


RESEARCH ARTICLE

The next mission: Inequality and service-to-civilian career transition outcomes among 50+ military leavers

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Abstract

We examine the Service-to-Civilian career transition for Military leavers aged 50 and above (50+). The exit age of our sampled group means that it is more likely that they hold senior-ranked positions across both Officer and Soldier career pathways. Despite both groups having access to similar transition opportunities and resources, we find that their work-lives are underpinned with economic, social, and structural inequality. This inequality has substantive effects on their employment transition outcomes. Our focus group data suggest that Soldiers have unequal access to formal (e.g., Career Transition Partnership programmes) and informal (e.g., social networks) transition support resources compared to Officers. Employing a structural equation modelling approach to analyse 183 survey responses, we found that Soldiers are more likely to apply for, and subsequently take, civilian work that is below their skills level. In turn, Soldiers are significantly less satisfied with their civilian work than Officers.

KEYWORDS

ageing workers, career transition, military personnel, organisation inequality

Abbreviations: CTP, Career Transition Partnership; MOD, Ministry of Defence; NCO, non-commissioned Officer.

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Practitioner notes

What is currently known about military veterans Service-to-Civilian work transitions?

1. 50+ Service leavers face a double discrimination (age and military status) as they transition to the Civilian workplace.
2. Skills acquired through military service are often considered less relevant to the civilian workplace by employers.

What does this paper add?

1. Despite participants being at the respective top of their career pathways—i.e., Officers and Soldiers—and being offered similar career transition support, we find that Officers have a more *successful* career transition journey.
2. We attribute this to social, economic and structural inequality.
3. Inequality means less access for Soldiers to key transition resources and opportunities.
4. We contribute to how career transitions, specifically the Service-to-Civilian one, are shaped by organisational inequality.

Implications for practitioners

1. We raise awareness of how organisational inequality in the Military can effect the Service-to-civilian career transition outcomes.
2. We stress the need to focus on improving formal and informal career transition support, especially in terms of access, content, and organisation. Organisational inequality does not fix itself.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Our research focuses on Service-to-Civilian career transition outcomes through the lens of inequality. In line with Amis et al. (2021), we define inequality as “the ways in which access to resources and opportunities are differentially distributed across a particular population” (p. 431). We use mixed method research—a combination of focus group and survey data—to study the transition experiences of ex-Service personnel. We focus on the transition experiences of those who have actively sought civilian work after leaving the Armed Forces at the age of 50 or over (hereafter, 50+). Specifically, we address the following research questions: First, how does inequality manifest itself in the Service-to-Civilian career transition? And second, what, if any, are the career transition outcome implications of this inequality?

In line with Ministry of Defence (MOD) career pathway classifications, we grouped participants into Officers (Senior, Middle-, and Junior-ranked) and Soldiers (Table 1). Due to their length of service in the military, many of our participants have progressed through—and some to the top of—their respective career pathways. The case of 50+ ex-Service personnel provides an ideal empirical context to study organisational career management practices and its potential impacts on career transition outcomes. On the one hand, as a senior group in the military, all participants in our study had access to the same transition resources. On the other hand, all suffer the same double civilian workplace discrimination, that is, bias against age and military status. Yet, despite being a seemingly homogenous group as they exit the Armed Forces, we find evidence of an organisational inequality. This stems from the organisational hierarchy, which seems to foster and perpetuate economic, social, and structural inequality between Officers and Soldiers (Mansfield, 2016; Razzell, 1963). Moreover, this inequality has shaped their respective exit transition outcomes; Officers positively, Soldiers negatively.

While we focus on the Armed Forces, our findings speak to a wide range of modern human resource management issues, including those that have arisen in the ‘new career’ era; namely a shift towards self-directed

TABLE 1 Highest rank served by respondents in the survey and pay scale

Ranks	Pay scale p.a.	Royal Air Force	Royal Navy	Army	Royal Marines
Senior officer ranks (47)	£91,776–£113,794	Air Chief Marshall	Admiral	General	General
		Air Marshal	Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General	Lieutenant General
		Air Vice-Marshal	Rear Admiral	Major General	Major General
		Air Commodore	Commodore	Brigadier	Brigadier
		Group Captain (15)	Captain (7)	Colonel (25)	Colonel (0)
Middle officer ranks (95)	53,975–£87,716	Wing Commander	Commander	Lieutenant-Colonel	Lieutenant-Colonel
		Squadron Leader (24)	Lieutenant Commander (10)	Major (58)	Major (3)
Junior officer rank (4)	£35,853–£50,967	Flying Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Captain	Captain
		Flying Officer	Sub lieutenant	Lieutenant	Lieutenant
		Pilot Officer	Midshipman	Second Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant
		(2)	(0)	(2)	(0)
Soldier ranks (37)	£39,896–£54,262	Warrant Officer (WO)	Warrant Officers Class 1	Warrant Officers Class 1	Warrant Officers Class 1
			Warrant Officers Class 2	Warrant Officers Class 2	Warrant Officers Class 2
		Flight Sergeant	Chief Petty Officer	Staff Sergeant	Colour Sergeant
		Sergeant (15)	Petty Officer (7)	Sergeant (15)	Sergeant (0)

Note: Military Ranks are based on information available on Ministry of Defence (2021b); Pay scale is based on armedforces.co.uk and MOD (2021b).

careers, facilitated by increased flexibility and labour market mobility (Arthur, 2008; Van Laer et al., 2021). This, in theory, gives individuals more freedom to attain both objective and subjective career success, but the career barriers faced by individuals with specific social identities—including gender, age, ethnicity, and so forth—are not well understood (Dany et al., 2011; Jeong & Leblebici, 2019). Our work sheds lights on how inequality experiences within the same occupation have both immediate and far-reaching effects on workers who are on different career pathways. Thus, our work provides support to theories of inequality, and extends research that raises the possibilities of negative effects of organisational inequality beyond the workplace (Amis et al., 2021; Bapuji et al., 2020).

1.1 | Theory: Organisational inequality and the armed forces

The UKs Armed Force follows a hierarchical organisational structure (Mansfield, 2016; Razzell, 1963). Historically, the upper echelons of the military are over-represented by privately schooled, university-educated, upper- and middle-class individuals (Razzell, 1963). Those on the Soldier pathway, by contrast, are typically voluntarily enlisted

young men from the lower social classes, and from regions with higher levels of unemployment (Mansfield, 2016; Powell, 2021). In other words, there is an inequality so deeply woven into the fabric of the organisation that there is likely to be an innate meritocracy deficit (e.g., Amis et al., 2021). Indeed, while the MOD claims that the Military offers a "limitless" career (MOD, 2021b), only a small proportion of Soldiers (approximately 10%) is promoted to non-commissioned Officer (NCO), and an even smaller share become commissioned Officers (Mansfield, 2016; MOD, 2021b). In starker terms, Mansfield (2016) describes this situation as a 'social apartheid'.

Inequality is far from unique to the Armed Forces. Indeed, it is not even unique among branches of government and public service (e.g., the Civil Service, see Friedman, 2021). Inequality radiates through all organisations via "unequal career opportunities and career boundaries" (Van Laer et al., 2021). There is limited understanding of how social structures within organisations "are designed or evolve to advantage some groups over others" (Amis et al., 2021, p. 431), and how this effects career transitions in this 'new career' era (Arthur, 2008; Jeong & Leblebici, 2019). Prior human resource management research has offered some insights on the interaction between dimensions of workplace inequality, specifically in terms of recruitment, retention, and remuneration decisions within a single organisation (Amis et al., 2020, 2021; Bapuji et al., 2020). However, theories of organisational inequality are still in their infancy, especially when it comes to experiencing crucial career events, such as moving between organisations and/or professions (Arthur, 2008; Jeong & Leblebici, 2019; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021). This is against the background that careers have become more complex and less predictable in general due to exponential changes in technology, an ageing workforce, and globalisation (Arthur, 2008; Sullivan & Al Ariss, 2021).

1.2 | Service-to-civilian career transitions

The exit transition experiences of Service personnel are under-studied and under-theorised. This is an oversight, especially given the importance of the Military's contribution to society (e.g., Mansfield, 2016; Razzell, 1963; Stone & Stone, 2015). For simplicity, we partition studies of the Service-to-Civilian career journey into two branches. The first focuses on the desirability of attributes developed during military service that would contribute meaningfully to the pursuit and undertaking of civilian work. These attributes include: leadership (Loughlin & Arnold, 2007), political skills (Blass & Ferris, 2007), strong ethics (Offstein & Dufresne, 2007), honesty, dependability, and diligence (Kleykamp, 2009). The second branch claims that even though civilian employers state they value military experience and skills, these same employers struggle to find ways to make use of those skills acquired during Service (e.g., Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021; Stone & Stone, 2015).

As mentioned above, there is scant attention paid to the structural, social, and economic differences between Soldiers and Officers. Rather, the journey into civilian work brings together ex-Service personnel under one banner and studies them as a homogenous group. Despite this, the reading is grim. Studies demonstrate that the Service-to-Civilian transition is fraught with unfairness and discrimination (e.g., Gati et al., 2013; Gonzalez & Simpson, 2021; Shepherd et al., 2019; Stone & Stone, 2015); especially for those who are older (Bass et al., 2002). The hiring biases against Service personnel in Civilian workplaces exist from the initial screening process (McFarling et al., 2011; Stone & Stone, 2015; Sudom et al., 2012) and this reinforces stereotypes associated with older workers (Riach, 2007; Van Laer et al., 2021).

Despite the set of desirable skills possessed by ex-Service personnel, a high percentage of 50+ Service leavers struggle to secure civilian work, and a non-trivial number end up on unemployment welfare or homeless (Buss-Blair, 2021). The UK government is aware of this struggle faced by ex-service leavers (e.g., Collins et al., 2014; Deloitte, 2018); hence, the MOD has crafted a thorough exit transition provision. A key part of the transition programme offered by the military is the Career Transition Partnership (or, CTP).

The CTP was devised to address the lack of *civilianisation* among veterans (Stone & Stone, 2015). Support is offered for up to 2 years before the exit and continues for up to 2 years post discharge (MOD, 2014). While

participation in the CTP is ostensibly compulsory, individual military personnel can choose for themselves whether or not to make use of CTP services. For example, the uptake in 2020 was 80% of Service Leavers (MOD, 2021c). Furthermore, accessibility to such exit transition provision among Armed Force personnel has been overlooked. The CTP includes a range of learning and development opportunities, for instance resettlement support, career transition advice, practical job search skills and accredited skills training. It is available, in principle, for leavers from every branch and every rank of the military.

2 | HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Our first set of hypotheses examines the existence of a hierarchical inequality between Officers and Soldiers, and how this effects Service-to-Civilian career transition success (i.e., attaining civilian employment and job satisfaction). Our hypotheses were developed abductively, working back and forth between theory, literature, and our focus group data. To facilitate our analysis, we analyse three determinants of inequality: social, economic, and structural, which favours Officers over Soldiers.

First, a combination of inside- and outside-work social networks endows Officers with access to social capital that may not be available to Soldiers (Hall, 2011). Access to different resources means that Officers might have access to a wider range of role models and advisors in the civilian workplace, have greater opportunities (formal or informal) for networking and work-shadowing (Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Mansfield, 2016). By contrast, Soldiers are usually school-leavers who enlisted principally because they struggled to secure civilian employment (Razzell, 1963). The second source of hierarchical inequality stems from an economic inequality. Officers not only receive higher pay (see Table 1), but on retirement at 50+ (subject to years' of service), Officers receive an immediate pension worth approximately a third of their final salary plus a tax-free lump sum. In our sample, many more Officers (over half) exit with a full pension, compared to 26% of Soldiers (Table 2). Note also that Military benefits accrue across an entire career, for example, via heavily subsidised accommodation. Indeed, higher-ranked Officers receive more benefits than other groups, thus creating a structural acceleration of inequality; for example, boarding school fees for their children are paid for by the services. This is summarised in the case reported in *The Guardian*, which offers a glimpse of a pay package for an Officer (Slawson, 2021).¹ For most ex-Service personnel, the loss of these benefits is felt keenly, but we hypothesise that it is felt more keenly by Soldiers than Officers, and this effects the former's transition choices. Our hypothesis of economic inequality rests on the idea that higher-ranked Officers' are able to take a longer-term view on selecting the type and quality of civilian employment when they leave the military. Moreover, Officers are less likely than their lower-paid Soldier peers to have to rush to find a job, and hence search below their skills level.

Thirdly, there is structural inequality built into the roles, tasks, and duties of Officers and Soldiers. Senior Officers perform a strategic function, and they benefit from higher levels of workplace autonomy (Mansfield, 2016; Razzell, 1963), which in turn allows them more freedom to choose their participation level in training and development opportunities, such as the CTP. By contrast, Soldiers and lower-ranked Officers have lower levels of autonomy and typically undertake more mundane tasks that are chosen for them. Our hypothesis of role-based inequality states that the role and responsibilities of higher-ranked Officers provides greater levels of freedom to participate in exit transition opportunities and resources.

From here, we derive the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a *Higher-ranked Officers are more likely to be successful in finding civilian employment than other groups because of the inequality that favours them.*

Hypothesis 1b *Higher-ranked Officers are more likely to be satisfied with their civilian employment than other groups because of the inequality that favours them.*

TABLE 2 Descriptive analysis on employment transition

Career pathways	Solider rank	Middle- and Junior-ranked Officers	Senior-ranked Officers
Starting point when exit			
Number of participants	37	99	47
Feel valued [-1,1]	-0.2	0.08	0.11
Average age when exit (years)	53	54	54
Having a Master or PhD degree	0	50	34
Access to full pension	26%	53%	48%
Perceived very good military pay	34%	30%	27%
Feel ready to go	0.12	0.32	0.27
Secure first job within 6 months after exit	76%	74%	83%
Current employment status			
Employed [1 employed; 0 unemployed but wish to work]	80%	82%	85%
Type of employment			
Employee	64%	61%	61%
Self-employed	16%	21%	24%
Current occupation			
Professional and management occupation	55%	92%	97%
Crafts/technical	15%	4%	0%
Administration	8%	1%	3%
Service/elementary	22%	2%	0%
Size of employer			
<5	11%	15%	15%
6-49	26%	18%	12%
50-249	15%	14%	3%
250+	47%	53%	71%
Current job quality [-2,2]	0.28	0.56	0.83
Places they currently live			
South East	8%	18%	22%
South West	18%	38%	37%
Job search activities to secure the first civilian job			
Using social/professional network	41%	51%	74%
Applied below skill level work	51%	37%	40%
Average number of jobs applied	22	17	17
Use career transition partnership provision			
CTP training participation rate	75%	88%	95%
Rating on CTP Support (advice, training, CV writing)	2.63	3.00	3.65
Using 8 listed service provided by CTP	3.92	4.05	4.71

Our second set of hypotheses is concerned with unequal access to the CTP support between Officers and Soldiers. For Soldiers, military work is more likely to involve frequent operational and training deployments, which means anti-social working hours and conditions (Mansfield, 2016; Razzell, 1963). During focus groups we were told

that these tasks restrict their freedom to engage with transition resources and prepare for their Service-to-Civilian career transition. By contrast, Officers' work typically offers more autonomy and freedom, and hence easier access to transition opportunities and resources. We thus propose that:

Hypothesis 2a *Compared with other groups, the relationship between high-ranked Officers' civilian employment outcomes is mediated by the degree of their engagement with the CTP support.*

Hypothesis 2b *Compared with other groups, the relationship between high-ranked Officers' satisfaction with their civilian employment is mediated by their degree of engagement with the CTP support.*

The third set of hypotheses deepens the focus on the structural inequalities by examining whether Soldiers are more (less) likely to search for civilian work below their perceived skills level. Skills (mis-)matching is an important concern among veterans (Stone & Stone, 2015). We hypothesise that Soldiers are more likely to feel forced to choose below skills level work because they have less access to key transition resources and opportunities than Officers. For example, ex-Soldiers have lower pension income and are less likely to have other economic resources upon which to fall back. Moreover, they face the problem that older workers often receive inferior pay in their second careers, because shifting between career pathways is typically a reset to the bottom of the ladder (Arthur, 2008; Jeong & Leblebici, 2019). Short-run deleterious employment choices, such as searching below their skills level, are likely to perpetuate this position. We propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a *The higher a Service leaver perceives their Military remuneration, the more likely they will search for work below self-perceived skills level to secure civilian employment.*

Hypothesis 3b *The higher a Service leaver perceives their Military remuneration, the less likely they will find satisfying work through searching for jobs below self-perceived skills level.*

3 | RESEARCH METHODS

This research was undertaken with funding from Forces in Mind Trust; led by the Officers Association (now part of the Forces Employment Charity), and conducted by the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce (CROW) (at the University of Hull). We chose a mixed methods research approach that is consistent with both the current state of knowledge and the complexities of the tensions we examine (McColl & Michelotti, 2019; Pernkopf et al., 2021). There are several advantages to a mixed methods approach. For example, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods allows opportunities for the refinement of research questions and instruments, which in turn enhances the rigour and robustness of outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). We adopted an exploratory sequential design (e.g., Bacon-Gerasymenko et al., 2016) which began with an examination of archival data for the purposes of situating the research, moved through a series of pilot interviews to inform the focus groups and survey, which in turn evolved into formal focus groups, and finally a questionnaire. Each phase of the research aided the design of the next (Greene et al., 1989).

Our sample selection was based on two criteria: first, we only used data of those who had already left the Armed Forces; second, they were 50 or over when exiting. We used data from 7 focus group discussions, involving 36 participants, alongside 183 valid survey responses. Although the research questions which we asked evolved as the study progressed, the core themes remained consistent from start to end.

3.1 | Focus groups

Six of the seven focus groups involved Service leavers who were in work either as employees of organisations (19) or as atypical workers such as casual workers, consultants or self-employed (10). One workshop comprised

seven Service leavers who, at the time, had been unemployed for over 6 months and not engaged in education or volunteer work. The focus groups explored individuals' experiences of both transitioning to, and subsequently in, civilian work. Topics discussed included: the barriers that veterans face after long military service, including ageism and anti-military bias; uncertainty with navigating the civilian job market; and the struggles faced when trying to build a career outside of the military while simultaneously having to navigate other civilian life transitions, such as housing and community. It is important to note that the tone of the workshops was mixed. For example, alongside remarks about discrimination they had faced in the Service-to-Civilian transition, respondents also provided some positive feedback about support which they received from employers, community organisations, and other veterans. Respondents related their past and present civilian work experiences, and how their career journeys compared with their expectations. We are satisfied that the point of saturation was reached, and the responses from participants provide sufficiently representative, robust and reliable data.

3.2 | Survey

The survey has a response rate of approximately 40%. These respondents are predominately white ($n = 181$) and male ($n = 175$), with ages ranging from 50 to 83. The responding veterans are well qualified: 57% of the sample hold a tertiary degree, and 46% hold a Master's degree or PhD (these are exclusively middle- and high-ranked Officers; an indicator of their privilege, Table 2). Among the sample, 47 are Senior Officers, 95 are Middle Ranking Officers, only 4 declared themselves within one of the Junior Officer categories. In the analysis, we merged Junior- and Middle-ranked Officers to mitigate sample size effects. In addition, there are 37 responses from individuals who identify themselves in one of the Soldier ranks (see Table 1). In total, 137 were economically active, that is, in employment, government training programmes, or actively looking for paid employment. Approximately 55% of the sample were ex-Army, the remainder split almost equally between the other branches of the military. This reflects the current armed force distribution based on the 2021-Armed force statistics, whereby 56% are in the Army, while the Navy and RAF equally share the rest (MOD, 2021a). See Table 2 for some descriptive analysis of the employment transition starting point, search activities, and outcomes.

4 | DEPENDENT VARIABLES

4.1 | Civilian employment outcomes

Two variables were used to measure civilian employment outcomes. The first measures whether or not the respondent was employed at the time of the survey. The second measures the satisfaction with civilian work. To capture satisfaction, we used three factors namely: (i) whether the veteran thought their current civilian work used and developed their skills; (ii) was interesting; and (iii) provided them a sense of being valued. A factor analysis indicates these three items are unidimensional (eigenvalue = 2.36, factor loading > 0.56, Cronbach's alpha = 0.85) (see Table 3 for definitions of the relevant variables).

4.2 | Independent variables

In line with theoretical expectations, we assume inequality stems from a number of sources. Specifically, we asked respondents: their highest rank, level of satisfaction with military pay, and their sense of feeling valued by

TABLE 3 Summary definition of the main variables

Variables	Definition	Mean (Std. Dev.)	No. of respondents
Civilian employment outcomes			
Current employment status	1 = employed or self-employed 0 = look for work or wish to work and age below 66	0.90 (0.38)	183
Civilian job satisfaction	Standardised rating on three items (strongly disagree to strongly agree, 1–5) Current job is interesting, uses my skills, and makes me feel valued.	0.58 (1.1)	165
Military attainment			
Perceived high military pay	1 = highly remunerated; 0 = other	0.30 (0.46)	183
Felt valued by the Military	5-point Likert Scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree (1–5)	3.25 (0.87)	183
Colonels or above rank (highest rank served in the Military)	1 = Colonel to General, Captain to Air Chief Marshall or Admiral. 0 = others	0.23 (0.42)	183
Mediators			
Engagement with CTP support	Rating on quality of CTP provision (strongly disagree to strongly agree, 1–5): Individual career advice, training support and workshops	3.11 (1.26)	183
Applied below skill level work	1 = applied for work well below their skill level; 0 = none	0.33 (0.47)	183
Control variables			
First civilian job	1 = Secure first job within 6 months after exit 0 = would like to work and secured a job later or still search	0.76 (0.42)	183
Ready to leave the Military	1 = I completed my commission and don't want to continue; I have a new career opportunity outside of the military; I wanted to try something new. 0 = others	0.24 (0.43)	183
Education	Approximate years of schooling in English Education system.	17.8 (4.15)	183
Age	Age when exit	58 (6)	183

the military. Rank is highly correlated with military attainment, an indicator of competence by merit. We were conscious that there may be a distorting negative response bias among those who were forced out of the military. Therefore, we include relevant control variables in Table 5. The empirical results show that this issue is not a concern.

4.3 | Mediators

We used two mediators: (i) degree of engagement with the CTP support; and (ii) applying for work below one's skill level. Despite being mandatory, a small number of respondents claimed they did not know about the CTP. To measure the level of engagement, we gauge not only their attendance in CTP programmes but also rating on relevant career transition programmes (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree): individual career advice, training support, and

workshops. A factor analysis indicates these three items are unidimensional (eigenvalue = 2.14, factor loading > 0.55, and Cronbach's alpha = 0.79) and can be used as one construct.

The second mediator measures whether the ex-Service person felt that they applied for work that was below their skills level at the exit transition point. To do this, we adopted a simple binary measure, whereby '1' indicated that the respondent believes they searched for work below their skill level and '0' denotes they did not. In total, 68 Service leavers believe they searched for work below their skills level.

4.4 | Control variables

Since the Service leavers' current civilian employment status is likely to be influenced by whether they secure a first civilian job within a short period of exiting the military, there is a potential dynamic endogeneity effect (Abdallah et al., 2015). In response, we include this variable to account for any endogeneity effect. We also used qualification level and age as control variables because of their potential importance to determining civilian employment outcomes.

5 | FINDINGS

5.1 | Focus groups

In line with expectations, there is a vivid awareness that exit transition preparedness is crucial. Maybe due to the high levels of acculturation, this is particularly important for the Service leaver. Indeed, one participant joked that military service was a process of "learning to leave from the day you join." In achieving a successful transition, we learnt the importance of access to, and engagement with, formal and informal support. In terms of formal support, we were told that the CTP plays a key role. This is despite an ambiguity regarding the role and function of the CTP among focus group participants. For instance, at one extreme, some believed that engagement with the CTP would guarantee a good job, whereas at the other end, others argued that they saw no value in participation.

In terms of informal support, focus group participants said that senior Officers, and other colleagues, provide essential direction and support. For example, one Soldier talked about their superior Officer introducing career planning time to their workload within the last 6 months of their military service. Yet, participants stressed that there is an inequality in the system whereby not everyone has equal access to the same resources and opportunities (Amis et al., 2020, 2021). One Junior Officer said: *"I feel that if I had someone to speak to or a mentor, I could have called on it. It would have been a great help in understanding why I felt isolated and no sense of purpose or value which really made it difficult for me to socialise and build relationships with people"*.

Alongside role-related inequalities, there are social and economic ones (Hall, 2011). For instance, an Officer offered the following advice: "Network, network, network because that is where your first job is likely to come from. Have the courage to turn down your first job offer if it is not right". However, in the presence of inequality, it is difficult to network when one's social capital is limited, and it is hard to turn down work without some economic security.

5.2 | Survey

The inter-correlations among the main variables are presented in Table 4. Conventional measures of work accomplishment—in this case, remuneration, rank, and feeling valued by the Military—are positively associated with civilian

TABLE 4 Correlation between main variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Civilian job satisfaction	1.00								
2 Currently employed	.	1.00							
3 Secure first job within 6 months of exit	-0.00	0.16**	1.00						
4 Applied below skills level work	-0.28***	-0.10	0.07	1.00					
5 Ready to go	0.06	0.00	-0.02	0.21***	1.00				
6 Engagement with CTP support	0.18*	0.27***	0.09	-0.00	0.04	1.00			
7 Felt valued by the Military	0.24**	0.08	-0.04	-0.14*	0.24***	0.24***	1.00		
8 Senior-ranked Officer	0.14	0.15	0.08	0.05	-0.02	0.27***	0.05	1.00	
9 High military remuneration	0.03	0.03	-0.07	0.20	-0.07	0.02	0.23***	-0.04	1
10 Education	0.14	0.05	-0.05	-0.07	0.02	0.16*	-0.04	0.29**	-0.14

*** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$.

employment success. This means both higher levels of employment and job satisfaction. These results were strongest among those who felt valued by the military and those that achieved Senior Officer rank. By contrast, we found that those who sought work below their skills level report significantly lower levels of job satisfaction.

The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) test value is less than 2 (threshold value $VIF > 4$). This indicates that multi-collinearity is not a concern for the regression analysis. To control for the influence of common method bias, we followed well-established protocol and recommendations (Spector & Brannick, 2009). For statistical remedy, a Harmon's single-factor test was conducted. Results from this test suggested the presence of three factors, indicating that common method effects are not a likely contaminant of the results of the regression analysis.

6 | HYPOTHESIS TESTING

We present our conceptual framework alongside key findings in Figures 1 and 2. Following the steps of analysing mediating effects as outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986), we first test the relation between our independent variables and attaining civilian outcomes in Step 1 (attaining employment, Table 5; job satisfaction, Table 6). Next, we test the potential mediators (engagement with the CTP support in Table 5; and Searched below skill jobs in Table 6) in Step 2. We then test direct effect by including mediators in Step 3. Finally, we examine the potential mediating effect on civilian employment outcomes in Step 4 (attaining employment, Table 5; job satisfaction, Table 6). We unpack the direct and indirect effects by running Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Control variables are included in all analyses and the empirical outcomes are presented in Tables 5 and 6.

As shown in Tables 5 and 6, the total effect (step 1), Senior Officers are more likely—though not significantly so—to find work compared with other groups of Service leavers. Moreover, Senior Officers are positively and significantly more likely to be satisfied with their civilian work. It seems that this group draw on sources of advantage to achieve this outcome—a sense of feeling more valued, higher economic certainty, and the sense of accomplishment that stems from holding a higher rank. Thus, these findings partially support the association between Officers—particularly Senior Officers—and Service-to-Civilian transition success. Senior Officers are not necessarily more likely to find civilian work, but they are more likely to find satisfying civilian work. This provides some evidence to support Hypothesis 1b, but we reject Hypothesis 1a.

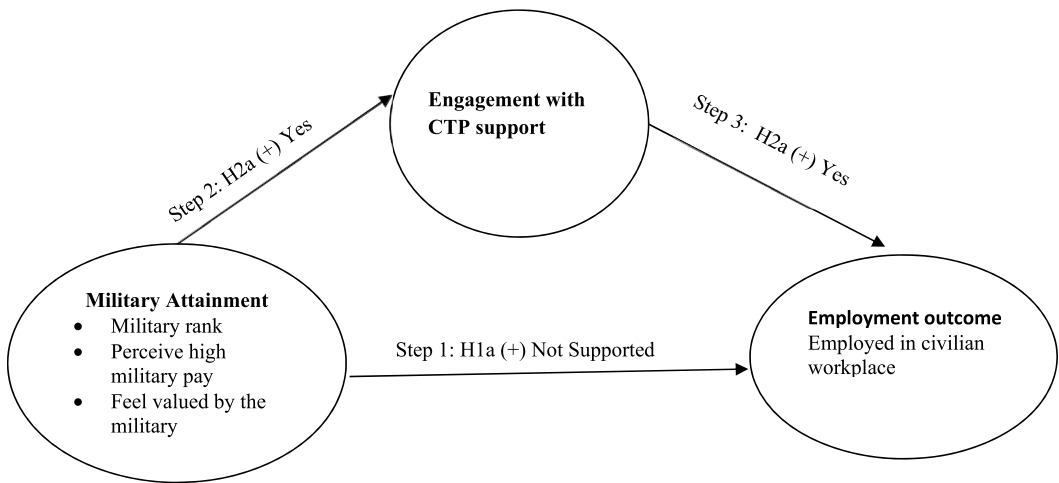


FIGURE 1 Transition outcomes: being employed

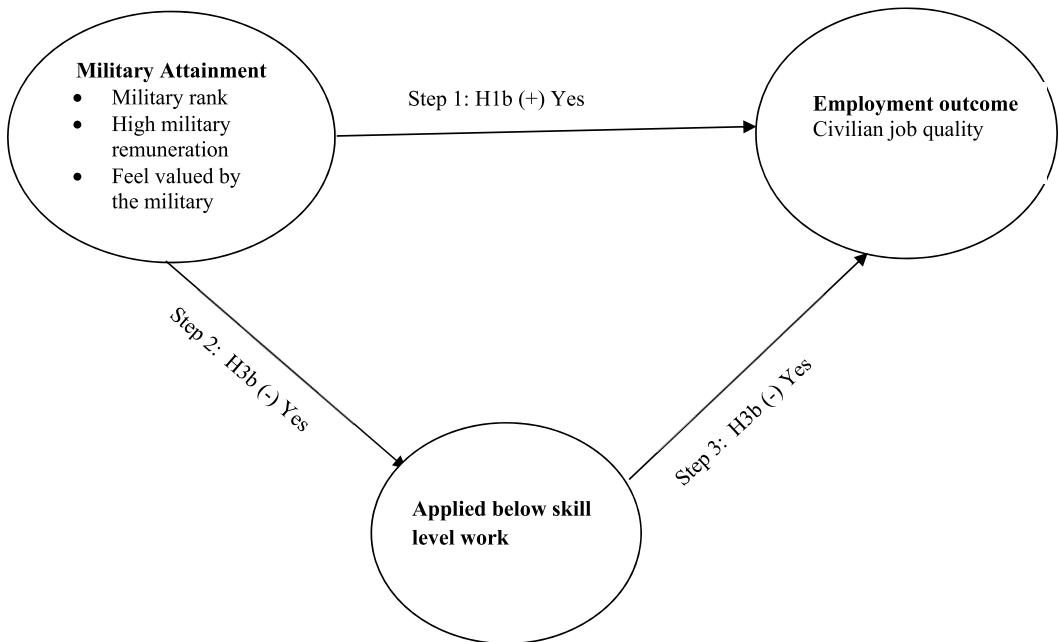


FIGURE 2 Transition outcomes: Civilian Job Satisfaction

Hypothesis 2 examines the possible mediating effect through CTP engagement between Senior Officers compared with other ranks and their civilian employment outcomes. In step 2 in Table 5, we show a positive and significant correlation between being a Senior Officer and engaging with the CTP. In other words, Senior Officers seem to be more able to access career transition resources and opportunities (Amis et al., 2020, 2021). In Step 3, we show that engagement with the CTP support is positively and significantly correlated with finding civilian employment. Table 6 presents analysis which shows that while there is a positive association between CTP engagement and job satisfaction, it is not significant. Our bootstrapping test—with 5000 simulated samples—confirms the significant level of indirect effect in Table 5 and its 95% confidence interval does not pass zero. Therefore, Hypothesis 2a is supported, whereas Hypothesis 2b is rejected.

TABLE 5 Generalised structural equation modelling on employed in a civilian workplace

	Total effect (Step 1)		Direct effect (Step 3)
	H1a	Mediator check (Step2)	H2a&H3a
Military attainment	Employed in a civilian workplace	Engagement with CTP support	Employed in a civilian workplace
Felt valued by the military	0.02 (0.03)	0.29*** (0.12)	0.17 (0.30)
Soldiers (benchmark group)			
Junior- and Middle-ranked Officers	-0.02 (0.38)	0.23 (0.28)	-0.29 (0.51)
Senior-Ranked Officers	0.04 (0.56)	0.73** (0.21)	-0.24 (0.44)
Perceived high military pay	0.18 (0.29)	0.01 (0.21)	0.29 (0.32)
Mediators			
Applied below skill level work			-0.30 (0.29)
Engagement with CTP support			0.28*** (0.12)
Control variables			
Secured first job within 6 months of exit	0.82*** (0.31)	0.33 (0.26)	0.78*** (0.32)
Felt ready to leave the Military	0.31 (0.36)	0.00 (0.22)	0.54 (0.35)
Years of schooling	0.02 (0.04)	0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)
Age on exit (log)	0.13* (0.06)	0.03 (0.03)	0.13* (0.06)
Indirect effect through CTP engagement (Step4)			
Colonels or above rank	0.05**		
R-Squared (Pseudo R2)	0.14	0.14	
Log likelihood	-60.48		-53.49
Number of observations	183	183	165

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Hypothesis 3 examines how ex-Service people behave in the civilian job market; specifically in terms of whether or not searching for work below one's skills level impacts civilian employment success. In step 2 (Table 6), we show that Officers (all ranks) are less likely to apply for jobs below their perceived skills level than Soldiers. Moreover, those that felt themselves to be well remunerated during Service are significantly and positively correlated with searching below skills level (Step 2 in Table 6). At the same time, Step 3 (Tables 5 and 6), show that searching below skills is negatively correlated with being employed and civilian job satisfaction. This is statistically significant for the latter, that is, civilian job satisfaction ($\beta = -0.77$, $p < 0.01$). Since Table 2 highlights that Soldiers are more likely to apply for jobs below their perceived skills level, taking this information together, Hypothesis 3a is rejected but Hypothesis 3b is partially supported.

7 | DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article, we examined the Service-to-Civilian career transition process among 50+ Soldiers and Officers. We draw on theories of organisational inequality (e.g., Amis et al., 2021; Amis et al., 2021; Bapuji, 2015; Dorling, 2015; Marmot, 2015; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010) as a sense-making frame. We explore the efficacy of organisational career

TABLE 6 Structural equation modelling on civilian job satisfaction

	Step 1: Total effect		Step 3: Direct effect
	H1b	Mediator checkStep 2	H2b and H3b
Military attainment	Civilian Job satisfaction	Applied below skill work	Civilian Job satisfaction
Felt valued by the military	0.28** (0.12)	-0.35** (0.13)	0.16 (0.13)
Soldiers (benchmark group)			
Junior and Middle-ranked Officers	-0.06 (0.31)	-0.47 (0.31)	-0.16 (0.31)
Senior-ranked Officers	0.21 (0.35)	-0.22 (0.36)	0.28 (0.36)
Perceived high military remuneration	0.07 (0.24)	0.69*** (0.23)	0.18 (0.24)
Mediators			
Applied below skill level work			-0.77*** (0.22)
Engagement with CTP support		0.07 (0.09)	0.10 (0.08)
Control variables			
Secured first job within 6 months of exit	0.05 (0.33)	-0.38 (0.28)	-0.11 (0.32)
Felt ready to leave the Military	0.03 (0.25)	0.16 (0.25)	0.06 (0.23)
Years of schooling	0.04 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Age on exit (log)	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)
Indirect effect through applied job below perceived skill level (Step 4)			
Perceived high military remuneration	-0.22**		
R-Squared (Pseudo R2)	9%	8%	19%
Log likelihood		-96.05	
Number of observations	183	183	165

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

practices in an under-studied area, that is, employment transition with both changes in organisational and professional settings, among those with a successful previous career who are 50+ (Dany et al., 2011; Jeong & Leblebici, 2019; Van Laer et al., 2021). It is important to make it clear that Service leavers across all ranks can find the Service-to-Civilian career transition difficult (e.g., Stone & Stone, 2015), especially those at an older age (Van Laer et al., 2021). However, we aim to shift the focus to the innate organisational inequality of a seemingly homogenous group (with regard to occupation status, age group, and success in their previous career), onto how inequality impacts career transition outcomes.

Our findings indicate that inequality works on several levels, perpetuated and facilitated by structural issues. These inequalities shape an ex-Service person's employment transition starting point, activities, and outcomes. With greater economic security, Senior Officers can afford to pick and choose their preferred job and are less trapped by the need to stay-put if they are unhappy. It is simpler to leave one job, in search of more satisfying work elsewhere. This advantage has been perpetuated by greater access to resources and opportunities and other organisational career practices. To this end, we find that Senior Officers are more likely to possess formal higher education qualifications (Table 2), a desirable element in the civilian labour market (Van Laer et al., 2021) which permits access to jobs that require degrees across different occupations and regions. Furthermore, their sense of norms and institutions cultured by their privilege in social capital enables them to find and fit into satisfying civilian work more easily. By contrast, Soldiers are less likely to find satisfying work, and this almost certainly stems from an economic, social, and structural inequality, which sees them leaving the Military with less recognised formal qualifications and narrower social networks. Soldiers are therefore more likely to apply for jobs below their skills level. In other words, Soldiers seem to be disadvantaged because of an inequality gap. The seniority of our sampled group makes us concerned that the

gap—and its impact—might be enormous for lower-ranked soldiers. This area deserves urgent attention given that 3000–4000 soldiers are estimated to sleep rough in the UK in 2021 (Buss-Blair, 2021).

Our findings signal a number of important implications. First, it requires structural and systematic changes in the Military to address the inequality which has deep historical and cultural roots. To be able to enact change, there must first be awareness of this embedded inequality issue, how it manifests, and how it effects Service-to-Civilian transition outcomes. Among 15,368 service leavers between 2019 and 2020, 10% are economically inactive in the UK alone (MOD, 2021c). Thus, our work addresses an urgent concern. There should be an immediate focus on creating equal and fair access to organisational career management practices by design. This requires considering how military practices and processes serve to divide the 'haves' from the 'have nots'. A simple example is when Soldiers, who spend most of their day working without a computer, face barriers when learning and development opportunities are communicated via email and/or accessed via online platforms. With better organising resources and access to them, this would add concreteness to the notion that a soldier is "learning to leave from the day they join".

Our findings also suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to formal and informal transition support needs re-thinking. Transition programmes should be determined by needs and take into account innate organisational inequalities, rather than aspirations. To be specific, those on the Soldier and Officer career pathways need different advice and support. The former need more provisions around how and what jobs to search and apply for, as well as how to manage the post-military financial uncertainty. The latter's needs vary across the ranks. Support and opportunities that benefit Junior- and Middle-Ranked Officers may not apply for the Senior, and vice-versa. However, a shared challenge for Officers of all levels in the Service-to-Civilian career transition is how to translate valuable skills to a new workplace setting, for example, leadership. One of the reforms which could significantly help address the inequalities identified in this research is to offer lifetime employment support to veterans of all ages. In the UK most employment services provided by CTP are available up to 2 years after leaving the Armed Forces. For most 50+ Service leavers this is plenty of time to access help in building a civilian career, but some may require access to training and employability support well beyond that initial 2-year period. This is particularly the case for soldiers who leave the Armed Forces with no idea what they want to—and can—do in the civilian workplace.

Finally, we propose some avenues for future research. Despite being a case in extremis, as the working population becomes older alongside technological advancement, there is an increasing trend to switch career paths between professions and/or organisations, the 'new career' era (Arthur, 2008; Dany et al., 2011). However, studies on career transition processes, practices, and outcomes have not kept up (Jeong & Leblebici, 2019; Van Laer et al., 2021). Every year, 14% of the UK workforce are redeployed without enough attention to their relevant work experience (McLachlan et al., 2021). To this end, what, and how effective, is transition support, and how does it translate into outcomes? We urge researchers towards more intensive study of the barriers linked to groups of individuals during career transitions, such as age, gender, occupation, social class—and practices that provide the most efficient and effective outcomes. For example, a key limitation of studying career transitions in the context of the UK military is that our sample is dominated by white British men. The MOD has endeavoured to improve diversity in the Armed Forces, and we would strongly urge further research into the employment transitions of female Service joiners and leavers, as well as those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the UK Data Archives at [https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2F2fs31949.pcdn.co%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F20200408-Exec-summary-FINAL.pdf&data=05%7C01%7Cww156%40leicester.ac.uk%7Cab92477b790e4278bd2508da3b5c158d%7Caebeed6a31d44b0195ce8274afe853d9%7C0%7C1%7C637887563940338403%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLjBtIl6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=mzlg-vEQoy8Ou3SN5IqW5ztu6IA2VZdJM6HtobE%2FMnU%3D&reserved=0](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fdoi.org%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cww156%40leicester.ac.uk%7Cab92477b790e4278bd2508da3b5c158d%7Caebeed6a31d44b0195ce8274afe853d9%7C0%7C1%7C637887563940338403%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLjBtIl6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=4mXOkLKhGaMMC0O5UjvluQHAKT3ZgX-5zmlCSDT8rIPY%3D&reserved=0[doi], reference number [reference number]. The data was collected as part of a research project funded by the Forces in Mind Trust and can be found here: <a href=).

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ENDNOTE

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