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Military Lives: Coaching Transitions

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Military Lives: Coaching Transitions

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is firstly to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identify. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world.

Design/methodology/approach – Underpinned by Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, the work provides a qualitative analysis data from coaching interviews with 5 veterans

Findings – The findings revealed the on-going legacy of military life and how its distinctiveness and belief centred on kinship shapes personal identity and the way they see their civilian world. The work sheds light on to the benefits of this Ricoeur's self-reflexive approach and how it can be used to provide a deeper insight in to the nature of personal transitions and how narrative can be used to expose complexities of the narratives of personal history and meaning as the narrator becomes both the seeker and what is sought.

Practical implications –the work reinforces the value of Ricoeur's self-reflexive approach identifying narrative mediating between two 'poles' of identity and the act of mimesis; prefiguration, configuration and refiguration as veterans project stories of their world and their place within it.

Originality/value – The paper provides new insights in to the important of narrative identify broadening its potential application with engagement across diverse communities, thereby providing depth and rigour of its conceptual understanding of personal identify. The work further provides insights in to the challenges facing veteran to integrate within a civilian society.

Keywords –narrative identity, military veterans, coaching, Ricoeur

Paper type - Research paper

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Introduction

Military veterans often have considerably more problems in gaining and maintaining employment than their non-veteran peers (Poppyscotland, 2015). The point of transition between the military and civilian would appear to be very challenging for veterans, of liminal magnitude, as they have to find not only an alternative job but an alternative lifestyle (Walker, 2012) which may have severe and long-term consequences on their personal and economic well-being. Retirement from the military is a very different experience from retirement from conventional civilian life and even those well prepared, the cultural difference can come as a surprise as leaving military service can be felt as a severance from a deeply engrained way of being (Dryburgh, 2012; Fraser, 2015). This is a challenging life transition that impact on personal identify and undermining personal sense of meaning and life purpose, with 27% of leavers saying re-entry was difficult for them (Bergman, et al, 2014) and acknowledge a feeling of 'loss' (Jolly, 1996; Walker, 2012).

In short many veterans have long term issues in reconciling their civilian and military identity (Higate, 2001) which has a major impact on key life trajectories as they remain captives of their past (Higate, 2001) presenting challenges in recognising who they are (Teachman and Tedrow, 2007) but also stigmatising who they are not. This has a profound impact on their ability to fully engage in society; for example, it is reported that unemployment amongst veterans aged 18-49 is almost twice that of the non-veteran. Further UK veterans (aged 16-44 years) are three times more likely to have mental health disorders than non-veterans of the same age (Fear et al., 2010; Fossey, 2012) with a prevalence of depression and alcohol misuse a theme that has been occurring for many years (Fear et al., 2007; Fossey, 2010; Fox, 2010). Veterans who saw active service in Iraq or Afghanistan had substantial increase in risk of alcohol misuse, and reservists with similar service are nearly three times as likely to have PTSD (Iversen, 2009; Milliken, Auchterlonie and Hoge, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is twofold; firstly, to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identify. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world. We employ

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coaching as an enabler of transition and a source of research data. We begin with a consideration of Ricoeur's (1984) hermeneutic theory of narrative identity which underpins our approach to working with veterans.

Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity and military lives

Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (1984; 1985) offers insights in to meanings and linguistic mediators in the shaping of identity, projecting narrative as a living concept which can be employed to gain greater insight into identity in organisational contexts (Brown, 2001; Coupland, 2007). Narrative identity theory focuses on representing how we interpret reality and re-display it to ourselves throughout our lives. We create a self-reflexive framework that enables this construction of self. This is influenced by the interactions with others and is temporal in nature encompassing a multiplicity of ongoing revisions (Brown, 1998) as the individual attempts to construct an ongoing dynamic yet coherent interpretation of self as they move through time and space taking on different roles and relationships (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995). It is also entwines in our actions and employment of cultural products such as car, cloths, titles etc.

Ricoeur refers to this process projection and imitation as "mimesis" creating reflections or interpretations of the real world. It involves the act of arranging of events that fashion a plot, that collates and narrates one's life experiences in order to make sense of the world setting its' own protocols and coherence. Constantly in a state of flux, looking back whilst projecting forwards, negotiating and adapting but contained within the author's temporal present (Ricoeur, 1992; Mallett and Wapshott, 2011).

Here we distinguish between ipse and idem identity, that is between 'the self' and 'the same' (Ricoeur, 1992: 117-8) or a generalised other that is dynamic and constructs roles in response to our interactions with others, who I am changing through time shaped to the needs to accommodate the generalised other, altering from moment to moment (ipse – the self). This retains a sense of sameness, with change going unnoticed but producing an evolving autobiography. Our fixed idem is shaped by our memories which in turn influences our expectations, and although we feel the same person, we are different, maintaining a sustained sense of selfhood (idem – the same) entwined narrative based episodic stories

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that shapes us and re-shapes us without end (Ricoeur, 1991). This is a subtle journey, where the tensions of difference provide greater insight in to understanding the full dimensions and consequences of personal identity. It uncovers an inherent multiplicity in our personal identities governed by our perceptions of contexts; we perceive, act and present ourselves differently dependent on our needs, wants and goals. Each time our stories are told we present the potential of a multitude of cascading and competing narratives to be created, facilitating the enactment of an evolving story of overlapping and subsuming plots exerting a pervasive influence on our unfolding day-to-day life and world outlook.

Ricoeur, (1984) introduces St Augustine's 'threefold present' (the past, present and future) and Aristotle's Poetics and 'emplotment' and 'mimesis'; (prefigurations of collective references; (present) presenting competing fictions to be navigated and (the future) a re-configuration)). Presenting a subjective and complex interweaving of fictional and historical narrative interpreted from the narrator's perspective (as author and the subject) a flowing narrative fashioning a personal imaginative representation of the real world. A polyadic reflexivity (Laitinen, 2007) generating a dynamic and mediated narrative, continually integrating and mediating meaning (Mallett and Wapshott 2011). A narrative that moves between contrasting interpretations of the world and one's place within it, a shape-shifting epistemology that provides a broader plurality of meaning (Hefner, 2014) present radically contrasting interpretations and realignment challenges (Geertz, 1973).

Fluidity of personal interpretations can lever power to or from the author's past depending on the strength of their personal belief and the current context, presenting hegemonic tensions between individuals and their current dominated groups (Clegg, 1989) as a shared narrative is fashioned between groups (Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Brown et al., 2005). From this we develop our dispositions and life habits and social groupings, establishing our individual and collective actions and rituals, what we do and who we do it with.

Interpretations of being are idiosyncratic in nature but are also shaped by the local context and therefore can be seen to be constructed of and constituted by our local backgrounds. This includes our relations and interactions with others (Walker, 2012) thereby enacting a

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transient self, a collaboratively shaped and constructed self that cannot be defined without reference to others (Ybema et al., 2009). Temporal definitions of who we are, 'who we want to be', who we are not an intersubjective and dialogical attainment of self that provide interpretations of meaning that are concurrently historically and culturally situated (Forster, 2011) but gradually shifting.

Ricoeur's theory has considerable relevance to veterans and how they engage in their civilian employment and how they reflect on their past and future through the prism on now. Personal identity is shaped through subtle socialisation processes (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) as individuals continually review their sense of self. This is fashioned by their personal desires set within context to the social interactions with others, therefore they are exposed to the challenges of the background organisational context (Ybema et al., 2009).

Higate (2012) provides insight in to the nature and extent of military and militarized masculinity across a range of contexts from the war to the mundane and every day (Arkin and Dobrovsky 1990; Higate and Henry 2009). Militarised practice, tradition and espoused values contribute to the construction of intra-masculine bonds within a wider hierarchy of men through norm-bound practices that cement through time and space heteronormative relations among its members.

The importance of developing a strong group cohesion and commitment as a means of gaining a sustain advantage in a warzone cannot be underestimated, however this not attained without running the risk of broader personal and social consequences, as there will be unintended, consequences of training individuals in the art of physical combat. for example, groups create inter-group hierarchies through framing the inferiority of 'others' thereby emphasising impression that the enemy is inferior to you can reinforced the belief that the ensuing combat will have a positive outcome.

As a means of deepening understanding of military identity the concept of fratriarchy provides insights (Dussel 2007). Fratriarchy describes a close relationships male group that is devoid of children or women. The roles of caring and sharing life with loved ones is also

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absence from the immediacy of the group (Remy 1990). The group is pre-occupied with interest others than paternity and parenting (Hearn 1998). Such groups emanates patriarchal values male moral authority, social privilege and power control but unlike a father dominate groups here men rule as brothers providing an environment where men can compete but also provide a united front detached from the 'others' (Jordan and Cowan 1995: 727).

Evidence suggest that some members remain 'psychologically trapped in fraternal fellowship [with some] thriving on the conflict and aggression characteristic of . . . male association' (Jewkes 2005: 48 cited in Higate, 2012), and will seek out such fratriarchy linking back to their former military career.

In Higate's research this related to Iraq deployed security firms but similar association can be made to other groups. For example, employment in uniformed services or civilian firms linked to the military, or joining associations and other groups i.e. reserve forces, regimental federations. This demonstrates the heteronormative draw of such groups; likewise such associating are not devoid of social or political context with the group reinforcing old legacies. Whilst one cannot make vast generalisation as to the impact these associations will make, it can be seen as a background or contributing factor to the challenges for veterans entering a civilian environment.

Walker (2012) conducted research with 28 service personnel preparing to leave the military, identifying five category 'Constructive Typology' of pre-exit orientations:-

a) **Transformed**: - those who suggested that they were better or superior to civilian and that they would deal with the transition process, were committed to the chance and that the military had made them in to what they are a real soldier; a pragmatic individual a cut above (civilians) that will wade in and get things done.

b) Soldier Scam: - those that felt there were not ''real soldiers'' (mainly from non-teeth arms i.e. infantry or armoured regiments) in part they distanced themselves from the stereotypical military figure.

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c) **No-difference**: - those who claimed service has had little effect on self-conceptions, these individual had limited career progression and had even gave examples of discipline problems, but still conformed to the system across the length of their service.

d) **Disavowed: -** a routine change in their life rendered continuing in service untenable – this included marriage or childbirth.

e) **Blighted: -** a disruptive events forced a changed injury, ill-health trauma and mental illness, potentially detached from current circumstances.

The typology provides a range of interpretations of personal history underpinning different but consistent narratives of army life from which future career and life style projections grow. Walker's work reinforced the sustained belief in a military identify, which in part projects a stable coherence of who they are, their contribution and who they are not. Even though their individual military experiences were very different and provide different career trajectories, there was still a common underpinning belief.

Critical is the understanding that this military coherence or common and idiosyncratic congruence needs to provide a positive yet realistic perspective of the current and future self thereby providing the essential building blocks and readiness and preparedness to move from a relatively stable career environment to a more uncertain and looser career and life style.

Methodology

A subjectivist ontology was adopted employing an interpretivist epistemology to give emphasis to the nature and form of local and specific co-constructed realities, which enabled the research to expose insights as to meaning-shaping through the dynamics of social relationships between individuals (Burr, 2003). This enabled the reflexive multiplicity of interpretations developing the context, depth, and local knowledge (Ramey & Grubb, 2009), through the medium of language simultaneously constructs and is constructed by a local reality (Gee, 2005). This brings to the foreground interpretive and co-authored reflexive processes as a way to explore participants' constructs of meaning with specific

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reference to a more polyadic reflexivity allowing sharing and deliberating on a number of interpretations of meanings.

A coaching intervention was selected as a suitable time, environment and engagement format, with its focus on the individual and its emphasis on gaining deep learning insights through the development of a support and authentic interpersonal dialogue. Coaching interventions enable others to gain and share deeper insights in to their world, from which they can develop new ways of interpreting, feeling and engaging with life and their situation (Schein, 2006). This is gained through the medium of facilitating a supportive dialogue and honest feedback (Garvey and Garrett-Harris, 2008); it provides a foreground for the coachee to build awareness and sense-making that helps the coachee to grow (Bluckert, 2006; Reissner, 2008). Participants were made aware of the context and value of the research and that they would retain anonymity and informed consent was sought and gained.

The work is based on the coaching of five veterans from infantry backgrounds, who have a similar range of experiences with length of service ranging from 8-15 years. All had a minimum of 6 years veteran experience in relatively low skilled occupations. The two periods provided participants with sufficient time to have developed a clear identification with the military and to have experience of transition in to civilian working environments. This provided an opportunity to explore their past and current perceptions of self, their experience of civilian life and the potential legacies and echoes of the personal identity military service had endowed them. The coaching method, with its developmental ethos, encouraged participants to fully engage in the conversations which were later analysed developing the themes of enquiry employing a similar method employed by Walker (2012)

The emphasis on meaning required a journey of narrative exploring the veterans' pasts (military and civilian), present, and anticipated future. The environment provided a collegiate and familiar space to build rapport to encourage participants to freely articulately their stories. Quasi-civilian/military vernacular was evident and employed to elucidate events and enrich meaning. Profanities or military idioms were not discouraged but appreciated as part of their linguistic repertoire helping participants to provide depth and make sense of their world.

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Analysis of Findings

We provide a selection of micro-narrative extracts from conversations with all five veterans which have been grouped in to two sections; firstly veterans' reflections on the past and secondly their reflections on the present and future to provide insights in to their interpretations of the world.

1. Reflections on the Past

a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):

I enjoyed my time in the army, I made some good friends.

We knew how to work and play hard, … there were bad days; weather conditions did not help but you all mucked in and you knew who you could rely on particularly when the chips were down.

I still miss the old days but I don't think I would go back. I am quite a bit older now, and I am not as fit.

It was good to work in the regiment … you felt you were really doing something that mattered.

b. Participant B (*Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver*):

I am proud of my regiment what we did, we always got the job done … I think we made a difference.

I've done my bit now.

I felt it taught me about leadership and commitment, but also what trust is all about.

c. Participant C (*Ex-Sergeant – warehouse worker*):

Had a blood good time, running up and down the hills, lots of action, shooting and beer!

I had some good NCO's who really knew their stuff and could be relied on … we knew how to get the job done.

I remember one time one of the Junior NCO's got burnt, pretty bad … we had to do first aid and get him evacuated pronto … worked like a dream, good team we know what to do. We also had some good back up … good planning and execution … the kit was there when we needed it … never get that in civvy land.

d. Participant D (*Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman*):

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Difficult to say why they were good times, it was tough. But we always got the job done … it seemed to bring us together … living together 24/7 you get to know your buddies … you sort of know what they are thinking … a team.

Just a good set of mates.

I miss it but life moves on.

e. Participant E (*Ex-Sergeant – driver*):

I really enjoyed the adventure and team work … living life to the full. I felt we made a difference.

All five extracts demonstrated a journey into their personal histories. Firstly by invoking images of a past masculine self; extracts such as *"work and play hard", "when the chips were down", "living life to the full", "good times, it was tough" and "I am not as fit"*. These stories' also demonstrated undertones reinforcing both a deep seated comradeship and fraternal association with their peers and the development of a sense of purpose *"really doing something that mattered".* Combined with evidence of collective shared hardship reinforcing a key theme "*there were bad days" … "mucked in", "knew who you could rely on", "when the chips were down", "the kit was there when we needed it"* marking their place in time. Marking a personal and collective presence in time and space, of making a stand in a challenging world where you and your peers are collaboratively accountable to each other and can be relied upon. Clearly these personal reflections invoke a series of properties that the individual applies to themselves, ones that are reinforced through the interpretations and reinterpretations of events of their past, a re-construction and personal authorship of their personal and possible heroic self. There was a great drive on getting things done, demonstrating professional skills, and that they were well trained to surmount the tasks set, that worked within strong 'band of brothers' relationship noting this as a fictive kinship but also providing an authenticity of collaborative action. They stood together (when an almost fictive others did not) and that they rose to the call and stood at a significant event, projecting the image of the military as a personal calling rather than employment (Biderman, 1959).

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This identifies themes and differentiates from who they are not, reinforcing a time and a state of *civilian other,* those who did not and were not. Such statements were absent when describing their civilian past, reinforcing different relationships and sense of purpose.

We can also notw how "*the regiment*" provides a specific personal reference point, not to the military but to the individual's corps or Battalion, a much more specific branch. This links to Walker (2012) typology where the participant holds themselves as being "real" soldiers having seen action and therefore holding authentic credentials rather than a "soldier scam". The latter are those who in part claim they are not real soldiers, i.e. those holding an appointment as a clerk or working in a back office role in the military, presenting a difference from what they would define as a hard extreme military profile. The former can present an image that the military has permanently changed them for the good and that they are "a cut above" (p.293) who will make their mark on the world as they get things done.

One also can suggest that these narratives demonstrated a nostalgic reminiscence of the past, "*I still miss the old days*" and a realisation that things had moved on, "*I don't think I would go back*" but with a justification of being "*not as fit",* possibly suggesting a loss of a masculine status and personal pride.

What is apparent is that narrative identity was derived from deeds and activities, the action of being a soldier, in what you do, who you were with, where you were at important moments in time and the hardship you suffered. This can be seen to challenge the current notions of military identities as being based on factors such as race or class following similar themes to Woodward and Jenkings (2011) but this is also reinforcing the notion that people are practical beings (Ricoeur 1984) and we identify with what we do.

2. Reflections on the Present and Future

a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):

I enjoy being a postman like to get out and about … keeps me fit … don't get a lot (remuneration) but with my pension I'm fine … I'm really just looking for retirement

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I would tell them to get their arse in gear! (joke), they need to give some leadership and commitment to their people.

It's like watching children at play – sometimes just hopeless.

b. Participant B (*Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver*):

I enjoy my job and there is nothing really wrong with being a civvy … sometime I feel it is not enough … definitely not exciting … but the pay is good and I enjoy being with the family.

Sometimes I do feel there are lots of meetings, lots of talking but no one really gets on with it.

Don't think that grasp what leadership is all about.

c. Participant C (Ex-*Sergeant - warehouse worker*):

It is nothing like the military in civvy world … they do their best but they really do not have team work, you need to live with folk to really get that.

"They only have one pace … don't seem to get urgent".

I'm just a driver … I don't have to be particularly motivated at work … don't think they have any idea of what I have done … offered to do stuff but they do not get it"

"Think I could help on the planning and speeding up lead times … also could motivate the troops … bit stronger leadership

"I think I have many skills I could offer them … but it is too much effort"

d. Participant D (*Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman*):

I know with my business I could get contracts because I could turn things around quickly and I did a good job, think it gave me a lot of advantage … I just got on with it and the clients like this.

Often the clients had simple problems but just could not get their act together … I think my ex-military experience gave me considerable advantage.

I was willing to stick my neck out and take a chance and get on with it something they seemed unwilling to do.

e. Participant E (*Ex-Sergeant – driver*):

Works OK but I do not feel as motivated as when I was in the regiment. When I left I was under no delusion of what I was coming to.

Clear use and distinctions were made by veterans of their time in the military past and their civilian present, a theme that has cascaded through the transition process with military

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personnel not expected to gain high levels of satisfaction from their civilian occupation (Jolly 1996).

There appeared to be a clear conflict between perceptions of what 'real' team-work or leadership is supposed to be (military) and what civilians practice, with comments such as; "*watching children at play", "sometimes just hopeless",* and *"really do not have team work*". There was a constant comparison to their past for final definitions and examples of how they understood real teamwork, with a focus on getting things done, demonstrating an inference that civilians could not quite get it right.

This also created personal challenges with the "civilian other" reinforced by; "*they do not get it", "they only have one pace", "no one really gets on with it", "get their arse in gear", "like watching children at play", "sometimes just hopeless" "bit stronger leadership"* and *"I just got on with it".* The stories positioned the military as being the superior route but also demonstrated a background belief that the civilian way was either wrong or not fully appropriate and that civilians needed more motivation, projecting an implication of inferiority. Further there appeared to be an absence of fictive kinship impacting on their sense of belonging; it can be suggested that in part this is something they have come to terms with but there is a missed element to their 'lives' for this relationship and it may well block developing civilian relationships. What was interesting was the comment, "*but it is too much effort*", almost abrogating a responsibly to actively engage in their civilian world, becoming complacent to their fate.

What did appear in all cases was not an alienation to the civilian world but a passive acceptance of events. Walker's (2012) work on final year soldiers identified that they anticipated a down scaling of job role, personal status and a feeling of loss creating a sense of anxiety for their future which could invoke a process of confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998) therefore their past experience shapes both how they see the world and what they will expect to see. It was obvious that their current world shaped their expectations but the degree of influence from the past was significant and building on the work of Walker, reinforced the important influence their past had on their aspirations of career progression as a civilian/veteran.

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What did appear was a conflicting desire to be back in but lack of willingness to want to actually do it, likewise their history was used both to enhance their status but also to reminisce on how that world was providing a certainty and moral position. What was apparent were no reflections on the bad times in the forces; this could indicate a degree of selective and possibly embellished authorship, a reseeding of vivid memories of the past, a key feature of Ricoeur's Narrative Identity. Even though the past is itself can be seen to be an unstable and fleeting, it provided a point of reference to contrast their civilian present, a platform to base current and future interactions upon. In so doing, this creates a dynamic tension that challenges and redefines preconceived constructs that initially appear stable but are temporal and illusive and thereby undermining the core of veteran's sense of self and there by create greater vulnerability. The comment, "*but it is too much effort",* could well demonstrate the impact of the clash of identities has on the veteran with a defence mechanism of disengage being a consequence of this. Veterans clearly demonstrated acts of reflexive identity accessing their past in part to interpret and make sense of their current position and future, it was clear history showed a strong regard or even yearning for the past and was employed to benchmark and reinforce and a coherent sense of self. Veterans made references to status, teamwork and the 'civvy' other, which clearly reinforced parallels to the dynamic of convergence or divergence between national militaries and their civil societies (Moskos, 1977).

Few indicated great trouble in gaining employment but few indicated that they felt the jobs they undertake were on a par to their regular roles; this point of references did not appear to help them in their transition, reinforcing the work Jolly, (1996), Wolpert, (2000) and Walker, (2012).

Discussion

The interviews exposed how stories act as key instruments that establish and reinforce personal and social identity. Further, the influence of Ricoeur's threefold mimesis was evident across the interviews, firstly uncovering the power and legacy of a pre-narrative framework (mimesis state 1, (predating the individual)) reinforcing traditions and providing collective references (idem) from which the present (mimesis state 2) will be viewed.

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The 'mimesis state 2' presents competing and socially contextualising interpretations that shape self-identity through culturally and socially mediated self-definitions, drawn from their new civilian world, that influence the re-seeing of self (ipse) and the past (selfhood and sameness). However, the author is both object and storyteller (in the present both lived and told (Ricoeur, 1991)) influencing accounts of events and circumstances (Ricoeur, 1987) though a blurring of constituting events, entwining facts and fictions, the author and the reader presenting a flux of vying interpretations. In turn this struggle of the past and present influences (mimesis state 3) a re-configuration and projection of the future.

One of the opportunities is for the coach to help the coachee to explore their journey as both object and storyteller (Ricoeur, 1992) but to raise awareness that the coachee is the recipient of such story's and how they influence the shaping of life projections. Such narrative based approach might encourage academics and practitioners alike to apply a more holistic and reinvigorated approach to organizational theory (Czarniawska, 1998) by providing insights in to the power of collective and personal narratives that fashion story's that embed meaning, purpose and expectations in everyday working life.

Such insights can reinforce their role of the coach as co-author who can help reseat the narratives of the past to uncover a positive present, which then can enable an attainable vision of the future.

In context to the veteran and their past, it would be difficult to see a more institutionally socialised group who through the establishment of traditions gain a clear sense of personal identity set within a stable organisational context. The challenges of this deeply engrained past identity is that they are temporal in nature and therefore presents the potential to create long-term post-exit vulnerability.

All participants indicated a loss of social status and a fictive kinship but also an undermining of personal values and purpose. The nature of belief in their distinctiveness (Biderman, 1959) to the level of calling and the importance of they placed on their 'pragmatic', 'will do' attitude reinforce a hero like self. The work raises important questions as to the nature and

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consequences of such fundamental lifestyle change and how this loss of the past undermines self-worth and vision of the future, as such can present challenges when they perceive they are embarking on a 'non-distinctive' civilian second a career.

An area overlooked in other research is the nature of veteran's pre-services past. What was apparent from discussion was a strong association with historically situated and male dominated social class backgrounds and how this affected their lives. Association can be seen to hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmid, 2005), whilst the concept is not without criticism military institutions do reinforce strong masculine traits a pattern echoed in working class society. Veterans often re-enter such family and social groups on leaving the military, presenting dual stories that reinforce old stereotypes shaping the past in the present.

Veterans do provide a distinct example of the challenges these groups face in transition but these are not alone. Most individuals will have backgrounds that influence their personal identity that which may hamper life transition. Therefore, Rancour's work can contribute to a range of contexts, from coaching elite groups through career transition such as in lost status through bankruptcy, redundancy or retirement or in supporting cultural or lifestyle transition for example for immigrants, refugees or those suffering from trauma. It can also help a coach's own life journey and that of their relationship with coachees, particularly in gaining insights in to the magnitude of the change and challenges they encounter.

The impact of personal identity can be profound, it was evident that all veterans reached deep in to their past to benchmark their current work roles. It was also evident that he process of life style change many still retained their ties to the regiment by attendance at regimental day, federations, social media or special events such as the annual remembrance parade. However, such connections could be a double-edged, both helping veterans adjust to civilian life by providing a support but also reinforcing a deep kinship old comrades who inadvertently reinforce generic stereotypes.

Generally, military careers provides secure, stable and coherent social framework that reinforces an institutionalised self-belief and commitment to a common cause, reinforcing a communitarian theme. The initial commitment for a recruit is set by the public

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proclamation of an oath of allegiance, swearing by God *"to be faithful and bear true allegiance"* to the monarch (state), as if a personal calling. This is reinforced through recruit training, entering the regimental system and wearing a common uniform systemically reinforcing a common collective identity setting them apart from others and fashions a common sense of self and collective purpose and establishing accepted norms and rules for personal conduct. Such rules are reinforced through the system and by peer influence creating a social web that can constrain or enable on human action imposed through a constant living and cohesive narrative that reinforce a common social state. This not only define what is or is not permitted, but also who is included and excluded and thereby who is inferior and superior, reinforcing a past history and establishing a legacy of deep-seated beliefs that stay with an individual throughout their lives.

This sustained institutionalisation provides a background that fashion a cohesive sense of the individual and collective self (Walker, 2012) with individuals depicting themselves as self-reliant members of a warrior class, who have demonstrate their worthiness through their acts and deeds. Veterans can portray themselves as practitioners of a martial craft holding a 'special' professional craft, competent professionals who made a committed contribution to nationhood (Zirker et al; 2008). This reinforces the notion of personal presence, firstly that they were present at a significant national or global event and secondly they played as significant role in it, (Woodward and Jenkings, 2011) they stood and were accounted for alongside their 'comrades in arms' a band of brothers reinforcing a close fictive kinship. This has considerable significance as this also infers who was not there and therefore are excluded group the 'civvy' reinforced in social culture *"shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here, and hold their manhood cheap"* (Shakespeare, 1559, Act IV Scene iii 18–67).

Such self-authored belief system that veterans ascribed to themselves sets their future legacy, for example, many leavers have low expectations of becoming civilians (Walker, 2012) living in a world of parochial and mundane which can invoke many challenges for personal adjustment unleashing feelings of anxiety, fear, despair and shame. Such perspectives expose veterans to the perils of confirmatory bias which limit expectations and

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life trajectories, summoning the need for a more informed and critical introspective to be taken, often lacking in leavers (Jolly, 1996).

All interviewees expressed feelings of loss and a nostalgia for what had been, they expressed their acceptance for their civilian predicament and acknowledge that they had to adjust to the demands of civilian life.

As the veteran takes on the role of author, their stories of the past and projections of the future can evolve. Identify is constructed in a social context through discourse with others raising the need for arbitration and reconciliation as they negotiating meaning to make sense of their new worlds. This exposes veterans to a dynamic tension of instability and inequitably that can expose inherent vulnerability to the shaping of their (and continually moving) post-exit identity. Veterans are exposed to new peers who have minimal experience of a military world, who will have difficulty in comprehending or valuing a veteran's history, experience, emotional exposure or social/moral worth presenting challenges of conflicting dialogue and understanding.

All 5 veterans had links to veteran associations and whilst these provided support they also presented the dilemma of a counter narrative, allowing them to reinforce and re-play their past story's with their old peers. Here the relationships reinforce the echoes of the past rekindle kinships and faith with the cause.

Delving in to a veterans 'pre-enlistment' past we see a deeper social legacies as educational attainment among soldiers is much lower than the national average (MoD, 2004) as many enlistees come disproportionately from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (DCSF, 2009:31) some with increased risk of social exclusion (Agulnik et al., 2002) and others joining the military as a last resort. What this exposes is that their past is more than their military service and their 'pre-enlistment' state may present a default position on returning to a civilian world, a secondary default position, assumed as a static place but one that has now moved on, presenting a double loss and the potential of having nowhere to go.

Conclusion

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The research contribution is that it provided insight into how veterans' past and current background provides a rich framework for the conceptualisation of military identities. In line with previous studies veterans' narratives stress their uniqueness and difference as resilient action orientated individuals which also provides insight as to how veterans see civilian others. The work reinforced the conceptualisations of military identities how their social categories emerged within the lived military experience, this in turn present legacies for future life. It also reinforces how through talk we can gain vivid insights in to how these relationships and identities unfold.

Ricoeur's work refocused our attention at a micro level and through talk we can explore subjectivities of veterans personal military identities unfold. Providing valuable insights in to the nature of veterans past (idem) and the tensions and challenged they experience through their day-to-day lives. The work reinforces and extends the work of Woodward and Jenkins (2003) that veteran identities link to practice and the act of being present, taking a moral stand, but also demonstrates the ongoing influence of the fratriarchy (Higate, 2003). Finally, the work supports Walker (2012) research 'constructive typology' particularly individuals who described themselves as cut above civilians. What was also apparent was a nostalgic sense of loss for the past and a need for recognition.

The works provides another perspective from which to understand, engage and employ a pool of human resources that may well be overlooked and undervalued.

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Military Lives: Coaching Transitions

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is firstly to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identify. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world.

Design/methodology/approach – Underpinned by Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, the work provides a qualitative analysis data from coaching interviews with five veterans

Findings – The findings revealed the on-going legacy of military life and how its distinctiveness and belief centred on kinship shapes personal identity and the way they see their civilian world. The work sheds light on to the benefits of this Ricoeur's self-reflexive approach and how it can be used to provide a deeper insight in to the nature of personal transitions and how narrative can be used to expose complexities of the narratives of personal history and meaning as the narrator becomes both the seeker and what is sought.

Practical implications –the work reinforces the value of Ricoeur's self-reflexive approach identifying narrative mediating between two 'poles' of identity and the act of mimesis; prefiguration, configuration and refiguration as veterans project stories of their world and their place within it.

Originality/value – The paper provides new insights in to the importance of narrative identify broadening its potential application with engagement across diverse communities, thereby providing depth and rigour of its conceptual understanding of personal identify. The work further provides insights in to the challenges facing veterans to integrate within a civilian society.

Keywords –narrative identity, military veterans, coaching, Ricoeur

Paper type - Research paper

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Introduction

Military veterans often have considerably more problems in gaining and maintaining employment than their non-veteran peers (Poppyscotland, 2015). The point of transition between the military and civilian would appear to be very challenging for veterans, of liminal magnitude, as they have to find not only an alternative job but an alternative lifestyle (Walker, 2012) which may have severe and long-term consequences on their personal and economic well-being. Retirement from the military is a very different experience from retirement from conventional civilian life and even to those well prepared, the cultural difference can come as a surprise as leaving military service can be felt as a severance from a deeply engrained way of being (Dryburgh, 2012; Fraser, 2015). This is a challenging life transition that impacts on personal identify and undermines a personal sense of meaning and life purpose with 27% of leavers saying re-entry was difficult for them (Bergman, et al, 2014) and acknowledge a feeling of 'loss' (Jolly, 1996; Walker, 2012).

In short many veterans have long term issues in reconciling their civilian and military identity (Higate, 2001) which has a major impact on key life trajectories as they remain captives of their past (Higate, 2001) presenting challenges in recognising who they are (Teachman and Tedrow, 2007) but also stigmatising who they are not. This has a profound impact on their ability to fully engage in society; for example, it is reported that unemployment amongst veterans aged 18-49 is almost twice that of the non-veteran. Further UK veterans (aged 16-44 years) are three times more likely to have mental health disorders than non-veterans of the same age (Fear et al., 2010; Fossey, 2012) with a prevalence of depression and alcohol misuse a theme that has been occurring for many years (Fear et al., 2007; Fossey, 2010; Fox, 2010). Veterans who saw active service in Iraq or Afghanistan had substantial increases in risk of alcohol misuse, and reservists with similar service are nearly three times as likely to have Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Iversen, 2009; Milliken, Auchterlonie and Hoge, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is twofold; firstly, to consider how veterans employ talk to shape interpretations of personal and social identify. Secondly, we seek to gain an understanding of how veterans see themselves in a civilian world, their ability to re-conceptualise and realign their perspective on life to support their transition in to a civilian world. We employ

coaching as an enabler of transition and a source of research data. We begin with a consideration of Ricoeur's (1984) hermeneutic theory of narrative identity which underpins our approach to working with veterans.

Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity and military lives

Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity (1984; 1985) offers insights in to meaning and the role of linguistic mediators in the shaping of identity, projecting narrative as a living concept which can be employed to gain greater insight into identity in organisational contexts (Brown, 2001; Coupland, 2007). Narrative identity theory focuses on representing how we interpret reality and re-display it to ourselves throughout our lives. We create a self-reflexive framework that enables this construction of self. This is influenced by the interactions with others and is temporal in nature encompassing a multiplicity of ongoing revisions (Brown, 1998) as the individual attempts to construct an ongoing dynamic yet coherent interpretation of self as they move through time and space, taking on different roles and relationships (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1995). It is also entwined in our actions and employment of cultural products such as car, clothes, titles etc.

Ricoeur refers to this process projection and imitation as mimesis creating reflections or interpretations of the real world. It involves the act of arranging events that fashion a plot, that collates and narrates one's life experiences in order to make sense of the world, setting its' own protocols and coherence, constantly in a state of flux, looking back whilst projecting forwards, negotiating and adapting but contained within the author's temporal present (Ricoeur, 1992; Mallett and Wapshott, 2011).

Here we distinguish between ipse and idem identity, between *'the self'* and '*the same'* (Ricoeur, 1992: 117-8) or a generalised other that is dynamic and constructs roles in response to our interactions with others. A dynamic defining who I am but changing through time and space, shaped to the needs to accommodate the generalised other, altering from moment to moment (ipse – the self). This retains a sense of sameness, with change going unnoticed but producing an evolving autobiography. Our fixed idem is shaped by our memories which in turn influences our expectations, and although we feel the same person, we are different, maintaining a sustained sense of selfhood (idem – the same)

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entwined narrative based episodic stories that shapes us and re-shapes us without end (Ricoeur, 1991). This is a subtle journey, where the tensions of difference provide greater insight in to understanding the full dimensions and consequences of personal identity. It uncovers an inherent multiplicity in our personal identities governed by our perceptions of contexts; we perceive, act and present ourselves differently dependent on our needs, wants and goals. Each time our stories are told we present the potential of a multitude of cascading and competing narratives to be created, facilitating the enactment of an evolving narrative of overlapping and subsuming plots exerting a pervasive influence on our unfolding day-to-day life and world outlook.

Ricoeur, (1984) introduces St Augustine's 'threefold present' (the past, present and future) and Aristotle's Poetics and emplotment and mimesis; (prefiguration of collective references; (present) presenting competing fictions to be navigated and negotiated, engendering a re-configuration of the future. The process creating a subjective and complex interweaving of fictional and historical narrative interpreted from the narrator's perspective (as author and the subject) fashioning a personal imaginative representation of the real world. A polyadic reflexivity (Laitinen, 2007) generating a dynamic and mediated narrative, continually integrating and mediating meaning (Mallett and Wapshott 2011); a narrative that moves between contrasting interpretations of the world and one's place within it, a shape-shifting epistemology that provides a broader plurality of meaning (Hefner, 2014) presenting radically contrasting interpretations and realignment challenges (Geertz, 1973).

Fluidity of personal interpretations can lever power to or from the author's past depending on the strength of their personal belief and the current context, presenting hegemonic tensions between individuals and their current dominated groups (Clegg, 1989) as a shared narrative is fashioned between groups (Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Brown et al., 2005). From this we develop our dispositions and life habits and social groupings, establishing our individual and collective actions and rituals, what we do and who we do it with.

Interpretations of being are idiosyncratic in nature but are also shaped by the local context and therefore can be seen to be constructed of and constituted by our local backgrounds. This includes our relations and interactions with others (Walker, 2012) thereby enacting a

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transient self, a collaboratively shaped and constructed self that cannot be defined without reference to others (Ybema et al., 2009). This provides temporal definitions of who we are, who we want to be, who we are not an intersubjective and dialogical attainment of self that provides interpretations of meaning that are concurrently historically and culturally situated (Forster, 2011) but gradually shifting.

Ricoeur's theory has considerable relevance to veterans and how they engage in their civilian employment and how they reflect on their past and future through the prism on now. Personal identity is shaped through subtle socialisation processes (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) as individuals continually review their sense of self. This is fashioned by their personal desires set within context to the social interactions with others, therefore they are exposed to the challenges of the background organisational context (Ybema et al., 2009).

Higate (2012) provides insight in to the nature and extent of military and militarized masculinity across a range of contexts from the war to the mundane and every day (Arkin and Dobrovsky 1990; Higate and Henry 2009). Militarised practice, tradition and espoused values contribute to the construction of intra-masculine bonds within a wider hierarchy of men through norm-bound practices that cement through time and space heteronormative relations among its members.

The importance of developing a strong group cohesion and commitment as a means of gaining a sustainable advantage in a war zone cannot be underestimated, however this is not attained without running the risk of broader personal and social consequences, as there will be unintended consequences of training individuals in the art of physical combat. For example, groups create inter-group hierarchies through framing the inferiority of 'others' thereby projecting that the enemy is inferior to you, and thereby reinforcing the belief that the ensuing combat will have a positive outcome thus strengthening morale and personal resolve and commitment.

As a means of deepening understanding of military identity the concept of fratriarchy provides insights (Dussel 2007). Fratriarchy is a fusion of 'patriarchy' and 'fraternity'

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depicting a close relationship within male groups that is devoid of children or women. The roles of caring and sharing life with loved ones is also absent from the immediacy of the group (Remy 1990) and is pre-occupied with interests other than paternity and parenting (Hearn 1998). Such groups emanate patriarchal values a dominance of male moral authority, social privilege and power control, but unlike a father dominant group, men rule as brothers providing an environment where men can compete but also provide a united front detached from the 'others' (Jordan and Cowan 1995: 727).

Evidence suggests that some members remain *'psychologically trapped in fraternal fellowship [with some] thriving on the conflict and aggression characteristic of . . . male association'* (Jewkes 2005: 48 cited in Higate, 2012), and will seek out such fratriarchy linking back to their former military career.

Higate's research related to civilian security firms working in Iraq but similar association can be made to other groups. For example, employment in uniformed services or civilian firms linked to the military, or joining associations and other groups i.e. reserve forces, military associated cadet forces, regimental federations etc. Parallels can be drawn with the heteronormative fratriarchy nature of such groups; likewise, such associations are not devoid of social or political context particularly as they reinforce old legacies. Whilst one cannot make vast generalisations as to the impact these associations will have, they do present a pervasive background or contributing factor that can influence veterans entering and working in an unfamiliar civilian environment.

Walker (2012) conducted research with 28 service personnel preparing to leave the military, identifying five categories 'Constructive Typology' of pre-exit orientations:-

a) **Transformed**: - those who suggested that they were better or superior to civilians and that they would deal with the transition process, were committed to the change and that the military had made them in to what they are, a real soldier; a pragmatic individual a cut above (civilians) that will wade in and get things done.

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b) **Soldier Scam: -** those that felt there they were not ''real soldiers'' (mainly from non-teeth arms i.e. infantry or armoured regiments) in part they distanced themselves from the stereotypical warrior military figure.

c) **No-difference**: - those who claimed service has had little effect on self-conceptions, these individuals had limited career progression an even gave examples of discipline problems, but still have conformed to the military system across the length of their service.

d) **Disavowed: -** a routine change in their life rendered continuing in service untenable – this included marriage or childbirth.

e) **Blighted: -** a disruptive event forced a change, injury, ill-health, trauma and mental illness, potentially detached from current circumstances.

The typology provides a range of interpretations of personal history underpinning different but consistent narratives of army life from which future career and life style projections grow. Walker's work reinforced the sustained belief in a military identify, which in part projects a stable coherence of who they are, their contribution and who they are not. Even though their individual military experiences were very different and provide different career trajectories there was still a common underpinning belief.

Critical is the understanding of the power of military coherence, an established and accepted common belief that provides idiosyncratic congruence for its members. However, personal congruency needs to provide a positive yet realistic perspective of the current and future self, thereby providing the veteran with the essential building blocks to enable them to move from a relatively stable career environment to a more uncertain career, and possibly holistic, life style change.

Methodology

A subjectivist ontology was adopted employing an interpretivist epistemology to give emphasis to the nature and form of local and specific co-constructed realities, which enabled the research to expose insights as to meaning shaping through the dynamics of social relationships between individuals (Burr, 2003). This enabled the reflexive multiplicity of interpretations developing the context, depth, and local knowledge (Ramey & Grubb,

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2009), through the medium of language as it simultaneously constructs and is constructed by a local reality (Gee, 2005). This brings to the foreground interpretive and co-authored reflexive processes as a way to explore participants' constructs of meaning with specific reference to a more polyadic reflexivity allowing sharing and deliberating on a number of interpretations of meanings.

Coaching interventions where selected as they presented a suitable time, environment and engagement format, they focused on the individual with an emphasis in gaining deep learning insights through the development of supportive and authentic interpersonal dialogue. Coachee's engaged in 2 sessions over an 8 week period as part of an exploration in to coaching practice with the aim to provide them with insights in to how it could be used to enhance and develop their skills and improve their personal effectiveness. This included reflecting on their military learning and experience in context to their civilian life. All participants were made aware of the context and value of the research and that they would retain anonymity and informed consent was sought and gained.

Coaching interventions enable others to gain and share deeper insights in to their world, from which they can develop new ways of interpreting, feeling and engaging with life and their situation (Schein, 2006). This is achieved through the medium of facilitating a supportive dialogue and honest feedback (Garvey and Garrett-Harris, 2008); it provides a foreground for the coachee to build awareness and sensemaking that helps the coachee to grow (Bluckert, 2006; Reissner, 2008) by providing the clarity to look at past events and assign a new meaning to them.

The work is based on the coaching of five veterans from infantry backgrounds who have a similar range of experiences with length of service ranging from 8-15 years. All had a minimum of 6 years veteran experience in relatively low skilled occupations. The two experiential periods (as serving members of the military and a civilian (veteran)) provided participants with sufficient time to have developed a clear identification with the military and to have experience of transition in to civilian working environments. This provided an opportunity to explore their past and current perceptions of self, their experience of civilian life and the potential legacies and echoes of the personal identity military service had

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endowed them. The coaching method, with its developmental ethos, encouraged participants to fully engage in the conversations, which were later analysed developing the themes of enquiry employing a similar method employed by Walker (2012)

The emphasis on meaning required a journey of narrative exploring the veterans' pasts (military and civilian), present, and anticipated future. The environment provided a collegiate and familiar space to build rapport to encourage participants to freely articulate their stories. Quasi-civilian/military vernacular was evident and employed to elucidate events and enrich meaning. Profanities or military idioms were not discouraged but appreciated as part of their linguistic repertoire helping participants to articulate and elaborate on events providing depth and insight in to how they make sense of their world.

Analysis of Findings

We provide a selection of micro-narrative extracts from conversations with all five veterans which have been grouped in to two sections; firstly veterans' reflections on the past and secondly their reflections on the present and future to provide insights in to their interpretations of the world.

1. Reflections on the Past

a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):

I enjoyed my time in the army, I made some good friends.

We knew how to work and play hard, … there were bad days; weather conditions did not help but you all mucked in and you knew who you could rely on particularly when the chips were down.

I still miss the old days but I don't think I would go back. I am quite a bit older now, and I am not as fit.

It was good to work in the regiment … you felt you were really doing something that mattered.

b. Participant B (*Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver*):

I am proud of my regiment what we did, we always got the job done … I think we made a difference.

I've done my bit now.

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I felt it taught me about leadership and commitment, but also what trust is all about.

c. Participant C (*Ex-Sergeant – warehouse worker*):

Had a blood good time, running up and down the hills, lots of action, shooting and beer!

I had some good NCO's who really knew their stuff and could be relied on … we knew how to get the job done.

I remember one time one of the Junior NCO's got burnt, pretty bad … we had to do first aid and get him evacuated pronto … worked like a dream, good team we know what to do. We also had some good back up … good planning and execution … the kit was there when we needed it … never get that in civvy land.

d. Participant D (*Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman*):

Difficult to say why they were good times, it was tough. But we always got the job done … it seemed to bring us together … living together 24/7 you get to know your buddies … you sort of know what they are thinking … a team.

Just a good set of mates.

I miss it but life moves on.

e. Participant E (*Ex-Sergeant – driver*):

I really enjoyed the adventure and teamwork … living life to the full. I felt we made a difference.

All five extracts demonstrated a journey into their personal histories. Firstly by invoking images of a past masculine self; extracts such as *"work and play hard", "when the chips were down", "living life to the full", "good times, it was tough"* and *"I am not as fit"*. These stories' also demonstrated undertones reinforcing both a deep seated comradeship and fraternal association with their peers and the development of a sense of purpose *"really doing something that mattered".* Combined with evidence of collective shared hardship reinforcing a key theme "*there were bad days" … "mucked in", "knew who you could rely on", "when the chips were down", "the kit was there when we needed it"* marking their place in time. This demonstrates a personal demarcation, marking a personal and collective presence in time and space; making a stand in a challenging world where you and your peers are collaboratively accountable to each other and can be relied upon. Clearly, these personal reflections invoke a series of properties that individuals apply to themselves, ones that are reinforced through the interpretations and reinterpretations of events of their past, a re-constructed authorship of their personal and possible projected heroic self.

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There was evidence of a great pragmatic drive towards getting things done, demonstrating professional skills, that they were well trained to surmount the tasks set, and that they worked within a strong 'band of brothers' relationship, clearly linking to a fictive kinship but also providing an authenticity of collaborative action. They stood together (when others did not) and that they rose to the call and stood at a significant event, projecting the image of the military as a personal calling rather than employment (Biderman, 1959).

This identifies themes and differentiates from who they are not, reinforcing a time and a state of *civilian other,* those who did not and were not. Such statements were absent when describing their civilian past, reinforcing different relationships and sense of purpose.

We can also note how "*the regiment*" provides a specific personal reference point, not to the military but to the individual's particular unit or battalion, a much more specific niche grouping. This links to Walker (2012) typology where participants hold themselves as being "*real*" soldiers having seen action and therefore holding authentic credentials rather than a "soldier scam". The latter are those who in part claim they are not real soldiers, i.e. those holding an appointment as a clerk or working in a back office role in the military, presenting a difference from what they would define as a hard extreme military profile. The former can present an image that the military has permanently changed them for the good and that they are "*a cut above*" (Ibid. p.293) who will make their mark on the world as they get things done.

Such narratives are indicative of a nostalgic reminiscence of the past, "*I still miss the old days*" and a realisation that things had moved on, "*I don't think I would go back*" but with a justification of being "*not as fit",* possibly suggesting a loss of masculine status and personal pride reinforcing a change to civilian status.

What is apparent is that narrative identity was derived from deeds and activities, the action of being a soldier, in what you do, who you were with, where you were at important moments in time and the hardship you suffered. This can be seen to challenge the current notions of military identities as being based on factors such as race or class following similar

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themes to Woodward and Jenkings (2011) but this is also reinforcing the notion that the military are practical beings (Ricoeur 1984) who identify with what they do.

2. Reflections on the Present and Future

a. Participant A (Ex-Warrant Officer - postman):

I enjoy being a postman like to get out and about … keeps me fit … don't get a lot (remuneration) but with my pension I'm fine … I'm really just looking for retirement

I would tell them to get their arse in gear! (joke), they need to give some leadership and commitment to their people.

It's like watching children at play – sometimes just hopeless.

b. Participant B (*Ex-Sergeant – lorry driver*):

I enjoy my job and there is nothing really wrong with being a civvy … sometime I feel it is not enough … definitely not exciting … but the pay is good and I enjoy being with the family.

Sometimes I do feel there are lots of meetings, lots of talking but no one really gets on with it.

Don't think that grasp what leadership is all about.

c. Participant C (Ex-*Sergeant - warehouse worker*):

It is nothing like the military in civvy world … they do their best but they really do not have team work, you need to live with folk to really get that.

"They only have one pace … don't seem to get urgent".

I'm just a driver … I don't have to be particularly motivated at work … don't think they have any idea of what I have done … offered to do stuff but they do not get it"

"Think I could help on the planning and speeding up lead times … also could motivate the troops … bit stronger leadership

"I think I have many skills I could offer them … but it is too much effort"

d. Participant D (*Ex-Sergeant – retired businessman*):

I know with my business I could get contracts because I could turn things around quickly and I did a good job, think it gave me a lot of advantage … I just got on with it and the clients like this.

Often the clients had simple problems but just could not get their act together … I think my ex-military experience gave me considerable advantage.

I was willing to stick my neck out and take a chance and get on with it something they seemed unwilling to do.

e. Participant E (*Ex-Sergeant – driver*):

Works OK but I do not feel as motivated as when I was in the regiment. When I left I was under no delusion of what I was coming to.

Clear distinctions were made by veterans of their time in their military past and their civilian present, a theme that cascaded through the transition process was that military personnel did not expect to gain high levels of satisfaction from their civilian occupation (Jolly 1996) a theme that was supported in the veterans coaching sessions.

There appeared to be a clear conflict between perceptions of what 'real' team-work or leadership is supposed to be (military) and what civilians practice, with comments such as; "*watching children at play", "sometimes just hopeless",* and *"they really do not have team work*". There was a constant comparison to their past for final definitions and examples of how they understood real teamwork, with a focus on getting things done, demonstrating an inference that civilians could not quite get it right.

This also created personal challenges with the "civilian other" reinforced by; "*they do not get it", "they only have one pace", "no one really gets on with it", "get their arse in gear", "like watching children at play", "sometimes just hopeless" "bit stronger leadership"* and *"I just got on with it".* The stories positioned the military as being the superior route but also demonstrated a background belief that the civilian way was either wrong or not fully appropriate and that civilians needed more motivation, projecting an implication of inferiority. Further, there appeared to be an absence of fictive kinship within a civilian environment affecting the veteran's sense of belonging. This did appear to be something the coachees have come to terms with but that this is a missed element of their 'lives', which may well hinder developing civilian relationships. What was interesting was the comment, "*but it is too much effort*", almost abrogating a responsibly to actively engage in their civilian world, becoming complacent to their fate.

What did appear in all cases was not an alienation to the civilian world but a passive acceptance of events. Walker's (2012) work on final year soldiers identified that they anticipated a down scaling of job role, personal status and a feeling of loss creating a sense

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of anxiety for their future which could invoke a process of confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998) therefore their past experience shapes both how they see the world and what they will expect to see. It was obvious that the five veterans' current world shaped their expectations but the degree of influence from the past was significant and, building on the work of Walker, reinforced the important influence their past had on their aspirations of career progression as a civilian/veteran.

What did appear was a conflicting desire to return to military life but a lack of willingness to actually do it, likewise their history was used both to enhance their status but also to reminisce on how that world was providing a certainty and moral position. What was apparent were only minimal reflections on the bad times in the forces; this could indicate a degree of selective and possibly embellished authorship, a reseeding of vivid memories of the past, a key feature of Ricoeur's Narrative Identity. Even though the past in itself could be seen to be unstable and fleeting, it provided a point of reference to contrast their civilian present, a platform to base current and future interactions upon. In so doing, this creates a dynamic tension that challenges and redefines preconceived constructs that initially appear stable but are temporal and illusive and thereby undermine the core of veteran's sense of self and creating greater vulnerability. The comment, "*but it is too much effort",* could well demonstrate the impact of the clash of identities has on the veteran with a defence mechanism to disengage being the consequence. Veterans clearly demonstrated acts of reflexive identity accessing their past in part to interpret and make sense of their current position and future, it was clear history showed a strong regard or even yearning for the past and was employed to benchmark and reinforce a coherent sense of self. Veterans made references to status, teamwork and the 'civvy' other, which clearly reinforced parallels to the dynamic of convergence or divergence between national militaries and their civil societies (Moskos, 1977).

The veterans did not indicate great difficulty in gaining employment but most did indicate that they felt the jobs they undertook were not fully on a par to their military roles; this point of reference did not appear to help them in their transition, reinforcing the work Jolly, (1996), Wolpert, (2000) and Walker, (2012).

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Discussion

The interviews exposed how stories act as key instruments to establish and reinforce personal and social identity. Further, the influence of Ricoeur's threefold mimesis was evident across the interviews, firstly uncovering the power and legacy of a pre-narrative framework (mimesis state 1, (predating the individual)) reinforcing traditions and providing collective references (idem) from which the present (mimesis state 2) will be viewed.

The 'mimesis state 2' presents competing and socially contextualising interpretations that shape self-identity through culturally and socially mediated self-definitions, drawn from their new civilian world that influence the re-seeing of self (ipse) and the past (selfhood and sameness). However, the author is both object and storyteller (in the present both lived and told (Ricoeur, 1991)) influencing accounts of events and circumstances (Ricoeur, 1987) though a blurring of constituting events, entwining facts and fictions, the author and the reader presenting a flux of vying interpretations. In turn this struggle of the past and present influences (mimesis state 3) a re-configuration and projection of the future.

One of the opportunities is for the coach to help the coachee to explore their journey as both object and storyteller (Ricoeur, 1992) but to raise awareness that the coachee is the recipient of such story's and how they influence the shaping of life projections. Such narrative based approach might encourage academics and practitioners alike to apply a more holistic and reinvigorated approach to organizational theory (Czarniawska, 1998) by providing insights in to the power of collective and personal narratives that fashion story's that embed meaning, purpose and expectations in everyday working life.

Such insights can reinforce the role of the coach as co-author who can help individuals to reflect and reseat the narratives of the past, assign a new meaning and expose a more positive present, from which a more realistic and attainable vision of the future can be projected.

In context to the veteran and their past, it would be difficult to see a more institutionally socialised group who through the establishment of traditions gain a clear sense of personal identity set within a stable organisational context. The challenges of this deeply engrained

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past identity is that, whilst they project a superficial stable state, they are in fact temporal in nature and therefore present the potential to create long-term post-exit vulnerability.

All participants indicated a loss of social status and a fictive kinship but also an undermining of personal values and purpose. The nature of belief in their distinctiveness (Biderman, 1959) to the level of calling and the importance they placed on their 'pragmatic', 'will do' attitude reinforce a hero like self. The work raises important questions as to the nature and consequences of such fundamental lifestyle change and how this loss of the past undermines self-worth and vision of the future, presenting a challenge to veterans who perceive they are embarking on a 'non-distinctive' civilian second career, a distinction that appears to be formed well before they leave the military.

An area overlooked in other research is the nature of veteran's pre-services past. What was apparent from discussion was a strong association with historically situated and male dominated social class backgrounds and how this affected their lives. Association can be seen to hegemonic masculinity. (Connell and Messerschmid, 2005) Whilst the concept is not without criticism military institutions do reinforce strong masculine traits a pattern echoed in working class society. Veterans often return to such family and social groups on leaving the military, presenting dual stories further reinforcing old stereotypes shaping the past in the present, which can be even more complex as the pre-services past will have also undergone change.

Veterans do provide a distinct example of the challenges faced in transition but these are not alone. Most individuals will have backgrounds that influence their personal identity which may hamper life transition. Rancour's work can contribute to a range of contexts, from coaching elite groups through career transition such as in lost status through bankruptcy, redundancy or retirement or in supporting cultural or lifestyle transition for example for immigrants, refugees or those suffering from trauma. It can also help a coach's own life journey and that of their relationship with coachees, particularly in gaining insights in to the magnitude of the change and challenges they encounter that have history set beyond the working environment.

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The impact of personal identity can be profound, it was evident that all veterans reached deep in to their past to benchmark their current work roles. It was also evident that the process of life style change is not total detachment and many veterans retained their ties to the regiment by attendance at regimental days, federations, social media or special events such as the annual remembrance parade. However, such connections could be a double-edged sword, both helping veterans adjust to civilian life by providing support but also reinforcing a deep kinship with old comrades who inadvertently reinforce generic stereotypes.

Generally, military careers provide secure, stable and coherent social framework that reinforces an institutionalised self-belief and commitment to a common cause, reinforcing a communitarian theme. The initial commitment for a recruit is set by the public proclamation of an oath of allegiance, swearing by God to *"be faithful and bear true allegiance"* to the monarch (state), as if a personal calling. This undertaking is bolstered through recruit training, entering the regimental system and wearing a common uniform, systemically reinforcing a common collective identity setting military personnel apart from others and fashions a common sense of self and collective purpose, as well as establishing accepted norms and rules for personal conduct. Such rules are further reinforced through peer influence creating a social web that can constrain or enable human action, imposed through a constant living and cohesive narrative that underpins a common social state. This not only defines what is or is not permitted, but also who is included and excluded. Thereby who is inferior and superior, reinforcing a past history and establishing a legacy of deep-seated beliefs that stay with an individual throughout their lives.

This sustained institutionalisation provides a background that fashions a cohesive sense of the individual and collective self (Walker, 2012) with individuals depicting themselves as self-reliant members of a warrior class, who have demonstrated their worthiness through their acts and deeds. Veterans can portray themselves as practitioners of a martial craft holding a 'special' professional competency and that they have made a committed contribution to nationhood (Zirker et al; 2008). This reinforces the notion of personal presence, firstly that they were present at a significant national or global event and secondly they played as significant role in it, (Woodward and Jenkings, 2011) they stood and were

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accounted for alongside their 'comrades in arms' a band of brothers reinforcing a close fictive kinship. This has significance as it infers who was not there, therefore who are excluded from the military group i.e. the lack of civilian presence that projects 'the civvy' as the outcast. This can also be seen to be reinforced in other aspects of broader social culture *"shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here, and hold their manhood cheap"* (Shakespeare, 1559, Act IV Scene iii 18–67).

Such self-authored belief systems that veterans ascribe to themselves sets their future legacy, for example, many leavers have low expectations of becoming civilians (Walker, 2012) living in a world of the parochial and mundane which can invoke many challenges for personal adjustment unleashing feelings of anxiety, fear, despair and shame. Such perspectives expose veterans to the perils of confirmatory bias, which limit expectations and life trajectories, summoning the need for a more informed and critical introspective to be taken, often lacking in leavers (Jolly, 1996).

All interviewees expressed feelings of loss and a nostalgia for what had been, they expressed their acceptance for their civilian predicament and acknowledge that they had to adjust to the demands of a new civilian world.

As the veteran takes on the role of author, their stories of the past and projections of the future can evolve. Identify is constructed in a social context through discourse with others raising the need for arbitration and reconciliation as they negotiate meaning to make sense of their new worlds. This exposes veterans to a dynamic tension of instability and inequitably that can expose inherent vulnerability to the shaping of their (and continually moving) post-exit identity. Veterans new civilian peers often have minimal, possibly media based, exposure to a military world, therefore have difficulty in comprehending or valuing a veteran's history, experience, emotional exposure or social/moral worth, this presents many challenges from not knowing what is not known to conflicting dialogues and tainted interpretations.

All 5 veterans had links to veteran associations and whilst these provided support they also presented the dilemma of a counter narrative, allowing them to reinforce and re-play their

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past story's with their old peers. Here the relationships reinforce the echoes of the past, rekindle kinships and faith with the cause.

Conclusion

The research contribution is that it provided insight into how veterans' past and current background provides a rich framework for the conceptualisation of military identities. In line with previous studies veterans' narratives stress their uniqueness and difference as resilient action orientated individuals which also provides insight as to how veterans see civilian others. The work reinforced the conceptualisation of military identities and how their social categories emerged within the lived military experience. This in turn presents legacies for future life. It also reinforces how through talk we can gain vivid insights in to how these relationships and identities unfold.

Ricoeur's work refocused our attention at a micro level, how through talk we can explore the subjectivities of veterans personal military identities unfold. This provides valuable insights in to the nature of veterans past (idem) and the tensions and challenges they experience through their day-to-day lives. The work reinforces and extends the work of Woodward and Jenkins (2003) that veteran identities link to practice and the act of being present, taking a moral stand, but also demonstrates the on going influence of the fratriarchy (Higate, 2003). Finally, the work supports Walker (2012) research 'constructive typology' particularly individuals who described themselves as a cut above civilians. What was also apparent for veterans was a nostalgic sense of loss for the past and an awareness of a lack of acknowledgement by their civilian peers, in part, presenting a need for recognition, exposing how deep ties of fictive kinship and legacy remain well beyond physically leaving the military world.

The implication for the practitioner is that the works provide another perspective from which to understand, engage and employ a pool of human resources that may well be overlooked and undervalued. This raises the need for employers to explore the history and implicit experience their employees bring to the company, attributes and virtues that appear not be fully captured in a conventional CV or verbalised by veterans in the workplace. This highlights that one cannot assume that two similar cultures share a fully

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common language and that there are linguistic nuances, subtle shades of meaning, which distort interpretation yet appear superficially to present a common meaning. This exposes the need for fine-grained understanding of narrative as a tool to achieve a greater depth of engagement, seeing the employee as more than a functional economic resource. Such engagement would not merely make economic sense but would also appear to enhance employee personal commitment and well-being (Alfes, 2010) which could be a generic benefit for the whole work force.

The work raises a call for research in to a veterans 'pre-enlistment' past to gain a deeper understanding of the background social legacies. Educational attainment among soldiers is much lower than the national average (MoD, 2004) as many enlistees come disproportionately from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds (DCSF, 2009:31) some with an increased risk of social exclusion (Agulnik et al., 2002) and some who join the military as a last resort. What this exposes is that their past is more than their military service and their 'pre-enlistment' state may present a default position on returning to a civilian world, a secondary default position, assumed as a static place but one that has now moved on, presenting a double loss and the potential of having initially nowhere to go.

Coaching can be a potential tool to both capture the richness of personal experiences and help personal transition to the benefit of the employer, line managers, working peers and veterans. Coaching intervention can get beneath the superficial similarities to expose important underlying differences that can more readily enable adaptation as well as support the development of a founding plan of action.

The work exposes the need for greater conceptualisation of narrative identity and how the narration of the past shapes our future, raising the observation that such approach can be used to engage with other communities. The work further calls for more research to gain insights into developing deeper conceptual understanding of personal identify and the challenges facing employed veterans to integrate within a civilian society. It also suggests that coaching provides a suitable conduit to gain engagement and support transition for veterans throughout their employment and help share their experiences with their peers to

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the benefit of the business and that the benefits of such initiatives are captured in future research.

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