

# ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM SPONSORED REPORT SERIES

Beyond the Uniform: Examining the Impact of MBA and M.S. Degrees on the Employability of Retired Navy Supply Corps Officers

June 2024

LT William S. Contarino, USN LCDR Patrick J. Foster, USN LCDR Andrew S. Steczo, USN

Thesis Advisors: Dr. Marco S. DiRenzo, Associate Professor

Dr. Edward H. Powley IV, Associate Professor

Department of Defense Management

**Naval Postgraduate School** 

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the impact of an MBA versus an M.S. degree on the employability of retired Navy Supply Corps officers transitioning into the civilian job market. Among ongoing discussions about the best educational pathway, this study provides insight into how these two degrees are perceived by employers and how they influence career opportunities after military service. This research surveyed companies on their hiring preferences and practices related to these degrees using quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The findings reveal neither an MBA nor an M.S. significantly sway employability on its own; instead, what matters most is the alignment of specific degree attributes with the strategic needs of positions within these companies. These results align with the boundaryless career theory, suggesting that successful career transitions depend not only on formal education but also on career competencies: knowing-how (human capital), knowing-whom (social capital), and knowing-why (psychological capital). It is recommended that the Navy Supply Corps not only enhance training programs to include components from the Navy Supply Corps Foundation's Career Transition Leadership Seminar but also integrate speakers who specialize in developing human, social, and psychological capital into the Basic Qualification Course (BQC) and Supply Officer Department Head Course (SODHC) to equip officers with skills to thrive in both their military duties and future civilian roles.



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#### LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APA American Psychological Association

BQC Basic Qualification Course

CEO Chief Executive Officer

CIVINS Civilian Institutions

CO Commanding Officer

DOD Department of Defense

DON Department of the Navy

E2E End to End

GMAC Graduate Management Admission Council

GMAT Graduate Management Admission Test

IRB Institutional Review Board

MBA Masters in Business Administration

MS Masters in Science

MSU Michigan State University

NOOCS Navy Officer Manpower and Personnel Classification

NPS Naval Postgraduate School

NSCF Navy Supply Corps Foundation

SC Supply Corps

SODHC Supply Officer Department Head Course

USN United States Navy



#### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a perception in the Navy Supply Corps Officer community that employability upon military retirement is affected by whether the Supply Corps Officer retiree holds a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) or a Master's in Science (M.S.) This study examines if an MBA or an M.S. affects a Supply Corps Officer's employability, shedding light on a knowledge gap in higher education and a niche labor market segment. By addressing this gap, Supply Corps Officers can make informed decisions about academic program offerings and craft their careers more effectively.

#### B. BACKGROUND

#### 1. MBA and M.S.

The MBA is a graduate degree that has been around for over 100 years. The first MBA program was established at Harvard University in 1908 in response to the growing need for business professionals with a strong understanding of management and finance (Garner, 2021). Since then, the MBA has become the most popular graduate degree in business. MBA programs typically last two years and cover many topics, including accounting, finance, marketing, and management. The MBA program, as mentioned by (Michigan State University [MSU], 2023), is designed to provide students with a "big picture" understanding of business, allowing graduates to have the flexibility to pivot across different industries.

In contrast to the MBA, MSU (2023) later discusses how the M.S. degree caters to those seeking specialized knowledge within a particular niche or industry, offering a potential competitive advantage of becoming subject experts. The decision between pursuing an MBA or an M.S. degree hinges on the student's career aspirations—whether they seek to become versatile business managers with a broad skill set or specialists with deep technical knowledge. Today, hundreds of master's degrees are being offered across the United States, so students' goals and preferences determine which degree type to pursue. The Supply Corps community brief emphasizes the value placed on a broad

spectrum of experiences and tours for advancement to the Commander level and above, reflecting the generalist orientation of the MBA. Concurrently, much like the specialized emphasis of an M.S. degree, the Supply Corps equally values subspecialty codes. These codes acknowledge a Supply Corps Officer's deep expertise in particular areas, signaling their subject matter proficiency to the community. This dual focus underscores the importance of both broad-based knowledge and specialized skills within the community.

## 2. Supply Corps Officer Education Paths

The career trajectory of a Supply Corps Officer commences with a broad spectrum of learning experiences across disciplines such as finance, logistics, and food service. This foundational knowledge cultivates a profound appreciation of the community's integral role within the broader Navy. Supply Corps Officers can earn subspecialty codes to further specialize in a logistical field of their choice. As officers progress in rank, the scope of available positions becomes increasingly specialized. By the rank of LT/LCDR, a Supply Corps Officer can attend a military-funded graduate school to pursue their master's degree, a requisite for promotion to Commander. Upon graduation, Supply Corps Officers are awarded subspecialty codes that qualify them for specialized billets tailored to their areas of expertise within the United States Navy (USN) or Department of Defense (DOD), thereby leveraging their focused knowledge as subject matter experts.

The Navy's Official website (Department of the Navy [DON], n.d.b) noted the following 10 responsibilities as a broad representation of what is expected of a Supply Corps Officer:

- Analyzing the demand for supplies and forecast future needs
- Ensuring all parts and equipment needed for ship maintenance and repairs are ordered and received on time
- Overseeing all retail services, logistics, and culinary operations
- Managing the inspection, shipping, handling, and packaging of suppliers and equipment
- Directing personnel who receive inventory and issue supplies and equipment
- Evaluating bids and proposals submitted by potential suppliers
- Maintaining Budgets
- Studying ways to use space and distribute supplies efficiently



- Determining the fastest, most economical way to transport cargo or personnel
- Overseeing the handling of special items such as medicine and explosive. (DON, n.d.b.)

These responsibilities are further clarified in the 2022–2023 Supply Corps OP Roadshow (personal communication, January 30, 2024) into four Lines of Operations that constitute an End-to-End (E2E) Supply Chain: "Ready for Sea," Operational Logistics, Supply Chain Management, and Acquisition and Life cycle Sustainment, as noted in Figure 1. These operations hinge on a Supply Corps Officer's core comprehension of business and logistics.

Upon screening and acceptance to a postgraduate program, Supply Corps Officers have three options for a master's degree based on the wants of the member and the needs of the Navy: Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Civilian Institutions (CIVINS), and Intermediate Service Colleges. Supply Corps Officers who complete these programs receive a subspecialty code as per the Navy Officer Manpower and Personnel Classification (NOOCS) Part B, reflecting the specialized discipline they have mastered in addition to their primary supply officer role. Notably, Intermediate Service Colleges, which focus on National Security Studies and are coded differently, fall outside the purview of this discussion.



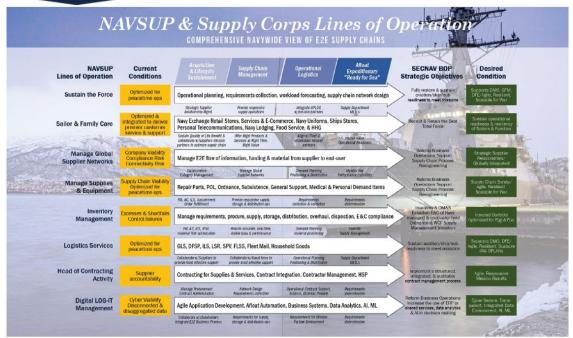


Figure 1. Supply Chain Lines of Operation. Source: 2022–2023 Supply Corps OP Roadshow (2023, p. 9).

#### a. Naval Postgraduate School (NPS)

Located in Monterey, CA, NPS offers supply officers the opportunity to receive a master's in five different areas of concentration, according to the *It's Your Education* handbook (n.d.a., p. 8) identified in Figure 2.

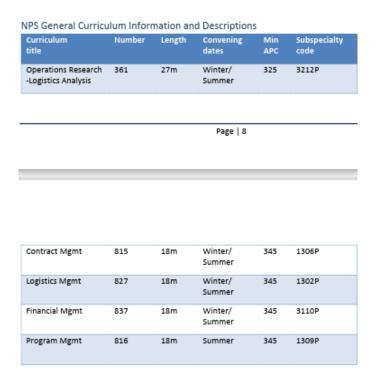


Figure 2. NPS General Curriculum Programs. Source: Department of the Navy (n.d.a, p. 8).

Upon completing and awarding the subspeciality code, Supply Corps Officers can fill coded billets in the specific study area identified in the code. For example, a procurement contracting officer billet in Washington, DC, coded for 1306, would be available to a Defense Contracting Management Program graduate.

## b. Civilian Institutions (CIVINS)

The CIVINS program offers Supply Officers two distinct options for obtaining a master's degree, outlined in Figure 3 from *It's Your Education* handbook (n.d.a, p.9)

				-	
Curriculum title	Number	Length	Convening dates	Min APC	Subspecialty Code
Civilian MBA Program	810	22m	AUG	245	1301P
Petroleum Management	811	22m	AUG	323	1307P

Figure 3. Supply Corps Master Programs. Source: Department of the Navy (n.d.a, p. 9).



The MBA-810 program allows Supply Corps Officers to attend a Bloomberg Top 30 business school for two years and receive a subspecialty code of 1301, focusing on Supply Acquisition and Distribution Management. Officers selected for this program must meet the enrollment requirements set forth by each university before attending (i.e., acceptance, Graduate Management Admission Test [GMAT], etc.).

The Petroleum Management 811 program is specific to the University of Kansas. Graduates earn an MBA and a subspecialty code, preparing them for billets focusing on petroleum management.

#### C. PURPOSE

This thesis aims to highlight the effects of holding an MBA versus an M.S. degree on the employment prospects of retired Navy Supply Corps Officers. It seeks to understand how advanced education correlates with employability in the civilian sector. By examining employer preferences, hiring trends, and the perceived value of these degrees, the study aims to offer insights that could help Supply Corps Officers navigate their careers effectively.

#### D. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central question of this research is how do companies perceive the employability of Supply Corps Officers with an MBA versus an M.S. degree? We will explore the nuances of employer preferences and the role of graduate education in shaping post-military career opportunities.

#### E. APPROACH

The study will employ a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data. Surveys conducted with selected companies will be complemented by an analysis of current hiring trends and literature on employability, career competencies, and the specific challenges faced by retired military personnel transitioning to civilian careers. This approach aims to comprehensively understand the market's reception to MBA and MS degrees among retired Supply Corps Officers.



#### F. ORGANIZATION

Following this introduction, the thesis will present a literature review that discusses theoretical frameworks of employability, explicitly examining the boundaryless career theory, career competencies, and the impact of graduate education on employability. The methodology section will detail the process of gathering and analyzing data from the selected companies. The findings will then be discussed, leading to conclusions and recommendations that address the research questions and fulfill the study's purpose.

#### G. SUMMARY

This research investigates the differential impact of MBA and MS degrees on the employability of retired Navy Supply Corps Officers, aiming to provide actionable insights and recommendations for navigating post-military careers.

#### II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### A. INTRODUCTION

This literature review explores the significance of graduate education, specifically MBA and MS degrees, in the employability of retired Navy Supply Corps Officers. This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will examine a theoretical framework of employability. We will first seek to understand how graduate degrees influence career prospects by examining the boundaryless career theory and its components of career competencies: knowing-how (human capital), knowing-whom (social capital), and knowing-why (psychological capital). Additionally, under the theoretical framework of boundaryless career theory, the second section will analyze skill valuation, employer preferences, and the impact of graduate education on employability. The primary objective is to synthesize existing research to offer insights into how graduate education can facilitate a successful transition for retired Supply Corps Officers into civilian employment, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of employability within this unique population.

#### B. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON EMPLOYABILITY

We will examine the theoretical framework of employability by reviewing the literature on career competencies, defining employability, explaining career competencies, and assessing graduate education as it relates to career competencies.

## 1. Literature on Career Competencies

The contemporary job market, characterized by rapid technological advancements and shifting economic conditions, demands that individuals accrue diverse skills and knowledge (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011). Employability is no longer seen as merely having a job but is characterized by employment security and control over one's professional trajectory. It hinges on an individual's ability to leverage personal resources to effectively navigate and thrive within the labor market (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011; Fugate et al., 2004). Workers increasingly focus on enhancing their employability by developing transferable career competencies, recognizing that such capabilities are crucial

for navigating the complexities of modern career landscapes (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011). DeFillippi and Arthur (1994) emphasized the boundaryless career perspective, where career competencies, defined as knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why, are vital for navigating changing markets and demands, thereby requiring a workforce that is flexible and adept at adapting their job skills to meet new requirements. Fugate et al. (2004) further articulated that employability is significantly augmented by an individual's career competencies, including adaptability, which empowers them to proactively improve their situation and sustain their value in a dynamic employment landscape. As discussed by De Vos et al. (2019), career crafting underscores the significance of continuous learning and adaptability, positioning individuals as central to their career development and responsible for acquiring new knowledge and skills throughout their lifespan. In short, a robust body of literature underscores the importance of employees developing a versatile set of career competencies and engaging in lifelong learning to enhance their employability and navigate the complexities of the contemporary job market effectively.

## 2. Definition of Employability

Direnzo and Greenhaus (2011) defined employability as "the capacity to control one's employment options through the creation, identification, and realization of career opportunities" (p. 575). This perspective positions individuals as proactive agents of their career destinies, suggesting that employability hinges on one's ability to respond adaptively to environmental changes and opportunities (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011).

Fugate et al. (2004) conceptualized employability as "a form of work-specific active adaptability that enables workers to identify and realize career opportunities" (p. 14). They go on to assert that "employability embodies (pro)active adaptability in the work domain" (Fugate et al., p. 17, 2004). The boundaryless career perspective, as outlined by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), underscores the shift away from traditional, linear career paths to more fluid and flexible career trajectories. In this context, employability is about having the competencies—knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why—that enable mobility across different employment settings and industries, thus ensuring sustained employability regardless of the external job market conditions. Moreover, the

concept of career crafting, discussed by De Vos et al. (2019), brings an additional layer to the definition of employability. It suggests that employability involves individuals actively shaping their career paths through reflection, learning, and strategic choices, aligning their work with their strengths, values, and aspirations. This proactive behavior ensures that individuals not only fit their current roles but also prepare for future career opportunities, thereby maintaining their employability over time. In the context of higher education, Tomlinson (2017) conceptualized employability as "constituting a range of dynamic, interactive forms of (graduate) capital which are acquired through graduates' lived experiences" (p. 340). Tomlinson's "Graduate capital" concept encompasses human, social, psychological, cultural, and identity capital that graduates leverage to navigate the labor market successfully.

## 3. Career Competencies Explained

In the preceding sections, we discussed the critical importance of developing transferable career competencies and explored various scholarly definitions of employability. We will now elaborate on the three career competencies that have been outlined by (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011) as essential to career growth -"knowing-how (human capital), knowing-whom (social capital), and knowing-why (psychological capital)"(p. 574). After discussing these three competencies, we will discuss a career strategy behavior, specifically receiving graduate education, and how it aligns with expanding the three competencies of knowing-how, knowing-whom, and knowing-why. By doing this, we hope to bridge the theoretical underpinnings of employability with the practical mechanisms through which individuals can actively navigate and optimize their career paths.

#### a. Knowing-How (Human Capital)

Human capital encompasses the skills, knowledge, and abilities that individuals accumulate, which are transferable across different employment settings. This concept is aligned with Becker's (1975) economic theories on human capital as a driver of productivity and employability (Fugate et al., 2004). In the context of boundaryless careers, the continuous acquisition of new occupational knowledge beyond formal credentials is



critical (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Employees are encouraged to engage in lifelong learning, whether through formal education or self-driven initiatives, to maintain their employability and adapt to technological and organizational changes (De Vos et al., 2019). The evolving nature of human capital demands that workers not only keep their expertise up-to-date but also develop a broader skill set that allows for adaptability and proactive career management (Fugate et al., 2004).

## b. Knowing-Whom (Social Capital)

Social capital refers to the networks of relationships individuals possess that can be instrumental in career development (Fugate et al., 2004). According to DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), social capital consists of valuable contacts and relationships from various spheres of an individual's life, including personal experiences with family, friends, colleagues, and mentors (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). These networks, particularly weak ties, are significant in job search and career advancement, as noted by Burt (1992) and supported by Granovetter's (1973) research on the strength of weak ties in job searches (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Social capital extends to creating career communities which support personal development and provide career opportunities (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011). The robustness of one's social capital can significantly influence one's career by providing access to information, opportunities, and resources that may not be available through formal channels.

#### c. Knowing-Why (Psychological Capital)

Psychological capital extends beyond the traditional human and social capital scope, encapsulating the individual's self-perceptions and psychological state. It comprises elements such as confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience, which are considered dynamic states that can be developed to enhance work performance (Luthans et al., 2004). Psychological capital acts as a 'cognitive compass' that guides individuals in navigating their career paths, providing motivation, meaning, and resilience to adapt to change and overcome challenges (Eby et al., 2003). This form of capital is particularly vital in enabling individuals to identify career opportunities that align with their values and aspirations,

making them more appealing to prospective employers and better equipped to handle the pressures of career transitions (McArdle et al., 2007).

#### 4. Graduate Education as It Relates to Career Competencies

An MBA program offers a broad perspective on business operations, emphasizing high-level leadership and managerial skills. The curriculum is typically structured around core topics such as management, strategy, finance, marketing, ethics, and communications, supplemented by elective courses and concentrations. These concentrations, ranging from accounting and business analytics to entrepreneurship, allow students to tailor their education to specific areas of interest. The holistic nature of an MBA education prepares graduates for leadership roles that require oversight of multiple departments, making it an attractive option for individuals with several years of work experience seeking to elevate their careers. Conversely, an MS degree provides a specialized education focusing on a singular business area, such as finance, data analytics, accounting, management, or marketing. This specialized approach aims to deepen the student's expertise in their chosen field, making them experts in that particular business area. The curriculum may include some foundational business knowledge but primarily concentrates on in-depth study within the specialization (Coursera, 2024).

#### a. Human Capital and Graduate Education

Graduate education, be it through an MBA or an MS degree, significantly contributes to the development of human capital, which encompasses the knowledge, skills, and abilities that individuals possess and can apply in various employment settings (Fugate et al., 2004). With their broad curriculum, MBA programs foster a versatile set of managerial and leadership skills, preparing graduates for senior and executive-level positions across different business areas. This broad knowledge base aligns with the knowing-how component of career competencies, enabling individuals to manage complex projects and effectively lead diverse teams (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

Conversely, M.S. degrees offer a more focused exploration of specific business areas, such as supply-chain or contracting, deepening technical expertise and specialized knowledge. This specialized education enhances the human capital specific to a particular



field, equipping graduates with the depth of knowledge necessary for expert roles within their chosen area (Tomlinson, 2017). Both pathways underscore the continuous pursuit of new occupational know-how, essential for maintaining employability in a dynamic job market (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

#### b. Social Capital and Graduate Education

The development of social capital, defined by the networks and relationships that facilitate career advancement, is another significant benefit of pursuing an MBA or M.S. degree. MBA programs offer ample networking opportunities with peers, faculty, alumni, and industry professionals. This exposure broadens one's professional network, or knowing-whom, which is crucial for discovering career opportunities and navigating transitions (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). While more specialized, M.S. degrees also contribute to expanding one's social capital within a specific industry or field, fostering connections that can lead to job opportunities and career advancement.

Fugate et al. (2004) stated that "The sheer size and diversity of an individual's network is presumably proportionate to the amount of information and influence contained within the network, as well as the utility of that information and influence" (p. 24), enhancing the individual's ability to identify and realize opportunities across organizations and industries over their careers. Moreover, according to DeFillippi and Arthur (1994), graduate education serves as a platform for building these vital connections, aligning with the concept that robust social networks enhance one's labor market visibility and, by extension, employability.

#### c. Psychological Capital and Graduate Education

Graduate education's role in cultivating psychological capital—comprising confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience—cannot be overstated (Luthans et al., 2004). These psychological resources enable individuals to adapt to changing work situations, remain open to new career experiences, and navigate the challenges of the professional world (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011). MBA and M.S. programs challenge students through rigorous coursework, group projects, and, often, the balance of study with professional responsibilities. These experiences build resilience and adaptability, contributing to a



knowing-why competency that provides motivation, meaning, and direction in one's career (DiRenzo & Greenhaus, 2011).

## C. SKILL VALUATION, EMPLOYER PREFERENCES, AND IMPACT OF GRADUATE EDUCATION ON EMPLOYABILITY

In this section, we will examine how the skills developed by supply officers translate to the three factors of employability and the impact of a graduate degree as officers transition to the civilian workforce.

#### 1. Human Capital and Skill Valuation in Supply Officers

Officers in the military commonly develop soft and hard skills that are transferable once they transition from military service to the public and private sectors. These skills are acquired throughout the officer's commission to maintain a successful career both during service and after the transition. Both hard and soft skills are essential to the development of human capital and, as identified by Edwards (2022), are essential and "needed to acquire and maintain employability" (p. 5). According to *Soft Skills Versus Hard Skills*, Edwards explains through previous studies of Yorke (2006) that employers are more concerned with skills the graduate possesses and less about the degree achieved (p. 15). Those hard and soft skills provide the baseline and promote desirability in the candidate.

Soft skills are driven through interpersonal relationships and are fostered through verbal and nonverbal communication development. Early in an officer's commission, individuals begin to hone these traits through daily encounters, from one-on-one interactions to facial expressions.

Gruba and Al-Mahmood (2004) acknowledged that a strong communicator conveys clear direction while building unity and trust within the organization where they operate and can convey ideas to people who do not necessarily understand a particular concept. Much like in business, as identified by Anchal Luthra (2015), a research scholar from SRM University, officers in the military also must be practical and convincing communicators to achieve professional success (Luthra, 2015, p. 1). This success can range from unit awards and recognition to advancement in rank for the individual and their members. Richard Branson, the founder of Virgin Groups, said, "Communication is the



most important skill any leader can possess" (Schwantes, 2022, para 2). This communication can flow in many directions, promoting a clear and concise vision of what is expected from the Commanding Officer (CO) or Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The military can serve in the strategic planning of an operation as identified in the *Joint Planning Process Workbook* (NWC 4111K):

Regardless of quality and effort, the assessment process is useless if the communication of its results are deficient or inconsistent with the commander's personal style of digesting information and making decisions. (Department of the Navy, 2022, p. G-5)

Nonverbal skills like hand gestures and eye contact are just as critical as verbal or written communication. Sutiyatno (2018), while speaking on Student achievements, tells us that although these skills occur unconsciously, "nonverbal communication is deemed much more reliable and effective than verbal communication as it supports verbal communication" (p. 431).

Hard skills, equally important, refer to the technical skills or abilities that an individual possesses to accomplish a job. These skills can be obtained through on-the-job training (OJT) or formal education, such as the NPS. For example, it is assumed that a pharmacist would have advanced technical knowledge in pharmaceuticals through their education and years of training in the field. A Supply Officer would have advanced training and education in E2E supply chain management or other logistics-related fields. Technical expertise is essential because knowing one's job compliments communication and other soft skills for employees as to what is expected of them.

Most of the military veterans (80%) perceived that additional training like attaining a master's degree or going back to collect to upgrade job skills help in adjusting to the civilian work life. Veterans viewed that upgrading personal job skills based on skills needed in the civilian workforce helps in meeting the required skill standards. (Ward, 2019)

Knowing the job required and what your employee does conveys confidence in an organization. In an article from *Forbes*, Sturt and Nordstrom (2019) reported that "when leaders can clearly articulate an employee's contributions or their job, companies can see a 200% increase in the incidence of significant work" (para. 6). These Human Capital skills



within the Supply Corps are benchmarked and outlined within the Community Values for the 2023 Roadshow conducted for Supply Officers. Under the valued achievements for all paygrades, "Sustained superior performance in leadership billets of increasing responsibility and complexity" (personal communication, January 3, 2023) is first. Effective leadership comprises the hard and soft skills one would develop while serving. From the specific technical expertise of a Comptroller holding fiduciary responsibility of operational funding to multicultural communication when dealing with foreign ports husbanding agents, the continuous acquisition of new occupational knowledge beyond formal credentials is critical (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). Communication also serves as a bridge to significantly improve one's social capital (knowing-whom) through one-on-one interactions, network building, and effective listening and receiving feedback.

#### 2. Social Capital and Skill Valuation in Supply Officers

The phrase *It is not what you know but who* encapsulates the idea of building social capital to further employability. Throughout one's career, an individual will develop relationships specific to their area of expertise. When enacting networking strategies, growth in the development of social capital has been shown. The president of Career Horizons, Matt Youngquist, has stated, "At least 70 percent, if not 80 percent, of jobs, are not published" (Kaufman, 2011, para. 5), which implies that up to 80% of job availabilities are filled through personal and professional contacts. These contacts are developed through interactions over an individual's life and extend to the military. The military and navy specifically align themselves closely by providing many social services for members and families to help bridge the connection:

During times of deployment or training overseas, at sea or in other temporary duty locations, family separation can be long and difficult. However, at the service member's assigned duty station, there are many initiatives and programs designed to enhance family support and involvement, such as Family Readiness Groups, Organized Volunteer Opportunities, Organized Team Building Activities and adjusted Work Days/Working Hours, that are all designed to help build cohesive support networks for family members while service members are deployed. (Dexter, 2020)

A sense of family in the military extends beyond biological ties because of the shared experiences that may appear different to those who have not served. The uniqueness of these experiences is indicated by phrases such as "only we know what we've been through." Ahern et al. touched on these shared experiences, stating that despite service challenges, the military environment was experienced as a "family" that cared for service members and provided a structured set of expectations (Ahern et al., 2015, p. 4). Fostering peered relations and networking bridges the military and civilian transition gap. One of those bridges, the Navy Supply Corps Foundation (NSCF), provides a network for Supply Officers, past and present, to build and maintain a connection of 35,000 people. Anyone who has ever worn the uniform- veterans, active duty, and reserve is included. Avenues for social relationships with like-minded individuals allow retired officers to find the right jobs with the right company. When translated successfully, Tutlys et al. (2018) discussed how these skills will help employees find employers who have previously dealt with identifiable competencies in functionally related activities (Tutlys et al., 2018). The bigger one's social network is, the more excellent the opportunity one has for finding employability.

## 3. Psychological Capital and Skill Valuation in Supply Officers

When considering the employability of retired Navy Supply Corps Officers, it is essential to examine the critical identifiers that companies are looking for when hiring potential candidates, what industries these officers are in demand for, and what skills supply officers have to offer. De Vos et al. (2019) mention the way to enhance employability in the workforce requires:

individuals to manage the balance between their current performance in order to safeguard one's current position, and the need for learning and further career development, aimed at increasing one's future employability. (De Vos et al., 2019, p. 132)

Because of the level of uncertainty in the global environment, members of the armed forces typically must develop, evolve, and change to suit the environment in which they reside. U.S. Marines have coined the term "Semper Gumby" as a play-off their motto to remain flexible and adapt to the unknown future. So why is this important for employability after service? De Vos et al. (2019) spoke on adaptability as one of three



factors closely associated with crafting sustainable careers: "Adaptability is important for flexibly meeting changing demands in one's field of work or personal life throughout the career" (p. 129). This resiliency displayed by service members is a form of adaptability and remains one of the four core characteristics of psychological capital. The American Psychological Association (2023) identifies four components of psychological capital as hope, efficacy, optimism, and resilience, which considerably strengthen a successful organization and individual and defined them as:

- Hope: Hope is the ability to see a potential path forward to a better future. It involves having goals and the willpower to achieve them. To realize hope, the path does not need to be easy or quick, but it must be plausible and achievable. Importantly, hope also includes the ability to generate new or alternate pathways to overcome obstacles while pursuing goals, or what is called "way power."
- Efficacy: In psychological science, "self-efficacy" refers to a sense of confidence in one's ability, upon putting in the necessary effort, to successfully follow a path forward to accomplish goals.
- Resilience: Psychological resilience is one's ability to return to baseline, or even come back stronger, after experiencing emotionally challenging life events, including stressful work situations. It is the ability to bounce back from adversity and cope with challenges, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility.
- Optimism: This refers to a way of thinking about life that tends to attribute positive events to you or your team's own skills and abilities, while attributing negative events to temporary, external circumstances. Optimism also refers to a general tendency to expect good things to happen in the future. Importantly, optimism is not the unrealistic belief or expectation that everything will always go smoothly. Instead, it is an expectation that the future will be generally positive with a grounded understanding that life is full of challenges. (American Psychological Association [APA], 2023)

A service member who has developed resiliency typically maintains hope and is more optimistic even in challenging circumstances (i.e., war, deployments, etc.). This could be partly due to the versatility expected of them across many spectrums.

#### 4. Employer Preference and Hiring

We examined five supply and logistics-related job postings online websites to find any correlation to what companies were looking for in a logistics specialist. Three skills



were identified from the five resume-based websites (Indeed, Resume Cat, Link Staffing, Insight Hiring Wizard, and Teal): Communication, Teamwork/Interpersonal Skills, and Adaptability (Hiring Wizard, n.d.; Indeed, 2022; Link Staffing, n.d.; Resume Cat, n.d.; Teal, n.d.). Analytics and planning were skills identified on multiple searches and deserve recognition as essential factors. We compared it to the Graduate Management Admissions Council (GMAC) Corporate Recruiters Survey of 2023 to measure the validity of what skills employers are looking for in their professions: "Employers say communication, data analysis, and strategy are currently among the most important skills for GME graduates—and most say their importance will continue to grow" (Graduate Management Admission Council [GMAC], 2023, p. 8).

Similar results were identified in the 2023 Corporate Recruiters Survey from the GMAC to compare the validity of the findings. Skills desired by employers included communication, data analysis, interpersonal, and strategy skills, with a continued growth of importance expected. (GMAC, 2023, p. 10). It is important to note that though the GMAC is closely related to MBA programs, universities with MS programs, like the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern, may consider GMAC scores acceptable when they are focused on specific fields like finance and business, both of which are considered core competencies of the Supply Corps. More than 5,000 programs worldwide in 82 countries identify the GMAC as part of the master's selection process (GMAC, n.d.).

## 5. Impact of Graduate Education on Employability: Empirical Evidence

When considering the employability of a supply officer, the GMAC pulled information across multiple graduate degrees, bachelor's degrees, and those centered on work industry experience. As noted in Table 1 from the GMAC 2023 Survey, the MBA graduates faired an average of 2.8% points better with employers globally, pro-profit, non-profit, and government than any other field of study and experience. Table 1 shows the percentage of employers in various sectors who have hired individuals based on their educational degrees or industry experience.

Table 1. Company Comparison of Degree and Experience. Source: GMAC (2023, p. 28).

	МВА	Master in Management	Master of Accounting	Master of Finance	Master of Data Analytics	Master of Business Analytics	Bachelor's	Experienced from industry
Global	91%	78%	72%	74%	74%	72%	84%	88%
For-profit, private	88%	77%	72%	74%	74%	72%	86%	90%
For-profit, public	96%	81%	78%	79%	83%	77%	88%	93%
Nonprofit	85%	67%	53%	57%	62%	60%	76%	82%
Government	92%	67%	58%	60%	64%	55%	85%	84%

<sup>\*</sup>Darker shading indicates a higher percentage of employers who hired a particular degree type.

On a global scale, numbers reflected more significant variance within the United States, at nearly a 2 to 1 ratio across all master's degrees, as noted in Table 2 in favor of an MBA. The broad scope of capabilities that an MBA brings to an employer allows adaptability for companies to align their needs with that of the employee, suggesting why MBAs were more sought after as compared to other degrees. This adaptability allows for "flexibly meeting changing demands in one's field of work or personal life throughout the career" (De Vos et al., 2019, p. 129), and it is the graduate who identifies this factor to make themselves more employable to the market. It is also worth noting that experience from industry fared better in Africa, Asia, and the United States than all other master's degrees. This also reflects that companies outside the United States hire more frequently degrees other than an MBA when compared to US-based employers.

Table 2. Regional Degree and Experience Comparison. Source: GMAC (2023, p. 27).

Degree	МВА	Master in Management	Master of Accounting	Master of Finance	Master of Data Analytics	Master of Business Analytics	Bachelor's	Experienced from industry
Global	91%	78%	72%	74%	74%	72%	84%	88%
Africa	88%	82%	81%	77%	68%	74%	86%	90%
Central & South Asia	92%	90%	92%	94%	98%	92%	88%	94%
East & Southeast Asia	92%	88%	83%	84%	81%	83%	88%	91%
Mexico, Caribbean, & Latin America	94%	85%	70%	79%	90%	76%	82%	90%
Middle East	97%	79%	71%	70%	70%	75%	72%	93%
United States	86%	42%	42%	42%	56%	48%	91%	88%
Western Europe	91%	89%	78%	83%	79%	74%	82%	87%

<sup>\*</sup>Darker shading indicates a higher percentage of employers who hired a particular degree type.

When employers were asked about hiring from a specific specialty in the same study, overwhelming employers noted that they prefer to hire graduates of the desired specialized field. Figure 4 breaks down the 19 fields and how each degree would be projected to be employed in 2023. Specialized degrees are best in the corresponding fields, with MBAs being more employable in strategy/innovation, consulting, and marketing (GMAC, 2023, p. 39).

	МВА	Master in Management	Master of Finance	Master of Accounting	Master of Data Analytics	Master of Business Analytics
Accounting	34%	30%	39%	57%	20%	12%
Budget Analyst	23%	29%	39%	30%	33%	19%
Business Development/Sales	40%	38%	30%	24%	23%	25%
Business Intelligence/ Analytics	34%	27%	28%	23%	43%	37%
Client/Customer Relationship Management	38%	44%	23%	25%	21%	19%
Communications	41%	40%	22%	19%	21%	15%
Consulting	45%	37%	27%	26%	29%	23%
Data Science	26%	20%	22%	24%	55%	27%
Finance	32%	26%	62%	38%	17%	13%
General Management	42%	53%	20%	22%	17%	16%
HR/Organizational Management	37%	45%	21%	24%	21%	16%
Information Technology/MIS	30%	26%	18%	22%	47%	23%
Market Research	36%	31%	24%	20%	33%	29%
Marketing	44%	37%	25%	22%	22%	23%
Operations/Logistics/Supply Chain Management	39%	42%	24%	23%	29%	21%
Product Management	37%	48%	23%	23%	22%	20%
Project Management	40%	46%	23%	25%	25%	23%
Research and Development	32%	35%	26%	22%	38%	25%
Strategy/Innovation	47%	38%	27%	25%	34%	28%

<sup>\*</sup>Darker shading indicates a higher percentage of employers who hired a particular degree type.

Figure 4. Employability of Specialized Fields. Source: GMAC (2023, p. 39).

Of the 1,028 recruiters participating in this survey, bachelor's degrees and industry experience were not included in this topic. When comparing predicted 2022, 2023, and actual hiring in 2022 across eight fields: MBA, Master's in Management, Accounting, Finance, Data Analytics, Business Analytics, Bachelor's degree, and Industry Experience, an MBA average overall the highest results at 91% actual hired with a 90% projected hiring for 2023, followed by Industry Experience with 88%/87% respectively as seen in Figure 5, all degrees were hired below the projected levels anticipated for 2022.

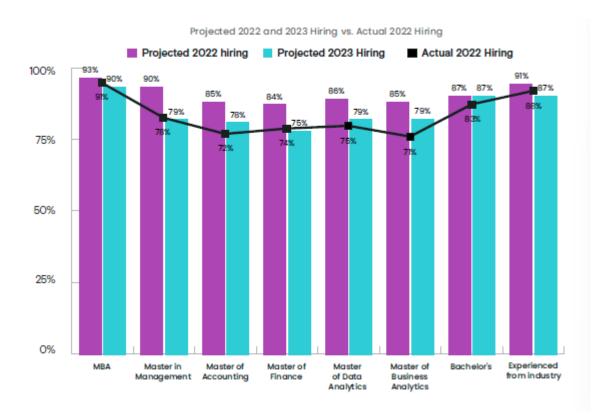


Figure 5. Projected vs. Actual Hiring in 2022–2023. Source: GMAC (2023, p. 37).

### D. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It is important to note that although the MBAs were employed higher overall when compared to other degree options when considering a specific area in Figure 4, corresponding degrees were higher in their specialty, while industry experience scored equally high across the industry. This suggests that along with professional development through education, experience is important when considering employability. It is also assumed that individuals seeking a degree in field specifics of data science would not be looking for employability in project management and vice versa.

#### III. METHODOLOGY

Existing studies on business education primarily focus on the outcomes and perceptions associated with traditional MBA programs. The limited research on M.S. degrees in business often centers on specific specializations, such as finance or marketing, rather than the broader implications of the degree change. Consequently, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence that directly addresses how employers perceive and evaluate M.S. degree holders compared to their MBA counterparts. Without comprehensive data and insights into employers' attitudes, preferences, and hiring practices related to these degree distinctions, stakeholders in higher education and aspiring Supply Corps professionals lack the necessary guidance to make informed decisions regarding their academic pursuits and career paths.

The research undertakes a comprehensive review using a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. This study will conduct surveys and interviews with a maximum of nine employers with experience hiring graduates, explicitly focusing on their perceptions of job prospects for individuals with an MBA or an M.S. degree. The analysis addresses both the research objectives and provides confirmation of the feasibility of retiring Supply Corps Officers as job candidates for private sector companies. By following this research methodology, this study aims to provide viable knowledge and insights into the employability of Supply Corps Officers with an MBA compared to an M.S. degree.

#### A. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To critically analyze hiring tendencies and preferences of private sector corporations with a specific focus on retired Supply Corps Officer candidates with an MBA compared to an M.S. degree.

# B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

#### 1. Quantitative Research Questions:

- On a scale of 1–7, how does your company rate the importance of an MBA versus an M.S. for leadership roles within your company? (1 indicates strong preference for MBA, 7 indicates strong preference for M.S.)
- On a scale of 1–7, how does your company rate the frequency of hiring management-level employees with an MBA versus an M.S. in your company? (1 indicates always prefer MBA, 7 indicates always prefer M.S.)
- On a scale of 1–7, in your company's supply chain and logistics roles, how does your company rate the preference for MBA qualifications over M.S. qualifications? (1 indicates strong preference for MBA, 7 indicates strong preference for M.S.)

### 2. Qualitative Research Questions:

- What specific skills and knowledge does your company believe are crucial for a retired Supply Corps Officer to succeed in your company, and how does your company think these are reflected in an M.S. versus an MBA curriculum?
- Describe any company hiring policies or practices that specifically relate to the preference for MBA or M.S. degrees in your company?
- In what ways does military experience complement graduate education in the candidates your company considers for employment?

# C. SUMMARY

This study follows a systematic approach and explores the parameters shaped by its scope and limitations, providing solid findings and practical advice to Supply Corps



Officers to improve the individual's career planning. It remains dedicated to applying a thorough analytical perspective while respecting the constraints imposed by its limitations, which will be discussed in the results chapter.

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#### IV. RESULTS

#### A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a practical roadmap for Supply Corps Officers weighing their options for civilian employment. Integrating quantitative data with qualitative feedback highlights how the competencies cultivated in both military and academic realms intersect with private sector needs. The chapter is organized into three principal divisions: quantitative evaluation, qualitative assessment, and conclusion. The information below will examine whether having an MBA or an M.S. affects retired Supply Corps Officers' employability.

# B. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS: MASTER OF SCIENCE OR MASTER'S IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

This section conducts a detailed comparative analysis of the two degrees regarding the employability aspect of these degrees and sees what preferences, if any, private sector companies have. In the U.S., the MBA degree has become the hallmark of distinction for people seeking advanced organizational positions (Herrington, 2010). However, it's recognized that not every career path necessitates an MBA. Conversely, M.S. programs typically provide a concentrated focus on a specific field of business, equipping graduates with deep expertise in their chosen area and presenting an M.S. as a viable alternative to an MBA for particular career trajectories (Coursera, 2022).

To gain deeper insight into prevailing private sector perspectives on pursuing an MBA or M.S., we posed three questions utilizing a 1–7 scale where 1 expressed a strong inclination toward an MBA and 7 a pronounced leaning toward an M.S.

- 1. On a scale of 1–7, how does your company rate the importance of an MBA versus an M.S. for leadership roles within your company?
- 2. On a scale of 1–7, how does your company rate the frequency of hiring management-level employees with an MBA versus an M.S. in your company?

3. On a scale of 1–7, in your company's supply chain and logistics roles, how does your company rate the preference for MBA qualifications over M.S. qualifications?

From the surveys distributed, we garnered feedback from four notable corporations—Amazon, FedEx, The Home Depot, and Starbucks—constituting the total number able to provide responses. Figures 6, 7, and 8 illustrate the findings from the responses to these three inquiries, employing a range from 1 to 7, whereby 1 decidedly represents a robust inclination toward an MBA and 7 decidedly represents a robust inclination toward an M.S.

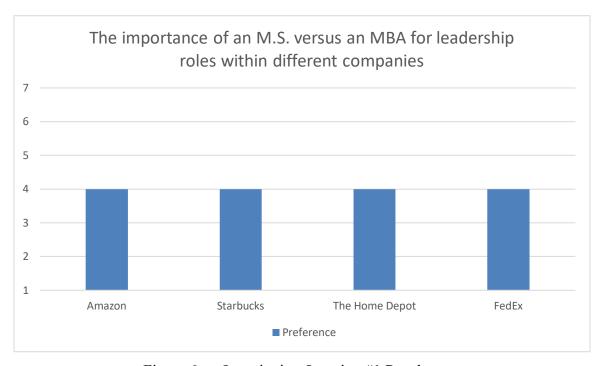


Figure 6. Quantitative Question #1 Results

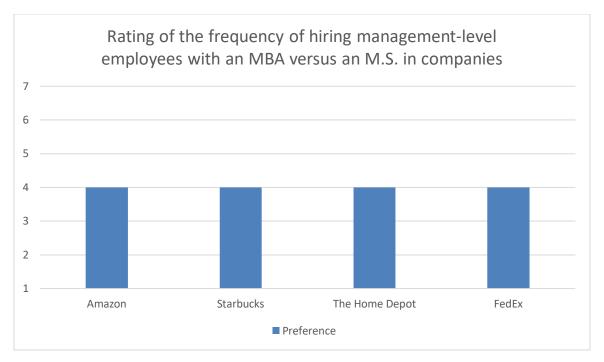


Figure 7. Quantitative Question #2 Results

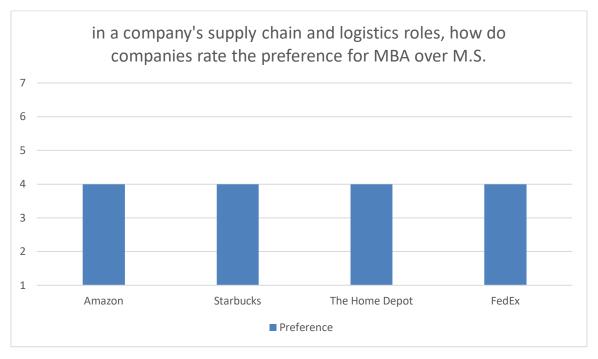


Figure 8. Quantitative Question #3 Results

Responses from four leading corporations—Amazon, FedEx, The Home Depot, and Starbucks—provided valuable insights. The data, represented in Figures 8, 9, and 10, reveal a lack of a pronounced bias towards either degree for potential candidates, suggesting a nuanced approach to hiring. The detailed feedback from these companies further highlights their stance. For instance, FedEx regards both degrees as equally valuable, while Starbucks suggests the choice between degrees depends on the specific requirements of the role. Amazon has no preference for either degree. However, on the Amazon Jobs website, a sampling of jobs shows that under basic qualifications, a Bachelor's degree or Master's degree is needed; however, for specific job postings, Amazon will prefer either an MBA or an M.S. degree. The same is true for both FedEx and Starbucks. The Home Depot, meanwhile, does not uniformly require either degree, with exceptions in specialized fields such as legal, finance, or accounting.

This absence of a clear preference for either an MBA or an M.S. degree among the companies surveyed indicates a more complex and nuanced hiring landscape than traditionally perceived. For retired Supply Corps Officers, this finding suggests that the decision between an MBA and an M.S. should align more closely with personal career objectives and the specific roles they aspire to rather than a perceived universal preference in the job market.

The overall indifference towards a specific degree type among these major companies points to a broader, more adaptable route to employability post-military service. This flexibility suggests that achieving career success in the civilian workforce may hinge more on a holistic approach, where formal education is balanced with developing soft skills, leadership capabilities, and specialized knowledge acquired during military service.

# C. QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: WHAT ARE COMPANIES LOOKING FOR?

This section explores the qualitative dimensions of what private sector companies seek in retired Supply Corps Officers regarding competencies. It scrutinizes how military experience and educational background—in either an MBA or an M.S. program—align with the preferences and requirements of the civilian job market. To thoroughly understand these preferences, we formulated three questions targeting the specific competencies



companies prioritize in candidates, the relevance of MBA and M.S. degrees to these competencies, and the added value of military experience.

- 1. What specific skills and knowledge does your company believe are crucial for a retired Supply Corps Officer to succeed in your company, and how does your company think these are reflected in an MS versus an MBA curriculum?
- 2. Describe any company hiring policies or practices that specifically relate to the preference for MBA or M.S. degrees in your company?
- 3. In what ways does military experience complement graduate education in the candidates your company considers for employment?

Responses were collected from the same four corporations as the quantitative analysis in the previous section: Amazon, FedEx, The Home Depot, and Starbucks, offering insights into their hiring philosophies and preferences.

#### 1. Amazon

Inquiring about the essential skills and knowledge Amazon values for success within their organization led us to their website's "About Us" page. This section presents Amazon's leadership principles alongside its mission statement, articulating the company's commitment to accountability, leadership, customer-centricity, and a culture of high standards. The mission statement reads:

We hold ourselves and each other accountable for demonstrating the Amazon Leadership Principles through our daily actions. Our Leadership Principles describe how Amazon does business, how leaders lead, and how we keep the customer at the center of our decisions. Our unique Amazon culture, described by our Leadership Principles, helps us relentlessly pursue our mission of being Earth's most customer-centric company, best employer, and safest place to work (Amazon, n.d.).

Listed beneath the mission statement are the essential skills and knowledge Amazon believes are crucial for its employees, from Amazon leadership principle website:

• Customer obsession



- Ownership
- Invent and simplify
- Are right a lot
- Learn and be curious
- Hire and develop the best
- Insist on the highest standards
- Think big
- Bias for action
- Frugality
- Earn trust
- Dive deep
- Have backbone
- Disagree and commit
- Deliver results
- Strive to be Earth's best employer
- Success and scale bring broad responsibility (Amazon, n.d.)

These criteria indicate Amazon's preferred behavioral competencies and leadership qualities over specific academic qualifications.

Amazon reported that no formal policy exists regarding hiring policies or practices related to a preference for MBA or M.S. degrees. Instead, the company emphasizes a candidate's display of the necessary skills and their suitability for the role over their educational background. This approach suggests that Amazon values skill development and practical experience more highly than academic achievements alone.

The response was unequivocally positive when asked about how Amazon perceives the value of military experience in conjunction with graduate education for prospective candidates. Amazon acknowledges the broad and diverse backgrounds military officers bring, appreciating the comprehensive skill sets developed through their service. This wide-ranging expertise aligns well with the majority of Amazon's roles. The company particularly values candidates who embody leadership principles, suggesting a strong preference for the leadership, discipline, and strategic thinking often found in military veterans.



#### 2. Starbucks

When asked about specific skills and knowledge that the company believes is crucial for success, the response from Starbucks was that the company values the skills and knowledge acquired by retired Supply Corps Officers. Starbucks sees that the ability to manage complex supply chains, demonstrate strong leadership, and maintain a keen sense of logistical efficiency are pivotal attributes sought after. In addition, these skills are well-reflected in both MS and MBA curricula, albeit with nuanced differences. An M.S. provides a more specialized and technical focus, while an MBA offers a broader, strategic perspective. Starbucks generally recognizes the importance of both aspects, depending on the role and its requirements. Starbucks acknowledges the value of both educational paths, indicating a balanced appreciation for the depth and breadth of expertise these degrees offer.

Regarding hiring preferences for MBA versus M.S. degrees, Starbucks maintains a flexible approach, valuing various qualifications without a definitive preference for one type of degree over the other. The company adopts a role-specific evaluation process, considering how a candidate's academic background meets the job's unique needs. Starbucks acknowledges that an MBA can offer a comprehensive understanding of business, which is ideal for strategic planning and managerial roles. In contrast, an M.S. degree provides specialized knowledge beneficial for technical positions requiring expert proficiency. This nuanced assessment strategy underlines Starbucks' dedication to diversity and inclusion, ensuring candidates are chosen based on their overall fit with the company's values and requirements rather than solely on their educational achievements.

Starbucks also places a high value on military experience, viewing it as a beneficial complement to academic education in potential candidates. The discipline, leadership, and problem-solving skills acquired in the military enrich the academic knowledge gained from graduate studies. The company seeks candidates who can leverage both their academic achievements and military experience to contribute effectively to the business. Many of Starbucks' job listings equate a bachelor's degree with four years of U.S. military experience, exemplifying the company's recognition and appreciation of the skills and values military service instills. This policy showcases Starbucks' commitment to

leveraging diverse backgrounds, including the unique combination of military experience and graduate education, to foster success within the company.

# 3. The Home Depot

The Home Depot indicated that the specific skills and knowledge required for success within the company vary by role, with specific competencies deemed essential and others preferred. This approach underscores the company's focus on the particular competencies needed for each position rather than a blanket preference for educational qualifications such as MBA or M.S. degrees.

Regarding the preference for MBA or M.S. degrees in their hiring process, The Home Depot clarified that such distinctions are generally not a factor in their employment decisions. This aligns with earlier statements that for the majority of roles at The Home Depot, specific degrees are not mandatory, except for certain specialized positions in fields like legal and accounting. The company prioritizes practical skills and relevant experiences, demonstrating a candidate's ability to perform the job effectively over formal academic credentials. This perspective reflects a comprehensive evaluation approach, prioritizing candidates' abilities and achievements over their specific degrees.

When discussing how military experience complements graduate education for potential candidates, The Home Depot representative expressed a positive view of the leadership skills acquired through military service, particularly valuing these qualities for positions within their stores and distribution centers. This distinction suggests that while military experience is highly regarded across the company, it plays a more pivotal role in non-corporate settings where a graduate degree may not be as critical. For corporate roles, while military experience remains beneficial, The Home Depot emphasizes how well this experience, coupled with educational background, matches the specific requirements of the available position.

#### 4. FedEx

FedEx communicated that leadership and critical thinking are crucial for success within their organization. Specifically, the company seeks retired Supply Corps Officers



with leadership experience, targeting those who have operated at the mid to upper management levels, equivalent to the ranks of Lieutenant and Lieutenant Commander. FedEx recognizes that both M.S. and MBA programs cultivate leadership and critical thinking skills, demonstrating no preference for one over the other but rather a strong emphasis on the practical application of leadership and critical thinking abilities. This approach underscores FedEx's value on the competencies candidates possess, rather than their specific degree.

Regarding its hiring practices, FedEx clarified that it does not prioritize MBA over M.S. degrees, except in rare instances where a position explicitly requires a specific educational background. This policy reflects FedEx's practical and role-focused hiring strategy, emphasizing the importance of aligning a candidate's skill set with the job's demands over possessing a particular degree.

In the context of how military experience enhances a candidate's graduate education, the FedEx representative shared that the company values the unique blend of leadership skills and discipline that military service brings, particularly when it supports its educational focus. The company often recruits internally, seeking veteran candidates whose military leadership experience can complement their educational background, especially for roles in mid-level management. The FedEx representative mentioned that the company primarily focuses on hiring Supply Corps Officers with 10 to 15 years of experience. They noted a preference for this experience level over officers who have served 20 to 25 years and were not previously enlisted, suggesting that positions within FedEx are better suited to those with a mid-level range of military experience.

#### D. LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research investigates whether having an MBA instead of an M.S. has an impact, either positively or negatively, on Supply Corps Officers after military service with his/her ability to be hired by a private sector company. Central to this scrutiny is the exploration of what views companies have towards candidates who have an MBA instead of an M.S. and how they view that either degree has the potential to be an advantage over the other.

While the research here aims to provide a comprehensive analysis, it also acknowledges that there are certain limitations that result from restrictions within its breadth and depth. This research is constrained in accessing firsthand information pertinent to hiring tendencies of private sector companies due to restrictions in the allotted quantity of companies we can solicit feedback from, regarding our quantitative and qualitative research questions, but also hindered due to the number of responses received. This forces the research to rely heavily on the few submissions received. This research, while aiming for a more extensive study, faces constraints in terms of time, thus limiting the scale of work and the extent of data collection.

#### E. FURTHER STUDY

This research suggests several areas for further study, which could help refine and expand the understanding of how graduate degrees impact the employability of retired Supply Corps Officers. Future research could benefit from surveying more companies across various industries to enhance the depth and breadth of the data collected. This would allow for a more comprehensive analysis of the trends and nuances in hiring practices concerning having an MBA versus an M.S. degree. Additionally, it would be insightful to focus on surveying specific leadership positions at the executive level of corporations. Examining how these advanced degrees influence employability at the upper echelons of management could provide valuable insights into the strategic advantages or disadvantages conferred by each type of degree in high-stakes decision-making roles. Such targeted research could deepen our understanding of the professional trajectories available to retired Supply Corps Officers in the private sector and guide a Supply Corps Officers' educational and career planning within the military to align with these opportunities.

#### F. SUMMARY

Given the constraints imposed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on the number of participants, it is recommended that further longitudinal studies be conducted. These studies should aim to validate the current findings, broaden the scope to mitigate any outliers and explore sector-specific preferences for MBA versus M.S. degrees, particularly in fields conducive to the transition of Supply Corps Officers. The limitation to surveying



just nine companies, with responses from only four, opens the possibility that a broader array of companies may exhibit a preference for one-degree type over the other.

The quantitative analysis reveals a dynamic shift in the landscape of higher education concerning employability, suggesting an evolving perspective in the private sector on the value of MBA and M.S. degrees. This shift underscores the need for a more individualized and strategic approach to career planning. The choice between an MBA and an M.S. degree is guided by personal career objectives, competencies, and job market demands rather than a perceived superiority of one degree over the other. This idea aligns closely with the boundaryless career model discussed in the literature review of this thesis.

The absence of a clear preference from employers for either degree indicates a trend toward valuing diverse competencies across different educational backgrounds. This suggests a move toward a more holistic assessment of candidates, focusing on a mix of competencies, experiences, personal attributes, and academic qualifications.

The qualitative analysis further highlights the companies' appreciation for the unique blend of knowledge, skills, and competencies developed through military service. It suggests no universal preference for either an MBA or an M.S. degree. Instead, the pathway for retired Supply Corps Officers seems to depend on how well the specific strengths of each degree align with the competencies desired by employers for particular roles.

Discussions with company representatives reveal a general respect for the leadership, resilience, and problem-solving skills developed during military careers. This highlights the potential for these human, social, and psychological capitals to significantly boost the employability of Supply Corps Officers significantly, irrespective of their academic background.

Despite a consensus among the four companies, subtle differences in their approaches highlight various perspectives on qualifications for employability. For instance, Amazon prioritizes practical skills, leadership experience, and alignment with corporate values over specific degrees, emphasizing the importance of demonstrating how experiences and skills, whether gained through an MBA, an M.S., or military service, make



a candidate suitable for the role. Starbucks' inclusive approach values both the depth of technical expertise and the broader strategic outlook provided by M.S. and MBA curricula, respectively, along with the recognition of military experience as a valuable asset. The Home Depot's responses reflect a pragmatic approach to hiring, focusing on the fit between a candidate's skills and the job requirements over the type of degree held, indicating a preference for practical abilities and experience. The company values the leadership qualities and operational skills that military experience provides, particularly for roles within its stores and distribution centers. It indicates a nuanced understanding of how different backgrounds contribute to the company's success. Lastly, FedEx's approach prioritizes leadership and critical thinking attributes in its hiring process, appreciating a variety of backgrounds while being adaptable about candidates' educational achievements to match the company's operational and leadership demands. Their hiring practices are specifically designed to fit the unique requirements of each job opening, showing a dedication to matching individual strengths with the company's needs. This strategy enables FedEx to utilize the distinct talents of candidates, particularly those moving from military to civilian roles, to fulfill its operational and leadership requirements effectively.

#### V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### A. OVERVIEW

The four corporate surveys analyzed for this thesis reveal diverse hiring strategies and perceptions regarding the employability impacts of MBA versus M.S. degrees among retired Navy Supply Corps Officers. Companies like Amazon prioritize alignment with their organizational culture and leadership principles, emphasizing psychological capital attributes like adaptability and self-efficacy. Starbucks values human and social capital, recognizing the depth of knowledge an M.S. provides and the broad strategic oversight an MBA offers, tailored to specific role requirements. Similarly, The Home Depot emphasizes practical experience, highlighting the importance of human capital, while FedEx values the leadership and critical thinking skills fostered by both educational paths. Our primary conclusion is that choosing between an M.S. and an MBA does not significantly impact the employability of retired Navy Supply Corps Officers. Both qualitative and quantitative data support this finding and underscore the practical applicability of the boundaryless career theoretical framework. This framework suggests that effective career development hinges on building comprehensive career competencies: knowing-how (human capital), knowing-whom (social capital), and knowing-why (psychological capital). Thus, our recommendations aim to emphasize the practical application of this framework, providing guidance to Navy SC officers and the broader SC community.

### B. RECOMMENDATIONS TO NAVY SUPPLY CORPS OFFICERS

We will now provide recommendations to Navy Supply Corps Officers that build on the boundaryless career theoretical framework of employability. These recommendations aim to enhance Supply Corps Officers' career competencies in preparation for both military and civilian roles.

### 1. Enhance Human Capital

To enhance human capital, we recommend that Supply Corps Officers strategically choose their educational paths to best suit their future career aspirations. Pursuing an MBA



can develop broad managerial competencies across various business functions, aligning with the "knowing-how" aspect of career competencies that emphasize adaptability in career paths (De Vos et al., 2019). For those looking to specialize deeply in areas like finance or logistics, for example, an M.S. degree can provide the necessary technical expertise, enhancing specific industry human capital (Tomlinson, 2017). Additionally, we recommend Supply Corps Officers commit to ongoing personal and professional development by pursuing lifelong learning through advanced certifications and continuous education opportunities, whether it be a graduate degree at NPS, Intermediate Service College, such as the Navy War College, or through a CIVINS via the 810/811 programs. De Vos et al. (2019) reinforce the strategy of lifelong learning as a key pillar to the career development process, otherwise known as "career crafting" (p. 134).

## 2. Build and Leverage Social Capital

We recommend that Supply Corps Officers actively expand their professional networks beyond military circles. Platforms like LinkedIn, industry conferences, and seminars provide valuable networking opportunities. As a mentor and a mentee, mentoring programs can enhance social capital by providing career development opportunities, as discussed by DiRenzo and Greenhaus (2011).

#### 3. Develop Psychological Capital

Supply Corps Officers must build psychological resources, such as confidence, hope, optimism, and resilience, to successfully navigate career transition into their post-military careers (Luthans et al., 2004). Participating in training programs and workshops focusing on developing leadership and adaptability can help translate military leadership skills into effective civilian leadership styles, supporting psychological adjustments to new career environments. As Supply Corps Officers plan their careers, it is important that they define their career objectives and assess how their military-acquired competencies align with the civilian job market. This reflective process is notable because it influences their educational choices—whether to pursue an MBA or an M.S. degree—based on the specific skills and competencies required in their targeted career paths. Such self-awareness is a core aspect of the 'Knowing-Why' competency of psychological capital, which Eby et al.

(2003) identify as fundamental in navigating career transitions successfully. They argue that career insight—which incorporates an understanding of one's career goals, expectations, and an awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses—combined with a proactive personality that encourages an individual to take responsibility for their own career paths, are predictors of career success (Eby et al., 2003).

#### C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NAVY SUPPLY CORPS

We will now present recommendations to the Navy Supply Corps. These recommendations focus on initiatives that build upon the boundaryless career theoretical framework and are specifically designed to prepare Supply Corps Officers for successful careers in the military and their future civilian roles.

# 1. Increase Awareness of the Navy Supply Corps Foundation's Career Transition Leadership Seminar and Incorporate Aspects of the Seminar into Supply Corps Officer's Early Career Training

To better prepare Navy Supply Corps Officers for eventual transitions into civilian careers, we recommended increasing awareness of the Navy Supply Corps Foundation's Career Transition Leadership Seminar and integrating aspects of the seminar early in Supply Corps Officer's career. Given the potential benefits of this seminar and the current lack of widespread awareness among officers, incorporating aspects of the Career Transition Leadership Seminar into the Basic Qualification Course (BQC) or the Supply Officer Department Head Course (SODHC) could be beneficial. Providing officers with this information at the beginning and end of their careers would allow them to craft their careers around the information learned in the seminars. The aspects of the seminar that could be integrated into the BQC or SODHC would focus on translating military experiences into civilian terminology, establishing personal branding, and effectively conveying each officer's unique value to potential civilian employers. This training would help officers create and communicate their personal narratives across various platforms – such as elevator pitches, LinkedIn profiles, and resumes – and allow them to begin crafting their civilian career narratives and personal brands from the onset. This proactive approach would not only improve a Supply Corps Officer's soft skills while in the military. However,

it would also underscore the Navy Supply Corps' commitment to the long-term career success of its community.

# 2. Integrate Career Competency Speakers into BQC and SODHC

Another initiative we recommend is introducing a series of talks by experienced speakers on career competencies related to human, social, and psychological capital during the BQC or SODHC. This initiative would offer officers insights into developing competencies that would benefit promotion while serving and lead to success in civilian roles after their military careers. The series could feature diverse speakers, including former military officers who have successfully transitioned to civilian roles, career coaches, and industry leaders. These sessions would specifically address skills development for human capital, strategies for building and leveraging networks for social capital, and fostering resilience and confidence for psychological capital. Incorporating interactive Q&A sessions would allow officers to engage directly with speakers and receive personalized advice, enhancing the learning experience. Such an initiative helps officers develop a robust set of adaptable skills that would benefit from tour to tour while serving and prepares junior officers for effective leadership within the Navy and successful careers in the civilian sector. Collaboration with the Navy Supply Corps Foundation, educational institutions, and professional organizations to identify and invite speakers, along with regular feedback collection and program adjustments, will ensure the initiative's relevance and impact.

#### D. SUMMARY

This thesis investigated the impact of holding an MBA versus an M.S. degree on the employability of retired Navy Supply Corps Officers transitioning into the civilian job market. This study provided empirical insights into how these two advanced degrees are perceived by employers and how they influence career opportunities after military service. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, this research surveyed four major corporations – Amazon, Starbucks, The Home Depot, and FedEx – to gather data on their hiring preferences and practices related to these degrees. The findings revealed that neither an MBA nor an M.S. significantly sways employability on its own; instead, what

matters most is the alignment of specific degree attributes with the strategic needs of positions within these companies. This aligns with the boundaryless career theory, suggesting that successful career transitions depend not solely on formal education but on a broader spectrum of career competencies: knowing-how (human capital), knowing-whom (social capital), and knowing-why (psychological capital).

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ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL 555 DYER ROAD, INGERSOLL HALL MONTEREY, CA 93943