based on the assumption that leaders can modify behavior to shape organizational outcomes. The focus on BT attempts to highlight the behavior mid-level managers desire and need from the leaders in their chain of command to contribute to their success, ensure productivity, and ultimately a reduce negative attrition. Follow-on questions include (a) What are the reasons mid-level managers are choosing to leave or stay in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible? and (b) What impact can leaders have to impact a mid-level manager to remain in the Marine Corps? A second way this research helps is by understanding the factors that contribute towards developing commitment and engagement in the leader-
subordinate relationship. These theories contribute to understanding potential actions or policies leaders can take to stem negative attrition and promote efficiency in an organization (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

**Discussion of relationships between concepts.** BT, CT, MT, and ET are a complementary set of theories that support the postulation that leaders influence and shape behaviors resulting in a direct correlation to a subordinate’s attitude, job satisfaction, feelings of commitment, and contribute to organizational growth (Yukl, 2013). This belief suggests leaders play an essential role in productivity, happiness and ultimately retention decisions (Yukl, 2012). BT impacts the correlation between organizational outcomes and leaders’ behaviors and suggests a leader’s behavior can be identified and taught (Van Dun, Hicks, & Wilderom, 2016). The behavior of leaders to subordinates can contribute to an employee’s level of commitment, engagement, and produce positive outcomes in an organization.

Figure 1 depicts how a leader’s actions can shape the organizational climate. The leader is the initiator, and their actions are observed and create an organizational climate the follower must respond to. The leader and follower both have many internal and external variables influencing their perspective, however, it is the follower who takes these inputs to ultimately decide whether to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible.

Understanding a subordinate’s needs are opportunities for leaders to establish and build commitment and trust. Commitment and trust are a by-product of a leader’s behavior and actions and lead to higher levels of motivation. This task requires leaders to adapt to changing circumstances and know what is important to their subordinates followed by ensuring their behavior is aligned with employee needs (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). As commitment and trust are developed, employees begin to feel part of a team and feel a sense of ownership in the
organization. As an owner, employees typically desire more responsibility and are motivated to excel. This engagement by employees is a catalyst for enhancing performance, efficiency, and retention.

A leader’s ability to adapt and shape their behaviors suggests leaders need to have the ability to recognize the importance of developing methods to understand employee needs and concerns adding to an employee’s pyramid of needs. This engagement provides leaders the ability to act on the information acquired to apply the right behavior, action, or driver, to the appropriate situation and at the right time. Spector (2013) stated that learning and the process of changing starts with understanding what needs to change and why. A leader understanding CT and ET will ensure their behavior supports employee’s needs.

In a study by Beasley et al. (2018), employees that are engaged are more likely to be happier, more productive, and research has also shown a reduction in absenteeism and increase in retention lengths. These factors influence the follower (See Figure 1) and their decision to stay or leave the Marine Corps. Engagement requires effective communication as leadership decisions, and choices are typically made in a dynamic setting with numerous factors influencing one’s action (Bazzani, Caputo, Nayga, & Canavari, 2017). Albrecht and Marty (2017) demonstrated in their research the positive effects of establishing high commitment rates in an organization and its positive effect on retention. This study further explored how commitment is developed and earned from a Marine Corps perspective, how it can be enhanced by leaders, and its impact on negative attrition. Understanding the drivers that enhance commitment inside the Marine Corps allows for leaders to focus attention on relevant factors to identify and enact strategies for enhancing commitment and developing trust.
Summary of the conceptual framework. A leader’s behavior directly impacts an employee’s performance, commitment, and even retention. A leader can evaluate their subordinate needs and tailor their actions to foster a positive work environment. Leaders are bombarded with factors and drivers that shape their actions. Figure 1 depicts the theories and impacts to the leader-follower ecosystem. Ultimately, the follower must digest the variables impacting their world and choose their response based on the factors most important to the individual. The leader’s ability to engage employees as stakeholders has a positive impact in promoting commitment, trust, and productivity and is a significant impact to the follower’s environment. The efforts of this research are grounded in identifying how these theories result in positive impacts on an organization, influence retention, and highlight available options leaders have to influence behavior.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions were provided to ensure clarity and the intended use of terms used in this study.

Behavioral theory: Behavioral theory is often called behavioral approach emphasizes a leader’s personality characteristics. Behavioral theory considers a leader’s behavior as the best predictor of leadership influence and success (Northouse, 2016).

Commitment theory: A theory that a higher level of emotional attachment to an organization will result in higher job satisfaction, productivity, and increased retention (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

Employee commitment: Employee commitment is defined as the conditions that exist where an employee feels compelled or obligated to work to a specific standard (Albrecht & Marty, 2017).
**Employee empowerment:** Employee empowerment is the concept of endowing employees with the authority and trust to make decisions in an organization (Potnuru et al., 2018).

**Employee engagement:** Employee engagement is the concept of creating conditions for personnel to thrive and deliver their best efforts in the interest of the business (Albrecht & Marty, 2017).

**Engagement theory:** Engagement theory is defined as a theory that an employee’s productivity, efficiency, job satisfaction, and retention in an organization increases when given trust and the opportunity to make decisions (Albrecht & Marty, 2017; Shuck et al., 2011).

**Motivation:** Motivation is defined as the physical and psychological reasons for people’s actions, desires, and needs (Maslow, 1943). This concept of motivation is that which initiates, guides and maintains goal-oriented behavior (Cherry, 2018).

**Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

**Assumptions.** The main assumption associated with this study was the value of the Command and Staff College (CSC) participants on Marine Corps Base Quantico to provide sufficient and useful data to determine common themes for qualitative study. The Marine Corps CSC students represent eminently qualified leaders selected to attend military graduate level studies with the intent the graduates will assume positions of greater responsibility. The assumption was the contribution obtained by this population sample accurately revealed themes useful in providing an accurate analysis.

A secondary assumption made was that participants would respond both truthfully and with candor. The Marine Corps officers are stakeholders in their organization, however, Marines are known for not complaining and it was assumed the Marine Corps officers recognized the importance of providing accurate information to aid in the research.
Limitations. A potential weakness of this study was in the interpretation of the results of discussions and interviews. CSC is a rigorous 10-month graduate level course. There was potential for results to be difficult to interpret based on the rigors and stress incurred from the courses and Marine Corps mentality to never complain. The ability to perform a cross-reference on survey results and interviews on the same subjects at a later time in the Marine’s career may reveal additional factors contributing to understanding negative attrition and leadership in mid-level managers.

A secondary limitation was the bounds of the qualitative case study. While conducting interviews and observations, I had limited time with students due to the participants’ rigorous academic program. The ability to put the Marine at ease by creating a sense of trust and confidentially was difficult and could have limited the ability to adequately and accurately interpret the results of the student response to the questions and interviews. Lastly, this case study did not take into account a student’s performance, personality traits, and other potential influencing factors to the type of response provided.

Delimitations. The scope of this study focused on middle-level leaders in the Marine Corps who exhibited exemplary leadership skills and a proven record of superior performance. There were occasions when the officers not selected to CSC were at times needed and retained by the Marine Corps until retirement eligible, however, this typically occurs when there is a shortage of quality officers available to remain on active duty until retirement eligible. The boundaries were purposely set to focus only on the CSC students whom the Marine Corps desires to retain until retirement eligible.
Significance of the Study

Reduction of gaps. The significance of this study may provide leaders with a better understanding of the many factors influencing retention in mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. The study may also contribute to the body of knowledge by expanding the understanding on how to apply the theories highlighted to increase performance, job satisfaction, and provide recommendations on how leaders can better engage with subordinates. The study will provide a better understanding of the dynamic relationship of the various theories and may lead to recommendations in training programs and policies to support Marine Corps and JP 1 objectives.

There is substantial literature informing society of the numerous factors impacting a mid-level manager’s decision to attrite. These factors impact both the mid-level managers and their supervising leadership and include variables such as biological, emotional, and social forces that motivate individuals to stay or leave their job (Cherry, 2018). In a study examining various occupations, there was a demonstrated growing concern by organization and the resulting increase in costs, loss of experience, and a reduction in competitiveness in the market, due to impacts of performance, morale, and ultimately retention (Baseman et al., 2018).

This study explored attrition and leadership and focused on contributing to the knowledge gap in mid-level managers in the Marine Corps by examining the factors influencing attrition through focused discussions and interviews. This study intended to reduce this gap of knowledge about mid-manager attrition in the Marine Corps and provide recommendations to leaders on how to improve retention. The practical contribution of this research will also assist leaders, decision-makers, and policy-makers better understand how to better predict where and how to influence a mid-level manager’s decision to resign their commission before retirement eligible.
This study focused exclusively on successful mid-level managers in the Marine Corps and examined the conduct, influences, and relationship between leadership behavior and the mid-level managers. It focused on the importance of understanding and establishing the conditions for managers to thrive through engagement, commitment, trust, and the various motivation theories that impact a leader’s decision. The focus on motivation involves the decision to initiate behavior, persistence towards efforts, and intensity an individual pursues towards a goal (Cherry, 2018). The use of several theories to compliment the research is an attempt to both triangulate variables influencing retention, but also to demonstrate the complementary effects of a holistic and dynamic approach to retention and leadership significantly adding to the body of knowledge on this topic.

**Implications for Biblical integration.** This research explored variables and associated theories to better understand the conditions and impact leaders have to affect a mid-level manager’s decision to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. This study also explored the similarities of biblical leaders with today’s Marine Corps leaders by highlighting biblical figures from both the Old and New Testament. The examination revealed the similar behaviors and traits used by leaders to accomplish God’s purpose. These actions by leaders in the Bible are relevant today as they were over 2,000 years ago and provide applicable opportunities to better understand the theories and factors considered in this study.

The book of Proverbs states, “Be sure you know the condition of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds” (Proverbs 27:23, NIV). The Bible directs believers to be attentive to the needs of those in their organization and is justification for needing this study. Furthermore, the Bible states in 2 Timothy that: “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. That the man of God may be perfect,
thoroughly furnished to all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV). This research acknowledges the
divine inspiration of God, his spoken word, and the work and authority of his son sent to earth to
save each of us from sin. The Bible is useful and applicable today as a training manual for how
leaders and followers interact in every aspect of life.

Old Testament. In Genesis 2:15, before man had sinned, God tasked Adam to have
dominion over the Earth, to rule and subdue it. This task suggests that the establishment of work
was part of God’s original design and is part of God’s divine perspective. Van Duzer (2010)
called for mankind to be stewards of God’s creation, which includes the work Adam performed
in the garden as well as the work we perform today. The work Adam and everyone else
performs is an integration of our faith, a path for us to contribute to a common good and is a
form of worshiping our creator (Hardy, 1990). How well we perform our jobs and our attitude is
an also reflection of our obedience to Christ. How one uses the resources and talents they
possess and develop is an opportunity to accomplish God’s purpose for our life and honor him
while on Earth (Van Duzer, 2010).

Noah, Abraham, and Joseph are a few of the many Old Testament leaders displaying a
divine perspective and exemplary leadership behavior and commitment related to their work.
Each of these leaders were motivated to serve God based on behaviors motivated by divine
intervention, and God’s prior provisions. In Genesis 7, Noah displayed obedience and stayed
steadfast in his actions by obeying God’s command to build an ark. Noah demonstrated
righteousness, persistence, and perseverance to accomplish this task despite the task being so out
of the ordinary.

Abraham also displayed righteousness by his actions in obeying God when directed to
pursue new land. In Genesis it is stated, “The Lord had said to Abram, go from your country,
your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1, NIV).

Abraham’s faith and obedience are examples of how leaders and subordinates are to comport themselves at home and work. Joseph is another example of a man who learned to persevere and follow God’s commands when sold into slavery by his brothers. Joseph chose righteousness when faced with temptation, chose to honor God when tested.

In each of these old-testament examples, Noah, Abraham, and Joseph trusted God and followed God’s commands. This faith and relationship with God were built on God consistently meeting the needs of his followers. Each leader exhibited the behaviors desired by God because they were both committed to God’s purpose and motivated to trust God’s plan for their life. God’s prior actions of meeting these leader’s needs; both physical and psychological, built a reservoir of faith, a persistent desire to look to God for guidance and vigor to commit to follow God’s instructions without hesitation.

**New Testament.** Jesus Christ is our baseline and example for how to lead and defined what servant leadership is (Greenleaf, 2002). Jesus came to this earth to save us from sin. In John it is stated, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV). Just as organizations strive for success, Christ desires for us to be successful in our families, at home, and in our work and profession. As a leader who demonstrated the leadership standard, we can learn from Jesus the importance of training our subordinates to feel engaged, possess a sense of ownership, commitment, and trust just as Jesus prepared his disciples to share the Good News after his death and resurrection (Bloom, 2017).

Effective leadership behavior requires meeting others needs and putting other individuals concerns before one’s own (Wilkes, 1998). Jesus invested in his followers by taking the time to
properly train, equip and develop his followers for a purpose higher than ourselves. The ability to exhibit leadership behavior, engage, and develop a commitment to following Christ is based on our Saviors divine perspective of humility, gratitude, and selflessness (Blanchard, Hodges, & Hendry, 2008). Jesus’ actions demonstrated his commitment to lead and serve others. In John 13, Jesus instructs his disciples to follow his example when he was teaching his disciples how to serve those they lead.

**Relationship to Field of Study**

The focus of this specific study was on various theories to better understand what reasons mid-level managers are choosing to stay or leave the Marine Corps until eligible for retirement. A secondary focus was understanding the impact and influence leaders have on retention as well as what leadership behaviors are most effective to influence followers. It is this focus that demonstrates how this study directly relates to the field of leadership and associated factors related to retention.

Northouse (2016) presented the behavioral leadership approach as a framework to identify specific behaviors to influence performance, and in this study, retention of mid-level managers until retirement eligible. Research in BT expanded the general focus of leadership from trait-based to a focus on two general kinds of behaviors (Stogdill, 1968). The first behavior is task-based behaviors which are tasks taken to achieve a specific objective (Yukl, 2012). Task-based behaviors include pre-determined responses to situations and consequences for actions. The second type of behavior are relationship-based behaviors that help employees feel engaged, build trust, and aid in employees to be more productive (Northouse, 2016; Yukl, 2012). This type of behavior can lead to greater job-satisfaction, trust, commitment, and ultimately retention.
(Yukl, 2012). The biblical leaders we examined provide examples of positive BT and consequences.

Employee engagement and empowerment is the concept of creating conditions for personnel to thrive and deliver their best efforts in the interest of their organization (Albrecht & Marty, 2017). This concept implies endowing employees with the authority and trust to make decisions. The expected results include greater morale, higher performance, lower absenteeism, increased efficiency, and ultimately lower attrition (Potnuru et al., 2018).

Engagement influences both the leader and follower. The leader must have the trust and confidence of their superior and have possessed the opportunity to adapt their leadership style to make decisions and set policy that supports empowerment (Albrecht & Marty, 2017). The follower is a respondent to the leader’s initiatives and actions. Their ability to establish a sense of belonging is related to actions, behaviors, and authority granted to subordinates. This empowerment can fulfill the need to feel significant and valued in an organization. The motivation of leaders and support to subordinates involve hygiene factors such as pay, job security, work-life balance, and general job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). Other motivational factors involve job satisfaction, the opportunity for advancement which contributes to a higher level of motivation, and the specific needs of the employee (Maslow, 1943). The ability to understand these needs and how to shape policies and the environment can have a significant impact on increasing organizational commitment and reducing employee attrition.

**Summary of the Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is in better understanding of the environment the mid-level Marine manager operates in and the many factors and variables that influence a mid-level manager in the Marine Corps to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. The ability
to understand how each theory interacts and supports the Marine’s decision is valuable to both the leader and Marine Corps. The ability to understand each driver can minimize the already significant cost to retrain leaders with the necessary KSAs to accomplish the Marine Corps and JP 1 mission. Secondary benefits include greater efficiency in the organization and less absenteeism.

An additional significance to this study is focused on Herzberg’s motivation theory which highlights the factors that promote job satisfaction in an organization (Herzberg et al., 1959). Research conducted demonstrated a positive correlation between job satisfaction and employee retention (Rose & Raja, 2016). Understanding the desire to persist in an environment faced with obstacles can help leaders understand the ‘why’s of behavior.’ The ability to recognize the drivers influencing the behavior of both leaders and followers can assist in developing a better training program for Marines in leadership positions that impact policy decisions to benefit the Marine Corps.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to provide both background information relevant to the understanding and dynamic relationship between leaders and middle managers in the Marine Corps and the many factors influencing leadership and retention decisions. Professional books, journals, and peer-reviewed scholarly articles were reviewed to provide a foundation to better understand the job satisfaction factors associated with leadership models and theories influencing both leaders and followers in the Marine Corps.

The articles chosen were based on a review of leadership theories and methods referenced from seminal authors located in Marine Corps doctrinal publications (e.g., US Department of the Navy, 1995) and the many evolving definitions for leadership highlighted in
academic journals over the past decade (Bryman, 1992; Antonakis & Day, 2017). Except for seminal authors, whose theories date back upwards of 100 years, over 80% of articles were published within the last five years and over 75 articles are peer-reviewed.

While significant attention to negative attrition and its detrimental impacts to an organization is available for analysis in industry and middle management, there exists little information on mid-level managers’ retention, its impacts to operational readiness, and the relationship to leadership in the Marine Corps. The summary of this literature review provides a synthesis of multiple factors and their relationship to retention and leadership and fill gaps in the body of knowledge. The first section pertains to types of attrition which consists of sub-sections involving both positive and negative attrition. The second section of this literature review focuses on how leadership styles interact with retention and leadership decisions through an in-depth analysis of various models. Leadership styles and theories reviewed consist of behavioral, great-man, transactional, transformation, and the trait theory. The third section involves examining factors associated with motivation and job satisfaction; providing analysis on its importance and relationship to retention. The fourth section consists of examining the four theories involving leadership, engagement, commitment and trust, and motivation. Each of these four theories examines how their theory interacts with various leadership styles and contributes to retention and leadership decisions in the Marine Corps.

**Introduction to attrition.** Research has shown that on average; the total cost of employee’s to an organization represent upwards of 70% of the cost of business operations (USDL-19-0449, 2018). Organizations attempting to understand, and influence attrition have the potential to generate tremendous savings, retain requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities inside their organization. These savings consist of both cost savings and create opportunities for firms
to generate efficiencies and improve their ability to compete in the market. The attrition reviewed in this research is broken down into four specific categories: voluntary, involuntary, functional, and dysfunctional (Marsden, 2016).

The first category is voluntary attrition which consists of an employee choosing to leave an organization for other employment. An example of this may occur when an employee is enticed to work somewhere else based on better working conditions or higher pay. The second category of attrition is considered involuntary attrition. This type of attrition consists of attrition initiated by an organization. Two examples of this type of attrition are (a) a firm restructuring its organization due to market conditions and no longer needs as many mechanics to perform a specific task or (b) an employee is failing to achieve tasks or meet requirements needed by the firm and the firm releases the employee to focus on employees with specific skills needed to remain competitive. A third type of attrition is functional attrition. This type of attrition consists of an organization terminating an employee due to poor performance. The essential element associated with functional attrition is the employee terminated is typically easy to replace and has little impact on the organization. The last type of attrition is dysfunctional attrition. This attrition consists of turnover which is considered harmful to the organization and also consists of employees with hard-to-replace skills (Marsden, 2016). This type of attrition has the greatest negative impact on an organization in terms of costs, efficiency, and may impact a firm’s competitiveness in the market. In examining the four types of attrition, an employee may fall into more than one category.

The research conducted examines each of these categories of attrition and for simplicity, combines the four categories into two specific categories: positive attrition and negative attrition. For terms of this review, positive attrition is defined as the attrition the Marine Corps wants and
needs to have to remain efficient and successful to accomplish its mission. Negative attrition is defined as the loss of desired personnel that erodes efficiency and hurts the mission and goals of an organization. Negative attrition in the Marine Corps negatively impacts the Marine Corps mission and support of JP 1. The focus of attrition in this study represents the attrition of mid-level managers who do not remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible.

**Positive attrition.** Attrition is the rate at which employees leave an organization over a period of time. Positive attrition is the force that helps ensure the right individuals with the right skill sets are available to an organization and the employees are in the best jobs to support a firm’s objectives (Spector, 2013). In a recent study by Cohee (2019), a leader’s actions to shape the staff and composition of employees is typically an effort to improve operational performance, improve profitability, and align employees to a desired culture within the organization. Marsden (2016) demonstrated in his research that attempts to retain the right employees is usually a less expensive and time-consuming process than hiring new employees into vacant positions. Organizations whose employees who are performing tasks they enjoy will typically experience lower attrition rates than those employees performing tasks they feel unqualified for or do not enjoy (Spector, 2013).

Training new employees involves more than developing new skills. It involves adapting employees to a culture and conforming individuals and the group to the organizational expectations inside a firm (Spector, 2013). The process for shaping a work force to meet organizational needs is not always successful. The needs of an organization can change based on the current economic environment, a change in leadership, or other factors. Change occurs based on both direct and indirect factors and an efficient organization will often look for ways to
reduce unneeded change, and when needed shape or even reduce its personnel force to remain competitive.

Organizations are often required to adapt to a changing competitive market. As employees mature, some are better able to adapt to changes in organizational culture and rise to the challenges needed in an organization (Spector, 2013). Other employees may have difficulty adjusting to changes in their environment and may detract from organizational goals. Many firms recognize as an organization grows and adapts to changing markets, its workers need to receive specialized training. Firms can look at the composition of their employees’ organizational skills, identify gaps in needed KSAs to decide on what are the best options to pursue. A firm may choose to develop needed skills and retain the organizations current employees or hire other employees with the requisite skills (Spector, 2013). A firm will typically develop policies and processes to screen workers as they progress through the ranks to ensure only the most capable employees for the organization are retained (Heilbronner, Connell, Dobyns, & Reis, 2010).

An organization may choose to incentivize attrition by offering workers an opportunity to retire early or simply conduct a reduction in force or layoff for those individuals whose skills are no longer needed. Other methods for shaping the work force are more nefarious and may include reducing benefits or even creating a climate where the worker finds their situation so untenable that they choose to quit. Research demonstrates the importance of caring for employees even when leaving a firm. How employees are treated when they depart a firm can impact current employees feeling of value, impact their productivity, and impact job satisfaction (Eluka & Okafor, 2014).
The Marine Corps employment system uses a vacancy driven model for promotion; meaning each rank has a specified number of Marines allocated for each occupational specialty. Each specialty is further delineated by specific qualifications and skills required based on the work needed by the organization. Tasks and skill sets may change as organizational objectives can change based on circumstances and goals outlined in strategic polices and organizational plans (JP 1). Promotion to the next rank only occurs when a Marine possesses the requisite skills required and can demonstrate their ability to fill a vacant position of the next higher rank (MMPR-1, 2018). This pyramid effect creates a natural selection process and progression in the workforce by squeezing the organization to only promote the Marines with the highest potential for service and forcing those Marines not needed or desired by the Marine Corps to depart after their service contract expires.

The Marine Corps also has other tools to shape its force and has previously used cash incentives, early retirement, and tougher promotion standards as a tool to reduce force structure. The effort to align the Marine Corps operational force are often required to meet new mission requirements based on potential threats as well as to create efficiencies due to budget constraints (JP 1). These methods for shaping the force are in addition to the natural selection process which make up the promotion process. Each promotion board is guided with precepts to fill the Marine Corps with the exact number and desired qualities and skills to meet future demands mandated by its own mission inside the Marine Corps and JP 1 (McHugh et al., 2006).

**Negative attrition.** Negative attrition is the unwanted attrition which consists of the loss of personnel a firm desires to remain in service (Spector, 2013). The costs to an organization include direct costs such as expenses to locate, hire, and train new personnel for vacant positions. The indirect costs are often difficult to measure, however, they include the cost of retraining a
new employee to become as efficient as the individual that was lost. Another indirect cost may include the cost of good will generated by a prior employee who had developed a strong relationship with an organization’s customer base. Additional indirect costs of unwanted attrition are often present in the perceived feelings of current employees’ sense of insecurity which may impact quality and has shown that it can negatively impact on organizations’ goals (Kumar & Yakhlef, 2016). In a recent study, attrition in the US costs employers several billion dollars per year in both direct and indirect costs (Marsden, 2016). The impact of these costs includes those associated with recruitment, background checks, lost KSAs, and costs associated with future leaders being available to meet the needs of an organization. These unwanted costs are similar in the Marine Corps and can have a negative impact of the Marine Corps’ primary mission to support JP 1 as a force in readiness.

An organization can benefit from understanding and ultimately reducing negative attrition. Factors involved in causing attrition often include adapting to a new culture, work and job requirements, family considerations, and the rigors of job expectations. Vasterling et al. (2015) provided research insight involving psychosocial predictors for retention. Vasterling et al.’s research included many of the same factors that complement the theories presented by Maslow and Herzberg, even though each organization is unique and the circumstances often vary.

Understanding why Marines are leaving prior to becoming retirement eligible involves assessing the many internal and external drivers associated with the stay or leave decision. In a study involving United States Navy management models for nurses supporting the Marine Corps, research results highlighted that leaders’ policies and behaviors were the single most influential factor in a Navy nurses’ decision to remain in the Navy (Kinstler, Johnson, Richter, &
Kocker, 2008). This study provides important clues to the importance of leadership factors and the role of the leader impacting retention decisions in the military and the ability to retain a quality workforce to accomplish its mission.

**Summary of attrition.** A summary of attrition recognizes the effects and dynamic impacts of both positive and negative attrition in an organization. Firms and organization are constantly evaluating their operating environment and adapting to both internal and external drivers to develop and maintain the right workforce to remain competitive (Spector, 2013). The various drivers impacting an employee’s desire include the ability for employees to adapt to the culture, the work environment, and various motivation and hygiene factors associated with meeting an employee’s needs. Creating the ideal environment to maximize an employee’s potential contribution to remain competitive requires responding quicker to one’s work environment than the competition and constantly evaluating how to promote effective leadership. To ensure success, leaders in an organization must create a domain or culture to cope with threats or changing conditions (Levy, 2014). These actions include a workforce balance of purging the personnel that are not adding value to the organization and retaining the right personnel to focus on meeting current and future needs (Spector, 2013). The next section examines the various leadership styles, the leadership characteristics, and contribution to job satisfactions and retention decisions.

**Introduction to leadership style.** Leadership is valued and sought by individuals as a way to improve their lives just as organizations seek leadership as a means to create additional value, achieve goals, and increase performance. Leadership has evolved over time from a theme of domination over subordinates highlighted in the 1900s to one of influence others to increase performance in the 1930s. Over the next several decades various leadership styles were
developed focusing on defining behavior and influencing groups towards a common goal (Northouse, 2016). Fleishman et al. (1991) identified over 60 dimensions of leadership in as many years. This study focused on five predominant styles highlighting both their strengths and weaknesses: behavioral, great man, transactional, transformational, and trait. The focus on these predominant styles is based on attempts to focus on the most prevalent leadership styles appearing in academic research involving the armed forces and specifically the Marine Corps training manuals and operational orders guiding the Marine Corps actions on leadership (MCO 1130; US Department of the Navy, 1995).

**Behavioral leadership.** The behavioral approach to leadership focuses on how leaders act and respond to situations. Yukl (2013) posited that the actions and behavior by leaders involve meeting subordinate’s needs and is the best predictor for leadership success. This leadership behavior is comprised of two specific categories focused on relationship behaviors and task behaviors. This style of leadership combines these two aspects of leaderships to influence employees in an organization to work towards a shared vision to accomplish goals (Northouse, 2016). The first category of task behaviors are those conditions a leader imposes to help employees achieve a specific objective, while relationship behaviors focus on helping employees feel a sense of ownership. The behavioral style of leadership requires leaders to recognize the uniqueness of followers and often requires cultivating a relationship. As suggested by Stogdill (1974), some followers need leaders to provide more direction than others, while some followers require a different approach or even nurturing.

The relationship approach of leadership requires the leader to analyze their own behavior and adjust their actions based on the needs of the individual. This subdividing of leadership actions provides a framework for leaders to learn what works best with their subordinates and
help leaders adapt their actions to elicit the greatest good or desired response in subordinates. The relationship approach often requires leaders to spend more time with subordinates to better understand their motivational needs (Stogdill, 1974).

Stogdill (1948) conducted research at Ohio State University and provided insight suggesting the trait approach to leadership was insufficient to maximize opportunities with followers. Additional research from Blake and Mouton in the 1960s examined task and relationship behaviors in small settings. Their research led to further study on the importance and influence of task and behavior aspects of leaders. Blake and Mouton (1964, 1985) conducted research leading to the development of a questionnaire called the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ), which is often used to assess one’s leadership behavior. The questionnaire provided leadership assessment on how leaders provide structure for followers to include task behavior and how well the leader nurtures their subordinate. These leadership actions referred to as relationship behavior in the study were found to provide significant positive impact to increasing employee performance in work environments (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Stogdill, 1985).

The behavioral style of leadership helps leaders understand how they are behaving rather than telling leaders how to act. A leader’s approach to subordinates occurs on both a task and relationship level and can provide insight to the leader on what works and how to maximize a positive response for action. A criticism of the behavioral approach is the lack of evidence demonstrating a universal style of leadership effective in almost every situation (Yukl, 1994). Furthermore, Yukl concluded the only strong findings in behavior theory of leadership is that leaders who considered their leader considerate and kind had a positive correlation towards job satisfaction.
**Great Man leadership.** The great man leadership theory became popular in the middle 1840s and theorized that leaders were born with specific traits and personalities that were part of their genetic make-up. These attributes would develop naturally and allowed these men to become natural leaders (Hubbard, 2018). Thomas Carlyle, a leadership theorist, first wrote about the Great Man theory in 1897 highlighting that natural leader rise to the position based on innate qualities inside an individual. As cited by Hubbard (2018), Carlyle posited that evolutionary forces drove certain men to be leaders and heroes. The Marine Corps, as a male dominated society focuses on many of the physical and social qualities often believed leaders should possess; such as a commanding presence, judgment, intuition, and even charm. Carlyle believed that primarily men were leaders and thought each of these qualities evolved over time from one’s genetic make-up (Mann, 1959).

The Great Man theory discounts the ability of individuals to develop skills through knowledge, and training as well as discriminates against women as leaders. The Marine Corps recruiting efforts consisted of many male-dominated slogans such as: “The Marines are looking for a few good Men” which is attributed to Marine Captain William Jones in 1799 (Jones, 1799). The skill sets required to be an effective Marine are situational. Likewise, in Afghanistan and Iraq, female soldiers were used to patrol the local villages and towns as they were found to be more effective than men in the campaign to win over the hearts and minds of the local populace (Lemon, 2016). Lemon (2016) revealed the impacts of cultural norms and customs as being situational constraints that the Marine Corps considered and effectively overcame by utilizing female Marines to accomplish their objective.

The Marine Corps evaluation system often supports the great man theory which consists of fitness report that measures various aspects of a Marine’s traits, accomplishments and physical
qualities. The fitness report is the primary method used by the Marine Corps office of personnel management to evaluate a Marine’s performance for promotion, retention, resident schooling, and for various duty assignments (Marine Corps Order, P1610.7F [MCO P1610], 2009). Qualities such as one’s height, weight, and performance on physical fitness tests are part of how Marines are evaluated. Somewhat subjective criteria is also used; command presence, loyalty, and aspects of wisdom and intellect (MCO P1610). This criteria includes trait characteristics as well as the great man leadership characteristics as many evaluation measures are based on one’s genetic profile and may leave some Marines at a disadvantage. For example, an Olympic athlete who joins the Marine Corps will likely perform better in physical fitness tests than an average individual and may rate higher than an individual who is not as athletic. Having the ability to perform well in physical fitness tests is good, however, analyzing the importance of various attributes may require weighting various traits to ensure they correspond to job-related requirements. In this example, the fitness report evaluation process has the potential to favor aspects of a Marine similar to the Great Man theory in which an individual has a limited ability to control.

**Transactional leadership.** Transactional leadership is an understanding between the leader and subordinate to exchange work for a reward (Laohavichien, Fredendall, & Cantrell, 2009). The transactional style of leadership provides clear expectations to followers on what one will receive when performance measures or compliance is met, and conversely, also keeps track of mistakes (Burns, 1978). Typically, the transactional style of leadership is looking to achieve stability over innovation and will use both discipline and incentives to motivate followers to perform tasks to a specific standard. The characteristics of a transactional leader consist of supervising and assessing the performance of individuals and groups to achieve a desired result.
or standard. This leadership style is known for working within a corporate structure and can be resistant to change, innovative ideas by employees, or creative thinking. A weakness of this leadership style is the focus on rewarding employees for achieving a goal and often stifles initiative that could potentially create efficiency. This focus can result in neglecting opportunities to develop the work force into a team and forgoing opportunities to create an environment promoting increased performance or motivating subordinates to exceed predetermined standards set by the leader (Arenas, 2019).

Transactional leadership consists of three main elements in the leadership contract for implementation. They consist of contingent reward, active management-by-exception, and passive management-by-exception (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leader and subordinate will utilize the appropriate component most applicable to the organizational structure and leaders capabilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Contingent reward is the simplest approach and typically involves a leader assigning work in exchange for a reward. An example of this type of approach is for a leader to promise a bonus for meeting a goal or some sort of recognition for the employee’s effort. The effective use of this reward requires the expectations to be clearly defined between the leader and subordinate (Brown & May, 2012). Management-by-exception is a leadership approach looking for divergence from a standard or expectation. Management-by-exception can be active or passive. The active approach consists of leaders looking for divergence from a known standard, while the passive approach waits for issues to arise. The management-by-exception was found to have the greatest negative impact on morale and the potential to create the greatest negative impact on a subordinate’s sense of competence in the workforce (Hetland, Hetland, Cecilie, Pallesen, & Notelaers, 2011).
The Marine Corps trains and requires every member in its organization to instantly obey all lawful orders. This attitude is taught and reinforced through constant training utilizing standing operating procedures, indoctrination, and through the use of studying history with examples. The Marine Corps also emphasizes customs and courtesies stressing the importance, pride, and honor that come with compliance and obedience. The Marine Corps also provides swift and often harsh discipline for those who fail to follow orders in addition to cultural pressure to conform to its organizational culture.

The Marine Corps has its own form of transactional leadership system and uses a reward as well as a disciplinary system available for leaders to use when Marines fall short of expectations. The discipline system used is unique to military service and it is through this form of non-judicial punishment Marines entice followers to adhere to exacting standards. Non-Judicial Punishment (NJP) is an aspect of military law and its stated purpose “is to promote justice, to assist and maintain good order and discipline in the armed force, to promote efficiency and effectiveness in the military establishment” (Marine Corps Order P5800.161 [MCO, P5800], 2017, p 1). The threat or use of NJP can be viewed as a type of transactional leadership tool depending on how it is used by senior leaders on subordinates. Minor infractions such as being late for meetings, or not following commands, though not criminal in nature, are available to commanders to ensure conformity and compliance to all orders and commands. The use of NJP is only available and authorized by the US Armed Forces or those operating under the authority of the US Armed forces (MCO P5800).

**Transformational leadership.** Transformational leadership is an attractive and popular model of leadership gaining global interest as organizations attempt to reform their firms or institutions to remain competitive in the market. The rise of global markets and the need to
quickly adapt to changing needs requires leaders to quickly refocus energies to remain competitive in a growing and evolving market (Daft, 2016). The transformation model focuses on a process of influencing behavior by sharing a vision with subordinates (Bush, 2018). Transformational leadership requires an understanding of the subordinates needs and finding ways to engage and meet these needs to elicit greater performance and improve job satisfaction.

The transformational model was first defined by Downton (1973) and further studied by political sociologist James Burns. Burns (1978) defined leadership as an essential element to meet a follower’s needs and recognized each follower may have slightly different needs. Metcalf and Benn (2013) stated this leadership is the inspiring and charismatic qualities possessed by a leader to cast a vision for employees. This leadership type focuses on leaders having the ability to adapt to the needs of followers, understanding follower’s motives, and an attempt to adapt to meet these needs. The transformational leadership model has an intuitive appeal and places an emphasis on ethics and values (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Kuhnert (1994) stated that leaders who exhibit transformational qualities often have a strong set of ideals and are effective at motivating other for the greater good vice their own self-interests. The transformational theory extends the leadership continuum established from transactional leadership to one that raises a follower’s level of consciousness about the value of idealized goals and to transcend one’s own self-interest for the sake of the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1993). There four primary leadership factors associated with transformational leadership; they include: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Idealized influence is the emotional component of leadership and describes leaders who act as role models and mentors for followers (Antonakis & Day, 2017). The idealized influence
is measured by how followers want to follow the leader’s vision and is often characterized as possessing positive attributional and behavioral components (Antonakis & Day, 2017). Inspirational motivation is the second factor and fits the leader who effectively shares high expectations with his team and is able to motivate followers to become committed to the shared vision of the leader (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The third factor is intellectual stimulation which includes leaders who stimulate followers to be innovative and to challenge their own values and beliefs of the organization. This factor encourages followers to think things out on their own and engage in problem solving (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The last factor of transformational leadership is individualized consideration. This factor represents leaders who provide a supportive climate and often act as coaches and mentors to assist followers to grow and challenge themselves towards betterment (Northouse, 2016). Leaders who exhibited transformational leadership were seen to be more effective leaders than those who exhibited transactional leadership (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996).

The current Marine Corps fitness report manual attempts to measure the effectiveness of how well a leader accomplish their tasks, but also how effective the Marine is as a leader and to what degree they espouse leadership. The purpose of the Marine Corps fitness report is to provide a comprehensive assessment and tool available to leaders to evaluate performance, provide constructive feedback on areas to improve, and document shortcomings. The evaluation system addresses many areas involving a Marine’s performance including the transformational leadership principles required by leaders to build their unit into a cohesive team to accomplish measurable objectives (MCO P1610.7F).

Marines are provided performance appraisals called ‘Fitness Reports’ on a regular basis and are part of a life-long profile used by the Marine Corps. Fitness Reports are required at a
minimum annually, and upon promotion, reassignment of duties, change of a reporting senior, and if there is any derogatory information that needs to be highlighted. The Fitness Report is used to assess and record performance and make recommendations for future assignments and retention. The performance appraisal includes how well Marines accomplish specific tasks, but also how well Marines emulate these transformational leadership principles in their day-to-day activities and in the application of their mission. These eleven leadership principles provided by the Marine Corps are studied and memorized by all Marines and included as metrics for evaluation by every leader in the Marine Corps (MCIO, P1550; see Table 1 below for the Marine Corps’ eleven leadership principles).

Table 1

*Marine Corps Leadership Principles (MCIO, P1550)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Principles</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Keep your Marines informed</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Set the example</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Train your Marines as a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Be technically and tactically proficient</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Know yourself and seek self-improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Know your Marines and look out for their welfare</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Ensure assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Make sound and timely decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Develop responsibility among subordinates</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Employ your unit within its capabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Seek responsibility and be responsible for your actions</td>
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An examination of the eleven leadership principles provide evidence of the importance of transformation leadership to the Marine Corps. Keeping ones Marines informed is the first principles and focuses on constant communication with subordinates. Effective communication is essential to ensure those in a team have the information needed to accomplish their tasks and an essential element linked to ethical standards (Fontrodona, Ricart, & Berrone, 2018). This
focus on communication enhances feelings of engagement and facilitates a sense of ownership to be part of the team allowing all employees to know their role and how to contribute to the organizational mission (Spector, 2013).

The second principle is for Marines to set the example which involves leaders demonstrating they are willing to perform many of the same tasks as subordinates. This principle is one that has shown to build trust, teamwork, and loyalty and authenticate the leader – follower relationship (Mariama-Arther, 2014). This leadership principle is important for setting standards in grooming, establishing standards involving quality of work, and job commitment. Setting the example is a principle that can quickly set a positive organizational climate for an organization (Sachs, 2012; Spector, 2013).

The third principle is to train ones Marines as a team which refers to recognizing the efforts of individuals and their unique and important part in an organization. This principle focuses on both the leader and follower sharing hardships and successes and fosters building unit cohesion and loyalty in an organization. Training an organization to be a team requires leaders to codify goals that are identifiable and measurable with constant feedback to evaluate performance (Spector, 2013).

The fourth leadership principle is to be technically and tactically proficient. This principle focuses on the leader acquiring the needed KSAs to accomplish their tasks and provide the leadership support and direction required by subordinates to accomplish their tasks. Today’s growing global economy, advances in technology, and a new focus on utilizing technology, modeling, simulation, as well as an increase in autonomous systems, requires leaders to be knowledgeable and adept to facilitating change in an organization (Byrd, 2017).

The fifth leadership principle is to know oneself and seek self-improvement. This
leadership principle requires an honest assessment of one’s strengths and weaknesses with an emphasis to focus on strengthen areas requiring attention in both oneself and subordinates. Leadership requires integrity and the humility to recognize shortcomings in oneself coupled with a corresponding effort to seek improvement (US Department of the Navy, 1995). In an article highlighting the most sought after trait deemed important by senior leaders, the ability for leaders to conduct analysis and anticipate needs to achieve corporate goals was deemed most important. Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and senior leaders actively sought leaders who sought self-improvement (Glazer, 2018).

The next leadership principle is to know one’s Marines and look out for their welfare. Herzberg et al. (1959) demonstrated the benefits of meeting one’s needs and the increase in job satisfaction when subordinates feel valued in an organization. Motivation factors include looking out for the welfare of subordinates and though studies demonstrate that motivator-hygiene factors do not increase job satisfaction, the lack of these hygiene factors contribute to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). An effective leader will recognize the KSAs of their team and often tailor their leadership approach to develop subordinates to their potential (Spector, 2013).

The seventh leadership principle is to ensure assigned tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished. These tasks include developing processes to facilitate accomplishing work to a specific standard. This principle also requires leaders to ensure subordinates have the training, equipment, time, and resources required to accomplish their tasks. Leader’s providing support is recognized as a positive hygiene factor in Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory (Herzberg et al., 1959).

The eighth leadership principle is to make sound and timely decisions. This principle
requires a leader to understand the risks, rewards, and consequences of decisions when leading their Marines to accomplish specific tasks. This concept focuses on developing individuals to solve problems and to create value. For this to work inside an organization, leaders must create an internal environment based on trust and a quality culture (Chiarini, 2011). This task requires a leader to rapidly estimate a situation based on obtaining as much useful information as possible and translating this information into a plan for success.

The next principle is to develop responsibility among subordinates. Assigning tasks and delegating responsibility to accomplish tasks promotes confidence and respect between the leader and subordinates. This concept implies trusting and providing opportunities for subordinates to make decisions. Research by Potnuru et al. (2018) demonstrated empowering subordinates’ results in greater moral, greater proficiency, lower absenteeism, and ultimately lower attrition.

The tenth leadership principle is to employ your unit within its capabilities. The successful completion of tasks depends upon a unit's capabilities and leaders must know the capabilities of their team to ensure skills and capabilities are employed appropriately. Assigning tasks that a unit is not properly trained to perform will likely result in failure and lower a unit’s morale and esteem. Subordinates typically want to perform well and care about their organization. Equipping personnel to properly perform their tasks increases productivity and job satisfaction (Islam & Ali, 2013).

The last leadership principle is to seek responsibility for one’s actions. For professional development to occur, the leader must actively seek out challenging assignments, display initiative, and exhibit sound judgment to accomplish tasks. Seeking responsibilities also means
taking responsibility for one’s actions and recognizing the leader is responsible for both the successes and failures of a unit.

In a study focused on transformational leadership, Alatawi (2017) recognized the value of multiple factors to achieve maximum efficiency in an organization. The research found the following factors: inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and a focus on the individuals needs as the greatest factors associated with transformational leadership. Furthermore, the cumulative effects of each of these factors working together along with strong management practices achieved the fullest potential of this theory (Alatawi, 2017). The study emphasized the value of blending each of the factors as essential to increase organizational performance.

**Trait.** The leadership trait theory is a common method for evaluating leaders and encourages organizations to develop individual character qualities (Northouse, 2016). The leadership traits are characteristics considered essential to possess and demonstrate for a leader to succeed. Trait theory suggests certain personality traits influence a leader’s emergence and effectiveness. Empirically organizations understand how these traits are valued and sought by individuals to become an effective leader. These leadership attributes are easy to understand and definable. The possession of these traits is considered likely to promote trust and a desire for employees to follow leaders displaying these traits (Mumford, Zaccaro, Harding, Jacobs, & Fleishman, 2000).

Similar to the traits discussed by Bennis and Nanus (1985), specific traits highlighted and desired by leaders are found in most employee training manuals, academic journals, and even scriptures. The trait approach is often seen as charismatic and engaging (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). Research by Colbert, Judge, Choi, and Wang (2012) suggested that trait leadership also
involves and correlates positively to personality. The five areas of personality traits examined and correlating to leadership involve a focus on individuals who are considered to exhibit strong leadership skills and those with a strong potential for leadership. The five personality traits chosen include neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Colbert et al., 2012). The magnitude to which one or all of these factors are present, can be used to predict the effectiveness of a leader and whether someone will become a leader (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002).

The results of the Colbert et al.’s (2012) research showed four of the five personality traits, with the lone except for neuroticism as exhibiting a positive correlation to leadership. Individuals scoring high in neuroticism were deemed more likely to be vulnerable to stress and aggression than the individual who scored lower for neuroticism (Colbert et al., 2012). These results indicate both the impact of one’s personality on leadership, but also value of positive attributes and their impact on organizational efficiency.

The Marine Corps has its own set of leadership traits and principles it has published and considers important for Marines to acquire and exhibit. Every enlisted man and officer is instructed with historical examples utilizing these traits and principles as a way to handle difficult situations and seek self-improvement (US Department of the Navy, 1995). The trait-based leadership theory is an attempt to define what qualities a Marine leader should possess and how an individual is to act or respond to situations encountered (Yukl, 2013). See Table 2 below which provides the Marine Corp’s leadership traits which are taught to all Marines.
Table 2

Marine Corps Leadership Traits (Dye, 2011; US Department of the Navy, 1995)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traits</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Giving reward and punishment according to the merits of the case in question. The ability to administer a system of rewards and punishments impartially and consistently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgement</td>
<td>The ability to weigh facts and possible solutions on which to base sound decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>The certainty of proper performance of duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endurance</td>
<td>The mental and physical stamina measured by the ability to withstand pain, fatigue, stress, and hardship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Uprightness of character and soundness of moral principles: includes the qualities of truthfulness and honesty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bearing</td>
<td>Creating a favorable impression in carriage, appearance, and personal conduct at all times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>The mental quality that recognizes fear of danger or criticism but enables a man to proceed in the face of it with calmness and firmness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tact</td>
<td>The ability to deal with others without creating offense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>The display of sincere interest and exuberance in the performance of duty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unselfishness</td>
<td>Avoidance of providing for one’s own comfort and personal advancement at the expense of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>The quality of faithfulness to country, the Corps, the unit, to one’s seniors, subordinates, and peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisiveness</td>
<td>Ability to make decisions promptly and to announce them in clear, forceful manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Understanding of a science or an art. The range of one’s information (e.g., professional knowledge) and an understanding of your Marines.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research highlights several weakness to the Trait Theory with the first being the lack of knowing which traits are most important or effective for leaders to possess to be successful (Yukl, 2012). There is little data supporting which trait is most important as well as an ability to quantify or adequately explain a consistent definition of traits required by a leader. Secondly,
research demonstrates that though specific traits are desired in leaders, possessing these traits are not easily taught and it is a leader’s actions or behaviors that have shown to be a better predictor for organizational success than specific traits (Derue, Nahrgang, Wellman, & Humphrey, 2011). Lastly, attempting to measure the magnitude or ‘how much of a specific trait’ a leader possesses or should possess is difficult and often subjective to the situation and circumstance (Yukl, 2012).

Organizations often facilitate surveys to help individuals assess leadership traits to help identify where to focus ones shortcomings. The Marine Corps requires teamwork to operate effectively and uses leadership traits and objectives to guide and focus Marines to work towards self-improvement. Northouse (2016) stated traits are easy to define and empirically individuals know that some traits are better than other (e.g., honesty is better than dishonesty). A weakness to this leadership theory includes a heroic-leadership bias which can potentially be used for nefarious purposes and abused by leaders for selfish gain (Yukl, 2012). Additionally, there is a lack of clarity on which traits or qualities should be emphasized and which traits, skill-sets, and competencies are not as important to be an effective leader. Due to various organizational objectives and goals, the skills required by leaders to effectively steer an organization down the right path, remain competitive, are often subjective to the situation, as well as the type of organization and its culture (Northouse, 2016). The leadership traits provided in the Marine Corps training manuals compliment many of those traits found in other supporting research.

**Summary of leadership styles.** The various leadership styles examined provide insight on the confluence of each style often working together to achieve desired goals to provide organizational efficiency, job satisfaction, and ultimately reduce negative attrition. The Marine Corps focuses on leaders and leadership to increase productivity, loyalty, and steadfastness by developing individuals to work as a team for a common purpose (US Department of the Navy,
The identification of specific leadership traits builds upon itself to develop the principles relating to transformational leadership. These leadership principles involve a transaction between leader and subordinate and members inside the team to accomplish the goals and mission established by leaders and the organization.

Bass (1985) theorized a concept known as the full range of leadership. This concept recognized that individuals may display each of the categories of leadership, each with varying degree and magnitude. This type of leadership model is based on the individual and the situation encountered and requires judgment, and awareness of each subordinate’s needs. Leaders often look for cues in their subordinates to help decipher the best leadership category to use. This concept recognizes the dynamics of leadership inside an organization and the influences on how leadership is used based on experience, personality, training, and even culture (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

**Theories to Support Research Factors**

Several theories are presented that influence a mid-level Marine officer’s decision to stay or remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. The theories below were chosen based on a review of the Marine Corps doctrinal publication on leadership which guides the leadership focus for all Marines (US Department of the Navy, 1995). These theories were reviewed to help explain the influences in the decision-making process, impacts to job satisfaction, feelings of engagement, the development of commitment and trust in an organization, motivational factors, and the many impacts leaders have on this process.

**Leadership.** Yukl (2012) listed leadership is the process of influencing and facilitating efforts to accomplish shared objectives. The Marine Corps lists the primary goal of leadership as the actions to instill in all Marines that they are warriors first and all efforts must be to ensure
troops win in combat (US Department of the Navy, 1995). Larsson and Vinberg (2010) claimed leadership are a process in which an individual influence a group to achieve a common goal. Each of these definitions emphasize a purpose or common objective. The individual performing this function or process to unite a group is the leader (Northouse, 2016). Effective leadership can create a positive culture influencing employee organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kang, Gatling, & Kim, 2015).

A review of current literature identifies various leadership models. Northouse (2016) mentioned numerous theories, however, this review focused on five predominant styles: behavioral, Great Man, transactional, transformational, and trait, which are highlighted in this research. The five styles chosen are among the most popular found in research and highlighted in various Marine Corps training manuals, peer reviewed articles and research, and correspondence (MCO 1130; US Department of the Navy, 1995). The various aspects of each leadership style are often manifested in the senior-leader to subordinate relationship. These various styles are common in both civilian organizations and in the Marine Corps culture. Examining the leadership process from indoctrination to promoting an individual’s personal style of leadership suggests a focus on the objective or mission, which often results in a blending of leadership styles to focus on a singular objective.

**Engagement.** Engagement theory postulates an employee’s productivity, job satisfaction, and desire to remain in an organization increases when trusted and given opportunity to make decisions (Albrecht & Marty, 2017). Employee engagement is a popular concept in organizations believing that employees who feel a sense of belonging will be more dedicated and productive in their work than those who do not feel ownership (Bakker & Leiter, 2010). Jack Welch, former CEO for General Electric, prioritized employee engagement over
customer satisfaction and cash flow (Welch & Welch, 2006). In a cross-sectional quantitative survey focused on job satisfaction for nurses at four large hospitals, research highlighted a growing problem to retain qualified professionals. The study chose the nursing profession to represent one of many high profile jobs noted for high-levels of stress due to high physical and psychological demands. The research demonstrated that engagement by leaders and helping employees develop a feeling of empowerment were the single most influential factor in reducing negative attrition (Fan, Zheng, Liu, & Li, 2016).

The second study involves US military wingmen focused on identifying positive results of engagement. Researchers focused on this small group of military professionals known for supporting each other and creating a climate of trust. The results of the study supported a strong correlation between work engagement and organizational culture highlighting the importance of a strong organizational culture and its influence on organizational efficiency, increased positive social interactions, and a positive work engagement (Alarcon, Lyons, & Tartaglia, 2010). Research also suggested that providing autonomy, trust, and creating an environment that respected worker’s needs, higher levels of engagement were present and corresponding desires to participate more and support the organization (Kovjanic, Schuh, & Jonas, 2013).

The Marine Corps is an organization that is also noted for high-levels of stress due to both physical and psychological demands. The Marine Corps’ indoctrination includes constant reference to the Marine Corps ethos and the importance of becoming part of the customs and traditions that make the Marine Corps unique (US Department of the Navy, 1995). This desire by individuals to become something larger than oneself and is an invitation to join and engage in a culture fostering opportunities to better oneself. This engagement with subordinates positively impacts job satisfaction and retention. Research by Kovjanic et al. (2013) and Grant and
Sonnentag (2010) helped explain positive employee engagement postulating that employees who easily associate their identity with their work are more likely to develop a deep sense of satisfaction in their work. This positive effect has the potential to lead to organizational efficiency and job satisfaction (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010).

The study by Fan et al. (2016) confirmed the structural association between one’s perceived working environment, job engagement and psychological empowerment as a significant contributing factor to job satisfaction and retention. Supporting evidence is highlighted in a study by Walker and Campbell (2013) that when an organization’s values are aligned with employee’s personal values, there is an overall positive feeling towards the work produced, an increase in productivity, and better retention rates. Specific areas deemed essential for a feeling of engagement are job satisfaction include opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making. Walker and Campbell (2013) found that employees who are allowed sufficient autonomy in how to accomplish tasks state they feel a greater sense of engagement and job satisfaction. Lastly, the research demonstrates that an organization that provides opportunities for its employees to grow and learn new skills contributed significantly to job satisfaction (Walker & Campbell, 2013).

**Commitment and trust.** Research conducted by Ekici (2013) revealed that trust is a construct that increases satisfaction, cooperation, commitment, and performance in organizations. Organizations that promote a culture and set of norms exert a powerful force for both individuals and groups to achieve an equilibrium which resists change (Lewin, 2013). The Marine Corps training and indoctrination includes a comprehensive cultural integration program that similar to a study by Stafford and Miles (2013) involved immersing new Marines into a culture that includes zero-tolerance for deviating from the Marine culture. Each stakeholder in
the organization is closely watched by senior leaders and peers to manage and shape attitudes to adapt to a culture-gain plan that emphasizes the benefits (Stafford & Miles, 2013).

Marine Corps doctrine includes a strong focus on leaders setting the example and an effort to constantly look out for the welfare of subordinates. The Guidebook for Marines is a handbook provided to all Marines and is required reading. The book references the most important objective of leadership is for Marines to accomplish their mission and to look out for the welfare of their Marines (MCIO P1550, 1983). Section B of the Marine Corps Manual provides specific guidance on how leaders and subordinates are to engage with an attitude of comradeship and brotherhood and as that of teacher and scholar (MCM, 1980). This doctrine of love of corps and country is meant to develop a commitment and trust inside the unit and organization (US Department of the Navy, 1995, p. 97).

There also exists a potential dark side to placing trust in leaders. Feng, Chang, and Peng (2011) highlighted the disappointment that subordinates may have when expectations from senior leaders are not met. Often a leader is placed on a pedestal and assumes almost a God-like quality that is easily shattered when the leader proves to be human. A trusted leader is a teammate and is expected to go the extra mile and demonstrate a reciprocal commitment. Roles and expectations are formed inside an organization and failing to honor an expectation can quickly erode any goodwill developed inside an organization (Spector, 2013). When these expectations do not materialize or are not met, a sense of betrayal or feelings of being taken advantage of can occur. This failing to meet often unrealistic standards can result in bitterness and resentment by individuals on the team causing those individuals to disassociate themselves from the group. The impact of this fall-out can negatively impact job satisfaction and retention decisions in an organization (Feng et al., 2011).
Motivation. The motivation theories examined consist of three specific theories. The first is Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory which suggests needs drive behavior and work attitude or satisfaction for individuals and groups. The second is Herzberg Motivation-Hygiene Theory which makes a distinction between the types of needs consisting of hygiene factors and motivational factors, furthermore, these needs are met intrinsically and extrinsically (Udechukwu, 2009). The last motivation theory is expectancy theory which was first discussed by Victor Voom in 1964. The theory suggests behavior is motivated by the individuals’ desirability of the outcome.

Maslow developed his motivational theory based on a pyramid of five progressive human needs. Maslow suggests individuals cannot move to the next level on the human-needs pyramid until the preceding hierarchical tier was met (Maslow, 1943). This hierarchal model defines the order of human motivation and serves as a guide for leadership practices leaders can use to motivate subordinates to meet organizational objectives (See Figure 2).

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid](image)

Figure 2. Maslow’s needs hierarchy pyramid (Jamali, 2015).
Examples of physiological needs are food, water, and air to breathe. These needs are basic to human survival and take precedence over all needs and in today’s society are basic needs usually met in any job an individual is employed. It is not until individuals’ progress up Maslow’s needs pyramid that motivational factors begin to have relevance (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow’s tier for safety often parallels an employee’s perception of losing their job if they cannot perform to a leader’s expectations (Benjamin, 2016). If the employee or Marine is unable to move into the next tier, then according to Maslow’s model, the Marine will have difficulty moving into workplace interpersonal relationships. In a 2011 study involving registered nurses, researchers confirmed Maslow’s theory in the research findings which determined that 90% of participants considered job security and guaranteed finances as the most important factor towards job satisfaction (Mokoka, Ehlers, & Oosthuizen, 2011). The research highlights leaders who want to create efficiency in their organization, must help create a feeling amongst employees that their workplace is safe.

The Marine Corps trains every Marine for combat and the stressful life of deploying to remote regions of the world to fight and win wars (US Department of the Navy, 1995). Gyamfi (2014) examined the relationship between stress and job satisfaction in police officers. The results of the study demonstrated a negative relationship between job satisfaction and one’s physical environment yet a positive relationship between job satisfaction and supervisor support (Gyamfi, 2014). The finding suggests a leader’s actions and practices can address the physiological needs of employees and improve job satisfaction (Gyamfi, 2014).

Love and belonging is the next tier presented by Maslow for connecting to an organization (Maslow, 1943). This need for acceptance is tied closely to fitting into a culture and being accepted inside a group (Spector, 2013). Nilsson and Nystrom (2013) highlighted the
importance of continual learning being required for one’s welfare, employability, job satisfaction, and workplace competence. In an article by Warhuus, Tanggaard, Robinson, and Erno (2017), research underscores the benefits of a climate within the workforce which supports learning and providing practical application for effective retention in the learning process and its importance to feel accepted inside a group. Hershcovis, Ogunfowora, Reich, and Christie (2017) examined work place belonging and embarrassment on job insecurity. The results highlighted the causal relationship between job satisfaction and relevance of an employee’s need to feel fulfilled and part of a culture further supporting Maslow’s theory (Hershcovis et al., 2017). The Marine Corps requires conformity to become a Marine. The following are a few of the attributes seen in virtually every aspect of a Marine’s life: grooming, how a uniform is worn, and the lingo used in day-to-day conversation.

Esteem needs are Maslow’s fourth tier on the pyramid of needs and focus on one’s perceived contributions to work or the organizations mission (Maslow, 1943). An environment that promotes esteem will likely result in increased organizational performance (Yang, Zhang, Kwan, & Chen, 2018). A leader’s ability to hone in on a subordinate’s esteem demonstrates addressing the holistic needs of an employee. Servant leadership focuses on addressing the wide-ranging needs of employees typically resulting in increased job satisfaction and organizational performance (van Dierendonck, 2011). A quick observation of the leadership traits and principles Marines are taught demonstrates the value of Marines contribution to lofty goals and the organization.

Self-actualization needs are Maslow’s last tier in the pyramid of hierarchical needs. Maslow’s interprets this term to mean a state upon which the individual becomes actualized in what he is potentially (Maslow, 1943). It is when an individual realizes their full potential. An
employee or Marine at this level is likely the type of employee an organization desire. It is an individual that is operating at their peak performance and has little or no interferences with their mission. Allowing employees, the ability to assume positions of greater responsibility and encouraging initiative creates an environment conducive for self-actualization (Atwood, 2018). Attempts by organizational leaders to reach this level are likely to see employees with the potential to contribute significantly to the organization and remain in employment (Atwood, 2018).

The Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory involves two aspects for motivation. The first are the hygiene factors which are extrinsic to the work and consist of: the company culture, supervision and leadership, interpersonal relationships, salary or pay, status, and security. Hygiene factors do not directly impact job satisfaction, however, their absence contributes to job dissatisfaction (Herzberg et al., 1959). The Marine Corps’ pay, and promotion policies are mandated by Congress, however, the quality of leadership and interpersonal relationships are variables a leader can adjust and influence inside their organization.

The motivation factors are intrinsic to the work and involve achievement, recognition, the meaning and value of work performed, responsibility and trust in oneself, and potential for growth and advancement (Herzberg et al., 1959). These factors led directly to job satisfaction and employee commitment. These factors relate to the Marine Corps culture as being unique and focuses heavily on customs and traditions to establish a culture that is set-apart from any other profession. “The few the proud” is a motivational slogan used to highlight the value and esteem earned upon becoming a Marine and is a strong motivator to conform to standards and work hard to support the organizational mission. Slogans used to motivate Marines are often portrayed throughout the organization highlighting the almost mystic like qualities of belonging to this elite
organization: “First to fight” and “The Few. The Proud. The Marines.” And even terms used by enemy combatants such as “Teufelhunden” meaning devil dog which described the Germans first encounter with Marines in World War I where Germans described the battle waged against them as if the gates of hell had opened and the dogs of hell were unleashed (US Department of the Navy, 1995). These and other terms are used by the Marine Corps to motivate a Marine to achieve higher standards in an effort to emulate and become worthy of these titles.

Expectancy theory focuses on an individual’s motivation for action. Vroom (1964) concluded there were three primary factors that influence behavior: expectancy, instrumentality, and valence. Expectancy refers to what employees expect from their efforts. Vroom explained that the more effort leaders provide their subordinates, the greater the performance. Marine Corps leaders ensuring subordinates have the training and equipment needed to accomplish their mission support expectancy theory and are reflected in the Marine Corps leadership traits and principles (US Department of the Navy, 1995). Instrumentality is the second category in Vroom’s theory suggesting employees must be recognized for their efforts and believe their hard work will provide adequate recognition and reward. The third aspect of expectancy theory is valence which ties closely to Herzberg’s hygiene theory that highlights the importance of meeting one’s needs. Vroom (1964) stated that behavior results from choices individuals make to maximize pleasure and to minimize pain. Each person has different needs and providing opportunities for leaders to understand what motivates subordinates has the potential for leaders to know how to elicit the most from their employees and positively impact retention (Vroom, 1964).

**Importance of job satisfaction.** In a study attempting to better understand the primary reasons for members leaving the armed forces over a 5-year period, an empirical research of 476
Indian military officers revealed the top three reasons for choosing to leave the armed forces as pay, promotion opportunities, and job satisfaction (Jaiswal, Dash, & Mishra, 2016). Pay and promotion factors are needs that align with Herzberg’s theory of hygiene drivers, while job satisfaction aligns with the motivation aspect of Herzberg’s theory. The military’s pay and rank structure in the US Armed Forces are authorized by Congress, thus, hygiene factors in the military can be difficult to influence quickly, however, job satisfaction is often subjective and can include policies desirable to an individual. It is a leader’s attempt to impact controllable conditions that can foster a positive work environment for individuals by providing both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards resulting in higher job satisfaction and ultimately job retention (Udechukwu, 2009).

Results of research by Herzberg et al. (1959) and Barrick and Ryan (2003) suggested a degree of job satisfaction is not on a continuum, rather, job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are independent variables and must be addressed separately. This causal relationship between pay and job satisfaction is not universally accepted as other research indicates pay is a small factor for negative attrition and may not be independent (Spector, 2013). In other research, factors influencing job satisfaction involved two primary drivers for an individual, which included the work environment and family concerns about meeting needs, pay, and time spent with family (Barrick & Ryan, 2003). Barrick and Ryan (2003) postulated that the confluence between a person and the organization is represented as how well the two entities fit or the organizational fit with their needs. A good job or environment fit is described when both parties share similar characteristics and needs are being met. The attraction-selection attrition theory states people self-select their careers with organizations that share common attributes and values with the organization (Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 2006). This theory helps explain one’s motivation
for choosing a specific service branch or occupational specialty that aligns with one’s needs and desires.

Findings referencing engagement and job-satisfaction are thought by Barrick and Ryan (2003) to increase when leaders take into account personal differences and preferences. An organization seeking to increase engagement is likely to achieve greater success when first determining what resources or needs are lacking. The implication is engagement takes into account personal desires, needs, and wants similar in many ways to the motivational theories previously examined (Wefald, Mills, Smith, & Downey, 2012). Management and leadership commitment to subordinates was found to be important to the sustained success of an organization (Sisson & Elshennawy, 2015). Leaders demonstrating their commitment to individuals and a team positively impacts subordinates’ commitment to an organization and job satisfaction and impacts organizational efficiency (Spector, 2013).

**Previous case study research.** Qualitative case study methodology involves exploring business problems, current events, and complex phenomena (Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). The specific problem addressed within this study involve leadership and attrition for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps utilizing the case study methodology. There are several research examples utilizing the case study methodology focused on leadership and attrition; yet none of these studies focus on mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. McCord (2014) conducted a qualitative study for Netflix utilizing the case study methodology to gain greater understanding on impacts of leadership and how to retain the right personnel for its workforce during market upheaval occurring in their industry.

To remain competitive in the market place, in early 2013, Netflix had to adapt to rapid developments in technology and quickly adjust its operating structure and found it difficult to
retain the right employee with the right skills. During a particular tumultuous period in 2013, Netflix leaders had a difficult time retaining qualified engineers to adapt to market demands. The case study methodology used in prior research highlighted useful data that was important to the organization. Leaders learned the importance of developing an organization that focused on supporting worker autonomy and trust. The research learned that these two specific drivers would aid in retention of quality workers. Furthermore, leaders learned that many employees felt unappreciated for their contribution and a leader’s involvement with employees improved workers perception of the firm, increased job satisfaction, and thereby positively impacted retention and improved efficiency (McCord, 2014). The research helped leadership understand the importance of factors that could influence to impact retention and allowed leadership the opportunity to shape its policies to meet employee needs and ultimately reduce negative attrition (McCord, 2014).

Another qualitative and similar case study research project explored involves leadership and retention issues at Whole Foods Market. A case study research project led at Johnson and Wales University identified the main factors driving retention decisions in those individuals the organization desired to retain (Pearson, 2012). The case study methodology enabled researchers to identify the importance of developing a climate of autonomy in its workforce which increased job satisfaction and similar to Netflix, improved overall efficiency. The Whole Foods Market leadership gained valuable insight through interviews underscoring the importance of creating a climate that promoted engagement between the organizations mission and employee’s duties. The results of the qualitative case study enabled leaders the necessary insight to develop processes to address the most important drivers impacting retention (Pearson, 2012).
Finally, a qualitative case study involving the value of employee engagement and its impact in retention is found in research involving Hyatt Regency. Hyatt has over 600 properties in more than 50 countries with a reputation as a fine hotel, yet had estimated its annual turnover rate for housekeeping at 74% during 2012 and 2013 (Chitre, 2015). This skyrocketing turnover rate created significant turmoil in the hotel industry forcing the company to raise rates to its customers and often falling short on quality goals. Finding qualified personnel continued to be difficult and research conducted by Hyatt focused on the high attrition rate and how its leaders could positively influence retention. Exploring employee’s concerns, leaders learned at the heart of Hyatt’s troubles was a lack of engagement between leaders and employees. Leaders recognized through the qualitative study the importance of empowering employees by providing opportunities for employees to seek additional education, supporting and rewarding initiative, and finding ways to recognize extraordinary efforts of its workforce (Byrne, 2015). The impact of the strategies was nothing short of extraordinary as retention, productivity, and profits increased dramatically in the following year (Chitre, 2015).

**Potential themes and perceptions.** Several themes emerge in collecting information for the literature review including the review of similar case study research exploring leadership and retention issues with organizations like Netflix, Whole Foods Market, and Hyatt Regency Hotels. There are several notable themes that appear to emerge in the data and findings from this study and previous case studies involving leadership and retention. The first potential theme is the increase in organizational efficiency and greater job satisfaction when an organization is focused on the collective value of each of several of the theories explored. There appears to be a compounding or multiplying effect when all of the factors (e.g., engagement, motivation, trust,
and commitment) are present inside an organization as compared to just one or two of the theories.

The second potential theme is there is strong desire by employees in an organization to want to belong to an organization they can identify with and belong. This theme suggests that employees want to be part of an organization, find fulfillment in challenges, and desire leaders to be engaged in their work and lives. This theme stresses the importance of leaders knowing how to engage employees into performing meaningful work that creates value, a sense of ownership, trust, and job satisfaction in an employee’s daily routine.

The third potential theme is the many factors that influence individuals as the organization creates its own culture. This theme demonstrated in the literature review appears to be a tactic used by the Marine Corps to convince leaders and subordinates to towards contributing their best towards accomplishing their mission in the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps uses elements of each of the several leadership models (e.g., trait, transformational, transactional, and Great Man) and the various aspects of theories (e.g., motivation, engagement, trust, behavioral, commitment, and trust) to provide a constant focus on service, devotion, and pride to belonging to a unique and special organization. This theme focuses on the culture of the Marine Corps and how it implicitly and explicitly drives mid-level managers to perform to their potential and remain commitment to their work.

**Summary of the literature review.** The summary of the literature review demonstrates the many contributing factors influencing leadership actions and attrition decisions inside an organization and the complimentary effects of the theories supporting how to impact organizational efficiency. The literature review increases the empirical knowledge of factors
influencing leader and subordinate behavior and attempts provides relevance to better understand how to reduce negative attrition for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps.

The use of the case study methodology was established as the appropriate qualitative design method for this study on attrition and retention of mid-level Marine Corps officers. Case study methodology in qualitative research is generally accepted as an ideal method for researching a contemporary business dilemma or phenomenon and will attempt to describe and understand a case or cases for meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2017). In addition, case studies are relevant when research questions require an in-depth description and attempts to understand a phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Case study methodology distinguish its use to other methods as a design that often arises out of an attempt to understand a complex phenomenon, organizational process, or event similar to factors influencing human relationships (Yin, 2017).

The use of case study methodology supports examining the perspectives of employees faced with many factors influencing their decision to remain with a firm until retirement eligible (Hanif, Khalid, & Khan, 2013). The use of scholarly data from prior research also includes a robust literature review examining factors influencing perspective of employees that compliments case study research (Jiang, Hu, Liu, & Lepak, 2017). This case study utilized participants desired by the Marine Corps to remain on active duty until retirement eligible to generate useful data and answer the research question associated with this research. Perceptions identified by participants were established to meet scholarly research objectives within the literature review (Huang & Miao, 2016).

The BT highlights how a leader’s action shapes the organizational climate at work and attitudes possessed by subordinates. This behavior creates a dialogue between an initiator and responder that impacts the organizational climate, job satisfaction, and ultimately retention.
decisions (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Spector, 2013). ET focuses on the leadership efforts and their impacts when attempting to create a sense of belonging inside a team, the importance of feeling special, trusted, and empowered and its impacts on retention. The CT recognized the value of investing in the individual and positive effects of creating an environment where each feel a sense of personal worth and creates a climate where both actions and the individual are appreciated. MT highlighted how needs must be met, including both hygiene and the various motivation drivers both inside and outside the organization. MT impacts how impressions and needs drive actions and influence decisions to impact retention.

Research involving previous case studies involving leadership and retention decisions was explored and demonstrated the importance and relevance of job satisfaction, engagement, and leadership actions to impact organizational efficiency and retention decisions of quality employees. Lastly, the literature review explored the various leadership models and how the leader as the initiator impacts or influences the follower or subordinate through their own actions and attitudes. The follower is the responder to factors influencing stay-or-go decisions and based on the organizational climate, leader’s actions, and own needs, makes the ultimate decision to remain in service until retirement eligible.

**Transition and Summary of Section 1**

In summary, in an effort to further understand how leaders and subordinates react to the many drivers influencing a stay or leave decision in the Marine Corps, the following factors and theories were explored: behavior theory, engagement theory, motivation theory, and commitment and trust theory. Furthermore, various leadership models were examined and explored for their attributes and potential criticisms as they relate to job satisfaction and a mid-level Marine’s decision to remain or leave the Marine Corps. The literature review highlights the impacts of
these models and theories and in many cases their complimentary effects in the mid-level Marine’s decision to remain or depart the Marine Corps before retirement eligible. The literature provided often highlighted multiple factors to help explain the actions between a leader and subordinate further suggesting the dynamics and influences of each model and theory contributing to a mid-level manager’s decision to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible.

The case approach utilized for research was described as were several key terms, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of the research presented for consideration. In addition, a thorough review of associated scholarly and professional literature was presented with potential themes which will be further explored in the project study for relevance. Finally, a review of relevant case study research explored similar studies in other organizations (e.g., Netflix, Whole Foods Market, and Hyatt Regency hotels) which focused on leadership and retention issues and confirmed the importance of scholarly research in this area. The next section discusses the project details with an emphasis on the case study method used to address explore each research question.
Section 2: The Project

This project explored the relationship between multiple leadership models and theories associated with retention and leadership in the Marine Corps. This study utilized the qualitative case study methodology and explored other similar case studies to help understand the phenomenon being explored. The target population chosen by the researcher to explore was mid-level Marine Corps officers currently enrolled in the Command and Staff Resident College (CSRC) located in Quantico, Virginia. The CSRC offers a Master of Military Arts (MA) degree and is a mid-level career course designed for leaders the Marine Corps desires to retain until retirement eligible (MCO P1553.4b, 2008). The data collected were from interviews, on-site observations, and field notes to better understand the dynamics of impacting leadership and retention. This section explains the research endeavor, defines the role of both the researcher and participants, the research method, and the research design. Additionally, this section defines the population and sample, information collection procedures, and data analysis methods utilized in this study. Lastly, the reliability and validity of the collected information are addressed in this section.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the reasons why mid-level managers are choosing to leave the Marine Corps before retirement eligible and what leaders can do to influence this decision. This larger problem was explored through an examination of various theories, and an in-depth study of mid-level managers in the industry. The target audience were Marine Corps leaders responsible for establishing policy and guidelines while the target population were Marine Corps command and staff students who represent a population sample inside the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps students consisted of proven leaders selected
due to attend a graduate-level program who demonstrated based on their previous past performance of success, the potential for future advancement (MCO P1553.4b, 2008).

The perception of mid-management leaders in the Marine Corps on leadership and job satisfaction are explored through a robust literature review and interviews. Perceptions are shaped and developed primarily through past experiences (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). Past experiences, cultures, and motivational factors shape and develop current perceptions and impact future perceptions and decisions (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015). The past experiences of the CSC participants may assist in understanding the deficiencies, barriers, and impact associated with succession planning within the institution. The interviews intend to explore areas in which the Marine Corps is successful in developing its current leaders, but also potential areas the Marine Corps can enhance areas of leadership training and/or development of senior leaders to improve mission performance and reduce negative attrition. Furthermore, this research may have ancillary benefits by guiding promotion boards and providing retention and policy recommendations governing the Marine Corps and its middle management. The benefit of this research also has the potential to provide for a better understanding of how to develop mid-managers to meet both personal and corporate goals to achieve the future needs of the Marine Corps to accomplish its objectives.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative case study is the primary instrument of the study. This role consists of collecting and interpretation of narrative and data designed to obtain insight into the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2009). This function also includes facilitating the understanding, impact, and relationship of models and theories to the research questions (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2009). The researcher in this study collected data utilizing in-depth participant
interviews, observations, and field notes focused on factors involving leadership and retention of mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. The researcher participated in each of the interviews after obtaining access to successful Marine Corps officers via the deputy director for the Lejeune Leadership Institute at the Marine Corps University (MCU), Quantico, Virginia. Additionally, the researcher conducted member checking by supplementing the interview process with follow up discussions with each participant to ensure the validity of the research. The researcher also utilized triangulation to help validate emergent themes by reviewing data acquired from each of the sources obtained from the data collection.

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview to ensure the process for interviewing participants remains consistent, adding consistency to the interview process. The interview questions often generate follow-on questions, which the researcher tracked for potential themes. The researcher also clearly conveyed to participants the purpose for the interviews. Sparkes and Smith (2013) stressed the importance of informing participants if the process is covert or not. Covert research typically avoids disclosing the reason for conducting research to the participants while overt research discloses both the purpose and reason for the research (Sparkes & Smith, 2013).

Finally, the researcher must balance the interaction between the leadership models and theories collected in the conceptual framework and avoid steering the participants based on information learned by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Information collected during the literature review and data collected during participant interviews included both direct and contextual observations and was reviewed within the framework of the qualitative study.
Participants

Participants in quantitative research are often comprised of a random sample of participants (Creswell, 2014). In qualitative research, purposive sampling is often used as an appropriate technique when a limited number of participants are chosen to better reflect a targeted group of individuals (Sargeant, 2012). Time, funding, and access to participants makes the use of purposive sampling useful to obtain a representative sample and facilitate obtaining data to better understand the research problem (Sargeant, 2012). To be effective, qualitative research participants must possess the qualification and experience to provide meaningful data in response to the research questions (Sargeant, 2012).

A target population is considered the totality of a group who possess a predetermined common characteristic relevant to the research (Bhattacherjee, 2012). To obtain the select group of officers with these common characteristics, the researcher contacted the Marine Corps University at Quantico, Virginia to facilitate obtaining an advisor to reach a large sample population consisting of purposely selected individuals to support the qualitative study. Dr. Van Zummermen, who is the deputy for the Lejeune Leadership Institute, facilitated access to the MCCSC to obtain a purposive sample. The CSC Marines consist of Marine Corps officers who have demonstrated successful careers and represent leaders the Marine Corps has screened for future command and staff assignments (MCO P1553.4B). Each of the CSC officers are competitively selected from an operational billets and provided nearly a year of specialized training for future assignments. These participants consist of Marine Corps officers representing mid-level managers and the Marine Corps officers that the Marine Corps likely desires to retain in service until they are retirement eligible.
Creating an atmosphere of privacy and confidentiality for the participants was essential to prevent guarded responses in the interviews. Each participant was invited to participate in a voluntary interview and advised that as willing participants, they can decide to stop participation at any time. Each individual was notified of the methods used to ensure privacy, furthermore, the researcher validated each participant had reviewed the interview consent form and agreed to the terms of the interview (See Appendix B). Data collected included interview recordings from a portable recorder and saved to a password protected computer. The file on the portable recorder was deleted once the recording was placed on the computer. The researcher made observations throughout the interview process and created field notes which were maintained and stored on a password protected computer. In addition, the researcher recorded observations outside of the interview process which may have revealed new, confirm existing, or contradict data obtained in the interview process.

The outside observations support providing robustness to the study and aid in ensuring validity by allowing additional data to be reviewed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher was the only individual with access to the secured computer. These measures are to protect the participants’ privacy are consistent with measures utilized by Byers (2016). Only the researcher and dissertation committee members were authorized to review participant responses, field notes, and other data associated with the study. Interviews were conducted in a private setting behind closed doors on the Marine Corps Base (MCB) Quantico. Finally, research data will be destroyed in three years, and participant names and titles will not be published.

**Research Method and Design**

Research methods are a detailed process or approach to collecting data and its interpretation to provide a greater understanding of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Mertens,
Morse (1991) stated that qualitative research is particularly useful when the researcher is uncertain of the variables to study. The research design is influenced by the nature of the research problem, the robustness of data, and the ability to conduct research into the phenomenon (Slife, Williams, & Williams, 2015). The research is focused on mid-level Marine Corps officer’s opinions and their perceptions to assist in understanding the meaning and factors influencing leadership and retention decisions. The researcher will focus on interviews to assess themes associated with the various leadership models, theories impacting the relationship between the leader and subordinate, and the factors explaining retention in mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. Yin (2009) stated that the case study research process consists of planning, designing, preparing, collecting, analyzing, and sharing. Creswell (2014) identified case study research as a scholarly process involving six steps that: (a) identify the research problem, (b) review associated literature, (c) specify a research purpose, (d) collect data, (e) interpret and analyze data, and (f) report the findings to aid in understanding the research phenomenon.

**Discussion of method.** The qualitative case study methodology was chosen due to its ability to generate a multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue (Crowe et al., 2011). Yin emphasized the importance of case study to understand factors influencing real-life issues yet stated case study often lacks a well-defined protocol (Yin, 2002). Stake (1995) stated that a precise definition of case study is not possible, and case study should be viewed as a bounded system and inquiry is not a process but an object. This real-life research issue is focused on leadership and retention decisions in mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. Choosing the right research methodology will facilitate answering and understanding the research questions (Slife et al., 1995; Yin, 2015).
The qualitative methodology is used to help understand a phenomenon of some sort, which occurs in a bounded context (Yin, 2009). The bounded system in the qualitative case study is the case (Merriam, 2009). The various aspects of leadership and its impact on retention decisions in mid-level Marine Corps officers are the phenomenon being researched and the factors influencing Marine Corps officers to remain on active duty until retirement eligible. The case study is both a process for learning about a case and the product of better understanding the issues or factors and their influences (Stake, 1995). The qualitative research methodology was essential to satisfy the purpose of this research and help understand the research problem. The process researchers follow to collect and analyze data and their approach to problems is an attempt to seek to understand the meaning and the relational factors influencing a problem (Stake, 1995; Toledo-Pereyra, 2012). The approach and depth of understanding a problem are directly influenced by the research methodology within the context of the research (Toledo-Pereyra, 2012). Finally, the research methodology includes and expounds on previous studies involving negative attrition at the macro level and the many factors involved in retention decisions by mid-level managers.

**Discussion of design.** Qualitative research attempts to gain a deeper understanding of a large population group, including user needs and behavioral patterns (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). Defining the design of case study includes connecting empirical data to the research questions and ultimately to conclusions (Yin, 2002). Yin (2002) provided four measures needed to design a quality case study: “construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability” (p. 19). Each of these measures must cling to each other and complement each other to support understanding the research problem (Yin, 2002). Creswell (2014) suggested the qualitative research design includes procedures for inquiry, analysis, and interpretation. The qualitative
case study methodology addresses the objective to design, research and explains the in-depth case, event, or program analysis by the researcher (Creswell, 2014). Case studies are also utilized to investigate complex issues without relying on previous investigations and research (Toliver, 2017; Yin, 2009).

Case studies are bounded by time and activity and often effectively used to explain an activity or process for one or more individuals (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009, 2012). Factors influencing the choice to use the case study methodology and its design include focusing research to explain retention and leadership issues. Additionally, case studies do not focus on the entirety of the participants’ life, but on an event or phenomenon (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). In this study, the research is focused on collecting information pertaining to organizational cultures, policies, and leadership philosophies from Command and Staff students on leadership and retention issues which support the primary focus of case study research involving human phenomenon (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2012). The narrow population and substance of the interview questions also support clarifying the research design to focus on just the research problem and its factors (Creswell, 2009).

The study explores behavior, engagement, commitment and trust, and motivational theories along with various leadership models to expand on the understanding of leadership and attrition in the Marine Corps. Case studies involve collecting and analyzing data then sharing the results of the study (Yin, 2009). The design of this case study research is to generate data from interviews and explore previous case studies to help understand various factors influencing mid-level Marine Corps officers. Negative attrition and leadership impacts are a generally accepted factor in both institutions and organizations. The qualitative case study methodology and
targeted population approach was the ideal design to enable the researcher to collect and analyze data, then share the perspectives of individuals to help explain the research problem.

Trickel (2015) stated that qualitative case studies provide a strength to research as data are obtained from multiple sources, including observations, interviews, and field notes. Trickel (2015) and Yin (2002) both describe interviews with individuals that experience the problem being researched as foundational to the success of the case study design. The primary data collection methods associated with case studies are interviews and participant observations (Yin, 2002). This study’s design is to utilize confidential interviews as the primary source for its data to better understand the experiences and human perspectives relating to leadership and retention in mid-level Marine Corps officers. The term participant observation refers to the researcher as both a participant and observer through immersion in the setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The research and interviews occurred over a month long period, placing the researcher on the MCCSC campus and likely provided opportunities for observations pertinent to the study. The purpose of participant observation is to facilitate the researcher’s ability to understand the reality as the research participant sees their situation and to obtain data that potentially will help discover recurring patterns of behavior or themes (Liampittong, 2011).

The qualitative case study is the research design chosen to understand the perspectives and drivers impacting decisions associated with motivation, job-satisfaction, engagement, commitment and trust, and behavior. The factors involving leadership and retention are best understood through the perspective of employees in an organization or institution (Desai, Lockett, & Paton, 2016). Merriam (1998) stated the bounded case is the event or phenomenon within boundaries. The multiple semi-structured interviews involving Marine Corps officers facing retention decisions is the bounds. Yin (2002) stated the embedded designs require
multiple units of analysis involving attention to the relevant literature and theoretical propositions to support data collection. The research design developed includes multiple units of analysis and multiple sources of data collection, thus supporting why the case study methodology was determined as the most appropriate design to help understand the research phenomenon.

**Summary of Research Method and Design**

The qualitative case method for research was selected because the research question involved understanding human perspectives within a bounded system, there exist multiple data sources, and the phenomenon is concerned with understanding current events through individual perspectives. The phenomenon explored is mid-level attrition in Marine Corps officers the Marine Corps desires to retain in service until retirement eligible. The officers are attending an intermediate career level training and have been screened by the Marine Corps as officers the Marine Corps desires to retain until retirement eligible. The case study methodology provides a formal research approach involving close and an in-depth examination of a case as well as contextual factors necessary to satisfy the research questions identified within a study (Yin, 2015).

**Population and Sampling**

This section provides a discussion on population and sampling methodology for academic research and the population and methodology chosen for this study. The discussion includes criteria for including participants into the research and sample population as well as methods to screen participants to ensure each meet the criteria for this study. The discussion also provides the rationale for how research participants are chosen to participate in the research to provide the information necessary to answer the research questions.
**Discussion of population.** A target population is the entire group of individuals or objects that possess the common characteristics relevant to the research or study (Fink, 2017). In selecting a target population to study, the researcher focuses on ensuring validity and must closely align the target population to the problem being researched (Fink, 2017). The research focused on Marines Corps officers desired by the Marine Corps to remain on active duty until retirement eligible. The sample population chosen is purposeful and provides a rich and robust amount of data directly linked to research studied.

The population requirement for the study consists of current active duty Marine Corps officers at the mid-point in their career whom the Marine Corps desires to retain to meet its JP 1 commitments as well as in-service operational and organizational needs (JP 1; MCO P1553.4B). The chosen population for this study is active duty Marine Corps officers attending an intermediate level school, which consists of Marine Corps officers halfway towards retirement eligibility. Each officer will be selected from a population group currently enrolled in the Marine Corps CSC at MCB in Quantico, Virginia. The Marine Corps Officers attending CSC are officers the Marine Corps desires to meet its future needs and possess the potential for future service. The selected population group represents a group of officers the Marine Corps has chosen to invest a full academic year of graduate study to further their critical thinking skills and to develop a full range of innovative problem solving skills. Marines chosen for CSC are selected based on keen competition and are required to remain on active duty for an additional three years upon graduation (MCO P1553.4B). All Marine Officers attending CSC meet the requirements for this population. Age, race, gender, ethnicity, and other social-economic factors were not considered in the target population.
The deputy for the Lejeune Leadership Institute at MCU and is providing the researcher with access to the current 2019 and 2020 academic year students attending CSC (J. Van Zummermen, personal communication, January 11, 2019). As deputy for the institute, Dr. Van Zummermen is able to help identify the members of the population group that meet the research criterion. Dr. Van Zummermen is also facilitating permission from the Marine Corps to conduct the research interviews and arrange for the research to occur on the MCU campus in Quantico, Virginia (J. Van Zummermen, personal communication, January 11, 2019).

**Discussion of sampling.** A sample is a subset of a population being researched to represent the entire population (Rao, 2000). The sample group being researched are the actual individuals who participate in the interview process. A primary goal of any research is to provide quality results that are reliable for decision-making (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of various sampling methods and techniques are crucial to ensure accuracy and legitimacy in the conduct of the research methodology (Groves et al., 2004). Sampling is further defined as the process of selecting a representative portion of a target population and should assist in satisfying the research questions (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010).

**Sampling size.** The selection of an appropriate sample size for a study involves obtaining enough individual samples or observations to accurately reflect the population being represented (Rao, 2000). An appropriate sample size must be large enough to saturate the data acquired; resulting in no new information, yet able to address the research questions without risking utilizing repetitive data (Rao, 2000). The larger sample size is typically more reliable and tends to better validate the research as very small samples may undermine the validity of the research by not achieving data saturation (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). A larger sample size is more
likely to reduce extreme observations which do not represent the target population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; Rao, 2000).

Qualitative research utilizing in-depth interviews often have a smaller sample populations as compared to quantitative research due to attempts to garner an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Charmaz, 1990). Determining the exact sample size to represent a population can be an imprecise science, however, Griffin and Hauser (1993) studied qualitative studies and determined statistically the sample size can grow proportionally less as the population size increases. As an example, if the population is 10, a sample of size of 1 represents 10% of the population yet is not as reliable as a sample size of 10 for a population of 100 (Griffin & Hauser, 1993). Griffin and Hauser (1993) stated that the goal in conducting in-depth interviews in qualitative research is to reach a saturation point which will typically reveal 90-95% of a customer’s concern or thoughts. Mason (2010) stated that the concept of saturation is a more important factor than sample size. Dworkin (2012) stated in qualitative studies that the number of recommended participants would range from 5 to 50 with the primary focus on data saturation.

The Marine Corps selects approximately 100 Marine Corps officers to attend CSC each year (MCO P1553.4b, 2008). The researcher is attempting to reach as large a population as possible with a minimum number of 10 students required to participate in the in-depth interviews. The researcher will continue with participant interviews until a saturation point is reached, which accurately represent the target population. Saturation is defined as the point in which the gathering of additional data no longer offers any new or theoretical insights (Charmaz, 2006).
**Sampling categories.** The two types of scholarly research sampling categories used are probability and non-probability sampling (Sarstedt, Bengart, Shaltoni, & Lehmann, 2016). Probability sampling is appropriate when the sample allows for objects or individuals to be selected at random when it is possible to know all of the potential samples within a population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Sarstedt et al. (2016) stated non-probability sampling does not involve random selection; rather, non-probability sampling utilizes personal judgment or a non-random methodology to select research objects or individuals. Non-probability sampling will often place limits on the size of the sample population being researched (Sarstedt et al., 2016). There exist several probability sampling methods for use in research, each with a slightly different approach yet each pursuing the same purpose of attempting to represent the researched population (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Emmil, 2015). The probability methods reviewed include random sampling, cluster sampling, and stratified sampling (Sarstedt et al., 2016). The non-probability methods reviewed include quota sampling, purposeful sampling, and convenience sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2016).

**Probability sampling.** There are three main forms of probability sampling which include: random, cluster and stratified sampling. Random sampling is used when objects or individuals have an equal chance of being selected for the sample population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Random sampling is theoretically the most accurate form of sampling in research methodology (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). Probability sampling methods were not appropriate for this study because the research questions required the sample population to possess specific characteristics within the target population.

Cluster sampling involves identifying a group or cluster of participants inside a population to represent a target population (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; Sarstedt et al., 2016).
This method is common when an assorted grouping of objects or individuals are naturally exhibited in a population, or there is an attempt to focus on a specific characteristic or factor associated with this group (Sarstedt et al., 2016). Cluster sampling has the potential to lead to bias when working with a small number of clusters, however, can be useful in dealing with targeted groups (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010; Sarstedt et al., 2016).

Stratified sampling involves dividing the sample population into subgroups or stratified sampling before randomly selecting the objects or personnel proportionally and randomly from each stratum (Sarstedt et al., 2016). Stratified and cluster sampling are similar in they both focus on randomly sampling elements or groups. Stratified sampling is different from cluster sampling as this method will often separate a group by characteristics as seen in separating individuals by gender or age (Sarstedt et al., 2016).

Random selection was not appropriate for this study because the research questions require a specific group of mid-level Marine Corps officers whom the researcher had to rely on to voluntarily agree to interview. Probability selection requires a random selection which was not possible to achieve in this research (Palinkas et al., 2015).

**Non-probability sampling.** Quota sampling involves the use of predefined distinctive controls and their distribution within the researched population (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Quota sampling often creates controls utilizing the researcher’s judgment to determine whom to sample and at times, used to target a sample population during certain conditions (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). Creating a quota of distinct categories would not have allowed for the selection of Marine Corps officers that experienced the researched phenomenon to address the research questions appropriately; as such, quota sampling was not appropriate for this research.
Purposeful sampling is often used in qualitative research to select a sample of the population related to a phenomenon of interest (Emmil, 2015). A type of purposeful sampling is critical case sampling, which utilizes one or a few cases which are considered decisive in explaining a phenomenon or research question (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Sarstedt et al., 2016). The researcher establishes the criteria required to assist in targeting the sample population to address the research phenomenon (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016). As such, purposeful sampling was used as the method for selecting participants for interview.

Convenience sampling is a method used based on the ease at which a researcher can gain access to potential members inside a target population (Creswell & Poth; 2018, Sarstedt et al., 2016). Obtaining a sufficient size or sampling is often difficult which can limit the researcher’s ability to get a representative sample. Convenience sampling has the potential for greater error based on its limited size and lack of focus on a representative sample (Palinkas et al., 2015; Sarstedt et al., 2016).

Sampling bias is a bias which occurs when a sample of a population is collected in a manner that does not accurately represent the total population (Rosenberger & Lachin, 2015). Types of sampling bias may include forms such as non-response bias which leads to under representing a segment being studied. An example of this type of bias includes a population segment who declines to participate for a variety of reasons. An individual might be embarrassed to disclose their beliefs or simply is too busy to partake in an interview or reveal their true beliefs (Sarstedt et al., 2016). The researcher must also guard against introducing their own bias in both the conduct and methodology of how data are collected (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Sarstedt et al., 2016).
Summary of population and sampling. The criterion used for membership in the research population was a Marine Corps officer in the CSC at MCB, Quantico, Virginia. This population represents a population the Marine Corps desires to retain until retirement eligible based on the officer’s past performance and potential for future performance (MCO P1553.4B). Purposeful sampling was used to ensure that members of the sample population were qualified to share perspectives pertaining to leadership and retention decisions. Participant screening procedures were implemented to validate qualified research participants from the sample population. The sampling method and screening procedures used within this study assisted in the selection of research participants that possessed the required traits to satisfy the research question within this research.

Data Collection

The purpose of data collection in a qualitative study is to substantiate data used to support the research questions and evidence (Polkinghorne, 2005). Hancock and Algozzine (2016) described case studies as an attempt to understand events and phenomena from the participants’ perspective and stress the importance of collecting accurate data to ensure the integrity of the research. The purpose of this case study is to explore leadership and mid-level management attrition in the Marine Corps. A strength of case study methodology is the use of multiple data points and collection methods used to research the potential themes explored (Hancock & Algozzine, 2016; Yin, 2015).

Data collection is a systematic approach to collect and measure information from a variety of sources. Weller and Romney (1988) stated the relationship between data collection and the type of data desired will determine what type of questions to ask and how to tabulate responses. The data collection was generated through personal interviews, field notes, and the
interviewer’s observations to provide context. The purpose of the interviews was to collect responses through a semi-structure interview to better address the research questions. Interviews are the favored method for data collection within qualitative case study research because the interviews often lead to an in-depth understanding of the researched event (England, 2012; Flick, 2014; Yin, 2015). In addition, data collected through interviews and external observations to the study can be supported and often validated by the researcher’s field notes (England, 2012; Flick, 2014).

Researcher observations were continuous throughout the study and included noting demeanor, temperament, as well as any indications of hesitancy or even eagerness to provide information. Participant interviews required the researcher to visit the MCCSC campus and interact with Marine Corps officers several times over a period of approximately one month. During the visits to the MCCSC, the researcher observed, collected, and later analyzed the interaction associated with the participant group. Important to the validity of the information collected is for the researcher to reflect on ways to avoid bias by choosing what will be observed and how it is reported (Brookfield, 1991). Field notes collected during the interview process are able to validate the narrative and often include the researcher’s observations to provide context on the participants’ response (England, 2012).

**Instruments.** Choosing the appropriate data collection technique is closely associated with the type of study performed and access to the data available to address research questions (Brace, 2018). Brace (2018) highlighted the various types of data collection media used in data collection: self-completion surveys, paper questionnaires, interview-administered interviews, and telephone-administered questionnaires. The type of data collection media used for data collection is often based on what is available and the access to collection sources, however, the
richer the media, typically the more robust and useful the data becomes in the study (Brace, 2018). Quantitative research often uses surveys or questionnaires as the instrument to collect data while in qualitative research, the researcher is normally the instrument (Creswell, 2012). Englander (2012) confirmed this by stating that in qualitative research, the researcher is normally the sole instrument used to collect data. Similarly, the researcher is the primary instrument used in this study to collect data through participant interviews, field notes, and direct observation.

Interview questions are designed by the researcher and must have boundaries that isolate the questions being studied (Weller & Romney, 1998). Weller and Romney (1998) stressed the importance of isolating the scope of the questions to form an alignment between the problem, the research questions, the interview process, and potential conclusions. In addition, the researcher supported the data collection process by reviewing the interview transcriptions, the follow-up questions, and their responses, observations, and field notes to find alignment and support development of themes. The researcher is responsible for developing probing and follow-up questions to aid in validating the participant’s responses; this is to ensure the participant’s desired message is understood (Flick, 2014). The practice of validating content by reviewing responses with participants, is consistent with the semi-structured interview technique and enhances validity for the research conducted (Flick, 2014). Attempts to validate the accuracy of interviews involves ensuring consistency in interview settings and by providing consistency in interview questions. An interview guide and interview questions are provided in Appendix E to aide in the conduct of the semi-structured interview. Strategies employed in the interview process are consistent with processes developed by Flick (2014) and Groenewald (2004) and are discussed further in the data validity and reliability sections.
Data collection techniques. The focus of this qualitative study was centered on leadership and attrition in mid-level managers in the Marine Corps, thus, participant interviews is an appropriate and primary method to use to collect data. Yin (2009) highlighted the value of using interviews as a source of evidence in case studies involving behavior and human events. Data acquired in scholarly research projects must be related to the topic, robust, and rich enough to be useful to support understanding the research phenomenon (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Focused interviews are utilized as a method to produce richness and related data by utilizing a focused sample population to aid in the examination of the overall research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interview questions developed are derived from the works of researchers experienced in case study methodology as well as a focus on leadership and other models that may influence retention efforts in the Marine Corps (Alase, 2016; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Yukl, 2013).

The following sources of data are being used for data collection: direct observations focused on the MCCSC students in their environment before, during, and after the interview process; the responses to the use of open-ended interview questions during the participant interview; archival records such as promotion precepts promulgated by the Marine Corps which may shape views and attitudes towards leadership and retention; and, documents such as the JP 1 which provides the strategic vision for the National Security strategy which influences each service branch’s plans and policies for retention, promotion, and operational planning for our nation’s defense (JP 1).

Participant interviews by MCCSC students will be the primary source of data collection and will emphasize open-ended and non-leading questions which focus on personal experiences to help the participant provide the insight desired in the interview (King, Horrocks, & Brooks,
The interviewer must attempt to build a rapport and trust with the participant to elicit accurate and often personal information to help address the research question (King et al., 2019). The interviewer will also attempt to minimize any power imbalance, which could skew the results of data collection (King et al., 2019). The interviewer by the nature of their position is often seen as being in a more powerful position and as such, the interviewer must attempt to minimize this imbalance (King et al., 2019). This relationship can be further complicated during the interview process due to the age and status of the parties involved. An important objective of the interviewer is to attempt to minimize any power imbalance between the parties in an attempt to better enable the essence of the phenomenon to emerge (Alase, 2016; King et al., 2019).

The interview process utilized an interview guide (See Appendix E) and consisted of the following actions to facilitate the interview process. The first action involves coordinating a general announcement by the Director of the Lejeune Leadership Institute to the target population about the importance of the study to the officer’s profession. The general announcement consisted of inviting volunteers for the research and assuring participants that results of the interview was being used to enhance leadership and retention efforts. This announcement occurred within the first month of the MCCSC commencing. The purpose of this announcement was to gain buy-in from the participants. The benefit of obtaining buy-in from participants is to add legitimacy to the interview, which can influence how the participant responds to the interview process (Spector, 2016). Furthermore, the announcement made by the Deputy Director introduced the interviewer and encouraged the participants to answer questions honestly and to the best of their ability. The interviewer did not interact with the participants during this time, however, observations were made as to tone, body language, and other behavioral characteristics that presented itself to the researcher. A recruitment letter and consent
form were provided by the Deputy Director for MCCSC students interested in participating (See Appendix B and C). Both a verbal and written assurance to each participant was made to participants assuring that their responses will be kept confidential. These assurances for confidentiality to participants were made in both the recruitment letter and were made again verbally prior to the commencement of the participant interview. Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2011) stated that in any form of communication, leadership must set the conditions to foster an honest and open dialogue with subordinates.

The following steps involved the researcher’s observations associated with the participants during the interview and direct observations the researcher encountered separate from the interviews. The direct observations were separated from the interviews and occurred during site visits associated with the participant interviews. The site visits to the MCCSC occurred over a month-long period as participants were available to meet for the participant interview. Observations involving personnel the researcher interacts with while visiting the MCCSC on conduct, perceived moods, demeanor and any other noticeable characteristics that might help in understanding the phenomenon being studied were collected for further examination. Data collected from direct observations outside of the interviews often allow the researcher an opportunity to obtain an account of the phenomenon of interest personally rather than relying on another’s perspective (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Observations by the researcher often provide contextual background that is useful in understanding the participant’s viewpoint and may include signs of anger, agreement, or other signals such as tone and inflection in one’s voice (Yin, 2009). Verderber and Macgeorge (2015) stated the importance of context in communication is useful in understanding a participant’s perspective and may provide essential information leading to better understanding the phenomenon being studied.
The first type of context noted was the physical context which involved the actual setting and objective observations being made by the researcher. To remain consistent in the interview process, the setting for the interviews were the same for each participant. The interview took place in a private room at the MCU library at Quantico, Virginia. The participants were made comfortable by ensuring a suitable space is provided for the interview and assuring the respondent that their discussion remained confidential. Water was available to each participant and the researcher attempted to place the participant at ease in an effort to encourage a full and robust response to interview questions. Observations may include physical context which involves observing a participants physical demeanor (e.g., is the participant smiling, seem self-assured, or is the participant demonstrating hostility; Verderber & Macgeorge, 2015). Physical context can provide clues to understanding a phenomenon.

Temporal context is also a form of observation which involves expectations participants may have based on past experience. This context is often difficult to uncover but can reveal clues on perceptions and drivers during the interview process (Verderber & Macgeorge, 2015). The researcher will attempt to look for signs of temporal context such as noting responses to interview questions that highlight past negative or positive experiences.

Social-psychological context is a type of context based on the participant’s perspective that recognizes a participant’s personal relationships and emotional state. Participants who are going through a challenging time may have a different viewpoint under different conditions (Verderber & Macgeorge, 2015). The ability to understand context takes time and requires the interviewer to find ways to develop a level of trust to interact in any context being displayed by the participant to aid in understanding. The researcher and interviewer for this project is a retired
and decorated Marine Corps officer who attempted to use his prior service as a measure to develop trust and encourage participants to answer questions honestly.

The culmination of the interview and engagement process involves a comprehensive review and comparison of associated documentation, the responses provided to interview questions, contextual observations, and impacts of archival data to corroborate and augment evidence from data sources. According to Yin (2009), using evidence from other sources such as archival records or physical artifacts plays an essential role in case study data collection.

**Archival records.** Archival records contain unique materials for an organization and are a tool for gathering data focused on the past which impact the present (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010). Archival records can provide important clues to priorities and content for examination relevant in case study (Mills et al., 2010). Archival records were searched to include precepts produced by the Marine Corps’ promotion board which prioritize skill sets, retention objectives, and promotion rates based on specific attributes desired by the Marine Corps. The Marine Corps produces precepts for promotion and retention boards which consist of guidance to leaders which may provide context for behaviors and attitudes leaders and subordinates possess towards retention and leadership. The Marine Corps’ orders, publications, and other sources of data are influenced by precepts and may provide information pertaining or leading to the participants concerns, attitudes, and perceptions that influence leadership actions and impact the phenomenon being studied.

**Document review.** The document review consisted of the joint planning documents produced by the Joint Staff and the National Security Council to promulgate guidance on strategic focuses for each branch in the Armed Forces. JP 1 is the foundational doctrine for integrating personnel support, goals, and objectives to provide a unified and cohesive fighting
force to meet peace and wartime needs (JP 1). The purpose of JP 1 is to improve continuity between forces by reducing redundancies in service branches (JP 1). This objective is achieved by continuously reviewing the joint activity of all armed force branches and setting the strategic vision to meet current and emergent needs for our nation (JP 1). The review of JP 1 provides insight into the policies and attitudes that shape promotion and retention policies for Marine Corps leaders and decision makers. A review of JP 1 may provide insight on the attitudes shaping retention and leadership attitudes for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps.

**Interviews.** Creswell (2014) provided three distinct interview formats used in scholarly research. The three interview formats are structured, unstructured, and semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview was chosen as the most appropriate format for the participant interviews to be conducted involving leadership and retention for middle managers in the Marine Corps. Semi-structured interviews guide the participant to focus on the questions and topic being studied yet allow opportunities for participants to explain and provide thick descriptions on their responses (Miller & Crabtree, 2003). Structured interviews are known by their focus to establish a strict adherence to standardized questions (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Hartas, 2010). A structured interview will have closed-ended questions fixed in advance and is often used in quantitative interviews (Englander, 2012). Unstructured interviews differentiate themselves by circumventing standardized questions and follow the path of the participant’s direction to generate (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Interviewers follow the direction of the interviewee and generate spontaneous questions (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). Semi-structured interviews start with established questions, however, they allow the researcher to ask follow-up exploratory questions unique to the individual interview to aid in understanding and is useful in providing context (Chan et al., 2013; Englander, 2012). The topical emphasis of semi-structured
interviews is largely determined by the interviewee’s responses to the initial questions (Englander, 2012; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009).

**Observations.** Observations are a fundamental source of data collection in qualitative research used to discover complex and dynamic interactions occurring in a social setting (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Yin (2009) stated that observation are invaluable in case study and are a continuous process focused on discovery of recurring patterns of behavior. Yin (2009) stated observations are an important research source for obtaining enough data to obey the principle of triangulation. The observation process commenced upon arrival at the Marine Corps Base and include observing and recording interactions with Marine Corps staff and interview participants both during interviews and apart from the interviews with participants. As patterns are developed by reviewing observations, themes are generated to help explain or understand factors associated with the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2002). Verderber and MacGeorge (2015) stated observations by the researcher are an important source of data and consist of a firsthand account of the phenomenon seen through the researchers’ eyes. The observations made by the researcher may include different observations than data collected during participant interviews. Ultimately, the goal of the research is to better understand the phenomenon and better provide understanding to the research questions.

Participant interviews occurred by the researcher during visits to the MCCSC. The interaction with the MCU and interview participants occurred over a period of about a month. During this time, notes pertaining to how the researcher was received, attitudes, demeanor, and any other behavioral traits were collected for further study in the research process. Observations also occurred during the participant interview providing contextual clues that might derive meaning in understanding the research problem. As with participant interviews, attention is
given to process all observations consistently to avoid potential bias and to aid in establishing credible findings (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

**Field notes.** Field notes provide an additional and supplementary source of data to support data collection measures and are considered an important source in qualitative research (Englander, 2012; Flick, 2014). Field notes provide important context for observations made throughout the study (Englander, 2012). Field notes are observations recorded as data are obtained that may relate to the phenomenon of interest (Englander, 2012). Field notes also occur during interviews and serve as a useful tool to augment information heard and observed during the interview (Flick, 2014). In addition, field notes were utilized to assist in improving the reliability of data collected and to capture and provide context to the interview and its process. The use of field notes in case study methodology is often used to help validate data collection and is considered a valid tool to aid the research process (Bruan & Clark, 2013).

Field notes aid in the reliability and validity of data acquired and should include information to help support understanding and assessing the content of the interview (Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney, 2012). To avoid bias, the researcher must regularly reflect on the methods to choose what observations are recorded; the criteria for recording observations must be purposeful and derive meaning (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Gubrium et al., 2012). Field notes should be dated and provide contextual information the researcher saw, felt, and observed (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). The use of field notes allows the researcher to capture nuances that are difficult to detect in spoken word alone. Applicable use of field notes support a detailed narrative useful for understanding the social phenomenon that can be missed in a transcribed interview alone (Schensul & LeCompte, 2013). The use of field notes and its
collection process used by the researcher will be consistent with recommendations provided by Flick (2014) and Schensul and LeCompte (2013).

Protocols. Protocols for interview questions and processes are established to support and assist in obtaining useful data to address the research questions and serve as an instrument to guide the interview process. The interview purpose is to collect and capture information that is rich and provides thick descriptions of the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Research questions were developed to address factors associated with leadership and retention issues for those mid-level Marine Corps officers the Marine Corps desired to remain on active service until retirement eligible. The interview questions were designed to align with research questions and provide sufficient data required to answer the research questions. Each participant was asked the same interview questions in the same setting and within a specific time-frame to provide consistency and support reliability in the interview process. Participants were assured that their response will be kept confidential. Background and identification information were collected and were consistent with recommended interview processes recommended by Flick (2014), Marshall and Rossman (2016), and Schensul and LeCompte (2013).

The use of an interview guide as provided in Appendix E, was utilized to guide the interview process to provide both boundaries and ensure consistency in the questioning in an effort to improve validity in the research process. The interview questions were directly related to leadership and retention efforts of middle managers in the Marine Corps and the drivers impacting their decision to remain in service until retirement eligible. Each of the interview questions provided in the guide were focused on answering the research questions to assist in better understanding the problem. Participants interviewed were provided a private location for the interview and allowed to respond to questions without interruption. The researcher annotated
both direct and contextual observations, such as the participants’ mood, ease at answering questions, and other factors that may provide information related to the research and understanding the research problem.

Clarifying questions were asked when required and upon conclusion of the interview. The interview participants were asked to review their transcript for accuracy and given an opportunity to provide any clarification to their response. The use of member checking is a tool utilized in the research process to authenticate the participants’ answers and provide an opportunity for the participant to make clarifying remarks to their responses (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Each participant was thanked for their support of the research project and its intended benefit to both their circumstance but also to help the Marine Corps in better understanding and addressing leadership and retention issues.

**Data organization techniques.** Data organization is vital to the attainment of the research study objective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) recommended establishing codified organizational processes prior to commencing the interview process. Researchers must create a database that serves as a reference the researcher can employ to locate data and comprehend the data acquired (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data collected associated with this study are generated through the following methods: (a) semi-structured interviews, (b) direct observations made and recorded throughout the research process, (c) contextual observations by the researcher during the interview, (d) field notes that capture data associated with the phenomenon both outside the interview process and during the interview, (e) and from documents and archival records available to the researcher. Prior to beginning data collection process, the researcher developed file folders on a secured personal computer which was organized by data source. The personal computer is password protected and access to the
secured file folders is limited to the researcher and members of the researcher’s doctoral committee. An electronic logbook was kept with the files to record any person who obtained access to view the files.

The process of developing questions and methodology for collecting data must be able to draw trustworthy conclusions that can adequately address the research questions (Schwalbach, 2003). The use of an interview guide purposefully guides the conduct of the semi-structured interview and adds both consistency and validity to the interview process. Additionally, the guide supports efforts by codifying the process should the study be replicated at a future time (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Schwalbach, 2003). There are two types of validity that guide the interview process and results: external and internal validity. External validity is more often associated with quantitative research is the ability to generalize the conclusions reached in a study which can be applied to a wider population (Bailey & Burch, 2018). In qualitative research, transferability is more often used and strategies utilized in validation consists of purposeful sampling, thick descriptions, and detailed information to support accuracy in research conducted (Geertz, 1973). Validity is more thoroughly covered in a subsequent section, however, higher levels of transferability are witnessed when using a guide that provides structure in an interview process to provide consistency.

Internal validity is the extent data collected, and the process is able to rule out alternative explanations and bias (Bailey & Burch, 2018). An interview guide is also a tool to provide the structure needed to help focus the interviewer and participant on avoiding potential bias (Bailey & Burch, 2018). In qualitative terminology, internal validity is typically referred to as credibility. The strategies employed will include the use of thick descriptions, the triangulation of multiple data sources to support credibility, and member checks (Guba, 1981). An additional
research strategy employed with validity is confirmability which also includes triangulation but also an audit trail which ensures the process is clearly documented, logical, and provides a clear record of field notes and transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

Participant interviews were digitally recorded and transferred from the recording device to the appropriate file folder located on the researcher’s secured computer. Field notes were handwritten by the researcher during the observation and interview process, and upon completion of an interview, the researcher scanned the handwritten notes into the appropriate subfolder. Once notes were scanned and secured on the researcher’s computer, all handwritten notes were destroyed. In addition, the researcher also utilized the handwritten notes to develop a typed narrative containing in-depth field notes designed to augment the initial field notes collected during the interview.

**Summary of data collection.** The use of a participant interview, observations, archival records, and field notes were the primary data collection techniques used to understand retention and leadership issues in mid-level Marine Corps officers in an attempt to answer the research questions. The potential interview participants were invited to participate in the interview via notification during the orientation period of the MCCSC academic year. This invitation was followed by an invitational email which was provided to research participants describing the purpose of the study, a summary of the research goals, and interview process. In addition, a consent form was provided for the participants’ review.

Potential participants were able to schedule an interview time and were notified that a copy of the consent form was to be provided for review before the start of the interview. The next phase of the research process involved reviewing the consent form and obtaining a signature from the interview participant. The last phase of the process consisted of conducting a semi-
structured interview with the participant. The interview was conducted at the US Marine Corps CSC campus library in a private and secure office located on MCB Quantico. The interview consisted of open-ended questions and the researcher asked the same initial questions during each interview. Follow-up questions were created spontaneously but were generated based on the response to the information provided by the participants being interviewed.

The use of an interview guide will be used to help maintain the semi-structured interview process and guide the interviewer to remain consistent in approach throughout the process (Bailey & Burch, 2018). Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim with a copy of the interview transcript provided to the participating interviewee to review and validate. During the participants’ interview, the researcher developed field notes that collected relevant data related to the context of the interview. The final phase involved the researcher supplementing the interview with field notes collected from the narrative of each interview for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Spencer (2005) stated that data analysis in qualitative research involves all aspects of the research process and at each stage of the journey. All data collected are considered raw, until it is transformed into something meaningful useful to the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that data analysis in qualitative research is the process of bringing structure, order, and meaning to the vast quantity of data collected. Data analysis requires the researcher to patiently reflect on the process to make sense of multiple data sources by generating categories and identifying patterns and themes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). While there is a multitude of ways to approach data analysis, each shares a common goal of extracting the underlying essence of the data collected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).
The researcher is utilizing the qualitative case study methodology and employing data collection procedures to support the methodology. Case study designs are often utilized by researchers to understand a relevant and contemporary phenomenon (Yin, 2017). Care must be exercised by the researcher to collect and utilize data that is suitable and relevant to the study (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The content of the case study involves factors involved in mid-level managers in the Marine Corps and their retention decisions. The Marine Corps has a quota of officer requirement by rank and skill set to meet operational needs, succession planning requirements, and to comply with mandates directed by the Commandant of the Marine Corps as outlined in JP 1. Data were analyzed to support the research question in an effort to both satisfy the research question, the sub-questions, but to also fulfill the purpose of this study to add to the body of knowledge on leadership and retention. Finally, the researcher allowed the data collected to direct and dictate the patterns and themes established within the data collected.

Three common forms of qualitative analysis include inductive, deductive, and abductive analysis (Brinkmann, 2014). Inductive analysis is data-driven analysis that involves data leads to become theory and in its purest form will lead to an approach where data will reveal or speak for itself (Brinkman, 2014; Yin, 2014). Deductive analysis is considered theory-driven analysis and states that theory determines the data (Brinkmann, 2014). This approach often uses the term ‘paradigm’ in explaining the theoretical framework that guides research from conceptualization through data analysis (Brinkmann, 2014). The last form of analysis in the qualitative approach is abductive analysis, which is explained as the relationship between the situation and inquiry (Brinkmann, 2014). Brinkmann (2014) stated abduction analysis is the process of attempting to understand insights or explain why a particular action occurs. In examining the research
questions, the goal of understanding factors influencing leadership and Marine Corps office retention is likely to require abductive analysis.

**Analysis process.** The case study methodology will dictate the analysis process and will be organized around the research questions, specific topics, and themes (Yin, 2017). The objective of qualitative case study analysis is to uncover truths, to understand the researched phenomenon, and to develop conclusions through the identification and exploring of themes (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). A systematic procedure for data analysis includes both a process but typically involves constant looping back to data in an effort to determine patterns and their impact in an effort to uncover meaning (Spencer, 2005). The ultimate goal of the process is to codify actions needed to make sense of the data (Lichtman, 2014).

Yin’s (2002) design process is comprised of five steps: The study’s questions, its proposition, the unit of analysis, the logic linking the data to the proposition, and criteria for interpreting the findings (p. 26). Yin (2002) placed emphasis on preparation of a detailed design beginning with data collection. The data analysis process being utilized follows Yin’s guidance by applying strict standards to collecting information from the participant interview, the literature review, field notes, and direct observations (Yin, 2002). The analysis process then utilizes measures to enhance the quality of the design against four criteria: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2002). Each of these criteria is further described in the reliability and validity section.

The analysis process consists of distributing the data into thematic clusters to be synthesized into a reliable portrayal of the phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yin, 2002; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The capturing and combining of clusters into an understanding of the phenomenon is what holds the aspects of the phenomenon together and is described as the
essence of the analysis (Phillips-Pula, Strunk, & Pickler, 2011; Yin, 2017). The process of establishing clusters is part of coding and classifying data into meaningful segments, sometimes called clusters (Bazeley, 2014). The clusters in qualitative analysis symbolize a summative and salient attribute that captures the essence of data being analyzed (Saldana, 2016). The categories derived from the foundation of the research become the tool to develop themes and relationships to address the research questions (Seidman, 2012). The process of winnowing groups of data is a process to both dissect and manage data into useful bites to glean critical information from each of the collection sources (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

A method often used for data collection analysis is a data summary table. In content review, counting the number of times a code occurs is a measure in assessing the frequency of a phenomenon, however, in qualitative coding frequency is not always an indicator of relevance (Saldana, 2016). A matrix similar to the table below was used to record the participants’ response to each question and descriptors to identify factors for further review.

Table 3

Data Summary Table Template (Guest et al., 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant 1</th>
<th>Descriptor 1</th>
<th>Descriptor 2</th>
<th>Descriptor 3</th>
<th>Descriptor 4 (etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N = X</td>
<td># = X %</td>
<td># = X %</td>
<td># = X %</td>
<td># = X %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4 (etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Table 3**

*Data Summary Table Template (Guest et al., 2012)*

<table>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4 (etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The use of the summary data table is a consistent process used to record findings of each participant’s response across categories relating to the research questions (Guest et al., 2012).

The themes that capture the essence of the phenomenon in the case study are established and further analyzed through scholarly literature, prior experience of the researcher, field notes and the interview process (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The goal of the final analysis should lead to a description of the common experience or core themes established from the data to address the research questions (Phillips-Pula et al., 2011; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The use of semi-structured interviews will allow for data analysis in real-time as the interview was occurring. The analysis process includes the context surrounding the interview and relevant notes taken during the encounter with the participant (Hartas, 2010).

**Bracketing process.** The purpose of bracketing is initially utilized in the collection process to assist in preserving the integrity of data and involves setting aside one’s personal beliefs associated with the researched phenomenon (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). Bracketing is also utilized in analysis and came from Husserlian phenomenology, which attempted to create a process for the researcher to create a distance from previously held theories or assumptions (Bertelsen, 2005). The bracketing process can mitigate bias when the researcher reflects on how their personal point of view, and feelings may influence the collection and analysis of data (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Ideally, research is conducted without preconceived views and is absence of opinion, however, it is rare for research to be conducted in isolation and without the researcher having opinions relating to the research topic (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The research conducted was by a retired Marine Corps officer who guarded against allowing insights or past experiences to taint the analysis process. Bracketing occurred by the researcher prior to any information collected. Measures included reviewing and following the interview guide,
ensuring consistency in how questions are asked, and codifying the process for collecting observations to only include data associated with the phenomenon of interest. Personal bias can negatively impact the validity, credibility, and trustworthiness of research which can occur throughout the research; and particularly during the participant interview process where bias can be manifested by the type of questions asked, the interviewer’s tone, response to answers, and even in facial responses (Sloan & Bowe, 2014).

Data collection review. The data collection review consists of reviewing all collected data in an effort to maintain the integrity of the data acquired. The data collection review consists of exploring and examining documentation, archival records, participant interviews, physical artifacts, and participant observations (Yin, 2002). The literature review established the importance of validity and trustworthiness and the value of a review. This review involves the researcher but also includes the opportunity for interview participants to provide clarifying remarks pertinent to the researched phenomenon to add validity (Sloan & Bowe, 2014; Yuksel & Yildirim, 2015). The researcher also reviewed field notes and direct and contextual observations to validate the essence of the information collected. Descriptive statements that demonstrate the essence of the phenomenon were isolated and compared to field notes and the interview using a summary table similar to Table 3.

Reflexivity is a process used by researchers to reflect on their personal beliefs and should occur by the researcher prior to engaging participants to support maintaining integrity in the data collection process (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Data collection review also involves the intentional examination of how reference material was selected and ensuring the literature review is allowed to reveal data without bias (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). Reflexivity is a continual process of
monitoring both data collection and analysis to establish credibility in the research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

A process for data collection review will cause the researcher to organize and examine similarly coded data to stimulate deeper thinking about the data collected (Cozey & Bates, 2012). Once data is collected, the similar coded items will be grouped together, noting the frequency and potential impact of the items to help in understanding potential and emergent themes. The data review process is also a search for combinations and blending of categories (Yin, 2002). This purpose is to discover meaning by tabulating, categorizing and recombining data to extract useful information to understand the research phenomenon (Cozby & Bates, 2012; Yin, 2002). The data review methodology will review both the process and settings to adequately capture the full range of experiences to establish believability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The process of data collection review includes ensuring the sampling strategy utilized sufficiently captures the target population and attempts to allow data to speak for itself (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The validity and reliability of the data collection review process occurs through triangulation and is an iterative process that repeatedly sifts through data looking for a convergence of evidence to uncover emergent themes (Yin, 2002).

**Summary of data analysis.** The data analysis process utilized will be grounded in scholarly literature and utilize examples from Yin (2002). The goal of data analysis is to help identify core themes followed by the developing of specific identifiable themes. The follow-on steps are to categorize specific characteristics of various themes into clusters. Each cluster will be categorized into thematic groups based on various descriptors. The themes are then tested and enhanced through triangulation and review of field notes to strength the themes. Yin (2002) stated the use of pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, and program logic
to provide validity provides credibility and trustworthiness to the data analysis process. Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher will attempt to eliminate personal bias through reflexivity and personal bracketing. The following section on reliability and validity provides an overview of the actions to support the credibility of the research.

**Reliability and Validity**

**Reliability.** Reliability of scholarly research and their findings are tied directly to the credibility and methodology of the research (Noble & Smith, 2015). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that if qualitative research is reliable, then researchers studying the same phenomenon will find compatible observations. Guba and Lincoln (1985) stated that in qualitative methodology, the research must demonstrate four specific criteria to be reliable. The first criteria are establishing credibility from the perspective of participants and in the ability to understand the phenomena being studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The choice in utilizing Marine Corps officers from CSC to participate in the research adds credibility to the research by focusing on the category of officers the Marine Corps wants to retain. This target population focuses on individuals associated with the research problem and attempts to identify various theories and leadership factors that influence retention. Establishing credibility in qualitative research also involves codifying the participant interview process and replicating it for each participant to ensure reliability in the results (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

This study will demonstrate reliability by consistently applying the same methods and techniques to ensure each participant has the same opportunity to describe and explain their perspectives through semi-structured interviews. An interview guide is used to ensure each Marine Corps officer has the opportunity to answer the same initial questions in a similar setting. Participants consist of the same academic class of military officers, all of whom were selected
for interviews at the beginning of the academic year. The purposeful method for selection and sampling is an effort to promote reliability in the research process. Dr. Van Zummerman from the Lejeune Leadership Institute at MCU, is assisting in facilitating access to the CSC students and providing a secure location for Marine Corps officers to participate in the interview (J. Van Zummermen, personal communication, January 11, 2019).

The second criteria for reliability are the extent the qualitative research can be transferred to other situations or contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Miller, 1986). Transferability involves the ability to thoroughly describe the research perspective and assumptions central to the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The literature review provides a comprehensive review of factors associated with leadership and retention and provides context for the research. Similar case studies involving leadership and retention were analyzed in the literature review and themes were compared to support understanding of the research phenomenon. The data and subsequent findings derived from the comprehensive literature review, discussion of leadership theories, and their impact on leadership and retention are supported by a codified process for the research conducted and potential transferability.

The third area involves confirmability, which is how well the results can be corroborated or confirmed (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Miller, 1986). Researchers in qualitative research must guard against bias, and a researcher’s own perspective as data interpretation can be subjective and potentially lead to errors (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Strategies employed to confirm the results of the research involve reviewing interview transcripts with participants for accuracy, rechecking data, and bracketing to look for potential bias (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). In a warning by Golafshani (2003) and Leung (2015), qualitative research attempting to replicate research independently has the potential to inhibit human subjects from sharing their unique and
individual perspectives, however, codifying the interview process and use of an interview guide supports reliability. Golafshani (2003) and Leung (2015) both stated that data collected in participant surveys will likely differ in richness based on individual factors and experiences incurred by participants.

Time is also a barrier for independent replication as the perspectives provided by the Marine Corps officers participating have the potential to alter their views with time. Additionally, the reliability standard in qualitative research considers the possibility that attempting to replicate the same study and results at a different period in time might produce different information. The standard for qualitative reliability is to lead to the consistent generalization of findings within qualitative case studies vice an exact replication in the findings (Golafshani, 2003; Leung, 2015; Yin, 2009). The study conducted is directly related to developing an understanding of the factors associated with the various interrelated theories associated with retention and leadership; thus the ability to provide exact replicability is highly unlikely. To minimize varying perspectives, the selection of sample participants and their corresponding interviews occurred within the same general time-period during the academic year.

The last area is dependability, which adds legitimacy to the research process. Dependability occurs when the researcher documents the process, any changes, and unexpected occurrences to explain findings (Altheide & Johnson, 1988; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The reliability within qualitative research should consistently yield data consistent with the methodology, however, the data allows variances based on individual perspectives (Leung, 2015). Triangulation is a strategy utilized to demonstrate reliability by converging information from different data sources (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville, 2014;
Method triangulation means utilization of multiple data collection methods to research the same phenomenon. The purpose of triangulation is to strengthen findings by reducing bias and improving reliability (Brown, 2001). Data collected from interviews and field notes will be used as a form of method triangulation as it enhances trustworthiness and the understanding of the participants’ context (Brown, 2001). Field notes and interview transcripts analyzed separately, then together supports method triangulation and improves the reliability of the findings.

Validity. Validity in research refers to the appropriateness of the research data, tools, process, and collection methods (Golfshani, 2003; Leung, 2015). Yin (2009) stated qualitative research involves the precision of which the findings accurately reflect the data acquired and consists of both internal and external components. Research using the qualitative methodology is also considered valid when the research participants perspectives are considered to be credible and confirmable (Silverman, 2015; Yin, 2017). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) stated that research is valid if it clearly reflects the world being described. Additionally, a comprehensive literature review enhances validity in case study research when relevant gaps are discovered and explored (Baskarada, McKay, & McKenna, 2013).

Internal validity in the qualitative case study method refers to the level of accuracy between research findings and reality and in qualitative terminology is referred to as credibility (Guba, 1981; Yin, 2009). Credibility involves the process of attempting to rule out bias and alternative explanations to obtain the essence of the problem (Bailey & Burch, 2018). Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) offered various research strategies to establish credibility such as providing use of multiple sources of data to corroborate research conclusions and prolonged engagement in the field of study to facilitate a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.
The researcher’s use of in-depth interviews, collection of field notes, and direct and contextual observations by the researcher during the participant interview support the use of triangulation and credibility in the research process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

External validity in the case study method of research relates to the trustworthiness of findings from the selected cases to the overall population and its ability to be transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1982). Trustworthiness is established from a purposeful sample that accurately reflects the target population (Bailey & Burch, 2018). The population being researched are the CSC Marine Corps officers the Marine Corps desires to retain until retirement eligible. Utilizing officers the Marine Corps has chosen for advanced degrees and future command and staff assignments is a target population the Marine Corps likely desires to remain on active duty until retirement eligible thus promoting external validity. The research conducted will also compare observations from previous case studies annotated in the literature review involving similar situations, which adds validity to the research process (Bailey & Burch, 2018). The review conducted ensures the research contains the needed detail so readers can adequately comprehend the research process and its ability to generalize conclusions associated with a larger audience (Bailey & Burch, 2018; Gerring, 2007). The detailed information obtained will also include and highlight negative instances or discrepant findings, further adding validity and credibility to the study (Guba, 1981).

Procedures designed to improve the validity of qualitative research include the use of a robust literature review to develop knowledge gaps, the use of audit trails, negative case selection, peer debriefing, and prolonged observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Lub, 2015). Negative case selection involves stretching data interpretation by seeking out and explaining outliers within the data and were observed in this study (Lub, 2015). Peer debriefings were used
to help avoid bias as did an extended observation and review period during the interview to help remove inconsistency and increasing validity (Lub, 2015). Research conducted utilized audit trails to document the research journey and member checks throughout the research process to increase the validity and credibility of the research.

Audit trails in qualitative research involve documenting the research process chronologically from the initial collection of raw data through the complete analysis of data (Lub, 2015). The audit trail should not deviate from findings and demonstrate data supports the findings (Lub, 2015). Interview transcripts, notes, and field observations are included in the audit trail and part of this research process. Dates collected throughout the data collection process provide a chronological audit trail to validate the methodology. Finally, member checks are conducted with interview participants by asking follow-on questions to validate their statements. Participants are also asked to check their transcripts for accuracy and provide clarifying remarks to ensure accuracy in the process.

Data saturation is a method to enhance validity and is described as the instance when data rich enough in data have been collected to result in no new information being available (Baskarada et al., 2013; Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016). Once participant interviews and other data collection methods reveal no new information, data saturation has occurred, and a sufficient number of participant interviews has taken place (Bernard et al., 2016; Mckay & McKenna, 2013). Participant interviews are the primary research method to collect data to develop themes and answer research questions. There are approximately 100 Marine Corps officers attending CSC each year. The researcher interviewed as many participants as needed to obtain data saturation. This method for determining saturation in qualitative research is consistent with standards employed by Fusch and Ness (2015).
Summary of reliability and validity. This section addressed both the reliability and validity of the data collected. Data collected in a qualitative case study research methodology is considered reliable and valid when the data collected accurately represents the target population and represents the findings of the research participants. Procedures designed to improve the validity of qualitative research include an ample sample size that accurately represents the target population. In addition, following the interview, each participant will review their verbatim transcripts of the interview and responses to questions. An audit trail was created through the use of interview transcripts, field notes, and interview documentation sheets consisting of questions and responses. Dates and times will be used throughout the interview to create an audit trail to validate each research participation. Finally, ensuring data saturation has been achieved will be utilized as a method to enhance credibility.

Triangulation was also utilized in this study to test both reliability and demonstrate the trustworthiness of the collected data and findings. Direct observations were made by the researcher throughout the study to help provide data on the phenomenon for study. Field notes both during the study and as part of the interview process were examined along the conversation transcripts were examined independently. The data collected were then evaluated together to participate in methodological triangulation to improve the reliability of the data collected. Reliability was established through the consistent application of research procedures and protocols. The researcher continuously reflected on the data collected to ensure validity and to avoid bias. Each conversation with interview participants was held in the same private location at the MCB Quantico, and similar instructions were provided to each participants’ in the same consistent manner. The same set of open-ended interview questions were asked to each
participant in the same order. Finally, each participant provided an opportunity to provide additional information and clarifying comments prior to the close of the conversation.

**Transition and Summary of Section 2**

This section provided a thorough description of the research project, its purpose, and applicability. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the reasons why mid-level managers are choosing to leave the Marine Corps before retirement eligible and what leaders can do to influence this decision. This larger problem is explored through an examination of various theories, and an in-depth study of mid-level managers in the industry. This section discussed the methodology for data collection methods, data analysis, and a codified process to ensure the credibility of the research.

The section provided interview questions for the sample population to contribute to understanding the research questions. The sample population were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview consisting of previously designed open-ended questions. As the researcher, I am responsible for generating field notes, follow-up questions, and continuing the data collection until data saturation was achieved. In addition, processes were identified and designed throughout this section to ensure reliability, credibility, and validity of the research methods and techniques utilized in the research. The following section is the culmination of research, presentation of the findings, a discussion on the applicability of these findings to the Marine Corps and the researcher’s personal reflections.
Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

The purpose of this section is to present findings, relevant applications, and recommendations associated with the qualitative study gathered from a multiple case study. The section begins with an overview of the study that addresses retention and leadership theories and factors associated with retaining mid-level Marine Corps officers until retirement eligible. A detailed discussion is provided on the applicability of research findings focused on the mission of the Marine Corps to achieve its own service branch objectives and JP 1 strategic goals which align with national policy. An in depth discussion on leadership theories and the dynamic relationship between leader and subordinate involving factors involving theories of engagement, behavior, motivation, and commitment-trust are addressed as they relate to retention and leadership objectives in the Marine Corps.

Important to any study is the use of an analytic strategic or techniques to ensure the study is of the highest quality. Four principles were used to guide the need for completeness: The first principle was an attempt to review all available evidence and avoid any potential alternative interpretations from the findings. The second principle addressed all plausible rival interpretations for any of the findings. The third principle addressed and explored in detail the most significant aspect of this case study and avoid potential detours on lesser or non-important issues. The fourth principle was to constantly reflect on the process, prior expert knowledge on this topic, ensure intellectual honesty and transparency, and look for potential bias that might unnecessarily reduce the quality of the study. The recommendations from the study are meant to provide useful steps for those impacted by the findings as well as provide areas and topics that may need closer examination. Lastly, a reflection of the researcher’s experience and an
examination of biblical principles are included followed by a summary of the salient points on how this research closed gaps in the literature.

**Overview of Study**

The purpose of this study focused on understanding why mid-level managers were leaving the Marine Corps before they were retirement eligible and what leaders can do to influence this decision. The majority of the data gathered for this study came from semi-structured participant interviews. The case study participants were CSC Marines whom the Marine Corps selected based on possessing attributes desired for future service (MCO P1553.4B). The 2020 CSC class consisted of approximately 200 students from a variety of sources with roughly 95 Marine Corps officers. A primary objective of the study was to validate enough responses were received by participants to achieve data saturation. Charmaz (1990) stated qualitative research utilizing in-depth interviews will likely have a smaller population for study than quantitative research due to attempts to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Griffin and Hauser (1993) suggested that a goal in conducting in-depth interviews via qualitative research, is to reveal 90-95% of a target’s thoughts or concerns. Based on the target population of 95, a total of 10 participants was expected to achieve saturation, however, the invitation for participants to support the study allowed all participants who expressed an interest in the study to participate. It is believed that data saturation was achieved early in the interview process as no new information was revealed after the sixth interview, however, all qualified participants expressing an interest to participate were allowed to participate. A total of 12 CSC students were interviewed which represented the 2019-2020 CSC class in this qualitative study.
This qualitative study focused on the relationship between theories and factors impacting retention efforts for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. The case study design method utilized semi-structured interviews on MCCSC students utilizing purposeful sampling. The necessity for direct access to a predefined set of individuals was an important factor in selecting the research method. The participants were selected based on their experience within the Marine Corps, and their ability to answer the interview questions to support addressing specific research questions. The qualitative case study commenced with a review of promotion and retention precepts promulgated by the CMC and utilized by promotion and retention boards. The follow-on actions included a review of CMC guidance and Marine Corps doctrinal publications disseminated and referenced to Marine Corps leaders. Participant interviews were conducted and recorded then transcribed into individual files utilizing codes for each participant’s name. During interviews contextual information was collected and evaluated.

The NVivo 12 qualitative research software was used to assist in understanding the experience and perceptions of the sample population studied. The responses from participant interviews were entered into the NVivo 12 software to aid in determining clusters, themes and reduce bias. The NVivo 12 software assisted in helping to validate the identification of themes and data saturation. Composite descriptors were generated based on participant interviews and included information provided through precepts and documents reviewed, to highlight relevant themes impacting retention and leadership.

The researcher communicated with the voluntary participants through email, phone calls, and in face-to-face interviews. The MCCSC participants chose when they were available for interviews and the researcher accommodated the participants schedule to preclude from interfering with any other activities. On the day of the scheduled interview, the researcher
verified the consent form was properly filled out and reminded the participant that their identity would remain confidential. The researcher attempted to create a relaxing atmosphere without any signs of creating a sense of power over the participant by dressing casually, sitting at the side of a table vice the head of the table, and presented a calm and friendly demeanor to the participant. The interview questions were read in a conversational tone and during the interview, the researcher took note of body language, inflections in the participant’s tone of voice based on the questions, as well as facial gestures to reveal any additional and pertinent information to help in addressing the research questions. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour and following the question and answer portion, the researcher reviewed the transcript with the participant to ensure the responses were accurate, free of errors, and that the interviewer understood the responses by the participant. The transcript review was used to improve the accuracy and add rigor to the validation process. In addition, member checking was also conducting which involved allowing the participant the opportunity to add any additional thoughts or comments they felt relevant to help the researcher in understanding their response to the questions.

The researcher interacted with CSC Marines outside of the interview process by observing temporal and social-psychological context during visits to MCB Quantico; conducting a review of archival records, and document reviews in an effort to triangulate data to reveal a greater understanding to the phenomenon being studied. Multiple themes emerged from the interviews and review of records and documents. These themes illustrated both the impacts of leadership theories and factors associated with retention decisions. Complimenting the data collected from interviews were precepts promulgated to prospective Marines desiring to be promoted to the next higher rank and those serving on selection boards. The precepts for the
fiscal year 2021 are provided by the Commanding General for Manpower and Reserve Affairs and provide selection guidance for officers desiring to achieve a promotion to the next higher grade (MARADMIN 168/19).

**Anticipated themes and findings.** The Marine Corps requires both officer and enlisted service personnel to memorize the Marine Corps leadership traits and principles. History lessons of notable Marine Corps battles are studied and often memorized as a way of teaching Marines how they are to act in both peacetime and war. These stories are meant to shape Marines attitudes to fit into the organizational culture required for Marines to be successful. The standards and high values required become part of the stigma associated with being a Marine. It is anticipated that engagement theory will be a focal point for retention which corresponds well with organizations that focus on positive social interactions and creating an atmosphere that promotes autonomy and trust (Kovjanic et al., 2013).

In addition, it is anticipated that how well the Marine Corps understands and meets the hierarchical needs of its Marines will also be critical in retention decisions. Maslow’s needs hierarchy pyramid illustrates the need for five progressive human needs (Maslow, 1943). How well the Marine Corps connects an individual to a higher need inside the group is likely to impact their satisfaction in the organization. The Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory involves two aspects for motivation consisting of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. The Marine Corps pay, promotion policies will appeal to the extrinsic needs of the Marine and the culture, value, and meaning of work will appeal to the intrinsic needs of the Marine contemplating their future retention plans. Both the desire for Marines to reach the self-actualization needs described by Maslow in his pyramid of hierarchical needs and motivational factors of value, recognition, and
potential for growth and advancement will lead directly into a strong motivation for a Marine to remain in service until retirement eligible.

**Presentation of the findings.** The presentation of the findings for this qualitative research illustrate the influence of leadership theories and factors affecting retention decisions for Marine Corps officers. All participant responses and data collected were treated equally and reviewed utilizing the software NVivo 12. Data collected throughout the study followed the five-step process outlined by Patton (1980) referred to as the data analysis spiral for qualitative research. The five step process was used to (a) manage and organize data which consisted of preparing files, creating a process to organize a datable for further analysis; (b) reading and memoing emergent ideas, which required taking notes while reading, summarizing field notes, and sketching reflective thinking; (c) describing and classifying codes into themes; (d) developing and assessing the interpretations by studying the contextual understandings, diagrams, theories and propositions; and (e) representing and visualizing the data and providing an account of the findings.

In determining themes, the researcher utilized the Van Kaam method which incorporated a modified process by Moustakas to review and study data acquired via multiple methods. Moustakas (1994) utilized a seven step process to help identify themes found in participants’ responses.

The Van Kaam process applied in this study consisted of the following steps:

1. Reduction and elimination; in this step, each quote from the participant interviews were reviewed and assessed. If the quote was a factor towards leadership and retention and helped address the research question, the participant’s response was recorded; otherwise it was ignored.
2. Listing and preliminary; this step reviewed all of the interviewed participants' quotes relevant to the research questions and provided labels for each of the factors discussed from the interviews. There were a total of 19 specific labels identified from the participant interviews related to leadership and retention decision.

3. Clustering and thematizing invariant constituents; this step involved clustering or grouping the quotes which involved the thematizing of the results of participant responses into specific identifiable categories. This process also involved identifying positive and negative labels associated with leadership and retention decisions.

4. Identifying the invariant constituents and themes by application; this step involved determining if the responses were expressed explicitly, if not, then a review was conducted to determine if the responses were compatible to the thematic clusters. Relevant clusters were reviewed while those clusters not related to the research questions were deleted.

5. Developing individual textural description for the participants. This step utilizing the relevant and validated invariant themes to construct individual textural descriptions to address the research questions. In this step, a composite description of the meaning and essence of the factors lead to the development of specific thematic themes.

6. Developing individual structural - textural descriptions for each participant; this step, is the synthesis step of the process which merged both the textural and structural context to provide a comprehensive understanding and refinement of the thematic themes for study.

7. Developing composite textural descriptions to represent the perceptions for all of the participants as one group. This final step provided specific boundaries for each of the themes generated and allowed for a greater understanding of perceptions related to retention decisions and leadership factors for mid-level Marine Corps officers.
A comprehensive review of the participant’s response was conducted based on the interview questions. In addition, observations of the participant’s demeanor and body language were recorded and studied. Lastly, information was collected from published precepts utilized by leaders to guide promotion and retention boards as well as the CMC’s planning guidance provided to Marine Corps leaders. The corroborating evidence provided from multiple data sources is part of the triangulation process to validate the study.

The procedures for reliability in coding data include creating a common platform for review and applying the same process and procedures to identify composite descriptions with a separate and distinct meaning. Each descriptor used was assessed as demonstrating a distinct and separate thought or concept that contributes to the overall study. In addition, each descriptor must be interpretive and involve reciprocity between the research questions and the data available. Table 4 illustrates the frequency of the most prevalent codes from participant interviews, however, the factors are not weighted, and their significance or weight of each factor annotated has not been determined.

Table 4 represents the experiences and perceptions of mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. The impact of precepts, CMC guidance to subordinates, and other factors related to leadership and retention is also used to support information learned from the prevalent themes derived from the participant interviews. Table 4 represents the codes uncovered during this study and consists of approximately 13% of the sample population.
Table 4

Data Summary Frequency Table

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Thematic grouping 1: A leader’s level of engagement with subordinates impacts retention decisions – addressed RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3.

RQ1 attempts to understand why mid-level managers are staying in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. RQ2 attempts to understand factors associated with why mid-level managers in the Marine Corps desire to leave before retirement eligible. RQ3 studies how leaders can impact and inspire these Marine Corps officers to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. The majority of interview participants were quick to highlight the value and their strong desire to engage with leaders and mentors that provided sincere and genuine interaction with themselves and subordinates. Lessons and values gleaned and taught from senior leaders remained with participants throughout their career and became part of their leadership philosophy.

Participants interviewed often remarked about how the mentorship and acceptance of themselves by the leader was a key factor in their retention decision. The feelings described were often described as intimate and similar to joining a family. Body language exhibited on virtually all of these participants interviewed portrayed a sincerity and a gravity of how important the interaction with a senior mentor was in their decision to remain in the Marine Corps. Participants often leaned forward and peered directly into the interviewer’s eyes to emphasize the importance of the bond they developed with a senior leader whom influenced their decision to remain on active duty. Participant 1 represented several views well by stating:

The biggest influence to remain in the Marine Corps came from wanting to be like my General. He inspired me to want to be like him by investing in me. … someday I want to be in the position they are in so I can do the same thing to other junior officers.

Another officer, participant 5, recounted the value of being mentored this way:
Once I was in the Marine Corps I initially struggled but quickly found mentors who took me under their wing and help me understand why the Marine Corps was such a great institution. I served under a particular General Officer who treated me like his own son. He trusted and believed in me and gave me room to grow, make mistakes, and always found ways to be an encouragement.

The most frequent factor associated with retention decisions and drive to excel came from one-on-one interaction with leaders who provided an example, demonstrated compassion and trust, and gave their subordinates an opportunity to make decisions. These factors align with engagement theory which proposes that an employee’s job satisfaction, desire to remain in an organization, and productivity will increase when given the opportunity to make decisions and is trusted (Albrecht & Marty, 2017). The majority of interview participants were able to share the same vision as their mentor which requires the leader to proactively find ways to engage with subordinates. Bush (2018) stated the transformational leadership model requires leaders to understand and engage with subordinates, which will likely lead to greater performance and increase in job satisfaction.

In a study by Fehr (2008), research determined that a personal relationship, characterized by equality with multiple points of engagement led to joy in the workplace and a sense of purpose and meaning in work. The Marine Corps is unique and the combination of areas it can influence (e.g., family services, career opportunities, commissary privileges, and even health care) have the opportunity to create an interconnected environment that fosters engagement leading to increased retention for Marine Corps officers desired to remain in service until retirement eligible.
Thematic grouping 2: Marines want leaders to lead through their actions and desire mentoring – addressed RQ1.

Participant interviews provided opportunities to explore individual perceptions on what factors influence retention decisions. Each participant provided examples on the impact a leader’s actions had towards their own desire to remain in the Marine Corps. A majority of participants stressed the importance of leaders setting the example for their subordinates. Terms used by participants included leadership traits promulgated to Marines, however, follow-on questions revealed a more detailed meaning of factors influencing leadership and retention decisions. One participant summed up the views well by stating the greatest negative impact a leader can have on one’s retention decision are: “…leaders who are hypocrites; afraid to make a decision, lazy, and display passive aggressiveness to others.” Participants provided numerous examples of leaders whom subordinates no longer respected and described each of them as officers who fell short of professional norms (e.g., professional appearance, quality of work, and selfishness).

Positive examples of leaders’ actions included setting a professional example during difficult or challenging times and seeking opportunities for self-betterment. Participants recounted good leaders exhibiting joy when encountering difficulties. The body language, tone of voice, and intensity was noted on virtually all officers interviewed as being sincere and important. Participant 10 summed up this leadership attribute well in stating:

A leader must lead, and they do so by setting the example. When the leader is grounded serving for unselfish purposes for truly the right reasons – it creates a contagious environment that makes you want to be part of that team and stay in.
The attitude of positive leaders on subordinates was seen as infectious and inspired others to work hard and dedicate themselves to the tasks and mission. One participant captured this common sentiment well by describing that being a Marine and its work is a calling, should be fun, and once it was no longer enjoyable their work was just a job and they would get out. This desire for mentoring aligns with engagement theory which attempts to build trust and ownership inside the organization. We see this interaction represented in Figure 1 which demonstrates how actions initiated by the leader will create a response by the subordinate or responder. This sense of belonging and ownership purported by ET also promotes a sense of trust and safety between the leader and the subordinate.

Thematic grouping 3: Leaders must allow subordinates to do their job – avoid micromanaging – addressed RQ3.

The thematic theme addressed in this category helps explain the desires and attitudes of mid-level managers’ desire to accomplish meaningful work. Participants repeatedly reported the value and joy of mentoring subordinates and ability to see the results of time invested helping to develop subordinates. All participants noted their desire to lead without undue supervision or micromanagement. General perceptions pertaining to impacts of leadership on negative attrition can be summarized in the following responses:

Participant 12: “Give me a long leash to do my job. I can be trusted, and do not need to be micromanaged.”

Participant 10: “Let me know the intent of what you want done, then get out of the way and let me lead.”

Participant 9: “I want the opportunity to lead Marines and help subordinates just like those who mentored me.”
The participant responses align closely with ET which believes employees who feel a sense of belonging and ownership is a positive and influential factor involving retention (Fan et al., 2016). Ekici (2013) revealed in a study that creating an environment of trust and allowing subordinates to make decisions increases commitment, job satisfaction, and performance in organizations. Leaders who develop and foster a relationship with subordinates have the opportunity to create a sense of belonging, meaning, and trust. Measuring the extent to which a person has found meaning is most often conducted by conducting participant interviews for a subjective evaluation (Steger, 2012). This study found that leaders the Marine Corp wants to retain until retirement eligible want and need to maintain positive social bonds with leaders and subordinates.

Thematic grouping 4: Leaders desire opportunities for increased responsibility and want to be challenged – addressed RQ 3.

All participants interviewed discussed their enjoyment in leading subordinates and seeking opportunities to further develop their professional skills. This thematic grouping appears to be closely aligned with the Marine Corps guidance to seek opportunities for professional development and the general perception by the participants was a strong appreciation to the Marine Corps for educational opportunities and professional development (MARADMIN 168/19) provides guidance to both officers seeking promotion to the next higher grade and officers on selection boards responsible for recommending an individual’s promotion to the next highest rank.

The importance of ensuring Professional Military Education (PME) is included in each Marine Corps officer’s Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) is the only precept, apart from ensuring the accuracy of a Marines record is noted, as factor influencing promotion. The OMPF
is an official record detailing the achievements, performance, and educational record for each Marine being considered for promotion. In the Commandant’s Planning Guidance (CPG) published in 2019, the Commandant of the Marine Corps (CMC) provided his strategic vision to focus the actions of the Marine Corps. The CPG is intended to align with Defense Planning Guidance (DPG) and provide a road map describing the Marine Corps priorities and initiatives to meet the Marine Corps war and peacetime mission (MCPG, 2019).

General Berger, CMC, provides five focus areas for all Marine Corps leaders to pursue: Force design to meet emerging threats, Warfighting, Education and Training, A focus on core values, and Command and leadership. The CMC guidance stated the following:

While performance is factored into promotion selection, it is narrowed to a slim cohort, roughly based on year groups – an antiquated model. Additionally, the service does not have the tools needed to recruit the skills it wants, retain specific talents, advance Marines more quickly based on need, and separate Marines who cannot perform or are not compatible with military service. (MCPG, 2019, p. 7)

Berger’s statement recognizes the current promotion model is not suited to meet the requirements of the Marine Corps and is likely a factor in retention decisions. Further guidance promulgated by the CMC included the importance of education to meet war and peacetime objectives:

The complexity of the modern battlefield and increasing rate of change requires a highly educated force. While different, education and training are inextricably linked education denotes study and intellectual development. We will not train without the presence of education; we must not educate without the complementary execution of well-conceived training. (MCPG, 2019, p. 7)
The CMC’s statement addresses the growing importance of education in the success of an officer’s promotion opportunities and compliments some of the participant’s responses towards wanting increased opportunities to develop their skills and obtain opportunities to for greater responsibility. Berger also stated: “PME is not a luxury and certainly not a reward for previous accomplishment or service; but rather, a necessary investment by the service to facilitate readiness across the force” (MCPG, 2019, p. 16). Berger’s statement compliments an important theme presented in participant interviews and appears to be providing guidance to address this gap to both promotion boards and subordinate commanders. Interview participants echoed many of General Berger’s comments stressing the value of professional reading, academic excellence, and their belief that the investment in learning had on their ability to succeed, grow, and ultimately increase their promotion potential.

Thematic grouping 5: Provide a path for stellar Marines to be promoted faster, and path for mediocre Marines to be discharged without discrimination - addressed RQ2 and RQ3.

A common frustration exhibited by participants interviewed was the seemingly futile efforts of working hard and not being rewarded with promotion opportunities or potential to assume additional responsibility for excellent performance. The constraining factor for each of the interviewed participants was the requirement to meet time-in-service obligations at a specific rank. Time-in-grade requirements had to be met before the hardworking Marine could become eligible for promotion to the next higher rank. The Marine Corps utilizes a vacancy driven promotion system which requires each officer to maintain their current rank or grade for a specific period of time before being allowed to compete for promotion, regardless of performance. The desire for promotion supports the Herzberg’s motivational-hygiene theory supporting the non-intrinsic need for Marine Corps officers to be offered opportunities such as
job advancement which often results in supporting job satisfaction and commitment (Herzberg et al., 1959). A response by participant 3 provided perception shared by many:

Promotion opportunity is key. Under our current system, you wait until you hit your required time in grade, and then you get your one “real” shot at promotion. Top achievers wait out the time in grade requirement along with everyone else, and underachievers who get promoted know that they can underperform afterwards without fear of losing their jobs. Some of the time I’ve spent working with Marines who have hit, and know they have hit, their terminal rank is discouraging. Seeing the Marine Corps turned into a government jobs program for those riding out until retirement sometimes makes me question my willingness to stick around.

A summary of views presented by Mid-level Marine Corps officers was the desire to see the Marine Corps leadership fight promotion stagnation by non-selecting those Marines who are undeserving of promotion and consider opportunities for officers of merit to be promoted ahead of contemporaries. The ability to recognize stellar officers and reward with promotion compliments the Hertzberg motivational theory.

Common perceptions and recommendations from Marine Corps officers interviewed as it relates to promotion stagnation include the following:

1. Find ways to separate Marines from active duty without the adverse effects of a punitive discharge. A punitive discharge requires the documentation of misconduct and often results in harming a Marine for life. It impacts future job opportunities, benefits, and even one’s self esteem. A Marine remains in service until they reach their service limitations based on the rank achieved. There exist few options available to leaders to administratively separate Marines from service apart from
utilizing punitive means. Finding a way to discharge a marginal performer will open opportunities to raise the quality of the force and speed promotion for deserving Marine Corps officers.

2. Find parity in promotion rates among occupational specialties. Occupational specialties promote their officers at different rates due to the vacancy driven model utilized in the Marine Corps. Participant interviews revealed the frustration and reduced motivation to pursue a career in the Marine Corps due to this lack of parity among occupational specialties.

3. Provide a path for stellar officers to be promoted ahead of contemporaries. The Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory is comprised of two aspects for motivation; consisting of extrinsic and intrinsic factors (Herzberg et al., 1959). Evidence of a Marine Corps officer’s need for growth and advancement are evidence from the participant interviews and align with Herzberg’s theory which supports the desire for Marine Corps officers to be offered opportunities for promotion which will support job satisfaction and commitment.

**Relationship of Findings to Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework involved a review of various theories including engagement theory, commitment theory, motivation theory, behavior theory, and the interaction between the leader and subordinate. This framework attempts to understand the action and response between the leader as the initiator to establish goals for the organization and accomplish its mission and the need for the follower to have their needs met. Ultimately, a decision is made by the follower to remain on active duty until retirement eligible or to leave.
Engagement theory. The findings suggest the importance for subordinates to feel as if they are part owners in the organization and are actively involved and participating in day-to-day operations. A positive climate that supports engagement by its members will be one that involves providing conditions to foster employee participation and ownership (Shuck et al., 2011). Participant interviews demonstrate engagement as the most frequent factor involved in retention decisions. In addition, a lack of engagement and poor leadership were frequent factors in a participant’s desire to depart the Marine Corps before retirement eligible. ET starts with employee commitment and follows a continuum that leads to engagement and ultimately employee empowerment. This process most readily occurs when leaders have established an organizational climate that embraces subordinates to thrive and perform their best (Albrecht & Marty, 2017).

One Marine Corps officer, participant 3, responded with a comment highlighting the importance of engaging and working alongside others to accomplish their mission: “I enjoy being a Marine. More often than not, I find the job to be fulfilling. I enjoy working alongside individuals who care about personal discipline and working toward a common mission.”

Another Marine described the following attitudes as contributing to their desire to remain in the Marine Corps. Participant 7 made the following statements: “A leader who believes in you can give one a new perspective on life” and “There are leaders whom have made a difference, mentors have guided me to be a better person and have encouraged me to emulate values I want to display in my own life.”

Each of participant 7’s responses supports the importance and impact of engagement by leaders towards job satisfaction and retention decision.
Commitment – trust theory. Developing commitment and trust in an organization is often linked to employee satisfaction and the ability of a team to continuously communicate and share knowledge (Hashim & Tan, 2015). CT focuses on efforts in an organization to develop a cooperative relationship between parties through trust and transparency focused on a common commitment to goals (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Precepts promulgated to leaders in the Marine Corps and guidance provided by the Commandant of the Marine Corps support efforts to communicate goals, priorities, and policies. The CMC’s guidance is aligned with JP 1, but also provides detailed background information on the importance of why these policies are being pursued.

Participants interviewed expressed a need to understand their immediate supervisor or leader’s priorities and goals. Understanding the Marine Corps mission provided a backdrop for how the Marine Corps would prioritize national objectives, however, subordinates were looking and observing immediate superiors to validate their local efforts to support a day-to-day tasks they could understand. Michael and Szekely (2018) stated that commitment is needed to ensure predictable behavior in the face of competing goals and interests.

Michael and Szekely (2018) stated that commitment is the power for subordinates to stay focused on their objective in spite of competing desires. It is the force that allows members to stay focused on tasks they would otherwise not perform. Participant interviewed demonstrated a strong desire to remain steadfast to their work in spite of hardships, deployments, long hours, and other career options available. One Marine Corps officer, participant 11, represented several participants’ attitudes by stating:
Good leaders build a reserve or reservoir inside you to handle bad days. A few kind words, a pat on the back and a little recognition go a long ways towards putting up with tough or challenging situations or times.

The reason for this commitment to the organization appears to be a result of enjoying a culture focused on trust and the Marine Corps’ investment in the person. Evidence of this investment is seen in the benefits provided to the officers, opportunities for advanced education, and strong focus by the Marine Corps to develop a team.

**Motivational theory.** The two aspects of motivational theory studied relate to Maslow’s needs hierarchy and Herzberg’s motivational theory. Maslow’s pyramid of human needs is inextricably linked to achieving a level of personal belonging and acceptance in an organization (Udechukwu, 2009). The Marine Corps’ warfighting mission provides structure and stresses the importance of each individual’s contribution to a team (FMFM 1.0, 1995). A subordinate Marines’ need for acceptance relates directly to actions by leaders and as Maslow’s theory suggests, the value of meeting individual needs will lead to increased performance and ultimately retaining the Marine Corps officers needed to remain on active duty until retirement eligible. A response by participant 5 during demonstrated this acceptance they found by leaders in the following statement:

> For me, I was an aide and I was treated like a son. I was trusted, mentored, and felt like I was really part of something huge. I think when a leader mentors and helps groom a subordinate, it can have a life-changing effect on that Marine and his family.

Participant 10 provided the following insight complimenting this view:

> They (leaders) genuinely cared – they believed in me and showed me respect. The interesting part of respect is the more you give it, the more you end up receiving it. I
think too, they admired someone who wasn’t afraid to try and occasionally make a mistake; this allowed me to learn.

Herzberg’s theory of motivation focuses on two main factors: hygiene or motivation (Herzberg et al., 1959). All participants interviewed were satisfied with the hygiene factors related to pay, job security, and retirement benefits. An interesting observation from several participants was the desire to remain in the Marine Corps was associated with intrinsic factors such as the ability to lead subordinates and a positive work environment. Spector (2013) discussed the relationship between job satisfaction, retention, and feelings of accomplishment in the workplace. Enjoying the work culture tied with positive engagement by leaders as the most frequent factor associated with reasons to remain on active duty until retirement eligible, which supports both Maslow and Herzberg’s theory recognizing the importance of motivation as it relates to both performance and desire to remain part of an organization.

**Behavior theory.** Participant interviews revealed strong opinions and influence of leaders’ behavior on their desire to continue service in the Marine Corps. Yukl (2013) discussed that the organizational climate and performance is often measured and revealed by the action or behavior of leaders. The Marine Corps is heavily focused on leadership and leadership training to fulfill its JP 1 mandates. However, the leadership traits included in Marine Corps training are distinguishable between the traits espoused by the Marine Corps and the behavior of leaders discussed in participant interview. A leader’s behavior was the most frequent factor for choosing to depart the Marine Corps before retirement eligible. BT supports the premise leaders and subordinates can develop the behaviors and skills to better lead others in an organization. Participant 3 provided common feedback on his supervisor’s attitude and the behavior exhibited
by an officer who positively influenced his decision to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible.

I worked for a boss who shared with me ‘cheerfulness in the face of adversity.’ Often he would make humor the heart of morale. That sentiment has stuck with me; the gallows humor that Marines share. The ability to laugh when you think you’re done with a hump, and then you find out you took a wrong turn and you’re still miles away from your endpoint. That boss bought joy to the workplace. He wasn’t always happy, but he approached every situation with a cheerful heart. I aim to follow his example.

The conceptual model in Figure 1 reveals the action and relationship between the leader and follower. The leader is the initiator and the follower is the responder. A leader’s actions and how they attempt to meet the needs of their subordinates is a factor in job satisfaction. Understanding BT and drivers for subordinates helps leaders better meet their needs and lead their team to desired objectives.

**Summary of findings to conceptual framework.** ET, CT, MT, and BT are a set of complimentary theories that suggest leaders can actively influence and shape a subordinates feelings of commitment, attitudes, job satisfaction, and contribute to the organizational climate (Yukl, 2013). Specifically, ET focuses on the leadership effort and impacts to create a sense of belonging inside a team. CT recognizes the value of investing in the individual and creating an environment where each feel a sense of personal worth. MT highlights are needs are met and the drivers both inside and outside the organization. Lastly, BT demonstrates how a leader’s actions shape the organizational climate and attitudes possessed by subordinates. A leader’s ability to understand a subordinate’s needs provide opportunities for leaders to engage their followers and build commitment and trust. The response by a follower to a leader’s actions is a by-product of
behavior and actions which can lead to higher levels of motivation, desired responses to organizational objectives, and desire to remain in their job (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

Herscovitch and Myer (2002) discussed the importance of leaders being able to adapt to changing circumstances and understand what is considered important to their subordinates, then aligning behavior to a subordinate’s needs. A common factor highlighted by CSC students when interviewed was the importance of a leader’s ability to create a positive work environment. The realization that these complimentary theories is a triangulation method that leads to validating the themes generated utilizing the data provided.

**Comparison of Anticipated Themes and Themes Found**

A review of anticipated themes as compared to findings reveals a complex and interacting set of factors and theories associated with understanding why mid-level managers are choosing to stay or retire from the Marine Corps before retirement eligible. Furthermore, there exists several factors associated with how leaders can and are inspiring these officers to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. It was anticipated that the success of the Marine Corps retention effort would support aspects of various theories with ET being the predominant theory supporting retention. The Marine Corps needs its officers to have ownership in its mission. The Marine Corps focuses on developing KSAs to support its force to create a culture where Marines feel a sense of belonging, trust and empowerment. What was not anticipated was the complimentary effect of all of the theories, BT, CT, MT, and ET and the dynamic relationship that appears to impact a subordinate’s attitude, desire to contribute to the organization, feelings of contentment, and job satisfaction. Each theory appeared to act as a catalyst for enhancing efficiency, performance, and retention.
Participants’ responses validated the assumption that most Marine Corps CSC officers were content with pay, retirement benefits, and medical benefits for their family. This was expected and the Marine Corps pay and allowances contributed to the extrinsic needs of the Marine, while the culture of trust, performing important work, and recognition appealed to Maslow’s pyramid of hierarchical needs and motivational factors. What was not anticipated was the magnitude of the motivational factors that drive their actions and influence retention decisions. The study revealed the importance of Marine Corps CSC students and the need to consider the intrinsic and extrinsic needs of their family. Participant 3 summed this factor by stating: “Quality of life for my family is key. If my wife decides that the Marine Corps is no longer right for our family then I’ll have to take a hard look at whether or not I decide to stay.”

Participant 6 complimented this sentiment by stating: “My family is the biggest influence. Like I said above, providing security for my family is very important to me.”

The motivational needs of family members was an important consideration for retention that was not adequately anticipated and has the potential to be a factor leaders can use to support retaining the type of Marine Corps officer desired for service until retirement eligible.

**Summary of Findings**

The findings presented are supported by participant interviews, a review of precepts promulgated by Marine Corps promotion and retention boards, a review of Marine Corps doctrinal manuals and publications, and CMC guidance provided to Marine Corps leaders. CMC guidance is provided annually to all Marines to set and prioritize objectives for Marines. The purpose of the study and findings was to facilitate a greater understanding of factors impacting leadership and retention decisions and provide insight on actions leaders can take to impact retention decisions. Participant interviews was the predominate method to yield the information
required and address the research questions. The large sample population studied and attempts to capture all data available to collect relevant evidence provides validity to the study and analysis of material reviewed.

Leadership theories and a focus on leadership factors reviewed from participant interviews, provided useful information on how to meet CSC officer’s needs and impact retention decisions. This study enabled the reader to better understand the impacts of leaders actions on subordinate’s perceptions and attitudes and contributed to better understanding what elements are important to meet the needs of subordinate Marines.

The conceptual framework was studied and evaluated based on information collected, including responses from participant interviews. The results of this study highlight the important and complementary set of theories that support the relationship and postulation that BT, CT, ET, and MT result in a direct impact to a subordinate’s attitude, job satisfaction, and impact feelings of commitment. These concepts provide useful information on how leaders can apply the right action or driver to ultimately contribute to an organization’s ability to retain the type of leader desired. The study revealed the importance of active engagement by the leader to the follower and the value of recognizing the employee’s pyramid of needs. Spector (2013) stated that the ability to influence subordinates to display desired actions, starts with understanding the needs of individuals and the organization. A leader’s ability to apply the right leadership driver is likely to have a positive impact on leadership and retention decisions.

Applications to Professional Practice

The value of this study has the potential to shape promotion and retention policies and decisions made by selection boards which can be used to better entice, capture, and retain the type of individual the Marine Corps’ desires to retain until retirement eligible. Additional value
is provided to leaders whom desire to shape cultural norms inside the Marine Corps to better reflect the values needed to retain the right type of officer to meet both Marine Corps’ goals and objectives as well as those established by JP 1. This study also serves as a foundation for similar studies which may be of use by the Air Force, Navy, and Army, which may have similar leadership and retention concerns. The ability for leaders to better understand subordinate concerns, perceptions, and factors associated with retention and leadership, can provide pertinent information to leaders to help create a positive culture inside the organization and lead to retaining the desired mid-level officer until retirement eligible.

The Marine Corps is an organization often represented as an organization that is tough, requires discipline, and uncompromising devotion to duty. Successes the Marine Corps may experience are also desired by for-profit organizations. The ability to foster teamwork, create efficiencies, and a sense of belonging are a few of the qualities many organizations strive to achieve. The study of mid-level managers the Marine Corps’ desires to retain until retirement eligible may find similar benefit to business entities attempting to achieve similar results.

**Recommendations for Action**

The following recommended actions provide specific structural recommendations the CMC can provide to its leaders. The recommendations require an objective ability to review and update precepts and policies which will positively impact a strategy the Marine Corps can implement. The focus on leadership and retention will always strive to obtain the best Marine Corps officers to remain in service until retirement eligible. The Marine Corps’ ability to align precepts provided to promotion and retention boards on what qualities are desired to retain the desired future leaders must include standards that compliment CMC guidance and JP 1. Any updates to precepts should guide both time-in-grade policies as well as provide performance
metrics for the type of officer the Marine Corps desires to retain. The steps required for this action include disseminating and promulgating guidance to retention boards based on needs of the Corps and will likely include positive impacts to retention and an increase in morale and operational efficiency.

Several participants in the study mentioned their frustration working for individuals that knew they had achieved their terminal rank, were retirement eligible, and were demonstrating little drive or motivation to contribute to the organization. One of the participant’s interviewed summed the view on this topic well saying: “Seeing the Marine Corps turn into a government jobs program for those riding out their job until they hit retirement makes me question my willingness to stick around.” The participants interviewed desire opportunities to be rewarded for their hard work and do not mind working for officers younger than them if they are capable.

Specific structural recommendations to the retention and leadership process include:

1. Expand promotion zones: Provide opportunities for stellar Marines to be rewarded with promotion opportunities ahead of their peers.
2. Make it easier to separate Marines who have reached their terminal rank and are no longer providing value to the Marine Corps.
3. Make quality of life considerations for the family a priority. The numerous long hours and deployments are an important factor in retention decisions.

Specific leadership recommendations from participants focused on the retention and leadership paradigm. They include:

1. Encourage a junior-senior mentorship program for officers. Virtually all participants highlight the value of one or two individuals in their life that provided guidance and mentoring that helped them achieve success.
2. Promote consistent adherence to standards regardless of rank, age, or years in service.

The majority of interview participants lamented their disdain for senior officers who had achieved terminal rank and were not maintaining professional standards (e.g., overweight officers, laziness, and apathetic towards their work).

Engagement by leaders who set a standard of professionalism, possessed a strong work ethic, and supported the development of subordinates to feel empowered to accomplish their work was the single most influential factor in reducing negative attrition (Fan et al., 2016). The results of participant interviews supports the need for subordinates to feel a sense of belonging, to trust their leaders, and for leaders to set an example for the subordinate to emulate.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

The study was comprised of CSC students the Marine Corps desire for retention until retirement eligible. The current study can be expanded to explore a replication of this study using different organizations such as the Army, Navy, or Air force to both broaden the body of knowledge and compare and contrast areas of significance. Three specific recommendations are made for further study. The first is to determine how the themes generated are either similar or different by gender and/or occupational specialty. The ability to understand differences by various groups has the potential to identify specific actions which may prove more likely to be effective to particular groups of Marine Corps officers and impact how leaders and the organization can influence behavior.

The second recommendation is to determine if the views presented were common to a specific occupational specialty and to identify if the views presented by each Marine changed over time and attempt to explain why. A study by cohorts has the potential to help in understanding what factors influence leadership and retention issues over time. Retention
decisions may be impacted by policy decisions, economic factors, and other variables which might reveal their influence if a cohort study is conducted and lead further to addressing knowledge gaps in leadership and retention issues.

A third recommendation for study involves the issue pertaining to those Marine Corps officers the Marine Corps desires to retain at a terminal rank of Major or Lieutenant Colonel. This study examined officers who were attending CSC and who were amongst the most competitive officers in the Marine Corps. There are numerous occupations and tasks in the Marine Corps that require officers to fulfill jobs that require the minimum skill set required to achieve the rank of Major or Lieutenant Colonel, but not Colonel or higher. There exists the possibility that comments made by participants that included perceptions that their progress was hampered by officers with a terminal rank was clogging the promotion system is inaccurate. Marine Corps promotion system is pyramid shaped and the higher a Marine officer is promoted, the narrower the field. The Marine Corps promotion system is a vacancy driven model, however, an important issue is how to keep the officers who are at their terminal grade engaged and motivated to contribute their best even when recognizing they will never be promoted again. A leadership study that analyzes how to keep officers who have reached their terminal rank to perform at their best is likely to have value in creating efficiencies in the Marine Corps.

**Reflections**

The privilege of studying leadership and retention decisions of Marine Corps officers brings into focus the many aspects and definitions of leadership, including what is leadership, who has it, how is it measured, and how does one enhance their leadership? There is little doubt that effective leadership helps to advance organizational objectives, but what if the organizational objectives or goals are improper, or even worse, illegal or immoral? In the
Marine Corps, how Marines are trained, led, developed, and groomed for future responsibilities follows a proven and codified process that has evolved and proven itself for over 200 years. Emphasizing leadership is more than a way of thinking, it includes how the content is presented and considers how the recipient will receive and respond to leadership.

The content of leadership has been endlessly debated in society, academics, industry, and sought via many avenues (e.g., life experience, academics, seeking wise council from mentors, and even religious enlightenment). The Marine Corps leadership tenants compliment biblical guidelines for how to live. The books of Proverbs, Psalms, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and the book of Job provide specific guidance for how to live resulting in happiness, prosperity, a long life, and contentment. The source of obtaining and learning effective leadership must come from a common belief or source. Recognizing that God who is perfect in every way created man-kind in his own image, provides the reference (God’s Word), a living example (Jesus and his life on Earth), and counselor (Holy Spirit) to guide us to experience a perfect plan for our lives and learn effective leadership for our lives.

The study in leadership appears to parallel the doctrinal study of wisdom illustrated in the Bible. Wisdom similar to leadership, consists of a collection of specific premises and understandings focused on a way of thinking and acting. Possessing leadership and wisdom helps leaders make the best decisions and experience advantages in life. Just as following biblical wisdom can help men and women grow, seeking to develop one’s leadership potential promotes opportunities for success and reduce negative attrition. In Proverbs 8:34, King Solomon is personifying wisdom and states “Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my doorposts. For he who finds me finds life and obtains favor
from the Lord.” Leadership like wisdom, must be pursued and nurtured for it to grow and develop.

It is my belief based on this study, that the Marine Corps’ success is in large part a result of its ethos and close alignment with a divine perspective focused on attributes which align with biblical teaching. The Marine Corps claims leadership is a state of mind (FMFM 1.0, 1995), but so is a divine perspective. In this research, we are presented with leaders focused on the welfare of subordinates and the concept of servant leadership. Greenleaf (2002) examined servant leadership and focused on Jesus Christ as a perfect example. Just as the Marine Corps wants to achieve victory, so does Christ desire for us to be victorious in our daily walk and provides each of us an instruction manual for us to follow. The bible states “All scripture is God-breathed and is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished to all good works” (2 Tim 3:16,17). A close examination of the leadership traits, principles, and doctrinal publications align closely with these biblical proverbs focused on how to be successful. The leadership study on retention of mid-level managers in the Marine Corps highlighted the relevance and applicability of biblical doctrine which is relevant today as it was when written by men inspired by God.

Summary and Study Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to identify leadership and retention factors to reduce negative attrition. BT, CT, MT, and ET are a set of complementary theories that support the notion that leaders influence and shape attitudes resulting in a correlation to a subordinate’s job satisfaction, feelings of commitment, performance, and may contribute to organizational growth (Yukl, 2013). This belief suggests leaders play an essential role in productivity, happiness, and
ultimately retention decisions (Yukl, 2012). The behavior of leaders to subordinates can contribute to an employee’s level of commitment, engagement, and produce positive outcomes in an organization (Van Dun et al., 2016).

The qualitative case study explored factors influencing leadership and retention decisions by mid-level managers in the Marine Corps, reviewing current Marine Corps precepts, leadership theories, current leadership doctrine promulgated by the Marine Corps, and interviewing Marine Corps officers attending CSC. The 2019 academic year for CSC consisted of approximately 90 active duty Marine Corps officers and the purposive sample used in this study included 12 Marine Corps officers. A sufficient population size was achieved to ensure saturation and enhance validity. The comprehension of leadership styles and various theories to address retention issues for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps is a complex process. The study uncovered several perceptions that may be useful in helping to reduce negative attrition and help senior officer better lead their subordinates.

The study demonstrated that leaders and subordinates often share the same goals of seeking professional development and desire to serve and mentor subordinates. Marines are seeking leaders they respect to emulate and want to know leaders are concerned with their welfare. The values highlighted in the study demonstrate a desire to serve in the Marine Corps under leaders who find joy in their work, demonstrate genuine care for their families, and in an institution that provides a fair and competitive promotion process. Marines are also looking for impartiality in the promotion process that rewards merit and hard work over longevity. Participant interviews showed how Marines thrive on the opportunity to serve and mentor others and how a leaders actions can either positively or negatively impact a subordinate’s level of commitment and engagement. As highlighted in participant interviews, a leader’s actions are
always being studied by subordinates and as pointed out by one of the participants “you might be able to fool your boss, but never your subordinates.”

The study on retention and leadership highlighted five thematic groupings. Many of these themes are closely related and all impact retention decisions for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps. Common perceptions pertaining to impacts of leadership on retention decisions include:

1. Leaders and their relationship with subordinates are an important factor and have a positive or negative influence on retention by how they lead and interact with their subordinates.

2. Leaders who motivate, empower, and build relationships with subordinates are likely to positively impact retention decisions. The converse is also true, leaders who fail to engage subordinates and build relationships appear to increase the desire to leave the Marine Corps before retirement eligible. A leader’s engagement with subordinates was the leading factor associated with a mid-level’s manager desire to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible.

3. Quality of life for families is an important factor in choosing to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. Participant interviews indicate that there is general satisfaction with current programs supporting opportunities for families to receive quality programs targeting spouses and children.

4. Current compensation and benefits include pay, medical and dental benefits, and a retirement plan. The current compensation and benefits afforded to Marine Corps officers are a positive factor in retention decisions. The majority of interviewed participants believe they are fairly compensated.
5. Mid-level managers in the Marine Corps want greater opportunities to lead and do not want to be micromanaged. This desire to serve and lead is closely aligned with engagement theory which creates a bond and sense of belonging. The ability to lead includes the opportunity to trust and allow subordinates to make meaningful leadership decisions in the Marine Corps.

6. Some officers will remain in the Marine Corps in spite of their negative perceptions due to the fear of not being able to find adequate work outside of the Marine Corps to support their family.

7. The Marine Corps focus on service and sacrifice appears to include a sense of obligation for mid-level managers to remain in the Marine Corps regardless of an individual’s desire to pursue a different career. Further study in this area regarding the impact of feeling guilty or not wanting to complain may yield additional information pertaining to retention decisions as well as job satisfaction.

The study reduces the gap in knowledge involving retention factors for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps by helping leaders better understand the challenges and concerns subordinates face involving retention decisions and the influence of various leadership factors. The study helps explain the importance of creating a culture focused on engaging the subordinate and the positive impact of helping and inspiring subordinates to achieve their potential. To accomplish this goal, leaders must fully immerse themselves into inspiring subordinates towards goals that transcend their own personal goals and desires to ones that meet the needs of the officer facing a retention decision. How well leaders can address and meet the individual needs of the officer faced with a retention decision is a key factor in remaining in service until retirement eligible. Fortunately, actions meeting the needs of subordinates can be learned and
developed through training and designing a culture sensitive to a subordinate and their family’s needs. The importance of ET is prevalent in virtually each participant interview and the correlation between organizational outcomes and leaders’ behaviors suggests a leader’s behavior can be identified and taught (Van Dun et al., 2016).
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Appendix A: Research Approval

August 13, 2019

Richard L. Diddams Jr.
IRB Exemption 3868.081319: A Qualitative Study on the Detrimental Impacts of Attrition in Mid-Level Managers in the United States Marine Corps

Dear Richard L. Diddams Jr.,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46.101(b):

(2) Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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Appendix B: Marine Corps Approval – Cover Letter

From: Commanding General, Education Command
To: Richard L. Diddams, Liberty University

Subj: EDCOM REVIEW OF RESEARCH REQUEST FOR “A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACTS OF ATTRITION IN MID-LEVEL MANAGERS IN THE UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

Enc: (1) Letter of Request from Richard Diddams, 12 Aug 2019
(2) Liberty University Institutional Review Board Approval, 13 Aug 2019
(3) Sample Informed Consent Form
(4) Interview Guide and Questions

Ref: (a) DoDI 3216.02
(b) SECNAVINST 3900.16D
(c) MCO 3900.18

1. Based on a review of the protocol and information presented in the enclosures, your request to recruit Command and Staff College students to participate in your project “A qualitative study on the detrimental impacts of attrition in mid-level managers in the United States Marine Corps” is hereby granted. Your stated intent to examine causes and mitigations for negative attrition may offer direct benefits to Marine Corps policy and practice.

2. This approval is contingent upon the administrative review and approval by the Marine Corps’ Human Research Protection Official/Chair of the Marine Corps Institutional Review Board. Please note that this is an approval to recruit, but given the unknown number, dates, and duration of your interviews, Marine Corps University cannot guarantee space to conduct interviews in university spaces.

3. The point of contact for coordination of this research is Kathleen Kuehn, Director of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning, (703) 784-2884.

[Signature]
Appendix C: Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

A qualitative study on the detrimental impacts of attrition in mid-level managers in the United States Marine Corps

A Qualitative Case Study
by
Richard L. Diddams
Liberty University
School of Business

You are invited to be in a research study examining the perceptions and experiences of employees pertaining to leadership and factors impacting retention. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a resident in the Command and Staff Resident Program at the Marine Corps University. In addition, you have institutional knowledge and are associated with leadership roles in the Marine Corps and have faced decisions regarding remaining in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible.

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Richard Diddams, a doctoral candidate in the School of Business at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explore leadership and mid-level attrition in Marine Corps officers.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Participate in a 60-minute, in-person, semi-structured interview with open-ended questions designed to understand your perspective pertaining to the impact of factors influencing your decision to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible. The interview will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.
- Review the completed verbatim interview transcript for accuracy and to ensure that your perspective is accurately reflected. This process will take approximately 20 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include the potential for the institution to enhance its impact on the community by assisting in the improvement of leadership policies and training. In addition, the information may assist higher education institutions in enhancing their services to stakeholders to include students, employees, businesses, and community members through reducing negative attrition.

Compensation: Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.
Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies, or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data. I will share the results of this study with the institution upon request; however, the results will not include personally identifiable information.

☐ Participants will be assigned a pseudonym that they will be referred to in an effort to protect confidentiality. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation and participant names and/or position titles will not be included in the published findings.

☐ Data will be stored on a private password locked computer and/or in a lockable drawer within a private residence and may be used in future research. Three years from the date of the study’s completion, all electronic records will be deleted.

☐ Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Recordings will be stored on a secured password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher, and, upon request, the doctoral program director and committee members, will have access to these recordings. The recordings will be transferred to a secure private computer from a digital recorder. The researcher’s notes will be stored in a private residence inside of a lockable drawer. Three years from the date of the study’s completion, the data and digital recorder will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University, the researched institution, or me. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Matthew Swanson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at rdiddams@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty advisor, Dr. Ed Moore, at emmoore3@liberty.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.
Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

______________________________
Signature of Participant

______________________________
Signature of Investigator

Date
Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

Dear [   ]:

As a graduate student in the School of Business at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to explore leadership and retention factors for mid-level managers in the Marine Corps.

I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are a current resident student at the Marine Corps Command and Staff College at Marine Corps Base Quantico, VA. and are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in a recorded in-person interview. In addition, you will be asked to review the verbatim interview transcript to ensure the transcript reflects an accurate depiction of your answers and experience. It should take approximately one hour for you to complete the procedures listed.

Your name will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be used to avoid identifying you in the responses.

To express your interest in participating, please respond to this email confirming your interest, as well as confirming a willingness to share your perspectives and experiences in an honest and detailed manner.

I will contact you via email within five days of your response to schedule an interview should you be selected to participate.

A consent document is attached to this message. Please review and sign the consent document and return it to me when we meet for the interview.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Richard L Diddams
Appendix E: Interview Guide and Questions

Interview Guide & Checklist

Ensure a separate file is created for each participant on a password protected computer.

24 hours prior to the interview; validate the identity, time, and location of the participant for the interview. Assign a pseudonym to the participant in an effort to protect confidentially.

Day of interview; ensure digital recorder is operational, notepad for field notes is ready, and the room is set in a manner to help set parity between the participant and interviewer. Note: have water available for the participant and ensure the location is properly reserved and there will be no interruptions during the interview.

Prior to meeting each participant and prior to each participant interview, review the research questions to maintain a proper perspective and focus on the research objective.

Be prepared to observe and record the individuals demeanor during the interview. Is the participant relaxed, nervous etc.?

The following script will be read to each participant:

“My name is Richard Diddams, I am conducting research pertaining to factors involving leadership and retention for leaders like yourself that the Marine Corps desires to retain until retirement eligible. As a student selected for CSC, you have proven yourself as someone whom the Marine Corps believes has potential for continued service. My goal is to help determine what factors are most important in retaining leaders like yourself as well as attempt to better understand the interplay of various theories that impact leadership and retention decisions.

I will ask you several questions that I want you to respond to in your own words about both your thoughts and perspective relating to the questions being asked. I will record the information to ensure I have accurately captured your thoughts and will provide you an opportunity to correct or add clarifying comments to any of my records. All recordings and notes will be kept confidential and destroyed after three years. The only persons who will see your responses are myself and my dissertation team”.

Preliminary interview questions:

1. Preliminary question: Have you seen, understood, and filled out the consent form?
   If yes – proceed; otherwise resolve or end interview.

2. Preliminary question: Do you have any questions for me prior to the start of the interview?
   If yes – answer and record question and provide response; otherwise proceed.

3. Preliminary question: Do you agree to review the verbatim transcript for accuracy following
the interview?

If yes – proceed; otherwise resolve or end interview.

“I am going to ask several questions. Please describe in detail your response to the following interview questions; feel free to provide as much background and context to help me understand your perspective. There is no wrong answer, only your perspective on the question being asked”:

**Interview questions:**

1. Question: What are the primary reasons for your choosing to stay in the Marine Corps up until this point?
   
   1. a. Potential follow up question based on response: Are there certain people in your life or events that influenced your decision to remain in the Marine Corps up until now?
   
   1. b. Potential follow up question based on response: What was it about these people, their characteristics, or events that helped you reach the level you are at now in the Marine Corps?

2. Question: What are the reasons you would choose to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible?

   2. a. Potential follow up question based on response: Help me understand the factors that are influencing your decision to remain in the Marine Corps until retirement eligible and how important each of these factors are?

3. Question: What are reasons you would consider leaving the Marine Corps before reaching your eligibility to retire from the Marine Corps?

   3. a. Potential follow up question based on response: What events, behaviors of leaders, or other factors contribute to a potential decision to leave the Marine Corps before reaching retirement eligibility?

4. Question: How do the leaders you have known and worked for impacted your decision to remain in the Marine Corps?

   4.a. Potential follow up question based on response: What are the character or leadership qualities of these leaders that influenced you either positively or negatively?

   4.b. Potential follow up question based on response: Can you provide examples of the actions of these leaders that led or influenced you either positively or negatively?

5. Question: Are there any factors that might cause you to leave the Marine Corps before becoming retirement eligible? What are they?
6. Question: What qualities, characteristics, or other factors have you seen in your leadership chain of command that has helped you most in accomplishing your mission?

6.a. Potential follow up question based on response: What is it about the Marine Corps, its leadership, its mission, your work, or the many other factors impacting your life that either positively or negatively impacts your plans to remain a Marine until retirement eligible?

7. Question: How can leaders best reduce any desire to leave the Marine Corps before retirement eligible?

8. Question: Based on the questions I have asked; is there any other information you think I should know that might help me understand your perspective on leadership and retention?

At this time I would like to review the questions and responses and verify if the information I have recorded is accurate. Please let me know if there is any information I need to amend or add?

Record any potential changes.

Thank you for your time and for supporting this research; are there any questions you have for me?

Address any questions and thank the participant for their time and contribution.

This concludes the interview.