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Exploring the Lack of African Americans in the Department of Defense Senior Executive Service Corps

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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Abstract

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Senior Executive Service Corps

by

Audrea M. Nelson

MS, National Defense University, Dwight D. Eisenhower School of National Security and

Resource Strategy, 2005

MS, University of Central Texas, 1984

BS, University of Central Texas, 1980

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

There is a lack of African American representation in the Department of Defense's (DoD's) Senior Executive Service (SES) Corps. In 2011, only 11.4% of the DoD's SES members were African American. This disparate representation is problematic because it contradicts the creation of a diverse workforce, which in turn limits opportunities for African Americans to join the elite DoD SES Corps. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of 9 African American SES members in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities to determine factors contributing to their promotions into the SES Corps. The theoretical framework for this study included Burns and Bass conceptualization of transformational leadership, as well as the social learning theories of Bandura and Vygotsky. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit the participants for face-to-face or telephone interviews. The interview questions focused on the attributes participants perceived as influencing their career progression into the SES. Upon transcribing interview data, an open coding process was used to categorize information collected followed by thematic analysis to facilitate further understanding. Findings indicate that professional qualities such as the ability to perform core executive functions, training, and education contributed to their SES progression. Furthermore, transformational leadership was perceived as being important in SES service. The implications for positive social change stemming from this study include direct recommendations to DoD human resource directors to capitalize on current African American leaders to serve as mentors to emerging leaders in a way that is consistent with transformational leadership.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all African American careerists who aspire to advance their careers to the Senior Executive Service through hard work, training and educational development, commitment, and true dedication to our great nation of the United States of America and the Department of Defense. To my grandmother Essie Mae King and great-aunt, Aretha McFadden: I dedicate this achievement in my educational development to you…I know you are Angels in Heaven looking down, smiling, and saying…

TO GOD BE THE GLORY!

Acknowledgments

The writing of this doctoral dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Public Policy and Administration at Walden University has been a long journey and an excellent learning experience. Completion of this journey in my life was possible with the support of many. First, I give honor to God, who has shown me once again that all things are possible through Christ who strengthens me. It is through his grace that I have been able to keep my mind focused and move forward in spite of the obstacles encountered along the way. I truly thank my Committee Chair, Dr. Cassandra Cardwell, Committee Member, Dr. Frances Goldman, and University Research Reviewer, Dr. Anne Hacker for their insights and support at each phase this dissertation process. Their guidance and suggestions were extremely helpful and appropriate. I am grateful for the services provided by Dr. Carolyn Rose-Smith. It is because of her advice and support that I was successful in getting organized.

I express my utmost gratitude to Ms. Susan Yarwood, for support in serving as my Department of Defense sponsor and paving the way for me to secure participants for my research. To all of the Department of Defense African American Senior Executives who freely provided their time to participate in this research: You are true leaders of change. Thank you for your support, insights, and distinct interest in leading and advancing change in the Department of Defense.

To my mother, Mildred Sharper, I express gratitude for your love and encouragement; plus, to my family, friends, colleagues, and Sorors…the phenomenal women of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, for your inspiration as I pursued my educational goal.

Table of Contents

iii

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The Department of Defense (DoD) has established and implemented recruitment

and retention programs with the goal of developing and hiring a diverse and professional

civilian senior executive service (SES) workforce (DoD, 2009). One of the DoD's main

objectives has been to secure a professional, diverse workforce that possesses

remarkable leadership skills, abilities, and knowledge. Additionally, the DoD has sought

to sure a workforce that enables professionals to execute strategic initiatives focused on

achieving the department's mission, which is to deter war and protect the national

security interests of the United States (DoD, 2009).

According to the DoD (2013b), to develop a diverse SES workforce, various

leadership development programs have been developed and implemented. Two of these

programs include the Defense Leadership and Management Program (DLAMP) in 1997

and the Defense Senior Leader Development Program (DSLDP) in 2009. The purpose of

development and implementation of the DLAMP was to form a cadre of highly capable

senior civilian leaders with a joint perspective on managing the department's workforce

and programs. Also, the DoD sought to develop civilian leaders to allow them to acquire

a defense-wide perspective of missions and functions, to gain a substantive

understanding of the DoD's national security mission, and to develop strong leadership

and management skills. Upon implementation of the DSLDP, a focus was placed on

ensuring that emerging DoD civilian senior executive leaders acquired knowledge and

skills in understanding the Department's enterprise-wide perspective to lead

organizations and programs as well as, achieve results in a joint, interagency, and

multinational environment.

Even though the number of African Americans increased in the DoD's workforce, the number of African Americans appointed to SES leadership positions did not increase at a proportionate rate (Akaka, 2011; Arnsdorf, 2011; Bass, 2008a; Lim, Cho, & Curry, 2008; Lynn, 2009). The number of career SES members increased from 6,110 in 2000 to 6,555 in 2007; however, the representation of African American men and women in SES positions declined during that same period from 5.5% to 5.0% (U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 2009). Furthermore, African American employees represented 6.1% of federal employees at the senior executive level and 17.8% of the permanent federal workforce compared to 10.1% in the civilian labor force in 2007. African American employees remain underrepresented in the SES ranks of the federal workforce, including the DoD (as cited by the GPO). Although the DoD was successful in establishing and implementing leadership development programs such as the DLAMP and the DSLDP, it is still challenged with establishing a demographically diverse senior executive leadership corps that is reflective of its workforce (DoD, 2012). As a result, there is a lack of senior executive leadership representation of African Americans at the DoD's SES level (Akaka, 2011; Arnsdorf, 2011; Bass, 2008; Lim et al., 2008; Lynn, 2009).

There is a gap in research that explores the personal experiences and perceptions of minorities concerning personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion to the SES leadership level. Specifically, literature is limited on African American SES leaders' lived experiences and perceptions in advancing their careers to the SES level. Therefore, this phenomenological research study explored the perceptions of African American senior executives employed in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Defense Agencies and Defense Field Activities concerning personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions by gaining an understanding of their lived experiences.

Dissemination of the results of this research will assist in understanding factors that contribute to the lack of African Americans at the SES level in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD. The results of this study may also provide knowledge that can assist African Americans to reach SES leadership positions and encourage senior executives to mentor African American employees for career advancement into the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities SES Corps. Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, nature of the study, definitions of terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study, and summary.

Background of the Study

The SES Corps was enacted by Title IV of the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978, PL 95-454, on July 13, 1979. Its purpose was to provide the people of the United States with a competent, honest, and productive federal workforce that is reflective of the nation's diversity (U.S. Office of Personnel Management [OPM], 2011e). According to the OPM (2011e and 2013b), the objective of the CSRA was to form an elite corps of senior leaders with common values, a comprehensive perspective of government, and robust executive skills. This elite workforce consists of managerial, supervisory, and policy positions above the general schedule (GS) 15 grade level or equivalent positions in the Executive Branch of the Federal Government.

Although the intent of the CSRA in forming the SES Corps may have been to establish a diverse corps of executive leaders drawn from all segments of society, William A. Brown Sr., President of the African American Federal Executive Association, reported that this factor has not occurred, (Brown 2008). According to Brown, minorities and women continue to be underrepresented in the SES Corps. In his testimony before Congress, Brown confirmed a GAO testimony to a subcommittee presented on May 10, 2007, addressing the underrepresentation of minorities and women in SES positions in the SES Corps. Brown related that GAO's testimony revealed only 8.6% of the approximately 6,300 career members of the overall federal SES were African Americans.

Various demographic reports reflect the underrepresentation of African Americans and other minorities serving in SES positions across the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD. For example, in a September 2008

demographic report, the OPM (2008) noted that Caucasian Americans held 92% of the DoD's senior leadership positions compared to 3% of African Americans in comparable positions. In June 2009, Representative Danny Davis of Illinois and five other Congressional Representatives introduced House Resolution (H.R. 2721), the Senior Executive Service Diversity Assurance Act, which provides for greater diversity within the SES Corps and defines policy to improve the direction and oversight of the SES (GPO, 2009). Davis reported that senior executives in the federal government do not represent the diversity of the American people they serve (GPO, 2009).

Kohli, Gans, and Hairston (2011) examined the underrepresentation of women and minorities holding SES positions in the federal government. As a result of their examination, they reported that by gaining a clear understanding of the barriers, patterns, and experiences faced by women and minorities seeking to secure senior-level positions may lead to opportunities for establishing improved hiring processes for all minorities in overcoming obstacles and increasing their advancement opportunities to senior-level positions. Kohli et al. further indicated that the cause of underrepresentation of women and minorities in the federal workforce stems from the practice of double standards, prejudiced attitudes, or gender stereotypes being a part of the normal operations when hiring individuals at the senior executive level.

According to Mitchell (2011), although African Americans represent the largest minority group in the federal workforce, employees in this demographic group have been underrepresented at the GS-13, GS-14, GS-15, or equivalent grade levels. Mitchell indicated that the higher the number of African Americans employed at the senior-level,

the greater the potential for more African Americans to be employed at mid-levels and advance in their careers to senior-levels. Similarly, Nachmias and Rosenbloom (1973) asserted that administrators push the interest and desires of those whom they are presumed to represent, regardless of whether or not they are representing all or some segment of the people. Therefore, securing high GS positions at grade levels below the SES level is critical to an employee's ability to further advance to the SES level. Jackson (2010) related that only 3.5% of African Americans serve at the SES level. Consequently, progress has been slow for increasing minority representation at both the SES level and the GS-14 through GS-15 grade levels.

Starks (2009) attributed the underrepresentation of African Americans at the senior executive level to a lack of leadership development initiatives focused on developing employees for advancement to senior-level positions. These programs may include formal classes at local universities, structured leadership development workshops, exchange programs with strategic partners, and mentoring programs that allow midlevel leaders or senior managers to provide professional guidance to lower level employees. Starks indicated that in embracing diversity, special programs could be established to help advance the hiring of minorities and better prepare them for careers at the senior executive level. Witherspoon (2010) related that the underrepresentation of minorities and women in the federal SES rank stems from the glass ceiling barrier due to race, gender, and ethnicity. Bass (2008) noted that African Americans remain underrepresented in management positions within both the public and private sectors.

Despite the contributions made by African Americans to the federal workforce,

inequalities at the senior executive level still exist in the DoD (Akaka, 2011; Arnsdorf, 2011; Bass, 2008; Lim et al., 2008; Lynn, 2009). There is a gap in the research that explores the personal experiences and perceptions of African Americans about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion to the SES leadership level in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. This phenomenological research study will address that gap.

Statement of the Problem

There is a problem with the lack of senior executive leadership representation of African Americans at the DoD's SES level (Akaka, 2011; Arnsdorf, 2011; Bass, 2008; Lim et al., 2008; Lynn, 2009). According to the GPO (2009), although the number of career SES members increased from 6,110 in 2000 to 6,555 in 2007, the representation of African American men and women in the SES positions declined during that same period from 5.5% to 5.0%. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM, 2013b) reported an increase in SES members appointed from 6,555 in 2007 to 8,004 in 2012. Of the 8,004 SES members appointed, African Americans held 829 or 10.4% of the total SES positions in the federal workforce compared to Caucasian Americans SES members who held 80.5% of the federal workforce SES positions. The OPM's report reflected the continued underrepresentation of African Americans in the SES ranks of the federal workforce. Therefore, despite African Americans' contribution to the federal workforce, inequalities at the senior executive level still exist in the DoD (Akaka, 2011; Arnsdorf, 2011; Bass, 2008a/b; Lim et al., 2008; Lynn, 2009; OPM, 2011b).

This problem negatively affects African Americans' career advancement and

professional success and places the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities at a disadvantage as diversity allows organizations to fulfill highly critical leadership roles in support of the complex DoD mission. To add, lack of African American leadership representation at the SES level decreases African American role models for other African American employees aspiring to achieve SES leadership positions (Ibarra, 2004; Lynn, 2009; Whitfield & Edwards, 2011). There is a gap in research that explores the personal experiences and perceptions of minorities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion to the SES leadership level. Specifically, literature is limited on African American SES leaders' lived experiences and perceptions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities.

Due to the significance of the problem, this study, which explored the perceptions of African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions by gaining an understanding of their lived experiences, is needed. Therefore, dissemination of the results of this research adds value in understanding factors that contribute to the lack of African Americans at the SES level, may provide knowledge that can assist African Americans to reach SES leadership positions, and may encourage senior executives to mentor African American employees for career advancement into the SES level.

Purpose of the Study

This phenomenological research study explored the perceptions of at least nine African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense

Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions by gaining an understanding of African American senior executives' lived experiences. As required by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, the SES consists of a corps of executives selected for their leadership qualifications (OPM, 2010). Members of the SES serve in key positions just below the top Presidential appointees and are responsible for operating and overseeing activities in approximately 75 federal agencies (OPM, 2010).

Research Questions

To explore the perceptions of African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions, this phenomenological research addressed one central research question:

- What are the perceptions of successful African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into an SES leadership position?

The four subquestions examined were:

1. What are participants' perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

2. What are participants' perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD,

Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

3. What are participants' perceptions of SES candidate development programs

contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in the

OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

4. What are participants' perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions

at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer enhance

advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the

OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

Theoretical Framework

Burns (1978) and Bass's (1985) transformational and transactional leadership

theories, Maslow's (1968) self-transcendence research which is the foundation for

transcendental leadership theory, and Bandura (1974, 1977) and Vygotsky's (1962) social

learning theories served as the theoretical frameworks for this phenomenological research

study. A brief overview of their theories will be presented in this section while Chapter 2

presents a more detailed explanation.

Burns (1978) first coined transformational leadership theory, which was further

developed by Bass (1985). According to Bass, transformational leaders are individuals

who have particular skills or characteristics that enable them to motivate followers to

move beyond their self-interests and commit themselves to organizational goals, thereby

performing beyond expectations. Bass (2008) noted that transformational leadership

involves the leader taking a direct interest in evaluating the follower's level of maturity,

ideas, and concern for the well-being of others, the organization, and society. In taking a

direct interest in their followers, transformational leaders engage closely with their

followers without using power or moral leadership.

Similar to transformational leadership theory, Burns (1978) first coined

transactional leadership theory, which was further developed by Bass (1985). Bass

defined transactional as a form of leadership where the leader determines the needs of

followers and engages in an exchange relationship based on objectives projected.

Transactional leadership considers the role of supervision, organization, and group

performance. Burns considers transactional leadership an exchange between the leader

and follower aimed at satisfying the leader's self-interests.

The third form of leadership theory applicable to this research considers Maslow's

(1968) concept of self-transcendence, which serves as the foundation for transcendental

leadership theory (Venter, 2012). According to Maslow (1968, 1973), rather than

focusing on performance and results, the transcendental leader focuses on external and

social environmental factors that impact the organization and overall work environment.

The social learning theories of both Bandura (1974, 1977, 1986) and Vygotsky

(1962) take different approaches to human development about the cognitive process of

individuals. Examination of their theoretical similarities and differences helps to form an

understanding of how people learn, think, and are motivated. Bandura developed social

learning theory (SLT) in the 1960s, which later changed to social cognitive theory (SCT)

in 1986 (Boston University School of Public Health, 2013). Regarding learning, Bandura

(1977) found that an individual's self-efficacy beliefs encouraged changes in behavior

and fear arousal. Given self-efficacy, individuals can perform in a manner that allows

them to attain their goals and work towards reducing their fears. This theory predominantly focuses on things a person is capable of doing and should not be confused with a person's lack of abilities, knowledge, or skills needed to perform a task effectively.

According to Vygotsky (1978a), social interaction leads to continuous step-by-step changes in a child's thought processes and behaviors. To best understand behavioral concepts relating to how individuals think and learn Vygotsky's research on how children solve problems and advance their level of development is the primary concept leading to Vygotsky constructing his theory, *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). Vygotsky's ZPD learning theory asserted that people with lower or less advanced skills can learn more advanced skills by modeling skills displayed by more advanced and experienced individuals.

Brewer (1999) expanded upon Vygotsky's (1978a) ZPD theory. According to Brewer, one theoretical assumption addressing attitudes toward in-groups and out-groups is best explained by Sumner's (1906) structural, functional theory on origins of groups faced with scarce resources. Sumner related that in an environment of scarcity, individuals need to band together in groups to compete successfully with other groups for survival. Concerning this study, this theory supports the concept that with the insufficient number of African Americans appointed to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, there is a need for this demographic group to band together and help others within the group to advance towards the SES ranks. Brewer further reported that for long-term survival, individuals must be willing to rely on others for information, aid, and shared resources.

Subsequently, to successfully band together in helping others, there must be trust amongst members of the African American demographic group. Brewer asserted that the decision to expend resources (i.e., knowledge, skills, mentoring) relied on every group members' willingness to trust each other. Brewer further asserted that a cooperative system requires forming a trust to dominate over distrust and indiscriminate trust is not an effective individual strategy. Therefore, without trust between senior-level African Americans and lower-ranked African Americans, the ability for them to effectively unite and add value in the mentoring or coaching process would be greatly impacted.

The DoD has fewer African American senior executive leaders to advocate for the advancement of African American employees (GS-14 and GS-15) to the SES leadership ranks or to pave the way for the career growth of those in lower level positions to advance their careers. Considering, Brewer's (1999) research, it may be necessary for individuals within the African American demographic group to band together for more innovative policies to be formed and implemented in a manner geared towards growing a more diverse workforce that truly reflects inclusion. This concept may lead to a more balanced workforce between African Americans and Caucasian Americans appointed to the SES level across the DoD organizational spectrum.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore the perceptions of African American SES Corps members employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions. Snowball sampling was

used to recruit nine African American SES members in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and

Defense Field Activities for the study. Based on the DoD guidelines, a sample size of at

least nine was acquired. To start snowball sampling, African American SES leaders who

were known to meet the selection criteria of being a male or female African American

SES Corps member employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field

Activities were contacted and asked to participate in the study. They were then asked to

recommend other African American senior executives employed by the same agencies

who might be willing to participate in the study. This process continued until at least nine

individuals agreed to participate in the study and saturation was achieved. The selection

criteria included full-time, permanent African American male and female SES members

employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD.

Data collected for this phenomenological research study was through the use of

face-to-face and telephone in-depth, semistructured interviews. Face-to-face interviews

conducted were with participants employed within the National Capital Region (NCR) to

include Washington, District of Columbia, Northern Virginia, and Maryland areas in the

United States. Teleconference interviews conducted were held with participants who

were not available to meet face-to-face. Upon reaching the sample size of at least nine,

phone interviews conducted were held with African American senior executives who

worked within and outside the NCR, considering scheduling and availability to meet

face-to-face. The data gathered from the in-depth, semistructured interviews was

transcribed and analyzed using NVivo for themes and codes. Also, this study was

conducted based on Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to

ensure the ethical protection of research participants. In Chapter 3, the nature of the study is discussed in full detail.

Definition of Terms

The following terms addressed in this research may be interpreted differently and, therefore, require clarification concerning application to this phenomenological research study.

African Americans: This term defines African American as an official racial category of individuals who have origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (Office of Management and Budget [OMB], 1997).

Caucasian Americans (Caucasians): Individuals with origins stemming from Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2010).

General Schedule (GS): This type of appointment reflects the broadest subdivision of the federal classification system as covered by Title V of the U.S. Code (USC), Section 5332, ranging from GS-1 to GS-15 (OPM, 2009).

Implicit or Unconscious Bias: A form of social behavior driven by learned behavior or stereotypes that operate automatically without any thought consideration or unconsciously when interacting with others (Roberts, 2011; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2012).

Nonminority demographic race: Individuals who are Caucasian American.

Other minorities: Includes individuals who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and individuals who are Hispanic or Latino (OMB, 1997; OPM, 2013).

Senior Executive Service (SES): The SES within the federal workforce consists of a group of men and women who possess well-honed executive skills that enable them to lead effectively, efforts in transforming the U.S. government (OPM, 2010). As required by the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, the SES consists of a corps of executives selected for their leadership qualifications (OPM, 2011e). Members of the SES serve in the key positions just below the top Presidential appointees and are responsible for operating and overseeing activities in approximately 75 federal agencies (OPM, 2011d).

Social learning theories: The social learning theories of both Bandura (1974, 1977, 1986) and Vygotsky (1962) take on different and diverse approaches to human development concerning the cognitive process of individuals. Bandura (1977) examined social learning and development related to the role of social modeling in human motivation, thought, and action. Vygotsky (1978a) constructed his theory, *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), which upholds the concept that people with lower or less advanced skills can learn more advanced skills by modeling skills displayed by more advanced and experienced individuals.

Sustainability: By developing structures and strategies, leaders can form a means to develop a workforce reflective of diversity and inclusion (OPM, 2011a). Sustainability results in accountability, measurable results, and institutionalizes a culture of inclusion within the organization (OPM, 2011b).

Transactional leadership: Transactional leadership considers the role of supervision, organization, and group performance (Bass, 1997). It is an exchange between the leader and follower and aimed at satisfying the leader's self-interests (Burns,

1978).

Transcendental leaders or self-transcended leaders: Leaders who reframe from normal organizational culture and focus only on results at all costs (Venter, 2012). They seek to refine and redirect their leadership efforts in a manner that includes a focus on social and environmental matters impacting the organization as a whole (as cited by Venter). Also, these leaders reach a point where they have little or no concern for influence stemming from their environment regarding how it impacts their personal development (Maslow, 1968, 1973).

Transformational leadership: Refers to leaders who create visions, shape values, exercise influence, and empower followers to advocate for change (Ford, 1981).

Workforce Diversity: A collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively (OPM, 2011a). These attributes include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures (OPM, 2011b). The concept also encompasses differences among people concerning where they are from, where they have lived, and their differences of thought and life experiences (OPM, 2011a).

Workforce Inclusion: A culture that unites employees as a core component of the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization in a manner that allows all individuals to participate at their full potential in accomplishing organization goals (OPM, 2011a).

Assumptions

There are numerous assumptions made for this study. First, African American senior executives employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities were aware of the lack of African American senior executive leaders in the DoD. Second, African American senior executives were willing to take part in the study because of its significance. Third, the face-to-face and telephone in-depth, semistructured interviews were appropriate to explore the perceptions of African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions. Fourth, the in-depth, semistructured interview questions were effectively worded in a manner such that participants accurately interpret the questions asked. Fifth, participants honestly and openly answered the interview questions by sharing their perceptions about the questions asked. Sixth, a generalization of findings from this study applies to similar populations of African American senior executive populations external to the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. Seventh, the results of this study would lead to positive social change.

Scope and Delimitations

The study's participants included nine African American senior executives employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD SES Corps. Therefore, the study focused on the perceptions of at least nine African American senior DoD executives about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions. This study excluded

individuals who are not African American and individuals who work in other federal

agencies outside the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD.

To achieve at least nine participants, African American SES men and women employed

within OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities were contacted and asked

to recommend other African American SES men and women within the OSD, Defense

Agencies, and Defense Field Activities who might be willing to participate in the study

and those who met the selection criteria. The study also excluded other data collection

instruments, such as documents and archival records.

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Limitations

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This phenomenological research study had five limitations. First, generalizing the

results of the study was a possible limitation since a snowball sampling of participants

was applicable and the results of the study were limited to populations of African

American senior executives who have advanced in their careers to the SES level within

the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD. Therefore, this

study used a phenomenological research design of at least nine full-time, permanent

African American senior executives to explore their experiences in advancing to the SES

level. The findings from this study may be generalized to similar populations of African

American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field

Activities but the results of the study may not be generalizable to other populations,

positions, or industry.

Self-report or social desirability bias is another limitation of conducting

phenomenology research (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, African American senior

executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities may want to be perceived more positively so they may not have responded honestly to the interview questions. However, all participants honestly and openly answered the interview questions, sharing their perceptions about the questions asked.

The third limitation pertained to self-report data. According to Krueger (1998), self-evaluated or self-enhancement bias is the tendency to describe oneself more positively than a normative criterion would predict. With relation to this qualitative phenomenological study, there was the possibility that participants would not accurately or fully describe or reveal their true leadership attributes accurately as SES members or disclose complete information about themselves during interviews.

A fourth limitation applied to the data collection stage. During this phase, telephone interviews were conducted with participants within the NCR who were not available for face-to-face interviews and with participants outside of the NCR. Face-to-face interviews allow for observational data to be viewed directly, whereas, telephonic interviews do not. Video conference devices such as Skype video capability and FaceTime were not used.

The fifth limitation applied to the gender composition of the study. This study was not limited to one particular gender (males vs. female African Americans). The sample population for this study included both African American male and female members of the DoD SES Corps

Significance of the Study

A review of the literature indicates that there is a gap in research that focuses on

the personal experiences and perceptions of African American senior executive leaders'

employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD

about their personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion to the SES

leadership level. Findings from the study help to understand factors contributing to the

lack of African Americans at the SES level. It also provides knowledge that can assist

African Americans in reaching SES leadership positions and encourages senior

executives to mentor African American employees for career advancement into the SES

level. Also, the results of this phenomenological study may improve diversity in the SES

ranks. Along with the field of public policy and administration, other fields might be

interested in the research findings as well, to include the fields of business administration,

human resource management, and psychology. The findings from this study may also

apply to many agencies and organizations, to include the DoD, OPM, and GAO.

Summary

This phenomenological research study explored the perceptions of African

American senior executives employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field

Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into

SES leadership positions by gaining an understanding of African American senior

executives' lived experiences. Data was collected for this study through the use of face-

to-face and telephone in-depth, semistructured interviews with African American senior

executives employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities.

Through the use of snowball sampling, African American SES leaders who were

determined to meet the selection criteria of being a male or female African American

SES Corps member employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field

Activities were contacted and asked to participate and recommend other African

American senior executives employed by the same agencies who might be willing to

participate in the study. This process was repeated until at least nine individuals agreed to

participate in the study or until saturation occurred. Dissemination of the results of this

research adds value in understanding factors that contribute to the lack of African

Americans at the SES level, provides knowledge that can assist African Americans to

reach SES leadership positions, and encourages senior executives to mentor African

American employees for career advancement to the SES level.

Chapter 2 addresses the literature search strategy, theoretical foundation,

leadership, human capital management for senior executives, historical evolution of the

senior executive corps, foundations unveiling the phenomenon of minority

underrepresentation, impacts to career advancement, key leadership development factors,

and summary and conclusions. Chapter 3 contains the research design and rationale, the

role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This phenomenological research study explored the perceptions of African American senior executives employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions by gaining an understanding of their lived experiences in advancing their careers to the SES level. There is a problem with the lack of senior executive leadership representation of African Americans at the DoD's SES level (Akaka, 2011; Arnsdorf, 2011; Bass, 2008; Lim et al., 2008; Lynn, 2009). According to the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO, 2009), although the number of career SES members increased from 6,110 in 2000 to 6,555 in 2007, the representation of African American men and women in the SES positions declined during that same period from 5.5% to 5.0%. In addition, although African American employees represented 6.1% of employees at the senior executive level and 17.8% of the permanent federal workforce compared to 10.1% in the civilian labor force in 2007, they continued to be underrepresented in the SES ranks of the federal workforce, to include the DoD (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2008a). Therefore, despite African Americans' contribution to the federal workforce, inequalities at the senior executive level still exist in the DoD (Akaka, Arnsdorf; Bass, Lim et al, Lynn).

This problem negatively affects African Americans' career advancement and professional success. It also places the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field

Activities at a disadvantage as diversity allows organizations to fulfill highly critical

leadership roles in support of the complex DoD mission. To add, the lack of African

American leadership representation at the SES level decreases African American role

models for other African American employees aspiring to achieve SES leadership

positions (Ibarra, 2004; Lynn, 2009; Whitfield & Edwards, 2011). There is a gap in

research that explores the personal experiences and perceptions of minorities about the

personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion to the SES leadership

level. Specifically, literature is limited on African American SES leaders' employed in

the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities lived experiences and

perceptions. Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategy, theoretical foundation,

leadership, human capital management for senior executives, historical evolution of the

senior executive corps, foundations unveiling the phenomenon of minority

underrepresentation, impacts to career advancement, key leadership development factors,

and summary and conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

Search strategies explored to support this literature review included detailed

searches using Walden University's research databases, to include all EBSCOhost

databases and ProQuest, in addition to the DoD Pentagon Library database. Key search

terms included: *senior executive service*, *SES minorities*, *leadership*, *transformational

leadership*, *transactional leadership*, *transcendental leadership*, *self-transcendence

social learning*, *social identity*, *self-evaluated and self-enhancement bias*, *mentoring,

coaching, career development*, *SES leadership challenge, workforce diversity, inclusion*,

minorities, glass ceiling, and *executive shadowing*. Additional references were examined

after conducting a detailed review of the reference section of the various journal articles,

dissertations, and policies. Relevant organizational websites such as the OPM, the

Department of Defense Human Capital, the Government Accountability Office (GAO),

and the Executive Office of the President were also searched.

Theoretical Foundation

Burns (1978) and Bass's (1985) transformational and transactional leadership

theories, Maslow's (1968) self-transcendence research which is the foundation for

transcendental leadership theory, and Bandura (1974, 1977) and Vygotsky's (1962) social

learning theories served as the theoretical frameworks for this phenomenological research

study. This section is organized in the following subsections: transformational leadership,

transactional leadership, transcendental leadership, transformational leadership versus

transactional and transcendental leaderships, and social learning theories.

Transformational Leadership

Burns (1978) first coined transformational leadership theory, which was further

developed by Bass (1985). According to Bass, transformational leaders are individuals

who have particular skills or characteristics that enable them to motivate followers to

move beyond their self-interests and commit themselves to organizational goals, thereby

performing beyond expectations. The concept of transformational leadership has

historical roots dating back to the life and times of Jesus, Mohammed, and Buddha. These

leaders not only created a vision and molded values but also exercised influence and

empowered followers to advocate for change (Ford, 1981). Bass noted that

transformational leadership involves the leader taking a direct interest in evaluating the follower's level of maturity and ideals. Transformational leaders also have great concern for the well-being of others, the organization, and society. In taking a direct interest in their followers, transformational leaders engage closely with their followers without using power or moral leadership.

Burns (1978) described transformational leadership as a leader's ability to motivate followers through the use of three general philosophies. First, the transformational leader raises their followers' level of awareness concerning understanding the importance and value of designated outcomes and determining ways of achieving results. Second, the transformational leader encourages followers to rise above their self-interest for the sake of others (i.e., team members, organization, or society). The third factor based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, focus on the transformational leader raising their followers' level of needs from a lower level to a higher level. Whereas, Maslow's (1954) lower level needs include psychological needs (i.e., breathing, food, water, sleep) or safety (i.e., security of employment, personal resources); higher level needs include improved self- esteem (i.e., confidence, respect of others, and respect for others), and self- actualization (i.e., creativity, problem solving, morality, lack of prejudice). In addition to the transformational leader exercising influence in encouraging and motivating followers to willfully engage in a process, another specific characteristic of a transformational leader applicable to this research is best described by Parry and Sinha (2005) who noted that transformational leaders are expected to cope better with adversity.

According to Bass (1990) and Bass and Avolio (1994), transformational leadership includes four different factors: (a) idealized influence or charisma, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. The researchers noted that leaders who display idealized influence or charisma demonstrate an inclusive vision, are committed and persistent in pursuing objectives, express confidence in the vision of the organization, develop trust and confidence among employees, symbolize the goals and mission of the organization, and believe in doing the right thing. Leaders who display inspirational motivation inspire others to perform, clarify the organization's future, create a strong sense of purpose among employees, ensure individual and organizational needs are aligned, help followers achieve more than they envision and believes that the organization's mission is achievable. Furthermore, Bass and Bass and Avolio reported that leaders who display intellectual stimulation encourage employees' imagination, challenge previous ways of doing things, seek better ways to do things, encourage followers to think independently, and will take risks for possible gains. Leaders who display individualized consideration are considered to be compassionate leaders who empathize with employees' needs, interpersonally connect with employees, care and show compassion, and encourage employees' continued development and growth.

Morreale (2009) reported that the public sector is facing a leadership crisis as large numbers of senior public managers retire, thus creating a critical shortage of leadership talent. With this loss of human capital, leadership development is a major concern, especially for effective operations and for supervisor and executive succession

management. The researcher discussed the Executive Core Qualifications (ECQ) from the

SES for the federal government, which is a helpful tool for the development of leadership

talent in local, county, and state organizations. In creating leaders who can be flexible and

resilient, thus adapt to changing times, traits of the transformational leadership style are

desirable in emerging leaders. Therefore, transformational leaders can navigate

bureaucratic government organizations that do not allow or encourage the creativity and

innovation that are necessary to accommodate change.

Transactional Leadership

Similar to transformational leadership theory, Burns (1978) first coined

transactional leadership theory, which was further developed by Bass (1985). Bass

defined transactional as a form of leadership where the leader determines the needs of

followers and engages in an exchange relationship based on defined objectives.

Transactional leadership considers the level of supervision, organization, and group

performance. Burns considered transactional leadership as an exchange between the

leader and follower aimed at satisfying the leader's self-interests.

According to Burns (1978), transactional leadership is based on a system of

rewards or punishments. Therefore, if employees perform well in achieving the

organization's objective, then they are rewarded. On the other hand, if employees do not

achieve the expected objectives or successfully advance the organization's mission, then

they are punished or reprimanded. According to Burns, when leaders require employees

to conform to strict rules, procedures, or standards, they are applying transactional

leadership, thus limiting their subordinates' ability to be creative in developing new and

innovative solutions in advancing the organization's effectiveness.

Burns (1978) reported that the successful application of transactional leadership can be best demonstrated when problems are simple and clearly defined by the leader. While transactional leadership can be effective in some situations, Burns asserted that it is considered an insufficient leadership form and may prevent both leaders and followers from achieving their full potential. Transactional leaders focus on increasing the efficiency of processes that have been pre-established, efficient, and revolve around followers conforming to existing rules rather than exploring more innovative ways to achieve the organization's objectives.

Transactional leadership includes three different leadership behaviors: (a) laissez-faire, (b) management-by-exception, and (c) contingent rewards (Bass, 1990; Bass, 1997; Bass & Avolio, 1994). Laissez-faire leadership describes a type of leader who is hands-off, avoids taking a stand on issues, does not emphasize results, does not intervene when issues arise, and a leader who is not aware of or is concerned about employee performance (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994). According to Bass (1997), there are two types of management-by-exception leadership: active and passive. Leaders who display active management-by-exception behaviors monitor their followers' performance, take corrective action if standards are not met, enforce rules, and avoid mistakes. On the other hand, leaders who display passive management-by-exception do not intervene until problems become serious, thus waiting to take action until mistakes emerge. Leaders who display contingent reward behaviors make clear expectations of outcomes and rewards, exchange reward and recognition for accomplishments, monitor employees' progress, and

provide constructive feedback (Bass, 1990; Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Tremblay (2010) proposed and tested a model linking transactional and transformational leadership with subordinates' commitment and turnover. Drawing on research and theory on leadership, organizational justice, and leader trust, the researcher proposed that fairness perceptions and leader trust would mediate the relationship between leadership style and subordinates' commitment and turnover. Findings indicated that transformational leadership was linked to a leaders trust and to fairness perceptions (i.e., partial mediation); and fairness perceptions relate to unit commitment through its relations to leader trust (i.e., partial mediation). Findings further indicated that transactional leadership relates to unit commitment through fairness perceptions and leader trust (i.e., full mediation).

Results of structural equation modeling suggested that both fairness perceptions and a leader's trust can be directly influenced by transformational leadership (Tremblay, 2010). Thus, according to Tremblay, one mechanism by which transformational leaders may be able to build commitment among their subordinates is through fair treatment and trust. Transactional leadership, on the other hand, appears to only directly and negatively influence fairness perceptions, as related to a leader's trust. Although not in the expected direction, this particular finding was also found by Pillai, Schriesheim, and Williams (1999). By assessing the two styles of leadership, the researcher was able to establish that both transactional and transformational leadership styles, although somewhat contrast, relate to fairness perceptions and leader trust.

Transcendental Leadership

Maslow's (1968) philosophy of the six hierarchies of needs known as self-transcendence serves as a foundation for transcendental leadership theory. Self-transcendence focuses on how leaders' view the world and their purpose in it on a more global scale. Self-transcendent leaders focus on a common purpose; have a global perspective, and joint responsibility for the fate of the whole organization (Venter, 2012). According to Venter, they identify with something greater than self and engage in selfless service to others. They are concerned about activities outside of the normal work environment that add value in enhancing the organization's image. Also, they are concerned about activities that add value in encouraging employees to achieve willingly, the organization's goals and mission objectives in light of the external environment. Venter further noted that the transcendental leader has a concern for how the organization responds to social issues such as environmental degradation, domestic employment status, and poverty within the community surrounding the external work environment. Venter related that the transcendental leader seeks to incorporate measures within the organization that advance the image of the organization and its employees within the global community with a common purpose and serve customers with a focus on improving the world and surrounding community as a whole. They can focus on a common purpose, global perspective, and take on joint responsibility for the fate of the whole organization; thereby, identifying themselves with something greater than the individual self and engaging in selfless service to others. Furthermore, they uphold ethical standards and responsibility by reflecting a positive image of themselves, the

organization, and the surrounding community.

Maslow reported that a self-transcendence level is reached when a person seeks to further a cause beyond self and to a level where they experience a communion beyond the boundaries of self (Maslow, 1968; Venter, 2012). Individuals displaying this style of leadership go beyond their personal needs, career growth, and development, and seek to advance employees' careers and enhance the organizations image (as cited by Venter). Venter further related that some company leaders seek to employ a code of ethics bound by social responsibility, seek to be more committed to all stakeholders, and establish long-term value to society. Considering Maslow's concepts of self-transcendence, within the federal government, attributes of transcendental leaders are best reflective of senior leaders who not only exemplify concern for others but also have the utmost consideration for accountability and transparency of the organization.

Fu, Tsui, Liu, and Li (2012) conducted a study of chief executive officers' (CEOs) self-identified values, leadership behaviors as described by top managers, and middle managers' self-reported organizational commitment, as measures of followers' commitment. Findings indicated that two personal values, self-enhancement and self-transcendent, of the CEO negatively correlate, but neither value is correlated with the leaders' transformational behaviors. Also, CEOs' transformational behaviors relate positively to their managers' commitment and negatively to their managers' leave intention. As the researchers predicted, the positive relationship between CEOs' transformational behaviors and middle managers' commitment is increased when the CEO holds a high-level of self-transcendence values but reduced when the CEO holds a

higher level of self-enhancement values. The relationship between CEOs'

transformational behaviors and followers' organizational commitment is strongest when

the CEO holds a high-level of self-transcendent and a low level of self-enhancement

values; whereas, the relationship is weakest when the CEO holds a low level of self-

transcendent, but a high-level of self-enhancement values.

Transformational Leadership Versus Transactional and Transcendental

Leaderships

According to Bass (2008) and Burns (1978), transformational leaders are artistic,

strive to form innovative solutions and work jointly with followers or subordinates in the

organization. On the other hand, transactional leaders reframe from making changes to

the current structure of the organization, which ultimately limits the potential of followers

or subordinates in advancing change. SES members of the OSD, Defense Agencies, and

Defense Field Activities are expected to build teams that work together in accomplishing

the mission, goals, and objectives of the agency, lead organizations in a manner that

allows all employees to contribute effectively, think creatively and strategically, and

develop and implement innovative long-term solutions leading to effective change

(OPM, 2010).

Concerning transcendental leaders, actions of the transformational leader such as

developing and implementing measures focused on advancing or enhancing the internal

organization and engaging directly with followers or subordinates in promoting

organization objectives are the least concern of the individual employing a transcendental

leadership style (Gardiner, 2006). Gardiner also asserted that the transcendental

leader is not concerned with applying measures focused on uplifting employees to better themselves. Nor is the transcendental leader concerned with rewarding employees for exceeding in work performance, or punishing them for not performing well within the organization (Bass, 2008; Burns, 1978).

Gardiner (2006) noted that according to Einstein a problem could never gain resolution at the same level of consciousness it created. With this assertion in mind, the transcendental leader holds a certain level of awareness about to how the lack of organizational progression, a tarnished organizational reputation, and overall employee performance reflects upon or impacts the organization's image within its surrounding social environment. Considering general OPM SES guidelines (OPM, 2010) related to leadership expectations of SES leaders, SES members are expected to build teams and lead organizations with concern for accountability and transparency. Application of both transformational and transcendental leadership theories are best suited to enable OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities SES members to be successful leaders of the corporate DoD workforce.

Leadership

Social Learning Theories

The social learning theoretical foundation related to an individual's growth and development stems from the central theory of whether or not the advancement of African Americans to SES positions is caused by the lack of growth and development through education and training rather than other theoretical factors. From this perspective, social learning theories about human growth and development as framed by Bandura (1974,

1977) and Vygotsky (1962) shed light on the fundamental factors contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities components of the DoD.

The social learning theories of both Bandura (1974, 1977, 1986) and Vygotsky (1962) take on different and diverse approaches to human development concerning the cognitive process of individuals. Examination of their theoretical similarities and differences helps to form an understanding of how people learn, think, and are motivated.

Bandura's social learning theory. Bandura developed social learning theory (SLT) in the 1960s, which later changed to social cognitive theory (SCT) in 1986 (Boston University School of Public Health, 2013). As one of the most noted scholars of social behavior and identification learning, Bandura conducted his initial studies in the area of social learning and aggression. Supported by other scholars such as his doctoral student Richard Walters, who assisted him in exploring social aggression, Bandura (1977) examined social learning and development about the role of social modeling in human motivation, thought, and action. He also focused his studies on various aspects contributing to the learning and development of individuals.

Regarding learning, Bandura (1977) found that an individual's self-efficacy beliefs encouraged changes in behavior and fear arousal. In viewing the concept of self-efficacy, individuals perform in a manner that allows them to attain their goals and work towards reducing their fears. This theory predominantly focuses on things a person is capable of doing and should not be confused with a person's lack of abilities, knowledge, or skills needed to perform a task effectively. One important element of the cognitive

developmental process is efficiency levels. Bandura (1986) reported that individuals must first determine their skill levels, understand what they are capable of doing and then determine how best to place their skills into action, which is the core concept of self-reflection. A unique human capability expressed by Bandura about the concept of self-refection implies that respected leaders have a tendency to evaluate and alter their personal independent thinking and behavior patterns.

In Bandura's 1974 publication, *Behavior Theory and the Models of Man*, he explored factors of human behavior based on various models of behavior that impact individuals' lives as well as their environment. First, he denotes that in a person's everyday life, there is a two-way control between the way a person behaves and their environment. To add, Bandura views behavior theory as being equal to the process of conditioning where individuals mainly learn and develop based on the manner treated by others. Bandura related that if the desire is to criticize or discredit something or someone, all people need to do is just continuously label the event as a behavior problem or refer to the issue as being behaviorist in nature. Bandura refers to this process as being "Pavlovian precursors of a totalitarian state" (p. 859).

Based on Bandura's (1974) reference to Pavlov's theory, individuals' response to an event is automatic or produced involuntarily as a result of the situation exposed. In other words, a person's response to how they are treated in life, the situation presented within their environment, their surroundings, and how they are continuously treated contributes significantly to their learning and development. Bandura discussed conditioning, where individuals react in a certain manner after repeated exposure. He

noted that most human behavior is learned through observation or modeling, which

serves as a guide for action (Bandura, 1977).

According to Allen (2007), social learning theory is an important learning theory

for leadership development. First, leadership is contextual; therefore, what works in one

situation may not work in another. Leadership development opportunities should help

individuals better understand their environment and how it affects those within in it.

People are products of their environment and have learned what is, and is not, socially

acceptable within their organization. At times, the real culture is different from the

espoused culture. A culture that promotes communication, honesty, ethical behavior and

transparency may not accept individuals with differing values and the opposite holds

true as well. Also, social learning underscores the importance of congruence between

leadership development and the corresponding culture.

On a more individualized level, social learning emphasizes the need for leaders

to exemplify desired behaviors (Allen, 2007). Allen related that proponents of social

learning asserted that leaders who do not model the desired behavior undermine efforts

to effect lasting change. For instance, supervisors who promote one course of action,

but do not exemplify this behavior themselves, are likely to undermine their efforts.

People learn behaviors based on modeling in their environment and this concept can

either help or hinder leadership development initiatives depending on the cultural context

once individuals return to their work environments.

Vygotsky's social learning theory. According to Vygotsky (1978a/b/c/d), social

interaction leads to continuous step-by-step changes in a child's thought processes and

behaviors. To best understand behavioral concepts relating to how individuals think and learn Vygotsky's research on how children solve problems and advance their level of development is the primary concept leading to Vygotsky constructing his theory, *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). Vygotsky's ZPD learning theory indicates that people with lower or less advanced skills can learn more advanced skills by modeling skills displayed by more advanced and experienced individuals. This process allows individuals with lesser skills to learn based on observation, modeling, training, and mentoring, thereby working directly with role models to enhance their skills in preparing to become senior executives.

Therefore, when assisted by a more senior or advanced skilled leader, employees desiring to advance to the SES level work to improve their skills by working with mentors or selective role models. Their level of ZPD is reached as more knowledge is obtained and senior executive level tasks are accomplished as a result of skills acquired by working with their mentors or role models. To better clarify the ZPD concept, Vygotsky (1978a) indicated that the zone of proximal development helps to define functions that have not yet matured but are under development. It is the distance between the developmental level and the level in which an individual is capable of advancing.

Dziczkowski (2013) reported that theories and concepts of prominent researchers and philosophers such as Vygotsky suggest that the learning potential contained within the mentoring relationship is great. As the mentoring relationship grows and establishes itself, benefits to both the mentor and mentee emerge. Although these benefits are great, mentoring is not always successful, and the mentoring relationship can fall apart. As

technology, time constraints, and communication increase, many individuals and organizations are adapting their traditional mentoring programs to include asynchronous e-mentoring. Organizational leaders today are challenged to examine and weigh the benefits and drawbacks of mentoring to determine if it enhances the effectiveness of the organization and its members.

Leadership Defined

According to Bass (2008), the term leadership is a universal phenomenon with many possible ways of being defined depending on its purpose. Various authors and theorists have formed a variety of definitions for the term. For example, Bass highlighted various definitions of leadership formed between the 1920s and 1990's. Some phrases Bass used in defining leadership included the ability of leaders to induce obedience, respect, loyalty, and cooperation upon those they lead; the ability of leaders to organize individuals and move those led towards a specific direction to accomplish an objective; the ability to persuade and direct beyond the effects of power or circumstances; actions taken by leaders within their level of authority granted by group members in facilitating over the group; the ability to use influence to move others towards a shared or common direction; the ability to use influence in directing one group member to motivate and move another group member; the ability of leaders to inspire others to take action; and the ability of both leaders and followers to exercise their influence to enact change in achieving a common purpose.

Bass (2008) further described leadership as a "interaction between two or more members of a group" (p. 25) that in most cases involve "structuring or restructuring of the

situation" (p. 25), as well as an assessment of the perceptions and expectations of group members. Leadership involves the leader taking on the role of a change agent by guiding others towards goal achievement. This broad definition opens the idea that "any member of a group can exhibit some degree of leadership," (p. 25).

Bass (1985), along with other researchers (e.g., Bellows, 1959; Bennis, 1983; Burns, 1978; Davis, 1942; Knickerbocker, 1948; Tichy & Devanna, 1986; Yukl, 1994) defined leadership as an instrument of goal achievement. Based on this concept, Bellows described leadership as the process of arranging a situation so that various members of a group, including the leader, can achieve common goals with maximum economy using less time and work effort. Knickerbocker described leadership as occurring when the leader is perceived by a group as controlling and satisfying the needs of group members. From a classical perspective, leadership is defined based on whether or not the group achieves its objectives. Davis defined leadership as the "the principle dynamic force that motivates and coordinates the organization towards achieving its objectives" (p. 20). Bass, Bennis, Burns, and Tichy and Devanna defined leadership as a process of transforming followers, creating a vision of obtainable goals, and the ability of the leader to successfully articulate to their followers defined goals for reaching objectives.

According to Bass (2008), leaders embrace interactions with others. Pigors (1935) defined leadership as a process of mutual stimulation by which successful interplay of individual differences controls human energy in the pursuit of a common cause. Bogardus (1929) viewed leadership as a social process in which social inner stimulation causes people to set out towards achieving old goals with new zest or achieving new goals with

stimulation and courage. Bass further noted that although individuals working towards

goal achievement are working within their personal areas of responsibility, the leader

stimulates group efforts to achieve goals. From Anderson's (1940) perspective,

leadership is the ability of a leader to work successfully with various groups of people in

accomplishing objectives or goals despite individual differences among group members.

Yukl (1994) defined leadership as an influence process whereas, the leader

influences or motivates followers towards achieving the organization's objectives, builds

and maintains cooperative relationships and teamwork in the organization, and has the

ability to enlist others from outside the organization to support and contribute to

achieving the organization's goals. Chemers (1997) described leadership as a process of

social influence, whereas, a person may be impacted by others or process by which one

person gains the aid or support of others to accomplish a common task.

McFarland, Senn, and Childress (1993) summed up the concept of leadership

based on specific themes. The first theme focused on the concept that leadership involves

not only the boss who is at the top but also other individuals within the organization.

Individuals within the organization can exercise leadership in accomplishing the

organization's goals or objectives. According to the second theme, leadership fosters

excellence in others. Leadership is exhibited when a true leader makes a distinct effort to

work successfully with others in achieving the organization's objectives, According to

the third theme, managers are not necessarily leaders. For example, whereas managers are

concerned about the accountability of resources and functionality of the organization's

operations, leaders are more concerned about the individuals within the organization and

their ability to influence these individuals to engage willfully in jointly advancing the organization.

According to McFarland et al. (1993), the fourth theme highlights leadership with a sensitive humanistic dimension. In other words, in exemplifying leadership, leaders show interest in the needs and well-being of others in accomplishing organizational objectives. According to the fifth theme, leadership involves taking on a holistic approach by applying a variety of skills, qualities, and capabilities. To add, leadership involves the leader being able to anticipate, initiate, and implement successful change.

Blank's (2001) concept of leadership takes into consideration the leader's ability to gain supporters who willfully follow the leader's guidance and direction. Blank noted that leaders gain followers when they provide direction and utilize influential methods that attract others in a manner that followers willfully embrace their direction. Leadership occurs when followers willfully follow the leader's directions. Another concept of leadership defined by Blank is the ability of a leader to provide direction through uncertainty or in situations where their followers cannot detect or easily overcome obstacles based on their independent efforts.

Considering the various concepts of leadership as presented by Bass (2008), Blank (2001), Yukl (1994), and other researchers, the definition of leadership adopted for this study is defined as was a process by which a leader applies influence to gain the willful support and motivation of others in working jointly to accomplish a common mission, goal, or objective when faced with uncertainties and individual differences.

Effective Leadership

The concept of effective leadership or the operational efficiency of leadership takes on various meanings amongst researchers. The criteria used in measuring the effectiveness of leadership in organizations may also vary amongst researchers. Effective leadership refers to the interaction among members of a group that initiates and maintains improved expectations and the competences of the group to solve problems or to attain goals (Bass, 2008). Bass noted that effective leadership is a result of the leader influencing followers in a manner that results in the attainment of goals.

Effective Leadership in the Senior Executive Service Corps

This subsection is formed under the following areas: leadership opposed to management and leadership roles and responsibilities of federal executives.

Leadership opposed to management. The term *executive* may suggest that members of the SES Corp should possess both leadership and management qualities to influence change effectively and guide the DoD operations and workforce. One of the five themes of leadership described by McFarland et al. (1993) indicates that leadership is not the same as management, thus implying that senior executives who may have remarkable managerial skills may not necessarily possess outstanding leadership skills. There are differences between leadership and management; however, both concepts are important (Bennis, 1994). Managers seek to bring about change, make accomplishments, and take charge or responsibility for making things happen. According to Bennis and Goldsmith (2010), management is an act of imitating, administering, and controlling a process or action.

On the other hand, Bennis (1994) and Goldsmith (2010) reported that leadership refers to acts of innovating, influencing, inspiring trust, and working with others in a manner that results in the accomplishment of an action or goal. One indication that leaders and managers are different is best quoted by Bennis, "Managers are people who do things right, and leaders are people who do the right thing" (p. 7). Bennis also related that management keeps the organization dedicated to goal accomplishment, focused on the application of leadership skills to inspire change through others and contributes to the development of innovative solutions in achieving the organization's mission and goals. Bennis and Nanus (1985) asserted that an individual cannot be both a leader and manager because leaders and managers have dissimilar values and personalities; however, Yukl (2010) disagreed and asserted that management and leadership can be interchangeable. According to Yukl, managers hold certain positions that require them to perform in a leadership capacity that influences processes and motivates people. Therefore, managers ultimately serve in a leadership role in accomplishing goals or mission requirements.

Leadership roles and responsibilities of federal executives. Senior executives in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities are responsible for accomplishing the goals and mission of the DoD by applying solid management skills to produce optimum results with limited resources (OPM, 2010). Furthermore, the defense senior executive workforce is also expected to hold solid strategic leadership skills in leading people, leading change, achieving results (e.g., accomplishing expectations), and building coalitions (e.g., engaging and partnering with other individuals to achieve a common goal) to effect change (OPM, 2010). One other desired skill of a senior

executive that may indirectly require an application of leadership abilities is business acumen. Holding this skill signifies the ability to manage strategic information, human, and financial resources.

In view of Yukl's (2010) interchangeability concept and the desired skills of senior executives as defined by OPM (2010), senior executives in the OSD, Defense Field Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD should hold both leadership and management qualities, which is fully supported by Dessler (2002). Dessler championed the idea that in order for both leadership and management to be effective both skills sets must be interconnected. Whereas excellent leadership skills enable a leader to influence and inspire others to accomplish goals, application of excellent management skills enables the leader to plan better, organize, and administer change effectively in the organization. Dessler also related that while a leader may be very effective in motivating and inspiring the workforce, without the application of proficient managerial skills, planning, structuring, and governing, human activity may fail and limit the effectiveness of the organization.

Social Intelligence and Leadership

Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) shed light on social intelligence relating to factors that enable individuals to advance as senior leaders where they successfully carry out their organization's mission without compromising the well-being of the workforce. The question arises as to whether or not an individual's social form or emotional intelligence concerning their social neuroscience skills (i.e., brain functions when people interact with one another) helps to define characteristics of a good leader.

Considering this general guideline, Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) formed themes to address social intelligence and leadership based on empathy, attunement, organizational awareness, and influence. Empathy refers to the ability to understand the motives of other people. Attunement addresses the leader's ability to listen and think about how others feel. Organizational awareness refers to the leader's ability to appreciate the group or organizational culture and values naturally, as well as understand social networks and their norms. Influence refers to a leader's ability to persuade others by encouraging them to engage willfully in decision-making, appealing to the interest of others, and gaining support from key personnel within the workforce.

Another factor based on the social learning foresight of Goleman and Boyatzis (2008) that applies to effective leadership is developing employees through compassionate coaching and mentoring processes. This concept involves the leader investing personal time and energy by catering to the direct needs and concerns of individuals or certain followers through personal mentoring and dedicating meaningful feedback geared towards individuals' professional growth and development. Through the application of effective social learning processes, the leader is also inspirational and seeks to promote teamwork. From this perspective, the leader can articulate a compelling vision by building pride, fostering a positive and emotional tone, and influencing cooperation of others by positively bringing out the best in people. Effective teamwork is constructed when it is clear that leader fosters cooperation, encourages participation, and directly takes interest in advancing the well-being of team members.

The Leadership Challenge

Kouzes and Posner (2012) asserted that considering that individuals live in an ever-changing environment with many unknown factors that must be dealt with, leaders are most challenged when creating ways to energize and mobilize the workforce as well as form innovative business practices that advance the organization to new levels. The authors further noted that with changes to time, problems, and people, the leadership challenge continues. Although individuals may refocus their leadership objectives, leadership challenges may prolong. Despite obstacles, leaders must seek to inspire individuals in the workforce to do things beyond expectations, even when faced with uncertainties, and persevere towards creating improvements and an image of a better future. From this perspective, the authors noted that the real leadership challenge is about forming ways to create a climate that naturally mobilizes others to take on a leading role in making extraordinary things happen in the best interest of the organization.

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Human Capital Management for Senior Executives

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Workforce Development through Developmental Assignments

McCauley (2006) asserted that effective leaders seek to develop their skills continuously throughout their careers. Therefore, when taking on a variety of leadership roles, leaders must seek to master new skills and develop proficiency in additional areas that are outside their normal responsibilities by broadening or expanding their repertoire of skills in a variety of functional areas. One manner of acquiring new skills is by gaining practical experience through training such as those offered by the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Executive Institute and developmental activities such as those

focused on augmenting job skills. Developmental assignments allow leaders to increase their skillsets. As noted by McCauley, the more diverse the practical experiences are, the greater the likelihood that the leader will develop a broad repertoire of skills. Leaders who step into new situations and face challenges that call for untested abilities continue to develop their capacity to take on high levels of responsibilities.

In the federal sector, such as all levels in the DoD to include the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, African Americans lack opportunities to participate in developmental assignments that would develop their leadership skills and better position them to equally compete for senior leadership positions. A 2012 study, commissioned by Carlton Hadden, Director of the EEOC Office of Federal Operations (OFO), indicated that "the limitation of training and development assignments perpetuate inequalities in skills and opportunities for African Americans" (EEOC, 2012, para. 4). According to the EEOC, developmental assignments are temporary projects assigned for the purpose of exposing employees to work duties and environments that will prepare them for promotional opportunities. In advancing to senior executive level positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, an ideal developmental assignment would be for African Americans at the GS-14 and GS-15 grade levels to engage in a four to six months assignment where they act in a supervisory capacity rather than assuming duties in a position such as a lead project officer.

A 2009 report issued by the United States Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) indicated that 13.9% of African American federal employees had served as acting supervisor, compared to 22.3% of White employees. Due to the lack of leadership

training as an acting supervisor or associate director, African Americans may be automatically placed at a disadvantage for promotions. Serving in an acting supervisory capacity is a more advantageous opportunity to gain experience for supervisory or higher level positions. The MSPB (2009) reported that employees who had served in an acting supervisory capacity were more likely to have received a greater number of promotions during their government careers. The effect on African Americans is that they are often not given as many developmental assignments where they serve in a leadership role as an acting supervisor. Also, African Americans are less likely to be offered the opportunity to act in a supervisory capacity at the same rate as Caucasian American males. Subsequently, the EEOC (2012) and the MSPB studies both suggested that the lack of training or developmental opportunities lessens the opportunity for African Americans to advance to senior-level positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD at an equal rate to that of Caucasian Americans.

Senior Executive Service Qualifications and Selection

The OPM (2010) reported that in 2008, they piloted two new methods for selecting members of the SES: (a) the record of accomplishment method and (b) resume-based method. Both of these methods are based on the five executive core qualifications (ECQs): leading change, leading people, results driven, business acumen, and building coalitions. The record of accomplishment method differs from the traditional approach to selecting SES members in that applicants are not asked to address the five broad ECQs, but rather on a select few of the 28 executive competencies underlying them. The resume-based option is even simpler with the applicant showing possession of the ECQs

in a standard resume format.

According to the OPM (2010), the law requires that the executive qualifications of each new career appointee to the SES be certified by an independent Qualifications Review Board based on criteria established by the OPM. The ECQs describe the leadership skills needed to succeed in the SES, and they also reinforce the concept of an *SES corporate culture*. This OPM concept holds that the government needs executives who can provide strategic leadership and whose commitment to public policy and administration transcends their commitment to a specific agency mission or an individual profession. Successful performance in the SES requires competence in each ECQ. The OPM related that the ECQs are interdependent, and successful executives use all five. The first ECQ is leading change, which involves the ability to bring about strategic change, both within and outside the organization to meet organizational goals. Leading change also includes the ability to establish an organizational vision and to implement it in a continuously changing environment. The second ECQ is leading people, which involves the ability to lead people toward meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals. Leading people also includes the ability to provide an inclusive workplace that fosters the development of others, facilitates cooperation and teamwork, and supports constructive resolution of conflicts.

The OPM (2010) reported that the third ECQ is results driven, which involves the ability to meet organizational goals and customer expectations. The term results driven also includes the ability to make decisions that produce high-quality results by applying technical knowledge, analyzing problems, and calculating risks. The fourth ECQ is

business acumen, which involves the ability to manage human, financial, and information

resources strategically. The fifth ECQ is building coalitions, which involves the ability to

build coalitions internally and with other federal agencies, state and local governments,

nonprofit and private sector organizations, foreign governments, or international

organizations to achieve common goals.

Application of Leadership Networks

Bass (2008) defined networks as a set of people connected by friendship,

influence, work, or communications. The connectivity of networks formed in a

variety of ways serve various purposes. According to Tichy and Devanna (1986),

networks are important to the transformational and transactional leadership

processes considering organizational elements change frequently. Concerning

transformational leadership, leaders who are considered to be transformational

seek to foster social networks with new flows and ties. Yukl (1998) asserted that

networks serve as a best practice for seeking opportunities for partnering with

contacts in doing unconditional favors and an act of becoming a better training

partner by keeping in touch with network members. To add, according to Yukl,

acquiring contacts beyond the normal course of work is important in gaining

influence and can be accomplished through building strong networks.

Concerning the advancement of African Americans in the federal sectors, the

EEOC (2012) reported that African Americans lack adequate networking opportunities at

higher levels in organizations. The EEOC related that networking opportunities are vital

for ensuring a diverse workplace, considering networking allows an opportunity to develop a network of professional contacts that can assist African Americans in finding unadvertised jobs, building professional skills, and enabling them to become more employable by having someone to vouch on their behalf. Considering the impacts of networking on African Americans in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, this demographic group is less likely to receive valuable information about career advancement, to include guidance on networking, tips on informal or unwritten rules of the workplace, or information about jobs due to the lack of senior level mentors.

Historical Evolution of the Senior Executive Corps

Ingraham and Ban's (1984) historical research on the civil service system revealed dissatisfaction with the operation of the system, which included allegations of administrators failing to protect employees' rights, as well as racial, sexual, and other types of discrimination in the early 1970's. This resulted in action being taken by U.S. legislators to reform the civil service system. This reform resulted in the establishment of Title IV of the Civil Service Reform Act (CSRA) of 1978, PL 95-454, and the creation of the SES Corps (OPM, 2013b). After the CSRA activation on July 13, 1979, the new SES Corps was to include members holding shared values, a broad perspective of government, and solid executive skills. The researchers noted that the primary purpose of the new SES Corps was to "ensure that the executive management of the Government of the United States is responsive to the needs, policies, and goals of the nation and otherwise is of the highest quality" (para. 1). Furthermore, Ingraham and Ban reported that the revised civil service reform required U.S. government senior executives to be held accountable for

individual and organizational performance. To achieve this purpose, the CSRA gave greater authority to agencies to manage their executive resources and assigned the OPM the responsibility for government-wide leadership, direction, and oversight.

Foundations Unveiling the Phenomenon of Minority Underrepresentation

Government Accountability Office 2008 Report on SES Diversity

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2008b), in 2008, a report issued to the House and Senate Subcommittee, resulted in several congressional testimonies that sparked the call for action to examine the phenomenon of underrepresentation of minorities in the government's SES Corps. The GAO reported that as of October 2000 there were 6,296 SES members in the government. Of this total, the number of DoD SES members was 1,143. Although the number of African American minority representation in the SES Corps increased between October 2000 and September 2007 in more than half of the government agencies included in GAO's audit, to include the DoD, this increase did not result in a significant change to the underrepresentation of African American men and women appointed to SES positions.

According to the GAO (2008b), between October 2000 and September 2007, the number of African Americans holding SES positions was 8.5% compared to Caucasian Americans holding 84% of the overall SES positions. The GAO noted that creating a diverse, senior service government organization strengthens the ability to create wider perspectives and approaches in forming and implementing policies and strategic plans and strengthens their problem solving and decision-making.

Defense Business Board Report on DoD's Senior Executive Diversity

The mission of the Defense Business Board (DBB) is to provide the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense as well as, other senior leaders with trusted independent and objective advice which reflects an outside private sector perspective on proven and effective best business practices for consideration and potential application to the DoD (DBB, 2004). A task group formed by the DBB acknowledged in its fiscal year (FY) 2003-09 report issued in FY2004, that both the U.S. military forces and the civilian management structure of the DoD play a leading role in American society with respect to infusing and integrating talented women and minorities into their management and leadership ranks (DBB, 2004). However, the DBB reported that unlike the private corporate sector, DoD has failed to adopt workable solutions leading to creating a diverse workforce at all levels of the DoD enterprise, particularly at the senior executive level. This dilemma brought on a major challenge for the DBB task group relative to development of strategies to achieve broader diversity in the general and flag officer and SES ranks, particularly within underrepresented minority groups such as African Americans.

According to the DBB (2004), the ultimate objective of the task group was to define best practices applied by the private sector that contributed to a proactive, strategic approach to recruiting, developing, retaining, and promoting minority personnel, and determining measures for adapting these best practices within the DoD's recruitment process. As a result of its assessment, the task group constructed three general themes with recommendations focused on the development of recruitment initiatives. The first

theme pertains to ensuring inclusion of leadership and accountability factors as critical requirements for successful leadership. One way of accomplishing this is by consistently conveying verbally and in writing the strategic importance of diversity in the DoD's top leadership workforce. Another means for achieving the theme of leadership and accountability is by forming an Equal Opportunity Council or Defense Diversity Board under the Deputy Secretary of Defense with top military and civilian membership and creating a process to ensure that leaders are held accountable for progress on measurable diversity objectives. The current Defense Equal Opportunity Council and EEO Boards, 32 Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 191.8, was created on May 21, 1987 (Cornell University Law School, 2014), therefore implementing the DBB's 2004 recommendation would be beneficial in recruiting, developing, retaining, and promoting minority personnel.

The DBB (2004) related that the second theme is to develop a broader requirements-driven approach to diversity by moving to a more advanced, requirements-driven approach to the diversity planning process and expanding the consideration of underrepresented groups beyond the minimally mandated categories to include those from different ethnic backgrounds, religions, and countries of origin. To add, the DBB related that it is also important to recognize that the Hispanic or Latino ethnic group, which is recognized as a large minority group in the United States, is also underrepresented in the DoD's senior leadership. DBB recommended the use of the pending retirement bubble in the civilian ranks to accelerate the expansion of a diverse candidate pool for the SES rank.

According to the DBB (2004), the third theme relates to ensuring that a diverse DoD workforce is well prepared for advancement by implementing plans and processes focused on increasing the talent pool of qualified, diverse candidates for promotions. This theme can be accomplished through the adoption of the best applicable private sector practices in the recruitment and development of highly talented people of all backgrounds, to include African Americans, and through the implementation of measures focused on ensuring that the core component for promotions considers ability, performance, and potential of all candidates.

RAND Corporation Report on Improving DoD's Diversity

To explore and form measures focused on improving diversity within the DoD, Lim et al. (2008) conducted research and established a report in 2007 for the DoD's consideration. In their report, the authors reported that a vision without historical credibility may imply that the DoD is avoiding improving representation of minorities and women within its top leadership ranks. Lim et al further reported that this perception can be reinforced by DoD's estimates that indicated virtually no prospect of an increase in representation of minorities or women in the higher ranks (military general officers and SES levels) for the next decade, even though minority populations are expected to grow significantly in future years.

Office of Personnel Management Report on Creating Workforce Diversity

Based on Hayes' interview with Deputy Director Christine Griffin from the OPM in 2009, creating an ideal diverse federal workforce entails reforming the federal workforce in a manner where it becomes a model employer that reflects the society that it

serves (Hayes, 2009). As reported by Hayes, Griffin also noted that a firm effort must be taken to promote greater efficiency and fairness in the federal hiring process at all grade levels, to include the senior executive level. Furthermore, as reported by Hayes, Griffin indicated that a hiring strategy must be formed that enhances opportunities for African Americans to break into leadership roles. The OPM's (2011b) agency-specific guidance on diversity and inclusion strategic plan provides federal agencies with direction to enable them to fulfill the goals identified in the 2011 Presidential Executive Order 13583 and coordinate their diversity and inclusion efforts within agencies in a collaborative and integrated manner.

Executive Office of the President Guidance on Diversity and Inclusion

According to Arnsdorf (2011), following the publication of the GAO's 2008 findings, research indicated that the SES segment of the federal workforce, specifically within the DoD, continues to show a lack of African American representation at the SES level. This trend is one of the primary factors leading to the issuance of the 2011 Presidential Executive Order 13583 requiring development and implementation of a government-wide strategic plan to promote diversity. According to the OPM Director John Berry (2011), the executive order elevates the issue of diversity to a higher level that prevents this initiative from falling by the wayside (as cited by Arnsdorf). Berry further stated that rather than creating a new structure, the president has built upon an existing structure at the very highest level that will get attention and scrutiny (as cited by Arnsdorf).

Theory of Workforce Diversity

According to OPM (2011c), 5 USC § 2301, Merit System Principles; "recruitments should be from qualified individuals from appropriate sources in an endeavor to achieve a workforce from all segments of society" (para. 2). To add, recruitments should be conducted in a manner that that avoids discrimination for or against any employee or applicant on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy or gender identity), national origin, age, disability, sexual orientation, or any other prohibited basis. Considering these factors, workforce diversity in this proposal refers to "a collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively" (p. 3). Some attributes of diversity include characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures.

Theory of Workforce Inclusion

The OPM (2011c) reported that the federal government's merit system principles promote efficiency and effectiveness. The theory behind workplace inclusion focuses on the realism that a diverse workforce alone does not guarantee a productive organization or employees reaching their full potential. The word inclusion refers to an organizational culture that connects each employee to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all employees can participate and contribute to their full potential. This research will explore measures taken in the DoD to achieve workforce inclusion in recruiting its senior leaders

from a diverse group of applicants to cultivate a culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness, thus enabling individuals to contribute fully, which in turn improves the organization's employee retention.

The OPM's Office of Diversity and Inclusion requires federal agencies to employ a workforce that draws from all corners of the U.S. population in filling positions from entry level to the SES level (OPM, 2011a). The OPM reported that by recruiting in this manner, agencies can create a culture that fosters creativity, which benefits these organizations. A primary goal of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion includes enhanced workforce diversity by recruiting from a diverse, qualified group of potential applicants to secure a high-performing workforce drawn from all segments of American society.

To add, other primary goals include enhanced workplace inclusion by cultivating a workforce culture that encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness, thus enabling individuals to contribute fully, which increases retention (OPM, 2011a). Furthermore, OPM (2011b) related that other primary goals include enhancing sustainability by developing structures and strategies to equip leaders with the ability to manage diversity, accountability, obtain measurable results, refine approaches on the basis of such data, and institutionalize a culture of inclusion. OPM (2012) further denoted that the above goals are necessary for the successful growth of diversity and inclusion.

DoD's Strategic Framework on Diversity and Inclusion (2012-2017)

Although the recommendations proposed by the DBB task group in its 2004 report, may have paved the way for corrective action for the DoD to implement programs or processes focused on changing the underrepresentation of African Americans appointed

to senior-level positions, the DoD's Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan of 2012-2017 provides clearer guidance (DoD, 2012). This reflects the foundation for requirements outlined in President Obama's Executive Order 13583, which requires federal agencies to establish a coordinated government-wide initiative to promote diversity and inclusion in the federal workforce (Arnsdorf, 2011). This plan also incorporates the priorities of the OPM's Government-Wide Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan and is aligned with key foundational DoD documents including the 2011 National Military Strategy, the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report, the 2010 National Security Strategy, the 2010-2012 Personnel and Readiness Strategic Plan, and additional federal workforce executive orders (OPM, 2011a).

Overall, the DoD (2012) Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan provides overarching direction, encourages direct leadership involvement and commitment, and creates alignment allowing DoD to approach diversity and inclusion efforts in a coordinated, collaborative, and integrated manner supported by measurable outcomes. As further noted in this plan, three primary goals provide a framework for successful diversity and inclusion efforts: (a) ensuring that leadership commitment focuses on accountability and sustainment of diversity efforts; (b) employing an aligned strategic outreach effort geared towards identifying, attracting, and recruiting executive leaders from a broad talent pool reflective of the best in the United States, to include African Americans; and (c) developing, mentoring, and retaining top talent from across the total workforce.

Congressional Reports Addressing the Diversity Gap

The issuance of various legislative actions over the past five years has resulted in an improvement in the diversity gap between Caucasian Americans and African Americans appointed to SES positions; however, the progress made in closing this gap continues to be slow (Akaka, 2011). In his March 2011 congressional testimony, Senator Daniel Akaka testified that as of June 2010, only 17% of SES members were ethnic minorities, which includes African Americans. Although this percent change is up 1% from 16% three years prior, much work in this area remains to be done.

Impacts to Career Advancement

Glass Ceiling Impacts to Career Advancement

Impacts of the glass ceiling as addressed in this research relates to unseen artificial barriers most likely created by prejudices that hinder African Americans from advancing in their careers to the senior executive levels of the federal government. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2011) reported that a glass ceiling occurs when discrimination increases in severity with movement up the occupational hierarchy. An examination of the impacts of the glass ceiling helps to understand the differences in senior-level position attainment in the public, academic workforce based on race and ethnicity and logistic regression analysis concepts. According to the researchers, people of color face disadvantages in managerial and professional settings.

Federal Glass Ceiling Commission Fact Finding

As noted in the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission Fact Finding Report (FGCC, 1995), Secretary of Labor Robert B. Reich reported that the term *glass ceiling* first

entered America's public conversation less than a decade ago when The Wall Street Journal's *Corporate Woman* column identified a puzzling new phenomenon. Reich further noted that during this period, there seemed to be invisible, but the impenetrable barrier between women and the executive suite, preventing them from reaching the highest levels of the business world regardless of their accomplishments and merits. This example of a federal employee glass ceiling that impacts women is indicative of the same barriers faced by African Americans seeking to advance to SES positions in the DoD to reach their highest potential of advancement despite their education, training, work accomplishments, and other merits.

The concept of the glass ceiling metaphor as supported by Reich's comment in a fact-finding report is that even at the highest levels of business, there is indeed a barrier only rarely penetrated by women or persons of color (FGCC, 1995). Similarly, Stivers (2002) reported a masculine bias in the structural nature of public administration in that equal opportunity strategies for advancing women's career in public service cannot be counted on to change administration of public affairs. The concept of bias hindering equal opportunities concerning the advancement of African Americans to senior-level positions in the federal sector to include the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD is validated based in the EEOC (2012) study. The EEOC examined obstacles within today's federal workplace that hinder equal employment opportunities for African Americans. The results of this study indicated "unconscious biases and perceptions about African Americans still play a significant role in employment decisions in the federal sector" (para. 2). In addition, findings suggested that unconscious bias tends

to hinder the advancement growth of African Americans. There is a stereotypical assumption or unconscious bias that African Americans who are in high-level positions cannot successfully perform in those positions because the positions are considered nontraditional for African Americans. Individuals may not be aware that their decisions are motivated by bias because it is subconscious rather than intentional; therefore, they do not take steps to change their biased decision-making. It is difficult to prove discrimination motivated by unconscious bias because it is not conducive to current legal analysis.

The FGCCFFR (1995) report indicated three levels of the glass ceiling phenomena that exist in relation to barriers impacting the advancement of minorities and women in the private sector that contradict this nation's ethic of individual worth and accountability, which is the belief that education, training, dedication, and hard work will lead to a better life. The three levels of barriers identified by the commission's research include (a) societal barriers, (b) internal structural barriers, and (c) government inherent barriers. Societal barriers manifest from conscious and unconscious stereotyping, prejudice, and bias related to gender, race, and ethnicity. Internal structural barriers include: lack of mentoring, lack of management training, lack of opportunities for career development, tailored training, and rotational job assignments. Government inherent barriers include lack of vigorous, consistent monitoring and law enforcement, weaknesses in the formulation and collection of employment-related data, and inadequate reporting and dissemination of information relevant to glass ceiling issues.

Key Leader Development Factors

Leadership Developmental Programs

Although many African Americans have successfully acquired advanced education

and leadership training through their competitive participation in programs such as the

DLAMP, DSLDP, senior leadership training provided by the OPM's Federal Executive

Institute (FEI), and formal training to acquire a Master of Science degree; their ability to

advance their careers beyond a general schedule (GS) level of grade 15 to the SES level

continues to be a great challenge compared to the advancement of Caucasian Americans

holding the same level of education or having acquired the same type of training and

development (Lynn, 2009). In preparing the overall workforce to lead the DoD into the

21st century as senior executives, the Deputy Secretary of Defense (SECDEF)

William Lynn (2009) noted that growing civilian leadership talent is a critical

responsibility of the DoD. Through his endorsement of the Defense Senior Leader

Development Program (DSLDP) which replaced the prior Defense Leadership and

Management Program (DLAMP), Lynn reiterated the DoD's commitment in

developing a highly skilled civilian workforce that possesses the knowledge and

skills to fill highly critical leadership roles in support of the complex DoD mission.

Lynn (2009) highlighted in his message that the intent of the DSLDP is to be the

primary vehicle for developing leadership talents of key civilians in efforts to prepare

them to take on a leading role in advancing the DoD into the future. The underlining

assumption is that the DoD seeks to train and develop a well-balanced and diverse group

of senior leaders from all demographic groups, to include African Americans, as a result

of the implementation of the new DSLDP, (DoD, 2011a). Despite the DoD's efforts to develop future leaders through its prior DLAMP and new DSLDP, which provides training at the OPM and the FEI, the DoD's rate of selection of African Americans to serve in its elite SES Corps continues to be lacking and underrepresented.

The Value of Mentoring and Coaching

Mentoring is essential in the development of senior leaders; however, evidence indicates that minorities seldom are successful in acquiring mentors at the same rate as their Caucasian male counterparts (Ibarra, 2004). In the federal government, this may be due to minorities, women, and persons with disabilities finding it challenging to connect with mentors and role models at work due to the small number of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities who hold leadership positions (Tyler, 2007). As a result, minorities, women, and persons with disabilities may be required to look outside their workplace for support in developing their professional identities given people inside their workplace often cannot provide the core internal sense of career that is so crucial to building a total career self-concept (Thomas & Higgins, 1995).

Farrow (2008) indicated that mentoring is an important aspect of organizational socialization and career development, and one benefit of emerging senior leaders acquiring a mentor is the positive influence mentoring can have on their career advancement. Farrow found that minority women who did not have influential or powerful mentors limited their career development and presence in advancing to senior leadership positions. According to Whitfield and Edwards (2011), mentoring is critical to the career development of ethnic minority groups. The researchers further noted that

minorities are at increased risk of information shortfalls and advice that is not framed with cultural sensitivity. Many organizations found that racial imbalances in the senior executive ranks were caused by the lack of sufficient mentoring and coaching of emerging minority leaders. Moreover, mentors add value in providing guidance, support, and a frame of comparison for protégés in a manner that guides behavioral patterns, choices, thoughts, attitudes, and emotions (Ibarra, 2004).

According to the EEOC (2012), along with the lack of networking opportunities, African Americans also lack adequate mentoring opportunities geared towards enhancing their ability to advance to high-level leadership positions in the federal sector. Participants in the study asserted that mentoring is crucial for enhancing an individual's skills, intellectual development, and adds value to influencing career development and advancement. Findings indicated that the lack of a formal mentoring program in the federal sector created various problems for African Americans concerning their personal career development, advancement, and interaction in the workplace. Specifically, the lack of African Americans' engagement in a formal mentoring program resulted in them being less likely to have multidimensional relationships that combine social components with work-based components. Plus, they were less likely to receive crucial information about career advancement, including coaching about networking, tips on informal or unwritten rules of the workplace, or information about job opportunities. Furthermore, they were less likely to secure a mentor because fewer management officials formally mentor employees. Finally, they were less likely to become managers and senior executives because managers and senior executives tend to be groomed for their positions by

mentors who steered and prepared them for career advancement.

In addressing the EEOC (2012) findings about the lack of formal mentoring programs for African Americans in the federal sector, the DoD as a whole, to include the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, does not have a mandatory or official mentoring program that assists civilian employees in reaching the SES leadership position; however, there are different approaches to mentoring in other federal government agencies, such as the traditional one-on-one approach (Cornell University, 2014). According to Cornell University, the traditional model of mentoring is a one-on-one relationship in which a more senior individual pairs with a more junior individual to provide the younger person with guidance, and encouragement. Formal mentoring programs using this model typically utilize an extensive matching process to ensure the pair has potential to form a strong, long-term relationship. One main advantage of the one-to-one mentoring approach is that it enables partners to develop trust and provides consistent support if the mentoring partnership is effective at the onset and the individuals commit to working together for a significant period such as for one year or more.

An example of a traditional one-on-one mentoring model is the U.S. Geological Survey's One-Year Guided Mentoring Program, where an employee in the SES position pairs with an early career professional with zero to five years of experience at the agency (U.S. Geological Survey [USGS], 2010). According to Cornell University (2014), mentor pairs are formed based on the professional development needs and goals of the protégés, and to help further orient employees to the agency. Based on research that the USGS did before setting up the program, the mentoring relationships lasted for a year. Typically, a

mentoring relationship includes both electronic communications and some face-to-face

interaction. Mentors and protégés are usually not co-located, and instead are matched

across bureaus and disciplines, according to goals and objectives. USGS facilitates two

cycles of formal mentoring matches annually with 30 partnerships formed each cycle.

Another example is the Department of Justice's (DOJ's) traditional one-on-one

mentoring approach, which uses the SES Candidate Development Program (CDP);

(Cornell University, 2014). The CDP is a competitive professional development program

designed to create candidate pools for SES positions (Wills, Cokley, & Holmes, 2009).

Cornell University reported that mentoring is a major component of the program and

formal mentoring takes place at the individual department level. In the past, candidates

for the CDP program were responsible for selecting their mentor on their own; however,

the DOJ asked members of senior-level management to volunteer to serve as mentors and

allowed candidates to pick from this pool of mentors who had already expressed interest

in this program.

Cornell University (2014) noted that over 50% of eligible senior-level

management applied to serve as a mentor. These type mentor programs are only made

available to individuals perceived as becoming future leaders inside of the agency and are

at the GS-14 and GS-15 grade levels. Mentors are required to work closely with their

candidates throughout the entire program, to attend an orientation or training session, and

to sign a mentoring agreement. The mentor is critical to the candidate's success in the

program and instrumental in their success should they become an executive with the DOJ.

As noted in the EEOC (2012) study, formal mentoring is crucial for enhancing an

individual's skills and intellectual development. Mentoring also enables career candidates to get acquainted with new occupational skills, workplace values, customs, resources, and a role model to help enhance their behaviors in the work environment.

Summary and Conclusions

The theoretical foundation of this phenomenological study included Burns (1978) and Bass's (1985) transformational and transactional leadership theories, as well as Maslow's (1968) transcendental leadership theory. Also, Bandura (1974, 1977) and Vygotsky's (1962) social learning theories were applicable. Although an abundance of literature exists on various barriers such as the glass ceiling phenomenon, and the lack of mentoring and coaching support for African American emerging leaders (e.g., Farrow, 2008; FGCC, 1995; Ibarra, 2004), there is little literature that addresses how to best overcome barriers of underrepresentation of African Americans to the DoD's SES rank. Another factor is that the literature does not shed light on the official or unofficial networks used in forming a balanced senior-level workforce that includes African American leaders.

Dennis and Kunkel (2004) discussed stereotyping and discrimination, as it pertains to how glass ceiling hinders career growth and contributes to the low selection of African Americans to senior-level positions. Ibarra (2004) addressed the benefits of mentoring in writings documented in the Harvard Business Essentials. A study by the EEOC (2012) indicated that unconscious biases exist about the employment of African Americans appointed to serve in senior leadership roles in the federal sector. Findings from the study supported the need for formal mentoring programs in the federal sector

geared towards enhancing the professional development and career growth of African

Americans in advancing to senior leadership positions.

According to Whitfield and Edwards (2011), African American leaders can

benefit from the support of leaders who are willing to mentor them as protégés; however,

minorities have a more challenging time finding a mentor compared to Caucasians. The

researchers noted that this might attribute to the lower number of African Americans in

top leadership positions. Understanding the perceptions of African American senior DoD

executives about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion

into SES leadership positions is an important step in creating diversity and inclusion in

the DoD SES ranks. Chapter 3 will include the research design and rationale, role of the

researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This phenomenological research study explored the perceptions of African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions by gaining an understanding of their lived experiences. The data collection for this study was through the use of face-to-face and telephone in-depth, semistructured interviews. During the data collection phase, face-to-face interviews were conducted with participants who reside in National Capital Region (NCR) to include Washington D.C., Northern Virginia, and Maryland. Telephone interviews were conducted with participants who were not available to conduct a face-to- face interview and if necessary, those residing outside of the NCR. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete (see Appendix F for the interview guide). The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo for themes and codes. To ensure the ethical protection of research participants, I conducted the study following the parameters established by Walden University's IRB. Chapter 3 includes the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and summary.

Research Design and Rational

Research Question

In exploring the perceptions of African American senior executives employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions, this phenomenological research study addressed one central research question:

- What are the perceptions of successful African American senior executives employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into an SES leadership position?

Four subquestions addressed included:

1. What are participants' perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

2. What are participants' perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

3. What are participants' perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

4. What are participants' perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer enhance

advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the

OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

Phenomenological Research Design Rationale

A phenomenological research design selected helped explore the perceptions of

African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense

Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their

promotion into SES leadership positions. This phenomenological research study,

therefore, provided the meaning, structure, and essence (Creswell, 1998) of African

American senior executives' lived experiences in advancing their careers to the SES

levels within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. Snowball

sampling was used to collect data through in-depth, semistructured interviews with

African American men and women senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies,

and Defense Field Activities. Data analysis included the use of NVivo for thematic

analysis and constant comparison of the interviews.

Creswell (2007) related that research designs are plans and procedures that define

the research decisions based on broad assumptions and application of detailed methods.

One of the primary decisions to address in conducting a research study is determining

which research design should be used based on the nature of the problem, the personal

desires and experiences of the researcher, and the audience involved in the study. Based

on the concepts of Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996), qualitative research is a means of inquiry

established based on the assumption that individuals construct social reality in the form of

meanings and interpretations of the issue examined. Furthermore, this form of research is

designed to capture multifaceted interpretations of human experience, which helps both

the researcher and participants understand why things are the way they are within the

social and cultural systems surrounding the phenomenon.

    According to Creswell (2007), there are five forms of qualitative research designs:

Narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. In assessing

the most suitable methods for this qualitative study, both the narrative and

phenomenology approaches were considered. The narrative research design enables the

researcher to address the story or information presented from document reviews (e.g.,

written transcripts, testimonies, documentation of life history, historical memoirs) and

what it reveals about the person, world event, or issue of concern (Patton, 2002).

    On the other hand, the phenomenology approach seeks to capture the experiences

of several individuals, rather than a single person, based on a general concept or

phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). This qualitative research design allows the researcher to

directly capture the true essence of the human experience about the phenomenon as

expressed by the participants (Creswell, 2009). Considering I sought to understand the

lived experience of the research participants about the personal attributes and factors that

contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions, the study selected is the

phenomenological approach. This design allows the researcher to bracket or relate

participants' personal experiences to gain a clear understanding of their experiences

(Creswell, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

    Husserl (1970) and Wilson and Washington (2007) also addressed the use of the

phenomenology approach as a philosophy, approach, and research method that is

inductive and descriptive. This approach is viewed as a philosophy because it assumes that the issues related to a matter may be only examined through the participant's voice or those directly impacted by the phenomenon (van Manen, 1997). Application of the phenomenology approach allows for examination of the human experience to be understood based on the true perspectives of those involved in the research, considering the primary objective of phenomenology is to describe the human experience as it is lived (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

While there are alternatives to phenomenology, such as narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies (Creswell, 1998), phenomenology is appropriate for this study because participants were asked to describe their perceptions about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into the SES Corps. Therefore, the theoretical concept behind the application of the phenomenological approach is to enable the researcher to examine the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience surrounding the issue of concern and determine impacts on individuals or a group of people as a whole (Patton, 2002). By exploring the theoretical elements stemming from the lived or firsthand experiences, the phenomenology approach enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the true nature or meaning of participants' everyday experiences and form probable resolutions to these issues.

Role of the Researcher

During this phenomenological research study, I served as a participant-observer by being a key instrument in the qualitative data collection process. I maintained direct contact with the participants as I recruited participants by phone, email, and face-to-face

conversations. I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews, which I transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted. I ensured that all aspects of the research were conducted to conform to the National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2013) and Walden University's IRB established guidelines for conducting research with human participants in a manner that ensured the ethical protection of participants. In accomplishing this, I completed my NIH training and obtained approval from Walden University before data collection.

During the face-to-face interviews, I observed participants to develop a keen understanding surroundings and responses to the topic of interest considering concepts introduced by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2008). In conducting observations and interviews about this research, Knight-Lynn (2011) noted that one element of concern is self-awareness, which pertains to any biases researchers may hold about their personal experiences and relationships with participants that might affect their viewpoint and approach to the study. Therefore, any biases projected may affect what is observed and documented during the interviews. I did not have any biases or a personal relationship with any of the potential research participants. However, if any biases did occur, I ensured that I handled any biases with honesty and acknowledged any prejudice through maintaining a documented Journal of areas or concerns foreseen. There was also no power differential between the potential research participants and me, as individuals with whom I had a direct working relationship are excluded from the study.

Methodology

Participant Selection and Sampling Strategy

Snowball sampling is a subset of purposive sampling and begins by making

inquiries with well-situated people who are in a positioned to provide key information to advance further the study (Patton, 1990). Patton further proclaimed that by asking a small selective number of people to refer other people to talk in conducting the study, allows the snowball to grow and new information to accumulate until achieving the desired sampling objective. This sampling process was used to recruit the participants for this study. In starting the snowball sampling, African American SES leaders who were known to meet the selection criteria of being a male or female African American SES Corps member employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD were initially contacted and asked to participate in the study. Those electing to participate were then asked to recommend other African American male or senior female executives employed within the same OSD, Defense Agency, or Defense Field Activity that might be willing to participate in the study. A repeat of this snowballing process was accomplished until at least nine individuals agreed to participate in the study or until saturation occurred.

Johnson (2008) and Sandelowski (1995) related that determining adequate sample size in qualitative research is ultimately a matter of judgment and experience, and researchers need to evaluate the quality of the information collected in light of its purpose, the research method, and the sampling and analytical strategies employed. When selecting the sample size, the goal is to determine the appropriate number of observations needed for inclusion in the overall statistical sample (Patton, 2002). As indicated by Patton (2002), although there are no specific rules for determining the sample size, it depends on the information desired, the purpose of the inquiry, impact of the study, and

the usefulness and purpose of the data to be acquired.

Creswell (1998) recommended five to 25 participants for phenomenological research studies while Morse (1994) suggested at least six participants. Bertaux (1981) suggested that at least 15 participants should be sampled for any qualitative research study. However, according to DoD's (2014) public collections guidelines, a sample size of 10 or more involving public respondents requires approval by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in compliance with the federal Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA). In obtaining OMB approval, Federal agencies such as the DoD are required to complete an Information Collection Request (ICR) consisting of a set of documents that describe what information is needed, purpose of the information, how it will be collected, and how much collecting the information will cost the respondents and the government. The overall ICR process takes approximately six to nine months to complete. However, a sample size of nine or less does not require the six to nine months approval process; therefore, DoD approval was granted for the use of nine participants or less (see Appendix B). Hence, at least nine participants were used in this study. The actual number of African American SES Corps members employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities within the of the DoD and located in the NCR is not known, as members who are assigned to this region may be deployed overseas or another United States location. To add, retired SES members are considered public respondents or public participants. Therefore, retired SES members were excluded from this study and only active SES members were included in the study (see Appendix C), which indicated that OMB approval was not needed, as the sample size was less than 10 and retirees were not

included in this study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

In-depth, semistructured interviews served as the main data collection instrument for this study to obtain the perceptions of African American senior executives employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions. I designed the questions to answer the research question and subquestions to foster open and honest communication between the participants and myself (see Appendix F for the interview guide).

Procedures

I have completed the NIH Office of Extramural Research (2013) Human Research Protections training (see Appendix H). Based on information acquired from the training, I conformed to all federal and state research regulations reviewed, to include keeping the participants' identity and information confidential. I complied with DoD research guidelines about this research with DoD participants and requested research approval from the DoD (see Appendix A). Approval was granted from the DoD (see Appendix B).

After receiving Walden University's IRB approval, the data collection commenced. The snowball sampling process started by contacting one SES leader in the DoD who recommended known African American SES leaders who fit the selection criteria of being a male or female African American SES Corps member employed in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD. An invitation was sent to each potential participate along with a recommendation request letter (see Appendix D).

These leaders were asked to participate and recommend other African American senior executives employed by the same agencies that might be willing to participate in the study. This process continued until at least nine individuals agreed to participate in the study.

In the invitation to participate and recommendation request letter, participants were informed that if they had questions, they could email or phone me. Upon receiving the email responses to the questions asked on the invitation to participate, and the recommendation request letter from those interested in participating in the study, I emailed each prospective participant the consent form. The consent form contained my electronic signature, a request for the participants electronic signatures for consent considering some participants would be interviewed by telephone (see Appendix E). Participants again were informed that if they had questions, they could email or call me before electronically signing the consent form.

Data collection included face-to-face and telephone semistructured interviews with participants. As I received the electronically signed consent form from each participant, they were contacted individually by phone or email to set up an interview time. For participants who would be doing face-to-face interviews, I set up the interviews at a time and place that was convenient for them. I set up telephone interviews with participants who did not reside in the area at a time that was convenient for them. This abided by the agreement with the DoD and also protected participants' identities. Interviews were audio-taped and took approximately one hour (see Appendix F for the interview guide). Before concluding the interviews, I answered any questions that the

participants had and addressed any concerns. At the conclusion of the interviews, each participant was debriefed and the member check process discussed. Each participant was thanked for their participation.

I conducted member checks where after transcribing the interviews, participants were emailed their individual transcript and asked to review it for accuracy. Member check is a quality control process that ensures the accuracy, credibility, and validity of the recorded interviews (Harper & Cole, 2012). By phone and by use of email I communicated the transcribed interview with each and acquired feedback about the accuracy of the data provided during the interview. This process took approximately 25 minutes. Each participant received a summary report of the research findings after final completion of the study conducted. I was the only person who had access to the data. The data is secured in a locked file cabinet and computer with password protection located in my home office. Data will be maintained for at least five years, per Walden University's guidelines.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) reported that in applying the phenomenology approach, a more personal touch is applied in completing the data analysis by incorporating personal experiences and expanding on the true essence of the research based on the researcher's direct knowledge of the issues addressed in conjunction with the information provided by the research participants. According to Patton (2002), the development of some manageable classification or coding of data scheme is the first step of the analysis. In organizing the content of all data collected, a process of categorizing, coding, labeling,

and defining the primary patterns of the data was used. Microsoft (MS) Office applications and NVivo were also used for managing and analyzing data collection.

After transcribing the interviews, each transcript was analyzed using NVivo for codes and themes. The use of NVivo provided clear, concise, and well-formatted data as well as aid in documenting coding procedures into a logical output. Also, Bazeley (2007) noted that NVivo assists in organizing and analyzing non-numerical or unstructured data collected from interviews, observations, and other data collection methods. By using the software tools available in the NVivo software, I was able to classify, sort, and arrange information; examine relationships in the data; and combine analysis using the linking, shaping, searching, and modeling tools.

Although computer technology was very useful in developing the overall output for this research study, these tools were not used independently of manual tools such as handwritten notes and hand coding of the data. As noted by Patton (2002), use of computer tools such as MS Office and NVivo in conjunction with handwritten coding, assists in building various levels of analysis. Data analysis tools to include charts, tables and figures were used to display the research output.

Codes may be defined tags or labels used in assigning key concepts of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information acquired from the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coding categories are often used in qualitative research to consistent group responses and summarize key ideas or patterns based on keywords emerging from responses to research and interview questions, as well as considering relationships to the theoretical framework. According to Miles and Huberman, codes are used to retrieve and

organize chucks of data for further analysis. This process in qualitative research helps the

researcher to determine specific patterns formed from the data collected. Alignment of

code words to the theoretical framework was based on the content of the responses

received from each research and interview question. According to Saldana (2012), code

words assigned are based on the outcomes received.

In applying coding to data collected, specific code words or terms were assigned

using a protocol based on the theoretical framework, research questions, as well as

interview questions. Terms such as *African American barriers*, *lack of representation*,

African American success, *personal attributes*, *become senior executive*, *training*,

mentoring, *mentorship programs*, *candidate development*, *advanced opportunities*, and

recommendations were used in the coding process to analyze chucks of data resulting

from responses to questions. Terms were also used to determine whether or not an

emerging pattern from interviewees addressing these terms in their responses was

present. This coding process helped in identifying themes and differences between the

perceptions of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The open coding process is a form of analysis performed in many ways (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). Within this qualitative research study, the provisional coding and

analysis worksheet illustrated at Appendix G was used to allow documented reflections

on the set data collected to be analyzed considering responses received from the

interviews conducted. A process of open coding, which involved defining line-by-line the

actions, events, and response to each question was applied to data collected. Coding in

this manner applied in qualitative research is most often use of a word or short phrase and

attribute assigned or captured to add particular meaning to data collected (Saldana, 2012).

In applying this concept of coding, I discovered, named, and categorized the phenomena

according to properties and dimensions. The axial coding process, defining consistent use

of the keywords implied or clearly stated in responses, helped to establish theoretical and

conceptual connections between the research and interview questions concerning the

theoretical framework concepts. In the coding process, it is not the actual words

themselves that are important, it is the meaning that matters (Miles & Huberman). For the

purpose of this research, the actual meaning of the words emerging from responses to the

research, interview questions, and linked to the general theoretical framework were what

mattered. Finally, selective coding helped to validate systemically the relationships by

searching for and confirming examples in the presentation of the data (Strauss & Corbin,

1998).

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity and Reliability of Qualitative Data

Patton (2001) reported that validity and reliability are of great concern during the

design phase of the study when analyzing the results and in judging the overall quality of

the study. In conducting a qualitative study, the researcher must make an effort to ensure

that the research findings resulting from hands-on inquiries are worthy of

acknowledgment and will garner attention (Golafshani 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Golafshani as well as, Lincoln and Guba noted that in conducting a qualitative study, care

must be taken to ensure that the information collected is reliable and credible. Therefore,

data collected must be dependable and reported in a manner that is neutral or

confirmable. To add, the researchers reported that data must be documented with consistency and in a manner that ensures that the participants' data are properly recorded and reported to avoid misinterpretation.

In this phenomenological study, validity and reliability were established through credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and intracoder reliability. Credibility or internal validity is an important factor in establishing trustworthiness and refers to the congruency of the findings (Shenton, 2004). In establishing creditability, a distinct effort was made to ensure that an accurate representation of the issue was clearly presented (as cited by Shenton). Member checks consist of a quality control process that ensures that the accuracy, credibility, and validity of data recorded during the interviews were used to strengthen the credibility of the study (Harper & Cole, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, after transcribing the interviews, each participant was emailed a transcript of their interview and asked to check the transcript for accuracy. Participants received feedback by email or telephone. The member check process took approximately 25 minutes.

Shenton (2004) reported that transferability or external validity pertains to the degree to which the study's findings apply to other situations. Therefore, efforts were made to present sufficient detail of the context of the study to allow the study processes to be used in other similar environments and repeated using the same research criteria at a later date. Dependability addresses the reliability of the findings. The processes of the study were reported in detail to allow future researchers to repeat the study; however, it does not mean that that same result will be obtained (as cited by Shenton). The

establishment of dependability was through the use of audit trails, where documentation included the audio-recorded interviews and interview transcriptions.

Confirmability addresses the objectivity of the study. Therefore, similar to credibility, steps were taken to ensure that information provided by participants reflected their viewpoints and not the researcher. Therefore, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy. Through the use of NVivo, intracoder reliability was established by coding the data in a consistent manner (van den Hoonaard, 2008).

Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations

I completed the NIH Office of Extramural Research (2013) Human Research Protections training (see Appendix H). I conformed to all federal and state regulations, as well as DoD guidelines applicable to the protection of human subjects as covered in the Department of Defense Instructions: Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD-Supported research (DoD, 2011b). I also conformed to Walden University's IRB guidelines for the protection of human participants during the research, which included obtaining IRB approval before beginning data collection.

Obtaining informed consent from participants is essential as it builds rapport with participants (Creswell, 2007; Nachmias & Frankfort-Nachmias, 2008; Nelson, 2011). Before beginning the data collection process, participants were emailed a consent form to obtain their permission to participate in the study (see Appendix E). In the consent form, participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and of any physical or psychological risks that the participants might

experience. They were also informed that they did not have to complete any part of the study with which they were not comfortable.

I eliminated all identifiable information from the interviews after the data collected process to keep participants' identities confidential. Therefore, interviews were numbered or coded to match each participant, thus protecting participants' identity; however, I knew the identity of the participants. I informed participants that the interviews would be audio-taped and later transcribed, verified for accuracy by participants at a later date, and then analyzed.

The audio-taped interviews, transcriptions, and other data were kept secured in a locked file cabinet and computer with password protection in my private home office for at least five years, per Walden University guidelines. I was the only person who had access to the data and only shared the data with the dissertation supervising committee. If participants had questions or concerns about the research, they were provided with my contact information as well as the contact information for the dissertation committee chair. Participants were provided with the contact information of the Walden University representative with whom they could talk privately about their rights as participants. Participants were emailed a summary report of the research findings after completion and approval of the study.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore the perceptions of at least nine African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors

that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions considering their lived experiences. Participants took part in semistructured interviews that were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo for themes and codes. The study followed Walden University's IRB guidelines to ensure the ethical protection of research participants. As I received the electronically signed consent forms from each participant, I set up interviews at a time and place that was convenient for participants who were participating in face-to-face interviews and those employed within the NCR. I set up telephone interviews with participants who were not available for face-to-face interviews and those employed outside the NCR if needed. Interviews were audio-taped and took approximately one hour (see Appendix F for the interview guide).

The audio-taped interviews, transcripts, and other data were kept secured in a locked file cabinet and computer with password protection. I was only one with access to the data. This data was shared only with the dissertation supervising committee and will be maintained for at least five years per Walden University's guidelines. Participants were given my contact information and the contact information of the dissertation committee chair in case they had any further questions or concerns about the research. Participants were provided with the contact information of the Walden University representative, with whom they could talk privately about their rights as participants. To add, participants were emailed a summary report of the research findings after completion and approval of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of African American senior executives within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES Corps. The perceptions of nine African American senior executives were explored to gain an understanding of their lived experiences in advancing their career to the SES level. Specifically, the purpose of this study was to answer the central research question: What are the perceptions of successful African American senior executives in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into an SES leadership position? I explored this question using the following four subquestions:

1. What are participants' perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

2. What are participants' perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

3. What are participants' perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in

the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

4. What are participants' perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer enhance advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities.

This chapter contains a discussion of the results obtained from the analysis of the semistructured interviews held with the participants. In this chapter, I describe the research setting to help readers internalize the context of the study and the environment that the participants interacted. I also presented brief and salient demographic characteristics of the participants, which are essential to describing the context of their responses and experiences. Also, this chapter reiterates the actual data collection and data analysis that I used in generating the themes of the study. Evidence of trustworthiness is then presented to assure readers that the data are valid and are representative of the actual experiences of Senior Executive African Americans concerning their leadership succession in the Department of Defense (DoD).

Research Setting

At the time of this study, there were no personal or organizational conditions expressed by research participants that influenced their contributions to this research. The snowball sampling method was utilized to gather data through application of in-depth semistructured interviews with nine African American senior executives employed across the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. The interviews took place in the private office spaces of participants and by telephone with participants with whom a face-to-face interview was not possible.

Demographics

Nine participants who are full-time, permanent African American SES members employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD participated in the present study. This study was not intended to examine gender factors as a measure of advancement to the SES ranks within the DoD. However, a combination of both male and female SES members participated in this study. For the purpose of this study, these participants were coded as SE or "Senior Executive" along with the assigned number of the participant (from one to nine). Seven of the participants hold directorship position while the remaining two participants hold executive or assistantship positions. The majority of the participants (8 or 89%), excluding SE#3, held their current position for a minimum of five years and a maximum of 14 years.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Participants

Participant Code	Current Leadership Position	Years with the Current Position	Dates of Interview
SE#1	Principal Deputy Director	6 years	13 Mar 2015
SE#2	Director	5 years	20 Mar 2015
SE#3	Director	2 1/2 years	11 Mar 2015
SE#4	Deputy Administrative Assistant	7 years	4 Mar 2015
SE#5	Principal Deputy Director	8 years	13 Mar 2015
SE#6	Program Director	12 years	13 Mar 2015
SE#7	Executive Director	14 years	2 Apr 2015
SE#8	Director	7 years	10 Apr 2015
SE#9	Deputy Director	8 years	30 Mar 2015

Data Collection

Before the data collection process, I obtained the required approvals and documentation for this study. I designed the interview protocol and formulated the interview questions appropriate for the research questions. Fifteen interview questions established were used in conducting the actual interviews. I opted to use a semistructured interview to provide the participants the flexibility to respond to the questions without hesitation. For those participants who were not available for a face-to-face interview or were not in the National Capital Region (NCR)/Washington, District of Columbia (DC) area for various reasons, or away on official travels, I opted to conduct a telephone interview rather than a face-to-face interview. Each interview took approximately one hour to complete.

I served as a participant-observer by being a key instrument in the qualitative data

collection process. I maintained direct contact with the participants, as I recruited participants by phone, email, and face-to-face conversations. I conducted in-depth, semistructured interviews, which I transcribed, coded, analyzed, and interpreted. I ensured that all aspects of the research were conducted to conform to the National Institutes of Health (NIH, 2013) and Walden University's IRB established guidelines for conducting research with human participants in a manner that ensured the ethical protection of participants. In accomplishing this, I completed my NIH training and obtained approval from Walden University before data collection.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process of this phenomenological study started during transcription of the semistructured interviews of the nine participants of the study. I reviewed all the transcriptions for accuracy and clarified important words that appeared inaccurately recorded or appeared confusing. I proceeded to conduct data analysis after ensuring that all information was clarified.

This phenomenological study utilized the open, axial, and selective coding processes whereby each process conveyed a significant pattern of information that could be categorized or grouped into larger thematic areas. Following this process, I identified salient words during the development of coding the data scheme. I managed the categorization, coding, labeling, and defining of the primary patterns of information using Microsoft Office applications and NVivo. These software packages aided me in sorting, formatting, and documenting the coding procedures in logical order. I began the open coding by tagging important words and assigned essential meanings to each word.

From the open coding process, a total of 266 open codes emerged in the analysis. All

codes were grouped according to 10 categories to include: (a) barriers to leadership

position, (b) factors to lack of leadership representation, (c) personal attributes in

leadership succession, (d) external factors affecting leadership, (e) barriers to succession

of leadership, (f) perception concerning training of African Americans, (g) influence of

mentoring to leadership succession, (h) perception of SES candidate programs, (i)

perception to leaders who gave African Americans opportunities, and

(j) recommendations. The categories formed, resulted from the consistent responses and

summary of key ideas that emerged from the responses to interview questions.

Organizing the codes and categories identified in the open coding allowed achievement

of added analysis in the axial and selective coding process.

Table 2

Categories and Axial Codes (Frequency)

Categories	Axial Codes (frequency)
Barriers to leadership position	Competition (4), lack of sponsor (3), lack of mentor (3), network (2), limited visibility (2), limited opportunity (2), limited understanding of SES (2)
Factors to lack of leadership representation	Personal attributes of AA (11), leadership skills of AA (8), lack of mentor (6), lack of sponsor (4), visibility (2), early career preparation (2), training/formal education (2), understanding of SES hiring (3), network (2)
Personal attributes necessary to leadership success	Communication skills (8), technical competence (3), team player (3), willingness to learn (4), early career progression (3), persistence (4), emotional intelligent (2)
External factors affecting leadership	Involvement in social organizations (7), familial support (3), sponsorship (2), discrimination
External barriers to leadership succession	Involvement in work and social organization (6), opportunities (5), available sponsor and mentor (3), early career progression (2), discrimination (2)
Perceptions of African American training	Limited application for career advancement (6), training alignment with ECQ and experience (3), mentors set the necessary training (2)
Influence of mentoring to leadership	Career guidance (2), establishment of personal connection (4) establishment of influence (2)
Perceived contribution of SES to African American advancement	Sponsors and mentors are equally important (4), identification of potential leaders (2), follow-on applications after graduation (2), opportunity for leadership advancement (2)
Perception of an advisor enhancing an African American's advancement	Demonstration of leadership competency (4), guidance/ access to leaders (3), gained supervisory experience (3), access to mentors/ sponsor (4), access to networks (2)
Recommendation	Proactive advocacy to AA leadership (8), encourage (3), imposition of diversity and mentoring policies

As shown in Table 2, I presented the categories and axial codes emerging from the transcripts of the participants. In the axial coding process, I sorted the open codes and identified codes that emerged frequently and appeared in each category. I then established the theoretical and conceptual connections between all interview questions related to the theoretical framework of the study. These axial codes were essential in the identification of the emerging pattern from interviewees addressing these terms in their responses. This coding process aided me in identifying the themes.

The axial codes aided me in understanding the relationship between each axial code along with each of the categories. For instance, under the category, *barriers to leadership position,* 11 axial codes were identified. The most frequently mentioned code was "competition" appearing four times in the transcripts of the nine participants. SE#2 associated the word competition with other SES applicants "who had more experience." SE#4 identified these applicants as "peers and retired military applicants." SE#4 further explained: "Considering retired military competitors, most military SES applicants normally have an abundance of supervisory and leadership experience at various levels of the DoD, which imposes a greater challenge for those without a military background to compete for SES positions." Other codes associated with the code competition are "limited position available (2)," "credible experience (2)," "advance education (2)," and "impressive resume (2)." When linked to the most frequently mentioned words these codes are considered essential, however, are excluded in the list of important axial codes.

The open and axial codes provided patterns that sequentially emerged as the themes of the study. The themes were determined based on the selective importance that each

code contributes to the understanding of the personal attributes and factors that contributed to the participants' promotion into SES leadership positions. I began to examine each of these codes to understand how the SES' individual perceptions and experiences dwell in the context of the present study. Following this procedure, I identified five general themes and related categories as summarized on the following page in Table 3. The themes identified are:

(1)   Progression to SES requires mentor for career guidance and sponsor to vouch for technical competency and, mentoring is essential in leadership development and career progression of the African American,

(2)   Barriers to African American leadership representation,

(3)   Involvement in social organizations strengthens network for career advancement,

(4)   Training the African American for career advancement would be effective with follow-on work application,

(5)   Exposure to supervisory roles provides leadership aspirant the varied opportunities.

Table 3

Themes and Categories

Themes and Categories
Theme 1: Progression to SES requires mentor for career guidance and sponsor to vouch for technical competency, and mentoring is essential in leadership development
- Access to sponsor and mentors is highly competitive
- Visibility and opportunity to access SE qualifications requires a good network
- Understanding of SES dynamic including hiring and selection process
- Mentors offer career guidance
- Establishment of personal connection and influence
Theme 2: Barriers to AA leadership representation
- Personal attributes and leadership skills of AA may need to be developed
- Limited access to good mentors and sponsors
- Sound training and education for career advancement
- Limited knowledge in SES qualifications and hiring dynamics
- Opportunity for leadership visibility
Theme 3: Involvement in social organizations strengthens network for career growth
- Access to influential mentor and sponsor
- Establishment of influence
- Early career preparation
- Opportunity to demonstrate leadership competence
Theme 4: Training the AA for career advancement would be effective with follow-on work application
- Alignment of new learning with SES requirement
- Mentor could provide access and guide to follow-on experiences
Theme 5: Exposure to supervisory roles provides leadership aspirant the varied opportunities
- Demonstration of leadership competency
- Access to mentor and sponsors
- Opportunity to establish networks
- Gain supervisory experiences

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Through the establishment of credibility, transferability, dependability,

confirmability, and intra-coded reliability; trustworthiness was achieved in this study.

These mechanisms ensured that the results of this study are generalizable among a

population with similar demographic characteristics, in this case, African American SES

members working in the DoD.

Credibility

Credibility ensures the congruency of the research findings to the purpose of the study (Shenton, 2004). Credibility achieved in this study helped ensure that the participants in the study were representatives of the African American SES population working full time in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Activities. Credibility achieved also helped ensure that interviews were properly recorded and transcribed. I initiated the conduct of member checking to ensure that transcriptions were correct and that my analysis of the data had no erroneous information. Each participant of the study performed a review of the transcript and provided additional data along with their confirmation of data recorded.

Transferability

Transferability or external validity pertains to the degree to which the study's findings apply to other situations (Shenton, 2004). Development of a detailed description of the research setting helped ensure transferability in this study. I provided descriptive information about DoD policies and procedures implemented to ensure that all reported findings were confined only to organizations that had similar characteristics.

Dependability

Dependability addresses the reliability of the data where findings are generated (Shenton, 2004). This present study tracked the data analysis process. The open, axial, and selective codes tracked are in a manner consistent with the data analysis guidelines. I

have kept all transcriptions for future researchers' reference when conducting similar studies.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the objectivity of the study. I remained objective in the analysis of the data. I utilized computer software such as Microsoft Office and NVivo to assist in sorting, categorizing, and identifying codes that are frequently mentioned by the participants. This technique helped me to reframe from including my personal biases in the data analysis.

<div align="center">

Study Results

</div>

Five themes emerged in the analysis of the participants' transcripts. These themes were identified using the open, axial, and selective coding process identified and discussed earlier in this chapter.

Research Question 1: What are participants' perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities? This question was answered using theme 4, *Training the African Americans for career advancement would be effective with follow-on work application*. This theme emerged from the two categories: (a) alignment of new learning with SES requirement and (b) mentor could provide access and guide to follow-on experiences. The majority of the codes identified in this study reflect that participants considered training as the least priority when compared with access to good mentors and sponsors, academic qualifications, and supervisory work experience in the DoD. SE#2 supported this by stating, "Formal training is ok, but it is

not as important as work experience." SE#2 further shared that hands-on work

experience, willingness to take new assignments and desire for personal growth and

development are helpful for leadership advancement. SE#2 also noted: I did not have

any special training to help me advance to SES. Work experience and taking on

challenging assignments to help demonstrate my abilities as outlined in the ECQs is

what is important and what counts. I focused my personal growth and development in

understanding the ECQs and sought only to acquire work that would help me to gain

experience and develop my skills in achieving each ECQs.

Seven of the participants claimed that while training is important, the learning

gained from training attendance should be in alignment with SES requirements. SE#9

stressed that training is available in the DoD. Specifically, SE#9 noted, "Training is

available and yes, African Americans have access to training opportunities as

everyone else within the DoD workforce." SE#9 added that: "The issue is after

completion of training, there are no opportunities in place to allow direct application

of newly acquired skills or jobs that offer greater levels responsibility." SE#9

demonstrated this case by sharing:

> There are no pre-established post-assignments. For example, upon completing
>
> advanced training (i.e., the Federal Executive Institute (FEI) or senior-service
>
> College such as the National Defense University/War College); if the
>
> employee has not served in a supervisory position, then he/she should be
>
> offered an opportunity to be assigned to the next available supervisory
>
> position. An alternative measure would be to assign the employee to a detail

position with supervisory duties, rather than assign the employee to a

nonsupervisory position performing work that does not offer application of

new skills.

SE#8 offered the same observation stating:

Although training is important and helps to enhance a person's ability to lead,

it is not the sole factor for advancement. Leadership is a built in quality;

training only complements this skill. Upon completion of training,

opportunities to directly apply skills serving in an executive leadership or

supervisory capacity should be made available. Having the opportunity to

acquire direct work experience is far more important to SES advancement than

training alone.

SE#6 noted that several forms of developmental training were available to African

Americans. SE#6 was doubtful, however, of the quality of the training African

Americans received. SE#6 was uncertain as to whether the targeted training for the

DoD workforce contributed to the advancement of the African Americans to an SES

position. After recalling the accessibility of training for African Americans, SE#6

concluded: "the problem is, once trained, is this training put to good use upon

returning to the job…are African Americans returned to the same work environment

performing the same work and not applying newly acquired skills?"

The category entitled, "*mentor could provide access and guide to follow-on*

experiences," emerged after identifying the critical roles the mentor could contribute

to the advancement of the African American in an SES position. Mentors provide

career guidance to the mentees. This guidance includes the identification of appropriate training necessary in the mentees' professional development. SE#7 advised: "Don't take training just for the sake of taking it…training attendance must be for a purpose; to fill a void in overall career development." SE#7 shared that mentors guide the mentee in the training and development planning process. SE#7 said: "careerists working with supervisors and mentors must understand how the training fits into their overall profile and what added benefits will the training serve."

SE#4 added that a good or solid mentor could advise the mentees "on training opportunities and how best to structure their educational development." SE#4 added that "senior level mentors can provide guidance on what type training and developmental opportunities are best for senior-level advancement."

Research Question 2: What are participants' perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities? Theme 5, *Mentoring is essential in leadership development and into the African American career advancement*. Mentorship programs provide aspiring leaders career guidance and access to senior leadership. SE#3 shared that mentorship programs provide African Americans opportunities to "perform assignments/projects with visibility, and they must have someone to advocate for them." In this stance, mentors who are well-established SES members in the organization could vouch for their leadership competency during the selection and hiring process for SES positions.

In most of the personal account of the participants, they shared that the visibility

and opportunity of African Americans to demonstrate their leadership competency were among their disadvantages over other aspiring leaders. SE#1 stated: "Lack of opportunity to gain visibility working directly with senior leadership can be a disadvantage." SE#1 further stated that an effective mentorship program allows aspiring leaders to "lead and have responsibility for high visibility efforts." SE#3 recalled the importance of visibility in the progression of African Americans in supervisory positions. SE#3 shared experiences involving White counterparts who progressed in their careers because of securing visible leadership responsibilities in the organization. SE#3 shared the following:

> I watched as they gradually were moved into jobs with greater responsibility shortly after hired. I observe them advancing into jobs with greater levels of responsibility and with visibility. They were allowed the opportunity to show their leadership skills presenting briefings and engaging with senior-level officials (SESs/General Officers). Black engineers hired around the same time as the White engineers did not receive the same opportunity to prove themselves.

The second category, *establishment of personal connection and influence*, emerged based on the perceived value of the mentor who can vouch for the aspiring leaders' competency during the selection and hiring process for SES positions. Mentoring is essential, particularly among African Americans who are yet to establish connections with senior leadership. SE#6 stressed that during the hiring process, "the hiring official happened to hire those they feel comfortable with." An African American with a mentor on the hiring panel could influence the selection board to hire a mentee. SE#7 described

the "comfort" in the mentor-mentee relationship and stressed that "good mentoring must

involve establishing a personal relationship with the individual mentored." SE#7

described experiences in establishing a personal relationship with a mentee by sharing:

> I ask questions to help the mentee focus on thinking about their career and
>
> personal goals for themselves as well as, the direction they were seeking in their
>
> careers. I realize that I may come across as being very brutal … but my goal was
>
> focused on helping the person I was mentoring…not harm them. The mentee, if
>
> they are open and receptive, can take away something important that adds value to
>
> their growth, development, and help to move forward.

SE#7 differentiated that this type of relationship might not emerge from a formal

mentoring program. SE#7 said: "…formal mentoring does not normally allow such

connectivity between mentor and mentee to occur." SE#4 was in agreement with SE#7

stating: "I believe informal mentoring allows the mentee to select a suitable mentor of

their choosing and allows for natural interaction between mentor and mentee." SE#4

further claimed: "I am not against formal mentoring, but I do think that informal

mentoring also allows for greater flexibility. Under an informal mentoring process, the

mentee can pick up the phone and connect with their mentee at any time." SE#4 stated

that a mentoring program should offer a candid conversation between the mentor and

mentee. This relationship would allow "immediate and regular feedback" of the concerns

that would impact leadership succession. SE#4 also stated: "I think it is important to be

able to tell the mentee what they need to hear, rather than what they want to hear." SE#4

further claimed that with this informal process, the mentee can connect with their mentor

and gain trust."

Research Question 3: What are participants' perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities? This research question can be answered by addressing the first theme, "*Progression to SES requires mentor for career guidance and sponsor to vouch for technical competency*; followed by addressing the second theme, "*Barriers to African American leadership representation*; and by addressing the third theme, "*Involvement in social organizations strengthens network for career advancement*."

The first theme, *Progression to SES requires mentor for career guidance and sponsor to vouch for technical competency*, emerged from the three categories. Note that advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks is not limited to the SES development programs. All nine participants in this study shared the importance of mentors and sponsors who can guide the aspiring leaders either for personal growth or for career progression. However, all nine participants agreed that access to sponsors and good mentors is highly competitive. This high competition results in the inability of African Americans to directly acquire for themselves sponsors and mentors who could help them advance in the SES ranks. SE#9 said that there was "lack of access to the right networks of individuals that can make a difference and advocate for emerging African American leaders when competing for SES jobs and help prepare these potential executive leaders for SES jobs." SE#9 demonstrated the importance of a mentor in the case of Condoleezza Rice. SE#9 shared:

For example, look at Condoleezza Rice, an African American female, who rose to two of the highest positions in federal government as Secretary of State followed by National Security Advisor. Early on in her career she had a network of supporters and sponsors who groomed her to excel in her job and career.

The second category, *Visibility and opportunity to access SE qualifications require a good network*, stressed that mentors and sponsors are forms of a network that could influence the selection and hiring process for SES positions. With a good network, African Americans would be given the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership competence. SE#3 stressed that opportunity comes along with the advocacy that mentors and sponsors could provide. SE#3 claimed that with access to senior leadership, someone could advocate for their needs, competency, and the need for career progression.

SE#9 explained that in addition to establishing good networks, it is important to establish a good relationship with the senior leadership of the organization. Establishment of networks inside and outside the organization helps in the development of a positive image. SE#9 stressed:

> "Outside business networks offer an opportunity to connect with and gain insights to career advancement opportunities, as well as allow you to build a positive public image outside the work environment or within networks. Connections with internal and external networks allow visibility to senior leaders that may be seeking to hire at some point."

The third category, *Understanding of SES dynamics including hiring and selection process,* is a component that only mentors could share with their mentees.

Mentors, in the process, could orient the mentees with the dynamics of the SES selection process, which could be the basis for identifying the training requirements including the essential work experiences that aspiring leaders should have. SE#3 stated that individuals may need to "figure out the game and the established networks." A good understanding of the SES requirements would guide the African Americans' career planning.

SE#4 shared that mentors provide insights "on developing long-term and short-term goals, help identify developmental activities, and use influence to help advance the mentee's career." SE#4 further claimed the mentors are knowledgeable of the dynamics of the organization. The depth of knowledge allowed them to "provide insights and guidance on securing new assignments that added value to their skill sets." SE#4 also shared that "having mentors…could introduce you to others (providing for an extended network)."

Research Question 4: What are participants' perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer enhance advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities? This research question was answered based on theme 6, "*Exposure to supervisory roles provides leadership aspirant the varied opportunities*." From this emerged aggregation of four categories: (a) demonstration of leadership competency, (b) access to mentor and sponsors, (c) opportunity to establish networks, and (c) gain supervisory experiences. These categories were found to be the significant factors that enhance opportunities for African Americans to advance to the SES ranks in the DoD. The first category, *demonstration of leadership competency*,

emerged after a majority or nine of the participants revealed that African Americans' leadership roles are not visible in the organization, particularly among the senior leadership, because there have been limited opportunities for them to lead the assignments. SE#4, for instance, claimed: "There is a lack work experience in positions or areas outside of their direct career fields." For example; not gaining any cross-training or developmental work assignments in a career field or work area that is unrelated to their primary career field." SE#4 further stressed that this limitation can be observed in their lack of abilities to prepare an early career progression plan that would help them advance to the SES rank. SE#4 said: "African American's should prepare themselves early-on in their careers to advance to the SES level by taking on challenging job assignments at various grade levels leading to SES, specifically at the GS-13, GS-14, and GS-15 grade levels. By doing so, they will gain varied experience at the appropriate levels in preparation for advancing to the SES level.

The second category, *access to mentor and sponsors*, was among advantages of the aspiring leader with their exposure to supervisory positions. SE#3 commented on this benefit by sharing, "By acquiring the appropriate guidance through access to senior leadership, the doors of opportunity change… acquiring a supporting mentor and receiving one-on-one mentoring helps careerist navigate through barriers that hinder advancement."

The third category, *opportunity to establish networks*, emerged after three of the participants asserted that in securing supervisory positions, networks offer aspiring African American leaders the opportunity to reflect informally, their leadership qualities.

Participants further claimed that with the limited number of supervisory positions available, advancement of African Americans to SES would be difficult. SE#1 shared that with a well-established network, seeking out supervisory positions covering 12-months period would be enhanced. SE#1 said: "We should do all we can to ensure African American careerist get opportunities to fill key leadership positions at the 14 and 15 level.

The fourth category, *gain supervisory experience*, is a minimum requirement for African Americans to be on a short-list for consideration in filling an SES position. SE#4 shared that by acquiring a 12-month supervisor assignment, aspiring leaders gained experience that would afford them an opportunity for considered for an SES position. SE#4 shared: "Before advancing to the SES level, applicants for such jobs must be good leaders. Serving as a supervisor for 12 months or more helps to build leadership skills and prepare individuals to lead and guide others." In addition to serving as a supervisor, successful SES candidates gain experience as team leaders or group leaders to enhance their leadership skills and experience.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions through understanding the lived experiences of nine African American senior executives who participated in semistructured interviews. The data analyzed using open, axial, and selective coding process resulted in 266 codes

emerging from the open coding analysis. These codes were categorized and formed into ten categories. From these categories, axial codes emerged that were used to identify the selective codes necessary in the development of the themes in the study. Five themes emerged in the final analysis. These included:

(1)   Progression to SES requires mentor for career guidance and sponsor to vouch for technical competency and, mentoring is essential in leadership development and career progression of the African American,

(2)   Barriers to African American leadership representation,

(3)   Involvement in social organizations strengthens network for career growth,

(4)   Training the African American for career advancement would be effective with follow-on work application, and

(5)   Exposure to supervisory roles provides leadership aspirant the varied opportunities.

These themes represented the answer to the central research question: What are the perceptions of successful African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into an SES leadership position? Chapter 5 presents a detailed discussion of the themes and categories resulting from this research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

Rationale for the Study: Why and How the Study was Conducted

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore the perceptions of African American senior executives within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions by gaining an understanding of their lived experiences. The problem with the lack of senior executive leadership representation of African Americans at the DoD's SES level has changed over the years. In spite of this change, a significant gap remains in the number of African Americans hired for SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. Through an application of the snowball sampling method, nine African American SES members within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities were recruited to participate in this study.

This study was designed to examine the central research question of, "What are the perceptions of successful African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into an SES leadership position?" Four subquestions were examined to explore the perceptions of nine SES members. These subquestions address: (a) whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders, (b) whether formal mentorship programs contribute to the advancement of African Americans to the SES rank, (c) whether SES candidate development programs contribute

to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks, and (d) whether holding supervisory positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer enhance advancement opportunities of African Americans to the SES ranks. Information was collected to address the central research question, and subquestions through the application of face-to-face and telephone in-depth, semistructured interviews.

A summary of the qualitative data analysis using the provisional coding sheet and NVivo software tool indicated that the transformational leadership style is most reflective of the characteristics desired by SES leaders. The qualitative data analysis further indicated that the general perceptions of study participants are that African Americans are trained to advance to the SES rank and training is available for them to develop skills needed to enhance their opportunity to advance to the SES rank in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities.

The perceptions of participants regarding whether formal mentorship programs contribute to the advancement of African Americans to the SES positions indicate that formal mentoring programs are not favorable. Many participants indicated that formal mentoring programs in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Activities would be too restrictive for mentors and mentees to function successfully.

The general perceptions of research participants regarding whether SES candidate development programs (CDPs) contribute to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities indicate that there are various SES CDPs sponsored by federal entities external to the DoD. These programs offer developmental training for selected participants. However, they would not be of

value in advancing African Americans to the SES rank in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Activities if participants do not apply the new skills acquired upon completion of the SES CDP training.

Lastly, the research participants' perceptions of whether supervisory positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 level contribute to the advancement of African Americans to SES leadership positions in the OSD Defense Agencies, and Defense Activities, indicate that demonstrated performance in a supervisory capacity for over 18 months at the GS-15 grade level is most desirable. However, demonstration of "leadership" skills as a supervisor is even more important in advancing to the SES level. The emphasis expressed by most of the research participants related to demonstrated "leadership" skills leading a workforce rather than the performance of administrative, supervisory tasks in advancing to the SES ranks.

Considering the results of the four subquestions, findings supporting the central research question indicate various factors contribute to the promotion of African Americans to senior executive positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. These factors include: (a) technical competence, (b) having a good mentor, (c) having someone to vouch for you, (d) successful performance of various job assignments with progressive levels of responsibility, (e) leading and supervising a workforce (at the GS-15 grade level), (f) education beyond a Bachelor's degree, (g) understanding how to apply for SES positions early on in career, (h) having knowledge of how to prepare SES executive core qualification statements (ECQs), (i) ability to effectively communicate orally and in writing, (j) securing support of mentors or

sponsors, and (k) securing only those jobs that help to acquire the right skills and enhance abilities to perform the ECQs.

Interpretation of Findings

Semistructured interviews conducted for this study, coupled with the use of a qualitative questionnaire and analysis of supporting provisional coding sheets revealed perceptions and lived experience of nine current SES members in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities concerning personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into the SES Corps. Their input provided insights into the role of African American senior executives in addressing the representation problem of the lack of African Americans at the SES level in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Activities. Additionally, their insights provided insights into measures to employ leading to the enduring establishment of career progression strategies for African American careerist desiring to advance their careers to the SES level in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. An analysis and assessment of findings, presented with conclusions address the research questions identified in this study.

Perceptions of Attributes and Factors that Contribute to Promotion into the SES

The primary research question for this study was: What are the perceptions of successful African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities about personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into an SES leadership position? Findings in Chapter 4 addressing this question indicate that participants believe many factors contributed to their promotion into the SES Corps. Some of these facts include: strong family support; having a good

sponsor or someone to positively validate your qualifications, abilities, and character; support from mentor(s); having effective technical abilities; possessing an educational level beyond a Bachelor's degree; ability to work effectively with others in achieving a common goal; and mobility are factors contributing to their promotion to the SES level.

Findings listed in Chapter 4 further reveal that study participants believe that succeeding to the SES level requires potential candidates for SES to hold certain professional qualities. Some of these qualities include the ability to communicate both orally and in writing; ability to demonstrate good work ethics to include being exceptionally good at their jobs at every stage of their career; and willfully taking on challenging assignments with greater levels of responsibility and visibility.

Several of the SES participants cited mobility as a factor for successful advancement to the SES ranks of the DoD. One SES pointed out that in seeking advancement to the SES level, African American careerist must be willing to get outside of their comfort zone. They must have a willingness to work different assignments at different locations outside their normal work environment, and seek to expand their professional networks working with different people. The SES members interviewed also pointed out that African Americans who become settled or complacent in their jobs and do not seek to take on new, challenging, and innovative assignments advancing change, may well hinder their development and opportunity to advance to the SES level. One research participant stated that in becoming a member of the SES Corps African Americans must be players rather than observers. They must be willing to take on the hard work assignments, and always seek to look for the next challenge.

A common perception of the senior executives interviewed indicates that in advancing to the SES ranks, candidates for SES must demonstrate abilities to perform each of the executive core qualifications (ECQs). These ECQs established by the United States Office of Personnel Management include: (a) leading change, (b) leading people, (c) results driven, (d) business acumen, and (e) building coalitions (OPM, 2010). Further, in preparing to advance into the SES, the perception of the SES participants is that African Americans must take a direct interest in their careers and seek to secure only jobs that add value in acquiring skills needed to enhance their ability to perform the ECQs.

The findings from the central research question are in alignment with research connected with transformational leadership concepts, and leadership qualities cited in the OPM SES guidelines (OPM, 2010). Transformational leaders have the ability to work with others in bringing about strategic change, both within and outside the organization, to meet organizational goals. They also have the ability to "motivate and lead people towards meeting the organization's vision, mission, and goals," as well as, the ability to make decisions that produce high-quality results." Considering transformational leadership theory coined by Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass (1985), perceptions presented by the SES research participants indicate that SES members should seek to grow others (as mentors and sponsors), as well as motivate followers to move beyond their self-interests.

As further reported by Morreale (2009), in changing the dynamics of the public sector, as large numbers of senior public managers retire, input to the central research question emphasized the need for current SES members to support the development of

new leaders. They must be willing to share their perspectives and concepts on factors that enabled themselves to advance into the SES Corps. Taking an interest in reviewing the ECQs outlined in the Guide to SES (OPM, 2010) is a helpful tool for African Americans to review and understand if they have a sincere interest in advancing to the SES ranks within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. By reviewing the ECQs, knowledge can be gained to express leadership talents in the same manner as indicated by Morreale in relaying development of the ECQs supporting local, county, and state organizations.

Perceptions of Training Contributing to African Americans' Advancement to SES

The first subquestion was: What are participants' perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities? In understanding SES leadership styles related to this research question, the research conducted indicates that the transformational leader style is most applicable. Leaders seek to inspire and motivate others to perform beyond their current capability (Bass 1985). About training and development, the transformational leader uses available training as a means to further develop emerging leaders and advance the organization's purpose. Also, they seek to ensure individual and organizational needs are aligned, help followers achieve more than they envisioned and instill confidence in followers to encourage them in achieving the organization's mission through the application of training acquired. The concern raised by most of the SES participants is about how training acquired is applied and transitioned into an enduring benefit to both the employee as well as the organization.

The themes and codes resulting from responses to subquestion 1 indicated that the interview participants believe many African Americans are well trained and have the opportunity to attend training offered to enhance their potential to advance as transformational leaders at the SES level. Social learning studies and theories formed by both Bandura (1974, 1977) and Vygotsky (1962) on human growth and development set the theoretical foundation linked to an individual's growth and development related to how an individual process information or apply training to career advancement. Understanding of social learning theories helps to understand the central theory of whether or not the advancement of African Americans to SES positions is caused by the lack of growth and development through education and training rather than other theoretical factors.

Training is available and African Americans have access to the same training opportunities as everyone else within the DoD workforce. The issue is that after completing training, there are no opportunities in place or post-training assignments that allow direct application of newly acquired skills or jobs that offer greater levels of responsibility. One research participant commented that upon completion of training such as, training at the Federal Executive Institute (FEI) or at one of the senior-service Colleges (i.e., National Defense University, Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy or National War College), if the African American attendee had not served in a job as a supervisor, he/she should be offered opportunity for placement into the next available superior position. An alternative would be to assign the employee to a detail supervisory position for 12 months or longer, rather than placing the

employee in a non-supervisory position performing work that does not offer application of new skills or opportunity for further growth and development towards the SES level.

Another SES research participant commented that there existed targeted training in the DoD. What this means is that although training opportunities are available, there is a probability that African Americans are not getting the desired training with the right follow-on job assignments needed to advance their careers to the SES level. The analysis of the research conducted indicates several research participants believe that although African Americans do have the opportunity to receive training and do attend training, upon completion of training, leadership skills are not being put to good use considering there are no follow-on assignments allowing application of leadership skills acquired through training. In most cases, upon completion of training, African Americans return to the same work environment performing the same work and never actually apply the newly acquired skills. The SES participants also noted that although training is available, another issue is that African Americans lack opportunity and lack access to the appropriate training that could help them to grow as leaders at the SES level. Also, African Americans lack understanding of what type of training is important. Because of this lack of knowledge, their career growth in advancing their careers to the SES level is hindered. For example, African Americans lack access to leadership training focused on the development of public speaking skills and in some cases they attend training that does not add any value to their career progression towards the SES level.

Findings resulting from the first subquestion are in alignment with research on social learning as expressed by Bandura (1974). One of Bandura's concepts of learning

theories indicates that an individual's response to an event is automatic or produced

involuntarily as a result of the situation exposed. Also, this research is in alignment with

research recited by Lunenburg (2011) addressing Bandura and Locke (2003) research on

self-efficacy. Bandura and Locke assert that employees with high self-efficacy are

confident that they can learn and perform a specific task at a certain level within the

organization based on their personal motivation and without any pressure from others. As

further indicated by Bandura and Locke, these individuals have a tendency to be

persistent even when problems surface; plus, their ability and willingness to acquire

training and apply skills learned from training is a determinant of their potential job

performance. These factors indicate that work assignments following developmental

training would allow African Americans to experience actual situations learned from

training activities and afford them an opportunity to apply leadership skills acquired from

training in a direct/hands-on environment.

Perceptions of Formal Mentorship Programs Contributing Advancement to SES

The second subquestion examined perceptions on whether formal mentorship

programs contribute to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within

the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. Subquestion 2 was also

designed to help determine the desired leadership traits of senior executives in

contributing to the advancement of African Americans to senior leadership positions in

the DoD. The theme resulting from subquestion 2 indicated that formal mentorship

programs are not well received for application in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and

Defense Field Activities, however mentoring of upcoming African American leaders is

needed. This result indicates that SES leaders do take an interest in their followers and seek to engage closely with them without using power or moral leadership as described by Bass (2008). Bass noted that transformational leadership involves the leader taking a direct interest in evaluating the follower's level of maturity. Transformational leaders also show concern for the well-being of others, the organization, and society.

Vygotsky's (1978a) theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) best explains the need for mentors as addressed by the participants of this study. This theory affirmed that people with lower or less advanced skills can learn more advanced skills by modeling skills displayed by more advanced and experienced individuals. Data collected through this research supports the concept that individuals assisted by a more senior or advanced skilled leader or have the support of other leaders as they seek to advance to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities can better improve their skills by working with mentors or selective role models. By working with mentors, those desiring to advance to the SES may reach their level of ZPD as knowledge is expanded and senior executive level tasks are accomplished as a result of skills acquired by working with their mentors or role models.

According to SE#3, formal mentoring programs of the past in the DoD have failed. SE#3 further stated, that good mentoring must involve establishing a personal relationship with the individual mentored…formal mentoring does not normally allow such connectivity between mentor and mentee to occur. Informal mentoring occurs when the senior executive is proactive in approaching emerging leaders and freely offering their support and advice in a manner that determines that the employee is receptive to the

information or guidance provided, and some form of value added. SE#7 commented that "the person who mentored me approached me, tapped me on the shoulder, and his leadership, advice, guidance, our connectivity resulted in a lasting relationship until his death." More than one mentor is needed considering mentors tell mentees things that they may not want to hear but need to know for growth. Mentors should seek to help the person mentored become successful. In accomplishing this objective, the mentor may need to tell the mentee things that they may not exactly want to hear. A formal mentoring program may not allow for this form of connectivity to be established between the assigned mentor and mentee or allow their relationship as well as communications level to truly connect.

Another concept of the theme resulting from subquestion 2 is that mentoring is a two-way process; both mentor and mentee must feel comfortable with one another. One SES participant indicated that some African Americans do not feel comfortable having a Caucasian mentor advising them. This thought process must be overcome to allow mentoring to be effective. Taking into consideration this manner of thinking, another study participant noted that regardless of racial demographics, mentors should feel comfortable talking about the same things with African American mentees as with Caucasian mentees or others with various demographical profiles. According to SE#7, the mentor should seek to put the mentee at ease by talking with them, being truthful, or by asking questions to help mentee think about their career. Another comment noted by SE#7 is that the mentee, if open and receptive to the mentor, can take away something important that adds value to their growth and development as well as, enable the mentee

to move forward in their career.

A final theme stemming from subquestion 2 concerning mentoring is associated with work ethics regarding willingness to take on new work challenges. In mapping out plans to advance to the SES level, SE#7 noted that African Americans must be players rather than observers and always seek to look for the next challenge. SE #7 further noted that having a Senior leader (regardless of race) for a mentor can help individuals find the next challenge considering mentors may be aware of assignments not always publicized on public websites that their mentees may desire to consider. Senior level mentors may also be aware of assignments only available to employees internal to the organization or DoD employees. Individuals who have flexible work ethics in relation their willingness to take on new and challenging assignments are prime candidates for taking on challenging positions recommended by mentors or Senior leaders acting as coaches or sponsors to various individual careerists to include African Americans.

Although the senior level mentors could just as well share their knowledge about new assignments with any workforce employee(s), as a mentor they may provide their mentee direct guidance and advice about specific assignments; plus, inform the mentee on advantages and disadvantages regardless of whether or not the assignment offers career advancement options.

Findings from subquestion 2 addressing mentorship programs support the concept that by banding together to help others, there must be trust amongst members of the African American demographic group. As asserted by Sumner (1906), in an environment of scarcity, individuals need to band together in groups to compete successfully with

other groups for survival. Llopis (2015) further asserted that in the current work environment, to compete effectively, a scarcity mentality must be embraced. By forming a scarcity mentality, individuals are empowered to compete better and grow considering they are forced to remain focused, seek out opportunities in everything, take on an entrepreneurial attitude, and anticipate the unexpected, (as cited by Llopis). Findings from this research support the concept that with the insufficient number of African Americans appointed to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, there is a need for African Americans to work together and help others in the group to advance towards the SES ranks. As mentors, SES African American leaders must help mentees remain focused on working towards the accomplishment of their career goals in spite of any roadblocks they may face.

Transformational leadership theory coined by Burns (1978), further developed by Bass (1985), and most recent research cited by Schoemaker (2013); provides insights about a leaders ability to lead through change requiring earned authority, authenticity, commitment, mastery of communication and consistency of message. Taking into consideration transformational leadership concepts; the themes and codes linked to subquestion 2 indicate that SES members are individuals who have particular skills or characteristics that enable them to motivate followers (through mentoring). SES members also encourage followers to move beyond their self-interests, regardless of the hard challenges they may face, and commit themselves to organizational goals, thereby performing beyond expectations.

Perceptions of SES Candidate Development Programs and Advancement to SES

The third interview subquestion was: What are participants' perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities? The themes and codes resulting from subquestion 3 indicate that SES candidate development programs are desirable if implemented in a manner that allows for post development assignments and immediate future placement of graduates into SES positions. Posttraining or follow-on positions are needed to allow reinforcement of skills acquired and to better position African Americans for advancement to SES positions as jobs become available. As previously noted about training, social learning concepts expressed by Bandura (1974) best support the need for reinforcement of skills through hands-on application following completion of training and development programs. As asserted by Bandura, a concept of learning theory indicates that an individual's response to an event is automatic or produced involuntarily as a result of the situation to which exposed. Direct follow-on work assignments following completion of the SES CDP would allow African Americans to experience actual situations learned from the CDP activity, and afford them the opportunity to apply leadership skills acquired from training in a direct/hands-on environment continuously.

Perceptions of Supervisory Positions Contributing to Advancement to SES

Subquestion 4 addresses: What are participants' perceptions of supervisory leadership position at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer in enhancing advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the OSD,

Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities? Themes and codes resulting from subquestion 4 reveal that serving in a supervisory leadership position at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer is very important and should be accomplished to allow African Americans to advance to the SES ranks. As indicated by several participants, the problem is that within today's workforce, there are fewer supervisory level positions to fill; therefore opportunities for African Americans to perform in a supervisory capacity are also limited. In line with possessing demonstrated supervisory skills, successful African American SES members must have the skills and abilities to lead people, considering not all supervisors are capable of leading others in achieving common goals or mission objectives.

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological research study resulted in five limitations. The first limitation is that the results of this study are not generalizable. The snowball sampling processed used to select participants limited the study and results to a population of African American senior executives who have advanced in their careers to the SES level within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. Therefore, this study used a phenomenological research design of at least nine African American senior executives to explore their experiences about advancing to the SES level. Given this research was limited to nine participants, the results of this research are not representative of the experiences of all African American SES members within the DoD as a whole. A future study could expand the sample population across the DoD to include populations above a sample size of nine African American senior executives to achieve a broader

understanding of the issues that impact the advancement African Americans into the DoD

SES ranks. Application of a sampling strategy other than the snowball sampling method

could apply. Another form of purposive sampling that would allow for more than nine

participants in the study sample could be applied. Also, considering a sampling of other

demographic populations, this study was limited to only African American SES

members. Future study may include members of other minority demographic groups

impacted by the same issue of the lack of representation in the SES ranks within the

OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities.

The second limitation relates to the potential of self-report or social desirability

bias existing when conducting the research. This limitation focused on the probability

that African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense

Field Activities perceived as being positive during the interviews may not have

responded honestly to the interview questions. In collecting the data for this research, it is

assumed that all senior executives interviewed were honest and responded candidly to

each question asked of them. Further, it is assumed that all participants honestly and

openly answered the interview questions sharing their perceptions about the questions

asked and provided examples to enhance understanding. Many of the participants

interviewed expanded their inputs in responding to the questions asked; thereby,

providing more information supporting the research. Social learning as addressed by

Miller (2005) indicates that positive reinforcement of an idea or concept adds value to

understanding and the learning process. Considering this concept of social learning, input

provided by the participants reflect their desire to positive reinforce their concepts of

understanding actions or processes that would add value to the future development of

African Americans desiring to advance to the SES level.

The third limitation is related to self-report data. In this qualitative

phenomenological study, there was the possibility that participants would not accurately

or fully describe or reveal their true leadership attributes. Each participant was assumed

to have openly shared information about themselves and their experiences in advancing

to the SES level during the interviews.

The fourth limitation applied to the data collection process. Considering the busy

schedules of the Senior Executive participants, interviews took place over lunch periods,

after normal work hours, or towards the end of the work day for approximately one hour.

Some interviews required additional time beyond the initial one hour scheduled

timeframe. At the discretion and approval of the SES interviewed, some interviews

encompassed an additional thirty minutes. Telephone conferences conducted with

participants within the National Capital Region (NCR) allowed interviews to take place if

the participant was not available for face-to-face interviews or worked outside of the

NCR. During the face-to-face interviews, observations of the surrounding environment

were made to include office setting and expressions of the participant. Interviews did not

include the use of Video conference devices such as Skype video capability and

FaceTime thereby, limiting the ability to record the room decorum, gestures, and the

body language of the Senior Executive interviewed. After completion of each interview,

the data collected was transcribed and provided back to each participant for review and

changes. Upon reviewing the transcripts, some participants clarified their input and added

additional information adding value to their input to the interview.

The fifth limitation to this study applied to the gender composition of the study. There was no limitation of this study to only include African American males or only females. The sample population for this study included both African American male and female members of the DoD SES Corps. However, far more males than females were available to participate in this research. A sample representation of an equal number of African American female participants or a limitation of only female participants may have resulted in a different outcome of the data collected. A similar future study may be conducted to assess the perceptions of a sample consisting of only African American females.

Recommendations

The results of this study may be used to expand research to advance social change. The focus of social change may be in the areas of developing, mentoring, recruiting, and selecting not only African Americans for SES positions, but also other underrepresented demographic, racial groups to include members of the Hispanic/Latino American, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Native Hawaiian /Pacific Islanders. The most recent OPM demographics study finalized in 2012 and published in September 2013 indicated that Caucasian Americans occupy 80.12% of SES positions across the federal sector to include the DoD. This same report reflects that African Americans hold 11.42%, Hispanic/Latino Americans hold 4.08%, Asians 3.05%, American Indian/Alaskan Natives hold 1.16%, and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders hold 0.13% of SES positions (OPM, 2013a). Considering these statistical facts

and figures, mentoring, training, and overall career development programs must be designed to improve the imbalances and representation of all demographic groups in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities SES Corps. Responses received from all research participants reflect support of this concept.

Another recommendation based on insights provided by the research participants is that current SES members should be proactive in serving as mentors and sponsors to emerging African American leaders. As noted by several of the SES research participants, in addressing the representation of African Americans in the DoD SES Corps, current DoD SES members should work jointly in identifying mentees who want to be players and have the drive to advance to the SES level. To add, SES leaders participating in this research suggested that current SES members must not only encourage careerists to diversify their experience at the headquarters level and field level activities, but also create innovative ways to pave the way for job placement and trade-offs. Positions would be made available to enable emerging leaders to acquire the experience needed to advance further in their careers to the SES level.

The resulting themes and codes applying to this research indicate that it is highly critical for the DoD to develop and implement measures leading to the establishment of job placement opportunities for African American. This form of job placement would be immediately following completion of long-term training and development programs such as attendance at the Federal Executive Institute or senior-service Colleges (i.e., the National Defense University, Dwight D. Eisenhower School for National Security and Resource Strategy; National War College, etc.). Job placement is critical if true change

leading to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions in the OSD, Defense

Agencies, and Defense Field Activities is to occur.

This study could also be adopted to facilitate designing improved training

programs for emerging SES leaders and advancing social change across all

underrepresented demographic groups into the DoD SES Corps. SE#5 asserted that

"minorities need to be in programs like the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF)

where they can be drawn into a "chute" for success and opportunity early and be prepared

to assume future SES positions in the DoD." Successful applicants of the current PMF

program become eligible for appointment to a PMF position within a participating federal

agency (OPM, 2015). Training and development programs completed by African

Americans as well as, members of other underrepresented demographic groups, could be

designed in the same manner as the PMF. By modeling the PMF, a process for direct

placement of graduates into positions that enhance their opportunity to secure a

permanent SES position within the OSD, Defense Agency, and Defense Field Activities

could be achieved.

Several research participants indicated that employees at the junior levels should

be encouraged to work towards planning their careers early on. Considering this

comment, the results of this research may also be adopted to advance training processes

through the design and implementation of an official career tracking system for DoD

employees at the GS-11 through GS-15 grade levels. This form of tracking system would

allow follow-on planning and monitoring of the career growth of careerist as well as,

tracking of job assignments, training, and developmental opportunities. Implementation

of an official career tracking system would allow employees to work with mentors or sponsors in determining training and development needs, job assignments, as well as follow-on work assignments that will best enhance their opportunities for career growth and help careerist secure SES level positions following completion of long-term training.

Implications

The results of this study have several implications leading to social change within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities. In meeting its mission critical requirements in responding to a dynamic national security environment, the DoD has worked diligently to create a personnel recruitment system that is flexible, fair, equitable, and free of processes that could lead to discrimination as it seeks to attract, recruit, assign, and retain a high-quality workforce. Research indicates that the DoD continues to face challenges in making improvements to the demographics of African Americans in its SES Corps. As of 2007, African Americans represented 6.1% of employees at the senior executive level and 17.8% of the permanent federal workforce compared to 10.1% in the civilian labor force (U.S. Government Accountability Office [GAO], 2008a). Since 2007, statistics reflect African Americans appointed to the SES level have improved escalating from 6.1 % in 2007 to 11.42% in 2013; however, there remains a gap in the number of African Americans appoint at the SES level of the DoD compare to the percentage of Caucasian American SES's appointed, (OPM 2013a). This research sought to offer insights into processes that may be implemented to improve this percentage gap and explore opportunities for African Americans to advance successfully to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities.

According to Creswell (2007), social constructivism presents another worldview in advancing social change through the examination of various viewpoints of study participants concerning a particular matter of concern. As asserted by Bergers and Luckmann (1966), the overarching concept of social constructivism is based on the premise that an individual's knowledge and belief of what is reality becomes embedded into the institutional structure of society. Considering this philosophy of Berger and Luckman, a person's perception of a matter or their perception of reality is considered to be socially constructed. In other words, over time the perceptions of others on a matter of concern, when disclosed to society can eventually be consistently embedded or adopted into normal/everyday operations and business processes.

The results of this research based on the perceptions, viewpoints, or perceived reality of nine current senior executives in the DoD, indicate that the advancement of African Americans into SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities requires proactive support from current SES members. Current SES members must be willing to serve as mentors and sponsors to support emerging African American careerists in advancing to the SES leadership level within the DoD. By evaluating the perceptions of current SES members employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, innovative measures leading to changes will occur. Specifically, change will occur in the recruitment, training, and development of emerging African American leaders if new processes are designed to enhance opportunities for their immediate advancement to the SES level in the DoD.

Social justice refers to the idea of creating a society in which the rights and privileges of all concerned are equal. It also takes into consideration the idea that an institution based on the principles of equality and solidarity understands the values of human rights and recognizes the dignity of every human being (Rawls, 1971). As further asserted by Rawls, the concept of social justice is reflective of society in which there exists an appropriate distribution of benefits and burdens for all concerned. Bass (1985) asserted that transformational leaders are individuals who have particular skills or characteristics that enable them to motivate followers to move beyond their self-interests and commit themselves to organizational goals, thereby performing beyond expectations. In advancing social change focused on the development of African American leaders, this research reflects that transformational SES leaders currently employed within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities must take on a leading role in mentoring emerging African American leaders. They must proactively lead efforts to design and implement job opportunities for the development of African American careerist and enhance their abilities to compete effectively and secure SES leadership positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities.

Conclusions

This study examined and discussed lived experiences of African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities that contributed to their promotion into SES Corps. The democratic idea of equality concerning the idea that "all men are created equal" as expressed by Thomas Jefferson in forming the Declaration of Independence, supports the idea that rights and social justice

in the interest of the whole DoD workforce should apply to all rather than a selected few. Concerning this research, to promote equality for the whole workforce thereby enhancing democratic principles would require designing measures to change the representation of African Americans in the SES Corps in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, applying innovative processes leading to radical and immediate change.

The workforce imbalances related to the representation of African Americans in SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities identified in this research and recommended actions focused on advancing improvements in the SES recruitment process cannot be over-looked. True change can only occur as a result of actions taken to advance social change. In advancing social change leading to improved equality at grades leading to the SES levels, action must be taken to reform the SES development and hiring process. Concerning John Locke's views on equality whereas he noted: "power and jurisdiction are reciprocal… no one has more than another," equality of all people is the tap-root of democracy. As asserted by Clancy (1950) and further reaffirmed by Gowdy (2011), without democracy all would not be endowed with equal rights or with inalienable rights.

Without social change through the implementation of the recommendations addressed in this study, an equal opportunity will not exist for African Americans of the DoD workforce to pursue career advancement opportunities at the top civilian ranks of the DoD. There would not exist opportunities to pursue life, liberty, and happiness in an equivalent manner as the majority demographic group (Caucasian Americans) that

dominates the top-level SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, (Nelson, 2011).

As noted by one SES participant, "There is no such thing as culture change. What can change is behavior. Consequence changes behavior. There must be consequences for not doing the right thing. You cannot depend on goodwill or kind natures."To ensure change takes place, correct imbalances, and improve the representation of African Americans in the SES ranks of the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities, radical and innovative change must take place. It must take place through the implementation of new and innovative personnel policies across the DoD that allow for a more flexible developmental process for African American careerist in a manner that does not hinder equality but rather allow forming of a racially balanced SES level workforce. Expansion of this research is encouraged to advance change in the representation of SES members within all underrepresented minority demographic groups across the DoD.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation Request to DoD to Conduct Research

May 12, 2014

Good Day,

I am a Doctoral candidate attending Walden University. I am completing my dissertation for my PhD program and I am seeking to do my research on the advancement of African Americans in the Department of Defense (DoD), Senior Executive Service Corps. My dissertation topic is "Exploring the Lack of African Americans in the Department of Defense, Senior Executive Service Corps."

In supporting my dissertation, my goal is to conduct a qualitative phenomenological research study to explore the personal perceptions of at least 9 current members of the DoD SES Corp about their personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion to SES and seek to gain an understanding of their lived experiences in advancing to the SES leadership level in the DoD. Information offered during this study by the participants would be their personal perceptions and not intended to be official position of DoD as a whole.

My overarching interview question is: "What are the perceptions of successful African American Senior DoD Executives about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into the SES Leadership?" The four subquestions to be explored during the interview process include:

1. What are participants' perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense

Field Activities?

2. What are participants' perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

3. What are participants' perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

4. What are participants' perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer in enhance advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?

This study will not involve use of any DoD resources; it is not DoD funded, and it will be conducted outside the work environment (non-DoD time) using face-to-face phone interviews to collect data.

The study participants will be recruited using non-DoD sources such as via their Linkedin email address or personal email address, and phone numbers. As noted their personal perspectives will be assessed; not the DoD official position.

Based on my initial review of DoD Instruction 3216.02, "Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD-Supported Research," this research will not include any DoD Human subjects, facilities, funding, etc., as addressed in this instruction.

In compliance with Walden University Internal Review Board (IRB) guidelines,

the identity of all individuals involved in this research supporting my dissertation will be protected. Measures have been included in the research design to ensure that the position, identity, etc., of those interviewed is not disclosed.

In order to further comply with Walden University IRB guidelines, I am taking an extra step to ensure that the DoD does not have any concerns relative to me conducting this research to support my dissertation considering the research topic and resulting research may add value to the over the long term advancement of diversity and inclusion in the DoD SES workforce as well as, advance positive social change in the advance of African Americans to and to senior leadership positions. It may also lead to future studies internal to DoD should DoD desire to adopt information presented in my final research paper.

Please reply at your earliest convenience denoting your approval for me conduct my dissertation research on the topic noted and perimeters presented. Should there be any specific DoD related guidelines I must adhere to and denote in my final research paper, please advise.

Respectfully,

Audrea M Nelson
Walden University Student
(571) 241-7627
audrea.nelson@waldenu

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation from DoD

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS SERVICES
1155 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1155

Human Resources

JUN 23 2014

Ms. Audrea Nelson
17963 Swans Creek Lane
Dumfries, VA 22026

Dear Ms. Nelson:

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *"Exploring the Lack of African Americans in the Senior Executive Service (SES) Corps in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Defense Agencies and Defense Field Activities."* This permission includes conducting interviews with SES members in OSD, Defense Agencies and Defense Field Activities. Your research, including interviews, research and analysis, is not a part of your professional requirements and, therefore, should be conducted during non-duty hours. Finally, you may publish your findings in your dissertation.

Participation of Department of Defense (DoD) individuals in your research is strictly voluntary. In addition, the number of DoD SES participants in your research should be limited to nine current on-board DoD SES subjects. Should you desire to expand your research to include 10 or more SES members of the public (i.e., DoD retired SES members), additional approval will be required.

I understand that my responsibilities include: confirming to African American SES members DoD's cooperation and permission to conduct the study. Interviews will not take place at DoD facilities. Appropriate processes should be used to ensure that the identity of participants are protected and not disclosed in published researched documents. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Susan Yarwood

Susan A. Yarwood
Director

Appendix C: Confirmation Email that OMB Approval is not Needed

Licari, Frederick C CIV WHS ESD (US)

to **WHS**, me

Jun 1, 2014

Ms. Nelson - per your request, I am confirming that you do not need an OMB approval

for your information collection because you are not including any members of the public

as defined by OMB and the Paperwork Reduction Act. I am cc'ing the Directives

Division, however, so that they are aware that you are including members of DoD. Given

your small number, however, you may not need an internal approval from that division,

but they can advise you.

V/R

Frederick C. Licari

DoD Public Collections Clearance Officer Public Collections Program, WHS/ESD

Information Management Division (IMD)

571.372.0493

Appendix D: Invitation to Participate and Recommendation Request

Invitation to Participate and Recommendation Request

Dear Senior Executives,

My name is Audrea Nelson. You may already know me as a senior staff accountant with the Department of Defense, but I am writing to you outside this role.

I am currently a doctoral student at Walden University, and I am exploring the perceptions of African American senior executives within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions. The study is not sponsored by the Department of Defense.

I would greatly appreciate your participation.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in an interview which would take about 1 hour. Participants who are located in the National Capital Region (NCR) will take part in a face-to-face interview at a time and place that is convenient for them. However, if participants within the NCR schedule does not allow for a face-to-face interview, then participants can participate in a telephone interview. Participants who do not reside in the NCR will take part in a telephone interview. Interview participants will later be emailed the date and time of their interview session at least 2 weeks in advance.

The information from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential and no one who

participates will be identified in any of the study's report that I prepare.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to email me at

audrea.nelson@waldenu.edu or give me a call at 571-241-7627.

If you are interested in participating in the study and/or would like to recommend another

African American senior DoD executive to be a participant in this study, please complete

the questions below in a reply email to me.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and assistance with my research

project.

Sincerely,

Audrea M. Nelson audrea.nelson@waldenu.edu

571-241-7627

If you are interested in participating in the study and/or would like to recommend

another African American senior DoD executive to be a participant in the study,

please complete the questions below in a reply email to me at

audrea.nelson@waldenu.edu:

1. What is your name?

2. What is your gender?

3. What is your race (African American, Black, White, Hispanic/Latino or

Spanish, Asian, or Specify Other)?

4. What is your contact information?

5. Would be willing to share your perceptions about your personal attributes and factors that contributed to your promotion into a senior DoD executive position, which will take approximately 1 hour in a face-to-face or telephone interview?

6. If you participate in the study, would you be willing to verify the accuracy on your interview transcript that would be emailed to you at a later date after the interview has been completed and the interview has been transcribed?

7. Are there other African American senior DoD executives that you would like to recommend to be participants in this study? If so, what are their names and contact information?

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix E: Consent Form for African American Senior DoD Executives

Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a research study on the perceptions of African American senior executives within the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OS), Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions. The researcher is inviting African American DoD SES members within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Audrea Nelson, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a senior staff account with the Department of Defense, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of African American senior executives within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities of the DoD about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Take part in an in-depth face-to-face or telephone interview, which will take approximately 1 hour. The interviews will be audio-taped.

- Participate in a validity process called member checks, where you will verify the accuracy on your interview transcript that will be emailed to you at a later date after the interview has been completed and the interview has been transcribed, and provide your feedback by email or phone. This process will take approximately 25 minutes.

- This research will involve a procedure called member checking. In conducting this process, upon completion of the interview, I (the researcher) will share with you my interpretation of information acquired from the interview. I will then ask that you provided your feedback on this interpretation in order to ensure that I have accurately documented information collected.

Here are some sample questions:

1. What is your current position within your organization? If you are retired, what was your last position?

2. How long have you been a senior DoD executive?

3. What were your other positions prior to arriving at your current position?

4. What barriers did you encounter when attempting to move into the senior executive leadership position in the DoD?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress and becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

Anticipated benefits of the study include an understanding of factors that contribute to the lack of African Americans at the SES level, which may provide knowledge that encourages the recruitment and mentoring of African American employees for career advancement into the SES level.

Payment:

No compensation is offered to participants.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. Your personal information will not be used by the researcher for any purpose outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure in a locked file cabinet and password protected computer where only the researcher will have access to the records. Data will be kept for at least five years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have questions about the research, you may contact the researcher, Audrea Nelson, via 571-241-7627 or audrea.nelson@waldenu.edu. After the study is completed, a summary report of the research findings will be emailed to you. The researcher's dissertation chair is Dr. Cassandra Caldwell who can be reached at 919-508-6116 or by email at cassandra.caldwell@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By electronically signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant ————————————————

Date of consent ————————————————

Participant's Signature ————————————————

Researcher's Signature ————————————————

Audrea M. Nelson

Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Legally, an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any

other identifying marker. An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as

long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically.

Appendix F: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Introduction

• Welcome participant and introduce myself.

• Explain the general purpose of the interview and why the participant was chosen.

• Discuss the purpose and process of interview.

• Explain the presence and purpose of the recording equipment.

• Outline general ground rules and interview guidelines such as being prepared for the interviewer to interrupt to assure that all the topics can be covered.

• Review break schedule and where the restrooms are located.

• Address the assurance of confidentiality.

• Inform the participant that information discussed is going to be analyzed as a whole and participant's name will not be used in any analysis of the interview.

Discussion Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions of male and female African American senior DoD executives about the personal attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion into SES leadership positions.

Discussion Guidelines

Interviewer will explain:

Please respond directly to the questions and if you don't understand the question, please let me know. I am here to ask questions, listen, and answer any questions you might have. If we seem to get stuck on a topic, I may interrupt you. I will keep your

identity, participation, and remarks private. Please speak openly and honestly. This session will be tape recorded because I do not want to miss any comments.

General Instructions

When responding to questions that will be asked of you in the interview, please exclude all identifying information, such as your name and other parties' names. Your identity will be kept confidential and any information that will permit identification will be removed from the analysis.

Interview Questions

1. What is your current position within your organization?

2. How long have you been a senior DoD executive?

3. What were your other positions prior to arriving at your current position?

4. What barriers did you encounter when attempting to move into the senior executive leadership position in the DoD?

5. What factors do you perceive to contribute to the lack of representation of African Americans in senior executive leadership positions in the DoD?

6. What factors contribute to the success of African Americans who reach leadership positions in the DoD?

7. What personal attributes helped you in becoming a senior executive in the DoD?

8. What personal attributes prevent other African American employees in becoming senior executives in the DoD?

9. What external factors helped you become a senior executive in the DoD?

10. What do you think are external factors that might have prevented other African

Americans from becoming senior executives in the DoD?

11. What are your perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the DoD?

12. What are your perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions in the DoD?

13. What are your perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in the DoD?

14. What are your perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer in enhance advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the DoD?

15. How should African American senior executives address the representation problem in the DoD?

Conclusion

Discuss the member check process with participant, answer any questions, and thank the participant for his or her time.

Appendix G: Provisional Coding Scheme and Analysis Worksheet

Provisional Coding Scheme and Analysis Worksheet

All questions will be coded using the Theoretical Framework representing the leading parent code as identified in the provisional coding scheme and analysis worksheet shown at Appendix G, pages 123 through 129. As reflected in column "D" of this worksheet, the code TF1 will be marked if the Senior Executive's response indicates that their leadership style is more conducive to the transformational style of leadership; TF2 will be marked if the response indicates a transactional leadership style; TF3 will be marked if the response indicates a transcendental leadership style; and TF4 will be used to indicate social learning characteristics.   The subordinate research questions (SRQ) reflected in column "A" (labeled as SQR 1- SQR 4) and the subordinate interview questions (SIQ) (also in column "A" labeled as SIQ 1- SIQ 15) both serve as secondary or child codes. Based on responses received from each participant (to be recorded in column "B"), key words that trigger a relationship to one or more form of leadership styles (coded as T1, T2, T3, or T4 in column "D") will be recorded in column "C" of the coding chart. Additional emerging codes will be determined and added as data is analyzed. A separate provisional coding scheme and analysis worksheet will be prepared for each of the nine Senior Executives interviewed. Additional observations and comments will be recorded at the end of the worksheet upon completing each interview (see page 129 of the provisional coding scheme and analysis worksheet).

Appendix G continued: Provisional Coding Scheme and Analysis Worksheet

Senior Executive (SE) #_____ (List SE number assigned to participant ranging from 1

through 9)

A	B	C	D
Research Questions (RQ)	**Participants' Response**	**Open coding Terms/Words**	**Theoretical Framework (TF)/ Other data determined from coding**
Overarching RQ: RQ1. "What are the perceptions of successful African American Senior DoD Executives about attributes and factors that contributed to their promotion to SES Leadership?			o **TF1** Transformational Leadership o **TF2** Transactional Leadership o **TF3** Transcendental Leadership o **TF4** Social Learning
Research Subquestion (SRQ)			
SRQ 1. What are participants' perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the DoD?			o **TF1** Transformational Leadership o **TF 2** Transactional Leadership o **TF3** Transcendental Leadership o **TF4** Social Learning

A	B	C	D
Research Questions (RQ)	**Participants' Response**	**Open coding Terms/Words**	**Theoretical Framework (TF)/Other data determined from coding words/term**
SRQ continued			
SRQ 2. What are participants' perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?			○ **TF1** Transformational Leadership ○ **TF 2** Transactional Leadership ○ **TF3** Transcendental Leadership ○ **TF4** Social Learning
SRQ 3. What are participants' perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?			○ **TF1** Transformational Leadership ○ **TF 2** Transactional Leadership ○ **TF3** Transcendental Leadership ○ **TF4** Social Learning

A	B	C	D
Research Questions (RQ)	**Participants' Response**	**Open coding Terms/Words**	**Theoretical Framework (TF)/ Other data determined from coding**
SRQ continued			
SRQ 4. What are participants' perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer in enhance advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities SES Corps?			o **TF1** Transformational Leadership o **TF 2** Transactional Leadership o **TF3** Transcendental Leadership o **TF4** Social Learning
Subordinate Interview Question (SIQ)			
SIQ 1. What is your current position within your organization?			
SIQ 2. How long have you been a senior DoD executive?			

A	B	C	D
Research Questions (RQ)	**Participants' Response**	**Open coding Terms/Words**	**Theoretical Framework (TF)/ Other data determined from coding**
SIQ continued			
SIQ 3.What were your other positions prior to arriving at your current position?			
SIQ 4. What barriers did you encounter when attempting to move into the senior executive leadership position in the DoD?			
SIQ 5. What factors do you perceive to contribute to the lack of representation of African Americans in senior executive leadership positions in the DoD?			
SIQ 6. What factors contribute to the success of African Americans who reach leadership positions in the DoD?			
SIQ 7. What personal attributes helped you in becoming a senior executive in the DoD?			

A	B	C	D
Research Questions (RQ)	**Participants' Response**	**Open coding Terms/Words**	**Theoretical Framework (TF)/Other data determined from coding words/ term**
SIQ continued			
SIQ 8. What personal attributes prevent other African American employees in becoming senior executives in the DoD?			
SIQ 9. What external factors helped you become a senior executive in the DoD?			
SIQ 10. What do you think are external factors that might have prevented other African Americans from becoming senior executives in the DoD?			
SIQ 11. What are your perceptions on whether African Americans are trained to become senior executive leaders in the DoD?			

A	B	C	D
Research Questions (RQ)	Participants' Response	Open coding Terms/Words	Theoretical Framework (TF)/Other data determined from coding words/ term
SIQ continued			
SIQ 12. What are your perceptions of formal mentorship programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to SES positions within the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?			
SIQ 13. What are your perceptions of SES candidate development programs contributing to the advancement of African Americans to the SES ranks in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities			

A	B	C	D
Research Questions (RQ)	**Participants' Response**	**Open coding Terms/Words**	**Theoretical Framework (TF)/Other data determined from coding words/ term**
SIQ continued			
SIQ 14. What are your perceptions of whether supervisory leadership positions at the GS-14 or GS-15 grade levels for 12 months or longer enhance advancement opportunities of African Americans to SES positions in the OSD, Defense Agencies, and Defense Field Activities?			
SIQ 15. How should African American senior executives address the representation problem in the DoD?			

Additional observations and comments:

_____

_____

_____   _____

Researcher's signature   Date/Time

Appendix H: NIH Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Audrea Nelson** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 06/19/2014

Certification Number: 1489276