

## **A Model of Military to Civilian Transition: Bourdieu in Action**

**Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health (in press)**

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### **Abstract**

Building on recent work that used the ideas of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to construct a theoretical framework with which to consider military to civilian transition (MCT), this article introduces a practical approach to develop the use of this theory into an adaptable framework to explore factors that affect MCT. We have devised a Model of MCT called the Model of Transition in Veterans (MoTiVe), to explore why an enduring attachment to the military exists for veterans and to develop an understanding of how ‘looking back’ on life events experienced in the military may cause difficulty for some in transition. We use Bourdieusian theory to consider the adjustment of military personnel back into civilian life, taking into account the importance of individual variances in socio-economic trajectories, life stories and subsequent discrepancies between the norms of the military and civilian environments. We suggest that MoTiVe is a useful tool to reflect on how life experiences, both within and outside of the Armed Forces affect the transition process, which can also be adapted to consider periods of transition in all walks of life.

Keywords: Bourdieu, civilian, identity, military, transition, veterans.

### **Introduction**

There is widespread interest in MCT within academic and military communities, yet little theoretical or empirical research exists to consider what difficulties may arise for some veterans in the process of the reintegration back into civilian life. In the UK, the Armed

Forces Covenant<sup>2</sup> informs quasi policy through the collaborative efforts of Corporate Covenants, Community Covenants, charitable organizations and individuals. The Armed Forces Covenant<sup>2</sup> suggests that the nation has ‘an obligation for life’ to support former members of the Armed Forces and their families, and that they should face no disadvantage in society based on their military service. However, support for transition commonly focuses on practical applications of support, such as job seeking, without an understanding of individual circumstances.

The construct and definition of a veteran varies between different nation states and the benefits associated with veteran status are similarly diverse<sup>3</sup>. For the purposes of this paper, we are using the UK definition of a veteran, that is, an inclusive classification for someone who has served at least one day in the Armed Forces<sup>2</sup>.

The Veterans Transition Review<sup>4</sup> conducted by Lord Ashcroft in 2014 draws attention to the problems that may confront service personnel when they leave the Armed Forces, including issues of housing, education, employment and well-being. In the US, Castro, Kintzle and Hassan<sup>5</sup> recognize that three main factors are key in shaping the transition journey; military and combat history, personal resilience and whether the journey towards and through transition has been a positive or negative experience. Ahern *et al.*<sup>6</sup> highlight the sometimes problematic nature of transition and the necessity for veterans to find strategies to reconnect with acceptable social civilian behaviours. As such, there is a paucity of theoretical and empirical understanding regarding how individuals experience the transition into non-military ways.

In considering integration back into civilian life, the legacy and influence of military culture are rarely considered by academics in the process of MCT. The Armed Forces serving population is predominantly male, with common stereotypes of dominant male behaviours. These traits include physical toughness, self-resourcefulness and risk-taking<sup>7,8</sup>. Hale<sup>9</sup> acknowledges the military as an institution that acts as an arena for the construction of rituals and practices where extreme masculinity is ingrained and accepted in order to adapt to living successfully within the military culture. Such behaviour is symbolically valuable. However, as well as living within the military institution, regular civilian life events during the course of a military career such as getting married, having children and being a property owner have to be negotiated concomitantly. The Armed Forces take recruits from all socio-economic backgrounds and a successful military career has the possibility to be a vehicle for social mobility beyond that of the family background.

Both Hockey<sup>8</sup> and Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg<sup>10</sup> recognize that the process of becoming a member of the Armed Forces requires adaptation into military ways of thinking and behaving, in order to prepare personnel to be ready to undertake their roles to fight and protect. This develops a cultural legacy of camaraderie that often remains compelling. Whilst a temporary mode of transition between two social spaces takes place whilst on leave, veterans have to make a permanent shift from their strong identification with their previous military setting into different and acceptable forms of civilian norms and values<sup>1</sup>. Although not readily acknowledged, at some point in their lives all serving personnel will leave the Armed Forces and will need to revert to accepted civilian practices, where different social and cultural norms co-exist. Ahern *et al.*<sup>6</sup> assert the disconnection veterans often associate with the return to civilian life and the renegotiation of the identity of the self away from the

military persona and into accepted civilian norms. Hockey<sup>8</sup> discusses the period of civilian ‘dispossession’ when entering military training which can, arguably, be reversed when undergoing MCT. However, the all-encompassing nature of military life, including extreme or ‘peak’ experiences, can create an intensity of lived experience which is unlikely to be replicated in civilian life. This can often leave a military legacy that endures long beyond service. Ahern *et al.*<sup>6</sup> highlight the challenges facing veterans who are in transition, particularly the loss of the military structure and all-encompassing environment, meaning that veterans often identify with their military colleagues as ‘family’.

In an earlier article<sup>1</sup> we used the theoretical framework and concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to examine transition from military to civilian life for UK Armed Forces personnel. Bourdieu was a highly influential 20<sup>th</sup> Century sociologist whose work on class, culture and forms of ‘capital’ has been widely applied within numerous academic fields. The full theoretical rationale for our application of Bourdieu’s work to MCT is fleshed out in the previous paper. In brief then, we applied Bourdieu’s social theory to describe the legacy of military life, and how this may influence the post-transition course of veterans’ lives. We suggested that service personnel must navigate a complex cultural transition when moving between military and civilian environments. There are distinctive forms of ‘cultural capital’ that are embodied and valued within the military institution, including subordination to rank and the symbolism of uniform, which does not translate into the civilian community. We argued that an understanding of how to mobilize capital into accepted civilian norms is essential to a ‘good’ transition, to enhance the possibility of successful employment and personal outcomes. Building on this theoretical model, we outline below how Bourdieusian theory can be developed into a highly practical framework for understanding the transition process.

## **A Model of MCT**

This paper sets out to understand how experiences and practicalities of real life throughout one's time in the Armed Forces, both in military and civilian circles, may have an effect following discharge. We have developed MoTiVe to demonstrate how on the *legacy* of life course events can shape the transition process. The model we propose applies a Bourdieusian framework to understand employment and family events during the lifespan of military service, which is explained in further detail later in this paper. MoTiVe itself is a visual representation of the often extreme experiences in the Armed Forces and the tension that can exist in negotiating commitments to family and work, alongside the needs of each individual. The model acknowledges changes over time, along with socio-economic variables and personal relationships. MoTiVe is therefore transferable for use in other research disciplines that examine processes of transition. Regardless of whether one has served in the military, all people are on a continuum along the life course and in constant transition, affected by time, age and maturity.

In addition to the practicalities of transition, there are various factors that are rarely considered when thinking about the transformative process from the Armed Forces to civilian life. We suggest that events experienced along the life course trajectory, both inside and outside of the military, can influence the decision making process with regard to career and family life. There are numerous reasons for leaving the Armed Forces, including: the end of a contract; redundancy; family pressure or service no longer being required. Self-identity and resilience are important factors in considering the success or otherwise of MCT. The lived experience of being a service person requires a shift in understanding of self-identity when renegotiating cultural norms within a civilian context. Bigo<sup>11</sup> uses the idea of magnetic forces

that draw us towards or away from different fields. For example, the ‘pull’ of an adventurous, exciting life as a soldier may be attractive to a young person, who at that time may ‘push’ away the alternative of family life. Table 1 below provides examples of common ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors for those serving in the military.

	<b>‘Pull’ factors</b>	<b>‘Push’ factors</b>
<b>Military field</b>	Adventure, travel, belonging	Frustration, boredom, repetition
<b>Civilian field</b>	Family, stability, freedom	Routine, lack of opportunity

*Table 1 – ‘Push’ and ‘pull’ factors*

Segal<sup>12</sup> argues that both military and the family are ‘greedy institutions’ which place competing demands on individuals’ time and resources thereby leading to personal conflict between family and work loyalties. Segal outlines the reality of soldiers attempting to maintain normative family relationships, alongside the pressure of being in the military and in a role that can significantly control a soldier’s geographical movement and time spent on leave. The ‘greedy institution’ resonates with the theory of the total institution, where there is no negotiation between opposing fields. Family members are affected by the demands that the Armed Forces make upon the time and loyalty of their personnel, as well as the emotional consequences of long periods of separation and the significance of family members in war zones or dangerous areas<sup>13</sup>.

Further examples from the military sociology literature may be used to illustrate the complexities involved in navigating MCT. Woodward and Jenkins<sup>14</sup>, for instance, note that Armed Forces personnel construct their identity based on skills and competencies exercised on local, national and global stages. Both military and civilian demands need be negotiated during service. Based on circumstances and individual levels of resilience, some personnel

will move between the military and civilian fields and re-adapt to civilian ways better than others. Jolly<sup>13</sup> further acknowledges that the veteran who finds employment during resettlement does not necessarily indicate a good integration back into civilian life, although employment remains a key measurement of ‘successful’ transition by the UK’s Ministry of Defence<sup>4</sup>. In addition, Higate’s<sup>15</sup> study of homeless veterans reiterates the robustness with which some of his participants adapted to being homeless, including our perception of the ability for Personnel to cope, based on their resilience skills learned in the Armed Forces.

We turn now to a hypothetical example that illustrates how MoTiVe works, based on a stereotypical life course for a military individual, in order to examine how the push/pull factors have the potential to affect people during their military and civilian lives. Soldier A joined the Army aged 16, looking for the adventure that military life offers. Having gone through basic and trade training and become immersed in the military community, he experiences for the first time a real sense of belonging to a team. This is illustrated in Diagram 1, where the soldier’s self-identity is heightened and completely embedded within the military, whilst his sense of civilian self is significantly reduced. The top line of the curve represents the extreme transformation into Armed Forces ways of being. The civilian identity is reduced and the individual experiences a concurrent ‘push’ towards military norms. The trend continues as he deploys on an operational tour and experiences the highs and adrenaline rushes of being a trained soldier in a combat theatre.

Over time, the perception of the stability and freedom of civilian life, along with the desire to start a family, starts to become more appealing than male communal living. Soldier A returns to duty but, now working in a regular job on a home base, no longer sees active combat. After a number of years of living this pattern, he considers that leaving the military offers the

chance of traditional family living and different opportunities. Military life normalizes over time and eventually culminates in the ‘pull factor’ of civilian life and a desire to leave the military. Having made the transition, Veteran A finds the new reality brings different challenges. These include finding satisfying work, the mundane nature of day-to-day family life, waiting lists for healthcare, paying bills directly and the loss of status and camaraderie found within his team. The legacy of the early days of Army life emerge post-transition, when Veteran A remembers the excitement of military life as a young man. The memories of his peak experiences endure, including the sense of freedom and self-worth that he felt in the Armed Forces which he may lack subsequently in civilian life. Diagram 1 illustrates our example.

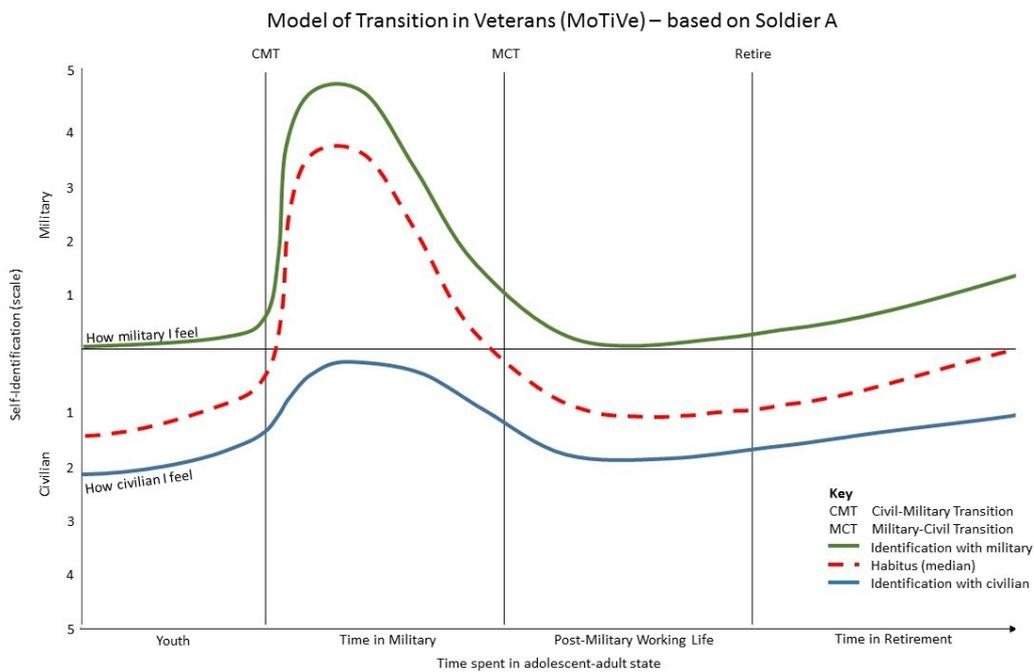


Diagram 1: An illustrative example of the Model of Transition in Veterans (MoTiVe)

## **Bourdieu in Action**

The MoTiVe model presented in Diagram 1 is underpinned by Bourdieusian theory. A table of lay definitions is provided at Table 3. Bourdieu's<sup>16</sup> work essentially explores class-based discourse, to understand how the inter-related concepts of habitus, field and capital can enhance or inhibit behaviour in cultural settings. The *habitus*, or dispositions and behaviours that are accepted within given social or cultural settings, act as structures that shape our logic and perceptions<sup>16</sup>. The military and civilian environments are *fields*, where social structures exist with their own sets of rules and have their own levels of authority<sup>17,18</sup>.

Bourdieu and Passeron<sup>19</sup> built on the interpretation of society as a body of social relationships that reproduce themselves. This supports the argument that social order is imitated over time and replicates and preserves power relations and inequality<sup>20</sup>. In order to participate in a military career and feel a sense of belonging in that environment, personnel have to assimilate and be immersed into the expected culture. As discussed earlier, the habitus within the military field is recognized as a masculine dominated, authoritative environment that is embodied by serving personnel<sup>7,21</sup>. The habitus is a way of being which is first constructed during basic training, when soldiers adapt into the military culture and away from their civilian lifestyle. This change of habitus helps to embody attributes that enable masculinity and organizational competence to deal with the potential of warfare and life or death situations<sup>22</sup>.

Habitus, therefore, takes shape within a particular field. The military may be thought of as one such 'meta-field' composed of a number of separate but interlinked sub-fields (e.g.,

branch of service, unit/regiment). To paraphrase Segal<sup>12</sup>, we might consider the military and the family as *greedy fields* which struggle to pull the individual closer and closer within. Individual behaviours adjust through everyday socialization within sub-fields such as the barracks or the changing base on deployment. The role and purpose of the soldier is lived out in combat, creating an embodied legacy that endures throughout the life span. When Personnel experience combat (not a 'field' as such but an exceptional and often chaotic space into which the military meta-field deploys), there is a lasting effect upon the habitus. Indeed, Maringira, Gibson and Richters<sup>23</sup> discuss the enduring nature of the behaviours learnt within the habitus. Some conduct will persist, despite changing conditions, when soldiers return to the civilian context.

The knowledge and acceptance of such distinct institutionalized behaviours are recognized as cultural and symbolic *capital* and are valued within the military field. Using the idea that ownership of capital can affect social mobility and career trajectory based on money, social circles and knowledge in particular social spaces or fields, such a concept can be translated into various settings, including the military. Bourdieu<sup>24</sup> suggested that those who can develop 'cultural competence' successfully within a given field will thrive, and used the metaphor '*as a fish in water*' (p43). The recognition of hierarchy within the military such as insignia on uniform has symbolic capital and reinforces power and authority. Table 2 illustrates some of the capitals that carry value within military fields.

<b>Capital</b>	<b>Military examples</b>
<b>Social capital</b>	Camaraderie and access to military social and friendship networks
<b>Cultural capital</b>	Knowledge and understanding of the ways in which to act to fit in within military circles; competencies, status
<b>Symbolic capital</b>	Swagger sticks; epaulettes on uniform; a reputation for combat expertise

*Table 2 - Capital and military examples*

Bourdieu<sup>16</sup> referred to embodied and habituated ways, such as obedience to hierarchy at a non-conscious level, as the *doxa*. Serving personnel not only have to work and live within the rules of the military habitus, they also have to renegotiate the doxa when moving between military and civilian fields on leave. The competition and tension between these two social fields can intensify significantly when leaving the military permanently. Living within a new set of social rules in the civilian field is necessary to renegotiate the familial habitus. An adaptation of behaviour is necessary to acknowledge the changing identity from service personnel to civilian. The individual who does not recognize this need may potentially experience further difficulty in the transition process. A ‘good’ transition is seen as making the shift from the military into civilian life and securing employment, housing and displaying general well-being<sup>5</sup>. However, if a good transition is not achieved, Cornish *et al.*<sup>25</sup> recognize there are significant barriers among military veterans to seek help, including fear of therapeutic interventions and the stigmatization of asking for support.

Military-to-civilian transition requires individual personnel to adjust to the doxa, or new habituated civilian ways, often in contrast to military life. *Hysteresis*, or a discord between two fields, occurs for those who encounter conflict between the new field and that to which they are accustomed<sup>16,26</sup>. Along with the negotiation of behaviours within particular fields,

the mobilization of the various types of capital acquired whilst in service into the civilian field is essential to a 'good' transition. However, some personnel lack the belief that military skills are transferable into the civilian field and, subsequently, finding employment after transition can be a struggle<sup>27</sup>. Remobilization of capital prior to discharge may help to promote a smoother transition process. However, personnel need to be mindful that capital is assimilated differently between military and civilian fields.

The MoTiVe model, shown below at Diagram 2 represents the term 'push/pull' factors to describe the changing habitus, affected by the magnetic nature of movement between the two competing fields of civilian and military life. We have added the Bourdieusian terms to the model to underpin how the doxa is re-interpreted, due to the movement between fields. We also demonstrate how the change of fields back to civilian ways and reinterpreted ways within the habitus leaves a lasting military legacy, which may cause difficulty following transition.

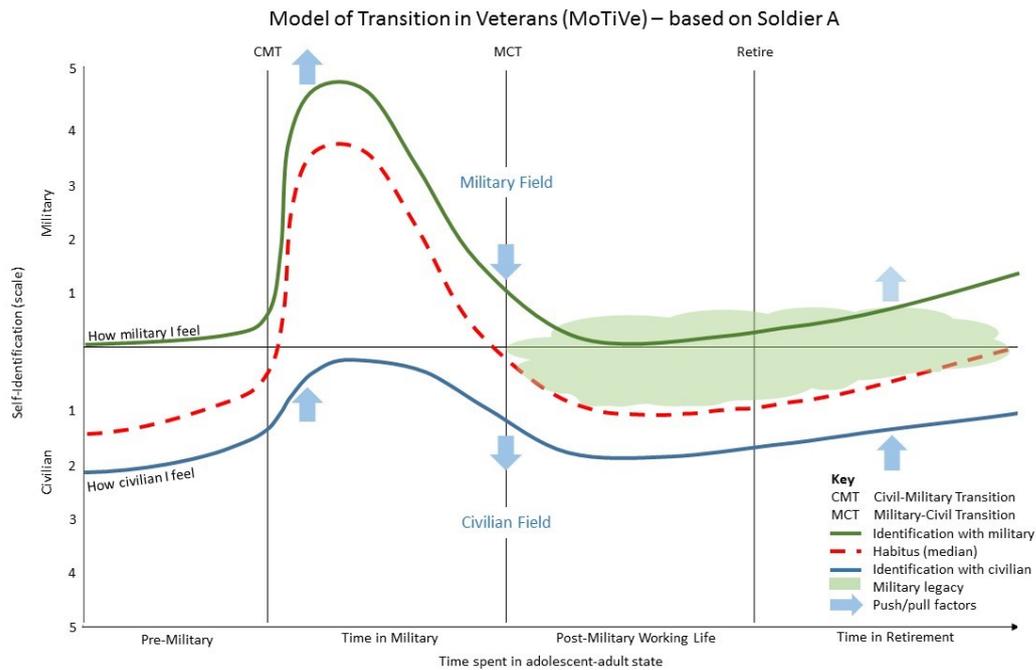


Diagram 2 – Model of Transition in Veterans (MoTiVe)

Bourdieusian term	Brief definition
<b>Habitus</b>	Behaviours, beliefs and dispositions formed through social encounters
<b>Capital</b>	A product that has legitimate value, but remains symbolic – Economic capital: money Social capital: social networks Cultural capital: knowledge Symbolic capital: prestige through ownership of capital or representations of power (e.g. medals)
<b>Field</b>	Symbolic social spaces or arena where structural relations take place and forms of power and relative capital are held
<b>Doxa</b>	Unquestioned, shared beliefs specific to a particular field. The taken-for-granted position
<b>Hysteresis</b>	Discord or a disconnected position occurring between two fields

References: 1, 17, 23, 24

Table 3 – lay definitions of Bourdieusian terms

MoTiVe provides an example of the peaks and troughs along the life course, which enables the user to map their own experiences. The model recognizes that individuals may have multiple identities (soldier, father, husband) but alongside the all-encompassing nature of serving in the Armed Forces, the soldier still retains aspects of his civilian self. It is acknowledged that civilian life may not be as risky as a military career and therefore the model is unlikely to show such extremes in the civilian field. Although the model is replicable, it is not generalisable due to the individual nature of life stories. However, the model is not restricted to MCT and can be adapted to accommodate other modes of transition, such as adolescence to adulthood, work to retirement or single to married life. It acknowledges that the life course is a permanently changing state and highly individualized.

## **Conclusion**

We have developed MoTive to create new practical understandings of transition underpinned by robust sociological theory. The model is unique in identifying that, for military personnel and veterans, there is a powerful interaction between the individual, accepted cultural behaviour and societal views in negotiating the MCT process. Using Bourdieu, we have explored the idea of movement between two different fields, military and civilian, and have highlighted some of the difficulties that can occur when negotiating different rules within each of these social arenas. We acknowledge that there are unquestioned behaviours that are normalized and accepted in each social space, which may be problematic on permanent return to the civilian field. We have discussed the push/pull factors of life choices and how

decisions in life have a sense of immediacy and importance at that temporal point. Although our needs and wants change during maturation and into later life, we acknowledge that veterans may look back on the highlights of their youth and long for the peak experiences, the memories of which create an enduring military legacy.

The application of capital from the military to civilian field is essential to negotiate new rules in civilian life, such as employment, housing and acceptable behaviours in different social circles. Although capital can be specific to a particular field, it is necessary to apply transferable skills in order to successfully move back into civilian ways. Thinking about transition in this way enables both military and academic communities to understand the wider considerations of transition, beyond practical issues. This paper acknowledges that long term habits and memories that have been built during a military career, often during formative years, can be suppressed and re-emerge during and following resettlement, the legacy of which often remains over the life span.

MoTiVe has the potential to be applicable across other disciplines, including, psychology, social work and social policy. It enables the observer to consider the challenges faced by military personnel, as well as those in public service, such as the emergency services, who have demanding roles and require an understanding of the practical issues when moving between their employment role and their place within the family. However, this model has been developed based on robust theoretical principles and requires further empirical testing and refinement. For the purposes of our work, the Model of MCT can be used by both service personnel and those outside of the military to understand how an enduring legacy of peak experiences in youth may cause difficulty in the transition process and why this might be important when undergoing the renegotiation of identity back to a permanent, civilian life.

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