ADMINISTRATORS’ DESCRIPTION OF THEIR FORMATION OF THE LEADERSHIP TEAM AT A STATE-SUPPORTED MERCHANT MARINE COLLEGE

A thesis presented

by

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Abstract

Over the last one hundred years, state-supported merchant marine education in the United States has evolved from a small group of men on sailing ships to diverse, multi-disciplined colleges with administrative teams that oversee the cadet corps in leadership development and merchant marine training. These leadership teams supervise and mentor the student cadets, and they are modeled after traditional military structures in other private, public, and federal military colleges. Unlike their military relatives, the leadership teams within merchant marine institutions do not hire solely from within their organizational culture, rather they hire from a diverse pool of public and private military, para-military, and merchant marine professionals. These administrators’ experiences are diverse, which can lead to challenges in leadership team formation. Using phenomenological methodology, the study focused on the lived experiences of five administrators, exploring the primary research question: How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team? Utilizing team cohesion as the theoretical framework, this study investigated the formation of one specific leadership team, opening the door to new research within merchant marine colleges, as well as adding to the research on leadership teams and the experiences of their members.

Keywords: leadership teams, merchant marine, leader-follower relationships, military education, team cohesion
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This phenomenological study’s purpose was to explore how administrators formed their leadership team; the study specifically focused on hierarchical relationships as well as the administrators’ perceived roles within the team. The theoretical framework supporting this study was team cohesion, which, through shared experiences, plays a significant role in determining the success within an organization (Forsyth, 2009). These shared experiences, both positive and negative, directly correlate with cohesion and ultimately team performance; they are driven by social identity or task determination and influenced by internal and external factors (Forsyth, 2009). In light of the multifaceted leadership role that college administrators have in development of cadets and merchant marine curriculum, it is of great importance to the research on leadership and the merchant marine industry to examine this phenomenon.

Problem and Significance

One of the goals of military and merchant marine education is leadership development, both at the practical, skill-based level as well as the theoretical level (Donnithorne, 1993). Education through experience has been the foundation of student leadership development at state-supported merchant marine colleges since they opened in the mid-nineteenth century (Brouwer, 1977). Although not the primary charge of most traditional institutions, leadership education is an immersing theme in higher education, and in recent years it has commanded significant research attention (Bush, 2011). Military institutions, particularly merchant marine colleges, develop leadership through pre-college training weeks, social structures, hierarchical leadership structures, and self-governed student leadership. These educational experiences, designed by the administrative leadership teams that organize the regimental cadet programs, are grounded in the colleges’ goals, leading students down predetermined paths to desired leadership
outcomes (Donnithorne, 1993). Although state-supported merchant marine colleges are not military schools, they are based on a military structure and maintain the military ideal that the student experience and curriculum should focus largely on leadership development. In line with these goals, administrators within these leadership teams play an important role in the college culture: mentoring, organizing, and supporting the student cadet corps 24 hours a day and seven days a week (Brouwer, 1977; Donnithorne, 1993). The relationships within these leadership teams, specifically the relationships between the senior officer administrators and junior officer administrators, are the linchpin of the military structure and a critical component of the students’ leadership development and the organization’s success (Donnithorne, 1993). Yukl (2009) specifically defines organizational success as the influence leaders have on their followers within their groups or teams.

Military leadership teams must build cohesion quickly, especially when team members have varied experiences (Department of the Army, 1987). Traditional military education benefits from a sole source of administrative talent, drawing qualified candidate pools from federal military branches (Driscoll, 2011). Educational organizations such as the Naval Academy and the Federal Merchant Marine Academy are examples of organizations that hire only naval or merchant marine officers who share common professional experiences; these officers serve as administrators to lead their cadets, and they turn-over on a regular three to five year cycle (Driscoll, 2011). As non-traditional military organizations, state-supported merchant marine colleges hire administrative leaders with a variety of professional experiences, including all four branches of the military and other para-military professions such as professional merchant mariners (U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d.). This freedom to hire from a diverse candidate pool places an increased responsibility on both the selection and vetting process, as
compared to the traditional military counterparts, and results in a less predictable turn-over rate much like a traditional civilian leadership team. New administrators coming into the leadership team bring with them diverse experiences that influence cohesion and the team’s formation.

One of the most difficult processes for any organization is the inclusion of new members into the group structure after the selection process. This process of selecting new staff that will be successful within a new culture is a gamble, one that involves time and organization to recruit using multiple resources (Gibson, 1994). For new hires, most organizations develop training programs and orientations on organizational inclusion, while others provide their teams with educational experiences to build team inclusion (Schunk, 2004). This complex process becomes even more difficult for organizations that do not have predetermined paths from which to recruit, such as state-supported merchant marine colleges. As further professional skill development has been added by federal and international regulatory agencies to the already existing merchant marine curriculum, recruitment paths for administrators have further diversified beyond the military and para-military to include private and public law enforcement, firefighters, and government officers (Merchant Marine Training, 46 C.F.R. § 310, 2002).

There has been no significant research conducted on state-supported merchant marine colleges. By examining the lived experiences of merchant marine administrators and their ability to form their leadership team, this study provides the starting point for understanding how these regimental leadership teams form through the members’ relationships, roles, and experiences within the unique sub-culture of a state-supported merchant marine college.

**Practical and Intellectual Goals**

The external and internal factors that influenced a selected administration within a state-supported merchant marine college were explored in this study to understand how the
administrators functioned as a leadership team. In their studies of teams, Hackman and Waltman (1986) and McGrath (1986) contended that research on teams should be conducted within living environments with the full understanding of the diverse factors influencing team cohesion and performance. Much of the current research on teams can be separated into two primary focuses: internal and external factors. External factors, such as the experiences and professional backgrounds of administrators, play an important role in the development of the heterogeneity and homogeneity of traits, abilities, and attitudes built into team cohesion (Goodman, Ravlin, & Argote, 1986). In contrast to external factors, internal factors focus more on relationships, both between members and between leaders and followers, as well as administrators’ tasks, goals, and decision-making (Goodman et al., 1986). While both sets of factors significantly affect team performance, Bass and Stogdill (1990) contend that much of the early research on teams and groups has been primarily one-sided: centered on the leaders’ influence on the followers. This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological approach and examined the lived experiences of the merchant marine college’s administrative team to gain an enhanced understanding of its goals, composition, and relationships and the ways these factors affected the administrators’ ability to work together.

In order to understand the development and success of a leadership team, a researcher must study the dynamics within the team, including the administrators’ perceived interpersonal relationships and professional backgrounds. Ultimately, all members within a team are striving for personal and professional satisfaction, attainment, and collective goals (Christensen, Marx, & Stevenson, 2006). Hackman (2002) states that a team’s cohesion and eventual success in achievement of goals is based on the right conditions and the ability of all team members to make substantial contributions.
Although not the primary charge of most traditional institutions, leadership education is an immerging theme with higher education and in recent years has commanded significant research attention (Bush, 2011). This study’s exploration of how the leadership team was formed within a state-supported merchant marine environment contributes to further research on leadership team formation and cohesion within state-supported merchant marine institutions.

**Positionality Statement**

Due to the unique culture of military colleges and specifically state-supported merchant marine colleges, it is not surprising that as the researcher, my professional and personal past is connected with these organizations. Having served in a senior administrative role, although not within the specific leadership team in this study, I have knowledge of the culture, which helped me to identify the problem of practice and gain access to the college and the selected leadership team.

Researcher bias within this study was controlled in two ways. The first involved the interview protocol and participants: identifying interview participants that the researcher did not know, which was made easier by organizational changes in the college, and a strong predetermined interview protocol (Seidman, 2006). The second control mechanism utilized to control bias in this study was the concept of bracketing. Bracketing, used specifically in phenomenological research, is when the researcher identifies their personal beliefs and sets them aside prior to and during the research collection (Moustakas, 1994). The ability to control these biases contributed to the validity and success of this study.

**Purpose Statement and Research Question**

The purpose of this study was to explore the formation of a regimental leadership team at a state-supported merchant marine college. Considering the lack of significant research on
leadership teams within this unique culture, this study endeavored to apply existing cohesion theories on military, civilian, and athletic organizations to the state-supported merchant marine collegiate environment.

The research question that guided this study is based on the theoretical foundation of team and group cohesion. To explore this theory, the research question centered on the past and present backgrounds, experiences, and perceived relationships of the administrators within the leadership team.

- How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team?

**Theoretical Framework**

The purpose of this study was to explore how administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college formed the leadership team. The theoretical framework used in this study was team cohesion, which starts at the formation of the team and plays a significant role in determining the level of success within an organization (MacCoun, 1993). Christensen et al. (2006) state that the primary task of organizational leadership is to place people within teams to accomplish the desired outcomes of the organization. This concept can be specifically applied to military structures where team formation is a focal point of the culture. Within these cultures, the organization selects their team members based on their experiences as well as their current skills and knowledge (MacCoun, 1993). A manual on team development by the Department of the Army (1987) concludes that within military teams, as cohesion builds, so does the team’s productivity, and in turn, the organization’s productivity. Oliver, Harman, Hoover, Hayes, and Pandhi (1999) support this concept; their study identifies that within military teams, cohesion directly influences performance.
The concept of cohesion. Groups or teams are more than a collection of people; they are organized around shared interactions requiring team members to depend on each other to accomplish goals (Eys, Burke, Carron, & Dennis, 2006). These groups or teams may include social groups, work groups, athletic teams, fraternal organizations, governmental organizations, and military structures. Across these different classifications, the concept of cohesion can be applied (Carron & Brawley, 2000). Mudrack (1989) defines the concept of cohesion as group members developing a bond through a sense of belonging and connectedness.

The study of cohesion began in the early 1950’s with the work of researchers Trist and Bamford (1951) and Festinger (1950), who defined team cohesion as all members of the group working together toward a completion of a common goal (as cited in Oliver et al., 1999). Although Festinger’s (1950) research focused on a member’s desire to remain in the group, while Trist and Bamford’s (1951) research focused on member behaviors, both studies paved the way to future research on cohesion specifically focused on attraction (as cited in Oliver et al., 1999). Further studies in the 1960s by Lott and Lott (1961) as well as Shaw and Shaw (1962) drew comparisons between the level of member attraction and its impact on the level of group cohesion (as cited in Oliver et al., 1999). As the focus on attractiveness within cohesion advanced in the research, later studies began to look at individual members’ social identities as well as their shared values and goals.

Cohesion is achieved not only through positive shared experiences but also through negative shared experiences. Members dealing with threats or dissatisfaction can add to cohesion and cause groups or teams to bond together (Forsyth, 2009). Guzzo (1995) found that threats, identified in many cases to increase the sense of belonging and group cohesion, were directly related to the group’s shared values and sense of task or goals. Cohesion and its impact on a
team’s performance builds on Zaccaro’s (1991) idea that regardless of how cohesion occurs, whether it’s based on social or task influences, its effects on the group’s outcomes are tangible and therefore require more in-depth study.

Recent studies have explored group cohesion within athletic teams, focusing on cohesion’s impact on overall team performance. Athletic team cohesion is centered on team goals (Cashmore, 2002). One of the leading researchers in team cohesion is Carron, who has explored the correlation between individual goals and a team’s desired goals, and how social identity and task driven determination drive team performance (Carron, Spink, & Prapavessis, 1997; Eys et al., 2006; Paskevich, Estabrooks, Brawley, & Carron, 2001).

**Task and social cohesion.** Behavioral scientists most commonly view cohesion through two lenses: task cohesion and social cohesion. Social cohesion is defined as the commitment of the members to each other within a team, while task cohesion is the commitment of the team members to accomplishing a task; both social and task cohesion play important roles in the identity of the team, their members, and ultimately its success (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McClendon, 2003; MacCoun, 1996).

Similar to social identity, self-efficacy is the foundation upon which social cohesion is built. A team member’s identity is developed through experiences and achievements, and when compared to others, commonalities lead to social cohesion (Beal et al., 2003). These comparisons occur when group members share both positive and negative team experiences. These experiences also directly contribute to shaping the individuals’ social identities as well as their hierarchical roles (MacCoun, Kier, & Belkin, 2006). While research suggests that the team leader plays a vital role in developing team cohesion, ultimately both the leader and the followers contribute to the level of cohesion, as is observed in leader-follower relationships (Christensen et
These leader-follower relationships between team members drive group interaction and performance. Social cohesion and members’ relationships support team performance, but a number of studies of military structures have suggested that task cohesion may take precedence (MacCoun, 1996).

Traditionally, social cohesion takes a greater amount of time than task cohesion to develop within teams (Christensen et al., 2006). Most teams unite for a new or challenging task, and as the group learns about the task and its goals within the context of the organization’s goals, the members begin to interact with each other, which in turn develops social cohesion. Thinking of the task as “job one” is not a new concept to military teams in which organizational goals are clear and social cohesion is considered a secondary mission to that of accomplishing the task (MacCoun et al., 2006). Within military structures, members move in and out of teams through systematic promotion and reassignment. This regular mobility combined with specific time expectations for each task results in the fact that military teams tend not to operate as cross-functional teams focused on broad objectives, but rather as specialized teams where social cohesion is not as essential as task cohesion (Parker, 2008).

Early research, such as Tuckman’s (1965) study, identifies four stages of group development: forming, storming, norming, and performing (see Figure 1). Within these stages, Tuckman (1965) identifies group interactions as occurring in two realms, social and task. Similarly, research by Townsend (1968) on cohesion and group interaction supports this idea of the task and social realms, and focuses on five stages of group development: stability, similarity, size, support, and satisfaction. More recent studies have identified additional stages and frameworks but have consistently done so within the theoretical lens of task and social cohesion.
In 1980, Carron’s study of task and social cohesion was applied to athletic teams. Carron’s (1980) model of team cohesion examined: internal and external environmental factors; the personal characteristics of team members; members’ leadership factors, such as style, behavior, roles, and communication; and the factors found within the group and not the individual. Carron’s model identified three characteristics that define the team and its success: their shared identity, their sense of purpose, and their communication structure (see Figure 2) (Carron, 1980, 1982). The model may also be applied to team structures beyond those of athletics; military structures mirror a similar sense of identity, purpose, and communication styles.
Research on task and social cohesion within the military found a foothold in the 1990s with studies of military units led by Oliver et al. (1999) and MacCoun (1993). Both studies considered cohesion within military units and its effects on team performance and desired outcomes. Specifically, MacCoun’s (1993) study focused on gender and unit cohesion in the army. He concluded that there was only a modest correlation between unit cohesion, performance, and gender, while Oliver et al. (1999) found a much greater correlation when not considering gender as a factor. Recent studies of cohesion within military structures have begun...
to focus on comparisons between task cohesion and social cohesion. In 2006, MacCoun et al. studied social cohesion within combat units. Unlike MacCoun’s early studies focused on gender, this study focused on the social connections and relationships that have an impact on cohesion within military structures. Social cohesion, which is dependent on relationships and interactions, takes longer than task cohesion to develop within diverse groups, as MacCoun et al. (2006) found within military units that cycled through personnel regularly. As would be expected, task focus guides a diverse group more quickly than a social focus (Knouse, 2006). Studies on military cohesion regularly conclude that task cohesion is a greater motivating factor in the military than that of social cohesion (MacCoun, 1993; MacCoun et al., 2006; Oliver et al., 1999).

**Relationship to the Problem of Practice**

As stated in the introduction, state-supported merchant marine colleges are built on a military structure, but they are not actually military colleges. Although much of the research on cohesion, specifically MacCoun’s (1993) and MacCoun et al.’s (2006) research on military units, can be applied to merchant marine education, it is important to note that there is no direct research available to discern how teams within this unique culture coalesce and function in support of the goals of the college. Building cohesion among team members from varied professional and personal backgrounds is challenging within a traditional culture, let alone within the unique military environments of merchant marine colleges. Understanding cohesion within these types of leadership teams is vital to team formation and will enhance the college’s ability to train and develop students for careers as merchant mariners.

**Content and Organization**

Continuing beyond the first chapter, which serves to introduce the problem of practice, the intellectual and practical goals, the research questions, and the theoretical framework, chapter
two comprises the literature review. Chapter three is focused on the study’s research design, which includes further descriptions of the phenomenological method, the site and participants, data collection and analysis, validity and credibility, and the protection of human subjects.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section explores the research on leadership, teams, and merchant marine education and focuses on several key elements within team leadership. To begin, this section provides an overview of teams and team research. These overviews provide a foundation for the ensuing review of leadership theory, specifically team leadership. Many sections touch on the research of military team structures; however, because state-supported merchant marine colleges are marginally connected to military education, the focus is on the general body of research. The section concludes with a general overview of state-support merchant marine education within the United States, including history, structure, and educational training. This final section supports the focus of this study: how administrators form their leadership team within the unique merchant marine collegiate environment.

Teams

Throughout the broad and varied research, there is an overlap and occasional confusion between the terms “group” and “team.” Bales’s (1950) definition states that as long as people are engaged together in a pattern of meetings, they could consider themselves a group. Alderfer (1972) defines groups as social systems with rules, organization, and members that are dependent on each other. A more recent study on groups led by Schein (1980) defines groups according to three conditions: the members perceive themselves as a group; they are aware of their interactions together; and they actually work together. All three of these definitions of groups are based on the individuals’ broad perceptions of each other and their collective meaning within their group. Throughout the research, groups are not defined in the same manner as teams. Teams are distinct because of the added component of shared goals. These shared goals are seen
as the group’s connection with their organization and its success, which leads to further identification as a team (LaFasto & Larson, 2001).

Lewin began researching groups and their relationship to the success of the organization in the early 1930s; recent studies have expanded on his research to include the study of team effectiveness (Richards, 2012). Much of the early research on teams focused on organization and size. Researchers such as Tuckman (1965) began to work on theories that identified how teams developed and what process they went through in that development. Research during the 1970s and 1980s was mostly focused on understanding how teams developed, including attempts by researchers to determine optimal team size and structure (Forsyth, 2009). This research assisted in separating teams into a variety of categories, from the traditional athletic and work teams to more recent categories such as project teams and virtual teams. Cohen and Bailey (1997) identified four types of teams within organizations, as follows. First, working teams are organized around a specific goal with the members having shared competencies. Second, parallel teams bring together members of different groups with varying competencies or skills to accomplish a shared goal. Third, project teams are short-term teams centered on a specific goal within a specific period. Finally, management teams focus on the organization’s major goals with a specific emphasis on the overall success of the organization (Cohen & Bailey, 1997). Early research on management teams focused on organization success, also identified in the literature as team effectiveness.

Since the mid-1990s, most research on teams has centered on team effectiveness. In 1961, Likert presented 25 characteristics of effective teams ranging from the skills of its members to the selection and skills of its leaders, with specific emphasis on member exchange (Richards, 2012). Later studies such as Galdstein’s Model of Task Group Effectiveness (1984)
began to put more emphasis on team structure and its effects on member relationships, focusing on team effectiveness (as cited in Richards, 2012). The concept of team structure combined with subsequent research on team effectiveness coincided with an economic shift in the late 1980s that saw Japan and Asia become more competitive with Europe and the United States in the global business market (Forsyth, 2009). Although this global shift is credited as a driving force in the study of team effectiveness, it was not until the start of the 21st century that researchers and business experts began to focus not only on team effectiveness, but also on team ineffectiveness, specifically the social behaviors and characteristics of teams that get in the way of effectiveness (Forsyth, 2009). An example of this trend is Lencioni’s (2002) work on the five dysfunctions of a team; the theory states that if team members do not trust each other or invest in their team culture, team and organizational dysfunction and failure are inevitable (as cited in Richards, 2012). Two of the more recent studies on team effectiveness by Joiner, Scholtes, and Striebel (2003) and Parker (2008) also exhibit a focus on the social characteristics of teams, including their traits and behaviors. Joiner et al.’s (2003) work, *The Team Handbook*, illustrates strategies that assist in the creation of effective, high performing teams. Parker’s (2008) book entitled *Team Players and Teamwork* expands on Joiner et al.’s (2003) theories about the development of effective teams to include team member relationships and interpersonal play within cross-functional teams, as well as the need for these team dynamics in a global society. The common theme between the two books is the focus on team formation and ultimately cohesion.

A team’s effectiveness is influenced by its leadership, which also plays an important role in the organization of the team. Leadership within a team can come from many internal or external sources and may come from those with a formal or informal leadership role (Cohen &
Bailey, 1997). Wageman’s (1995) study of corporate cultures in the United States concluded that internal group influencers come in large part from an individual, often the positional leader within the team; the results of the study showed that teams often function with a laissez-faire leader or even function with no leader at all (as cited in Cohen & Bailey, 1997). The leadership style associated with the team’s leader and his or her relationships with followers plays an important role in team cohesion and success (Cohen & Bailey, 1997).

**Leadership Theory Overview**

Leadership is perhaps one of the most studied disciplines within organizational dynamics. Literature over the last decade has attempted to analyze and decipher the qualities that create leaders through investigation of their traits, skills, and psychology. This research has categorized leadership theory into as many variations as there are leadership theorists. Two of the most cited early works on leadership are Bass and Stogdill’s (1990) *Handbook of Leadership*, first published in 1976, and Burn’s (2010) *Leadership*, first published in 1978. Although they focused on leadership from a moral and a social perspective and were published before the modern age of leadership research, both works set the foundation for modern authors’ study of leadership theory. Northouse’s (2010) and Yukl’s (2009) recent summaries of leadership theory over the last 100 years provide a solid overview on which this section is based. While Northouse’s (2010) work focuses more on a practical design, covering a great many theories and approaches, Yukl (2009) puts leadership theories into five categories: trait, behavior, power-influence, situational, and integrative. Based largely on the four works by Bass and Stogdill (1990), Burn (2010), Northouse (2010), and Yukl (2009), this historical overview of leadership will focus on four major categories: trait, behavioral, contingency, and transformational. These categories will be
organized by the periods in history in which they held the greatest influence on leadership theory.

**Trait.** The earliest trait leadership theory was classified the Great Man theory. As Bass and Stodgill (1990) note, research and writing on this theory can be traced back to the late 19th century with the writings of Thomas Carlyle who characterized leadership influence in terms of classical heroism. Carlyle described heroism as an act of valor or exemplary behavior that serves as the foundation of other’s belief in or desire for a Great Man leader (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Great Man theories center on position, title, as well as the need and desire for heroism. Great Man leaders, Carlyle alleged, were driven by the idea that they had innate abilities and traits that allowed them to reach these positions, and thus made them better positioned for success (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Proponents of this theory maintain the belief that leaders in the royalty, military, government, and industry achieve success in part due to their innate abilities and personalities (Yaverbaum & Sherman, 2008). These theories focus heavily on the leaders’ abilities and are mostly from their specific point-of-view, rather than that of their followers. Great Man theories largely assume that leaders’ development comes from within; they do not consider how followers influence that development. The central themes to the theories are the ways in which the leaders work to develop their followers and affect organizational success.

Later trait theories focus on a leader’s characteristics and personality, but they also examine how these aspects are utilized within the concept of leadership (Yukl, 2009). Trait theories became most prominent in the early 20th century leading into World War II, when theorists turned their attention to both leaders and their followers (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Trait theories center on the premise that, beyond followership, those who rise to leadership have unique abilities that allow them to do so (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Intelligence, social ability, and
determination are the most common qualities of desired leaders based on the research. Early theorists such as Stogdill, in 1948 and in 1974, and Mann in 1959, conducted research on leader traits (Burn, 2010). These studies produced lists that ranged from 124 to 1400 leader traits using personality tests and surveys. Later theorists, Locke and Kirkpatrick (1991) and Bryman (1992) continued trait theory, specifically focusing on traits associated with perceptions, comparing leadership traits among successful leaders to find correlations (as cited in Burn, 2010). Trait theories suggest that a leader’s natural abilities and personality are enhanced through their continued practice of leadership. Although not as popular in modern research, leadership traits remain a foundation of many leadership theories today.

**Behavioral.** Northouse (2010) defines behavioral theories of leadership as the attempt to identify behaviors, as opposed to traits, that leaders develop and demonstrate based on the situation and organizational needs. Behavioral leadership theories emerged post World War II and were often referred to in the context of “leadership styles.” Kurt Lewin, the founder of action research, first began to study leadership styles in the 1940s; he looked at graduate research assistants and their use of three specific styles when interacting with their students: autocratic, democratic, and laissez-fair. He best-known research on leadership behavior came about as a result of Ohio State University’s development of the Leadership Behavioral Descriptive Questionnaire (LBDQ) in the late 1940s (Northouse, 2010). Their study measured nine dimensions of leadership behaviors by examining participant statements (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). This resulted in the development of the LBDQ that divided behavioral leadership into two parts: initiating structure (task) and consideration (relationship) (Northouse, 2010). In the 1960s and later in the 1980s, Blake and Mouton developed the managerial grid focusing on leadership style (behavior) within the concept of the team structure (Yukl, 2009). Using a four-quadrant graph
similar to the LBDQ, the managerial grid focused on behavioral development and modification of team managers (leaders) in ultimately reaching an organization’s goals (Yukl, 2009). The idea of task and relationship, a central theme in behavioral theories, provided the foundation for Fred E. Fiedler’s research, considered by many to be the initiator of contingency leadership theories (Yukl, 2009).

**Contingency.** Research on contingency theories, from the late 20th century to today, connect behavioral or leadership styles to specific situations. Fiedler was one of the first to pioneer this theory with his least-preferred co-worker scale or LPC (Northouse, 2010). Fiedler applied the LPC to different groups, from high school boys’ basketball teams to Air Force bomber pilots, in an attempt to find correlations among them in how leaders and followers behave (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). The situational theory, developed by Blanchard and Hersey in 1969, centers on the premise that different situations require different leadership styles (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Using a four-quadrant chart, the situational theory devises a model of leadership practice that utilizes four behaviors: supporting, coaching, delegating, and directing. It identifies how leaders should use varying leadership styles to assist followers through their development cycle to optimize their performance. Path-goal theory, another contingency theory, centers on how followers are motivated by their leaders. First developed in the early 1970s and championed largely by Robert House, the path-goal model focuses on the leader’s style and its influence on the follower’s characteristics within specific work situations (House, 1996). A complex theory, it asks leaders to understand the followers’ motivation, identify obstacles, and select a leadership style that will best facilitate the follower’s success (House, 1996).

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Burn introduced a contingency theory referred to as transformational leadership theory (Yukl, 2009). Transformational theories focus on the leader’s
ability to transform an organization using keen vision and charismatic influence to revise organizational values, perceptions, and expectations, and thus inspire their subordinates towards mutual goals (Yukl, 2009). Although different, theories of transformational leadership have been closely linked with those of charismatic leadership. First published by House in 1976, charismatic leadership theory centers on the leader’s style and ability to influence the group or followers (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). Charismatic leaders are regularly highlighted throughout history as larger than life figures who depend heavily on their relationship with their followers to reach their goals.

The relationship of the leader to the team and its members is a consistent theme found within contingency approaches. As stated in Bass and Stogdill’s (1990) *Handbook of Leadership*, regardless of the type of leadership style utilized, leaders must understand how they influence members and affect both individual and organizational goals. Team leadership plays an important role in the overall success of individual team members as well as the overall success of the team (Northouse, 2010).

**Team leadership.** Team leadership theory developed out of the early works of researchers on group dynamics in the 1940s and the use of T-Groups in the 1950s (Porter & Beyerlein, 2000). These early studies focused on team structure, how to maximize the production of the team, and the success of the team’s attempts to achieve desired outcomes. Team leadership theory focuses on the inter-relationships of team members and ultimately how their satisfaction leads to organizational accomplishments; organizational accomplishments are the foundation of the functional model of team leadership theory (Porter & Beyerlein, 2000). Early research on this model considered two primary concepts, accomplishment and satisfaction or climate (Zaccaro, 1991). The first concept, accomplishment, focuses on the leader as a problem solver who bases
all decisions on accomplishing the goals or task of the group (McGrath, 1986). Although this concept is important, it focuses on short-term solutions for group and member issues to reach organizational outcomes. The second concept of group satisfaction or climate places the leader focus on group members, their development, and cohesion (McGrath, 1986). This model was termed the functional model because it focused on how the group functions together for arguably greater success over the long term, leading to organizational success. The development of the functional model coincided with the research moving from groups to teams.

The functional leadership model utilized a grid that measured monitoring versus action, and external issues versus internal issues (McGrath, 1986). The primary assertion of the functional model is that the leader has the responsibility to ensure that the needs of the team and its members are met (McGrath, 1986). This does not mean that the leader is solely responsible for the care of the team and its members; the model’s expectation is that the leader monitors what occurs, how members are influenced, and responds as needed (McGrath, 1986). If the team develops a culture of respect and cooperation, the members should provide assistance to each other with support from the leader (McGrath, 1986; Zaccaro, 1991). In order for this model to be successful, the leader must accurately assess what occurs within the team and balance the needs of the members with the needs of the team as a whole, while supporting the needs of the organization (Zaccaro, 1991). This functional model places the majority of the responsibility on the leader and his or her knowledge of the team and ability to coordinate appropriate responses.

Evaluating organizations on their outcomes is not a new phenomenon, but with the increased attention paid to teams in leadership research, the studies in the 1980s and 1990s focused more on team effectiveness as a measurement that led to organizational success (Northouse, 2010; Zaccaro, 1991). Research conducted through two different studies helped to
advance the concept of team effectiveness through the understanding of their characteristics. Hackman and Walton (1986) determined that five characteristics played into team effectiveness: clear goals, solid structure, standards, leadership or coaching, and needed resources. A later study conducted by LaFasto and Larson (2001) expanded on these characteristics to include member competence and collaboration. Although these studies and consequent ones set out to explore the impact of these seven characteristics, as well as others, one constant remains in the research: the assertion that leadership has the capacity to either positively or negatively affect the performance of teams and ultimately organizations.

The idea that leaders play an important role in the team is a central principle within Hill’s team leadership model, developed in 2001, and is one of the most popular team leadership theories (Northouse, 2010). The model unites the previously mentioned research on team leadership from functional models to team effectiveness in a flow chart. Hill’s (2001) team leadership flow chart allows leaders to improve their decision-making by focusing on team success (Northouse, 2010). The model considers many factors that can affect the entire team, like supportive decision-making and increasing production by improving team effectiveness. By providing a flow chart, Hill (2001) believes leaders will more actively consider the primary variables that account for team success. According to McGrath (1986), leader success is built on the knowledge of what issues to look for as well as how to solve them, and the team leadership model assists in guiding the leader in that decision-making process.

The model is separated into three parts; the first is focused on the leader and their mediation decisions (Hill, 2001). According to Hill (2001), there are three decisions that the leader has to make before solving an organizational concern or issue, the first being whether he or she will monitor the members and let them take independent action or if they will directly lead
the action themselves. In this first mediation, the leader assumes an active or a passive role within the team dynamic (Hill, 2001). By choosing a more passive approach, the leader invites team members to work through their issue, which leads to a decision regarding monitoring the team (Hill, 2001). The extent and nature of the leader’s supervision can allow team members to grow in competence individually, collectively, or both, supporting cohesion and ultimately team effectiveness (Hill, 2001). It is important to note that this growth can also lead to further team issues as members work through their self-development that can slow team effectiveness (Hill, 2001). Passive monitoring also requires that the team leader be knowledgeable of member abilities, especially when they are deficient, and the complexities of the issue(s) at hand, while continuing to follow the group through their process (Hill, 2001). By taking an active role, the leader assumes that the team needs assistance with a complex issue or that the members’ development as a team has not yet reached the level that supports the leader stepping back (Hill, 2001).

In deciding whether to adopt a passive or active role, the leader determines the level of involvement in assisting the team members (Hill, 2001). Focusing on interaction, the flow chart encourages the leader to assess if the team needs internal support, therefore assistance working with each other, or external support, dealing with challenges outside of the team (Hill, 2001). Once the leader has made a decision regarding the kind of support the team requires, he or she can engage the third and final decision of Hill’s model, the type of intervention needed. For internal support interventions, the flow chart separates the team process into a task section, assisting the team in goal, skill, and structure clarification, or a relational section, assisting the team in conflict management, needs assessment, and personal mentoring/coaching (Hill, 2001). If the leader chooses an external support initiative, Hill’s model indicates the leader should work
with the team on factors such as networking, information sharing, and negotiation skills. How a leader pursues a course of action based on the assessment of team issues is one of the most important parts of Hill’s model. The leader must have a clear understanding of all the functions, variables, and action steps found within the model to make the correct selection (Hill, 2001).

Once the leader decides upon and pursues an appropriate course of action based on task, relational, or environmental focuses, the final stage of team effectiveness is realized. In this final part of the model, the leader evaluates both the team’s effectiveness in implementing the chosen actions, and assesses how successful these actions have been in addressing problems and improving team member performance (Hill, 2001). This type of review develops the leader’s ability to understand the team and make better decisions in the future (Northouse, 2010). Overall, the quality of the decisions made by leaders not only influences team effectiveness, but also affects team cohesion, including the extent of the support they provide to individual members, team development, and the degree to which team members trust them (Northouse, 2010).

The success of the team leadership model is based on its ability to assist the leader in supporting the team via an operational approach that is adaptable to various theories, models, and organizational structures (MacCoun, 1996). The model’s primary drawback is that it employs a unilateral, top-down approach to team performance that does not allow for the ground up influence from team members or followers that could improve leadership development and ultimately team cohesion. Much of the current leadership literature suggests that leaders overestimate their worth within organizations and teams (Beal et al., 2003; LaFasto & Larson, 2001; MacCoun, 1996). Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggest in their book The Leadership Challenge, that leadership and decision-making must be based not on the top-down approach, but on the relationship between leaders and their followers. This cross-hierarchical dialogue and
understanding between leaders and followers clarifies the notion of perceived worth versus actual worth impacting team effectiveness (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

**Leader-follower relationships.** Leader-follower relationship theory, which originated during the industrial revolution of the early 20th century, centers on the study of relationships between individual leaders and followers (Van Knippenberg, Van Quaquebeke, & Van Gils, 2010). The emergence of large and complex organizations initiated the demand for research on the productivity of workers. This focus considers the organization’s leadership and proposals for how they could improve their followers. Much of the research on these relationships, however, pays attention to the leader’s point-of-view, while offering little perspective on the complexities of followership (Tanoff & Barlow, 2002; Yukl, 2009).

The theory’s focus was to provide an understanding of what skills and behaviors a given leader possesses that influences followers. However, in its initial incarnation, the theory presented a one-sided view of the leader-follower relationship that assumed followers have little impact on the leadership development of their superiors, much like the leader-follower model currently found within military structures (Donnithorne, 1993; Vecchio, 1997). This top-down approach was consistent with research during this time period on leader-follower relationships, using trait, skills, and behaviors as the focus to understanding the leader’s role over followers (Yukl, 2009). Yukl (2009) describes two specific contingency theories, the LPC contingency theory and the multiple-linkage model, as prime examples of early research that focuses on leader behaviors within the leader-follower relationship. While both theories incorporated situational variables, they also focused on leader-follower relationships and the influence that leaders have on the followers’ performance.
Later theories began to incorporate follower perspectives, considering the relationships as transactional rather than top-down. These theories developed into value-based models using value expectancy, value alignment, and attributions in their research. Similar to Evans and House’s path-goal theory, the expectancy value theory focuses on the leader-follower’s path to their goals through a calculation of their beliefs and expected difficulties (Barge, 1994). Later studies of military officer relationships with their subordinates by Nebecker and Mitchell (1974) took the expectancy value theory further by incorporating behavior or value alignment as a component of leader-follower relationships. This compass of behaviors and values, which leaders use to guide their decisions and practices, plays a significant role in follower achievement (Nebecker & Mitchell, 1974). These theories were formulated into the attribution model, which centers on employee performance evaluations by leadership and their effect on leader-follower relationships (Yukl, 2009). Yukl (2009) highlights the connection between the attribution model and leader-follower relationships, stating that weak leader-member relationships correlate with negative attitudes seen by both the leader and the follower. Described as the true north in modern leadership literature, value alignment between leaders and followers serves to bring together behaviors, beliefs, ethics, and morals in the development of a value system, suggesting that the leader-follower relationship is cyclical (George, 2007). Attributes modeled by the leader are passed on to the follower, the organization, and ultimately back through the leader (George, 2007). In identifying the significance of the connection between leaders and their followers, researchers proceeded to develop the most studied leader-follower theory entitled the leader-member exchange theory.

Leader-member exchange (LMX) was first studied by Dansereau, Graen, and Haga (1975) and has developed throughout the last 30 years (Yukl, 2009). Thought of as the process of
communication or socialization between leaders and followers, LMX focuses on how these relationships are built and eventually influence team and organizational effectiveness (Dansereau et al., 1975). A relatively simple construct, leader-member exchange states that the leader-follower relationship is dyadic in nature, with individual inter-relationships affecting overall team cohesion (Dansereau et al., 1975). The relationships between individual followers and their leader are delineated into two categories. The first, referred to as the in-group, is defined as the group of followers that manage to build a stronger relationship with their leader (Dansereau et al., 1997). As Krone (1991) states, the in-group earns greater trust and receives more responsibility than the other members of the team. They also enjoy greater communication with their leader. The other group within the team, termed the out-group, does not develop the same interpersonal relationship with their leader and focuses more on tasks (Dansereau et al., 1975). Overall, members develop relationships with their leadership, which ultimately define the nature of their current and future roles within the team (Dansereau et al., 1975).

According to Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995), the dynamic among members of a team develops through a three-stage continuum referred to as the life cycle. The three stages, as defined by Dansereau et al. (1975), are role-taking, role-making, and reutilization. These three stages identify each leader-follower relationship from its beginning to its conclusion (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). During role-taking, the leader assesses the follower’s skills and personality, and then draws conclusions about motives and expected success. Followers begin to separate into the in-group and the out-group (Dansereau et al., 1975). During the role-making stage, the in-group begins to build a personal and trusted relationship (professional and/or personal) with their leader (Dansereau et al., 1975). The initial in-group may decrease in number as members are weeded out into the growing out-group (Dansereau et al., 1975). During the final stage of reutilization,
the most trusted of the original group are accepted by the leaders and become the final in-group; this cycle continues with each new member of the group to determine their place on the team (Dansereau et al., 1975).

Although studies by Day and Schyns (2010) and Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) support Dansereau et al.’s (1975) assertion that higher leader-follower agreement leads to better performance and ultimately higher team and organization performance, other current studies disagree. A 2006 study by Liden, Erdogan, Wayne, and Sparrowe demonstrated that leader-member non-agreement may also result in beneficial outcomes when teams concentrate on tasks over relationships. In these instances, task-focused team cultures can lead to positive performance as demonstrated in many early studies of military units (Liden et al., 2006).

Although many of the findings regarding military unit team cohesion, specifically task cohesion, have applications in merchant marine education, it is important to note that there is no relative research available to understand how teams within this unique educational culture come together and function. Building cohesion with members from varied professional and personal backgrounds is challenging within a traditional professional organizational culture, let alone a culture that blends military structure with that of a professional merchant mariner.

**State-Supported Merchant Marine Education**

Due to the unique culture of merchant marine education, it is important to have both a general understanding of its history as well as an understanding of the current structure of its leadership training. Merchant marine colleges, compared to traditional military institutions, follow military etiquette but are unique in that they do not utilize the same curriculum or cultivate the same leadership culture. Unlike their military counterparts, the professional leadership figures of these colleges are hired from many different types of military and para-
military backgrounds and have very different professional experience. Despite their existence for over 100 years, there has been no significant research on state-supported merchant marine colleges or their leadership teams.

**Historical overview.** There are only six state-supported merchant marine colleges in the United States, located in Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Michigan, Texas, and California (U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d.). These colleges prepare students for the global maritime industry and offer them the option of earning a U.S. merchant marine license in addition to a baccalaureate degree. Students who receive their license sail on U.S. flagged merchant vessels as officers either in the engine room or deck sides (U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d.). Students earn degrees in concentrations such as Engineering, Naval Architecture, International Business, Business and Commerce, Biology, and Maritime Studies (California Maritime Academy, 2013; Maine Maritime Academy, n.d.; Massachusetts Maritime Academy, n.d.; SUNY Maritime College, n.d.; Texas A&M University, n.d.). All state-supported merchant marine colleges offer a military ROTC option through the Navy or the Marines but are not required to do so, and less than 10% of the schools’ full-time student population select this route (Driscoll, 2011).

The first state-supported merchant marine college in the United States opened in New York City in 1874; SUNY Maritime College was originally known as the New York Merchant Marine Academy (SUNY Maritime College, n.d.). Like many higher education institutions in the U.S. that were created as a result of the first Morrell Act of 1860s, SUNY Maritime College was founded in response to the industrial revolution and the need for more skilled labor on the seas (Brint, 2006). The 1862 amendment to the Morrell Act added seven provisions that allowed for the creation of state-run merchant marine academies (Brint, 2006). Two successive legal acts of
the New York State Senate in April of 1873 established a nautical school (Brint, 2006). New York Merchant Marine Academy was the nation’s first academy for the instruction and training of merchant mariners, and it levied financial support from both the State of New York and New York City for its maintenance (Brouwer, 1977).

The impact of New York State’s Chapter 288 quickly led to the creation of a nautical school in Massachusetts in 1891 (Massachusetts Maritime Academy, n.d.). Today these institutions train men and women to become merchant mariners aboard United States flagged vessels and provide college education in the areas of engineering, science, math, business, and other disciplines. Shortly after the creation of the Massachusetts Nautical Training School, now Massachusetts Maritime Academy, other states began to establish merchant marine institutions (Brouwer, 1977). The creation and success of these institutions directly correlated with the rise of the industrialized maritime industry in the United States and later led to the Merchant Marine Act of 1936 (Brouwer, 1977). The Merchant Marine Act, placed into effect by Congress, allowed the establishment of a merchant marine corps and a federally-supported and maintained academy at Kings Point on Long Island, New York (Brouwer, 1977). The 1936 Merchant Marine Act led industry into the modern age and was the precursor to new federal and international laws that have influenced merchant marine education across the globe.

**Modern merchant marine training.** Modern merchant mariners now fall under both federal and international guidance from their education to their continued professional training (Merchant Marine Training, 46 C.F.R. § 310, 2002). Within the United States, the Maritime Administration Agency, under the Department of Transportation, both monitors the maritime institutions and, along with the United States Coast Guard, administers the merchant marine licenses. This licensure, along with completion of a degree from an approved merchant marine
institution, allows students to serve as officers on merchant vessels. In 1948 the United Nations developed the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to regulate and develop standards across the industry, specifically within all maritime institutions around the world (Merchant Marine Training, 46 C.F.R. § 310, 2002). These standards for training and education have guided the educational curriculums of all merchant marine institutions over the last sixty years.

In the early 1900’s, education at these institutions occurred solely aboard a training ship; the ship served as the entire campus, where students slept, ate, and studied (Brouwer, 1977). In the 1920’s these institutions moved from ship to land, establishing more traditional educational environments that included residence halls, dining halls, academic and administration buildings, and recreational space (Brouwer, 1977). While maintaining a land environment, the institutions are required by federal statute to maintain a federally-funded training ship that serves as the platform for nautical instruction (Brouwer, 1977). These ships are mandated to take students out to sea for 60 to 90 day terms for practical experience training and the accumulation of “sea-time” that is required for the Coast Guard License and the IMO (Merchant Marine Training, 46 C.F.R. § 310, 2002). Although merchant marine colleges are not military institutions, they do utilize military educational structures and dress. This structure is required and enforced by the United States Federal Government Maritime Administration and by the United Nations. The 2002 Code of Federal Regulations requires state maritime academies to present an approved plan of education that follows the United Nations guidelines for regimented (military) maritime programs; these programs are titled as either regimental or corps, and in them, students are defined as cadets (U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d.). Although the outward appearance of merchant marine colleges mirrors that of a typical military college, their training and education
are not identical. Instead of focusing on combat training and strategy, merchant marine curriculums are built to support the merchant marine industry.

Typically, the first year at state-supported merchant marine colleges is the most formative for students (Tinto, 1993). Unlike traditional colleges in the United States, however, merchant marine institutions organize the first year to ensure students learn the practices and culture of a merchant marine education. The first year centers on the military ideal of leadership, followership, and cultural conformity, as one must first learn the culture and how to follow before learning how to lead (MacCoun, 1993). Cultural conformity is an individual’s attenuation of the cultural norms found within a particular community or sub-culture, such as terminology, expressions, and gestures (Brint, 2006). Following from research that suggests students develop best when academic and experiential learning are coupled together, merchant marine colleges promote a culture in which students take responsibility for their actions and their development. One of the best methods for building skills, leadership, and career experience in college comes through participation in a group or culture such as those found in merchant marine colleges (Tinto, 1993). This cultural conformity begins before the start of school with a pre-college training period that is a blend of a traditional college orientation with a military boot camp. After this training period and throughout the first year, students are taught the college’s language, traditions, policies, and practices while also learning how to follow and how leadership is defined at the institution (California Maritime Academy, 2013; Texas A&M University, n.d.).

Much like traditional colleges that use terms like freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior, students at maritime colleges are identified socially by their class year, rank, and degree designation (Brouwer, 1977). Added to the hierarchical military constructs of rank and privilege, merchant marine institutions are highly organized as well as segregated (Brouwer, 1977). Led
entirely by the upper class, students develop a strict military-like routine that is both highly disciplined and socially organized (Brouwer, 1977). Through workshops, lectures, and practical training, the underclassmen are prepared for their roles as leaders and professional mariners (Brouwer, 1977). Leadership development and professional training are the core principles of each merchant marine institution (California Maritime Academy, 2013; Maine Maritime Academy, n.d.; Massachusetts Maritime Academy, n.d.; SUNY Maritime College, n.d.; Texas A&M Maritime Academy, n.d.). Students marry education and personal development in a manner that is unique to merchant marine colleges via training ship exercises, military corps or regiment practices, academic courses, extra-curricular activities, and IMO merchant mariner classes that are organized and led by the upper classmen (juniors and seniors) and monitored by the leadership team.

**Summary**

As the research has shown, the success of an organization depends greatly on the success of its leadership team. Within these teams, the relationships of the team leaders with their members have a direct impact on the team’s cohesion and ultimately team effectiveness. The understanding of team cohesion within the context of the organization and its goals will assist in greater team effectiveness and consequently increased organizational success. Translated to the organizational world of state-supported merchant marine colleges, this research draws attention to leadership team formation in a culture that has not been researched and has clear differences from those military cultures that have been researched. In addition, this study’s exploration of a leadership team’s formation within state-supported merchant marine environments may lead to further research on team cohesion within state-supported merchant marine education.
Chapter 3: Research Design

For this qualitative study, the researcher used a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of senior and junior administrators in the formation of their leadership team at a state-supported merchant marine college. Phenomenological research is best described as a reflective study of the lived experience that focuses on description or explanation (Adams & Van Manen, 2008; Creswell, 2011). This approach was selected by the researcher because of its suitability to the military educational culture of merchant marine organizations. Closed cultures, such as those encountered at military educational institutions, require the researcher to develop one-on-one relationships with participants in order to build trust (Creswell, 2011). Since phenomenological research relies on participants sharing personal details and experiences, less invasive qualitative data collection methods such as limited observations and interviews were deemed by the researcher to yield the best potential results. This style of research afforded the institution and the study’s participants the least amount of disruption. This consideration proved important in gaining access to the chosen study site, one that has never allowed any outside access to their regimented leadership team. The research question and subsequent interview questions guided the exploration of the participants’ lived experiences, and the gathered data was later organized into themes and interpreted into textural and structural descriptions of the administrators’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Purpose Statement and Research Question

Based on information gleaned from the literature on team leadership, specifically team cohesion, the research question was centered on the team’s formation through the lived professional and personal experiences of its members within both a military and civilian team environment (Carron, 1980; MacCoun, 1993). The primary research question of this study:
How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team?

The purpose of this question was to explore how administrators formed their leadership team, specifically focusing on hierarchical relationships as well as their perceived roles within the team. Team relationships and roles contribute to the formation of the leadership team, which within a military structured environment, is central to the organization’s attainment of its goals (Carron, 1980; MacCoun, 1993). Using the phenomenological model, the study employed interview questions that explored the individual administrators’ backgrounds, their team roles, and finally, their perceived relationships with team members, all within the context of the how these experiences influenced the leadership team’s formation.

Methodology

This study used the phenomenological method, targeting “multiple individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon,” where individuals being interviewed have “experienced the same phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences” (Creswell, 2011, p. 148). The study examined the phenomenological narratives of five selected administrators, who are responsible for developing and leading merchant marine students, in order to understand their perceived abilities to work together as a leadership team. Group cohesion, specifically Carron’s (1980, 1982) team cohesion model, served as the foundation for the examination of the selected administrators’ past and present common lived experiences, taking into account the different influences that may affect team cohesion and understanding that state-supported merchant marine colleges are unique in their structure.

Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher focused on field research, utilized personal interviews to develop the narratives, and explored the lived experiences of the
participating administrators. Along with the transcripts of the subjects’ interview responses, the study is comprised of the observations the researcher recorded during the interviews. Based on the study’s research question outlined above, the researcher built individual portraits of the participants and an overall view of the leadership team. The following sections discuss the organization of the study and the researcher’s selected methodology.

**Phenomenological philosophy.** Starting with the early works of German mathematician Edmund Husserl, phenomenology has evolved into a discipline in philosophy, described as the study of conscience from the first-person point of view (Smith, 2013). Philosophy includes four primary fields of study: metaphysics, the study of beings or what is; epistemology, the study of knowledge or how we know; logic, the study of reasoning or how to reason; and ethics, the study of right and wrong or how we act (Moran, 2011; Smith, 2013). Phenomenology, proposed as a fifth field of study by some scholars, focuses on the study of experiences (Mohanty, 2000). Although considered by some to be related to epistemology and its concept of phenomenalism (the idea of physical objects as perceptual phenomena), phenomenology stands apart from the traditional philosophical fields of study (Mohanty, 2000; Smith, 2013).

Derived from the Greek word *phainomenon*, meaning appearance, phenomenology is the study of the lived experience (Creswell, 2011; Smith, 2013). In many ways, phenomenology can be described as the study of perceptions or beliefs and not reality. Experiences, from a phenomenological point of view, can include sensory perception, imagination, thought, emotion, desire, and action from the first-person point of view (Mohanty, 2000). Phenomenology as a philosophical concept has evolved, thanks in large part to the initial works of Husserl, Brentano, and Stumpf in the early 20th century, into a research methodology focusing not on a final hypothesis but rather an essence of the phenomena (Smith, 2013).
**Phenomenological research.** Phenomenology employs an analytical research approach to subjects’ lived experiences as a way to find meaning in them (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). While there is a general qualitative theme used to analyze data, phenomenology has a slightly different spin. This method, delineated by Moustakas (1994) and further described by Creswell (2011), differs from general qualitative data analysis in that it aims to study the perception of what has been lived. In essence, the phenomenological approach centers on the “descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 71). Investigation into the study participants’ lived experiences and the researcher’s exploration of subjective phenomena are the essence of this type of research (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Van Manen, 1990).

Although the concept of phenomenology has been in practice for many centuries with ancient eastern meditative philosophy, the modern age of phenomenological study grew out of the work of Husserl (Creswell, 2011; Van Manen, 1990). Throughout the mid to late 20th century, the field grew in popularity and began to develop into seven distinct forms of thinking (Creswell, 2011). Five of these approaches are not as common. The first form of thinking, Naturalistic, focused on nature and consciousness; Existential focused on freedom of choice within human existence; Generative focused on meaning generated through historical processes; Genetic focused on the genesis of meaning through stream of experience; and Realistic focused on the structure of consciousness and intentionality (Van Manen, 1990). Two other forms of thinking, Hermeneutical and Transcendental, are more widely used within modern phenomenological research. The Hermeneutic approach focuses on the interpretation and structure of texts (Van Manen, 1990). This form has become increasingly popular, extending the concept of textural interpretation to the world of social media as well as studies focused on
individuals’ interruptive experience of sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google Plus. The most common phenomenological form of thinking is Transcendentalism, first written about by Husserl and most commonly championed by Moustakas (Moustakas, 1994). Focused on the meanings of individuals’ lived experiences, this form provides a foundation for phenomenological research that is centered on the lived experiences within groups of people (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental Phenomenological research can draw data from single or selected-sample participant research groups (Moustakas, 1994). Although single-case research works well with identifying the concerns or failures within a system, the use of multiple participants assists in drawing out themes to build a more detailed and diverse study (Moustakas, 1994). The methods used in the collection of data, regardless of participant type, in phenomenological research are varied. Interviews, observations, document analysis, and focus groups are all governed by the idea that these methods, which utilize open-ended approaches, result in a significant amounts of data for analysis (Creswell, 2011).

The most utilized method, and this study’s approach, is interviewing. Since this approach relies heavily on the researcher’s interpretation of the subjects’ experiences, the phenomenological researcher’s ability to control and limit his or her assumptions or bias is central to the study’s success (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). An interview protocol helps to reduce researcher bias, as bias can lead to inaccurate interpretation of the participants’ answers within the interview process (Seidman, 2006). The researcher’s preexisting knowledge of the studied phenomenon is controlled by identifying his or her personal beliefs; this phenomenological process known as bracketing is vital in allowing the researcher to understand and describe the phenomenon being studied from an objective point of view (Moustakas, 1994).
Along with the interviews, the use of observations provides the phenomenological researcher with additional data resources (Creswell, 2011).

The phenomenological approach focuses on the researcher’s assemblage of interviews and observations that once transcribed can present a large amount of data that has to be systematically broken down and divided (Seidman, 2006). This amount of data is an identified concern of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2011). Once transcribed, interviews are categorized and organized into themes or clusters of meaning; the research then moves into the “what” and “how” of the experience, the development of textural and structural descriptions of the administrators’ lived experiences, and ultimately a synthesized description of the phenomenon or essence of the experience (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research methodology is composed of a number of methods that guide and support data collection and analysis as well as site and participant recruitment.

**Site and participants.** This study took place at a merchant marine college campus among the leadership team of the cadet regimental program. Given the studies research focus, namely the impact of administrators’ lived experiences on the formation of their leadership team at a state-supported merchant marine college, all participants were selected from the current leadership team at the time of the study. Participants were pre-selected to represent a diverse pool, in terms of gender, professional background, and length of time at the college. Leadership training is considered to be the foundation of the college’s mission and the leadership team is the most prized position within the institution. Due to the type of population under investigation, the college’s institutional research office, through consultation with the college’s president, approved the selected participant pool (see Appendix A).
Having served as an administrator in a merchant marine college and a military college, I had developed the cultural competency required to work with the participants. My training as a college administrator and leadership educator also provided a secondary set of competencies critical to understanding and engaging with the selected participants (Seidman, 2006). These competencies enhance the rapport building that assists in eliciting participant honesty and openness, which are vital to the validity of the study, especially considering its sample size limitations (Seidman, 2006). The interview questions were shared in advance with each participant, which contributed to building rapport and trust, considering the apprehension traditionally found in closed military or para-military organizations.

Due to the limited population size of the regimental leadership (a total of eight administrators) the study utilized a convenient sampling strategy to select its participants. Specifically, this researcher selected five of the available eight administrators based on the study’s needs and expectations. This strategy allowed the college’s president and institutional research office to participate in the selection of the participants based on the needs of the researcher and the study (Creswell, 2011). Utilizing a convenient sampling strategy affects data accuracy and reliability, but allows for efficiency and ease of access (Creswell, 2011). Considering the apprehensive nature of the administration within this closed culture, the researcher believes this strategy assisted in interview collection.

The selected population, composed of merchant marine administrators, contained individuals with various forms of military, para-military, and other professional experiences. Each selected participant individually consented to participation in the study prior to data collection (see Appendix B). The researcher conducted individual meetings with each of the
selected participants to review the study’s research design and human subject rights protocols. The researcher required participants to sign an informed consent document.

Interview access to the participants, once selected, was limited to a ten-day period. Most of the potential participants were residing in on-campus housing due to the military nature of their positions to allow for access throughout the day or evening. None of the available participants had a direct relationship with the researcher, although a few of the potential participants had past knowledge of the researcher’s professional role within the merchant marine college field. This limited knowledge contributed to the rapport and aided in the comfort level of the participants (Seidman, 2006). The remaining participants who had no knowledge of the researcher balanced the validity and trustworthiness of the participant pool during the data collection period (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Each administrator participated in two interviews of 60 to 90-minutes. Each interview session involved general data collection questions as well as broad open-ended questions with follow-up questions (see Appendix C). The open-ended questions focused on participants’ perceptions of their roles and relationships within the current leadership team, including their goals, and past and current experiences. These questions supported the study’s research questions, further focusing on the leadership team’s formation. Interview data, researcher notes, and personal observations supported the phenomenological approach of the study and provided a rich data set for analysis (Creswell, 2011). Consistent with the phenomenological method, this study identified the administrators’ perceptions concurrent with their lived experiences.

**Data Collection**

Data for this study included participant interviews and interview field notes collected by the researcher during open discussions with the team and the individual interviews. The
participant interview portion of the study served as the primary data collection strategy. The interview strategy employed was formal semi-structured interviews. Following Patton’s (2002) protocol for opened-ended interviews, broad open-ended questions were asked of participants along with follow-up questions that served to probe and clarify their answers but also permit them to freely develop and share ideas that have the potential to lead the research in new directions.

**Interviews.** The researcher developed and utilized an interview protocol form as directed by Northeastern’s Institutional Research Board (IRB). The protocol focused on developing a foundation with each participant to both remind them of the research goals as well as ease them into the interview (Seidman, 2006). Interview questions were grouped in accordance with the study’s research question and purpose statement. The researcher’s reasoning was that groupings of questions better allow for interview participants to transition from one question to the next, easing their stress and contributing to their delivery of open and honest answers (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This grouping also allows for unplanned dialogue that can turn the research in new directions towards unplanned results (Thomas, 2003). The researcher conducted all interviews in person and recorded them using a digital device with a lapel microphone. Interviews consisted of two sessions per participant and allowed for one follow-up session after the initial data was recorded and transcribed. In accordance with best practices prescribed for this type of research, these sessions were conducted after participants’ work hours to limit potential distractions and maintain focus (Seidman, 2006).

After agreeing to the study’s written participation requests and before the actual interview, each participant received a document containing an overview of the research study’s goals, research questions, and theoretical framework. Following Rubin and Rubin’s (2012)
contact protocol, participants were provided an introductory understanding of the study but were not given full access to the study’s problem of practice, so as to not unduly influence the participants’ responses. Full disclosure of the study and its problem of practice were made to the study site’s institutional research director and president only. Participants were also provided a second document that they were required to read and sign: a consent form that outlined the study’s data management plan as well as the participants’ rights as human subjects (Creswell, 2009). The interviews posed no direct risk to participants, but the researcher maintained full confidentiality with regards to their participation.

The researcher personally conducted all interviews and was the only one who handled the corresponding data, with no outside assistance. This method ensured the confidentiality of the participants as well as complied with security protocol for storage and management of all data (Creswell, 2011). All data at each stage of collection, including the researcher’s written notes and recorded interviews, were stored in two different locations. Although traditional qualitative research suggests that storage of data should be limited to one location for security, the researcher’s experience with previous data loss of professional work-related research led to this study’s protocol of data back-up in two different locations. Saved interview transcriptions were downloaded into the software MaxQDA to allow for further analysis and coding, while electronic copies of all data were saved on the researcher’s personal computer with virtual cloud back up. Once again, all access, either through the researcher’s desktop or through the MaxQDA software, were password protected.

**Interview field notes.** Interview field notes are considered to be an important source of data in both qualitative as well as phenomenological research (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006). The interview notes consisted of visual and theoretical observations that the
researcher made before, during, and after the interviews. These notes were not transcribed but kept in separate notebooks organized by participant name, date, and the type of interaction. Use of these types of notes can be used to assist a researcher in uncovering gaps within the research that commonly occur during data analysis (Saldana, 2009).

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2011) offers three qualitative analysis strategies that can be modified to fit a number of inquiry approaches. Moustakas (1994) offers two examples of data analysis for phenomenological studies, both modified from other researchers’ strategies. Although these strategies are not connected within the same methodical approach, they are all centered on a basic analytic model that begins with sketching notes and idea, creating themes, and finally displaying data. Researchers are expected to control or bracket their bias and use their knowledge of the study’s research question to guide the development of their approach (Creswell, 2011). The strategy developed for this study is a modified version of the transcendentalist approach that Moustakas (1994) used. This approach presented a clear five-step strategy that took the data from coding to the final description of the phenomenon, also called its essence of meaning.

**Transitional step – coding.** This process served to bridge data collection and the analysis process through the development of simple words or phrases that helped to capture key elements of the interviews. This step was also important when setting up and utilizing the MaxQDA software. The coding process followed a streamlined design of Saldana’s (2009) code-to-theory model, again utilizing a mixed approach of an interpretive framework with a traditional framework organized in a five-step analysis process (See Figure 2). Coding was conducted using
MaxQDA software. Developed in 1989, MaxQDA is a coding and data organization software that is used in both qualitative and quantitative research (MaxQDA, 2015).

MaxQDA assists in the coding and categorization of data in transcribed interviews and in the development of themes. MaxQDA was a valuable tool in data analysis as it provided support in the validation process through the intercoder agreement tool that compared frequency and code values (MaxQDA, 2015). Throughout the data analysis, MaxQDA assisted in some part of each framework step in reduction of data, focusing on the essence, and highlighting descriptive information.

Step one – Epoche. The epoche serves as the first step in transcendental phenomenological research, requiring that the researcher set aside all personal opinions and assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl describes this stage as vital to the research study and its validity; the ability to free one’s mind of preconceptions and prejudgments is termed as bracketing (Moustakas, 1994). The focus of the study was only on the researcher’s perceptions,
notes, and transcribed data to ensure that the participants’, not the researchers’, lived experiences were analyzed.

**Step two – Horizontalization.** This step started with an overview of the data and development of sub-codes that connected to specific statements of the participants about their experiences (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). This lean list of sub codes came to fruition after the researcher read each of the transcribed interviews multiple times to allow for a more in-depth understanding of the overall data (Seidman, 2006).

As an example of horizontalization, a review of the transcribed data of Drew, around the eventual theme of social connections, was done through review of the transcribed data and identification of statements and phrase. Once similarities were identified within his statements, these were taken and put into MaxQDA to catalogue and organize them. This process, utilizing both MaxQDA and the spreadsheet, assisted in highlighting and organizing this data into the sub-codes for easy visualization of the selected statements (See Table 1).

Key phrases were identified within each of the statements, which then guided the data to the development of sub-codes. While these sub-codes were not used as the final theme, they assisted in identifying partners across all the participants which eventually led to the creation of themes, and in this case the theme of social connection. Notes, utilized within this step, were also vital in the eventual identification of their textural and structural descriptions.

Notes within the spreadsheet allowed the data to be explained within the context of the entire interview. Ultimately this process aided in the development of the theme of social connections as well as further textural and structural reductions required in the next two steps; step three, clusters of meaning and step four, descriptions.
### DREW'S THEME 1: SOCIAL CONNECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements/Quotes</th>
<th>Key Phrases</th>
<th>Sub-Codes</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have a retired marine corps officer who did 20 years and an enlisted coast</td>
<td>- get along great</td>
<td>Professional Relationships</td>
<td>While differences were highlighted, Drew became more emotional and positive around the shared military experiences and social relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>guard reservist compared to pure merchant marine graduates who sailed or did not</td>
<td>- came back to the college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sail and came back to the college to work. We get along great despite our</td>
<td>- dedicated professionals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differences.</td>
<td>- motivates and inspires us</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Commandant is one of the hardest and most dedicated professionals within the</td>
<td>- extended to work</td>
<td>Professional Relationships</td>
<td>Drew hesitated at first with the question about the Commandant and his role and/or relationship with the leadership team but it was clear that his relationship with him influenced him, and he felt, others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regiment of Cadets and motivates and inspires us to be the same</td>
<td>- family focused</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- relational driven</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Deputy Commandant is family focused and very personable as well as relational</td>
<td>- came together</td>
<td>Personal Relationships</td>
<td>There was a strong relationship between the Deputy Commandant and Drew. While that was formed in their professional environment, Drew hinted that also extended into his family and personal environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>driven which make us all feel connected to each other and which extend to work.</td>
<td>- lived together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- shared commitment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The staff that live-on came together, especially as we all went out to sea and</td>
<td>- tight group</td>
<td>Professional Relationships</td>
<td>The connections and relationships also extended to their shared athletic experiences and impacted their professional lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>worked and lived together, there was a shared commitment.</td>
<td>- more positive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- and creative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To bond and be on the same page and be part of a tight group, much like an</td>
<td>- peace of mind</td>
<td>Personal Relationships</td>
<td>While hours were a concern for Drew he believed that the time together with team members built a stronger bond and support system within his professional and personal lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>athletic team, is a benefit for state colleges versus federal academies and the</td>
<td>- crazy work schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more positive and creative the president was the more we excelled.</td>
<td>- community around them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- support system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The college gave me an opportunity to be with them, regardless of the crazy work</td>
<td>- peace of mind</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>schedule and hours, while I recovered. It also gave me peace of mind that they</td>
<td>- crazy work schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>were safe on the campus and had a community around them that served as a support</td>
<td>- community around them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>system.</td>
<td>- support system</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1.* The table is an abbreviated exert of the notes taken for the MaxQDA software on Theme 1: Social Connections from one participant, Drew.
These connected statements guided the researcher in further understanding the perspectives of the participants in their phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher also adhered to Creswell’s (2011) suggestion of reducing data to guide the ensuing analysis. MaxQDA supports Creswell’s (2011) approach to reducing data, specifically when working with multiple transcripts, to equip the researcher with a more concise validation of the data’s strengths and weaknesses (Light, Singer, & Willett, 1990). While conducting this analysis the researcher was cautious to not become immersed in the data to avoid bias (Seidman, 2006).

**Step three – Clusters of meaning.** The next step further broke down the data and these statements into only what was needed with relation to the research question. This further reduction ensured that there was not data that negatively clouded or influenced the development of the final phenomenological description (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006). These remaining statements that had significance to the study’s research question were then grouped together into themes or clusters of meaning (Moustakas, 1994). Participant quotations are one example of a set of clusters that were developed. The use of quotations within the qualitative phenomenological study provides a rich narrative that supports the eventual themes and study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These clusters were then connected to the theoretical framework and the literature.

As referenced within step two, horizontalization, the collected data and sub-codes were cross-referenced across all the participants. MaxQDA served as a valuable tool, color-coding and names to help identify and manage the coded sections. Sections of each data set, once color identified and highlighted, were attached to sub-codes by the drag and drop method equipped within the software. The software used the inputted data to show the repetitive overlapping in a visual format and saved these data patterns for future study and validation. The software as well as the written notes (See Table 1), served as a visual assistant to organize the clusters and
connect them to sub-codes or themes, as well as the literature from the review and team cohesion theory.

**Step four – Descriptions.** Based on Moustakas’s (1994) procedures, this reduction of data separated the participants’ narratives into textural and structural elements (Creswell, 2011). The textural descriptions focused on what the participants experienced while the structural focused on how they experienced it (Creswell, 2011). This phase of the fourth step moved the data analysis across the codes-to-theory model to the study’s conclusion where a descriptive narrative was formed representing the essence of the phenomena, which related to the study’s research question. Once again, MaxQDA assisted in color coding and grouping the textual and structural elements of the data.

Moustakas (1994) does identify that an additional part of this step is to include descriptions of the researcher’s experience, specifically, the textural and structural elements that help identify how his or her experiences within the data collection and analysis were influenced (Moustakas, 1994). These descriptions are not included in the data analysis; they are identified and used in the written conclusion of the study. The textural and structural descriptions identified the different commonalities between the participants and led the research towards an understanding of the essence of the participants’ lived experiences.

**Step five – Essence of the experience.** The last step represented in the MaxQDA visual chart is the final meaning of the phenomena. Similar to the MaxQDA chart that shows coding, this visual displays the identified themes, statements, and clusters, how they unify the different patterns, and their connection to the study’s emerging essence. After synthesizing the descriptions, textural and structural, the researcher then develops a singular meaning of what it is like to have lived that experience (Creswell, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). This process, referred to as
“intuitive integration,” is where the final description becomes the ultimate essence of meaning (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). The MaxQDA visual presentation, at this final stage, supports validation of the aforementioned codes, themes, clusters, and final essence.

**Validity and Credibility**

Qualitative research is not without its limitations. General qualitative design limitations such as ‘fishing’ and unstructured approaches are anticipated difficulties that the researcher must contend with (Maxwell, 2005). To mitigate the effects of these limitations, the researcher implemented a semi-structured interview design, using the majority of the sample population as well as individual observations to assist in strengthening the qualitative design component. Even with weaknesses such as researcher bias and individual interview accuracy controlled by the phenomenological method of bracketing out one’s personal experience, the ability to synthesize the collected data adds validity to the findings (Light et al., 1990).

Utilizing a convenient sampling strategy affects both data accuracy and reliability when attempting to replicate studies (Creswell, 2011). To improve trustworthiness, the researcher utilized three specific strategies outlined in Creswell’s (2011) work. The first was clarifying researcher bias, which was detailed at the start of the study in the introduction. The second strategy, member checking, gave participants the opportunity to review their profiles at the study’s conclusions to ensure accuracy. Finally, comprehensive descriptions of the literature and detailed backgrounds of merchant marine education and its history provided further contextual evidence for the data and how it related to the research question.

**Participant accuracy.** Following the phenomenological approach, and in accordance with Creswell’s (2011) suggestions, the researcher utilized participant profiles in the analysis. These profiles provided an opportunity for the participants to conduct some direct, base level
validation by reading their profiles to check them for accuracy. This type of validation allows the researcher to double check the accuracy of the collected data and conduct updates as requested by the participants (Creswell, 2011). Participants were given the opportunity to read the transcribed profile data and the final narrative developed for the study. The researcher made every effort to discuss discrepancies found by the participants and corrected them as necessary. Although the method was time consuming, it significantly added to data accuracy and aided in building the rapport and trust needed to successfully conduct phenomenological interviews.

**Data accuracy.** The reliability of the multiple data sets was enhanced using MaxQDA and intercoder agreement (Creswell, 2011). This process illuminates the differences between the interviewees as well as the effects of outside influences; outside environmental effects on interviews are common within qualitative research (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Data validation does not always lead to concrete conclusions, but, instead, can create more questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Concerns over researcher bias were monitored carefully, particularly after the first data review when further follow-up questions were required to provide additional scope and clarity to participants’ answers. These types of questions are helpful in qualitative research to improve the perspective of both the researcher and the study (Seidman, 2006). Careful consideration was also made to avoid leading the interviewees and thus tarnishing the validity of responses. Based on the analysis of the coded segments, the initial and follow-up interviews were balanced in both length and depth. Validation of the coding concluded that the researcher was consistent in his data collection and analysis.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

The study did not present any direct risk to participants (see Appendix D for NIH Certificate of Completion). All data collected was used to explore the administrators’ lived experiences in their leadership team at a state-supported merchant marine college. Although
many of the goals of the study centered on individuals’ past experiences and their relation to their current team, possible concerns with data related to their present experiences could have been realized if their confidentiality was not protected. Military organizations are ones that do not open-up to outsiders easily, due in large part to trust and confidentiality concerns within that culture (Donnithorne, 1993). Ensuring that all data was controlled and that candid interviews remained confidential was perhaps one of the most crucial pieces to the organization’s participation in this study.

All interviews were conducted and handled only by the researcher, with no outside assistance. This method ensured both the confidentiality of the participants as well as the security protocol for storage and management of data. Following all collection and analysis, a strategy of member checking was implemented: participants had the opportunity to review their participant profiles and conclusions to ensure accuracy. Safeguards such as no outside assistance ensured that other individuals did not have access to the participants’ transcriptions. The institution and each participant acknowledged their understanding and agreement of the data collection procedures and management protocols for the study with a signed consent.

Data was only used for this study and was destroyed following its completion. Future studies will have to collect new data from either the current participants or a new population pool. If further articles draw from the completed study, all participants will be notified and new consent protocol will be issued and signed. Although the issuing of a new consent form seems extreme, these measures and protections were articulated to all participants and contributed greatly towards easing their concerns about confidentiality and once again building the necessary rapport and trust needed for the interview process. These measures are necessary when dealing with closed cultures, such as military or para-military organizations, that do not trust outsiders.
These measures were also discussed and approved by the college’s institutional research officer and president.

**Conclusion**

The intent of this research, to study how administrators form their leadership team at a state-supported merchant marine college, fulfills the need for these colleges to more specifically understand leadership team cohesion beyond that of the traditional military colleges. The research question—How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team?—was guided by the theoretical foundation of team cohesion.

Utilizing Tuckman’s (1965) five stages of group development as well as Carron’s (1980) team cohesion model, this study, using phenomenological methodology, asked selected participants to participate in two 60 to 90-minute semi-structured interviews to gain an understanding of their lived experiences both before and during involvement in their leadership team. These interviews were transcribed, coded, reduced, and clustered, building a picture of the lived experiences of participants and in turn exploring their cohesion within the leadership team. The phenomenological methodology fit well with the study’s focus on the participants’ past and current lived experiences. Phenomenology’s use of interviews for data collection also served to minimize the issues surrounding access and trust within the closed culture of military organizations (Driscoll, 2011; Mace & Ross, 2001).

Studying the administrators’ formation of their leadership team within this type of unique educational military organization allowed for a greater understanding of team cohesion. Specific to the college and other state-supported merchant marine institutions, this study provides the starting point for understanding how these regimental leadership teams form through their
relationships, their roles, and their experiences within the unique sub-culture of a state-supported merchant marine college. Ultimately, this knowledge may increase team effectiveness, leading to increased organizational performance in their goal of developing cadets into well-educated and trained merchant marine professionals.
Chapter 4: Report of Research Findings

Using phenomenological methodology, this study explored the research question: How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team? Focusing on the lived experiences of five administrators, the researcher selected and interviewed leadership team members from within the merchant marine college’s regiment of cadets: Joel, Mike, Drew, Tom, and Rick. The research, once synthesized, yielded five themes: social connection, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty.

The first theme, social connection, was identified by all five participants. These connections were relationships between family and friends that occurred within personal and professional settings on the campus and aboard the training ship during the summer sea term. The shared experiences theme referred to the participants’ identified common sets of past and present experiences that directly impacted their formation as a team. These experiences were both professional and personal, and they touched on areas of military training, the merchant marine profession, and athletics, both as players and coaches. The third theme, focused on organizational resources, covered the concerns that all five of the participants had in relation to their work within the leadership team. Frustrations with work-load and resources, both financial and human, caused significant stress on their mental and emotional well-being, impacting their team’s formation. Policies and procedures focused on the team’s organizational culture, the team members’ process of joining the team, as well as the written polices and job descriptions. While some of the team members interviewed found frustration within these areas, others found the freedom liberating and exciting, depending on their point of view. All of the participants believed that the operational elements contributed to team formation. The final theme, sense of
duty, focused on the participants’ commitment to their team, the college, and their country. These elements served to bond the participants tighter around a common purpose that significantly aided in their formation as a leadership team.

The results in this chapter are divided into three sections. Section one identifies each participant in a profile that includes quotes from interview transcripts and serves to build a foundational picture of each participant. The second section serves as an overview of how the five participants characterized their experiences as a leadership team, using quotes from the interviews. The themes or clusters of meaning are identified in the third section, having been developed through phenomenological data analysis. These themes, derived from the participants’ lived experiences, support the study’s research question. Section four is composed of composite textural and structural descriptions of the participants’ experiences, including how they perceived team formation within the themes. The fifth and final section, description of the phenomena, focuses on the commonalities between the participants’ textural and structural descriptions leading to the essence of their lived experiences.

**Section 1: Administrator Profiles**

All five men came to the college’s leadership team with varied types and lengths of experience, but all of them had served in leadership capacities in their previous positions. The leadership team leads the college’s cadet corps that numbers approximately 1,000 students (SUNY Maritime College, n.d.). The cadets are divided between four classes of approximately equal size based on their academic year at the four-year college. Students who take more than four years to earn their degree are included in the fourth class. Each year the college graduates approximately 300 cadets, and of that, over 85% receive their United States Merchant Marine
License; only 2% receive a commission as a Naval, Merchant Marine, or Marine officer through the Navy ROTC Office (SUNY Maritime College, n.d.).

The leadership team is comprised of seven white males, so diversity based on gender and race was not considered in the selection of the participants for this study. The criteria used in the selection of the participants were years of experience, professional background, and a minimum of two years on the college’s leadership team. As stated in chapter three, the selected participants had to be approved by the college’s president prior to the study’s data collection, as per the research agreement with the college. The following profiles are organized hierarchically within the leadership team, as is the cultural norm for merchant marine or military colleges. As such, Joel is the most junior administrator in the team and is the first profile, followed by Mike and Drew, who are the most experienced of the junior ranking administrators. Tom, the next profile, is one of the senior ranking administrators within the leadership team, and he reports to the team’s leader Rick. Rick, the team leader, is the most experienced participant and the final profile.

Profile 1 Joel: Younger professional and new (3 years) regimental commander. Joel was the second participant interviewed, and we met for both interviews at my place of employment as he no longer worked at the college. Joel and I already knew each other, and his demeanor during the first session was relaxed. He was eager to start the interview. Although he answered all questions quickly and succinctly, he was careful in his choice of wording and a few times asked if he could reword an answer. Joel showed little emotion in his answers, but his body language suggested a high level of interest as he would move forward and sit up more as he became engaged in the questions.
Growing up, Joel was attracted to organized athletics due to “the discipline, structure, and teamwork” that they provided, and these qualities directly assisted in his ability to excel in the classroom. It was this attraction to discipline that drew him to ROTC in high school and eventually led him to the NROTC program at the merchant marine college. In his words:

My family at the time did not have a great deal of money and it was apparent to me if I wanted to go to school I needed to find a way to fund it on my own. So, I applied for the ROTC scholarship and I was accepted to Maritime for a full ride.

Joel attended the merchant marine college where he played NCAA Division III lacrosse and received both his Bachelor’s degree in Marine Transportation and a Master’s degree in International Transportation Management. After graduation, he received his commission through the NROTC program into the United States Navy, and he served for a little over four years. After leaving active duty, Joel returned home, remaining in the Naval Reserves, and began to search for civilian employment.

Joel’s strongest connection at the college was Drew, who was a regimental commander also out of the Navy. Drew assisted Joel in both transitioning from active duty and applying for the job at the college. “Who you know” became a vital mantra for Joel in his future success. A position opened up at the college at the same time Joel’s active duty was ending, which he believed to be “fortuitous” timing. This position provided him with a chance to give back to the organization that gave so much to him:

But it was my experience as a cadet and desire to want to come back and help the college; I wouldn’t say compelled but it drove me in some ways to want to come back and work for the school and continue to help.
Profile 2 Mike: Older professional and new (4 years) regimental commander. Mike was the fourth participant interviewed, and as with Joel, I conducted the first session in my office at my place of employment. After talking with Mike, who had served in the Marines for over 20 years, I learned that he had the most concerns of all the participants about sharing his perceptions, regardless of the nature of the study. Mike and I had not really known each other before this study, and I felt that removing him from the college would provide him a more relaxing and secure environment and would allow him to open up more in the interview. He answered all questions in a very careful and intentional manner and spoke out of one side of his mouth because he was chewing tobacco. Though he gave careful responses, he was comfortable, injecting humor into many of his answers. The second interview session was conducted at his office on the campus. The first session proved to Mike that this study was not intended to hurt or discredit anyone or the college, which allowed him to feel comfortable conducting the second session on the campus.

Mike talked very little about his time growing up in Wyoming and Colorado before college. He went to a “stereotypical suburban high school” in Kasper, Wyoming. He clearly articulated, with humor, that he was not a stellar student, and that he would describe himself as a “smart-alecky, clown type” at that point in his life. He credits his participation in football with keeping him on track. He attended the local college, the University of Wyoming, where he played two years of NCAA Division I college football and received a Bachelor’s degree in Physical Education. He described his college years as fun, and he felt his attitude had not changed from high school to college until he met his future wife: “My wife and I met after I had quit the football team, and she grounded me. Her belief in me as a person is what changed my life.”
In his senior year of college, Mike married his wife and they had their first child. The birth of his daughter focused Mike, and he ended up joining the Marine Corp. at 21 years of age in order to provide for his family. I asked Mike what directed him to the military considering there was not a family connection, and he stated:

What drove me to get into the military was after I graduated from the University of Wyoming, I was married before I graduated and I had a child and unlike my friends who had education degrees, and could go live in a car in California and wait for a job, I had to go find one. Her father was in the Air Force and kept beating me up on the military and I did not want to be Air Force so I joined the Marines Corp. thinking it was cooler, which it is. I thought it would be as easy as the Air Force; unfortunately, we were both wrong on that one but that is the way I ended up in the Marine Corp.

While serving in the Marine Corps Mike was sent to their Naval War College, where he received a Master’s degree in Strategy and National Defense. Mike never lost his “love and passion” for football and took advantage of opportunities to coach, either recreationally or at the high school level, when he was stationed at the Naval Pre-School in Newport, Rhode Island. It was in Newport that he became close professionally and personally with the head coach, who became the college’s NCAA Division III head football coach five years later. The coach began using Mike as a consultant to the team during his military leaves, which led to his recruitment as a regimental commander and part-time coach. He once again used humor to describe his decision to retire from the Marines and take another position:

My wife told me that she and my two daughters would kill me if they had to deal with me all day and all the time. They and I had grown accustomed to my deployments and demanded that I take this position and get busy.
Profile 3 Drew: Middle-aged professional and experienced (12 years) regimental commander. Drew was the first participant I interviewed for this study. I met him for the first session in his office at the college during the early morning hours of his work week. Drew and I had known each other for approximately six years, and he was aware of my desire to conduct a study of the college’s leadership team. Following phenomenological research protocol, I never discussed the study with him, knowing that he might become one of the participants. Drew’s only pressing issue was making sure he had enough time to answer all my questions before the students returned from classes and the leadership team completed their college meeting.

Drew grew-up in a suburban home with three brothers and one sister. As early as he can remember, he was competing with his brothers for “everything.” This level of competition led him to becoming a three-sport athlete in high school, playing lacrosse, soccer, and basketball. Drew described athletics as “the bond that brought the family together,” and whether it was participating, watching, or coaching, everyone had “a foot in” athletics. In addition to attending a strict Catholic school and having a father who served in Vietnam as a Marine, Drew found that sports contributed greatly to the focus on structure and discipline in his life and led him to accept an NROTC scholarship at the college:

My father was a Marine in Vietnam so the idea of discipline and ultimately going to a military type school was natural. I went to a Catholic school from grammar school to high school, so the idea of wearing a uniform was also very common to me and seemed like a good fit. So coming out of high school and doing something different, not just academic but of doing an activity-based education interested me.

Drew graduated with a Merchant Marine’s License and a Bachelor’s degree in Marine Transportation and left the college as a two-sport star in soccer and basketball. His NROTC
scholarship required him to accept a commission as an officer in the Navy. Drew talked fondly of his time in the Navy as well as his brief time sailing commercially, serving as a reservist and how it connected to the college. Drew thought so highly of the college and how it influenced his life that he convinced his family to enroll his youngest brother. His connection to the college even went so far as his marrying his “college sweetheart.” All of Drew’s opinions and stories about his time at the college were positive. For example, he stated:

To do something different in college was so exciting to me. I had never been to sea before, but the idea that it seemed different and not seated at a desk was what I wanted. The college gave that to me as well as life-long friends and colleagues and ultimately my career.

This “love” for the college he expressed throughout the interview and his desire to raise a large family drew him away from the military. After sailing commercially for over a year, Drew connected with the new Commandant, the team’s leader and also a graduate of the college, and secured a position as a regimental commander. The lifestyle of a live-on position that included a three-month sea term was what he needed for his family:

Family-wise, during my four years in the Navy I averaged eight months each year at sea, so having a life outside of that was difficult. You could see guys in the military that were older, like my boss, his boss, and the captain of the ship, all had difficult family lives. I did not think I wanted to have that type of life. In order to have the family I wanted, it would require me being home more than if I continued in at a job at sea.

**Profile 4 Tom: Older professional and new (4 years) Deputy Commandant.** Tom was the third participant interviewed and the most challenging from a technological point of view. At the time of his first interview, he was overseas representing the college, which meant that I had
to conduct the interview entirely through Skype. Tom made what could have been a challenging and awkward process easy and interesting due to his positive attitude and can-do spirit. We connected in the afternoon on EST time, which was very early in the morning on his time in Africa. The second interview session after Tom returned from his trip overseas was more traditional.

Tom grew up in rural North Carolina, in a town of less than 1,000 residents. The son of a career military father and grandfather, he was raised within a “strict Protestant and military” family. Tom spoke at length about how his parents, two siblings, and his church shaped his “moral code” and “affinity for relationships.” Tom said he “loved North Carolina” and with excellent grades received a scholarship to attend the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. There he continued to be very active in student organizations and the student government, and he developed his passion for weight lifting. Graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in Business Administration, he enrolled at Wake Forest University Law School, graduating with his J.D. and becoming a member of the North Carolina Bar. It was at this point that he decided to follow in his family’s footsteps and enlist in the Navy, becoming a Judge Advocate General (JAG).

During his 30 years in the Navy, Tom rose to the rank of Captain (the next highest rank is Admiral) and was stationed around the world. He was married twice, and between both families, actively raised six children. He served in many capacities that he was eager to talk about:

I served as the senior JAG for all SEAL units and in my last command was a Commanding Officer of the Naval Justice School. In Naval Justice School, we taught Coast Guard, Marine, and Navy. We taught anyone who was coming in to be a judge advocate in those three branches. We also taught our enlisted personnel and while I was there, we decided we wanted all of our enlisted personnel to become paralegals with a
four-year education. I became a member of the Standing Committee for Paralegals for the ABA. We reached out and taught 13,000 students a year; sometimes it was only a one-hour course or a ten-week course. We went all over the world, associated with the Institute of International Legal Studies, which went all throughout the world teaching one or two week courses on nation building, UN peacekeeping, and human rights.

While he served as head of the Naval Justice School, Tom began getting calls from organizations asking if he would be interested in having a position at their law schools. He stated that while trying to “make up [his] mind” as to where and what type of position he would take, he received a call from a former three star admiral who was the new president of a state-supported merchant marine college. After a few visits to the college, Tom said the connection with his former supervisor, as well as the college’s “merchant marine connection to the Navy,” encouraged him to accept the position and, with his wife, live on the campus.

Profile 5 Rick: Older professional and experienced (15 years) Commandant of Cadets. Rick was the fifth and final interview participant for the study, and both interviews were conducted during the workweek in his office at the college. I was familiar with Rick as he was the advisor to the President of the college, and he assisted in the approval of the study and the use of the regimental staff as participants. His answers to every question were thorough and well developed. He displayed a seriousness that was unequaled by the other participants. Rick has served as the Commandant (leader of the team) for over 15 years, and he is also a graduate of the college. He made an effort to be attentive and active in the interviews.

Rick grew up in a middle class, religious family that taught him the value of “hard work, discipline, and attention to detail” that led him to athletics. He was an honor student, graduating first in his high school class, and he pursued scholarship opportunities at Cornell, Syracuse, and
the Coast Guard Academy. Having lost his father suddenly in his senior year, Rick changed his college plans and decided to attend the local school, which enabled him to remain close to home to help his mother. This decision was a life changing one that Rick discussed:

Attending this college was the right decision for me and my family and it caused me to grow up very quickly. I had to work because I had to pay my other bills. My scholarship covered all my tuition but it did not cover everything else. I worked in the city as a night watchman to save up enough money for my education, and I think what changed my view of the world [was] watching my classmates focus on nothing else but college.

While at the college, he majored in meteorology and oceanography, graduating with a double degree as well as a Merchant Marine License. He spoke fondly of his time on the training ship, stating that it allowed him to “focus” on one thing, unlike his land-side life, which focused on the job, family, school, and other responsibilities. It was at this point in the interview that he spoke about his passion for crew. He explained that the only thing he “greatly missed” while he was at sea was rowing for the college’s crew team. He participated on the team for all four years at the college, and in the end of his senior season, as an All-American, he began training with the United States Olympic Rowing Team.

While training, Rick decided to stop shipping out because he wanted more time to train, so he approached the college looking for a position. Five years after Rick’s graduation from the college, he was offered a position to serve as a training officer on the ship. This allowed him time to work more “traditional hours of nine to five,” but also maintain his license, shipping out for three months in the summer. After a year, the college offered him a position to teach, and he became chair of the department within a few years. Rick mentioned that the success he found at the college further strengthened his belief: “The college was a perfect fit for me. It supported me
and gave me opportunities that have shaped my life and continues to provide me with what I need to grow as a leader and a person.”

Rick returned to sea after seven years at the college when his time with the United States Rowing Team ended. This time in his life, working as a professional sailor and ship captain, further strengthened his resolve that he was meant to be at sea as a merchant marine. Rick sailed for an Arab company for ten years, captains large oil tankers across the Atlantic Ocean. During this time he stated that he “honored” his leadership skills and began to strategically plan for a return to the college. He knew he wanted to return as the captain of the training ship and regimental commander, so he kept in contact with the person in that position and the college, and waited for him to retire. He returned to the college as the Master (captain) of the Training Ship and acting Commandant, which eventually led to him receiving both positions full-time.

Section 2: Leadership Team Characterization

After further review of all the participants’ interview transcripts, overlapping characterizations of the leadership team emerged that gave insight into the study’s focus on how administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team. These characterizations centered on either their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the team’s commitment to the college’s mission to prepare cadets for professions within the merchant marine industry on both land and at sea.

Joel was the youngest, newest, and least experienced administrator within the leadership team. He expressed little patience for lack of structure and discipline. He admittedly had no immediate friends at the college or locally, having been at sea for the Navy for four years, which may have contributed to his desire for teamwork and stronger relationships within the team. As the only single participant within the study, Joel also had the least outside commitments. This
allowed him to leave the position quickly after he had decided that “his frustrations with the team culture and focus on only the micro” did not meet his professional needs.

Conversely, Rick had the most experience within the leadership team both professionally and personally as a graduate of the college. He articulated that his “experience directly contributed to his success as the Commandant” and team leader. His stated that his beliefs in right and wrong and his place at the college and in the merchant marine industry are very important to him and factored into his belief in the team. This same belief in the leadership team was also found in another alumnus, Drew, who had the longest tenure of the live-on campus team members and also had the largest family. Outside of his concern for the team’s structure and written procedures, he genuinely conveyed a positive connection to team members and their experiences. Drew was motivated by his work with the cadets and his relationships within the leadership team, and when asked about his future at the college he stated, “I am happy where I am.”

Both Tom and Mike, with professional backgrounds in the Navy and no merchant marine or college ties, discussed their strong affection for the relationships within the leadership team but had little patience for its organization. Mike stated:

For many who work at the college, it is long hours, there are frustrations, but by people getting along and having relationships, they are able to work through problems and focus on the bottom line: we are there for the students, not just regimental students, but all students.

Mike described himself as having the least amount of knowledge of the merchant marine culture and training. Living on the campus with his wife and two adult daughters, Mike also expressed frustrations with the leadership team as an organization but found comfort with its relationships,
stating that “family stability, relationships” were the central reasons that he enjoyed the college and the leadership team.

Whether satisfied or frustrated, all but one of the study’s participants characterized the leadership team, specifically their relationships within the team, as a positive experience. For the one participant in opposition, Joel, the experience was so negative that he left the leadership team immediately following his interviews. While his outlying characterization can be justified by multiple factors, including family, professional experience, and age, it is important to note that Joel’s negative frustrations with the organization and structure were shared by most of the other participants, and Joel never talked negatively about relationships.

Section 3: Interview Themes

The following section is derived from step three of the study’s data analysis, which further broke down the data into clusters of meaning as they relate to the research question: How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team? There are five themes—social connection, shared experiences, organizational resources, policies and procedures, and a sense of duty—that each of the administrators interviewed for this study identified as significant with regard to the formation of their leadership team. The participants came from varied backgrounds and were asked to describe their experiences, team roles, and relationships within the leadership team. Each participant highlighted specific points that contributed to his development within the leadership team based on lived experiences. These themes are divided between the two interviews conducted with each participant. The first interview focused on their backgrounds and current roles within the leadership team, and the second interview focused on their relationships within the team.
**Theme 1: Social connections.** Each of the five administrators discussed the significance of social connections with regard to team formation. Although the participants also talked about professional relationships, all of the participants talked in great detail about their personal relationships with each other on the team. These relationships included family and friends and occurred on the campus as well as on the training ship during their summer sea term. All of the participants believed that their social connections, developed in large part from their communal living environment on the campus for all but the team’s leader, as well as their shared experiences on the summer sea term, contributed greatly to their ability to come together as a leadership team. Most of the participants found the opportunity to live and work together to be an advantage that they experienced during their time in the military and in the merchant marines, and they believed in “social connections” as a key to team formation and satisfaction.

The relationships that occurred while living on the campus were identified by all the participants as having a significant impact on team formation. This was particularly evident when the participants discussed their relationships between not only themselves but also their families. Joel, the youngest and only single administrator, highlighted this sense of comfort and connection stating that the vast majority of the leadership team lived on the campus. The opportunity to live with each other and their families, which is not provided in the military, allowed the team to form emotional bonds that transcended the professional environment. Mike and Drew identified that Tom, the Deputy Commandant, had social gatherings at his campus home that allowed team members to relax and enjoy each other beyond the work-place, building relationships that “extended to work” and ultimately contributed to the success of the leadership team. Drew, who had the second longest tenure as an administrator on the campus as well as the
largest family, spoke at length and fondly about family picnics and holiday celebrations together on the campus, calling them, “very communal.”

Of all the interview participants, only Rick, the team’s leader and Commandant, did not live on campus. All of the participants pointed out that Rick was more removed from this communal environment because he did not live on the campus, and therefore had a “different personal experience and sense of connection” that contributed to the team’s relationships. Not living on campus was an intentional choice that Rick made, stating:

I was originally supposed to have a house. I have a good situation myself, but for me, I keep my Maritime life and my outside Maritime life very separate. It’s just the way I am.

If I lived on this campus, I think it is very awkward in some regard.

This choice is one that Rick also carries forward to the sea term stating that he “separates his professional relationships” because of his role as the team’s leader. When asked if he believed this had an effect on the team relationships as compared to his subordinates, Rick quickly stated, “Oh, big time,” explaining that this is his style and personal choice but that his team’s ability to connect socially strengthened the team and its formation.

As Rick identified, this social connection also took place on the summer sea term, which included the entire leadership team, excluding their families. Life on the ship was a 24/7 endeavor through which the entire team connected professionally and socially. Rick described this as a time when team members blended and built both personal and professional relationships, stating:

The team, much like my crew team and a military unit, has to trust the leader and know that they are doing what is right, even if it may not seem that way a first. There are a lot of details and nuances that go into decision making that the team members are not aware
of and may not understand. It is their job to support and carry out what is asked of them and not to challenge the coach or leader. This comes from having a cultural connection beyond what you can learn in a classroom.

Mike also spent a great amount of time discussing the leadership team’s time on the summer sea term. Barriers such as age, experience, philosophy, and training are “overcome” in this environment. Mike made it a point to express that his ability on the sea term to interact professionally with faculty and other staff contributed to his success on land with those same people whom he knew. Using his humor, he stated:

I think that everyone should go on the cruise [summer sea term]. If they did, we would all be more efficient and better as a team across the college and at every level. After each and every summer, our leadership team improves and this is not a coincidence. We now care for each other and share the same culture.

Although more guarded, Joel talked about the long hours on the sea term as feeling “really close” to his colleagues because of the amount of time they all spent together. Joel had no family and was the youngest in age and experience among the leadership team members interviewed, and he consequently talked little of family. He mentioned his time in the Navy aboard ships at sea, which he recalled with great fondness, with regard to relationship building and leadership team development. He described how everyone “came together” as a team and focused on “what had to be done” on the ship. Joel believed that although there were similarities between the relationships built on the summer sea term and in the Navy, the officers and the enlisted did not live together; he stated, “Officers were expected to live in town, they do not generally live on the ship, and the enlisted lived on the ship.” This separation was a traditional
structural element found within military organizational cultures that was not found within the leadership team at the college (Driscoll, 2011).

**Summary.** The social connections played a significant role in the development and eventual cohesion of the leadership team. All of the interview participants attributed their social connection to their time together both individually and with their families and friends. That time together at a state-supported merchant marine college occurred both personally, with the majority of the team members living on campus, as well as professionally, with their service on the training ship during the college’s summer sea term. The team acknowledged that the success of the leadership team was built on the relationships they forged outside of their normal duty hours; these social connections positively affected their team, their performance, and personal and professional satisfaction.

**Theme 2: Shared experiences.** This theme focused on the administrators’ past military, merchant marine, and athletic experiences and how these common histories influenced their ability to work together within the leadership team. All but one of the participants had prior military experience, while three had merchant marine experience, and all five had athletic experience. These shared experiences gave the team a common bond and belief system.

The connection that the leadership team members made between their merchant marine experience and their military experience was noticeably strong. Although it is important to note that while merchant marine education is modeled after many aspects of military education, they are not the same (Brouwer, 1977). This difference is illustrated within the participants’ interviews; participants highlighted the role of their military experience in forming a leadership team.
The shared military experience allowed for team members to easily adapt to their new team within the college and find support from their team members. Joel and Drew, who each had only a few years of military experience, found that their shared experience as maritime graduates made their transition to the merchant marine lifestyle easier. The two older participants, Mike and Tom, each had over 20 years of military experience and found that the organizational transition was very easy, but the team transition was difficult, due to their lack of knowledge of the merchant marine culture.

Rick, the participant with no military experience, agreed that this “shared experience” allowed for his team to form more quickly and to function more successfully. His opinions with regard to the military and its influence on the team’s leadership and training were the most different from the other four. Concerned that the merchant marine college should not be confused as a military institution, Rick did not believe that development of cadets and their character was the focus of the team’s goals, rather he believed that it was career training. Despite this concern about the connection between the merchant marine and military training, Rick strongly believed that those team members with military experience were valuable. It was important to him that they understood there would be differences in expectations, communication, and operations. He stated:

We don’t bring in people necessarily to come right in to the battalion. Typically I will bring in a new person to the staff duty officers’ function because it is more administrative, it is more task oriented. . . you are doing this. I don’t know, just because your resume may say that you have done x, y or z. It’s a college, it is not war. And a lot of times I think what was wrong in the past was that they would hire a person that was very good in the military, but they were not necessarily good in the college. So practice,
and it is not stated is I would never bring in a battalion officer, I would bring in a staff duty officer and observe them and let them adjust to a very different structure than the military. Similar but different. And that would start at the lower rank, and whether or not that person was enlisted or officer rank, it does not necessarily correlate if you are a Commander in the Navy, you may not be coming in as a Commander because you are new to my organization.

Rick’s distinct separation between military experience and experience found at the college was not expressed by the other interview participants, especially Tom, the second in charge of the leadership team.

Tom believed that the military prepared him well for his position on the leadership team. Although he did say that “he knew little about state-supported merchant marine colleges,” he felt very comfortable leading and educating others, particularly the staff under his supervision. Tom expressed many times during both his interviews that what excited him most about his role on the team was “working with others and making a difference in people’s lives.” He also believed in process and chain of command as he was trained in the Navy. Members moved in and out of teams, but training was minimal. Tom stated that “people knew what they had to do,” including who was in charge and who supported whom; he believed “there was a leadership progression” that was very clear. Tom’s belief in structure and knowing one’s role extended to his conception of leadership and ultimately his interpretation of his role within the leadership team:

There had to be education, the brick and mortar studies they had to go through, there had to be training so they would know how to operate on a vessel or some other type of organization, and there also had to be a continuum of leadership and team play. So one of the things we were very concerned about and very focused upon was when the individual
came in for that person to learn to be a team member and then for that progression to follow. Then you could be a leader of a small group and then after that you could progress to be a leader of a larger group or at least work effectively in that larger group. So team-work leadership was always part of our education continuum and a lot of times you were able to do that by assigning roles and assigning tasks and responsibilities to others and watch them as they progressed.

Tom and Mike did express frustration when they discussed how their lack of merchant marine experience affected their learning curve with regard to the college culture and the leadership team. Although they each struggled to learn about the field and the differences in structure and operation within state-supported merchant marine colleges versus the military, they both felt a level of comfort knowing that they “had others on the team that had the same military experience.”

All the team members shared frustrations concerning their military experience. Joel, Drew, Tom, and Mike talked at length about how the ranks and structure found in the military did not correlate to that of the leadership team. This seemed to frustrate Joel significantly more than the others, stating, “Job descriptions and roles were always unclear as compared to the Navy, and although I was a graduate of the college I was not aware that the differences between the Navy and the regiment were that strong.” Joel, like the other team members with military experience, had expectations that the leadership team should function as a military team.

Rick, Joel, and Drew had the common experience of serving as professional merchant mariners. While Joel and Drew also served as naval officers, it was their merchant mariner experiences that allowed them to transition quickly and connect to the college and the team. Joel and Drew’s common background as both merchant mariners and military officers assisted them
in the transition from the military to the college. This directly aided in the team’s positive formation.

This theme of shared experiences carried through the interviews in regard to athletic experience, which was discussed by all the participants, but in particular Tom, Mike, and Rick who maintained a significant role as athletic coaches at the college. The entire leadership team participated in some level of athletic coaching based on their past experiences as members of their respective sports. The concept of “team” was consistent with each participant when connecting their experience in athletics to the current professional leadership team. Tom, Mike, and Rick all attributed their concept of “team” to their time as high school and college athletes as well as coaches. Rick specifically stated:

The discipline in rowing is easily transferred to life and this leadership of the regimental staff. Know the direction you need to go, work as one unit to get there, and support each other, because you are only as good as your weakest member.

Again a shared experience, now around athletics, assisted the group in overcoming the varied backgrounds and built on the team’s overlapping experiences with the military and the merchant marines.

**Summary.** Team members identified that these shared experiences with the military, merchant marines, and athletics contributed to their team’s formation. Those that had only military experience and none with merchant marines found it more difficult adjusting to the leadership team and the merchant marine culture. All of the participants acknowledged that there was a significant difference in team structure when comparing the merchant marine culture to that of the military, but they also identified that their athletic backgrounds served as their unifying, shared experience. The four interviewees with military experience found that their
shared background eased frustration in their transition to the team directly due to their common bond with each other. Overall, their shared experiences, positive and negative, played a significant role in their team’s formation.

**Theme 3: Decreased morale due to limited resources.** The third theme discussed centered on organizational resources and its influence on the morale and the formation of the team. Each participant expressed great concern about the workload and the limited financial and human resources that were available to the leadership team. The long hours and the fact that they were all “on call” 24 hours a day led to the opinion that the work was “never ending.” Some of the interviewees believed that the size and budget of the leadership team, as compared to other peer merchant marine and military institutions, took an emotional toll on their families. Other participants worried more about their fellow team members and their stress. The limited organizational resources had a significant impact on team formation and ultimately the team’s success.

Each participant compared the size and structure of their leadership team to other organizations that they knew of personally or through their professional contacts. The three participants that had merchant marine experience, Rick, Joel, and Drew, all compared their leadership team to the other state-supported merchant marine colleges as well as the one federal academy at Kings Point. These comparisons were not positive, and each person believed that the morale suffered within the team because of this. Tom and Mike focused their comparisons more on their military experiences and discussed the leadership team’s structure.

Dissatisfaction with the lack of human and financial resources available to them at the college was consistently identified by all five participants. There are only six state-supported merchant marine colleges in the United States, so the peer group for the leadership team is a
small one (Brouwer, 1977). This limited size and small community made it not only easy to compare resources, but participants also regularly benchmarked beyond their peers to military colleges. These comparisons were identified consistently throughout the interviews and most regularly focused on team size and budget.

Rick, the team leader, was the most vocal in his frustrations about the disproportionate resources of the leadership team as compared to the other institutions, stating, “Most schools have a lot lower ratio with regard to the cadet to regimental officers which allows personnel to divide duties and have better coverage and support for the cadets.” He also commented that their budgets were more proportional to that team member to cadet ratio than that of his organization. The size of the regiment at the college at the time of the study was over 1,200 cadets. With only seven team members within the regiment’s leadership team, this meant that each administrator had to take-on “extra duty” and smaller budgets, which Rick explained “directly impacted the team morale.”

As the Deputy Commandant and second in-charge of the leadership team, Tom’s philosophy and role on the team were impacted by this lack of resources. Tom believed his primary focuses were morale and the support of Rick, stating:

He spent innumerable hours going over the training plans for the ship, the ship’s schedule, ensuring people had all the credentials and requirements not only to be a cadet, but also to go to sea. He was also a teacher. He spent hours upon hours with the leadership cadre of the regiment talking to them and trying to see where we could better ourselves. As far as the staff, for a while, we were very, very green. We only had six companies and one company officer, one staff officer for every two companies. So that
made things barely, that kept us very thin, so that people instead of complaining about it, they just worked more hours.

Tom also admitted that his knowledge of the merchant marine college was limited, which caused him to focus his organizational comparisons with those of his experiences in the military.

With regard to the workload, Tom stated that current team members worked “over 50 hours a week, sometimes 80” in accomplishing their tasks. Specifically, he illustrated the indoctrination time (orientation for the cadets) during which he would work “100 hours a week.” Tom believed that this was not consistent with what he experienced in the military, stating, “Military personal do work very hard but they are required to have breaks and mandated down time for R&R [rest and relaxation].”

Hard work and high expectations were explained as “part of the job” by Mike, also a career military officer. More accepting than Tom, Mike believed that the military experience prepared him and his family well, stating that “long hours were a norm in the Marines and me and my family were accustomed to that.” Mike did reference the summer sea term and the extreme hours that the leadership team put into their work on the ship. It was clear that Mike was most frustrated by his time at sea on the training ship, stating:

You are working 24/7, there is no break from the regiment at all, there is no break from the instructors, you are right there 500 feet from everybody, at all times, but then you get a little bit of a break because you go on shore for a little bit and now you can relax and now you can talk about that shared hell that you did for two weeks before you got that one night out in town. Then you come back and do it again.

Joel and Drew, having had both military and merchant marine experience, commented on the lack of employees and the heavy workload as compared to other institutions. Joel specifically
made a number of direct comparisons to the federal Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point and their “large budget and staff” that supported half the number of cadets as the state-supported merchant marine colleges with three times the budget. At the conclusion of the first interview, Joel explained to me that these structure issues were not the fault of the leadership team, but in fact were caused by the instability of the college due to changes in enrollment, facilities and leadership. He stated:

> The college was going through a massive amount of change, between the change of the Presidents, the tremendous increase in enrollment, the limited facilities, many which needed updating, so it’s not hard to see why things were the way they were in some instances. I don’t think it is the fault of the different members of the regimental team, but helps to illustrate the fact that even though there were certain things that probably should have been better, I think there were a lot of people trying to fix them if they could, all things considered.

As the team’s leader, Rick was very conscious of the morale of the team and felt significant remorse for his team’s workload when compared to that of the other merchant marine colleges. He stated:

> That prevents me from being strategic, so these guys have to keep with that and I think they are. I mean every time a kid goes to a board or goes to mast, it takes an extensive amount of tracking of things like that and we have a contract with the state that says you have to adjudicate this in so many days if they are going to appeal it. So that takes a lot of manpower. When we get ready for cruise, we have to support them, we have to get passports, trip cards, and I have to charter planes. I mean it is crazy what we have to do aside from the regimental side in regards to the ship and all these people do all that.
Summary. The administrators’ frustrations with the workload and the limited human and financial resources, especially when compared to other institutions, played a significant role in the team morale and consequently their team formation. Although one would expect that this would impact the team’s formation in a negative manner, it actually produced a positive effect. Team members connected and supported each other more because of their shared negative opinion, much like an “us against the world” mentality. Although it was clear that team members with more professional experience, no matter what it was, were more accustomed to handling the stress, the pressures of the workload and lack of resources were still evident with each interviewee. Additionally, the leaders, Rick and Tom, carried an additional burden, believing they were powerless to solve this issue and to bring their organization to the level of their peers. This was a clear struggle for the team members. Their unified belief and experiences with regard to a lack of resources and workload was a common bond that played a positive role in the team’s cohesion and ultimately its formation, but took a significant individual toll on morale.

Theme 4: Frustration over policies and procedures. The next theme, policies and procedures, is based on the dissatisfaction that all the participants articulated that they experienced as members of the team. Although each participant came into the leadership team at different times and at different points in their professional careers, they all shared a common frustration with the lack of written, consistent policies. The lack of preparation and materials provided when they joined the leadership team and assumed their roles concerned each leadership team member and did not aid them in their transition to the team. These concerns led to initial and continued frustrations that have negatively impacted their team formation to this day.
While it was obvious that Mike and Tom, who had no merchant marine experience, had
the steepest learning curve, the experience level of the individual did not seem to matter. All of
the participants had significant concern over the onboarding process. Some of these concerns
were attributed to the lack of organization by the team’s leader, while others just thought of this
as part of the culture of small state-supported specialty institutions, such as merchant marine
colleges. Unilaterally it was believed that much of this lack of operational structure could be
attributed to the institution’s inconsistent culture, caused by changes in the college leadership.

The frustration centered on onboarding was also directly attributed to a lack of job
descriptions and written expectations for their positions. Tom stated,

“It is extremely difficult to expect any human resources manager or department to develop
and execute a new member orientation or program when there are not even consistent or
accurate job descriptions for the regiment and its staff. For that I do not blame those that
are in leadership now, I look at those that came before them and before them. This is an
epidemic that has grown and needs to change, and once that occurs then I believe that
everything else will start to fall into place.”

All participants, particularly the team’s leader Rick, expressed that expectations remained broad
and undefined, which led team members to work at either higher than normal levels or less than
normal levels and “not deal with the job descriptions and policy issues at hand.”

All of the participants expressed concern for the lack of consistent written policies and
rules, noting how their ability to accomplish their jobs and ultimately form as a team were
affected. From the training MUG (Midshipmen Under Guidance) book to the Rules and
Regulations of the regiment, each participant believed that his job was more difficult due to a
lack of operational structure. Team members tried to change and update written documents with
little support, with each person subjectively and individually adding his opinions. Many of the participants stated that the lack of consistency within these documents directly contributed to varying individual interpretations.

Drew believed that the team “could have done a better job defining their roles and responsibilities.” Drew did not seem to believe that the lack of operational structure was always a negative, stating that “internally they had a better sense of what they were doing, but that it was just not written down.” This aspect of the organization’s policies and procedures seemed less of a focus for Drew, who was happy to have the freedom that the military and professional merchant marine companies did not provide. He described this freedom as the “grey area” that he believed every team member operated in. Despite this description, Drew did state:

At Maritime we made it up as we went along. I can’t believe the college was in existence for over 130 years, this can’t be the first time we are doing this, and why are we making it up now.

The idea of “grey” in a world of black and white was not one that Mike, Tom, and Joel embraced. Mike believed in the ideal he learned in the Marines, that “organization was a key to success.” He addressed the issue that little was in writing, from job descriptions to performance expectations, stating:

Well, inside the Marine Corp, every position upon the officer level has a turnover binder. Because every two or four years you are leaving that job and a new guy is coming in, or your boss is leaving, or your boss’s boss is leaving, so everyone has a turnover binder. Unlike when you go out in the civilian work, the Marine Corp works really hard to get you an overlap whereas the guy replacing you will be there for a week and you have
some time with them. So you can walk them through the binder and introduce them. It allows everyone to know their role and accomplish all tasks.

He described the federal merchant marine licensing as a “vague thing” that was difficult to understand and never truly explained to the team members before arrival or even after, which contributed to his views of the team and his concerns about his role in it.

Tom also described the concept of a “grey area” as difficult. Upon his arrival he would have liked to audit some of the merchant marine courses to aid “in a quicker understanding of the culture,” and continue professional development throughout his time in his position. Tom’s extensive experience as an attorney and as a business owner highlighted his strengths in research and knowledge. When discussing his many professional experiences he stated:

I think that if I could have gotten into more of the educational background myself by taking courses or monitoring courses I think that would have assisted or made me more of an efficient member of the college, or at least it would have aided my progression and now continued growth as a member of the college.

Specifically, with regard to the policies of the college, Tom was charged with cadet conduct enforcement on the leadership team. Within these areas Tom was most critical of the operational structure; he believed that trying to get the rules and regulations written out “was an almost impossible task” considering the lack of written history and data.

This same lack of policies and procedures was also stated by Joel, who was charged with the cadet MUG Book, a policy and culture guide provided to new cadets upon arrival. Joel’s concern about the book was expressed in detail:

When I arrived as a Regimental Affairs Officer, I was appalled at how poorly organized and written the MUG book was. A slew of inappropriate comments were written into the
MUG book itself and this is something that the university gives to every incoming student and the student purchases it. I took it onboard as a special project to overhaul the entire MUG book from start to finish and to my understanding it is still being used now. Joel explained these issues by identifying the team’s lack of expertise in technology. This lack of technological knowledge led to more work and often “a lack of consistency,” especially within the student conduct system. Joel stated that since the written rules lacked clarity and were outdated, there were different outcomes based on which team member handled the case. He mentioned:

We seemed to waiver quite a bit when it came time to enforcing the judicial standards and by association, the leadership development. If you are trying to teach leadership development but are not enforcing rules for every cadet across the board in the same way, I think it is a very poor example of how to train leaders.

Rick was not a fan of the college’s use of technology, explaining that “there is so much administrative, it’s crazy. I mean in today’s world even though we have electronics, you have to maintain both hard copies and electronic copies.” Although Rick did not mention his direct role in leading the organizational structure of the team or their lack of written policies, it was clear that he did agree that the policies and procedures needed improvement, citing, “We have greatly improved our organization and team communication, but there is more to do.”

**Summary.** The leadership team members expressed consistent frustration in the policies and procedures tied to poor onboarding and a lack of consistent written policies; however, they attributed these issues to the larger organization and not to themselves. Drawing the focus away from their team and their leader could be seen as another instance of the members being united by a shared negative experience, as with their organizational frustrations. They discussed turning
their frustrations into opportunities by focusing on their ability to improve this lack of structure and ultimately be seen as a value to the team. This method of coping, to rise above an obstacle, played a pivotal role in the team’s formation. Only one member, Joel, was unable to overcome his frustrations concerning the operation structure, which resulted in his voluntary departure from the team.

**Theme 5: Sense of duty.** The final theme, sense of duty, was articulated by each of the leadership team members and perceived to be very uplifting. While their individual senses of duty focused on different areas, duty to country, duty to the merchant marine profession, or duty to the college, they each expressed a higher duty to others beyond the team that pushed them through both positive and negative experiences. The participants believed that “duty” was the foundation principle that guided all their decisions and beliefs and served as the basis for their formation as the leadership team.

This was highlighted by Tom in his belief that “genuinely” caring about the others and their lives allowed the team to form a stronger bond because it tied members to a shared “sense of duty.” Tom, as well as each member of the leadership team, believed that the sense of duty connected them within the team to each other in a way that transcended all differences. Drew stated:

The regimental staff comes from different places and different backgrounds. We each have different experiences and beliefs in leadership and what we see as successful and meaningful work. These differences can easily frustrate us and get in the way of what we do, and they do, but it is that common sense of duty to each other that brings us together.

The sense of duty articulated by the participants also extended to athletics and their commitment to the cadets. Each participant suggested that his sense of duty and commitment
was interwoven through the college’s athletic program. The team members had varying roles on athletic teams and articulated their sense of duty to those teams, which included players, coaches, and the college community as fans. Mike specifically stated:

[Athletics] teaches discipline and teamwork but most of all determination, all things you need to succeed at college or in life. I am equally committed to my coaches and athletes as I am to the cadets and regimental staff. It is my duty to be there for them and get them to where they want to go.

This belief was so strong among the leadership team members that they each coached as unpaid volunteers on various NCAA Division III athletic teams in addition to the normal duties required of their full-time positions. They also stated that they would not consider giving up these volunteer positions regardless of the hours they put in to their college positions.

These added hours and extra duties, on the campus, during the sea term, and in athletics, were also connected to a sense of duty to the merchant marine profession and the country. Some of the more experienced and senior team members, such as Tom and Rick, identified that the merchant marines in the United States served an important role for commerce and the military. Rick specifically stated, “We are here to ensure our economy and way of life,” and he believed that “supporting our country” is a vital component of what the leadership team does within the mission of the college. All of the participants articulated that they had no contractual obligation to go out on the ship in the summer, but that “duty” called. Tom stated, “You finish what you start and see [students] through to the end of their training.” Each member, especially Rick the team leader, used duty as a primary descriptor when discussing the summer sea term. Rick, who also served as the captain of the ship during the sea term, stated:
Everything that we train the cadets on during the school year comes into play during the summer sea term. Each crew member, most from the regimental team, feels a sense of duty to the cadets and each other to help produce the best merchant mariners in the world.

All of the participants related their sense of duty to the greater purpose of the college: educating merchant marines. Four of the team members, Joel, Drew, Mike, and Tom, all had military experience, with Mike and Tom having served in senior positions. This history of service to one’s country played a significant role in the sense of duty to the college and its mission. Tom illustrated this view of the merchant marines’ commitment to support the military, stating, “Our country would not have survived if it were not for the men and women of the merchant marines.” The word “duty” came up in all of the interviews with Joel, Mike, and Tom in their descriptions of why they went into the military as well as their interest in their current positions. This sense of duty was not lost on Rick, the Commandant. He expressed many times the “debt” he owed to the college for his training and education.

**Summary.** All of the participants found great comfort in being motivated by a sense of duty, and they touched on their devotion and duty that extended to the team, college, or country, depending on their lived experiences. This sense of duty also assisted in guiding each member through difficult times. Drew used an analogy that his “focus on duty served many times as a guiding light in the dark, much like a ship and a lighthouse.” Their sense of duty brought the leadership team together and significantly impacted the team’s formation.

**Section 4: Composite Textural and Structural Description**

The previous section highlighted each of the five themes, social connections, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty, in order of their frequency in being expressed by the participants regarding
their impact on the leadership team formation. This section will further delineate these themes through composite textural and structural descriptions constructed from the participants’ experiences. These descriptions represent what each of the participants experienced and how they experienced it within each of the five identified themes.

**Textural description.** Following the development of themes, the next step in this study was to develop a composite textural description of what the administrators experienced in their formation as a leadership team. Through review of the five themes, social connections, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty, there were several key words and phrases present in the interviews that stood out in the participants’ positive and negative experiences in their team’s formation.

When discussing the leadership team, the participants identified the frustrations that they felt regarding many of the facets of the team and overall organization. All five of the leadership team members found it difficult to work within a more informal structure than what they were used to within their previous experiences. While the team’s leader, Rick, used phrases such as “less formal” and “openness” to describe and minimize the impact of the informal structure, other participants articulated their opinions using terms such as “lack of organization,” “disorganized,” and “free for all” to describe their frustrations. While it was clear the “lack of formality” the team members felt was not a positive experience, there was one participant, Tom, who tried to see “both sides of the fence,” articulating that less formality, while frustrating, did allow for “creativity” and “freedom” that many on the team had not experienced before. Still, “frustration” proved to be the prevailing term, used by each participant and collectively 27 times.

Although the team expressed considerable frustration with the lack of formality in organizational and team structure, their resources or “lack of resources,” as stated by many of the
administrators, negatively affected their morale and work-life balance as well. Although Rick, the team’s leader, stated, “I know that at the end of the day my team will get the job done and that is all that counts,” Mike, Drew, and Tom, articulated how “a lack of resources” meant “overtime” at work and “missed time” with their families. The term “extra duty,” was used repeatedly as a descriptor when members were asked about their work-life balance. This frustration over time and resources was most evident when the participants discussed the summer sea term. In reference to this time, they regularly used words like “long hours,” “high stress,” and “burnout” to describe their shared experiences on the ship, which was identified by four out of the five leadership team members as a “tin can.”

While clearly the participants were frustrated with the limited resources and the effect on team morale, they expressed that it was their “belief” and “commitment” in the team and each other, that “pushed them forward.” Drew and Joel, the youngest members on the leadership team, found inspiration from the more experienced team members. Drew stated he felt “inspired” by the more experienced team members’ “sense of duty” and “work ethic.” Joel agreed, using terms such as “commitment” and “duty.” This sense of commitment and duty illustrated the connections that built positive experiences contributing to the team’s formation.

The participants identified their relationships with the other team members, built through both social and professional experiences, as a “motivating” factor in their team’s development. Drew mentioned that the “commitment” to leadership development of the cadets was “second only to respect and commitment” to each other. The team members used words like “connected,” “love,” family,” and “all-in” when discussing their peers. Rick, the team’s leader, stated:
I think it helped that we had a shared value system around leadership development. There was no ordering to your peers, and even from the Deputy you would not hear an order: “I need this done.”

Rick later went on to describe the team’s relationships as “strong,” “balanced,” “personal,” and “important.” These terms, although not directly stated by each member, resonated with their statements regarding “sense of duty.”

Outside of their relationships with each other professionally, the team also found their social relationships to be a positive factor in formation. The leadership team members described their social relationships using phrases such as “we are all in it together,” “united we stand,” and “together we can do anything.” Even when discussing negative experiences such as family crises, leadership team members articulated their resilience through support for each other. Mike specifically stated numerous times that “without each other” he and his family would not have been able to transition from his life in the Marines to his position at the college. Similar personal statements used terms such as “lifted-up” and “unconditional support” when describing the team members’ relationships with each other, especially around their families and personal lives. The types of emotional connections to the team and the organizations were also illustrated by Drew’s story:

While I was in the Navy I was diagnosed with brain cancer, and although I received excellent treatment I was away from my wife and children. The college gave me an opportunity to be with them, regardless of the crazy work schedule and hours, while I recovered. It also gave me peace of mind that they were safe on the campus and had a community around them that served as a support system.
While Drew’s story of cancer was the most emotional, it was not the only example of support and connectedness. Three other team members, Tom, Rick, and Joel, each had a personal example of how their team members “lifted them up” in a personal time of need.

The textural descriptions found within the study reflected that the team’s negative experiences were mostly centered on tasks through their positions, while their social connections led them to mostly positive experiences. The participants in the study also articulated their sense of duty to each other and how this became a significant influence in their formation as a team. All five participants articulated key words and phrases when illustrating their positive and negative experiences that related to their formation as a leadership team.

**Structural description.** The next step of data analysis within this phenomenological study was the development of composite structural descriptions. This encompassed the compilation of the descriptions of how the participants’ contextual experiences influenced their formation as a leadership team. This sense of “how” was explored across the study’s five themes, social connections, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty, in relation to the study’s research question: How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team? When reviewing the participants’ descriptions of how their experiences influenced the team’s formation, three contexts emerged: athletics, military and merchant marines, and family.

While growing up, regardless of their location or family structure, all of the team members participated in competitive athletics. Whether at the club, high school, or collegiate level, each participant described his experience in multiple ways, from the influence and mentorships of coaches to the relationships built through team sports. What stood out most was
how all of the team members expressed that discipline and preparation learned through athletics helped to focus them and eventually influenced their careers. Mike went so far as to state that:

Football is what saved me from being a screw-up both in school and at home. Everything good in my life has come out of team sports, and specifically football, from staying out of trouble to getting into college, to meeting my wife, to my life after the Marines with coaching. [Football] teaches discipline and teamwork but most of all determination.

In a similar fashion, Rick, the team’s leader, articulated that after his mother passed away he found “order and meaning within the sport of rowing.” Mike, Rick, Drew, and Joel also mentioned periods of time when athletics helped to “mold them into men” and “prepare them for a life of service” within the merchant marines and the military.

The participants’ ideal of service fit with the sense of duty they expressed within the second context: military and merchant marine cultures. All team members identified a significant sense of belonging and duty to their prior profession as federal employees in service to the nation.

Mike articulated that the military provided him a career and the opportunity to continue to serve his country, which, in his words, “made me the person and professional I am today.” This same experience influenced Drew and Joel as well. Unlike Tom and Mike, Drew and Joel did not see a long career in the military, but rather they wanted to blend their experiences in the merchant marines and the Navy in a “landside civilian job” that would also allow them to continue their passion for athletics. This goal is what attracted them to positions at the college, where their skills, experiences, and knowledge “would be assets.” Rick, Drew, and Joel were graduates of the college and they shared a connection as proud merchant marine alumni. All of the team members identified that their time in the merchant marines and the military was made
possible by the support of their families, and that this experience ultimately prepared them well for their positions at the college and on the leadership team.

The participants all articulated a very strong sense of duty to their families, the third contextual descriptor. Exemplified by Mike and Drew, who left the military to be closer to their families, the participants expressed that their families continued to impact their professional lives and ultimately the team. Mike articulated that his reason for joining the college’s leadership team was to be closer to his family, and Drew stated that his desire to have more family time was the main reason he left the Navy and joined the leadership team. Both articulated that they found “strength” and “commitment” in family that directly correlated to their positions with the team. All of the team members expressed that their families were “proud” of their past and present experiences and continued service to others. Rick, the only team member with no current immediate family, discussed how his father’s passing in high school impacted his decision to “not be too far away from home” to support his mother. Even though she passed away after he finished college, he believed the opportunity for her to see him excel in the local college made their time together more meaningful. These experiences exemplify the participants’ commitment to family, the impact of family on their professional experiences, and the role of shared beliefs and experiences in aiding their team’s formation.

Within the structural descriptions, each of the three contexts played a significant role in the leadership team’s formation. The contexts influenced the members’ development, specifically their resilience in “overcoming the odds,” whether it be professionally or personally. All three contextual descriptions influenced the formation of the leadership team.

**Summary.** Despite the differences between the five themes (social connections, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures,
and sense of duty), the textural and structural descriptions identified phrases, words, and contexts that crossed over all the themes. The descriptors, structural and textural, support the study’s phenomenological approach. Within the three structural contexts of athletics, merchant marines and military, and family, the team members described their unconditional “commitment,” which was developed before their involvement with the team. In reference to both negative and positive experiences, many of the words and phrases used within the textural descriptions connected to the concept of “resilience” that allowed the members to be successful within their team, regardless of profession or obstacle. Through the textural and structural composite descriptions taken from the study’s transcribed data, the concepts of resiliency and commitment emerged as central themes, and they ultimately serve as the study’s phenomenological essence.

Section 5: Description of the Phenomenon

For this study on how administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as a leadership team, the five administrators provided descriptions that were both detailed and personal. The description of the phenomenon or essence is defined by Moustakas (1994) as a universal condition that allows a thing to be what it is. In this study, each participant spent almost four hours of his time sharing his lived experiences in relation to the formation of the leadership team. Following the analysis of the transcribed interviews, five overall themes emerged: social connections, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty. Within each of these themes, the individual textural and structural descriptions were synthesized into a composite textural and structural description, which was then developed into the essence of the participants’ lived experiences.
The essence, developed from the participants’ positive and negative experiences at the college and in the leadership team, was their remarkable resilience and commitment. They all stated that they gained respect for each other through their shared experiences and social connections. They showed considerable resilience in working long hours with little financial or structural support while living together on campus and on the summer sea term. Through these experiences and relationships, they also found common beliefs and values based on family. Despite their frustrations with the informal structure and the lack of human and financial resources, the administrators’ demonstrated a strong sense of duty and persevered with a commitment to be successful for their cadets, their team, and the college. Although the participants discussed the positive and negative effects of these frustrations on their team, it was clear that their resolve, their loyalty to each other, and their common beliefs strengthened their bond.

The administrators’ resilience and commitment directly influenced their team’s cohesion and morale. The participants articulated how their abilities to see beyond the current state of affairs and actively work with other team members, despite the challenging personal and profession conditions, gave them a focus and a common goal. The team’s success depended greatly on their morale and ability to accomplish tasks, especially during long periods in very close and confined environments such as the college’s training ship. Their commitment to each other as a team could be seen in their responses to difficult questions. At only one point did any participant attribute fault to another team member, as was the case when Joel discussed the lack of support from the team’s leader. However, immediately after, Joel made a point of saying that “he was not blaming Rick,” but rather explaining that Rick was “a product of the larger dysfunctional culture.”
As touched on previously, the team’s resilience and commitment also influenced the team’s task and social cohesion. All of the participants expressed the belief that their drive, specifically their sense of duty, guided their individual and team focus. Although their social cohesion drove the team members to accomplish tasks, tasks took precedence when situations were frustrating and difficult. Their lived experiences impacted their values and beliefs, significantly influenced their perceptions of their organization, its structure, and their current relationships with other team members, and ultimately affected their team’s formation. Through demonstrated respect, trust, and empathy for one another, they showed resilience and a commitment to achieve.

Guided by phenomenological methodology, the study focused on the formation of a leadership team at a state-supported merchant marine college. Following Moustakas’s (1994) and Creswell’s (2011) data collection and analysis approaches, interviews were conducted with five selected administrators on the college’s regimental leadership team. The analysis followed the transcendental phenomenological approach, starting with the epoch, or bracketing of the researcher’s personal feelings and opinions, moving through horizontalization to identify the clusters of meaning, developing composite textural and structural descriptions within the clusters or themes, and working toward the essence of the phenomena. Chapter five will further review the five themes as they relate to the theoretical framework and discuss implications for practice, recommendations, and considerations for future research.
Chapter 5: Interpretations, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of five administrators in support of the study’s research question: How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team? The purpose was to obtain a greater understanding of the team’s formation through the experiences and descriptions of its members. Using a phenomenological methodology, the study employed interview questions that explored the individual administrators’ backgrounds, their team roles, and finally, their perceived relationships, all within the context of how these experiences influenced the leadership team’s formation. The research data collected through interviews and the subsequent analysis identified the study’s essence: the participants demonstrated remarkable resilience and commitment to the team and its formation. In addition, through the identified themes of the study—social connection, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty—team members showed resilience and commitment to both their personal and professional goals demonstrating task cohesion.

Despite their structure, merchant marine colleges are not military institutions. In turn, collegiate merchant marine leadership team members come from different backgrounds, although they do have multiple overlapping shared experiences. One of the most difficult processes for any organization is the inclusion of new members into a leadership team. This process of integrating staff within a new culture is a gamble, one that involves time and organization (Gibson, 1994). The study of team dynamics is essential to understanding the formation of leadership teams, and this study specifically focused on roles and responsibilities, interpersonal relationships, and professional experiences. Ultimately, all members within a team are striving for personal and professional satisfaction, attainment, and collective goals.
The team’s formation and eventual success in achieving its goals is built on members’ professional and personal cohesion (Carron, 1982; Hackman, 2002; MacCoun, 1993).

The theoretical lens of team cohesion framed this study’s exploration of how administrators perceived their formation of the leadership team. Team cohesion’s theoretical focus on task and social cohesion, as well as the concept of positive and negative shared experiences, provided the framework for this study, specifically the interview questions. The framework also assisted in identifying the themes that emerged from this study: social connection, shared experiences, organizational resources, policies and procedures, and sense of duty, which support the study’s recommendations. This chapter will discuss these findings as seen through the theoretical framework of team cohesion, providing recommendations for practice, and concluding with an overview for future research.

**Interpretation of Primary Findings**

The team’s ability to form a cohesive group is one of the early keys to success (Christensen et al., 2006). Acknowledging the role of team cohesion within the unique culture of state-supported merchant marine colleges provides greater potential to assist these organizations in their team formation and success. The following section identifies the study’s findings based on the research question: How do administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college describe their formation as the leadership team?

The researcher interviewed five leadership team members at a merchant marine college, asking them to describe their past and present experiences with their team. The data gathered from their interviews led to five themes—social connections, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty—all
of which impacted the team’s formation. The first theme, social connection, focused on the relationships between family and friends, and occurred within personal and professional settings on the campus and aboard the training ship during the summer sea term. Shared experiences, the next theme, explored the common sets of past and present experiences that directly impacted the members and their formation as a team. The third theme, organizational resources, focused on the concerns that all five of the participants had in relation to their work in the leadership team. The policies and procedures theme covered the organizational culture as well as the lack of written polices and job descriptions for administrators new to the team. The final theme, sense of duty, focused on the participants’ commitment to their team, the college, and their country. The leadership team members demonstrated resilience and commitment, regardless of negative or positive influences. These findings have the potential to impact merchant marine educational leaders in the recruitment, support, and development of future teams, having a direct impact on their goals and success in leadership development. Utilizing the theoretical framework of team cohesion, the following section will identify the study’s findings, as they specifically relate to task and social cohesion.

**Social cohesion.** The concept of social cohesion is built on the foundation of a team member’s identity both individually and as part of his or her team (Beal et al., 2003). These identities are created before the member’s arrival on the team and reinforced by positive and negative experiences while on the team. These social experiences, which occur within leader-follower relationships, especially within hierarchical organizations such as encountered in this study at a merchant marine college, significantly impact team cohesion (MacCoun et al., 2006). The first theme of this study, social connections, found that administrators’ relationships with each other inside and outside of their professional environment influenced their social cohesion.
and ultimately their formation as a team. These relationships play a critical role within teams, particularly in team formation (Eys et al., 2006). These types of social connections have also been established within military and athletic organizations, where the success of the team has been directly attributed to the ability of members to build social bonds to accomplish tasks (Driscoll, 2011; MacCoun, 1993; Oliver et al., 1999). These relationships between team members were highlighted in each of the interviews as a significant factor in forming as a team.

The study revealed that the social relationships developed inside and outside of the professional environment, through personal and family interactions within closed living and working environments on campus and at sea, contributed to the development of a support system for the team members. This support system directly assisted in the leadership team members’ ability to work together regardless of the circumstances and their frustration level. Specifically, these social connections contributed to their support of each other through long hours and limited resources, as seen in the theme of organizational resources. Despite these frustrations, team members were “on call” for their students all day and every day, dealing with issues surrounding medical emergencies, mental health crises, and personal issues. Team members worked with each other over long stretches of time on campus and during the summer sea term, when they manned and supported the training ship at sea for three months straight. This social connection supports Tuckman’s (1965) model of group cohesion based on the four stages: forming, storming, norming, and performing. The participants, through social bonds and shared experiences, grew together to overcome their frustrations and accomplish their goals.

This time together also strengthened their commitment to a shared sense of duty, another theme within the study. The concept of duty was enforced by the participants’ experiences with the military, athletics, and the merchant marines. Carron (1980, 1982) states that shared
experiences play an important role in team cohesion, allowing members to unite over positive and negative situations. As people enter new environments, they seek out those individuals who have shared values, ideals, and experiences to form bonds, aiding in team formation (Carron, 1982; Smith, 2013). Although not all team members shared all of these same experiences, they did overlap in their beliefs of commitment, determination, and sense of duty to the team, the college, and the country. The participants of the study discussed how they supported each other because of their sense of duty and how their experiences brought them together socially. The participants’ positive relationships and shared negative frustrations were of great value and led to social cohesion, which impacted their formation as a team.

**Task cohesion.** Task cohesion is regularly found in organizations or teams that have high stress and challenging goals such as the military (MacCoun, 1996). Within military types of leadership teams, members are rotated in and out regularly, so building strong social connections is a luxury and not necessarily possible (Driscoll, 2011). Four of the five participants in the study demonstrated a long term (over five years) commitment to the team. While this extended time together did support their social cohesion, the group also articulated that they had a high level of commitment to reaching their goals. This level of commitment, termed social striving, emphasizes how the group’s outcomes or tasks become a driving factor over an individual’s needs (Early, 1989).

At no point was the concept of social striving more evident than in the participants’ sense of duty, derived from their shared experiences in athletics, the military, and the merchant marines. Studies on teams within the military and athletics have centered their theoretical question and focus on task cohesion, creating in these cultures a predetermined focus on task (Carron, 1980; MacCoun et al., 2006). This focus on task cohesion is even more noticeable in
popular literature and government manuals (Bouwer, 1977; Department of the Army, 1999; Donnithorne, 1993; Driscoll, 2011; Merchant Marine Training, 46 C.F.R. § 310 (2002); U.S. Department of Transportation, n.d). The importance of accomplishing tasks is a central belief in all three of these cultures, yet tasks are made difficult when human and financial resources are scarce. All of the participants articulated frustration with being understaffed, over worked, and in the words of Drew, “always asked to do more with less.” The participants explained that they pushed through this frustration because of their sense of duty to the college, the students, the team, and each other.

When the participants’ sense of duty was combined with the organization’s lack of policies and procedures, frustrations again arose. The two participants with over 10 years of naval experience believed that this was a cultural phenomenon that had predated their arrival at the institution and led to a phenomenon they described as a “grey area.” This “grey area” became synonymous with the terms: “vague,” “unknown,” “inconsistent,” and “blurred,” words that were all frequently used in the interviews. This lack of structure affected the team’s morale, and participants expressed concerns about accomplishing their tasks. It is not surprising that task completion was a significant concern for the administrators, considering the informal structure, their prior shared experiences, and their strong sense of duty.

**Summary.** Through most of the academic year (August through May), the majority of the leadership team lives on the college’s campus and in the summer goes out to sea, living on a ship for three months. There is little surprise that the team’s social cohesion as an independent community is extremely high. Although the team’s leader did not share the other participants’ military experience or live on the campus, he did live aboard the training ship during the sea term, serving as its captain. All of the team members, including the team’s leader, articulated that
“living on the campus aided in forming their team,” as did their time together on the training ship. This community has spent significant time together as friends and professional colleagues; their shared respect for each other and their positive and negative experiences directly impacted their formation as a leadership team. Team members articulated their belief in their social bond, stating that “their bonds drew them together,” which “allowed them to overcome adversity and focus on job one.” That ideal of “job one” relates directly to their focus on the task at hand, in this case “developing young men and women for future roles as U.S. Merchant Mariners.” These examples, as well as the others found within the study, demonstrate that both social and task cohesion played a significant roles in the leadership team’s formation.

The study’s essence determined that the administrators’ resilience and commitment impacted cohesion and ultimately team formation. Clearly the themes of organizational resources and policies and procedures impacted each team member in mostly a negative fashion. Resources were seen as unfair and inadequate, policies were inconsistent or nonexistent, and hours were very long. This shared negative experience, as the study has shown, brought the participants together to bond as a team. Tom, the second in charge and the participant with the most total leadership experience, articulated, “We are who we are, and we do more with less, and we are damn proud of that!” This demonstrated a shared sense of identity. Social cohesion was the positive linchpin of the team’s formation, as task served as a common central point that drew on their sense of duty. Born out of struggle, the administrators’ resilience to overcome all obstacles and their commitment to their tasks were their primary motivators. The interviews revealed that the overall feeling among the team was that they “worked harder and longer” than their peers, and that their duty was to accomplish their tasks at all costs. No matter their frustrations, beliefs, influences, or relationships, the leadership team described their formation as being motivated by
both social and task cohesion as articulated across all five themes as well as within the textural and structural descriptions.

**Implications for Practice**

In relation to these findings, recommendations for leadership team formation within state-support merchant marine colleges are as follows: (1) provide a consistent and intentional clarity of expectations; (2) identify a specific professional recruitment strategy that will both diversify and increase the applicant pool, while developing a defined onboarding process; (3) organize professional development opportunities for the team members that will help them focus attention on their own strengths rather than the strengths of their peer organizations; and (4) create clearly articulated policies and structures that include job descriptions and position and team expectations.

**Clarity of expectations.** Based on the shared experiences of the team members, it is clear that social connections were an advantage in team formation. Although many professionals and organizations value time away from work, military and athletic teams encourage this type of social connection (Carron, 1980; MacCoun, 1993; MacCoun et al., 2006). It is unknown as to why the college requires only some of its leadership team members to live on campus, but this type of requirement for all members, including the team’s leader, would positively aid in team formation.

In a similar fashion, there seems to be an unwritten institutional requirement to have all team members participate on the summer sea term. Although this experience was valuable in building professional and personal connections, it seems that participants did not have sufficient time away from their work to connect with family and rest. Staggering the deployment of team members on the training ship would still allow for the consistency of work and social cohesion,
as well as providing time off for members to recharge. Developing a plan to write this type of requirement into the job descriptions would increase the opportunity for the entire team to have the same type of social experience and would also prepare job candidates and their families more appropriately for these positions on the team and within the institution.

Further exploration of the time commitments expected of leadership team members would assist on multiple fronts to build a supportive organizational structure. While social cohesion can and is developed through challenging and negative experiences, it can as easily develop over shared positive experiences (Carron, 1983). Providing clear and defined expectations that included opportunities for professional and personal social time would support development as well as improve morale.

**Recruitment strategy.** The demographics of the participant pool have a common culture of athletics, but the group is separated into two professional areas, military experience and merchant marine experience. Each participant articulated that he arrived at his role on the leadership team through personal and professional connections and not through a recruitment ad. The college has not fully developed a targeted recruitment strategy with regard to its leadership team. Team members discussed how they did not formally interview for their positions, but rather went through an informal process, which highlights their concerns regarding the organization’s policies and procedures. The recommendation is to identify and target communities and advertising markets that fit the cultures represented on the leadership team. This plan should increase the size of the applicant pool and eventually build a diverse and well-rounded team.

Developing a recruitment strategy would enable the organization to hire professionals with targeted but diverse experiences, and decrease the on-boarding frustration identified by this
study’s participants. This recommendation centers on creating an introductory experience for all team members to assist them in their transition into the merchant marine college environment. Developing organized and detailed recruitment on-boarding plans would be part of a strategy to increase team members’ indoctrination and diversity while connecting them to the institution’s unique mission and values. This would allow for arguably a faster transition to the culture and formation of their team.

As previously discussed in the study, military education has long benefited from leadership teams with diverse but targeted candidate pools from within desired cultures (Driscoll, 2011). Shared cultural experience and professional training directly impacts team cohesion, regardless of its focus on task or social cohesion (Carron, 1980). The development of a strategic and targeted recruitment plan, based on this study’s data, would allow merchant marine institutions and their leadership teams to focus their resources on more direct training and education programs to aid in the team’s formation.

**Professional development opportunities.** The team members need to research what they do best and encourage reciprocal visitation to other institutions. It is clear from this study that leadership positions in merchant marine colleges are 24 hours a day, seven days a week, high stress jobs. The leadership team members cannot rely on their peers to voluntarily visit their institution or to assume that what they read or hear about their peers is accurate. They need to market themselves as well as open their doors to others. This closed culture, commonly found in merchant marine institutions, needs to change.

To assist with this concept of marketing, the college should put a stronger emphasis on professional development. None of the participants mentioned professional development, either individual or team focused. The team should develop a strategy to provide professional
development opportunities to its members. This could include attending conferences, bringing in speakers, and conducting shared-experience training sessions on and off campus. These opportunities could increase morale and turn the negative shared experiences into positive ones with the opportunity to share some of the innovative strategies that they are employing.

This study found that task and social cohesion served as equally significant influences on team formation. Strategically-planned professional development opportunities would not only impact professional growth and morale, but also serve to bridge gaps between members’ experiences and training and further increase social bonds. In discussions with a former military and merchant marine college administrator, Driscoll (2011) identified that state-supported educational environments, specifically merchant marine colleges, do not demonstrate a strength in professional training and development. Building on this weakness, as identified by each of the five participants in the study, would impact team member competencies, positively affecting team formation.

**Articulated policies and structures.** Few organizations are as formally structured as the state-supported merchant marine education, which follow a military style (Brouwer, 1977; Donnithorne, 1993). However, this military style has clearly not translated to an organized operational structure. An onboarding process and clearly articulated position expectations and descriptions would assist in transitioning team members into this culture. The onboarding plan should identify and recognize the different experiences of the members, so that these natural bonds are encouraged, but it should also include training that provides members with a shared language and culture that will be carried into their team and organization. Blending an educational onboarding process that includes a focus on tasks (goals) as well as the social (experiences) would build their sense of identity as one team.
The changes can come from setting formal and attainable goals both for individual team members as well as the leadership team as a whole. These goals would align with the expectations articulated within the recommended position descriptions and would serve to guide the team’s development of recommended professional development opportunities. These goals would be reviewed mid-year and again at the close of the fiscal year; they would support team members’ annual reviews required by all state-supported educational institutions and connect to most of the recommendations found within this study.

Despite the resilience demonstrated by the leadership team members in overcoming a lack of written and consistent policies, they all expressed a considerable amount of frustration as well. When taking into account the study participants’ predilection to structure, along with their lack of merchant marine experience, written policies and a structured onboarding process would support team members’ past experiences, regardless of the culture from which they are recruited. This would positively impact morale and ease their frustrations, aiding in team cohesion and formation.

Conclusion

The study, exploring the lived experiences of five administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college, investigated team formation through the theoretical framework of team cohesion. Through the participants’ descriptions, obtained through semi-structured interviews, the study explored the individual administrators’ backgrounds, their team roles, and their perceived relationships, all within the context of how these experiences influenced their cohesion and their formation as a team. The data analysis identified the study’s themes—social connections, shared experiences, decreased morale due to limited resources, frustration over policies and procedures, and sense of duty—and ultimately its essence, that team members
showed resilience and commitment to their personal and professional goals, as demonstrated through task and social cohesion.

**Future research.** This study’s exploration of how a leadership team is formed within a state-supported merchant marine environment will contribute to further research on leadership team formation and cohesion within state-supported merchant marine institutions. The study’s data revealed that this unique culture’s teams form through a variety of negative and positive experiences centered on task and social cohesion. It is important to note that this study focused on one leadership team at one state-supported merchant marine institution, and further research at other institutions would greatly assist in providing further data on this culture’s leadership team formation.

Although not the primary charge of most leadership teams within traditional educational institutions, leadership education is an emerging theme within higher education, and in recent years it has commanded significant research attention (Bush, 2011). The development of a similar study on the same type of leadership team within a more traditional higher educational institution would provide comparison data for the merchant marine environment and further enrich the current literature on leadership team formation, specifically within higher education. Another step that would provide for more comparison data would be to conduct this type of study at federal military academies with their leadership teams.

The study’s interview data taken from the five participants not only provided detailed experiences related to the team’s formation, it also generated data that could lead to additional research outside this specific area. Further research on the team’s time on the summer sea term could inform the institution on its team’s formation, on cohesion, and even on crisis response. Further responses to institutional changes in leadership and the growth and development of the
college could be used to explore organizational change theory within military educational environments. The most obvious study that could come out of this data is to explore the impact of the leadership team on the students as merchant marine professionals. These studies would have a significant impact on how the merchant marine institution carries out its mission and goals, and in a broader context, provide further understanding of the merchant marine educational environment and culture.

**Summary.** The purpose of this study was to learn about the experiences of administrators at a state-supported merchant marine college and their formation as a leadership team. The five participants interviewed shared their experiences, perceptions, and beliefs leading up to and during their time as members of the institution’s leadership team. The study’s preparation uncovered a lack of research within the state-supported merchant marine educational community on leadership teams, their formation, and their cohesion. The purpose of this study was to provide substantive data that would assist these unique organizational cultures to more effectively build their teams. Unplanned outcomes of the study were to steer new research on leadership and teams in this untapped merchant marine culture, as well as to successfully encourage this community, which has traditionally closed its doors to outsiders from the non-military or merchant marine educational communities, to allow for further types of leadership research.

Further research of this type within the small community of state-supported merchant marine education is vital to its development as well as the improvement of the leadership field within this type of institution. Similar studies can provide smaller communities access to research and educational expertise that will provide rich and honest data that can impact growth and create significant positive change. The participants involved in this study demonstrated a
commitment to their mission and to the students of the institution. With an organized plan and clearer expectations, teams at these unique institutions could increase retention of team members, target potential new members, and build more successful leadership teams. This will result in leaders better serving their institution and its goal of developing student leaders for the merchant marine and shipping industries.
References


Appendix A

Institutional Approval Letter

Admiral Carpenter,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at the State University of New York, Maritime College. I am currently completing my Doctorate of Education at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, and I am in the process of writing my Doctoral Thesis. The study is entitled “An Exploration of Administrators Experiences and Backgrounds and Its Impact on their Leadership Team within a State-Supported Merchant Marine College.”

I am requesting that Maritime College allow me to interview selected participants of varied ranks from the regimental administration. Due to the nature of the study, my desire is to recruit five to six participants through one-on-one, in person requests, conducted by myself. Interested participants will be given a disclosure document highlighting the nature of the study and if they consent, participants will be asked to sign a Northeastern Institutional Review Board (IRB) form.

All data collection, through interviews, will be conducted in private by the researcher. All interviews will be recorded using a digital device with a lapel microphone and should take no longer than 90-minutes. Once the data is transcribed, there may be an opportunity for one follow-up interview lasting no longer than 60-minutes. The interview results will be analyzed and individual names as well as the college’s name will remain confidential. Neither Maritime College nor individual participants will incur costs.

Following our meeting on April 5, 2013, I believe I fully understand both your desires as well as your concerns with the study. I acknowledge I have a level of personal and professional bias due to my previous employment and friendships at Maritime College. I will take appropriate steps to avoid having this influence my research, line of questions, information analysis, and authored works. Maritime College is a unique institution, both within higher education and merchant marine colleges, and as such all data will be considered carefully. The opportunity that the college is granting me is one that I do not take lightly and my goal is to conduct a professional and informative research study whose results will assist the college and the merchant marine collegiate community in their continued practice of the development of future leaders. I fully expect that this study will lead to future research leadership within this culture.

I look forward to working with you and the regimental staff, and welcome any insight that can be provided to assist the study. The signing of this letter confirms the college’s commitment to participate in the study based on the parameters listed above. Please feel free to contact me at any time at either cell phone (646) 370-9249 or email address kneubuehl.e@husky.neu.edu, and thank you once again.

Sincerely,

Erik J. Kneubuehl

Admiral Wendi B. Carpenter, SUNY Maritime College President

[Signature]

1 June 2013

Date
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Northeastern University: Department Educational Leadership

Investigator Name: Erik J. Kneubuehl

Title of Project: Collegiate State-Supported Merchant Marine Leadership: Exploring Beliefs and Leader-Follower Relationships

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask him any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your role as an administrator leading the Regiment of Cadets.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of the formation of the regimental leadership team and more importantly your backgrounds, current roles, and perceived relationships within the team. This study will provide further insight into leadership team cohesion and success within merchant marine education.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to participate in two 60 to 90 minute interviews. These interviews will be conducted by myself, the researcher, and will consist of broad open-ended questions that will allow you to expand or provide further explanations. You will have an opportunity to review the questions prior to consenting to the interview.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

All interviews will take place in a location that you select and at a time that you select. A digital recording device with a lapel microphone will record all interviews. Once all interviews are completed, there may be a request to have one more follow-up interview that would not last more than 30-minutes in length.

Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?
There will be no risk or discomfort to participants. All interviews as well as your names will be confidential and will not be released to anyone in or outside the college.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**

There will be no direct benefit to you for taking part in the study.

**Who will see the information about me?**

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researcher on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way.

All data at each stage of collection, both written notes and recorded interviews, will be copied and stored in two different locations, the researcher’s office and home computer. Any and all devices used to transport the data to these locations will be immediately destroyed following their successful transmission to the said new location. Saved interview transcriptions will be downloaded into software MaxQDA to allow for further analysis and coding and once they are secure all written and recorded data will be erased and destroyed from the office location. Remaining data will be stored on a password-protected home computer and written data, including all consent forms in a locked file cabinet. All transcripts and notes will be destroyed following the approval of the thesis and all signed consent forms will be destroyed 3 years after the approval date of the thesis.

In rare instances, authorized people may request to see research information about you and other people in this study. This is done only to be sure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are authorized by organizations such as Northeastern University to see this information.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**

No special arrangements will be made for compensation or for payment for treatment solely because of my participation in this research.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. Even if you begin the study, you may quit at any time. If you do not participate or if you decide to quit, you will not lose any rights, benefits, or services that you would otherwise have as an employee of the college.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**

Erik J. Kneubuehl (646) 370-9249 kneubuehl.e@husky.neu.edu

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University Boston, MA 02115 tel. 617-373-7570, email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Will I be paid for my participation?**

There is no financial benefit provided to participate in this research.

**Will it cost me anything to participate?**

There is no cost to participate in this research.

**Is there anything else I need to know?**

Participants will be included in the study providing anonymous participant descriptions that will be based on your interview. Each description will be provided to the participant before it is placed into the final study.

**I agree to take part in this research.**

___________________________________________________________________________

Signature of person agreeing to take part                                      Date

___________________________________________________________________________

Printed name of person above

___________________________________________________________________________

Signature of person who explained the study to the Participant above and obtained consent  Date

___________________________________________________________________________

Printed name of person above
Appendix C

Interview Questions & Protocol for Interview #1

INTERVIEWER NAME: ____________________________________________

INTERVIEWEE NAME: ____________________________________________

DATE & TIME: ____________________________________________

LOCATION: ____________________________________________

INTRODUCTION:
Good morning (afternoon). My name is Erik Kneubuehl and I want to thank you for participating in this study. You have read the study’s disclosure document and have signed the consent form. As a reminder, this study is focused on gaining a greater understanding of leadership teams and their formation within the organizational culture of merchant marine education. To remind you this study’s data collection process is separated into two 60 to 90 minute interviews. This first interview is separated into two parts. The first section will focus on background information. After a short break the second section will focus on your role within the regimental leadership team.

I will be tape-recording our conversation using a lapel microphone to better capture your voice. The purpose of this is so that I can get all details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you and write down notes. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. As a reminder, I will be compiling a participant profiles that will contain all participants’ perceptions, quotes, and opinions without any reference to a specific individual. You will have the opportunity to review your profile for accuracy, prior to it being included in the report.

SECTION I – BACKGROUND:
This first section will ask you questions about your background prior to your role at the college much like you would find on a resume. Are you ready to begin?

Q1- DESCRIBE YOUR PROFESSIONAL/EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND LEADING UP TO YOUR EMPLOYMENT AT THE COLLEGE?

Q2- DESCRIBE YOUR PERSONAL BACKGROUND, FOR EXAMPLE FAMILY, EDUCATION, AND GOALS?

Q3- HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED AT THE COLLEGE AND IN WHAT CAPACITIES?
Q4- IS THERE OTHER INFORMATION YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

TRANSITION:
Thank you. Before we move forward, I would like to take this opportunity to take a 5-minute break so that you and I can use the restroom and/or stretch for a moment. While this occurs, I will pause the recording device and we will not start until you are ready once again.

The next set of questions will ask for more information so please answer fully. Once we are finished with the second section, we will conclude this first interview. Are you ready to begin?

SECTION II – ROLE & DUTIES:
This second section will focus on your role within the regimental leadership team. This sections purpose is to get a further understanding of your professional duties and your role within the regimental leadership team. There is no right or wrong answers. Are you ready to begin?

Q1- DESCRIBE THE REGIMENTAL PROGRAM AND YOUR CURRENT ROLE IN IT?

Q2- DESCRIBE THE REGIMENTAL LEADERSHIP TEAM’S GOALS?

Q3- DESCRIBE THE ROLES OF THE OTHER REGIMENTAL ADMINISTRATORS WITHIN YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Q4- DESCRIBE SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS YOU HAVE MADE WITHIN THE REGIMENTAL LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Q5- IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

SUMMARY:
Thank you very much for participating this first interview. Your time is very much appreciated and your comments have been very helpful. The result, this research will provide useful information to leadership teams at state-supported merchant marine colleges, helping to structure further educational research on the understanding of the formation of regimental leadership teams.

As a reminder, we will meet again for our second and final interview. If you have any questions prior to the start of that interview please feel free to contact me at any time, all my contact information is included on the consent form. Thank you again and I will see you in a few days.
**INTERVIEWER REFLECTION:**
Please describe the respondent’s attitude toward you and the interview:

Please describe any unusual circumstances and/or events that had any bearing on the interview such as interruptions, language difficulty, etc.:

Please describe anything else that happened during the interview that has any bearings on the study’s objectives:

Additional comments:
INTRODUCTION:
Good morning (afternoon). I want to thank you, once again, for participating in this study. As a reminder, you have read the study's disclosure document and have signed the consent form. Once again, this study is focused on gaining a greater understanding of leadership teams and their formation within the organizational culture of merchant marine education. This second interview is separated into two parts. The first section will focus on your relationships with your fellow regimental leadership team members. After a short break the second section will be a rap-up that will provide you an opportunity to add any additional information that you feel is important based on the first interview as well as this one today.

Once again, I will be tape-recording our conversation using a lapel microphone to better capture your voice so that I can get all details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you and write down notes. I want to remind you that again all your comments will remain confidential. As a reminder, I will be compiling a participant profiles that will contain all participants’ perceptions, quotes, and opinions without any reference to a specific individual. You will have the opportunity to review your profile for accuracy, prior to it being included in the report.

SECTION I – RELATIONSHIPS:
If you are ready to begin, I will once again start the tape recorder. This first section will focus on your relationships within your leadership team, both from your perspective as well as your perceptions of their perspective of you. There are no right or wrong answers. Are you ready to begin?

Q1- DESCRIBE YOUR EXPERIENCE SERVING ON THE LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Q2- DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR PEER LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS WITHIN THE REGIMENTAL LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Q3- DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR SENIOR/JUNIOR ADMINISTRATORS WITHIN THE REGIMENTAL LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Q4- DESCRIBE HOW THE REGIMENTAL LEADERSHIP TEAM WORKS TOGETHER?

Q5- WHAT ACTIONS OR BEHAVIORS HAVE SUPPORTED THE FORMATION OF THE TEAM?
Q6- WHAT STILL NEEDS TO HAPPEN FOR THE LEADERSHIP TEAM TO BE FULLY FORMED AND FUNCTIONING?

Q7- IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

TRANSITION:
Thank you. Before we move forward, I would like to take this opportunity to take a 5-minute break so that you and I can use the restroom and/or stretch for a moment. While this occurs, I will pause the recording device and we will not start until you are ready once again.

The next set of questions will provide an opportunity for you to add to anything that was discussed over both interview sessions. Once we are finished with the second section, we will conclude this second and final interview. Are you ready to begin?

SECTION II – CONCLUSION:
If you are ready to begin, I will once again start the tape recorder. This second and final section will be very open-ended and will allow you to make any additions or clarifications to either interviews that were conducted for this study. Once again, there are no right or wrong answers. Are you ready to begin?

Q1- IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD CONCERNING YOUR ROLE WITHIN THE REGIMENTAL LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Q2- IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD CONCERNING YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE REGIMENTAL LEADERSHIP TEAM?

Q3- IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD IN CLOSING OUT THESE INTERVIEWS?

SUMMARY:
Thank you very much for participating in these interviews for this study. Your time, throughout both days, has been very much appreciated. Once again, the results of this research will provide useful information to leadership teams and merchant marine organizational cultures, helping to structure further educational research.

As a reminder, you will be kept anonymous during all phases of this study including any additional writings, published or not. As stated in the disclosure document, there will be participant profiles crafted for the final study and each participant will have an opportunity to review their profile to make sure it is correct. There may be a need to conduct a follow-up interview that would be no longer than 30 minutes in length. If that need arises, I will contact you and work around your schedule. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at any time and once again thank you.
INTERVIEWER REFLECTION:
Please describe the respondent’s attitude toward you and the interview:

Please describe any unusual circumstances and/or events that had any bearing on the interview such as interruptions, language difficulty, etc.:

Please describe anything else that happened during the interview that has any bearings on the study’s objectives:

Additional comments:
Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that Erik Kneubuehl successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”.

Date of completion: 03/28/2012

Certification Number: 893608