BECOMING THE BOSS: USING SCHLOSSBERG’S TRANSITION THEORY TO EXPLORE NEW SUPERVISORS’ TRANSITION TO SUPERVISORY ROLES AT A FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. The challenge of coping with career transition can be significant as individuals endeavor to adjust to their new roles, potentially overwhelming their ability to adapt. Using Schlossberg’s transition theory as the conceptual framework, this study explored the following central research question: How do new supervisors at a federal government agency describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role? Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with eight first-time supervisors in a federal government agency from both headquarters and field locations. Analysis followed the modified van Kaam method for descriptive phenomenological research as outlined by Moustakas. The overall results of this study support the key assumptions of Schlossberg’s transition theory and the applicability of the theory to the transition of new supervisors to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. The four themes that emerged from the new supervisors’ experience involved the (a) value of prior leadership experience, (b) helpfulness of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, (c) power of social support from professional peers, and (d) use of engagement and disengagement as coping strategies. This study advances scholarly understanding of the resources that new federal supervisors rely on and the coping strategies that they use in their career transitions.

Keywords: transition, coping, supervisors, federal government, leadership, leadership development, phenomenology
Dedication

This doctoral dissertation is dedicated to all the leaders who have steadfastly served their country in the federal civil service. Much respect and gratitude go to them for demonstrating a deep commitment to public service, aligning organizational objectives and practices with public interests, and ensuring that their actions meet public needs. I salute them.
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

We live in times of change – rapid and radical change – and much of it centers on our working lives. Even if we lived in times of tranquil stability we would still be confronted with the task of adjusting to transitions, compelled by the perpetual motion of the life cycle. . . . Transitions are . . . inevitable. (Nicholson & West, 1988, p. 1)

How do first-time federal supervisors navigate the career transition from employee to manager within the bureaucratic structure and systems of the federal government? In federal agencies of the United States government, roomfuls of policymakers, senior managers, and human resources professionals strive to ensure that the federal civilian workforce is prepared to carry out its critical role serving the American people. Over a quarter of a million individuals hold supervisory positions in the federal civilian non-postal workforce (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017). As with other transitions in a person’s life, moving into a supervisory role often requires a change in assumptions and a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships (Schlossberg, 1981a). Given research showing that more than half of new managers underperform during their first two years on the job (Corporate Executive Board, 2006), ineffective supervision in the federal sector can lead to inadequate support and direction to employees in the federal bureaucracy. This underperformance of federal supervisors matters because it could, in turn, affect the overall mission accomplishment of federal agencies.

Supervisors in the federal civil service who are prepared for their leadership role and transition effectively into the supervisory position are able to lead toward mission accomplishment, enhance employee morale, and increase efficiency and productivity (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). The successful transition from individual contributor in the workforce to a supervisory role in the agency helps to ensure that new supervisors can lead people and manage processes in a highly bureaucratic environment. Yet the problem of coping
with the challenges of career transition arises as these individuals move from employee to supervisor in the federal workforce. These challenges of career transition can be minor or significant, private or public, and fleeting or long-lasting. Despite the accumulating knowledge regarding career transitions, more remains to be learned about the supervisory transition process and the factors involved.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. Prior to this study, no formal research had been published on the experiences of individuals transitioning to new supervisory roles in the federal civilian workforce and how these individuals cope personally with their career transitions. The transition to a supervisory role in the federal civil service can be particularly challenging given the reputation of the federal government for resistance to change, high risk aversion, and lack of flexibility (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009, 2010). Robust evidence justifying change is often necessary in the federal government because agency cultures commonly have entrenched attitudes and approaches (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). This qualitative study of career transition utilized the methodology of descriptive phenomenology to examine the research problem, employing individual interviews with new supervisors in a federal agency to explore their views and perspectives about their personal experiences in navigating their transitions to the supervisory role. Knowledge generated from this study was intended to clarify how new supervisors in the federal civil service navigate their transition to their supervisory roles and provide insights for federal agencies and their first-time supervisors on ways to deal with work-related stress and resolve challenges to ensure successful transitions.
This chapter begins with a statement of the problem with evidence from the literature referencing prior research on the study topic to establish the context. The significance of the study is discussed next, outlining why the study topic was worthy of more in-depth examination and drawing connections to potential contributions of the work. The research problem is then delineated, and the research question is identified. Finally, the theoretical framework that serves as a lens for the study is introduced and explained.

Statement of the Problem

This study addressed the problem of coping with transition for new federal supervisors as they experience the change in moving from positions as non-supervisory employees to new supervisory roles. Irrespective of the specific type of change involved, transitions often require ways of coping with unfamiliar environments and unexpected situations (Schlossberg, 2011). When first-time supervisors assume their new roles, they are at risk of being unable to cope with the transition because the demands of the change can overwhelm their ability to adapt (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Fouad & Bynner, 2008). Research indicates that when an individual’s work and career situation meaningfully changes, the effects are often significant for both the individual and for people around them (Herr, Cramer, & Niles, 2003). For organizations, one of the more challenging problems involves employees transitioning into new jobs and struggling to meet expectations of job performance (Roedder & Anderson, 2013). In federal agencies, navigating these supervisory transitions can prove particularly challenging given the situational context of a federal bureaucracy known for resistance to change, high risk aversion, and lack of flexibility (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009, 2010). When individuals in these supervisory positions are unprepared for their roles and do not carry out their jobs
effectively, it can result in serious problems for employee morale and mission accomplishment (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). Previous research by the Learning and Development Roundtable of the Corporate Executive Board (2006) found that nearly 60 percent of new managers underperformed during their first 24 months on the job. Greater knowledge about the resources and strategies used by new supervisors to deal with their career transitions would allow the individuals themselves and their organizations to better ensure more effective transitions into supervisory roles.

Exploring how new federal supervisors transition to their supervisory roles was worthy of examination because the inability to cope with the role transition might likely result in being unsuccessful in the supervisory position, which has a ripple effect on other individuals and the work to be accomplished. Federal supervisors who are successful in their roles are able to meet or exceed job performance expectations by motivating and directing employees to work as a team to accomplish the mission of the agency (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). Effective supervision in federal agencies is demonstrated by mastering the ability to lead people and manage processes in a highly bureaucratic environment (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003). Conversely, ineffective supervision in federal agencies can result in subordinate employees not having adequate support and direction needed to operate in the bureaucracy, which can adversely affect employee morale and job tasks. If federal employees are not successful in their roles, federal agencies’ ability to meet their missions could likely be impaired. In these cases, Americans might not receive vital services and protections, such as national security, law enforcement, food safety, environmental protection, social security, and transportation and infrastructure. If practitioners do not understand how federal supervisors transition to their supervisory roles, they cannot fully understand what new supervisors should do
to better position themselves for success and how organizations might better help these individuals in becoming oriented and prepared to carry out their jobs effectively.

Previous research on new federal supervisors’ transition to their supervisory roles has primarily focused on organizational efforts in selecting and preparing individuals for these leadership positions (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2015; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009, 2010; U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). These studies noted the vital role that supervisors play in the success of federal agencies and acknowledged that these supervisory jobs can be challenging to carry out, particularly in an organizational environment that is rigid, risk-averse, and resistant to change. According to the studies, federal agencies overall were not doing an effective job of selecting and preparing individuals for their demanding new roles as supervisors. Federal agencies often selected supervisors based on technical expertise rather than leadership competencies and often gave low priority to developing these supervisors with essential skills such as communicating effectively, resolving conflict, and addressing poor employee performance, according to the research. The studies recommended that federal agencies improve their efforts in recruiting and identifying employees with supervisory potential and that they prioritize orienting and training these new supervisors to build stronger supervisory skills to carry out these leadership roles successfully.

Previous empirical research and theoretical analysis on new supervisors’ and new managers’ transitions to their leadership roles in the non-government sector has also suggested the need for more attention and further study on these career changes (Dragoni, Park, Soltis, & Forte-Trammell, 2014; Plakhotnik, Rocco, & Roberts, 2011; Rapisarda, Desmond, & Nelson, 2011). In their study of front-line supervisors from around the world, Dragoni et al. (2014)
reported that more empirical research was needed on how to support the development of supervisors during the period of transition. In their analysis of the processes that first-time managers experience in transitioning to management, Plakhotnik et al. (2011) argued that more empirical research was needed on the transition situations for first-time managers that involve carrying out new behaviors. In their study of the process of doctoral students’ development from supervisees into supervisors, Rapisarda et al. (2011) suggested that additional research was needed on the challenges that new supervisors face, the dynamics of developing a supervisory identity, and the support that supervisors need as they continue their leadership journey. To explore further how to support transitioning supervisors, researchers and practitioners alike need to know more about how new supervisors are personally navigating their transitions to new supervisory roles, including the resources these new supervisors use, the actions they take to cope with this change, and the areas that present the biggest challenges to successful transition.

**Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Prior to this study, no formal research had been published on the experiences of individuals transitioning to new supervisory roles in the federal civilian workforce and how these individuals cope personally with their career transitions. A research base did exist regarding the role that effective supervision plays in serving as a catalyst for high organizational performance in federal government agencies (Boyne, 2003; Brewer & Selden, 2000; Fernandez, 2008; Gould-Williams, 2004). It was also clear that new federal supervisors could benefit from effective training and development programs to aid them in their leadership roles by developing supervisory competencies such as communication, team building, and conflict management (Brewer, 2005; Clardy, 2008; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). It was less clear, however, how new supervisors navigate their career transitions to supervisory roles and whether
difficulties in these transitions relate to a lack of knowledge and skills in supervision or rather an inability to cope with change. A review of the literature indicated that researchers had not conducted interviews with new supervisors in the federal civil service to ask these individuals specifically about their personal experiences in coping with their transitions to supervisory roles. Thus, this study explored the personal experiences of new supervisors transitioning to their supervisory roles in a federal agency, including how these individuals have coped with the transition.

In addition, from a theoretical standpoint, another missing perspective in previous research was the notion of approaching the study of supervisory transition using a broadly applicable theoretical framework that could apply to transitions in any context of life. Prior studies of work-related transitions for individuals principally used theoretical frameworks that were developed specifically for analyzing transitions in a work-role or leadership context (Ciampa & Watkins, 1999; Gabarro, 1987; Gilmore, 1988; Hill, 2003; Nicholson, 1984; Watkins, 2003). In this study of supervisory transition, the focus was to use a broadly applicable transition model as a theoretical framework that was developed for personal transitions that can occur in any facet of life, including intrapersonal transitions (e.g., adjusting to retirement), relationship transitions (e.g., entering a marriage), and organizational transitions (e.g., becoming a supervisor). For educators, counselors, and others serving in helping roles, having and using a broadly applicable framework for analyzing all kinds of personal transitions could be particularly beneficial in providing a standardized approach to formulate interventions to assist people in dealing with transitions in their lives.
**Intended Audience**

By exploring the lived experience of new supervisors in their career transition from employee to manager, we can better understand the context and variables that influence both successful and less-than-successful transitions to supervisory roles. For researchers, an exploration of new supervisors’ transitions at a federal agency could help assess the applicability of individuals’ experiences to existing career transition theories and models. Researchers can generate theoretical knowledge and provide practical information to organizational leaders to help them better understand the timing and duration of these types of career transitions, the personal resources that individuals draw upon, the types of support individuals rely on from other people and from organizations, and the strategies that individuals use to cope with these career changes. For individuals who are new to their supervisory role, increased knowledge about the transition from employee to supervisor could assist them in identifying, understanding, and using their personal resources and social support to deal effectively with supervisory challenges that come their way, such as managing multiple processes simultaneously, dealing with difficult subordinates, or tamping down self-doubt about their abilities as supervisors. For federal agencies, job transitions are often a challenging and inescapable aspect of organizational life, so federal agencies can gain insights on possible ways to provide organizational support to new supervisors throughout the transition process, beyond offering standard training on supervisory skills. For the federal government sector as a whole, learning more about the transition of new federal supervisors to their supervisory roles provides the federal government with evidence to support possible changes in regulations and policies to help ensure improved employee performance and enhanced employee engagement in the federal workforce. Therefore,
this study seeks to explore and describe new federal supervisors’ experiences in transitioning to new supervisory roles in a federal government agency.

Significance of the Research Question

Supervisors represent a large pool of management talent in most organizations, and successful supervisors are crucial for organizational success (Derven, 2009). The effective transition of individuals to the supervisor role helps to ensure positive experiences for the new supervisors, their direct reports, and their organizations. Researchers have acknowledged and recognized the cadres of hard-working and dedicated supervisors who serve as true leaders in their organizations (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). Supervisors who are prepared for their role and transition effectively into the position are better poised to drive toward mission accomplishment, enhance employee morale, and increase employee productivity (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001).

According to Risher (2010), the effectiveness of an employee’s immediate supervisor is significant in influencing the level of employee engagement in an organization.

To ensure effective operation of the federal civil service, government agencies need a cadre of supervisors who are fully prepared and capable of overseeing the federal workforce (Brewer, 2005). Each year, scores of federal supervisors make the journey from being an employee to becoming the boss. Of the federal civilian non-postal workforce of about 2.1 million people, 12.2% of the workforce is in supervisory positions, or a total of approximately 256,000 supervisors (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017). Research in the federal sector indicates that supervisory proficiency is a primary predictor of a federal agency’s performance (Brewer, 2005). Supervisors serve as the linchpin between senior management and employees in agencies by communicating agency goals, priorities, and policies and by
monitoring progress and identifying problems that impede performance (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). Given that supervisors are the nexus between agency senior leadership and agency employees, ensuring that these public servants are prepared for their roles is vital to demonstrate to the American public that crucial governmental activities are carried out effectively and efficiently (Brewer, 2005). At an organizational level, the implications of the problem for new supervisors and their agencies clearly establish the significance and relevance for possible new policy formulation and implementation. Considering the standardized legal and regulatory framework in the federal government, human resources laws and regulations in the federal sector influence key aspects of hiring, staffing, training, and evaluating the over 2 million employees in the federal civil service (Gitterman, 2017).

Given the linkage established above between effective supervision and federal agency performance (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010), and the noted significance of transition in peoples’ lives (Anderson et al., 2012; Herr et al., 2003; Roedder & Anderson, 2013), learning more about the context and factors that influence career transition for new federal supervisors provides the federal government with increased opportunities to enhance efficiencies and improve effectiveness in achieving agency missions. This study adds to the literature by providing insights into the lived experiences of individuals transitioning to new supervisory roles in the federal government and how these individuals navigate their transitions. This study also contributes to the inquiry of whether difficulties in these transitions relate to a lack of knowledge and skills in supervision or rather an inability to cope with change. With increased knowledge about how supervisors transition to their supervisory roles, human resources officials and training and development professionals within agencies can serve as social support in assisting individual supervisors with their
transitions and act as change agents in pressing agency senior managers and government policymakers to make needed changes to agency-wide or government-wide policies and regulations governing the selection, orientation, and training of new supervisors. Strong evidence to support change is often needed in the federal government sector because agency cultures typically have entrenched attitudes and approaches that are highly resistant to change (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010).

**Research Problem and Research Question**

The problem of coping with career transition can be significant for first-time supervisors as they try to adjust to their new roles and the accompanying job stress, particularly in a federal bureaucracy known for resistance to change, high risk aversion, and lack of flexibility (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009, 2010). With these transitions, new supervisors need to assess their unique, personal situations; consider what resources are available for them, both personally and professionally; and determine what strategies they should implement to help them cope with this change in their lives (Schlossberg, 2011). In the federal government, supervisors in the various agencies who do not transition effectively to their supervisory positions are not likely to be successful in their leadership roles, and thus federal agencies’ ability to meet their missions is negatively affected. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to new supervisory roles at a federal government agency. No formal research existed in the literature on the experiences of individuals transitioning to new supervisory roles in the federal civil service and how these individuals personally navigate their career transitions. This study sought to fill that gap and add to scholarly understanding of the resources that new federal supervisors rely on and the coping strategies that they use in their career transitions.
The central research question for this study is the following: How do new supervisors at a federal government agency describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role? To further guide the study, four research sub-questions were formulated that align directly with the four key components of the theoretical framework to be used for this study. The four research sub-questions are described below.

- The first sub-question is about the situational aspects of the transition: What conditions exist for new supervisors when transitioning to their supervisory roles? These conditions could include the trigger for the transition, the expected duration of the transition, the amount of control the supervisor has over the transition, and the degree of role change involved.

- The second sub-question is about self: What personal characteristics do new supervisors make use of when transitioning to their supervisory roles? These characteristics could include the supervisor’s age and level of maturity, sense of self-confidence, and level of optimism.

- The third sub-question is about support: What social support do new supervisors rely on when transitioning to their supervisory roles? This support could include significant others, family members, friends, colleagues, mentors, groups, institutions, and communities that can provide emotional support, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback.

- The fourth sub-question is about strategies: What personal coping strategies do new supervisors use when transitioning to their supervisory roles? These strategies could include taking direct action to correct or mitigate a problem in the transition, reframing a problem or negative aspect of the transition by perceiving it in a more positive light, and managing the personal stress associated with the transition.
These four sub-questions aligned directly with the interview protocol used for interviews of the new supervisors who served as study participants in this qualitative study. Although the results of this study are not generalizable to the entire population of supervisors in the federal civil service due to the qualitative design of the study, emergent themes derived from the study participants’ responses to the interview questions could provide valuable insights regarding the experiences of these transitioning supervisors.

**Definition of Key Terminology**

Below is a list of several key terms referenced in this study. This section provides definitions, drawing from other works when appropriate, as a reference to the reader.

**Constructivism** – A research paradigm holding that knowledge and meaning are determined by the interaction between individuals and their world and that researchers should strive to understand these lived experiences directly from the perspectives of the individuals themselves (Golafshani, 2003; Mertens, 2010).

**Coping** – The thoughts and behaviors of an individual used to manage the demands of an unfamiliar, stressful, or challenging situation (Latack & Havlovic, 1992).

**Event** – An incident, occurrence, or action that is disruptive or life altering in that it causes a change in the person’s typical day-to-day routine (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

**Job stress** – An individual’s reactions to aspects or characteristics of the work environment that seem emotionally and physically threatening to the individual (Jamal, 1984).

**Nonevent** – An event that an individual expects to happen but does not materialize (Schlossberg et al., 1995).
**Phenomenology** – A method of research inquiry that seeks to explore a phenomenon from the perspective of those individuals who experience it first-hand and identify the essence of the lived experience (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015).

**Self** – The personal and demographic characteristics of an individual that might affect views and perceptions of a transition, such as socioeconomic status, gender, age, ethnicity, and state of health, as well as the individual’s psychological resources that could influence coping, such as levels of maturity, optimism, and self-confidence (Anderson et al., 2012).

**Situation** – The conditions of an individual’s transition, such as the trigger, timing, control, and expected duration of the transition, the degree of role change involved, previous experience with a similar transition, and the presence of concurrent stress (Anderson et al., 2012).

**Strategies** – The coping mechanisms that an individual uses to negotiate a transition, including taking direct action to correct or mitigate a problem in the transition, reframing a problem or negative aspect of the transition by perceiving it in a more positive light, and managing the personal stress of the transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

**Supervisor** – An individual employed by a federal agency having authority to hire, direct, assign, reward, discipline, transfer, promote, or remove employees (5 U.S.C. § 7103(a)(10), 2016).

**Support** – The external resources that could help an individual navigate a transition, including types of support such as intimate relationships, family members, friends, colleagues, institutions, and communities, as well as functions of support such as emotional support, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (Anderson et al., 2012).

**Transition** – An event or non-event for an individual that results in a change in roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships; an integrative process that involves moving in, moving through,
and moving out of the changes one experiences throughout life (Anderson et al., 2012). In the context of this study, transition is a change from a nonsupervisory role to a supervisory role in an organization.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used for this study is Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) theory of transition. At the heart of Schlossberg’s transition theory are several categories of factors that influence the process of an individual moving through, and adjusting to, a transition in life. Schlossberg’s transition theory was selected for the study because of its grounding in the adult development literature. Schlossberg (1981a) asserted that examining individuals in transition is an effective approach to understanding how adults respond to their environments and the transformations in behavior, relationships, and self-assumptions that occur during periods of adjustment to new circumstances. Thus, as described in detail below, Schlossberg’s framework was an ideal model for the purposes of this study to examine the lived experience of new supervisors in navigating their transitions to supervisory roles in a federal government agency. Given its degree of complexity, the framework provided a comprehensive lens through which to determine categories of factors that influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition. Schlossberg’s framework aligned directly with several aspects of the study, including the research strategy of focusing on the transition of individuals to a new role in an organization.

**Description of the Theoretical Framework**

Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition theory serves as a framework for analyzing an individual’s movement through, and adjustment to, a transition that he or she is undergoing in life, a transition that often results in changed roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships. According to Schlossberg (1981a), a transition in an individual’s life occurs when “an event or
nonevent results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5). An event can be an anticipated or unanticipated change, and a non-event occurs when a change that an individual expects to happen fails to materialize, such as not receiving a job promotion. Under this transition theory, people move through the transition process in three phases: (a) moving in, when individuals are confronted with a transition or change and begin to familiarize themselves with the new system; (b) moving through, when individuals learn to balance new or changed roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships with other aspects of their lives; and (c) moving out, when individuals integrate the change into their lives and consider what is next (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 56).

A key component of Schlossberg’s (2011) transition theory is a model representing four categories of factors that influence the ability of an individual to adjust to a transition in life. Schlossberg argued that, although individuals’ experiences with a transition can differ, a standard framework could be used to understand and describe all individuals in transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995). As shown in figure 1, Schlossberg’s four-part model, sometimes referred to as the “4S” transition system, describes the following four categories of factors that influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition:

- situation, which involves the conditions of the transition, such as the trigger, timing, control, and expected duration of the transition, the degree of role change involved, previous experience with a similar transition, and the presence of concurrent stress;
- self, which involves personal and demographic characteristics of the individual that might affect views and perceptions of life and the transition, such as socioeconomic status, gender,
age, ethnicity, and state of health, as well as the individual’s psychological resources that might influence coping, such as levels of maturity, optimism, and self-confidence;

- **support**, which encompasses the external resources that could help an individual navigate a transition, including types of support such as intimate relationships, family members, networks of friends, colleagues, institutions, and communities, as well as functions of support such as emotional support, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback; and

- **strategies**, which are coping mechanisms that an individual uses to negotiate a transition, including taking direct action to correct or mitigate a problem in the transition, reframing a problem or negative aspect of the transition by perceiving it in a more positive light, and managing the personal stress of the transition (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 62).

According to Schlossberg, an individual’s success in dealing with transition involves balancing assets and liabilities that fall into each of these four categories of factors. In addition, Schlossberg’s model holds that each individual undergoing transition would have a different 4S profile, even for individuals who might be going through the same or similar transition.
Schlossberg first proposed her transition model in a 1981 journal article, “A Model for Analyzing Human Adaptation to Transition,” published in The Counseling Psychologist. In the article, Schlossberg (1981a) introduced the transition model as a framework that could be used to analyze personal “transitions of all kinds – positive and negative, dramatic and ordinary” (p. 3). Schlossberg stated that her goal in developing the model was to identify and categorize the variables that influence the process and outcome of an individual’s transition in any facet of life. Given her academic background and experience in adult development and counseling, Schlossberg believed that such a model could serve as a systematic framework that counselors,
social workers, psychologists, and others in helping roles could use to assist adults in formulating interventions for dealing with transitions in their lives (Anderson et al., 2012). Schlossberg reported that her model drew on the works of several other scholars of adult development, including Lieberman (1975) and Lowenthal and Chiriboga (1975). Schlossberg proposed in the 1981 article that her transition model was “tentative and exploratory, subject to revision as new data emerge” (p. 3). In the 1981 article, Schlossberg identified three categories of variables in the model that influence a transition: the characteristics of the particular transition, the characteristics of the person experiencing the transition, and the characteristics of the environment. Schlossberg expanded on her model in later works (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg, 1984) by referring to these three categories of variables as situation, self, and support, respectively, and adding a fourth category of variables, strategies, to represent the actions that individuals take to cope with the transition. In 2011, Schlossberg further described the four factors as being internal variables (self and strategies) and external variables (situation and support).

**Criticism of the Theoretical Framework**

With the publication of her initial transition framework in 1981, Schlossberg received some criticism. Danish (1981) criticized Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition framework in that it focused on remedial interventions at the time they occur and neglected individual development from education. Insisting that transition is only one component of life-span development, Danish argued that the improvement of coping resources for individuals does not need to wait until challenges arise from specific transitions in life. In her written response to Danish’s criticism, Schlossberg (1981b) acknowledged this observation, and in later writings Schlossberg and her colleagues (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1984; Schlossberg et al., 1995) discussed the
importance of this type of educational intervention and how counselors and others in helping roles can intervene with individuals around various transition points in their lives. Hopson (1981) criticized Schlossberg's (1981a) use of the term 'adaptation' in the original description of the framework as a model of human adaptation of transition. Hopson argued that some possible reactions to transition are non-adaptive in that they are fleeting and merely allow the individual to improvise. Hopson (1981) suggested that 'responses to transition' (p. 37) was more accurate terminology to reflect the range of actual responses possible by an individual. In later writings, Schlossberg decreased emphasis on adaptation and instead described the framework as a model of 'the individual in transition' (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 39; Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 27).

Criticism of Schlossberg's (2011) more developed version of her transition model relates to its degree of complexity, particularly given that each of the 4S factors in the model contains multiple variables (Evans, Forney, Guido, Paton, & Rem, 2010). Evans and colleagues asserted that more research was needed on Schlossberg's transition theory but observed that quantitative studies might likely be difficult to carry out given the complexity of the model and the lack of assessment tools available to evaluate the numerous variables in the model.

Nullification of Theory

This study of supervisory transition in a federal agency focused on transition as an aspect of adult development. Researchers and theorists have generally explored the topic of adult development from four perspectives: the developmental perspective emphasizes the stages of adulthood across a lifespan with specific markers over time and assumes that humans pass through developmental stages, even though these stages are not automatically linked with age;
• the *contextual perspective* views adulthood primarily in relation to experiences within a common setting and background, and emphasizes the everyday happenings in the context of daily life and its environment as affecting the personal experiences and growth of individuals;

• the *life-span perspective* sees adulthood as adaptation leading to unique and varying pathways over the course of life and emphasizes both variation and individuality of these pathways; and

• the *transition perspective* views adulthood as events in individuals’ lives that involve change and refers to *turning points* as those periods of time between two periods of relative stability (Anderson et al., 2012, pp. 4-5).

Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) theory is grounded in the adult development literature with a strong alignment to the transition perspective. Schlossberg argued that individuals continually experience change as they move through life and that examining individuals in transition is an effective approach to understanding the development of adults. This study on transitioning supervisors thus drew from the transition perspective of adult development. The use of Schlossberg’s 4S transition model as a theoretical lens for the study helped fill a gap in the existing academic literature related to individuals who are navigating a career transition to a supervisory role.

**Use of Theoretical Framework in the Study**

The theoretical framework of Schlossberg’s (2011) transition model aligns directly with several aspects of the study, including the selection of study participants, the environmental context, the research paradigm, and the interview protocol. First, given that the theoretical framework focuses specifically on individuals in transition, the selection of study participants...
focused on exploring the experiences of supervisors at the federal government agency who are transitioning to their supervisory role. For this study, the researcher identified new supervisors who had been in their supervisory roles for at least one year but no more than two years.

Second, according to Schlossberg, the 4S model relates to transition that occurs in any context, including intrapersonal transitions, relationship transitions, and organizational transitions. This study involved the transition of employees to new supervisory roles in a workplace setting.

Third, the theoretical framework supports the research paradigm of constructivism that was used for the study. Given that Schlossberg’s model holds that individuals respond differently to a transition, even if their experiences are the same or similar, the constructivist approach supported the notion that knowledge is derived from individuals and their own experiences (Mertens, 2010). Fourth, the four categories of variables in the transition model served as the basis for the interviews with the study participants. The interview protocol linked directly with each of the four categories of factors as outlined in the 4S transition model.

Conclusion

As in other organizational settings, federal government agencies need supervisors who can transition successfully into their roles and help carry out the essential work of the federal government. Ineffective supervisors can result in their employees not having adequate support and direction, which can adversely affect employee morale and job tasks, which in turn could disrupt the ability of federal agencies to carry out their missions in serving and protecting the American people. With the role challenges and related job stress that first-time supervisors can face in transitioning to their new supervisory positions, it is critical to understand the context and factors that influence the ability to cope with these types of transitions. Given the lack of formal research on the experiences of individuals transitioning to new supervisory roles in the federal
civil service and how these individuals cope personally with these career changes, an exploration of the transition of new federal supervisors to their supervisory roles could reveal new knowledge that change agents can leverage in promoting and implementing needed reforms. Human resources officials and training and development professionals could use the knowledge to support first-time supervisors in their career transitions and influence senior agency managers and policymakers for needed changes to policies and regulations dealing with the selection, orientation, and training of new supervisors in federal agencies. This exploration could also shed light on career transitions in organizational cultures similar to those of federal agencies, with the presence of resistance to change, high risk aversion, and lack of flexibility.

Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition model serves as a useful theoretical framework for analyzing a new supervisor’s movement through the transition for a supervisory role because it applies to an individuals’ transition in most any context, such as intrapersonal transitions, relationship transitions, or organizational transitions. Additionally, Schlossberg’s framework supports the transition perspective of adult development theory with a recognition that transformations in behavior, relationships, and self-assumptions often can occur during periods of adjustment to new circumstances in life. Although the model recognizes that transitions in adult lives occur in different ways, even if the individuals have the same or similar experiences, research can potentially uncover patterns that represent a commonality of the new supervisors’ lived experience. Given the comprehensive nature of Schlossberg’s framework, this study can help uncover new understanding of the context and factors influencing the ability of new federal supervisors to cope with their transitions to supervisory roles.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This literature review analyzes and synthesizes a body of research related to individuals’ transition to supervisory roles in organizations. The research presented in this chapter is included because it informed the researcher in preparing to conduct the current study. The review of the literature supported the intent of this study to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. Given that over a quarter of a million individuals hold supervisory positions in the federal civilian non-postal workforce (U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017), the actions of these supervisors can be widely influential for federal agencies in carrying out their missions to serve the American people. Federal supervisors who are successful in their leadership roles are able to meet or exceed their performance expectations by directing and motivating their employees to work as a coordinated team to accomplish the mission of their agency (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). To ensure the effective operation of the federal civil service, each government agency needs a corps of supervisors who are fully prepared and capable of carrying out their roles in leading front-line employees in the federal workforce (Brewer, 2005).

The problem of coping with career transition can be significant for first-time supervisors as they try to adjust to their new roles. Given the situational context of a federal bureaucracy known for resistance to change, high risk aversion, and lack of flexibility, navigating supervisory transitions in federal agencies can prove particularly challenging (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009, 2010). Research by federal agencies and independent researchers indicates that federal agencies overall have not done an effective job of selecting and preparing individuals for their roles as new supervisors (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2015; U. S.
Learning more about the experiences of new federal supervisors and the challenges that these supervisors face in their transitions can help to paint a clearer picture of what new supervisors might do to better position themselves for success and how their employing organizations might better assist these new supervisors in becoming oriented and prepared to carry out their jobs effectively. A review and analysis of the literature expanded knowledge toward answering the central research question of this study: How do new supervisors at a federal government agency describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role?

This chapter summarizes a review and analysis of the relevant literature, first focusing broadly on the organizational context for the study, then exploring the concept of transition within that organizational context, and finally framing this transition within the theoretical lens selected for the study. The first strand of literature addresses supervisory roles in the organizational context of the federal civil service. This topic was relevant to this study because the study participants are new supervisors of a federal government agency and because federal supervisors are so impactful for the organizational performance of the federal government. The second strand of literature examines transition for individuals in life and empirical research related more narrowly to the organizational context of career and work-related transition. The topic of transition was relevant to this study because the research question sought to explore how new supervisors describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role in an organizational context. An exploration of the literature shed light on how transitions in related and other contexts might bear upon the transition of new supervisors to their roles. The third strand of literature focuses on job stress and coping strategies for individuals in work-related contexts. The topics of stress and coping are relevant to this study because the theoretical
framework for this study views transition as a matter of coping and because coping is a response to stressors in life. An exploration of stress and coping in various work-related contexts as reported in the literature provided further insights into how new supervisors cope with the stress of transitioning to their new supervisory roles. This literature review was conducted using Google Scholar, a literature database of journal articles, technical reports, books, theses, and other academically oriented documents, and Northeastern University’s Scholar OneSearch system, which includes citations from over 140 research databases and resources.

Supervision in the Federal Civil Service

The first strand of literature examines the topic of supervision in the federal civil service. The study population for this doctoral study was new supervisors employed by a federal agency of the U.S. government, whom the researcher interviewed to answer the central research question for this study. A review and analysis of the literature on supervision in the federal civil service was relevant to this study because federal supervisors have such an influential role in guiding the organizational performance of the federal government. This section discusses the role of federal supervisors, research on the transition of federal supervisors to supervisory positions, and federal agencies’ efforts to prepare and train their new supervisors for their leadership roles.

The Role of Supervisors in the Federal Sector

Supervisors in the federal civil service have a distinct and vital role: accomplish the organizational goals of their federal agencies by planning, organizing, and monitoring the work of employees assigned to report to them (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). Of the 2.1 million civil servants in the non-postal workforce of the U.S. federal government, supervisors total approximately 256,000, or about 12.2% of the workforce (U. S. Office of Personnel
Management, 2017). In the federal government, a supervisor is defined as an individual employed by a federal agency having authority to hire, direct, assign, reward, discipline, transfer, promote, or remove employees (5 U.S.C. § 7103(a)(10), 2016). In practice, supervisors in federal agencies are those individuals in the organization who are responsible for approving administrative actions (leave requests, time and attendance, training) and preparing and delivering formal employee performance evaluations (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2012). As noted in an independent study, “Because they [supervisors] have direct and frequent contact with employees, first-level supervisors can have a stronger, more immediate impact on employee performance and productivity than higher-level managers” (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010, p. 1). In carrying out their supervisory roles, federal supervisors serve as the critical link between senior management and front-line employees in agencies by communicating agency goals, priorities, and policies and by monitoring progress and identifying problems that impede agency performance (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010).

Supervisors in the federal civil service have a challenging role, having to “ply their trade in the hardscrabble world of public management” (Brewer, 2005, p. 508). These federal supervisors must master a repertoire of capabilities to lead people and manage processes while working in the highly bureaucratic environment of the federal government (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003). Observers of the civil service have noted that the federal supervisory role is a difficult job that continues to become even more demanding (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2015; U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). A study panel of human resources management experts examining the role of federal supervisors reported:
In the 21st Century, first-line supervisors must do more than manage a budget, review work for technical accuracy, and analyze programs. They also must communicate their organization’s vision, lead change, build high-performing work teams, and coach and mentor employees—all while coping with enormous challenges and change. (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003, p. 13)

The U. S. Office of Personnel Management, the federal government’s human resource agency, reported that federal supervisors “are supervising greater numbers of employees, using broader delegations of authority, helping more employees balance work and family demands, responding to increasing demands for customer service, and handling more instances of violence in the workplace” (U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). Previous research has indicated that while federal supervisors often bring technical knowledge to the job, they often lack a full toolbox of managerial competencies and interpersonal skills needed to lead people (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009; U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001).

Research supports the view that effective supervision in the federal civil service is a strong contributor to high organizational performance in federal government agencies (Boyne, 2003; Brewer & Selden, 2000; Fernandez, 2008; Gould-Williams, 2004). Federal supervisors who are prepared for their role and transition effectively into the position are better situated to drive toward mission accomplishment, enhance employee morale, and boost employee productivity (U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). With supervisory personnel serving as the tie between agency senior leadership and agency employees, ensuring that these public servants are fully competent in their roles is vital to demonstrate to the American public that crucial governmental activities are carried out effectively and efficiently (Brewer, 2005). Federal supervisors ensure that the policies and decisions made by Congress and the President
are implemented through the support, services, and information that the federal workforce provides to the American people (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010).

**Research on Federal Supervisory Transition**

Although a body of literature exists for both the theoretical conceptualizations of leadership transition (e.g., Ciampa & Watkins, 1999; Gabarro, 1987; Gilmore, 1988) and empirical research on leaders’ transition to their leadership roles (e.g., Appelbaum & Valero, 2007; Manderscheid & Ardichvili, 2008), no peer-reviewed research had been published specifically on the experiences of individuals transitioning to new supervisory roles in the federal civilian workforce and how these individuals cope personally with their career transitions. A review of the extant literature indicates that researchers have not conducted interviews with new supervisors in the federal civil service to ask these individuals specifically about their personal experiences in coping with their transitions to such supervisory roles. Given this gap in the research literature, researchers lack robust knowledge about how new supervisors navigate their career transitions to supervisory roles and whether difficulties in these transitions relate to a supervisor’s deficiency of skills in supervision or rather an inability to cope with change. In agencies across the federal government, navigating these supervisory transitions can be challenging, especially given the situational context of a federal bureaucracy often acknowledged as being resistant to change, risk-averse, and inflexible (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009).

Previous research on new supervisors’ transition to their supervisory roles in federal government agencies has focused primarily on selecting and preparing individuals for these leadership positions, often identifying deficiencies in agencies’ efforts (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2015; U. S. Merit
In a survey of over 30 agencies looking at supervision in the federal sector, the U. S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) concluded that agencies needed to improve their efforts in identifying employees with supervisory potential and preparing them for these supervisory roles (U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). In a study of the selection, development, and management of first-line supervisors in the federal service, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), an independent organization chartered by the U. S. Congress to improve governance, concluded that federal agencies needed to take action to more adequately prepare and support the leadership cadre of front-line supervisors to succeed in their demanding roles, including exploring better ways to determine the capabilities and performance of supervisors and providing support and tools to assist supervisors in managing human resources (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003). In researching the effectiveness of federal first-line supervisors and how well agencies select, develop, and manage these supervisors, the U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB), an independent agency that serves as the federal government’s guardian of federal merit systems, called for further exploration of efforts that federal agencies could take to assist new supervisors in their transitions, as well as ways to provide career opportunities for those employees who have strong technical skills yet are not well-suited to a supervisory role (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009, 2010). Furthermore, in a study of federal supervisors’ actions related to employee job performance, the U. S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), the congressional watchdog agency, recommended that federal agencies share promising practices in working to ensure that the federal workforce has a well-qualified cadre of supervisors (U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2015).
Training for Federal Supervisors

One of the primary ways that federal agencies attempt to prepare new supervisors in their transitions to supervisory roles is through training and development. The Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004 (2014) directs federal agencies to provide leadership training to individuals in supervisory roles in the civil service. Specifically, the Act requires agencies to deliver training to supervisors within one year of the individual’s initial appointment to a supervisory position and on a periodic basis of at least once every three years on the following four topics: mentoring employees, improving employee job performance, conducting employee performance reviews, and identifying and assisting employees who have problems with job performance. OPM promulgated regulations to federal agencies to carry out the requirements of the Act and suggested that agencies can go beyond the Act’s specific requirements when developing training for their supervisors (Supervisory, Management, and Executive Development, 2009).

Existing research indicates that new federal supervisors can benefit from effective training and development programs to support them in their leadership roles by developing competencies linked to supervisory responsibilities, such as communication, team-building, and conflict management (Brewer, 2005; Clardy, 2008; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010). Adequate training for supervisors was identified as a prominent variable in measuring the organizational performance and effectiveness of agencies, in a study examining the role of front-line supervisors in the federal government (Brewer, 2005). This study concluded that federal agencies should carry out a more concerted effort to recruit, select, train, and retain supervisory talent. A direct connection was delineated between federal agencies’ efforts to conduct supervisory training and the effective and efficient management of agency employees, in a
review of federal training policy (Clardy, 2008). According to this study, each agency should be expected to provide initial training for all new supervisors based on thorough needs assessments and to offer continuing education for these supervisors. In its report on improving first-line supervision of federal employees, MSPB (U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010) found that more than three-quarters of new supervisors in federal agencies did not receive training in rudimentary areas of supervision, such as managing employee performance and providing effective feedback. MSPB concluded that many new federal supervisors lacked the training and development needed to not only supervise their employees effectively but to understand and appreciate agency expectations for individuals in supervisory roles.

Conclusion

Several federal government research and oversight agencies (e.g., U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010; U. S. Office of Personnel Management; 2001) have studied the state of supervision in the federal sector and the readiness of new supervisors to navigate their transitions to new supervisory roles. A deeper understanding of this state of supervision in the federal sector and the organizational context that influences supervisory behavior as reported in the research literature helped the researcher to hone the central research question and the research design for the current study. The existing research paints a convincing picture of continued challenges with the readiness of new supervisors to assume their supervisory roles and the insufficient efforts of federal agencies to assist and prepare these new supervisors for that leadership transition. The federal government requires agencies to provide training to new supervisors on several specific supervisory skills, including mentoring employees, improving employee job performance, conducting employee performance reviews, and identifying and assisting employees who have problems with job performance. Although agencies are required
to provide such training to new supervisors, the question remains as to whether any difficulties in these supervisory transitions relate to a lack of knowledge and skills in supervision or rather an inability to cope with change. Gaining a clearer picture of this phenomenon of supervisory transition would allow for possible solutions to emerge such that new federal supervisors might better position themselves for success in their new roles and their employing agencies might better assist these new supervisors in becoming oriented and prepared to carry out their jobs effectively.

**Career Transition**

While the first strand of the literature review establishes the organizational context for the study, this second strand of literature examines transition for individuals situated within the framework of changes related to work and career. Transitions for individuals within organizations can take many forms. For this study, the focus on career transition is relevant given that the central research question seeks to explore how new supervisors describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role. This exploration of the literature can enlighten us about how transitions in related and other contexts might apply to the transition of supervisors to their new roles.

The literature in this domain generally makes a distinction between the concepts of change and transition (Kralik, Visentin, & Van Loon, 2006; McLean, 2011). Change is viewed as an event or a happening that is external to an individual, such as a new job, while transition is an internal psychological process in response to the change and during which individuals attempt to make sense of and adjust to the change (Bridges, 2004; McLean, 2011). Up until the middle of the twentieth century, adult lives were typically seen as unfolding along a predictable timetable, such as completing school, securing a job, getting married, having children, and so on.
More recently, researchers have begun to recognize a different view of adult life that acknowledges periods of stability and instability (Butler, 2005). In the context of career transition, a change for an individual can occur either when there is *task change*, which is a shift from one set of tasks to another set of tasks while in the same job; *position change*, which is a shift in jobs with the same or different employer but with no significant difference in job duties; or *occupational change*, which is a shift from one set of job duties to another dissimilar set of job duties, often in a new setting (Heppner, 1998, p. 137).

A review of the studies in the existing literature directly exploring supervisory transition revealed that new supervisors and new managers often have misconceptions about their new role and unrealistic expectations about their job performance (Dragoni et al., 2014; Plakhotnik et al., 2011; Rapisarda et al., 2011). Although first-time managers often expect that their new role will provide them with more autonomy, authority, and placidity, these new managers instead often experience less of all three (Plakhotnik et al., 2011). This research on supervisory transition hints that, to be successful in transitioning to their new role, new supervisors need to (a) identify and establish a supervisory style, (b) form strong working relationships with their direct reports, and (c) develop supervisory skills focused on employee growth such as of modeling leadership behaviors and providing useful feedback to subordinates (Rapisarda et al., 2011). Recent research also suggests that transitioning supervisors learn their new role more quickly when their boss frequently models effective leadership behaviors and imparts a large amount of relevant information about the role to the new supervisor (Dragoni et al., 2014).

Although there is limited existing research on personal experiences of supervisory transition, particularly in the context of the federal civil service, a review of the literature on the topic of career transition revealed a more significant body of research focused on transition
models, with *model* defined as a simplified, presumptive representation of some aspect of reality that consists of explicitly defined concepts and that often shows how different factors are connected (Williams & Chesterman, 2014). Examining these models can allow for the identification of patterns or themes across their respective sources that might be on a par with, and apply to, transitions of supervisors to new supervisory roles. In this vein, there are two subsets of relevant transition models prevalent in the literature. One set of transition models was designed to explain transitions in any facet of an individual’s life and consequently are applicable to transitions in career and work-related contexts. The other set of transition models was designed specifically to explain career transition, including transitions to leadership and managerial roles. The overall transition experience as shown in these dozen models has been conceptualized in different ways, yet all the identified models are grounded in empirical research and theoretical analysis. Table 1 presents an alphabetical summary of these two subsets of models on individual transition by showing each model under the associated level of system (i.e., transitions in all facets of life versus transitions in career and work-related contexts). The remainder of the discussion of this strand of literature will examine these transition models in further detail to uncover information that could be applicable to the phenomenon of supervisory transition.
Models for Individual Transitions in Life

The first set of transition models are those frameworks predominant in the literature that were developed to describe the transition of individuals in any facet of life. As with Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition theory, which is the selected theoretical framework for this doctoral research, these transition models can be applied in work-related settings, such as the transition from employee to supervisor. The inclusion of these transition models in this literature review provides a multidimensional view of the perspectives on transition that is instructive in exploring the phenomenon of supervisory transition. The six models included in this set are van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage, Hopson and Adams’s (1976) transition curve, Bridges’ (1980) transition model, Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition theory, Moos and Schaefer’s (1986) model of life crises and transitions, and Hudson’s (1991) cycle of renewal. Appendix A provides a chronological overview of the six models, including the bases of model development, descriptions of the models, and examples of empirical research and theoretical analyses using the models.
A comparative and contrastive analysis of the six models reveals insights that could be applicable to the phenomenon of supervisory transition. These six models generally depict transition as both stages of a process and factors that influence the transition. Although the stages of transition in these models are depicted in different and sometimes complex ways, all the models in simple terms follow a process-oriented pattern of three key elements: (a) a change to the status quo, (b) efforts to adjust to the change, and (c) assimilation to the new reality. Some of the models describe the transition process as linear (e.g., Hopson & Adams, 1976; Moos & Schaefer, 1986) while another portrays the process as circular (e.g., Hudson, 1991). The various factors in the models shown as influencing the transition include the individuals’ emotions (e.g., Hopson & Adams, 1976), personal characteristics (e.g., Schlossberg, 1981a), personal skills (e.g., Moos & Schaefer, 1986), new perceptions and awareness (e.g., Bridges, 1980; Van Gennep, 1960), available resources (e.g., Hudson, 1991), environmental factors (e.g., Schlossberg, 1981a), strategies and actions (e.g., Schlossberg, 1981a), and outcomes (e.g., Moos & Schaefer, 1986).

From a broad perspective, in addition to examining the process and factors that influence transition for individuals, it is beneficial to consider the summative characterization of each of these six transition models and how these characterizations might relate to the phenomenon of supervisory transition. Each of these six transition models published in the literature can be summarized as follows.

- Van Gennep (1960) viewed transition as a matter of passage.
- Bridges (1980) saw transition as a matter of letting go.
- Schlossberg (1981a) viewed transition as a matter of coping.
• Moos and Schaeffer (1986) conceived transition as a matter of surviving a crisis.

• Hudson (1991) considered transition as a matter of assumptions.

It was instructive to consider through this doctoral study how, if at all, the new supervisors’
descriptions of their transition experiences might align with one or more of these summative
characterizations of these existing transition models.

Models of Transition for Individuals in Career or Work-Related Contexts

In addition to analyzing transition models that apply to any facet of life, the next set of
transition models in this strand of the literature review are those frameworks predominant in the
literature that were explicitly developed to describe the transition of individuals in career or
work-related contexts. These more specific models focus on how individuals in transition think
and behave in the context of work, career, or organization. Because the focus of the current
study involves transition to a supervisory role in a workplace setting, the inclusion of these
career and work-related transition models in this literature review offers relevant contextual
information for further analysis and possible applicability in answering the central research
question for this study. Some of the models in this category are labeled as career transition
models (e.g., Nicholson, 1984) because they can be applied across occupations and work roles
while other models are characterized as leadership transition models (e.g., Gabarro, 1987)
because they deal directly with individuals’ transition to leadership or managerial roles. The six
models included in this set are Nicholson’s (1984) career transition cycle, Gabarro’s (1987)
leadership transition model, Gilmore’s (1988) framework of leadership transition, Hill’s (1992)
process of becoming a manager, Ciampa and Watkins’ (1999) leader transition framework, and
Watkins’ (2003) leadership transition strategies. Appendix B provides a chronological overview
of these six models, including the bases of model development, descriptions of the models, and examples of empirical research and theoretical analyses using the models.

A comparative and contrastive analysis of the six additional models reveals insights that could be applicable to supervisory transitions. As with the first set of transition models discussed previously in this chapter, this second set of models also present transition as both stages of a process and factors that influence the transition. Although the stages of career transition in these six models are depicted in different ways, all the models likewise follow a process-oriented pattern of three key elements: (a) a change to the status quo, (b) efforts to adjust to the change, and (c) assimilation to the new reality. Some of these models depict the transition process as linear (e.g., Ciampa & Watkins, 1999; Gabarro, 1987) while another shows the process as circular (e.g., Nicholson, 1984). One of the models (Nicholson, 1984) explicitly describes the transition process as recursive, meaning that an individual can be in one or more transition cycles at any point in time. Likewise as with the six broader models of individual transition discussed earlier in this chapter, the various factors in these six models shown as influencing career transition include the individuals’ emotions (e.g., Nicholson, 1984), personal characteristics (e.g., Nicholson, 1984), personal skills (e.g., Hill, 1992), new perceptions and awareness (e.g., Gabarro, 1987; Hill, 1992), available resources (e.g., Gilmore, 1988), environmental factors (e.g., Nicholson, 1984), strategies and actions (e.g., Gilmore, 1988; Watkins, 2003), and outcomes (e.g., Gabarro, 1987).

From a general standpoint, in addition to examining the process and factors that influence transition for individuals, it is also instructive to consider the summative characterization of each of these six transition models and how these characterizations might relate to the phenomenon of
supervisory transition. Each of these six transition models presented in the literature can be summarized as follows.

- Gilmore (1988) conceptualized transition as a matter of decision making.
- Watkins (2003) considered transition to be a matter of adding value.

It was illuminative to consider through this doctoral study how, if at all, the new supervisors’ descriptions of their transition experiences might align with one or more of these summative characterizations of these published transition models.

**Conclusion**

A review of the literature indicates that transition for individuals has been conceptualized in numerous ways. An analysis of a range of approaches allows us to view transition theory from multiple perspectives and sort out what might be key commonalities in transitions and how these insights might relate specifically to the transition of new supervisors to their new supervisory roles. Some researchers have focused primarily on identifying the *stages* of the transition process while others have focused chiefly on the *factors* that influence a transition. Several models of transition discuss both a process through which people pass as well as personal and situational factors that affect the outcome. This review of the literature and an analysis of the identified transition models allowed for the selection of Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition theory as a theoretical framework that could encompass both the stages of the transition process for new supervisors as well as the factors that influence the transition to a new
supervisory role. Schlossberg’s model also aligns with the transition perspective of adult development theory in recognizing that transformations in behavior, relationships, and self-assumptions often can occur during periods of adjustment to new circumstances in a person’s life.

**Stress and Coping in Work-Related Contexts**

The third strand of literature looks at stress and coping for individuals in work-related contexts. The topics of stress and coping are relevant to this study because the theoretical framework for this study considers transition as a matter of coping and because coping is a response to stressors in life. Of the dozen transition models discussed in the second strand of the literature review, this doctoral study is framed by Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition theory, which addresses the factors that influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition in life, which can include the transition to a supervisory role in an organization. One subset of research in this strand addresses various aspects of stressors that affect individuals in work-related roles, often referred to as job stress. Job stressors are relevant to include in this literature review because they serve as the basis for coping strategies in a work environment, and a review of the literature on job stressors can uncover possible similarities with the unfamiliar, stressful, and challenging situations that new federal supervisors face in their supervisory transitions. The second subset of research addresses the coping strategies that individuals use in work-related roles in response to job stress. An exploration of coping in various work-related contexts as reported in the literature can provide additional insights into how new supervisors cope with the demands of transitioning to their new supervisory roles.
Elements of Job-Related Stress

Understanding the essential elements of job stress is necessary given that coping strategies are in response to work-related demands and challenges that individuals regularly face on the job (Montero-Marin, Prado-Abril, Demarzo, Gascon, & García-Campayo, 2014). A review of the first subset of the literature reveals that researchers have conceptualized and examined the topic of job stress in varying ways, including theoretical models of work-related stress. Categories of job stress that emerged from analysis and synthesis of identified studies include job-intrinsic stressors, role-related job stress, career development job stress, work relationships and job stress, and organizational-focused job stress.

Theories of stress. Stress can be viewed as an individual’s perceptions of the demands and challenges of a particular situation or circumstance (Ganster & Rosen, 2013). Lazarus (1966) proposed one of the most influential theories of psychosocial stress, which is often referred to as the transactional perspective. This transactional definition suggests that stress is a function of the interaction between an individual and the environment, meaning that stress does not reside solely in the person nor the environment (Lazarus, 1966). Applying the concept of psychosocial stress to a work-related environment, Jamal (1984) defined job stress as “an individual’s reactions to work environment characteristics that appear emotionally and physically threatening to the individual” (p. 225). Karasek and Theorell (1992) proposed that job stress can be viewed as work-related responsibilities and situations that exceed an individual’s ability to cope. In addition, researchers sometimes use the term eustress to refer to the positive aspects of stress that enable individuals to tackle challenges that confront them (Kung & Chan, 2014).

Models of work stress. From the mid-1970s through the early 1980s, several scholars developed models to describe and outline the various aspects of job stress (Cooper & Marshall,
One of the most frequently cited models of work-related stress in the academic literature is a five-category model developed by Cooper and Marshall (1976). These two scholars categorized the sources of stress at work as

- **intrinsic to the job**, which includes workload, time pressures, and physical working conditions;
- **role within the organization**, which involves role ambiguity and role conflict;
- **career development**, which includes overpromotion, underpromotion, and lack of job security;
- **relationships at work**, which entails the interactions that occur with the supervisor, subordinates, and peers; and
- **organizational structure and climate**, which includes organizational politics and a lack of participation in decision making (Cooper & Marshall, 1976, p. 12).

The Cooper and Marshall model has served as the framework for literature reviews (e.g., Finney, Stergiopoulos, Hensel, Bonato, & Dewa, 2013) and the basis of several empirical studies exploring issues related to job stress (e.g., Chan, Lai, Ko, & Boey, 2000; Johnson, Cooper, Cartwright, Donald, Taylor, & Millet, 2005; Motowidlo, Packard, & Manning, 1986). In these empirical studies, the Cooper and Marshall model was found to be useful for articulating categories of job stress for individuals. For presentation purposes, the following section summarizes the existing research on job stress under these five categories, with particular reference to the domain of supervisory transition.

**Job-intrinsic stressors.** During the transition to a supervisor role, new supervisors in organizations could experience stress that is intrinsic to the job, such as high workload and
intense time pressures. In the literature, work overload and task demands were found to be significant factors in the level of employee job stress for a variety of jobs, including supervisory positions (Chan et al., 2000; Erera-Weatherly, 1996; Hart & Warren, 2015; Hu & Cheng, 2010; Jou, Kuo, & Tang, 2013; Ramirez, Graham, Richards, Gregory, & Cull, 1996; Wan, 2013). A lack of necessary resources to perform the job optimally was also shown to be a huge stressor for individuals (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001; Ramirez et al., 1996; Summerlin, Oehme, Stern, & Valentine, 2010). In addition, existing research indicates that there is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and job stress in a wide range of jobs and occupations (Chen, Lin, Wang, & Hou, 2009; Hawe, Tuck, Manthei, Adair, & Moore, 2000; Stanton, Bachiochi, Robie, Perez, & Smith, 2002). Furthermore, the physical environment of the workplace and safety issues on the job were the major stressors for some workers (Moon & Maxwell, 2004; Wong, Chen, Yu, Lin, & Cooper, 2002). Although some stressors might be common to all jobs, work-related stressors can vary by type and level of the position (Ramirez et al., 1996).

**Role-related job stress.** New supervisors could experience challenges in dealing with role-related job stress, including role ambiguity and role conflict. Role ambiguity occurs when an individual lacks clear information about the specific position, and role conflict occurs when an individual perceives opposing expectations in carrying out the responsibilities of the job (Schmidt, Roesler, Kusserow, & Rau, 2014). A review of the recent literature shows that role ambiguity and role conflict were key contributors to job stress, including for supervisory positions (Soltani, Hajatpour, Khorram, & Nejati, 2013; Teh, Yong, & Lin, 2014). Earlier studies indicated that role conflict was associated with higher levels of emotional stress on the job (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993: Gil-Monte & Peiró, 1998) but that role ambiguity had not led to
an increased level of job stress (Allard, Wortley, & Stewart, 2003). Also, both managers and employees in smaller organizations tend to have broadly defined job roles and are more likely to be in jobs that require a diverse set of skills (Buultjens and Orme, 2002; Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989).

**Career development job stress.** New supervisors could also experience job stress related to career development issues, such as being promoted at a time perceived to be too soon or too late. Previous research has reported mixed results in studying the relationship between years of work experience and levels of job stress (Choi & Koh, 2015; Clunies-Ross, Little, & Kienhuis, 2008; Han, Kim, & Won, 2007). In addition, employees in small and medium-sized organizations were more likely to experience poor promotion opportunities compared to employees in large organizations, who were more likely to experience less job autonomy (Lai, Saridakis, & Blackburn, 2015). Although the lack of opportunity for advancement and the lack of recognition for high job performance can be major job stressors for workers (Pienaar & Rothmann, 2006), this issue is less likely to be of concern to new supervisors given their recent promotion to the supervisory role. In addition, although job security can be a significant job stressor to those individuals working in market-oriented systems (Shin & Jung, 2014), new supervisors employed in the federal civil service may or may not experience such stress depending on the status of Congressional appropriations and potential downsizing targeted for particular federal agencies (Baumer & Van Horn, 2014).

**Work relationships and job stress.** New supervisors could also find that their working relationships with supervisors, subordinates, and peers are primary sources of job stress. Research has supported the notion that strong supervisory support and collaborative working relationships with co-workers are associated with lower levels of job stress (AbuAlRub, 2004;
Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2002). Earlier research had indicated that supportive supervisory and coworker relationships could help to cushion job stress for employees (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993). Individuals who are new to supervisory positions can have challenges in their working relationships, particularly in attempting to establish a supervisory style, managing multiple processes with numerous subordinates, and dealing with poor performing employees (Gazzola, De Stefano, Thériault, & Audet, 2013).

### Organization-focused job stressors

New supervisors could likewise experience challenges around organization-focused job stressors, such as office politics or a lack of participation in decision making. Organizational politics can be a significant job stressor for workers, particularly when politics directly affects decisions in the organization rather than a reliance on data-driven determinations or the actual performance of individuals and teams (Lee-Larson, 2004). Workplace politics often involves self-serving behavior that attempts to influence organizational decision making (Yen, 2015). Although politics in the workplace can be a significant job stressor for employees, workplace politics can lead to improved job performance (Kumari, Joshi, & Pandey, 2014). Researchers have also found that participation in decision making on the job is associated with lower levels of job-related stress (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013).

### Coping Strategies in Work-Related Contexts

A review of the literature identified another subset of related research referencing the aspects of coping strategies used by individuals in response to stressors in a work-related context. Given that the theoretical framework for this study, namely Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition theory, views transition as a matter of coping, an exploration of work-related coping strategies in the literature can provide context for addressing the central research question for this
study on supervisory transition. Coping can be defined as the thoughts and behaviors of an individual that are used to manage the demands of an unfamiliar, stressful, or challenging situation (Latack & Havlovic, 1992). Considering that supervisors are the target population for this study, one part of this research focused specifically on coping strategies of individuals in supervisory roles (Hu & Cheng, 2010; Erera-Weatherley, 1996; Wan, 2013). In addition, to gain insights on possible coping strategies that new supervisors might use, it was helpful to review and analyze the coping strategies used by other types of workers. Thus, another part of this research focused on coping strategies of workers in various occupations and industries (Carton & Fruchart, 2014; Deery, Iverson, & Walsh, 2010; Kramen-Kahn, Hansen, & Deleon, 1998; Law, Pearce, & Woods, 1995; Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Pisarski, Bohle, & Callan, 1998; Roach, 2003).

Categories that emerged from analysis and synthesis of these studies include (a) common types of coping strategies, (b) effectiveness of coping strategies, (c) supervisor versus employee coping strategies, and (d) researchers’ recommended actions for organizations about coping strategies.

Common types of coping strategies. Over many years in the academic literature (Hall, 1972; Latack, 1984; Lazarus, 1966; Kahn et al., 1964; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978), three broad categories of coping efforts have been identified, which Schlossberg (1981a) incorporated into her transition theory. First are control-oriented strategies, which occur when an individual proactively takes action by attempting to change the stressor situation directly or by trying to change the individual’s relationship to the situation. For example, if an employee is experiencing stress caused by a conflict with co-workers, the person might initiate a meeting with a supervisor to obtain support in trying to resolve the conflict. Second are escape-oriented strategies, which occur when an individual cognitively reevaluates the stressor situation so that the situation does not seem so upsetting or worrying, a process sometimes called cognitive
reappraisal (Troy, Shallcross, & Mauss, 2013). For example, the employee experiencing stress caused by a conflict with co-workers could reconceptualize the stressor situation as one in which the co-workers are attempting to help the employee in some way. Third are manage-oriented strategies, which occur when an individual attempts to change the symptoms of stress that an individual is experiencing with the stressor situation. For example, the employee experiencing stress caused by a conflict with co-workers could engage in a physical exercise or meditation to manage the level of stress.

**Effectiveness of coping strategies.** New supervisors and their employing organizations also need to consider the effectiveness of the coping strategies used by these transitioning leaders. A few studies from the mid- to late 1990s looked at the efficacy of job-related coping strategies (Kramen-Kahn et al., 1998; Pisarski et al., 1998), including for individuals in supervisory roles (Erera-Weatherley, 1996). For example, interviews with supervisors at local public welfare offices indicated that effective coping strategies included prioritizing policies, seeking emotional support, compartmentalizing work and home, and taking time off, while ineffective coping strategies for these supervisors included lowering expectations, postponing or avoiding risky decisions, changing personal values, and suppressing emotions and thoughts (Erera-Weatherly, 1996). Research indicates that the choice of coping strategies can influence the health and well-being of workers (Pisarski et al., 1998). For instance, emotionally expressive coping increased support from family members whereas disengagement coping strategies, such as avoiding thinking about the stressful situation or withdrawing socially, tended to produce increased levels of both physical and psychological symptoms (Pisarski et al., 1998). In short, the effectiveness of various coping strategies is key to ensuring a result that is highly beneficial
for individuals who are experiencing considerable work-related stress or undergoing a major job transition (Kramen-Kahn et al., 1998).

**Supervisor versus employee coping strategies.** Based on the existing literature, supervisors sometimes used different work-related coping strategies compared with those strategies used by employees in general (Deery et al., 2010; Hu & Cheng, 2010; Law et al., 1995; Wan, 2013). One of the top coping strategies of employees was to approach the supervisor for support (Law et al., 1995). Employees facing high work-related strain and emotional exhaustion on the job turned more often to supervisors for support compared to social support from co-workers or family (Deery et al., 2010). Conversely, only a small number of supervisors referenced turning to a supervisor for support (Wan, 2013). This difference as reported in the literature could indicate that while front-line employees might be open to reaching out to their supervisors for assistance in addressing job-related stressors, individuals who serve in supervisory positions might be less inclined to ask their superior for that type of support. In a study of hotel industry supervisors (Hu & Cheng, 2010), direct action, which involves proactively trying to change the stressful situation, was the most common coping strategy used by the supervisors and avoidance was the least used coping strategy. Although a few prior studies have directed attention specifically on the coping strategies of individuals serving in supervisory positions (Erera-Weatherley, 1996; Hu & Cheng, 2010; Wan, 2013), no peer-reviewed research has focused directly on the job-related coping strategies of new supervisors.

**Researchers’ recommended actions for organizations.** Prior studies that explored work-related coping strategies (Deery et al., 2010; Gazzola et al., 2013; Law et al., 1995; Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Wan, 2013) concluded that the employing organizations should take a more proactive role in assisting their employees to use coping strategies for job-related stressors,
such as providing training and management support. For example, new supervisors could benefit from organizational support throughout the transition process given that new supervisors can have difficulties adjusting to their supervisory roles (Gazzola et al., 2013). Employers could train individuals in new roles on work-related stress and ways to manage the stress and better support these individuals in coping with job stress by providing prompt and effective communication and showing concern through reassurance (Paquette & Rieg, 2016). Also, senior management of employing organizations could apply enterprise-wide strategies to help employees throughout the organization in coping with job-related stress (Law et al., 1995). In addition, lower-level managers and supervisors in organizations could help reduce employees’ work-related strain through informal procedures that provided flexibility in employee scheduling (Deery et al., 2010). Moreover, management could take hands-on measures to help supervisors and other employees avoid and reduce job-related stress, including frequent surveying of employees on job attitudes, regular training sessions on stress and coping strategies, and encouragement to seek assistance from the company when employees experience stress (Wan, 2013).

**Conclusion**

An analysis of the literature on stress and coping in work-related contexts reveals evidence in a wide range of situations and circumstances that could be instructive for the study of supervisory transition. Job stressors revealed in the literature include work overload, time pressures, poor physical conditions, role ambiguity, role conflict, poor working relationships, and organizational politics. Coping efforts revealed in the literature include prioritization of workload, social and emotional support, compartmentalizing work and home, physical exercise, meditation, taking time off, and reconceptualization of job stressors in a positive way. Still,
extant research on stress and coping for individuals in supervisory positions is much less extensive, especially for people in new supervisory roles. For first-time supervisors, establishing a supervisory presence might indeed be a challenging and stressful situation that requires a deliberate structuring of meaning.

**Summary**

This literature review informed the researcher toward conducting the current study and answering the central research question focusing on the lived experiences of new supervisors at a federal government agency. Surveying the literature allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of what related phenomena have already been studied, what has already been learned, and where gaps in current knowledge exist. With previous research indicating that federal supervisors contribute to high organizational performance in the federal civil service, these supervisors can benefit from optimal conditions and circumstances when undergoing their transitions to supervisory positions. According to the prior research cited in this chapter, federal agencies have often underperformed in assisting and preparing these new supervisors for their crucial leadership roles. Given the challenges that new federal supervisors face in the transition to their new leadership roles, gaining an increased understanding of their lived experiences can help in identifying possible ways to aid new federal supervisors and their employing agencies during this process of supervisory transition. Additional evidence can be gathered on what new supervisors might do to better position themselves for success in their new roles and how their employing agencies might better orient and prepare these new supervisors to carry out their jobs effectively. In addition, both scholars and practitioners can learn whether any difficulties that the new supervisors face in their transitions relate to a supervisor’s deficiency of skills in supervision or rather an inability to cope with change.
A review and analysis of the evidence across the existing literature suggest that the journey of new federal supervisors from non-supervisory employees to their new supervisory roles likely follows a process of transition and involves various personal and environmental factors in the transition. As shown in the dozen models of individual transition included in this literature review, the process of transition typically follows a general pattern of three key elements: (a) a change to the status quo, (b) efforts to adjust to the change, and (c) assimilation to the new reality. The factors in the models shown as influencing a transition could include an individual’s emotions, personal characteristics, personal skills, new perceptions and awareness, available support and resources, environmental factors, strategies and actions, and outcomes. This review and analysis of the transition models in the literature also allowed for the selection of one of the models, namely Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition theory, to serve as the theoretical framework for the current study. Schlossberg’s transition theory was selected for the study because of its grounding in the adult development literature and the recognition that transformations in behavior, relationships, and self-assumptions often can occur during periods of adjustment to new circumstances in a person’s life.

In addition, when undergoing the transition to their new roles, new supervisors can experience multiple levels and types of job stress and apply coping strategies in response to these job stressors. Although researchers have undertaken studies of work-related stressors and coping mechanisms in varying situations and circumstances, as discussed in this chapter, less is known about the job stressors that new supervisors experience and the coping strategies that these supervisors use in their supervisory transitions. Albeit some job stressors and coping strategies might be common across most jobs, further examination of supervisory transition is needed to
determine how these job stressors and coping efforts might unfold for first-time supervisors
navigating their journey to the supervisory role.

To summarize, no peer-reviewed research has been published specifically on the
experiences of individuals transitioning to new supervisory roles in the federal civilian workforce
and how these individuals cope personally with their career transitions. A review of the extant
literature indicates that researchers have not conducted interviews with new supervisors in the
federal civil service to ask these individuals specifically about their personal experiences in
coping with their transitions to such supervisory roles. Considering the overall landscape of the
existing literature on the circumstances and efforts of new federal supervisors to navigate their
transitions, interviewing individuals who have recently transitioned into supervisory roles at a
federal agency could reveal critical information that may well assist new federal supervisors in
making the transition to becoming the boss.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The phenomenon of supervisory transition for new supervisors in the federal civil service was demonstrably ripe for further examination, as summarized in Chapter 1. As new federal supervisors experience the change in moving from non-supervisory positions to new supervisory roles in their employing agencies, the problem of coping with this supervisory transition can be palpable. No matter the specific type of change involved, transitions for individuals often require ways of coping with unfamiliar environments and unexpected situations (Schlossberg, 2011). When individuals in these supervisory positions are unprepared for their roles and do not carry out their jobs effectively, it can lead to serious problems for employee morale and mission accomplishment in their agencies (U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001).

A review of the existing literature as summarized in Chapter 2 revealed that researchers have conceptualized career transition for individuals in numerous ways, with models often presenting transition as both a process through which people pass in addition to various personal and environmental factors that affect the outcome. Although the literature on stress and coping for individuals in work situations is robust, existing research on job stressors and coping efforts of individuals in supervisory roles is much less abundant, particularly for individuals in new supervisory roles. Also, studies undertaken by federal government research and oversight agencies (e.g., U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2010; U. S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001) depict a backdrop of continued challenges with the readiness of new federal supervisors to assume their supervisory roles and unexceptional efforts of federal agencies to assist and prepare these new supervisors for the transition. A review and analysis of the extant literature confirmed a gap in the research about how new supervisors navigate their career
transitions to supervisory roles and whether difficulties in these transitions relate to a supervisor’s deficiency of skills in supervision or rather an inability to cope with change.

Given the identified gap in the research, this study aimed to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to new supervisory roles at a federal government agency. Understanding the essence of the experience of becoming a new supervisor at a federal government agency has the potential to assist agency officials and individual supervisors better devise and implement appropriate strategies to navigate the challenges of supervisory transition. To obtain a rich description of the transition experience, the researcher used the following central research question for the study: How do new supervisors at a federal government agency describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role?

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the research design and methodology that the researcher used to perform this study. First, a description of qualitative inquiry and justification for the selection of qualitative research are offered. This description includes insights into the guiding research paradigm for the study and the research tradition of the chosen qualitative approach. Next, the chapter includes a discussion of the recruitment and selection of study participants and the identification of the chosen research site. In addition, the procedures that were used to collect and analyze the data are outlined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of measures that the researcher took to ensure the integrity of the qualitative research, including ethical considerations, credibility, transferability, confirmability, transparency, and an acknowledgment of the limitations of the study.
Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative Inquiry

To perform this study, the researcher employed a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative inquiry refers to a broad group of empirical procedures designed to describe and interpret the experiences of study participants in a context-specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). The overall objective of a qualitative study is to foster a deep understanding of how a population of individuals experienced a given phenomenon ( Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Qualitative research seeks to explore an identified phenomenon and to delve into everyone’s experience from the perspectives of the participants themselves (Creswell, 2009). The qualitative approach explores a topic or issue primarily through open-ended questions and narrative descriptions, generating data that is rich and descriptive (Creswell, 2009). From descriptions of those individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under study, the researcher identifies the common themes representing that experience (Merriam, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Through an exploration of the personal stories of the study participants, the use of a qualitative methodology attempts to expose meaning rather than impose it (Bryman, Bresnen, Beardsworth, & Keil, 1988).

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative inquiry typically involves gathering narrative descriptions and interpretations of study participants’ experiences as the measurement system rather than statistical analysis of collected numerical data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Qualitative research can be viewed as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). Whereas researchers employing a quantitative approach strive for prediction, causation, and generalization of study findings, researchers using a qualitative approach pursue exploration,
understanding, and extrapolation of study results to similar situations (Golafshani, 2003). The strength of qualitative inquiry is derived from “its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than on numbers” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22). A small sample size is typically used in qualitative research because this approach allows the researcher to gather a rich and deep set of information for each study participant (Creswell, 2015). Under a qualitative research approach, the researcher is the primary mechanism for data collection and should be responsive to participants’ needs and concerns as well as aware of his or her own personal subjectivity (Merriam, 2002).

In qualitative inquiry, the general purpose of the research question is to capture a variety of participants’ views and perspectives and then analyze and synthesize the collected data to gain a thorough understanding of the experience. According to Creswell (2009), how and what questions in research are best answered through the application of qualitative inquiry. The central research question for this study focused on how new supervisors describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role in a federal government agency. The research sub-questions used to further guide this study focused on the characteristics and circumstances surrounding these transitional experiences of new supervisors. Using a qualitative approach with these research questions allowed the researcher to learn about the views and perspectives of individuals through an exploration of their lived experiences in navigating the transition to supervisory roles in a federal government agency.

For this study of supervisory transition, the researcher selected qualitative inquiry as the most appropriate research design for several reasons. First, qualitative inquiry provides for an in-depth, holistic exploration of a phenomenon, allowing the researcher to explore in detail how the study participants perceive their experiences (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Second, a
qualitative methodology is appropriately suited for obtaining complex descriptions of how people experience a given issue or topic, including beliefs, opinions, emotions, behaviors, and relationships (Creswell, 2013). Third, qualitative inquiry provides flexibility in exploring a topic or issue and does not limit the views and perspectives of the study participants, thus allowing for the introduction of new or related issues to emerge (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, a qualitative approach typically involves collecting data in the field at the site where participants contextually experience the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2009).

Research Paradigm

This study was guided by the research paradigm of constructivism, which holds that knowledge and meaning are determined by the interaction between individuals and their world (Creswell, 2013). A paradigm can be defined as a “set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provides a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organized study of that world” (Filstead, 1979, p. 34). Unlike a positivist paradigm, which assumes the existence of an objective reality, a constructivist paradigm contends that reality is created in the mind of the study participant (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). According to the constructivist perspective, reality is subjective and is “influenced by the context of the situation, namely the individual’s experience and perceptions, the social environment, and the interaction between the individual and the researcher” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 130). The constructivist paradigm holds that, rather than the existence of one exact reality, knowledge is constructed through the existence of multiple realities as determined by individual persons (Golafshani, 2003). This paradigm facilitates the answering of the research questions in a study by allowing study participants to describe their personal experiences, within their own realities, and share insights on their perspectives and decision-making processes (Ponterotto, 2005). In employing a constructivist
paradigm, a researcher typically relies on a qualitative methodology or a mixed methods approach through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

An essential characteristic of constructivist thinking is the significance of the interaction between the researcher and the study participant (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). Under the paradigm of constructivism, the researcher strives to bring the experiences of the study participants “to consciousness” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129) through inquiry and reflection and serves as a “facilitator of multi-voice reconstruction” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 196) of the participants’ experiences. Within this constructivist frame, the researcher seeks to understand individuals’ experiences from the perspectives of the individuals themselves and interacts directly with the study participants to gather associated data on their perceptions and interpretations of these experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Ponterotto (2005), the interactions between the researcher and the participant allow for meaning to unfold and be revealed through deeper exploration and understanding.

Phenomenology

The selected methodological approach for the study was descriptive phenomenology, which is also referred to as transcendental phenomenology or simply phenomenology (Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is a method of research inquiry that has its theoretical underpinnings in a tradition of German philosophy focusing on the conscious experience of individuals (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Phenomenological research seeks to explore a phenomenon from the perspective of those individuals who experience it first-hand to identify patterns and associations of meanings (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). The aim of phenomenology is to understand the experience of individuals going through the same or similar
phenomenon as consciously experienced rather than as hypothesized or conceptualized by an outside researcher (van Manen, 1997). Through in-depth dialogue with study participants, the researcher examines the shared experience of the individuals to determine the essential meanings mutually understood through the commonly experienced phenomenon (Patton, 2002). This understanding of the phenomenon, arrived at through the interaction between the researcher and the participants, allows a new awareness of the phenomenon to emerge, thus strengthening the contribution to the respective researcher’s discipline (van Manen, 1997).

In phenomenological research, a study is considered to use descriptive phenomenology when it describes the study participants’ experience with a phenomenon rather than interpreting the experience (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). In descriptive phenomenology, the researcher obtains robust individual accounts of the participants’ experiences with a phenomenon and synthesizes those individual accounts to discover the essential features of the lived experience while setting aside any biases and preconceptions of the researcher (Laverty, 2003). In contrast, interpretive phenomenology, also called hermeneutic phenomenology, is a research approach that seeks to uncover the personal meaning and sense-making that each of the participants underwent as they processed their experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Through interpretative phenomenological analysis, the researcher engages in a process of self-reflection, not to set aside biases and preconceptions but rather to acknowledge and embed them into the interpretive process (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). As Laverty (2003) noted in her discussion of interpretive phenomenology: “The researcher is called, on an ongoing basis, to give considerable thought to their own experience and to explicitly claim the ways in which their position or experience relates to the issues being researched” (p. 17).
Several notable scholars are associated with phenomenology (Dowling, 2007). Edmund Husserl, considered the founding father of phenomenology, was a German philosopher interested in the discovery of the meaning and essence of human experience (Moustakas, 1994; Reeder, 2010). Husserl criticized the notion that human experience could be studied only through the lens of pure empirical research and argued that individuals do not simply react to external stimuli automatically but rather respond based on the meaning that they attribute to those stimuli (Laverty, 2003). Husserl came to believe that individuals’ experiences with a phenomenon could be studied if the researcher is able to suspend his or her biases and preconceptions about the phenomenon to see and understand the essence of the experience in a clear and straightforward manner (Laverty, 2003). In contrast, Martin Heidegger, another German philosopher influential in the phenomenological movement, favored understanding individuals’ experiences not simply by describing the experiences but by interpreting those experiences (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Heidegger argued that all descriptions of experiences are already an interpretation because we as humans inherently attempt to understand the world around us (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). In favoring an interpretive phenomenological approach, Heidegger argued that individuals cannot be distinguished from the world in which they live and that a focus on historical aspects of society, culture, and politics is central to an individual’s experience (Laverty, 2003). More recent theorists notable in the area of phenomenology include Giorgi (1985), Moustakas (1994), and van Manen (1997).

A descriptive phenomenological approach was appropriate for this doctoral study for several reasons. First, the researcher wished to engage in an open-ended exploration of the experiences of new supervisors to gather information principally based on their first-person accounts using their own words. The researcher aimed to create a sense of openness to
encourage free discussion with the study participants. Qualitative research was thus a more appropriate methodology than was the use of quantitative research, which generally does not allow for robust interaction or follow-up interview questions with participants (Creswell, 2015). For this study, the researcher interacted directly with participants to obtain narrative descriptions of their transition experiences that align with components of Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition model, the theoretical framework selected for this study, as discussed in Chapter 1. Schlossberg’s model was originally developed in the context of counselor practitioners helping adult clients address challenges in their lives through open dialogue and exploration.

Another reason that descriptive phenomenology was an appropriate research approach for this study was the researcher’s desire to understand the shared essence of the experience that these new supervisors had in transitioning to their supervisory roles. To answer the central research question in describing the shared essence of the participants’ lived experience, a phenomenological approach was more appropriate over other qualitative methods that have different intents and foci, such as (a) exploring the life of an individual, which is *narrative research*; (b) describing and interpreting a group and its culture, which is *ethnography*; (c) developing a theory from data collected in the field, which is *grounded theory*; or (d) developing a detailed description and analysis of a case or several cases using multiple sources of data, which is a *case study* (Creswell, 2013). Using a phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to answer the central research question by examining the essence of the new supervisors’ lived experience in parallel with Schlossberg’s (1981a) framework that describes and analyzes individuals’ adjustments to transitions in life.

Still another reason that descriptive phenomenology was an appropriate approach for this study was the researcher’s aim to bracket his own personal experiences and assumptions so that
researcher biases and preconceptions did not unduly influence the findings of the study. Because
the primary purpose of the research was to describe the new supervisors’ experiences instead of
interpreting them, a descriptive approach to phenomenology was more appropriate than an
interpretive one. The researcher initially considered using an interpretative phenomenological
approach for the study but opted instead for descriptive phenomenology to minimize researcher
bias and avoid being drawn away from study participants’ direct narratives and original
meanings, which can occur when using an interpretative approach (Pringle, Drummond,
McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011).

Participants

The participants for this study were new supervisors employed by a federal agency of the
U.S. government. The inclusion criteria for the study participants were new agency supervisors
who (a) have served in the supervisory role for at least one year but not more than two years and
(b) have not held a supervisory position previously. These criteria ensured that the participants
had enough experience with the phenomenon of supervisory transition to respond authentically
and comprehensively to the interview questions and to ensure that the participants had not
previously experienced supervisory transition so that they reflected on and responded to the
phenomenon as new (Polkinghorne, 1989). Individuals who had previously experienced the
phenomenon of supervisory transition would likely have already considered and applied coping
strategies in the past, thus limiting the ability of the researcher to describe a new shared
experience on the part of the participants. The researcher sought diverse perspectives by
selecting both male and female participants with different occupations and geographical
locations. In addition, participants were selected who agreed to answer the interview questions
openly, honestly, and thoroughly to obtain a realistic, supportable, and accurate description of everyone’s experience with supervisory transition.

**Site Selection**

According to Creswell (2009), the selection of the research site is an essential component of the study that helps to capture the essence of the phenomenon that the study participants have experienced. The site selected for this study was a mid-sized federal government agency headquartered in Washington, DC. The researcher targeted finding at least a mid-sized agency to have enough new supervisors from which to recruit a sample and decided against selecting a large federal department or agency because of the likelihood of more bureaucratic levels of approval to conduct a study there. The selected agency employs civilian employees and appoints individuals to supervisory positions on an ongoing basis throughout the year based on workload need and supervisory turnover.

**Access and Recruitment**

The researcher requested and obtained approval from the selected agency’s legal division and labor relations office to conduct this study and to recruit and interview new supervisors at the organization, under specific conditions which follow:

- Participation in the study by agency supervisors is entirely voluntary.
- None of the agency employees to be interviewed for the study are in the bargaining unit of the agency’s union.
- Study participants must be notified that their participation is part of an individual’s doctoral dissertation research and not an official research project of the agency.
- The researcher and study participants cannot use official agency time or official agency travel to complete any part of the doctoral dissertation research.
• The researcher must ensure that necessary procedures are taken to protect private and sensitive personal information of participating supervisors.

• The researcher must ensure that necessary procedures are taken to protect agency confidential and sensitive information provided by study participants.

The researcher agreed to these conditions for the study.

An official within the agency’s training and development office agreed to serve as the gatekeeper for this study. A gatekeeper is a person associated with the organization selected for the study who provides entrance to the research site and assists the researcher in identifying and contacting individuals to be included in the study (Creswell, 2015). The gatekeeper for this study had access to a regularly updated listing of individuals in the agency who had been recently appointed to a supervisory position and could identify those individuals who had served in their supervisory positions for at least one year but not more than two years, which was a criterion for inclusion in this study. The gatekeeper contacted these individuals via electronic mail to recruit new supervisors to serve as the participants for the study. The initial email invitation to participate in the study provided a study description, criteria for inclusion in the study, and contact information for the researcher.

Sample Size

In qualitative research, the typical manner of choosing individuals as study participants is nonprobability sampling, also called purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). In nonprobability sampling, the researcher deliberately selects participants who could offer accurate and thorough information central to the purpose of the study (Merriam, 2009). With purposeful sampling, the results of the research are not generalizable to a larger population beyond the sample (Creswell, 2009). This purposeful approach to sampling contrasts with probability
sampling often used in quantitative research, in which researchers use techniques to randomize participant selection to ensure the results of the research are generalizable to the larger population (Merriam, 2009). For a descriptive phenomenological study, the number of study participants in the sample usually ranges from a minimum of five people to up to 10 to 15 people (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). In accordance with this guidance, the researcher included eight participants in this study of supervisory transition.

**Procedures**

**Data Collection**

Generally, for academic studies, data should be collected that can best answer the research questions (Creswell, 2013). The data collected for this study primarily involved participant interviews, with additional context provided by the researcher’s notes recorded in the form of analytic memos. To ensure the appropriateness of the proposed interview protocol for this study, the researcher pilot tested the interview questions prior to conducting the interviews with study participants. The details of the pilot testing and data collection are provided in this section.

**Interviews.** For a phenomenological study, the relevant source of data for the guiding research question is typically collected through in-depth interviews of study participants, which increases the likelihood of capturing the lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The interview questions focus on requesting the participants to reflect on and describe their personal experiences related to the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Conducting interviews allows the researcher to learn about the experiences of the participants through the sharing of their personal stories (Seidman, 2013). Galletta (2013) described the semi-structured interview process as a means of ensuring that specific areas of inquiry are explored while
simultaneously allowing “participants to offer new meanings” (p. 2) about the phenomenon. For this study, data were collected from the participants through semi-structured interviews conducted in person or via video conference. Moustakas (1994) recommended an interview protocol be used that lays out the questions to be asked during the interview and helps to ensure that participants are asked the same questions.

For this study, prior to conducting the interviews with study participants, the researcher requested that each participant complete a short demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). In addition to confirming each agency supervisor’s eligibility to participate in the study, the use of the questionnaire allowed the researcher to gather information about each study participant to present a short, one-paragraph description of each individual when reporting the results of the study. Specifically, the questionnaire requested that participants identify the number of months served in the supervisory role and whether the participant had previously served in a supervisory role. Also, the questionnaire asked participants for background information such as gender, occupation, geographic location, education level, and amount of work experience. The participants were required to return the completed questionnaire to the researcher prior to conducting the interview.

The questions in the interview protocol (see Appendix E) were designed to gather relevant information about the participants and their personal experiences in navigating the transition to a supervisory role. The interviews of participants began with an introduction explaining the purpose and rationale behind the study, assurances of confidentiality, and an explanation of the interview process. The first part of each interview was devoted to verifying the information that participants provided about themselves prior to the interview in responding to items on the demographic questionnaire. The interview questions began with a general
inquiry about the professional work history of participants to build trust and rapport. The researcher then asked participants directly about the phenomenon under study, with underlying linkage of the interview questions to the four key components of Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition model, the theoretical framework for this study. Specifically, the participants were asked about (a) the conditions that existed as they transitioned to the supervisory role, referred to as situation; (b) the personal characteristics that helped or hindered their transition to the supervisory role, referred to as self; (c) the individuals, groups, or organizations that helped or hindered their transition to the supervisory role, known as support; and (d) the coping mechanisms they used in transitioning to the supervisory role, referred to as strategies. The interviews with participants were audio recorded and transcribed to ensure an accurate record of the discussions. The duration of the eight interviews lasted from 45 to 80 minutes. To confirm the accuracy of the collected data, the researcher reviewed the written transcript while listening to the recorded interview, and corrections were made to the transcripts as needed.

**Pilot testing.** Prior to interviewing the selected participants for this study, the researcher pilot tested the interview questions with an individual who met the requirements for inclusion in the study but who was not considered a study participant. The purpose of the pilot test of an interview protocol was to allow the researcher to determine whether the interviewee understands the interview questions and could provide the researcher with feedback about possible changes to the interview protocol to address concerns or confusion about the appropriateness of interview questions (Creswell, 2015). The piloting of the interview protocol can also help to reassure the researcher that the planned interview questions will support the collection of data needed to answer the central research question, research sub-questions, and overall purpose of the study. In addition, the pilot test can assist the researcher in confirming the approximate time required to
conduct an interview with the planned interview protocol. The gatekeeper at the federal agency recruited the individual for the pilot interview from amongst those persons who meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. The pilot interview was conducted via telephone and lasted 45 minutes. Other than identifying that the interview was a pilot test, the interview protocol followed the same procedures as the interviews with the study participants. Immediately upon completing the pilot testing, the researcher sought feedback from the interviewee to determine whether any interview questions might need to be altered, added, or removed to support the collection of needed data for the study. Based on input from the pilot interviewee, the researcher did not alter the interview protocol.

**Analytic memoing.** In addition to conducting interviews of study participants, the researcher used analytic memoing to further inform the data collection process. Memoing is a research practice that involves the researcher writing observational and reflective notes to document and explore what the researcher notices, experiences, and ponders during the study, “as a basis for deeper analysis” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 46). Memoing is often a key component of data collection and analysis in qualitative inquiry (Miles et al., 2014). The primary purpose of memoing is to document the decision-making process used to carry out the research and to facilitate the determination of the meaning of the data collected for the study (Groenewald, 2008). According to Birks, Chapman, and Francis (2008), memoing allows researchers to “immerse themselves in the data, explore the meanings that this data holds, maintain continuity and sustain momentum in the conduct of research (p. 68).” These types of notes generally include the researcher’s subjective reactions to, interpretations of, and reflections on the experiences that the researcher encounters in the research as well as objective descriptions of the study context (Saldaña, 2016). Memoing helps the researcher to examine his or her
assumptions, preconceptions, and biases to lessen any adverse judgment throughout the course of the research and to protect against distortions arising from the researcher’s reliance on memory (Groenewald, 2008). By writing memos, researchers ensure that ideas are retained and not lost to memory (Creswell, 2015).

For this study, analytic memoing was carried out preceding, during, and following the interviews of study participants as well as during data analysis to ensure that the researcher’s observations and reflections were captured throughout the full data collection and analysis process. During the interviews for this study, the researcher made note of key terms and phrases used by interviewees and the perceived emotional reactions of interviewees. The researcher also engaged in memoing to identify and analyze themes from the participant interviews and find meaning and connections between the collected data with the theoretical framework selected for the study and the literature review conducted prior to the interviews. Memos were used to track decisions and trace how the researcher’s understanding of the phenomenon developed over time. The researcher recognized that through the process of memoing, he might also gain insights about himself as a researcher, as noted by Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills, and Usher (2013).

Preserving thoughts, feelings, and observations in the form of memos, even those the researcher initially deemed to be inconsequential, could prove to be consequential as the study progresses (Miles et al., 2014).

**Data Analysis**

The analytical methods of descriptive phenomenological inquiry involve five sequential stages: (1) epoché, (2) horizontalization, (3) phenomenological reduction, (4) imaginative variation, and (5) synthesis (Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). The five stages are summarized as follows.
1) **Époché.** Époché, a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, holds that the phenomenological researcher should establish a new way of looking at the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). The process of examining researcher biases and preconceptions is undertaken to minimize adverse judgment during the course of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Through self-reflection, the researcher strives to identify his or her biases and preconceived beliefs and hold them in abeyance, or bracket them, to carry out the research with a fresh and renewed perspective about the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological researchers often maintain a journal of notes to assist them in the process of reflection and aid their efforts to bracket assumptions as protection against bias (Laverty, 2003).

2) **Horizontalization.** After the data are collected, the researcher searches for significant statements in participant interview transcripts that have strong relevance to the phenomenon under study, a process that Moustakas (1994) referred to as horizontalization. The process of data analysis typically involves a review and coding of the transcribed text to identify categories or key themes (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Coding is the process of identifying and applying a word or phrase to a section of text in an interview transcript that summarizes the essence of a participant’s statement (Saldaña, 2016).

3) **Phenomenological reduction.** The identified themes and meanings in the collected data are then used to develop the textural descriptions of each participant’s experience, a process called phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). These textural descriptions focus on what the participants experienced related to the phenomenon and often include verbatim examples from the participants’ interview transcripts to support the analysis (Creswell, 2013).
4) **Imaginative variation.** The identified themes and meanings of the data analysis are also used to develop the structural descriptions of each participant’s experience, a process called imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). These structural descriptions focus on the context or setting that influenced *how* the participants experienced the phenomenon and often include verbatim examples from the participants’ interview transcripts to support the analysis (Creswell, 2013).

5) **Synthesis.** The textural descriptions and structural descriptions developed by the researcher are then integrated to identify the essence of the phenomenon for all the participants in the study (Moustakas, 1994). As part of this process, the researcher usually employs member checking by requesting that the original participants review the descriptions of the experiences as synthesized by the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

In his often-cited book on phenomenological methods, Moustakas (1994) outlined two optional approaches of descriptive phenomenology that both involve these key stages of data analysis: the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method and the modified van Kaam method. The method of analysis selected for this study was Moustakas’ modified van Kaam method, as it involves a hierarchical treatment of the interview data and provides a more structured outline for coding to identify emergent themes or patterns from the interviews. Specifically, the researcher followed Moustakas’s (1994) modified van Kaam’s method by carrying out the following seven steps:

1. list all interview statements that are significant to the experience being studied, which is the horizontalization of the collected data;

2. reduce or eliminate interview statements that are not necessary or sufficient to understand the experience or that cannot be summarized and labeled;
3. cluster the remaining statements, referred to as the invariant constituents, into groups of related statements that then represent the core themes of the phenomenon;
4. validate that each theme and invariant constituent is either expressed in the collected data or compatible with the collected data and, if not, is excluded;
5. construct a textural description of the experience for each study participant using the themes and invariant constituents;
6. construct a structural description of the experience for each study participant using the themes and invariant constituents; and
7. develop a composite description of the experience from those of all participants to identify the essence of the phenomenon (pp. 120-121).

To analyze the collected data from participant interviews, the researcher first reviewed a hard copy of each interview transcript and marked in the margins of the text using in vivo coding, which involves identifying a word or short phrase of a participant’s own words to label a section of data in an interview transcript to capture the meaning inherent in the individual’s experience (Saldaña, 2016). To cluster these interview statements according to similarity and regularity, the researcher then used Dedoose (www.dedoose.com), a web-based, data analysis software application, to facilitate the development of categories of connections, or emergent themes. Throughout the analysis of the interview data, the researcher also reviewed his reflective and descriptive notes created through memoing to facilitate the determination of the meaning of the collected data and to protect against researcher bias. The composite description of the participants’ experience is presented in the form of emergent themes based on the data analysis. In addition, although the phenomenological researcher focused on presenting the essence of the
experience of the total group, the researcher also considered differences among individual participants and sub-groups of participants, as suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2008).

**Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research**

In conducting this qualitative study, the researcher made efforts to ensure that the research is of the highest quality. As described below, careful attention was given to ethical considerations and to the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and transparency of the study and its primary results. Limitations of the research are also acknowledged and delineated.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher took several precautions related to ethical considerations to protect the human subjects in this study and to safeguard participant information. All aspects of this study were conducted in accordance with the ethical research principles outlined by, and with the approval of, Northeastern University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). A thorough and detailed description of the participant selection and data collection process was presented to the IRB and approved by the IRB in March 2019. None of the participants for this study were recruited until the researcher passed an oral defense of the thesis proposal and approval was received from Northeastern University’s IRB.

**Protection of human subjects and participant confidentiality.** Ethics principles in research hold that study participants have a right to be informed of the nature and potential consequences of the proposed research (Tracy, 2010). To ensure that participants fully understand the study, the researcher described the components of the study to participants both orally and in writing. During the recruitment process, the purpose and methods of the study were made transparent, and all potential participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation. The method of participant selection was free from bias and used sampling
procedures commensurate with methodological requirements for qualitative research. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were given and asked to sign an informed consent (Unsigned Consent to Participate, Appendix C) that described key aspects of the study, including the purpose of the study, the protection of confidentiality of the participants, and the right of participants to withdraw voluntarily from the study at any time. Participants were also informed that interviews would be audio recorded and transcribed. Participants were provided with a copy of the consent form so that they could review their rights at any time.

As outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2012), the researcher must consider the risk to participants associated with participation in a study. The research participants for this study, who were new supervisors at a federal government agency, were not a vulnerable or high-risk population and were asked about their personal transitions to supervisory roles and their work responsibilities. The researcher believed that the study posed no more risk than the participants would face as part of their normal workday. The researcher did not ask questions nor publish information that would cause harm to the individuals in the study. The researcher ensured participant confidentiality by not disclosing the participants’ real names and by using pseudonyms and interviewee numbers when referring to the participants. Interview transcripts were carefully reviewed and screened for any references with the potential to identify study participants.

Data storage. The researcher has taken several precautions to safeguard participant information in storing the data and related materials for this study. Miles et al. (2014) recommended that researchers have a “well-organized physical place for storage and retrieval of raw field notes, audio and related media, edited hard copies, and so on” (p. 50). Participant names and other identifying characteristics were removed from the transcriptions of interviews
and the researcher’s memos and other records. Only the assigned interviewee numbers and pseudonyms were referenced in the interview transcripts, coding documents, and researcher notes. Only one hard-copy document with the participants’ actual names and corresponding interview number and pseudonym was maintained in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s residence. The electronic documents for this study were created and saved on the researcher’s personal computer, which is password protected. These electronic files were backed up on a password-protected flash drive stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher’s residence. Only the researcher had access to these files. Research materials for this study will be erased or destroyed following the researcher’s degree conferral date in accordance with the guidelines of Northeastern University’s IRB.

Credibility

Qualitative research requires solid credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility relates to the idea that the study participants and readers of the study can believe and trust the results enough to act on them in a purposeful and meaningful way (Tracy, 2010). To enhance the credibility of this study, the researcher used member-checking and peer review, as described below.

Member-checking. For this study, the researcher employed member checking, a research technique where the researcher presents raw data and researcher interpretations of that data back to the study participants so that they can review and confirm the credibility of the researcher’s account of the information (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), a researcher’s use of member checks is “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) in a study. Specifically, participants in this study were asked to review the transcripts of their respective interviews to confirm that the transcripts were accurate and
complete. All eight study participants completed and signed a member check form (see Appendix F) to confirm their agreement with the transcript and provide changes or additions, where relevant. In addition, after the completion of data collection and the coding process, participants were offered the opportunity to examine the emergent themes identified by the researcher. This rigor of member checking ensured that the results of the study are a realistic, supportable, and accurate description of the lived experience of the participants.

**Debriefing and peer review.** Debriefing involves discussions between a researcher and an impartial peer about the progress and results of an ongoing study (Spall, 1998). Debriefing supports the credibility of the data in qualitative inquiry and provides a means toward establishing overall trustworthiness of a study’s results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Miller (2000) wrote: “A peer review or debriefing is the review of the data and research by someone who is familiar with the research or the phenomenon being explored” (p. 129). For this study, the gatekeeper at the selected federal agency was debriefed and served as a sounding board in reviewing progress and results. This gatekeeper interacts directly with new supervisors at the agency and has also completed a doctoral degree and thus understands the requirements of doctoral research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) expressed reservations about using members of a dissertation committee as a debriefer because of the authority that the dissertation committee has over the doctoral candidate.

**Transferability**

Transferability relates to the results of the research as being applicable to contexts or circumstances outside of the boundaries of the study (Shenton, 2008). Although there were limitations to this qualitative study, which will be discussed later in this chapter, the findings of the study could inform the transition of newly appointed supervisors in similar contexts, such as
those at other federal government agencies. To enhance the potential transferability of findings for this study, the researcher relied on thick description, which is a well-established research method where the researcher collects and presents representations of a situation, event, or phenomenon that offer considerable concrete detail and strong contextual meaning (Tracy, 2010). According to Holliday (2004), thick description is a way to add additional layers of understanding by exploring the richness of the collected data and showing the interconnectedness of various aspects of the data. Thick description allows the reader to assess the extent to which the information gathered about the phenomenon can be transferred to other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Capturing and presenting such thick description in a study creates a sense in readers that they are directly experiencing, or might experience, the events described in the study, a concept known as verisimilitude (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The use of thick description, which often includes personal stories and direct quotations from participant interviews, is applicable to descriptive phenomenological inquiry because descriptive phenomenology calls for the researcher to gather detailed accounts of the experiences of participants in relation to the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002).

**Internal Audit**

The researcher for this study maintained an audit trail so that an independent auditor could review and follow the specific research activities of the study. Documenting an audit trail is an activity that a researcher carries out to establish the confirmability of a study (Wolf, 2003). The audit trail, also called the confirmability audit, helps an auditor or peer reviewer to trace the data sources of the study to the researcher’s interpretations, findings, and conclusions (Wolf, 2003). The audit trail consists of materials that document crucial aspects of the study including the research questions; the interview protocol; raw data, such as audio recordings, interview
transcripts, and researcher notes; the data reduction and analysis, such as coding of transcripts, patterns of themes, and researcher memos; and data reconstruction and synthesis, such as narrative descriptions, emergent themes, figures and tables, and draft and final versions of the study reporting (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993). According to Tracy (2010), researchers should also document challenges faced in the study and any deliberate or unexpected changes to the study over time.

Self-reflexivity and Transparency

As a researcher, self-reflexivity is a process of being honest and authentic with one’s self to allow the researcher to consider and self-disclose personal assumptions, biases, and beliefs (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Tracy, 2010). Machi and McEvoy (2012) emphasized that researchers should understand their personal viewpoints about the areas they intend to research and acknowledge that a researcher hobbled by unchecked bias assuredly produces biased findings. Positionality is a researcher’s worldview and stance related to the research based on the researcher’s identity, values, knowledge, and experience (Merriam, 2009; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Disclosure of the researcher’s positionality demonstrates a reflexive approach to research and provides transparency to readers for their consideration and critique (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). A researcher’s background and life experiences often contribute to the formation of a structure, which effectively represents the person’s identity and is reflected in the person’s beliefs, values, and rules (Merriam, 2009).

As the researcher for this study, I recognized the importance of understanding my personal perspectives and viewpoints related to the topic under investigation, in this case the transition of individuals to first-time supervisory roles at a federal government agency. For the study, I aspired that the outcome be objective, with a full acknowledgment of any limitations of
the research. In this positionality statement, I present my positionality as a first-time supervisory, my positionality as an educator assisting new supervisors, and my positionality as a researcher in the role of scholar-practitioner.

**Positionality as a first-time supervisor.** Part of my motivation for researching the topic of new supervisors’ transitions in the federal sector stemmed from my personal experience serving as a first-time supervisor. When I began serving as a new supervisor in the federal sector over 15 years ago, I did not have many formal support mechanisms in place to assist me in coping with the transition. I learned the role of being a new supervisor primarily on the job by making several mistakes. For example, I hoarded some of the team’s responsibilities and did not delegate as much as I should have. I perceived almost all the conflict on the team to be dysfunctional rather than viewing some conflict as functional in helping to make optimal decisions. In addition, I sometimes overlooked the excellent work of employees because I focused on managing and controlling the risk of what they did not do rather than acknowledging and appreciating what they did do. My personal experience in this area has influenced my opinions about adult learning and leadership development and has contributed to my bias toward the importance of preparing new supervisors for the demands of their supervisory role.

**Positionality as an educator assisting new supervisors.** Another part of my motivation for researching the topic of supervisors in transition came from over a decade of work experience on issues related to employee learning and development in the federal sector. As a scholar-practitioner working in the fields of adult education and leadership development, I am keenly interested in studying how individuals transition to supervisory roles for the first time. As an instructor in numerous leadership development courses and as a leadership coach for dozens of individual managers, I have observed hundreds of new supervisors as they attempted to navigate
their new role of supervisor. Providing information to participants in those courses and programs has assisted many supervisors in their transitions, yet I sense that supervisors often need or use multiple strategies to cope with their transition. My personal experience in adult education has influenced my opinions about leadership development and has contributed to my bias toward the use of particular leadership development techniques to aid with transition, such as coaching and mentoring relationships.

**Positionality as a researcher.** To help address my positionality and preserve my objectivity as a researcher, I undertook a couple of actions as a matter of course. First, during the study, I used memoing to reflect on my research journey and record my personal biases, opinions, feelings, and reactions related to the problem of practice and the research topic. By earnestly reflecting on these views and related contextual factors, I could better surface opinion, question assumption, and control bias. Second, I relied on peer feedback to illuminate any potential biases, blinders, or limitations of my research and scholarship. A peer can pose questions that I had not previously asked myself about the research and could challenge me with alternative perspectives, particularly when the peer disagrees with my views and assumptions. With varied perspectives in hand, I could then seek out contrary data to ensure that my research was sound and reasoned. Because researchers commonly have personal attachments to, and perspectives about, their own interests (Machi & McEvoy, 2012), I needed to remember that my personal interest is inextricably linked to my identity and positionality. My goal was to apply the research results to my teaching practice and to the learning programs and developmental activities of my organization. Bridging these scholarly pursuits with these practical experiences required carrying out my research with identity and positionality firmly in mind.
Limitations

This study had a few limitations that should be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the study results. First, a primary limitation of the study was the small sample size of new supervisors included in this study. As a qualitative study, this work was not intended to be generalizable to a broader population but instead was intended to provide a window into how several new supervisors at a federal government agency transition to their supervisory roles. As a descriptive phenomenological study, the purpose of this research is not to produce findings that are transferable to how all new federal supervisors transition to their supervisory roles. Second, new supervisors participating in the interviews were recruited through a gatekeeper and participation in the study was voluntary. Thus, individuals who chose to participate in this study might have had particularly strong positive or negative experiences to share regarding their supervisory transitions. Third, the collection of data for this study was contingent on the study participants’ ability and willingness to answer questions openly, honestly, and thoroughly during the interview process to reveal a realistic, supportable, and accurate description of their lived experience. Any participants who do not answer questions openly, honestly, and thoroughly could affect the findings of the study.

Summary

The qualitative design for this study allowed the researcher to explore and describe the experiences of new supervisors in their transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. Framing this work in the research paradigm of constructivism, the researcher collected and analyzed participant interview data using the modified van Kaam method of descriptive phenomenology as outlined by Moustakas (1994). This descriptive phenomenological approach called for crafting both textual and structural descriptions of the participants’ personal
experiences and developing emergent themes that represent the essence of the lived experience of the study participants. A full rationale is provided for the use of descriptive phenomenology to allow for the direct interaction and open dialogue with study participants, to understand the shared essence of the participants’ lived experience, and to set aside the researcher’s own experiences and assumptions so as to minimize the influence of researcher bias and preconceptions.

Participants of this study were eight new supervisors at a mid-sized federal government agency. The federal agency agreed to allow access to the researcher to interview the new supervisors, and the identified gatekeeper at the agency agreed to aid in recruiting new supervisors to participate in the study. Interviews of study participants focused on the conditions that existed as they transitioned to the supervisory role, the personal characteristics that helped or hindered the transition, other people who helped or hindered the transition, and the coping strategies used to navigate the transition. The use of pilot interviewing helped to ensure that the planned interview questions were formulated to collect the data needed to answer the central research question for the study. The researcher’s use of analytic memoing facilitated examining researcher assumptions and biases and aided in analyzing themes from participant interviews.

The high level of quality for this qualitative research required careful attention to ethical considerations and to the credibility, transferability, confirmability, and transparency of the study and the study results. The acknowledgment and delineation of the limitations of this study also indicated recognition of and concern for quality research. This concern for quality was also demonstrated by the disclosure of the researcher’s positionality as a first-time supervisor, as an educator working in the field of leadership development, and as a researcher in adult education. High-quality studies by prior researchers in the craft of phenomenology were an inspiration for
this researcher, and the researcher’s efforts to make certain that this study was of the highest quality hopefully serve as an example for other scholar-practitioners.
Chapter Four: Results

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to new supervisory roles at a federal government agency. This study sought to add to scholarly understanding of the resources that new federal supervisors rely on and the coping strategies that they use in their career transitions. Using the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with study participants, the data analysis process for this phenomenological study followed the procedures presented by Moustakas (1994), as detailed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Using a phenomenological research approach allowed the researcher to explore and describe the essence of the lived experience of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under review. For this study, the phenomenon was the first-time transition from a non-supervisory to supervisory role at a federal government agency.

The study was guided by the following central research question: How do new supervisors at a federal government agency describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role? To further guide this study, four research sub-questions were posed:

1. What conditions exist for new supervisors when transitioning to their supervisory roles?
2. What personal characteristics do new supervisors make use of when transitioning to their supervisory roles?
3. What social support do new supervisors rely on when transitioning to their supervisory roles?
4. What personal coping strategies do new supervisors use when transitioning to their supervisory roles?

These four research sub-questions align directly with the four components of Schlossberg’s (2011) transition theory, which is the theoretical framework that served as the lens for this study.
This chapter begins with narrative profiles of study participants, including their demographic information and the textural and structural descriptions of their experiences with the phenomenon of supervisory transition, with textural descriptions representing what they experienced and structural descriptions representing how they experienced it. Next is a discussion of the themes that emerged from the review and analysis of the collected interview data, which align directly with each of the four research sub-questions. Based on the analysis of the collected data, four themes emerged:

- Prior leadership experience aided participants in their supervisory transitions, but these prior experiences were generally not equivalent to the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role.
- Both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assisted participants in their supervisory transition more so than did technical skills.
- Participants’ professional peers provided crucial support with technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback, oftentimes more so than from supervisors.
- Direct engagement with others and disengagement from others and the work were prevalent coping strategies for participants.

This chapter concludes with a composite description of the essence of the participants’ experiences as derived from the synthesis of their textural and structural descriptions.

**Participant Profiles**

A total of eight new supervisors at the selected federal agency were interviewed for this study. The researcher sought to interview both male and female participants with varying backgrounds, educational experiences, and geographical locations, with the goal of gathering multiple perspectives. Table 2 provides a summary profile of the study participants, who are
listed by pseudonym in order of interview. Five male and three female supervisors participated in the study. The range of participants’ occupations included attorney, compliance analyst, data analyst, economist, financial analyst, and policy analyst. The educational backgrounds of participants ranged from bachelor’s degrees to doctoral/professional degrees. Four participants were stationed in the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the agency, and four participants were stationed in the field at four separate office locations, including two on the West Coast, one in the Mountain West, and one in the Northeast of the United States.

Table 2

Summary Profile of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number of direct reports</th>
<th>Work location</th>
<th>Years of professional work experience</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Race/ national origin</th>
<th>Highest level of education completed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>Financial analyst</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
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<td>Jacob</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60+ years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctoral or professional degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>Financial analyst</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
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<td>Maria</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Doctoral or professional degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwayne</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>30-39 years</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kathleen</td>
<td>Financial analyst</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant #1: Robert

Demographic information. Robert is a white male in his 50s. He works at the agency as a financial analyst in a field office on the West Coast of the United States and has nine
employees who report to him. Robert has 33 years of professional work experience, with all that experience working at his current federal agency in a variety of roles. His highest level of education completed is a bachelor’s degree.

**Textural description.** In making the transition from a non-supervisory position to a supervisory role, Robert stated that the timing of the move was right for him. He said that he had been in his non-supervisory role for many years and that “it was about time for me to try to transition to something and see what the experience would be like in a supervisory role.” He highlighted the conditions that prompted him to transition to the supervisory position: “I felt like I had enough experience at this point of tenure and respect in the field office, that I could function reasonably well in that capacity.” In describing his experience, Robert referenced a crisis that the agency had gone through a few years prior and how the challenges of responding to that crisis aided him in his professional growth. He remarked, “It’s like getting a PhD, it’s very painful, but you learn a heck of a lot by the time you go through it.” He posited, “If it had been 10 or more years ago, I probably wouldn't have posted for the position. At that time, I probably wouldn't have felt I had enough experience or tenure.”

In discussing the degree of role change with the transition to supervisor, Robert described his transition as moving to more of an adviser: “I’d had a fair amount of tenure in the field office, so a lot of the staff would periodically consult with me anyway. But there’s more of that in the supervisory capacity.” Robert also referenced the career development of employees in relation to the new supervisory role. He said:

I’d say another part to that is helping them develop, and this is the part that I probably enjoy most, is helping them develop their career and career path . . . consulting with them
as needed, and giving them ideas based on their interest and experience, and where they might best perform and excel.

Robert added that as a new supervisor, “you also overnight have to become somewhat of a disciplinarian in certain things.” He commented that as a supervisor, “You have to approve their expense vouchers, you have to approve their time and attendance records, their requests for training, and then sometimes you have to say no.” He said, “That was a new responsibility, but I knew, I wasn’t surprised or shocked by it. I knew that was part of the supervisory function, so I think overall the transition was fairly, relatively easy.”

Robert observed that overall, he had “a fair amount of control” in his transition to a supervisory role. He explained that his boss is not a micromanager and “he lets you try to figure things out on your own, which I think is usually the best course of action.” According to Robert, “I would say generally speaking, I’ve felt pretty comfortable in the [supervisory] role from the start.” Robert mentioned that areas where he needed to obtain further guidance as a supervisor were primarily on “technical types of things as opposed to personnel issues.” He went on to say that the autonomy he had in the position allowed him to “develop [as a supervisor] and make decisions, and make mistakes, and learn from those mistakes.”

**Structural description.** Reflecting on his feelings during the transition, Robert said that when initially taking the supervisory role, he looked forward to the new experience and the challenge of it all. He referenced his desire to feel “balanced” in ensuring that employees’ needs were addressed while also making certain that employees effectively carried out their work. He went on to say that generally over time a new supervisor “should become more comfortable in the role, if everything goes according to plan.” He observed that after a while there is a tendency for a new supervisor to lose the employee’s perspective, even in a short amount of time: “You
Robert deduced that even after serving almost two years in the supervisory role, he considered his supervisory transition as still ongoing. He said, “I’m still learning, still trying to become better and perfect my skills in certain areas.” In contemplating how he will know when he is no longer transitioning, Robert stated:

I think you reach a point where you feel confident in all aspects of the supervisory function, and I don’t mean that you’re still not learning, but that you can address and respond to all questions that come up from the staff. You may not have the answer, but you know how to respond if you don’t know the answer.

Reflecting on his observations of other supervisors in his field office over the years who were navigating their supervisory transitions, Robert said he observed these individuals in transition and recognized that they still had something to learn and more to grow, even after serving in the supervisory role for a while. He provided examples of two supervisors in his field office who were in their leadership role for 8 to 10 years and how he was able to see a marked difference between the two-year mark and where those supervisors are now.

Thinking over what might have been missing from his experience in transitioning to a supervisory role that he believed might have helped him, Robert surmised that having the
opportunity to work with a “personal coach” that had considerable supervisory experience would probably have helped him or expedited his development. He said that he certainly was able to rely on his supervisor and peers in the office to provide support to him, but they were not always available. He acknowledged that having a personal coach working day-to-day directly with every new supervisor would probably be difficult to put into practice. Still, he maintained that such an approach could be helpful “[i]f you had that availability, someone that you could go to with a variety of problems or that had experience that they could provide to helping you avoid certain problems or handle certain personnel situations.”

Overall, Robert said that he hoped he had not changed much as a result of his experience in transitioning to a supervisory role. He commented that he had become “more observant” in his supervisory role, noticing the actions of others instead of being focused so firmly on his own personal world as an individual contributor. He went on to say that he was probably also “a little less patient when certain circumstances come up.” He remarked, “You don’t have to deal with or think about those things when you’re just a contemporary [employee] because it’s not your responsibility.” He said he has observed that supervisors who are in their role for an extensive period of time tend to lose touch with the intricacies of the day-to-day work carried out by employees.

Participant #2: Jacob

Demographic information. Jacob is a white male in his 60s. He works at the federal agency as a policy analyst at headquarters in Washington, D.C., and has five direct reports. Jacob has 36 years of professional work experience, including 19 years of employment in the federal civil service with 10 years of employment at his current federal agency. Prior to his
In making the transition from a non-supervisory position to a supervisory role, Jacob relayed that he wanted to accept a new challenge and try something different. He said, “I didn’t want to coast to the end of my working age, so I decided to take on some new challenges that I thought a managerial role would offer me.” He added, “And I believed it would be helpful to the group that I worked with, that I felt very close with, that I take on this new challenge.” Jacob believed that he was likely selected for the supervisory position because he often voluntarily took on additional responsibilities that a supervisor would carry out. He remarked, “I’ve always prided myself on, when there’s a fire, I always run toward the fire, not away from it.”

Jacob described the degree of role change with his transition to a supervisory role to be significant. He offered the following insight about his transition: “You know, prior to this position, my successes depended on my performance. Whereas, I think, as a manager, my successes depend on others’ performance.” Jacob said that a considerable difficulty as a supervisor is managing both down and up in the organization. He made the following observation: “The challenge, I think, is managing staff, but also being responsive to our supervisors. We’re in the front line of management.” Jacob went on to say the following: “And personnel issues are something I’ve never had to deal with before. And without getting into too much detail, because I can’t, that has been particularly challenging.”

In discussing the degree of control that he has had with the transition to supervisor, Jacob said that his typical day in the prior non-supervisory position was all about using his knowledge and expertise. He described the situation thusly: “Your day was filled up with knowing your
subject matter. So, to me, that’s a lot of control.” Jacob noted that moving into the supervisor position, where he is “a facilitator” for so many other people, he felt a certain loss of control. Jacob captured the experience as follows:

When you’re used to what you’ve done, and you know you could do it in your sleep, it was much less stressful. There was stress with those things, deadlines and things like that. But there was a lot more control. I find, as a [manager], I’m not always in control of what the expectations are of me.

Even now, when he is further along into his supervisory transition, Jacob senses a loss of control. He described the situation in this way: “Sometimes I feel like I can’t contribute like I used to. They’re not areas I have the expertise in.”

**Structural description.** Reflecting on his feelings during the transition, Jacob said that initially he experienced “a combination of feelings.” He summarized his initial feelings as both excitement and trepidation. He made the following observation:

My whole career, I’ve always got excited by new challenges, but at the same time, what makes something exciting is also a little fearful. It’s fearful. The unknown. Again, leaving behind what I knew. And moving into a world of what I’ve observed and never have ever been directly involved in.

When reflecting on what the word transition means, Jacob characterized it this way: “I think I pride myself that, no matter where I am in my professional career, I’m always transitioning. I’m always transitioning from what I was yesterday, to what I am today, and trying to improve.”

After over one year in the supervisory role, Jacob said that he considers his supervisory transition to still be going on. He provided the following explanation:
I’m still looking for the right balance in how I operate as a manager. So I don’t think the transition is quite over yet for me. And then, there’s things that happen throughout the year that is a first time…different platforms, different reporting requirements. So I’m still, even to this day, and it’s been over a year, still coming across new tasks that I’m transitioning into.

When asked how he will know when he is no longer transitioning, Jacob responded with uncertainty. He summarized his deliberation as follows:

I don’t know. That’s a good question. So far, I don’t . . . I’m close. But I’m not quite there yet. I have days of great successes. And then I have a not so successful day. And on those not so successful days, I feel like, "Wow. I guess I’m still transitioning." You know? But days I feel good about things, and myself, that I’m thinking, "Huh, maybe I’m getting this. Maybe the transition period is coming to an end.

Jacob reflected further on his supervisory transition and his long-term career: “So I came to work one day, not long ago, and it hit me like a lightning bolt.” He continued, “I looked around, and I said, “Dang. I’m the oldest guy here now. I used to be the youngest guy” in the office.

Thinking over what might have been missing from his experience in transitioning to a supervisory role that he believed might have helped him, Jacob said a more realistic preview of what the supervisory position is like would have been helpful for him. He said that he served in a short-term acting supervisory role prior to getting the permanent supervisory position, but he characterized the acting role as “significantly different.” He recalled the following: “I just remembered thinking, ‘Wow. There’s a lot more to the position in the permanent role than there was in the acting.’” He described the situation thusly: “I almost feel like the acting [role] was maybe more like shadowing . . . and the permanent [role] really was, you’re now on your own.”
Jacob said that, overall, he did not think he has personally changed as a result of his experience in transitioning to a supervisory role. He reflected on that and said the following:

From a personal standpoint, I guess, I like to think I’m still the same person I’ve always been. I’ve always stayed true to myself throughout my career. I’ve been this way for 35 years, and I don’t plan to change really now.

Still, he remarked that he has “grown in this new position” and possesses “a slightly new, or better, appreciation of what management has to deal with, as far as working with the staff.” Somewhat jokily, he also remarked that his body weight had changed. He remarked thusly: “I’ve recently taken 12 pounds off. But that’s because I put 15 on. So I think there was the stress eating after work at night. Or just that I didn’t eat all day at work.” He recognized that his physical health is something that he has also focused on in his transition.

**Participant #3: Samantha**

**Demographic information.** Samantha is a white female in her 40s. She works at the federal agency as a financial analyst in a regional office in the Northeastern United States and has nine direct reports. Samantha has 17 years of professional work experience, with all that experience working at her current federal agency. She has worked in three different field office locations during her career with the agency. She started her federal career directly out of college, where she earned a bachelor’s degree.

**Textural description.** In discussing what prompted her to transition to a supervisory role, Samantha referenced the contributions that she believed she could make in the managerial position. She said, “I did feel like I had ideas that could contribute to making processes and things better in the regional office.” She went on to say, “It’s not that I didn’t feel listened to before, but definitely when you’re in that supervisory role, you learn who to talk to to get things
done, and you learn the political aspects more and more.” Samantha also mentioned her affinity for teaching employees as a motivating factor in seeking the supervisory role. She described her thoughts as follows: “I always liked teaching. I don’t know if there’s a correlation, but I do feel like part of a supervisor’s role is teaching and developing others. I guess that part appealed to me.” She went on to say, “It just felt like the natural next step, the expanding of your knowledge beyond technical skills, and I did feel like I had something to contribute.”

In discussing the degree of role change with the transition to supervisor, Samantha said that she did not feel like the transition was abrupt and that “it was a very smooth transition.” She relayed that she had lots of prior technical experience at the agency that prepared her for taking on the supervisory role. She also described that she had served in several detail work assignments, participated on various work-related committees, and served in an acting supervisory role at the agency for a six-month period prior to her selection as a permanent supervisor. According to Samantha, the support of her supervisor and her peers in the office was also “huge” in making the transition so effective.

Samantha said that she had “almost instantaneous control” when she was promoted to the supervisory position. She commented that in some ways she had “almost too much control” because she did not know how to answer certain questions or what to do in some situations. Describing her initial transition to supervisor, Samantha summarized the experience as follows: “It was basically, ‘Okay, here. It’s your job now. Make the decision. We’re not going to question you.’” She said that she was immediately given additional authority as a supervisor to leverage the performance of her team. She offered the following realization: “If anything, I was slower to accept the control than what was given to me.”
**Structural description.** Samantha described her initial feelings in transitioning to a supervisory role as excitement. She then recounted a particularly stressful event for her soon after her promotion that made her question the decision to become a supervisor. She said that this stressful event caused her to reach out to a peer supervisor for help. With reassuring support from a peer, she was able to recover from the “great nosedive” and return to liking the supervisory role. She said that she has now learned how to better manage the stress associated with the demands of her job.

In reflecting on her experience, Samantha concluded that her supervisory transition is still ongoing. She said, “I’m definitely a supervisor . . . but I also know I still have a lot to learn about being a supervisor, and each conversation, each of the more hard conversations get easier as I do them.” She suggested that one aspect of her transition is complete: “The technical side of the transition, I think that’s done.” Samantha then commented that learning the people side of supervision “is going to go on for a long time.” She offered the following insight about working with employees:

The personnel stuff, I think that’s what’s less natural. I think you’ll always still be learning about personnel, like how to talk with people, learning from different people what works, what kind of language works for different people. That I think will take a long time.

In considering what might have been missing from her experience in transitioning to a supervisory role that she believed might have helped her, Samantha said, “I didn’t feel like there was any big hole in my transition or anything.” She specifically mentioned the benefit of the assignment of a peer mentor to assist her and her attendance at the agency’s leadership development course for new supervisors.
When asked how she had personally changed, if at all, as a result of her experience in transitioning to a supervisory role, Samantha responded that she is more self-assured on the job as a result of her transition experience. She said, “I’m more confident talking about the random hot topics that I have to talk about with [stakeholders].” She also commented that she has come to accept the realization that not everyone is going to like her or what she does in the supervisory role. According to Samantha, accepting that realization has been a challenge for her, but her increased level of confidence has helped her to shift her thinking on that issue.

**Participant #4: Maria**

**Demographic information.** Maria is a white female in her 50s. She works at the federal agency as a data analyst at headquarters in Washington, D.C., and has six direct reports. Maria has 29 years of professional work experience, with half of that experience in the federal civil service and half in the private sector. She began working for the agency directly out of college after earning a bachelor’s degree. She soon left the agency to work in the private sector and then returned to the agency later in her career.

**Textural description.** Maria was prompted to transition to a supervisory role because she was “ready for something new, a different challenge.” She said that prior to her supervisory role, she served as an analyst in a group of six employees whose job duties included collecting and analyzing a wide variety of data. She commented that after collecting the data, she enjoyed “making it do backflips and coming up with charts and visual representations that told a story.” Maria relayed that as an analyst she was eventually given the opportunity in the agency to serve on a detail in a temporary supervisory role and found the experience to be fulfilling. She noted that she “got the fortunate opportunity to apply for that detail and try my hand at managing people and I even had some unique individuals to manage [because] they weren’t easy.” Maria
further described the experience thusly: “I realized that it wasn’t that bad, I kind of like that part. And I felt I liked building the team.” She said that when the opportunity came up for a permanent supervisory role, she applied for a supervisory position and was selected.

In discussing the degree of role change with the transition to a supervisory position, Maria characterized the change as “pretty drastic.” She described the experience as follows:

I guess I felt like, going from where you’re just knee deep in the weeds, to then becoming a manager where you got to see the big picture, do a lot more presentations, be visible, and then manage the rest of the people that you’ve just been working with and even relying on them a lot of the time to help you.

She also mentioned her move to Washington, D.C. from the midwestern United States and the challenges of becoming familiar with a new office and new coworkers.

In discussing the degree of control that she has had with the transition to supervisor, Maria said that over time she gained more control as a supervisor, even though she started out feeling “more out of control.” The following is her description of the experience:

Every email that hits you was, “Who do I talk to about that? What is that? What do you do about that?” The acronyms, just the reports that I was asked to update, “What are these?” Everything was new. So I didn’t feel like I had much control of things when you have to ask, “What is this? What do I do with it?” You’re asking who, what, when, where, why, and how on so many things that are coming over email or meetings that you’re asked to go to or people that call you. You have to ask so many questions to get anything done. Which I think is a sign that I didn’t have a lot of control of the issue compared to fast forward. And it went from out of control to just over a year to be in control.
Maria depicted the degree of control as being closely linked with the extent of her supervisory experience: “I think of control, I put it directly with experience. Or that’s how it feels to me.” According to Maria, her employees are now more comfortable with her performance as a supervisor than they were initially, so that makes her feel like she is more in control.

**Structural description.** Maria described her initial feelings in transitioning to a supervisory role as “a little fear” and “a lot of deer in the headlight.” She said that she experienced “a lot of discomfort and stress at first” because of the following:

- You had to ask so many questions and what things were and who to talk to. And not knowing what those personalities were like. Because there are some people that are warm and fuzzy and there’s a few that aren’t. And you just get really brief, short answers, and just go figure it out.

Maria said that over time her experience as a supervisor allowed her to become more comfortable in her role. She said that “once you get the experience and dig in and figure out what we’re talking about,” then “the experience helped lessen that discomfort.” She referenced the process of building rapport with her supervisor and team members. She said that soon “I was feeling like I was fitting in.” She summarized the change in her feelings over time as follows: “Discomfort to now fitting in to the place.”

Maria said that she no longer considers herself to be transitioning to the supervisory role. She recalled a conversation with her supervisor less than a year ago that served as a turning point for her. She described her experience as follows:

- It was the moment that [my supervisor] and I had a really good discussion. . . . He wasn’t looking at me like, “What do you mean?” anymore. And we laughed, and the communication was going well. I was like, “Okay, I think I got this.
Maria believed that building rapport with others and communicating effectively were the telltale signs for her successful transition. She said: “It’s just the feeling of comfort and being able to communicate more. Communicate what your group is doing, I guess. You finally learned enough that you can speak the speak, talk the talk.”

Reflecting on what might have been missing from her experience in transitioning to a supervisory role that she believed might have helped her, Maria suggested that having a day with the previous manager of her current position to learn about the job would have been valuable for her. She said, “It would have been helpful if there could have been more of a handoff from the previous manager to me.” She said that she turned primarily to experienced peers during the transition to help her navigate the technical issues of moving to supervisor.

When asked how she had personally changed, if at all, as a result of her experience in transitioning to a supervisory role, Maria responded that her outlook is now much more strategic than in the past. She explained thusly: “I think I’m quite a bit different in that I think more globally and long-term. For every question I’m asked, I think about the impact not only to me, but to my team, and the [agency] both now and in the future.” She recalled, “When I was just in my own little silo, when everybody got their work done, I didn’t pay attention or realize maybe what the managers had to do or talk to the other people about.” Maria added that rather than just answer questions that come up on the job from day to day, she is now able to promote and defend her answers.

**Participant #5: Alex**

**Demographic information.** Alex is a white male in his 30s. He works at the federal agency as an economist at headquarters in Washington, D.C., and has seven direct reports. Alex has 16 years of professional work experience, with 2 years of experience at a non-profit
organization after attaining his undergraduate degree and then 14 years at his current federal agency. His highest level of education completed is a master’s degree.

**Textural description.** Alex relayed that his primary goal in seeking the supervisory role was his strong belief in the power of research and data analysis “to support evidence-based policymaking” at the agency. He emphasized his status as a professional researcher in support of institutional decision making as follows:

I mean, if there’s one through-line to my career, that was it. So this particular role was ideally situated, I think, for myself and what motivates me professionally. And so the opportunity to do it, obviously, couldn’t really pass it up from that perspective.

Also, in addition to liking the salary increase that came with the new supervisory position, Alex explained that he relished the leadership challenge of the new role. He stated he was motivated by “the ability to sort of build a team, make it run, and find what are better ways to accomplish this particular function at the [agency].”

Alex described the role change that came with his move to a supervisory position as being “significant in some ways and not significant in other ways.” He stated that his group was newly established in the agency, and he was given a great deal of autonomy with his new team. Alex explained that because he did not have the challenge of many new managers in taking a pre-existing culture and trying to effect change to the culture the manager wants. He offered the following explanation:

I didn’t have to spend my time thinking a lot about, how do I enact change to accomplish the culture that I want. I didn’t have a lot of pushback from that perspective like, there was just a vacuum and I could fill it with whatever I wanted.
Instead, he said, “I have another type of challenge, which is that, the weight of being the first to establish a culture in the function.” Alex described the process of transitioning to a manager for any new supervisor as finding the appropriate balance between trying to fit into an existing culture of a group versus trying to define the culture of that group.

In further describing the autonomy that he had in his supervisory transition, Alex characterized the degree of control he had with this team as “quite high.” He remarked, “I had a lot of control within my team to make the role what I thought it needed to be to succeed.” Conversely, Alex recognized that he had less control in dealing with stakeholders in other parts of the agency. He observed: “People are territorial . . . and have their own opinions about how things should best go.” He acknowledged that it was a challenge “trying to build trust with those people and find productive ways to engage with them, and many cases those ways differ from people to people.”

**Structural description.** Alex articulated that his initial feelings when transitioning to the supervisor role were “pride” and “excitement.” He explained that he initially had “a sense of gratification that the work that I’d previously done for this organization and for my boss . . . were in some ways ratified, that my hard work for the organization was sort of paying off.” He went on to say that he was excited “at this notion of accompanying an opportunity to be a leader and to challenge myself in that way.” He recalled that his excitement soon turned to “the immediate follow-on realization” of underestimating “the bureaucratic aspects of being a manager” and then a subsequent realization that “this job is about people, and not about numbers.” Finally, he said that his feelings transitioned to “a sense of comfort and confidence” that the role was getting executed in the way that he envisioned it.
Alex said that he believes he has completed his transition to the supervisory role. He described the end of the transition as the point where he fully garnered the “sense of self confidence” in being a manager. He said that “things are getting done” and he is “doing an okay job” and “the ships aren’t wrecking.” He remarked that he is “just doing my job and trying to be the best manager that I can.” Alex acknowledged that now that he is maturing into the supervisory role, he is beginning to ask himself questions about whether he needs to make additional changes. He said that he has recently been reflecting on his uncertainty by thinking about how I perhaps was maybe a little bit guilty of accepting certain cultural norms that existed in the division, when I first stepped into the role and rethinking those culture norms now, as not taking them unquestioning now, just sort of going back and thinking of, I mean, “Is that still the right thing for us?”

Alex implied that for him the process of transition seems to be continuous, with periodic reappraisals of goals and processes to getting to where you want to be as the leader of a team.

Reflecting on what might have been missing from his experience in transitioning to a supervisory role that he believed might have helped him, Alex said that it would have been helpful to have more centralized resources on how to learn about managing in the bureaucracy of the agency. He said that the agency’s leadership development program for new supervisors was beneficial in helping him “contextualize things in a different way,” but it would have been useful if “somebody gave me a booklet of all the various definitions or timeframes that you needed to accomplish x, y, or z.” Alex also commented that no one in the agency explicitly advised him to read the collective bargaining agreement between the agency and the employee union. He recalled, “There came a point in executing my job where I was like, I got to read this thing
because it’s interacting with two or three things that I needed to do that people are expecting me to do.”

When asked how he had personally changed, if at all, as a result of his experience in transitioning to a supervisory role, Alex answered that he is now “a more collegial problem solver” than he was previously, although he acknowledged still needing some additional development in that area. When reflecting on his supervisory approach, he said the following:

I think I’m more cognizant of . . . my employees and my colleagues and my managers as human beings who have things going on in their lives, unrelated to whether or not I need them to get something done in the next 15 or 20 minutes.

Alex also stated that he is improving in his communications, such as the tough conversations that supervisors sometimes need to have with employees. He offered an example: “I particularly don’t like having dress code conversations with people because it seems extremely paternalistic, and it’s not my disposition at all, but I’m getting better at having those conversations.” In addition, Alex said that he is getting better about knowing his own useful strategies to cope with challenges that come his way. As an illustration of his preference for physical exercise as a coping strategy, he made the following observation:

I just can’t run myself ragged. . . . I need to go for a run otherwise I’m not the best person to talk to at the end of the week. That’s not helping me and it’s not helping my employees. I think I’m getting better at that.

Finally, Alex relayed that he is now more comfortable with ambiguity. His previous work experience of “being repeatedly thrown into the deep ends without a compass” has made him “more comfortable with the situation of not really knowing what the right direction is to go at any one time.”
Participant #6: Victor

Demographic information. Victor is a white male in his 40s. He works at the federal agency as an attorney at headquarters in Washington, DC., and has six direct reports. Victor has 21 years of professional work experience, with 19 years of experience in the federal civil service and 5 and a half years of experience at his current federal agency. His private sector experience included employment at two law firms, where he worked directly after earning his law degree.

Textural description. Victor reported that his interest in having more input into decision making about agency policy prompted him to seek a supervisory role. He stated, “As a line attorney, there’s only so much involvement you can have with issues like that.” He went on to say, “I’ve tried to become involved and volunteer for various projects throughout my career that were more policy-oriented . . . but I felt as though I would be able to have a greater impact and greater involvement in those sorts of issues as a supervisor.” Victor also referenced his penchant for teaching younger employees as spurring him toward assuming a supervisory position. He said that he enjoyed “showing them the ropes, bringing them up, mentoring them. I think it’s an important role for folks who have been in the government for a while to mentor folks who are new to government and don’t have much experience.”

In discussing the degree of role change with the transition to supervisor, Victor highlighted three key differences from his prior role as a line attorney. First, Victor commented that he now holds many additional responsibilities as a supervisor. He said that as a line attorney, he had his own portfolio of cases and matters and “my job was to work on those and get those done, and that was my sole focus really.” As a supervisor, he still retains his own portfolio of matters, albeit smaller than before, but he is now also responsible for all the work that his direct reports carry out. He described the work as follows:
There are a lot of briefs, and motions, and things like that that my folks draft on a fairly routine basis, and I’m responsible for reviewing those, providing comments, talking to my folks about perhaps different approaches or asking them questions to clarify why they decided to go a certain way in a certain motion or brief.

Second, as a supervisor, Victor must address general inquiries and technical issues that come down from senior managers in the agency. He described the situation as follows: “I didn’t really have a great appreciation for how often that happens. That’s something that I didn’t have to deal with as a line attorney that I certainly have to handle now.” Third, Victor did not fully appreciate that the supervisory role for direct report employees included “managing them as people.” According to Victor, “my job now is to make sure I stay connected with them not only to keep apprised of what work is being done but also just to make sure that everything is copacetic.”

Victor described the degree of control that he has had in the transition to supervisor as being “fairly broad.” In reflecting on his autonomy in the transition, he said, “I was never really given any sort of parameters that I needed to stay within in terms of managing my employees.” Still, Victor was hesitant to institute anything new within his area of responsibility. He said, “I was reluctant to make changes even where I felt like maybe changes were appropriate.” He continued, “I wanted to give things a little time just to make sure that I had a good line of sight as to what we were doing before I went in and started making changes to those things.” He relayed that as time has moved on, he is more comfortable instituting those types of changes using his supervisory authority.

**Structural description.** Victor said that his prevailing feeling initially when transitioning to a supervisory role could best be described as “awkwardness.” In describing the transition from being “one of the gang” to being their supervisor, he commented that he did not
fully appreciate what that change would entail. He said, “I struggled with how to make that
transition effectively, how to make sure that I was treating everybody equally and not doing
things unintentionally to make it seem like I was favoring one person over another.” In
reflecting on how his feelings changed as he moved through the supervisory transition, he said:
“As time has moved on, I feel like I’ve gotten over most of that.” He noted that his “confidence
or comfort level has continued to increase” and that his “level of awkwardness or discomfort has
decreased.” He offered the following insight about his feelings: “I think I just feel more
comfortable as a supervisor. I feel like I’m not just occupying somebody else’s chair. I feel like
it’s my chair. It’s my role. I’m not just keeping the seat warm or babysitting it.”

When asked whether he considered his supervisory transition to still be going on, Victor
expressed some uncertainty. He described his thoughts in this way: “I don’t know that I’ll ever
be done transitioning. The reason I say that is because I’m a firm believer that you’re constantly
learning. You can constantly improve yourself.” He continued his description as follows:

I certainly feel more comfortable now than I did when I first assumed the supervisory
role, but I don’t know that I’m going to ever get to the point where I feel like, “I’ve got
this. I’m good. I don’t need any assistance. I know what I’m doing.

Relating the process of supervisory transition to his previous experience in a non-supervisory
role, Victor explained his sentiments in this way: “I always felt like I could do better. . . . There
was always a way for me to improve myself, and so as a supervisor, I imagine I’m going to feel
the same way.”

Reflecting on the question of whether there was anything missing from his experience in
transitioning to a supervisory role that he believed might have helped him, Victor replied that
more clarity around expectations of him in the supervisory role from his senior managers would have been valuable. When describing his transition experience, he said:

I wasn’t really given any parameters. I wasn’t told not to do certain things. I think it would have been helpful for me to have a conversation with my bosses about what their expectations were of me as I moved into this role. That didn’t really happen.

When asked why that clarification of expectations did not happen for him, he expressed some uncertainty: “I don’t know the answer to that. I mean, I probably could have been more proactive in asking for that.” He continued, “I don’t know that I knew what questions to ask at that point.” Victor remarked that it would have been helpful to hear what senior management wanted to see from him and what pitfalls to avoid in carrying out his new supervisory role. He proceeded with his explanation: “Maybe that’s an unfair ask. I don’t know, but I think for me anyway, that would have been helpful.”

As a result of his experience in transitioning to a supervisory role, Victor stated that he now has “a greater appreciation for supervisors.” In discussing his perceptions about the underappreciated role of supervisors, he observed, “I do think that there are lots of challenges that supervisors manage on a daily basis that go unseen by their staffs.” Victor stated that initially he thought to himself concerning the supervisory role: “How hard can this be?” He described his subsequent realization as follows: “The job didn’t seem that arduous, and I was greatly mistaken. I mean, it’s tough. There’s a lot of work.” Victor went on to say the following: “I like to think that I haven’t really changed all that much other than that. I think what’s made me successful throughout my career to this point [are] the same things that are helping me hopefully be successful in this role going forward.”
Participant #7: Dwayne

**Demographic information.** Dwayne is a white male in his 30s. He works at the federal agency as a compliance analyst in a field office on the West Coast of the United States and has 11 direct reports. Dwayne has 13 years of professional work experience, with 13 years of experience in the federal civil service and 9 and a half years of experience at his current federal agency. He previously worked for another federal agency in the Northeastern United States. He began his federal career directly out of college after earning a master’s degree.

**Textural description.** Dwayne communicated that he had two primary motivations in transitioning to a supervisor role. First, he said that he was “looking for the next level” in the organization and wanted “the new challenge that would come with it.” Dwayne welcomed the idea of taking on the responsibilities of being a leader through a supervisory position. He stated, “I enjoy the technical aspects of the job, but I do like working with people as well.” He then quickly added, “Although that is turning out to be the harder part of the job is the human relationships and managing that.” Second, Dwayne stated that he wanted more control over the demands of frequent work-related travel. According to Dwayne, many individuals in non-supervisory roles in the field office must travel more often than those individuals in supervisory positions. He underscored, now as a supervisor, “I have more control over my schedule and where I’m needed, which helps with balancing out having kids and family life.”

Dwayne described the degree of role change with the transition to a supervisor position as “pretty substantive.” He explained that he went from being a colleague in his group to then supervising people in that group: “Going from a peer to now a supervisor, that’s been some nuance there, some challenge in terms of what you talk about in the relationships.” He provided an illustration:
I’ve been party to a few conversations where there’s been some conflict between team members that before I would have never been part of. But now as a supervisor, I have to get involved, and so you see a side of people that maybe you don’t see otherwise. That’s been a little eye-opening.

Still, Dwayne said, “The more comfortable I get in the new role, the less I really worry about it or think about it.”

Dwayne commented that in his supervisory role he did not have much control over his assigned day-to-day responsibilities and activities. He said that his boss had clear role expectations for him coming into the supervisor job in detailing the what of his role and that he moved forward during the supervisory transition carrying out those activities as directed by his boss. Dwayne noted that he has had more control in how he carries out the supervisory role. He said that his supervisor’s perspective of Dwayne’s role is along these lines: “As long as the job gets done, I’m glad you’re doing it, and it’ll get done.” Dwayne remarked that he liked the adaptability that his boss offered him with the supervisory role, adding that his supervisor has shown a willingness to revisit the allocation of management duties between the two of them to make sure that he and his boss are “not getting burnt out.”

**Structural description.** Dwayne described his initial feelings when transitioning to the supervisory role as “euphoria” and “thrilled.” He said that he greatly appreciated that managers above him viewed his job performance and leadership potential as strong enough to assume the supervisory role and he relished the idea of controlling his travel schedule. According to Dwayne, over the past year that he has been in the supervisory role, “the euphoria has gone down” but he is still pleased with the supervisor role and the transition. In reference to “a really, really bad day” that happens some days at the office, he said the following: “I just try to temper
that with telling myself, ‘Hey, this is a learning process. This is hard now, but it’ll get better as you get more comfortable with it.’” In discussing the ambiguity that occasionally comes with the supervisory role, he added that “some of the things have worked themselves out in the sense of the unknowns.”

Dwayne reflected on his current circumstance and commented that he considers his supervisory transition to still be ongoing. He explained his transition thusly: “I don’t think it’ll be done for another year or two. I think three years is probably the goal of getting comfortable into the transition fully.” He further described the situation as follows:

I think it’s like learning anything else where when I get to a point where I can train someone to do my job, then that means I understand how to do it . . . I can answer enough questions without really having to think about it.

He continued, “Then at that point, I’ll probably feel more comfortable and then maybe start saying, ‘Well, now that I know I can do this through rote memory, now I’ll take on some other assignments to challenge myself.’”

When asked about what, if anything, might have been missing from his experience in transitioning to a supervisor role that he believed might have helped him, Dwayne described the challenge of beginning the role without much guidance. He said, “You start in your new role, and there’s not really a formal training in the sense of these are the different systems you’re going to use and the reports you’re going to run.” He commented that the agency’s leadership development program for new supervisors promoted personal reflection and offered insights on determining one’s managerial style but did not get into the more day-to-day, detailed technical aspects of the job. Dwayne said that he was lucky in that the agency double encumbered his supervisor position for two weeks so that he was able to sit down with the departing supervisor
he was replacing and have the person walk Dwayne through some of the technical aspects of the job. Dwayne suggested that it would likely help other new supervisors to be able to do the same thing by having an overlap with the outgoing manager to better ensure “a smoother handoff like a relay race versus a hard start.”

Participant #8: Kathleen

Demographic information. Kathleen is a white female in her 30s. She works at the federal agency as a financial analyst in a field office in the Mountain West of the United States and has 13 direct reports. Kathleen has a total of 15 years of professional work experience, all that experience working at her current federal agency. She began working at the agency as an intern in 2004. Her highest level of education completed is a bachelor’s degree.

Textural description. Kathleen relayed that she always wanted to be a supervisor since she became a journeyman-level employee at the agency. She explained that two factors influenced her desire to become a supervisor. First, she wanted to work with employees to help them develop in their careers, and thus serving in a supervisory role would allow her to take a more direct and active part in that effort. She said that she likes to help develop employees because it empowers them in making decisions and carrying out their jobs. Second, she realized that accepting the new supervisory position would permit her to move closer to her family in another state and better manage family responsibilities. She stated that when she and her husband began having children, that prompted her to consider other concerns like the demands of the job and being closer to family.

When describing the degree of role change that came with the transition to a supervisory position, Kathleen characterized the change as significant. She explained that the various types of issues that supervisors need to address in their role can differ from field office to field office.
in the agency. She also stated that subcultures can differ from field office to field office in the agency. She portrayed the transition as follows:

I moved to a different field office, to a different region. My responsibilities completely changed, so it was a big change. I was adjusting to the culture of the field office, the culture of the region. Getting to know everybody within the region and in the field office and understanding how the field office works.

Kathleen emphasized that adjusting to the subculture of a new office can be more challenging than learning about the different issues of that office.

Kathleen described the degree of control that she has had in the supervisory transition as “pretty well balanced.” She found that as a supervisor, she now has more control over her work-related travel requirements. According to Kathleen, before she accepted the supervisory position, she had a forthright conversation with her boss about the travel required for the position and her desire to control the frequency and duration of travel given the demands of her family responsibilities. She added, “I think, right now I’m just trying to figure out my role even though I’ve been on for over a year now, what my strategy is, and what I want to do with my career.”

**Structural description.** Kathleen described her initial feelings in transitioning to a supervisory role as “excited” and “nervous.” She recalled the experience in this way: “I was happy that I got in the position and shocked, too, to be honest. I didn’t think I was going to get it.” She said that when she was selected for the supervisory position, she knew who her boss would be in her new field office and that she was eager to meet the other supervisors there. Also, Kathleen said that she was anxious about the transition because the field office had “a lot of really smart people.” She expressed her concerns as follows: “I was nervous that maybe I wasn’t going to be able to catch on quickly or follow through or understand a lot of things. It’s
still taking me a while, but it’s not as bad as I thought.” According to Kathleen, as time has gone by, she has been “very pleased and happy” with her transition, primarily because her boss and her fellow supervisors have been so supportive. She added that she had been “very fortunate” to work with such a collegial group of supervisors.

Reflecting on the duration of her transition experience, Kathleen stated she believes that her supervisory transition is still ongoing. She explained it thusly: “I thought it would be done by now. I think, for me, I’m still learning a lot.” She explained that at the end of the year, several changes will likely occur in supervisory personnel in her field office because of expected retirements. With these anticipated personnel changes, she posited, “I think by that time I’ll not be the new supervisor on the block.” According to Kathleen, at that point she will be expected to assist the new supervisor in understanding the expectations and culture in the field office. She noted with sureness: “They’re going to be asking questions.”

Considering the issue of whether there was anything missing from her experience in transitioning to a supervisory role that she believed might have helped her, Kathleen responded that more training on the administrative expectations for supervisors would have been helpful, such as the rules and procedures on employee time and attendance and employee travel vouchers. She also referenced the “tons of paperwork” required for managing various requirements for new employees, such as mandatory certifications that employees have acquired specific competencies. Kathleen stated that although her supervisory peers in the office have been great in providing support to her for learning these administrative processes, formalized training on these types of administrative topics would be helpful. She expressed particular concern for new supervisors at the agency who might not have a strong peer network to help with these types of administrative questions.
When asked about how, if at all, she had personally changed as a result of her experience in transitioning to a supervisory role, Kathleen said, “I honestly don’t think I’ve changed that much.” She then expressed some apprehension that perhaps she had not changed enough in her transition in being more forceful and proactive with her supervisory approach. She observed, “I think I should be changing a little bit and getting that mindset of being a supervisor and I’m the person that can make the decisions.” She provided the following example: “Talking to the employees, making sure that if there is anything that I’m not appreciating or I don’t like [on the job] that I’m voicing it or I’m coaching them while I see something.” She continued, “I think that’s one thing that I need to actually work on.”

**Themes and Composite Description**

An analysis of the study participants’ descriptions of their supervisory transition experiences revealed four themes that emerged from their accounts. The four emergent themes align directly with Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) “4S” transition system, which sets out four categories of factors that influence an individual’s ability to cope with a transition in life, as described in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Specifically, these four categories of factors are (a) *situation*, which involves the conditions of the transition; (b) *self*, which involves personal characteristics of the individual in transition; (c) *support*, which encompasses the external resources that the individual has available for navigating the transition; and (d) *strategies*, which are the coping mechanisms that the individual uses to negotiate the transition. Based on the data analysis, the four themes are as follows:

- **Theme 1 (Situation):** Prior leadership experience aided participants in their supervisory transitions, but these prior experiences were generally not equivalent to the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role.
Theme 2 (Self): Both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assisted participants in their supervisory transition more so than did technical skills.

Theme 3 (Support): Participants’ professional peers provided crucial support with technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback, oftentimes more so than from supervisors.

Theme 4 (Strategies): Direct engagement with others and disengagement from others and the work were prevalent coping strategies for participants.

The following is an explanation of these four emergent themes with examples from the supervisory transition experiences of the participants as gleaned from the research interviews.

**Theme 1: Situation**

The first emergent theme from the analysis of participant interview data aligns with the first research sub-question for this study, which concerns the situational aspects of the transition. Specifically, the first sub-question is the following: What conditions exist for new supervisors when transitioning to their supervisory roles? The analysis of the interview data revealed that participants’ prior leadership experiences aided them in their supervisory transitions, but these prior experiences were generally not equivalent to the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role in the agency. All eight supervisors interviewed for this study referenced a previous leadership experience that was similar to their transition to a supervisory role. Five of the study participants referenced prior acting supervisory roles in temporary, short-term arrangements; two participants referenced previous non-supervisory team leadership roles, and one participant referenced a previous leadership experience in the non-profit sector.

Victor, Kathleen, Samantha, Maria, and Jacob served in short-term acting details prior to their transition to a permanent supervisory position. Victor explained that the acting role was
helpful because “I got my feet wet in supervising here at the [agency]” and the experience was “a huge help once I moved into the position permanently.” He went on to say the following:

I was able to get a taste of what it’s like, what the challenges were, what the personalities were like, so I think that that better prepared me for assuming a permanent role so I wasn’t walking in completely cold.

Victor added, however, that the acting supervisory experience was not a precise reflection of the permanent supervisory role. He described the prior experience thusly:

Because it was such a short period, if there were significant long-term issues or matters that were being discussed, I do feel as though some of those were not necessarily kept from me, but I wasn’t given full responsibility for them because my superiors knew that I wasn’t going to be in that role beyond the three months.

Victor said that in the permanent supervisory role, he spends a higher percentage of his time directly supervising the work of others versus managing his own portfolio of work.

Kathleen resounded Victor’s sentiments about the experience with the temporary acting role. Kathleen said that the acting supervisory experience allowed her the opportunity to get to know the relevant people and issues but that the acting role required less responsibility than her current, permanent supervisory position. She added that because she was in the acting role for less than three months, “It wasn’t like I had to really dig in and understand everything.”

Kathleen said that she is “still learning a lot” in her permanent supervisory role, even after over a year in the position.

Similarly, Samantha reported that in her previous acting role she reviewed employees’ work products as would a supervisor, but she explained that she has more authority and influence now as a permanent supervisor. For Samantha, the attendant authority in the permanent
supervisory role allows her to exert more influence in teaching and developing employees, which she said was “part of a supervisor’s role” and one of the primary factors that prompted her to transition to a supervisory position. She explained that she delights in helping employees develop their skills and “making everyone, the whole organization, better.” She said, “Maybe it sounds altruistic, but I enjoy it.”

Maria likewise said that her current supervisory role is more complex than her previous acting experience, where she had fewer people to lead and the responsibilities were much more routine. She stated that the acting role involved leading “only three people” and that she “did a lot of just the same quarterly things.” According to Maria, the opportunity for her to be a permanent supervisor “came with promotion and money and a move across the country.” She characterized the transition to the permanent supervisory role as “pretty drastic,” additionally because of the change in day-to-day work content and the responsibilities of leading a larger team of employees with whom she had not worked previously.

In the same vein, Jacob stated that the level of responsibility in his short-term temporary role was not nearly as significant as his permanent supervisory role. He described his acting supervisory role as “maybe more like shadowing.” He said that in the acting role, his manager did not give him responsibility for some administrative tasks that he was expecting to receive. Correspondingly, according to Jacob, the permanent supervisory position involved more responsibilities than he was expecting to receive. He succinctly characterized these additional responsibilities as follows: “There's just a lot of other stuff.”

In discussing their previous experiences, Robert and Dwayne referenced prior roles serving as non-supervisory team leaders as being similar to their transition to a supervisory role. Robert offered the following:
I think in many senses that’s why I haven’t found this a very difficult transition or challenge, the supervisory function, because you get a lot of that, a fair amount of that experience and background as [a team leader]. You get a lot of responsibility on those [team leader] jobs, in terms of making sure the job is carried out and completed on time. Still, Robert said that the transition from non-supervisory team leader to supervisor revealed that his current, permanent supervisory role is more complicated and involves a larger scope of work than his experience as a team leader. Similarly, Dwayne said that much of his team leader experience has translated to his supervisory role but that the two experiences are not comparable. Dwayne relayed that as a team leader he had some preconceived notions of how he thought the work should be carried out. He described the actuality of the experience in this way:

But when you become a supervisor, you run up against the reality of people above you looking at your hours and your budgets and managing things and you realize, “Oh, maybe it’s not so simple as I once thought it would be.”

Still, Dwayne said that transition is “a learning process” and that he hopes the supervisory role will proceed like the previous team leader experience in that his duties and responsibilities will become more second-nature to him as he gains more experience in the role.

Alex referenced his previous leadership experience working in the non-profit sector as similar to his transition to a supervisory role. Alex noted that the amount of responsibility that he was given as “a newly minted professional” at the non-profit organization was considerable and yet valuable. He summarized the experience of working in the non-profit space as follows:

You get paid almost nothing, but the responsibilities that you’re given to execute those things is quite large. Because, when budgets are tight and resources are tight, people tend to give people a lot of latitude to do whatever they need to do to accomplish a job.
Alex suggested that if he had not experienced these demands in the workplace as a younger worker, he would likely find the supervisory transition to be more challenging, or at a minimum he might have “a little bit less confidence” in his ability “to figure out the best path forward in a world of infinite possibilities.” He said that his current supervisory role is more complex than his previous experience for several reasons, including the level of bureaucratic obstacles to overcome in decision making and the need to define a workplace culture for his new team in the agency.

**Theme 2: Self**

The second emergent theme from the analysis of participant interview data responds to the second research sub-question for this study, which concerns self. Specifically, the second sub-question is the following: What personal characteristics do new supervisors make use of when transitioning to their supervisory roles? The analysis of the interview data revealed that both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assisted participants in their supervisory transition. Although no single personal characteristic stood out prominently for all study participants during their interviews as helping their supervisory transitions, both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills were referenced by participants as beneficial more often than were technical skills. The difference between interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can be summed up in that interpersonal skills are qualities and behaviors that relate to interactions and communications with other people, while intrapersonal skills are conditions that are situated in a person’s mind, such as their thoughts, feelings, and emotions (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). In discussing personal characteristics that assisted them with their supervisory transitions, participants referenced numerous interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Also, the interviews of participants indicated
that the same interpersonal and intrapersonal skills can likewise hinder participants in their transitions.

**Interpersonal skills in the supervisory transition.** Study participants described several interpersonal skills that helped them in the supervisory transition. These interpersonal skills can be categorized into three areas: (a) friendly and outgoing nature, (b) trust and honesty, and (c) nurturing the growth of others. The following is a description of these personal characteristics with examples from the interviews with participants.

**Friendly and outgoing nature.** Jacob, Kathleen, and Samantha suggested that their friendly and outgoing nature was a personal characteristic that helped them in the supervisory transition. Jacob described the situation as follows: “I’ve been told that I have a good affect. I interact well with my colleagues. I think my staff think highly of me as a person.” He added that he believes one of the reasons he was selected for the supervisory role was because of his positive attitude and friendly disposition. Kathleen also agreed that this personal characteristic was helpful for her in the transition. She said, “I'm pretty friendly and outgoing” by nature. She went on to say that many of her colleagues are introverts, so she tends to stand out. According to Kathleen, her outgoing nature helped her in getting to know all the employees in the office and contributed to building a working environment where they “get along” with one another. In a similar vein, Samantha commented that her friendly and outgoing manner has made her more approachable as a supervisor. She provided the following insight about this personal characteristic: “I feel like my direct reports feel like they can tell me what’s going on. I probably know more personal stuff than some other managers, but it helps me help them prioritize.”

**Trust and honesty.** Kathleen, Robert, and Alex mentioned trust and honesty as aiding them in their transition to a supervisory role. Kathleen said, “I think, the number one thing is,
I’m trustworthy.” She went on to relay a story to illustrate the point, referring to a retirement gathering for her mentor: “Even my mentor . . . at his speech when he left, he even mentioned that he could trust me immediately.” According to Kathleen, her mentor mentioned her by name in his retirement remarks because he wanted to communicate to others in the office that she was trustworthy, particularly given that some employees in the field office seemed apprehensive and unsure about her as a new supervisor there. Robert also referenced the influence of trust: “I try to give people the benefit of the doubt, until it becomes apparent you have a situation where you need to address it with the employee, whatever that might be.” Along the same lines, Alex underscored the power of honesty in building and maintaining trusting working relationships with employees in the workplace. He said that “you need to confront them with honesty and earnestness.” He went on to say, “If you’re coming in with respect, it’s a lot easier than if you walk into rooms with a lot of sense of prejudice to prejudgment.”

*Nurturing the growth of others.* Robert and Dwayne both said that their supervisory transitions were aided by possessing a strong interest in nurturing the growth of others. Robert said that he has a natural tendency to want to help others grow both personally and professionally and that he views teaching and developing employees primarily as affirmative and not corrective. Robert made the following observation: “I would naturally reach out to some of the staff and try to offer my availability to help them in certain areas where they felt like they were struggling, as opposed to being critical or criticizing them.” Robert commented that some supervisors in his field office do not appear to like training and developing their staff and that he probably does more of that than other supervisors because he enjoys it so much. Dwayne recounted a similar observation about this type of interpersonal skill, remarking that people always looked to him as
a resource and a “go-to person” for answering questions on both work-related and non-work
topics. He recalled the following:

When I first came in, I was willing to train people and say, “Hey, I want to be a resource
for junior employees” as they’re progressing and help them to get to where they need to
be. . . . People would come to me with questions or we would talk about things going on
in the world or in their life. . . . I think being approachable is part of it, too.

Dwayne acknowledged that several other employees who applied for the supervisor role and who
were not selected actually have stronger technical skills, but he said that “they have zero
interpersonal skills.” He went on to say that possessing a balance of technical skills and
interpersonal skills is “the secret sauce” that got him to where he is now.

Interpersonal skills that hindered. The interviews with study participants revealed that
these interpersonal skills also sometimes hindered participants in their supervisory transitions.
For example, a friendly and outgoing disposition on the part of a supervisor could be viewed by
others in the workplace as being weak and ineffectual. Jacob acknowledged that although his
kind, easy-going manner with a “steady hand” is a strength for him, this attribute is also viewed
at times as a deficiency. Jacob encapsulated this perspective in the following way: “Sometimes I
feel like I want to tell people, “Don’t confuse my kindness with weakness,” because I don’t think
I’m a weak person.” Moreover, Dwayne said that when he applied for the supervisory role, he
heard direct feedback from a manager in the agency that he was overly friendly. According to
Dwayne, the manager communicated the following to him:

I think you’re too nice, and I had concerns that when you need to be a hard-ass, to use
that term, I had questions about whether you could do that. When you have to just get on
someone to say, “Cut the BS. I need you to do this right now,” that, I think, will be a challenge for you.

Dwayne commented that he is trying to do the best he can as a supervisor when those types of situations arise and remind himself that he cannot always be “a nice guy.” Kathleen echoed the same challenge:

I think being friendly is also something that’s hindered me because, you want to be friendly, you want to work with others. . . . But when you have to make a decision that doesn’t go well with the [employees], that’s tough for me.

Along similar lines, Victor said that although he is an attorney, he has a natural dislike of conflict and that this dislike of conflict has hindered his transition. He said that his team has experienced some conflict over the past year, explaining the situation thusly:

[T]here has been conflict in my unit, and I've had to deal with it, and I don't know that I've been as effective in dealing with it as perhaps I could be. . . . My preference or my natural inclination is to sort of try to avoid it.

**Intrapersonal skills in the supervisory transition.** Study participants additionally discussed several intrapersonal skills that helped them in the supervisory transition. These intrapersonal skills can be categorized into three areas: (a) reflective open-mindedness, (b) positive and professional mindset, and (c) calmness and composure. The following is a description of these personal characteristics with examples from the interviews with participants.

**Reflective open-mindedness.** Robert, Alex, and Maria referenced personal characteristics associated with the notion of reflective open-mindedness as aiding them in the transition to the supervisory role. Reflection allowed the supervisors to consider their own experience and examine it closely for new insights and learning. Robert described the
characteristic as follows: “I tend not to be overly reactive. I generally try to approach things with an open mind, and don’t jump to conclusions or extremes until I have all the facts. I think that’s probably been the most beneficial thing.” Similarly, Alex described this personal characteristic in connection with his status as an economist and researcher: “Well, so I think [I have] sort of an aggressive sense of self reflection, and I don’t know if this is just natural to me, or sort of endemic to researchers.” Alex said that his deep-rooted belief in evidence-based policymaking drives him to be open-minded and reflective, which has led him to a position where he can “have even more larger effect on policy.” Maria mentioned “the ability to just be a sponge at first” and be observant and open to what was happening around her. She knew that she should not hastily “make all these rules and directives” but rather should “just learn first.” Based on her prior experience observing previous supervisors in the workplace, Maria said: “It was the people who learned the culture and people’s personalities, and learned how to work with them, they were the ones who stayed the course.” She went on to say, “People who came in, guns blazing, my experience is they never worked out very well.”

**Positive and professional mindset.** Samantha, Dwayne, and Alex referred to having a positive mindset of success and professionalism as a personal characteristic that contributed to assisting them in their supervisory transition. Samantha cited her positive attitude as a helpful personal characteristic for transitioning: “I try to be a pretty positive person, which has been stressed a little bit during this year of being a supervisor.” She went on to say, “I think I’m naturally optimistic, not that that doesn’t get tested. Actually, my boss says we’re not paid to be optimistic, but I think I’m positive.” Dwayne also referenced this positive and professional mindset as a valuable trait for supervisory transition. He attributed this personal characteristic to aiding his transition as follows: “I think one is just professionalism, showing up to work each
day with a professional mindset of, ‘We’re going to do this job. We’re going to be professional in all our interactions.’” Also, Alex suggested that he possessed a natural predisposition towards wanting to succeed at whatever projects he is working on. He described the situation as follows:

As a new manager, the layers of review get thinner and thinner above you. And so there’s less and less abdication of responsibility for projects to the system, because there’s just less and less system above you. And so, I think, being cognizant of that and just sort of having that task completion mentality.

Alex stated that treating people professionally shows “fundamental respect,” whether the individuals are direct reports, an immediate supervisor, or stakeholders in other parts of the agency.

**Calmness and composure.** Victor and Jacob referenced personal characteristics associated with being steady, calm, and levelheaded as helping them in the move to the supervisory role. Victor suggested “balanced” composure as a trait that helped him to “navigate sometimes choppy waters” he encountered in his supervisory transition. He explained as follows:

I consider myself a relatively levelheaded person. I don’t get too high, I don’t get too low, and I think that served me well certainly in my first year of being a supervisor. This job throws you curve balls from time to time and sometimes more often than not, and I think it’s important that as a supervisor, you’re able to deal with those and not get too agitated, or stressed, or scared, or otherwise.

Jacob referenced his “calming” nature and his “steady hand” as helping him to weather challenges both at work and outside of work. He commented that this marked composure has
been particularly beneficial more recently because “[w]e have a little bit of turmoil in our group.”

**Intrapersonal skills that hindered.** The interviews with study participants also revealed that these intrapersonal skills likewise at times hindered participants in their supervisory transitions. For example, a fair amount of reflective open-mindedness on the part of a supervisor could be viewed by others as being indecisive. Robert acknowledged his tendency in this area:

> Sometimes I probably tend to be too reflective, and probably take too long to think about things. A lot of times, the staff, they just want a quick response and reaction. In some cases, it’s probably been a little frustrating at times for some of the staff.

Maria made a similar observation based on her experience:

> I don’t like making decisions quickly, and I like to have all the facts before I really go one way or another. . . . [But employees] like somebody who can make a decision, people who can make a decision firmly and quickly.

Victor also realized that indecision has hindered his transition: “I have a tendency to be, I don’t know, indecisive. I do like to make sure that I get a lot of opinions. I generally can see both sides of an issue.” Victor said that as an attorney he views his job as ensuring internal clients have the information they need to make the best informed decisions and that this mindset has affected his supervisory approach.

**Theme 3: Support**

The third emergent theme from the analysis of participant interview data links to the third research sub-question for this study, which is about support. Specifically, the third sub-question is the following: What social support do new supervisors rely on when transitioning to their supervisory roles? The analysis of the interview data revealed that study participants’
professional peers provided crucial support with technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback, and that participants frequently relied on support from peers more often than from supervisors. After professional peers and supervisors, other types of support mentioned less often by the participants include spouse, family, friends, and mentors. A spouse, family member, or friend often provided emotional support.

In the discussion of social support for her, Samantha referenced an example of peer support with a particularly difficult situation that occurred less than a month into her new supervisory role. She described the situation, which involved a stressful meeting that added to her initial doubts about deciding to become a supervisor, as follows:

I was driving back from a meeting and I called one of my [peers] and I was like, “What did I do? This was the stupidest decision.” Because just a couple of stressful things had happened. I just felt overwhelmed by my email box and I didn’t know what to do with half of them . . . but she just talked me through it.

Samantha said that her colleague’s support helped her survive “this great nosedive” and she recovered “back up to like the job again.”

Maria commented that she looked to supervisory peers for support and assistance, often more than relying on her boss. She said that her peers were working on similar projects, so she could call them with questions: “I might say . . . ‘How did you do this? What do you think about this? How does this process work?’” Maria commented that during her transition she did not fully understand what she had the authority to do on her own as a supervisor versus what needed to be approved by others in the agency. She said that peers helped her sort out these numerous approval processes in her division and in the agency, often surprising her when in some cases she
had more authority than she expected and bewildering her when in other cases she had to obtain approval from so many others in the bureaucracy.

Victor also referenced a fellow supervisor in the agency who greatly aided him in his transition to the supervisory role. He described the support as follows:

If I had a problem, or a concern, or a question, I feel very comfortable going to her and just talking to her about it, using her as a sounding board, and so I think she was vital particularly in the initial stages of helping me become comfortable with being a supervisor here.

Jacob also referenced a peer supervisor who was extremely supportive since Jacob took on the supervisory role just over a year ago. Jacob remarked, “He’s out showing me the ropes, giving me the ins and outs, and just being there to lend an ear whenever I’m frustrated or have some issues.” Jacob said that this colleague offered support to him both “on the managerial side” and “some sort of emotional support,” although “I don’t want to say a shoulder to cry on.”

In their discussions of social support, Dwayne and Kathleen said that the curricular content of the agency’s leadership development program for new supervisors was helpful for them, but the bigger benefit was developing a network of peers through the program. Dwayne said:

There’s a room full of people going through the same thing I’m going through here. If I run into a question or an issue, I now have 20 other people that I can email. It could be a different division. It could be a different region. It doesn’t matter. I can reach out to these people and say, "Hey, I’m dealing with this. Have you dealt with that before?" and understand what that’s like.
Kathleen echoed a similar sentiment in reference to the agency’s leadership development program: “I think the best part about that was really getting to know the other supervisors and what they’re going through. Talking it out with them has helped.”

Robert also said that his contemporary supervisors in his field office were a valuable resource for him in making the transition. He noted that he went to his supervisory peers if he had “questions or issues” and that these peers often provided technical assistance, such as guidance on operating new computer systems that supervisors must use in their role. Similarly, Alex commented that he relied heavily on the process of peer review that is inherent in his role related to research and that this feedback from peers gave him “a sense of confidence” about transitioning to the supervisory role.

**Theme 4: Strategies**

The fourth emergent theme from the analysis of participant interview data responds to the fourth research sub-question for this study, which is about strategies. Specifically, the fourth sub-question is the following: What personal coping strategies do new supervisors use when transitioning to their supervisory roles? The analysis of the interview data revealed that personal engagement with others and disengagement from others and the work were prevalent coping strategies for participants. To deal with the attendant challenges of the supervisory transition, participants used a variety of coping strategies, based on their responses in the participant interviews. The coping strategies most often used by the participants involved dichotomies of engagement, either directly engaging with others or purposefully disengaging from others or the work. Specifically, seven of the participants referenced using direct engagement with others, four participants cited using disengagement from others or the work, and three participants discussed using both engagement and disengagement to cope personally with their transition.
Other coping strategies mentioned less often by the participants include patience, reflection, drawing on prior experience and learning, time management, physical exercise, and humor.

**Direct engagement with others.** Participants in the interviews often reported using direct engagement with other individuals as a coping strategy to deal with the challenges of supervisory transition. This direct engagement by the supervisors was carried out in various ways, such as obtaining input on approaches to address a specific difficulty in the transition, gaining reassurance that the participant can indeed carry out the supervisory role, reframing a problem or negative aspect of the transition to see it in a more optimistic light, or managing personal stress associated with the transition. The individuals with whom the participants engaged to help with coping typically were professional peers, supervisors, and family members. Victor stated that a coping strategy he used is “reaching out to what I call my support system when there were challenges or concerns.” He said that his support system consists of individuals whom he trusted and who could understand the experience he was going through. Victor described this support as follows:

I knew that they were there, and I felt comfortable going to them, and so if I had something that I felt like I needed some outside assistance with, I certainly used them and continue to use them as appropriate.

For Samantha, reaching out to professional peers was an effective coping strategy because “you can go talk to somebody that’s in the exact same situation as you, or a very similar one, and share.” For Dwayne, “just asking a lot of questions and talking through things with people” helped him to navigate the transition experience. For Alex, reaching out to his supervisor for honest feedback served as a strategy for coping, particularly given that they “have a really good working relationship.” Robert said that this direct engagement to cope personally with the
transition included not only talking with other supervisors to garner knowledge and advice but also observing other supervisors on the job. He described the experience as follows: “Looking at supervisors that you have respect for, and that have a good reputation in terms of watching them to see how they react and behave. And in some cases, trying to model that behavior in certain situations.”

Kathleen stated that talking with her spouse and her work peers often helped to assuage her concerns and reassure her that all was well. She said that her husband was previously a supervisor in the federal civil service and provided her with technical assistance along with emotional support and reassurance. She explained that she also relied on her supervisory peers to provide information about “the culture” of the new office and “the expectations” for the supervisory position. She said that “just really communicating with them” and “talking it through” served as the most effective coping strategy for her in the supervisory transition.

For Maria, coping through direct engagement with others involved reaching out to connect and spend time with friends. She said that with the transition to the new supervisory position along with a move to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, she initially experienced “a lot of discomfort and stress” and made a commitment to meet new people outside of work as a way to cope:

I said, “Okay, the thing I’m going to do is I’m going to go out to those meetup groups.”

Anything from you like to fish, knit, eat oysters. There’s a group for everything. And I went to one of those and was pleasantly surprised.

Engaging with friends helped Maria to cope because “it’s just knowing that life’s not all work. I’ve got another life. I feel like I have a life, not just work.”
**Disengagement from others or the work.** To cope with the challenge of supervisory transition, participants also used disengagement by withdrawing from others or the work, most often on a temporary or short-term basis. Jacob recounted the following experience after he left the office at the close of the workday:

> I will say that there’s been more times than it used to be, where I’d go home at the end of the day, and just have to tell my spouse: “I just need an hour to myself. Just give me an hour to decompress.” And I hadn’t felt that way in years.

Jacob reported that he has also used disengagement to cope during the workday. He said that he takes “little walks” at lunchtime instead of sitting in his office. He added, “I just walk the long way around the block. Get a little fresh air. Recharge the battery.”

Victor also discussed the coping strategy of disengagement in dealing with the challenges of his new supervisory role. He captured a description of his disengagement in the following way:

> If I’ve had a particularly challenging day, if there’s a particularly challenging issue that I’m struggling with, I will generally just put it to the side, go home, maybe have a glass of wine, get a good night’s sleep, and come back the next day, and try to look at it fresh. It sounds a little trite, but for me anyway, it actually has worked pretty well. It’s just getting away from it for a period of time even if it’s only an overnight, and coming back, and looking at it with fresh eyes.

Victor relayed that he initially did not fully appreciate what the supervisory transition would be like for him. Although he noted that his “comfort level has continued to increase,” he acknowledged that he continues to struggle with the transition in some ways and stated that the occasional use of disengagement has allowed him to better manage the stress of the change.
Samantha likewise referenced her desire to disengage from the work to manage the stress of the transition. She explained her disengagement in this manner:

One of my coping strategies is turning off when I go home. I don’t have to think about work. So, I guess putting things in perspective that way and thinking nothing requires my attention that much that I can’t try to shut off at the end of the day.

She stated that she commutes by train and the ride home allows her to shift her thinking so that by the time she arrives at home, “all I’m worried about is dinner and getting the kids to bed.”

Maria echoed the usefulness of disengagement from work to cope with the challenges of transition:

After I have so much stimulus during the day, I just think going home to my little one-bedroom apartment to be a relief in not having to see a lot of people at night. Just personal time. That’s how I cope.

Maria remarked, “To me, coping is something that makes my life easier.” She referenced the feelings of “comfort” and “discomfort” numerous times throughout her interview to describe the passage from negative to positive aspects of the transition. She said that disengagement from the work benefits her in that it feels like it is giving her “some relief.”

**Composite Description**

The final step in the process of descriptive phenomenological analysis involves integrating the textural and structural descriptions of the study participants as developed by the researcher into a composite description of the essence of the experience of the phenomenon under review (Moustakas, 1994). The aim of this phenomenological approach is to understand the experience of individuals going through the same or similar phenomenon as consciously experienced rather than as hypothesized or conceptualized by an outside researcher (van Manen,
Based on an analysis of the collected data for the participants in this study, the essence of the experience of transitioning to a new supervisory role at a federal government agency is summarized below as a narrative composite description.

The new supervisors’ transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency begins with the consideration of previous experiences in life. Prior leadership experience assists new supervisors with their supervisory transitions, but the prior experience is typically not equivalent to the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role. Both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assist new supervisors in their supervisory transition more so than do technical skills. Interpersonal skills that are helpful in the transition include a friendly and outgoing nature, trust and honesty, and nurturing the growth of others. Intrapersonal skills that are beneficial for the transition include reflective open-mindedness, a positive and professional mindset, and calmness and composure. Professional peers provide crucial support to new supervisors through technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback, often more so than from supervisors. Direct engagement with others and disengagement from others and the work are prevalent coping strategies for new supervisors in dealing with the challenges of the supervisory transition. Table 3 outlines the composite description and links the description to the four components of Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition framework, namely situation, self, support, and strategies.
Table 3

Composite Description of New Supervisors’ Transition Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation</strong></td>
<td>The conditions of the transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation</td>
<td>• The new supervisors’ transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency begins with the consideration of previous experiences in life.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Prior leadership experience assists new supervisors with their supervisory transitions, but the prior experience is typically not equivalent to the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self</strong></td>
<td>The characteristics of the person in transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>• Both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assist new supervisors in their supervisory transition more so than do technical skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interpersonal skills that are helpful in the transition include a friendly and outgoing nature, trust and honesty, and nurturing the growth of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Intrapersonal skills that are beneficial for the transition include reflective open-mindedness, a positive and professional mindset, and calmness and composure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td>The external resources to help an individual navigate a transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>• The new supervisors engage with professional peers, supervisors, and family members to help them with the transition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Professional peers provide crucial support to new supervisors through technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback, often more so than from supervisors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td>The coping mechanisms that an individual uses to negotiate a transition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategies</td>
<td>• The new supervisors use direct engagement with other individuals as a coping strategy to deal with the challenges of supervisory transition, such as</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– obtaining input on approaches to address a specific difficulty in the transition,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– gaining reassurance that the supervisor can indeed carry out the supervisory role,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– reframing a problem or negative aspect of the transition to see it in a more optimistic light, or</td>
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<td></td>
<td>– managing personal stress associated with the transition.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The new supervisors also rely on disengagement from others and disengagement from the work as useful for dealing with the challenges of the supervisory transition.</td>
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</table>
Summary

The eight participants who were interviewed for this study provided valuable insights about their experiences as new supervisors transitioning to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. The participants represented a mix of genders, occupations, educational experiences, and geographic locations. The textural descriptions of the participants’ experiences focused on areas such as what prompted the transition to a supervisory role, the degree of role change involved with the transition, and the degree of control that participants had in the transition. The structural descriptions of the participants’ experiences focused on areas such as the participants’ feelings during the transition and the participants’ reflections on how they might have personally changed as a result of their transition experience.

Based on an analysis of the interview data, four themes emerged related to the participants’ experiences of supervisory transition. An emergent theme was identified for each of the four components of the theoretical framework used for this study. The researcher used the interview data from the agency supervisors to develop a narrative composite description of the experience of the participants that included the following: (a) the usefulness of prior leadership experience to aid in the supervisory transition; (b) the reliance on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills versus technical skills to assist with the transition; (c) the support of professional peers in providing technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback during the transition; and (d) the use of direct engagement and disengagement as coping strategies to contend with the demands of the transition. This composite description serves as the essence of the lived experience of the new supervisors in their transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. As described in Chapter 5, the findings of this study have specific implications in relation to
Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition framework, to the literature review conducted for this study, and to educational practice.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Findings

Given that over a quarter of a million individuals hold supervisory positions in the U.S. federal civilian non-postal workforce (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2017), it is essential that the federal government has a well-qualified cadre of supervisors who can lead people and manage processes in a highly bureaucratic environment. With research indicating that more than half of new managers underperform during their first two years on the job (Corporate Executive Board, 2006), ineffective supervision in the federal sector could lead to inadequate support and direction to employees in the federal workforce. In turn, this underperformance of federal supervisors could affect the overall mission accomplishment of federal agencies. Thus, the successful transition from individual contributor in the workforce to a supervisory role in the agency contributes to conditions where new supervisors can operate effectively in an environment that has a reputation for resistance to change, high risk aversion, and lack of flexibility (National Academy of Public Administration, 2003; U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009, 2010). Understanding the context and factors that influence career transition for new federal supervisors may provide the federal government with new options to boost the efficiency and improve the effectiveness of first-time supervisors during their transition to a leadership position.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to new supervisory roles at a federal government agency. Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition theory, which was formulated to explain transitions in any facet of a person’s life, served as the theoretical lens for this study. The study was guided by the following central research question: How do new supervisors at a federal government agency describe their personal experience of transitioning to a supervisory role? To answer the research
question, the researcher employed descriptive phenomenology through semi-structured interviews with eight first-time supervisors at a mid-sized federal agency headquartered in Washington, DC, and captured rich descriptions of their transition experience. Based on the analysis of the interview data, the results of this study as detailed in Chapter 4 support the following:

- While prior leadership experience, such as temporary team leader or managerial assignments, aided participants in their supervisory transitions, these prior experiences were generally not equivalent to the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role.

- Both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assisted participants in their supervisory transition more so than did technical skills.

- Participants’ professional peers provided crucial support with technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback, oftentimes more so than from supervisors.

- Direct engagement with others and disengagement from others and the work were prevalent coping strategies for participants.

In this chapter, these findings are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework, the literature review, and educational practice. Recommendations for future research based on the results of this study are also presented and discussed.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to Theoretical Framework**

The overall results of this study support the key assumptions of Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition theory and the applicability of the theory to the transition of new supervisors to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. The interviews with new supervisors revealed that participants’ prior leadership experience aided them in their supervisory transitions. Schlossberg (1981a) pointed out that prior experience often influences how an individual
approaches a current transition in life. In discussing the factors that influence transitions, Schlossberg and her colleagues (Anderson et al., 2012) observed that an individual who has successfully endured a specific type of transition in the past will likely be successful at undergoing another transition of a similar kind. The experiences of the new supervisors in this study bolstered the substantive notion of the transition theory that a critical skill in today’s workplace is knowing how to “recognize the learning and be able to apply it in the new situation” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 170). As with other transitions that occur in a person’s life, moving into a supervisory role often requires a reassessment of assumptions and a related change in one’s behavior and relationships (Schlossberg, 1981a).

The finding of this study addressing the personal characteristics of study participants also aligns with Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition theory. Based on the interviews of the new supervisors at the federal agency, no one single personal characteristic stood out prominently for all study participants as aiding their transition to a supervisory role. This finding corresponds with Schlossberg’s transition system that outlines categories of factors that influence an individual’s ability to navigate a transition in life. Specifically, Schlossberg posited that each individual undergoing transition has a different profile of these influence factors, even if the individuals are going through the same or similar transition. The results of this study indicate that the new supervisors experiencing transition each had specific personal characteristics that they believed uniquely helped their transitions to becoming a supervisor. Still, the analysis of interview data revealed that interpersonal and intrapersonal skills aided the new supervisors in their transitions and that these interpersonal and intrapersonal skills were referenced as beneficial by the supervisors more often than were technical skills.
The findings from this study also revealed that participants’ professional peers gave crucial support in the supervisory transition by providing the new supervisors with technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback. Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition framework directly addresses external resources that could be helpful for an individual as he or she navigates a transition. Specifically, the framework includes types of support, such as family members, friends, and colleagues, and well as functions of support, such as direct assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback. Although participants in this study identified a wide range of types and functions of support as a component of the supervisory transition, the participants’ descriptions drew particular attention to the value of peer support. This discovery through the participant interviews that professional peers generally contributed to supporting the new supervisors as much as, and sometimes more than, their direct superiors, demonstrates the value of these types of working relationships. Schlossberg and her fellow researchers (Anderson et al., 2012) observed that some social support for individuals can be stable over time while other social support might change with the passage of time based on changes in role relationships in a person’s life. The results of this study highlighted the significance of support for individuals as role relationships change, such as the movement in status from employee to supervisor in an organization.

The results of this study also revealed that direct engagement with others and disengagement from others and the work were prevalent coping strategies for study participants. These results correspond with Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition framework of three sets of coping strategies: (a) taking direct action to correct or mitigate a problem in the transition, (b) reframing a problem or negative aspect of the transition by viewing it in a more positive light, and (c) managing the personal stress of the challenges associated with the transition (Anderson et
al., 2012). Based on the participants’ descriptions in this study, the coping strategy of direct engagement with others aided these new supervisors in obtaining input on approaches to address a problem or difficulty with the transition, gaining reassurance to carry out the supervisory role, and seeing negative aspects of the transition from a more optimistic perspective, which all align with the first and second set of strategies posited by Schlossberg. Moreover, the participants’ descriptions of the coping strategy of disengagement typically involved helping the new supervisors in managing personal stress in the transition, which aligns with the third set of strategies outlined by Schlossberg.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The first finding of this study indicated that, although participants’ prior leadership experience assisted the new supervisors in their supervisory transitions, these prior experiences were generally not an accurate reflection of the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role. Study participants relayed that their permanent supervisory roles involved greater responsibilities, a fuller scope of work, more authority and influence, and increased emphasis on longer-term decision making. Previous studies exploring supervisory transition revealed that new supervisors and new managers often have misconceptions about their new leadership role, including the degree of autonomy and the level of authority they will have in the role (Dragoni et al., 2014; Plakhotnik et al., 2011; Rapisarda et al., 2011). Several scholars exploring the dynamics of personal transition whose work has been published in the literature over the years have directly addressed the significance of previous experience as influencing a person’s transition in meaningful ways (e.g., Ciampa & Watkins, 1999; Gabarro, 1987; Hopson & Adams, 1976; Nicholson, 1984). These scholars discussed in their research how individuals should attempt to understand the landscape of their new environment and act on issues and
problems based on familiar situations and prior experience. The supervisory participants in this study articulated that they relied on familiar situations and leveraged prior experience in helping them to navigate the transition to the new supervisory role.

The second finding of this study suggested that both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assisted participants in their supervisory transition and did so more than did technical skills. These interpersonal skills included a friendly and outgoing nature, trust and honesty, and nurturing the growth of others, and the intrapersonal skills included reflective open-mindedness, a positive and professional mindset, and calmness and composure. Previous research indicated that, while federal supervisors commonly possess the technical knowledge needed to carry out their jobs, these supervisors often lack a full range of managerial competencies and interpersonal skills needed to lead people (U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, 2009). Prior research supports the contention that federal managers are often promoted to their supervisory roles based on their skills related to the technical aspects of their jobs rather than their abilities related to interacting with and leading people (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2001). The significance of the needed supervisory behaviors for transition to supervisory roles is supported in research that corresponds closely to interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, namely that new supervisors need to (a) identify and establish a supervisory style, (b) form strong working relationships with their direct reports, and (c) develop supervisory skills focused on employee growth (Rapisarda et al., 2011). According to prior research, new supervisors can develop these skills, in part, by focusing their behavior directly on employee growth, such as modeling leadership behaviors and providing useful feedback to subordinates (Rapisarda et al., 2011).

The third finding of this study revealed that the participants relied on professional peers for crucial support with technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback, oftentimes more
so than from supervisors. This social support served as a key external resource in helping the study participants navigate the transition to a supervisory role. Existing literature indicates that supervisors in organizations tended to use different work-related coping strategies compared with the strategies used by employees in general (Deery et al., 2010; Hu & Cheng, 2010; Law et al., 1995; Wan, 2013). While employees facing high work-related strain on the job often turned to supervisors for support, supervisors were less likely to reach out to their direct supervisor for support (Wan, 2013). This difference as reported in the literature could indicate that while front-line employees might be open to reaching out to their supervisors for assistance in addressing job-related stressors, individuals serving in supervisory positions might be less inclined to ask their direct superior for that type of support. In addition, prior research indicates that collaborative working relationships with co-workers are associated with lower levels of job stress (AbuAlRub, 2004; Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Deery et al., 2002).

The fourth finding of this study uncovered the primary coping strategies that participants relied on in the transition to their supervisory roles, notably direct engagement with others and disengagement from others and the work. Research over the years has asserted the conception of three broad categories of coping efforts for individuals: control-oriented strategies, escape-oriented strategies, and manage-oriented strategies (Hall, 1972; Kahn et al., 1964; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). Control-oriented strategies occur when an individual proactively acts by attempting to change the stressor situation directly or by trying to change the individual’s relationship to the situation. Escape-oriented strategies occur when an individual cognitively reevaluates the stressful situation so that the situation does not seem so upsetting or worrying. Lastly, manage-oriented strategies occur when an individual attempts to change the symptoms of stress that an individual is experiencing with the stressful situation. The results of this study
support the idea that supervisors’ direct engagement with others for coping primarily falls within control-oriented and escape-oriented strategies while supervisors’ disengagement from others and the work primarily falls within manage-oriented strategies. Still, a note of caution for new supervisors could be warranted in that prior research indicates some disengagement strategies, such as avoiding thinking about the stressful situation or withdrawing socially, tended to produce increased levels of both physical and psychological symptoms (Pisarski et al., 1998). Also, given the challenges and uncertainties that first-time supervisors can face in coping with transition, it should be noted that several prior studies examining work-related stress and coping (Deery et al., 2010; Gazzola et al., 2013; Law et al., 1995; Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Wan, 2013) concluded that their employing organizations should take a more proactive role in assisting these employees to use coping strategies for job-related stressors, such as providing training and management support.

Additionally, comparing the results of this study with a dozen supplementary transition models introduced in Chapter 2 and detailed in Appendices A and B revealed some notable confirmations and disconfirmations. Examining these various transition models allowed for the possible discovery of patterns or themes that align with, or apply to, transitions of first-time supervisors to new supervisory roles. One set of these models was designed to explain transitions in any facet of a person’s life and thus are applicable to transitions in career and work-related contexts. The other set of transition models was designed expressly to explain career transition, including transitions in the context of leadership and managerial roles. These various models conceptualize transition as stages of a process, factors that influence the transition, or both.
Participants in this study appeared to confirm some aspects of these supplementary transition models. For example, the experiences of the participants in this study corresponded with a key principle of Hopson and Adams’s (1976) transition framework, which states that all transitions in life for individuals involve some level of stress, even ones considered to be positive. The study participants also described periods of anticipatory excitement and fear during the transition process, as outlined in the four-stage model of Nicholson’s (1984) transition cycle. In addition, the experiences of the study participants aligned with the implementation strategies that Ciampa and Watkins (1999) outlined for new managers during the first few months in the position, including (a) setting priorities and managing expectations with key stakeholders and (b) establishing new working relationships and building coalitions.

Conversely, participants of this study did not appear to confirm other aspects of these supplementary transition models. For example, the participants did not generally describe the notion of denial as outlined in Hopson and Adams’s (1976) transition curve, whereby a person in transition minimizes or denies truths about the change and reverts to previously successful behavior. In addition, the study participants largely did not describe experiencing a phase of “the doldrums” as outlined in Hudson’s (1991) cycle of renewal, whereby individuals become ambivalent with the current situation and are torn between holding on to the current vision or letting go for something new. Moreover, although Hill (1992) observed that new managers tended to learn from experience and from others instead of relying primarily on personal reflection, the results of this study indicate that participants appeared to rely fairly evenly on both direct experience and personal reflection in making the transition. Participants in this study noted that they completed a leadership development program at the agency that encompassed personal reflection on their role as a supervisory leader. Thus, this reliance on both direct
experience and personal reflection might not be typical of the experiences of other new federal supervisors.

**Discussion of Findings in Relation to Educational Practice**

Findings from this study support several conclusions for application in educational practice focused on the particular context of the federal government sector. The analysis of interview data from the participants in this study revealed that their prior leadership experiences were generally not equivalent to the demanding conditions found in the permanent supervisory role in the agency. Based on the results of this study, federal agencies could provide employees with developmental opportunities that allow them to experience and learn about numerous aspects of the supervisory role. As part of a strong succession management program, human resources officials and training professionals in agencies could help to establish realistic expectations for those serving in acting supervisory capacities and team leader roles. Agencies could inform the individuals in these developmental assignments and emergent roles that the transition experience in a permanent supervisory role might likely differ if and when these individuals transition to a permanent supervisory position. Individuals in these acting and temporary capacities should be prepared with the knowledge that they might not touch some core elements of the supervisory role and thus they are not necessarily encountering the full supervisory experience. A variety of supervisory responsibilities are cyclical, such as conducting employee performance appraisals and preparing operating budgets, while others are infrequent, such as initiating action to discipline or terminate an employee.

The analysis of interview data for this study highlighted the benefits that interpersonal and intrapersonal skills provided in assisting new supervisors in their supervisory transition. To address the significance of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in aiding supervisory transitions
as indicated in this study, agencies could help new supervisors leverage the value of social support by formulating experiences that take advantage of assistance from those individuals around the new supervisor. Human resources officials and training professionals could encourage the use of multi-rater feedback assessments, sometimes called 360-degree feedback, to provide constructive input to the supervisors about their job performance from their colleagues and other stakeholders in the workplace. Specific performance feedback can allow these supervisors to better assess their strengths and weaknesses related to interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, such as nurturing the growth of others and possessing a positive and professional mindset. Human resources officials and training professionals could also encourage and facilitate supportive coaching and mentoring relationships to aid these new supervisors in building on their identified strengths and addressing their identified weaknesses related to these interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. These coaches and mentors could be individuals who are internal or external to the employing organization of the new supervisors.

The interviews with new supervisors for this study highlighted the significance of peer support for new supervisors during their transitions. Technical assistance, affirmation, and honest feedback from professional peers served as crucial support to these first-time supervisors. In consideration of the consequence of this peer support, federal agencies could undertake efforts to provide the supervisor cadre with adequate training on peer coaching and mentoring techniques and related best practices. According to the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (2010), many new federal supervisors lacked the training and development needed to not only supervise their employees effectively but also understand and appreciate agency expectations for individuals in supervisory roles. Human resources officials and training professionals could inform new supervisors that in the upcoming months and years ahead, these supervisors
potentially will serve as a key resource of support as peer mentors for future first-time supervisors. In connection with these training efforts, agency officials could also facilitate the formation of peer networks across the agency to connect new supervisors with other individuals facing similar problems and issues. The Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004 (2014), which outlines specific training to develop managers as part of a comprehensive succession management program, requires federal agencies to deliver training to new managers on actions and strategies for mentoring employees. Although the Act is silent on training for managers on mentoring their professional peers in supervisory roles, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management suggested that agencies can go beyond the Act’s specific requirements in developing training for their supervisors (Supervisory, Management, and Executive Development Training, 2009).

The interviews with participants of this study captured their experiences of directly engaging with others and disengaging from others and the work as strategies to cope with workload demands and other challenges. Given that first-time supervision can be particularly stressful for new supervisors, agencies could also ensure that first-time supervisors have adequate training on the full range of coping strategies that these new supervisors can rely on to aid them in the transition, including engaging with others for support. This action aligns with prior research supporting the idea that employers should take a more proactive role in assisting their employees to use coping strategies for job-related stressors, such as providing training and management support (Deery et al., 2010; Gazzola et al., 2013; Law et al., 1995; Paquette & Rieg, 2016; Wan, 2013). Human resources officials and training professionals could make sure that these new supervisors have information about not only the causes and impacts of the challenges of supervisory transition but also a full range of extant coping strategies that new supervisors
might use to deal with the difficulties of the supervisory role and the transition experience. Individuals in these new supervisory roles could benefit from the knowledge and understanding that asking for help by reaching out to others for support is not a sign of weakness. New supervisors should know where to go for such assistance and understand the boundaries of responsibility and accountability in their new roles. Some of these new supervisors could feel that they must weather the transition challenges alone and might be reluctant to ask the predecessor and others for assistance, even if those other persons are readily available to the supervisor and highly amenable to assist. Agencies could also ensure that these new supervisors are aware of employee assistance programs that offer voluntary, confidential services such as professional counseling, which could help employees work through various problems or challenges in life that may negatively affect job performance and personal health and well-being.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the results of this study and the existing literature, several additional areas of research could be explored by future researchers. The results from this study revealed that both interpersonal and intrapersonal skills assisted participants in their transition to supervisory roles more so than did technical skills. Schlossberg’s (2011) transition framework holds that the personal and demographic characteristics of an individual in transition can directly influence how the individual approaches and copes with the transition. Future researchers could gain additional insight into this phenomenon through the implementation of a study designed to identify and prioritize a comprehensive list of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to determine the extent to which new federal supervisors utilize these skills in aiding their supervisory transition. Such a study could be implemented through a detailed, structured questionnaire or through a similar methodology that allows for the measuring of individual attitudes through
ratings or rankings, such as Q methodology (Herrington & Coogan, 2011). This type of review could allow researchers to determine the relative significance of specific interpersonal and intrapersonal skills to the phenomenon of supervisory transition.

Another valuable area for future researchers involves the social support that new supervisors receive in the transition process. This study revealed that participants often engaged with others as a strategy to cope with the challenges of the supervisory transition and that participants’ professional peers provided crucial support to new supervisors, often as much as or more frequently than from supervisors. Schlossberg (2011) posited that social support was one of the key factors to consider when examining an individual’s ability to navigate a transition in life. In which case, an in-depth qualitative study that specifically examines the reasons that new supervisors engage with peers versus supervisors for support could provide additional insight about new supervisors’ views of the benefits and disadvantages of engaging with varied stakeholders for support and assistance during the transition process. Such a study could include a related exploration of other types of social support, such as family members, mentors, and direct reports.

Future researchers could also look to replicate this study by expanding the sample size across organizational boundaries. This study was concentrated on exploring the transition experiences of a limited number of participants from one mid-sized federal government agency and thus its findings are not necessarily generalizable to other populations, conditions, or contexts. With the results of this study as a baseline, a larger-scale qualitative study could be designed to explore the transition experiences of new supervisors at multiple federal government organizations. Results from such a study could further serve to identify factors that have implications for educational practice across the federal supervisory workforce.
Summary

This qualitative study used a phenomenological research design to explore the essence of the experience of transitioning from an employee to a first-time supervisor in a federal government agency. The use of descriptive phenomenology allowed for direct interaction and open dialogue with study participants. Eight new supervisors who experienced the phenomenon were interviewed, and the interview data were analyzed to identify emergent themes. Based on the analysis of interview data, the emergent themes provided rich insight into the phenomenon of supervisory transition at a federal agency, including the (a) value of prior leadership experience, (b) helpfulness of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, (c) power of social support from professional peers, and (d) use of engagement and disengagement as coping strategies. The identification of these themes was significant because federal supervisors have such a major impact on the overall mission accomplishment of federal agencies.

The findings of this study supported the applicability of Schlossberg’s (1981a, 2011) transition theory to the transition of new supervisors to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. Schlossberg’s framework, which was designed to explain transitions in any facet of a person’s life, outlines the stages of the transition process and the various factors that influence the transition. Employing Schlossberg’s transition theory as a lens for the study allowed for a comprehensive look at the phenomenon of supervisory transition. In addition, the results of the study saw direct linkages to research content across the three strands of the literature review, including the helpfulness of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills versus technical skills to supervisory transition, the use of social support as a coping mechanism during supervisory transition, and a comparison of supplementary transition models to the supervisory transition experience.
Given the significance of the supervisory role with over a quarter of a million supervisors in the federal civilian non-postal workforce, this study also offered the opportunity to identify implications for educational practice and options for aiding federal supervisors in their transition. Recommendations for federal human resources officials and training professionals included (a) establishing realistic expectations for those individuals serving in acting supervisory capacities and team leader roles, (b) encouraging the use of 360-degree feedback and ongoing coaching and mentoring to help new supervisors leverage social support, (c) training for the supervisory cadre on peer coaching and mentoring to aid fellow supervisors in the transition, and (d) training for new supervisors on coping strategies and support systems that could be used in the transition.

The results of this study laid a foundation for future research on the phenomenon of supervisory transition in the federal sector. Future researchers could (a) identify and prioritize interpersonal and intrapersonal skills based on their usefulness for new supervisors during the supervisory transition, (b) examine the reasons that new supervisors would engage with their professional peers versus their direct supervisors for support during the transition process, and (c) replicate this study with an expanded sample size of new supervisors from multiple federal government organizations. With a clearer picture of the phenomenon of supervisory transition, federal supervisors might better position themselves for success in their new roles and their employing agencies might better assist these new supervisors in becoming oriented and prepared to carry out their jobs effectively.
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Appendix A

Overview of Predominant Models of Individual Transition for Any Facet of Life

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model #1</th>
<th>Van Gennep’s (1960) rites of passage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basis of Model</strong></td>
<td>Van Gennep (1960) reported:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Development of model relied on anthropological data from around the world that was available at beginning of 20th century.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Various rituals, traditions, and ceremonies play crucial role in emotional and social adjustments to changes in status and help to ensure stability and maintenance of societies across generations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Model was presented in van Gennep’s seminal book <em>The Rites of Passage</em>, originally published in French in 1909 and subsequently published in English in 1960.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of Model</strong></td>
<td>Van Gennep (1960) posited:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Transition can be viewed as a three-phase process that focuses on rites of passage of individuals from one status to another in society, such as births, initiations, weddings, and funerals.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Although rituals in some societies emphasize or minimize one phase over others, rites of passage across societies had similar patterns and structures that include all three phases of <em>separation</em>, <em>transition</em>, and <em>incorporation</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Process supports both the individual undergoing transition as well as members of accompanying group or community who need to recognize legitimacy of individual in new role or position.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>▪ Regeneration occurs as person in transition is reintroduced into society in new role or position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model</strong></td>
<td>▪ Marriage and divorce ceremonies in contemporary Western societies (Arosio, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Transition of student nurse practitioners into and out of part-time clinical degree program (Barton, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Rites of passage in sport hazing and initiations (Johnson, 2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Shock</td>
<td>Is surprised or overwhelmed by reality of transition compared to expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Denial</td>
<td>Minimizes or denies truths about the change and reverts to previously successful behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Awareness incompetence</td>
<td>Begins to face reality of change and becomes depressed or frustrated and doubts own abilities to make transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Acceptance</td>
<td>Accepts reality, lets go of negative emotions, and focuses on future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Testing</td>
<td>Adopts new way of thinking about situation and tries out new approaches to adjust to transition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Search for meaning</td>
<td>Reflects on own experiences and begins to comprehend meaning of change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Integration</td>
<td>Assimilates change into own life and completes transition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Internal and external factors influence impacts of transition, including significance of change to individual, previous life experiences, current physical health, degree of tolerance with unfamiliarity or ambiguity, intensity and duration of related stress, and number of concurrent stressful events.

**Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model**

- Teachers who transition from public school teaching to pursue career in another field (Heider, 2006)
- Experience of becoming student affairs leaders in higher education institutions (Kuk, King, & Forrest, 2012)
- Career transition of professional ballet dancers (Roncaglia, 2008)
### Model #3  Bridges’ (1980) transition model

#### Basis of Model

Bridges (1980) reported:
- **Change** is an occurrence that unfolds in the external world, and **transition** is an internal psychological process through which people gradually accept a new situation and the changes that come with it.
- All of life is a process of transitions.
- Model serves as a simple and straightforward vantage point from which to consider the transition of an individual to a change in life, with attention on emotional aspects of individuals as they move through phases of transition.

#### Description of Model

Bridges (1980) posited:
- Transition takes place in three phases of psychological readjustment and reorientation based on individual’s reactions in face of change: **letting go**, **neutral zone**, and **new beginnings**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letting go:</th>
<th>Neutral zone:</th>
<th>New beginnings:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ending familiar and comfortable ways of being, which causes disorientation</td>
<td>Adjusting to new environment and role but behavior is not yet settled or habitual</td>
<td>Accepting change and taking on new behaviors in an established, systematic way</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Individuals must go through each of the three phases to make a successful transition.
- Model recognizes that the major difficulty an individual faces in navigating transition is dealing with ending of status quo encountered during first phase.
- Personal transition is a dynamic of six functions (Bridges, 2001):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reorientation</td>
<td>Gaining a new understanding of our world and our relationship to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal growth</td>
<td>Allowing ourselves to acknowledge the changes that happen to us daily and develop a more beneficial relationship to the world around us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authentication</td>
<td>Coming to know ourselves more fully and being able to express who we truly are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Being open to circumstances where anything can happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Being connected with the past and our history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renewal</td>
<td>Capturing the energy that propels us into the new environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model

- Transition of young people from public care to independent living (Anghel, 2011; Dima & Skehill, 2011)
- Exploration of how leaders manage polarities in their transitions from one leadership role to another (Manderscheid & Harrower, 2016).
### Model #4: Schlossberg’s (1981a) transition theory

**Basis of Model**

Schlossberg (1981a) reported:
- A standard framework could be used to describe all individuals in transition.
- She sought to answer the question: “[H]ow can we understand and help adults as they face the inevitable but nonpredictable transitions of life?” (p. 3).
- People react and adapt differently to transitions, and the same person can react and adapt differently at different points in life.
- Model developed based on her personal counseling experience, empirical research, and conversations with academic colleagues and counselor practitioners.

**Description of Model**

Schlossberg (1981a) posited:
- Transition is a process whereby an individual proceeds through three phases: moving in, moving through, and moving out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situation</strong></td>
<td>Variables that involve the condition of the transition, including the trigger, timing, control, and expected duration of the transition, the degree of role change involved, previous experience with a similar transition, and the presence of concurrent stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self</strong></td>
<td>Variables that involve personal characteristics of the individual that might affect views and perceptions of life and the transition, including gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and state of health, as well as the individual’s psychological resources that might influence coping, such as levels of maturity, optimism, and self-confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support</strong></td>
<td>Variables that represent external resources that can help (or hinder) an individual to navigate a transition, including types of support such as intimate relationships, family members, networks of friends, colleagues, institutions, and communities, as well as functions of support such as emotional support, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategies</strong></td>
<td>Variables that represent mechanisms an individual uses to cope with the transition, such as taking direct action to address or mitigate a problem in the transition, reframing a problem or negative aspect of the transition by perceiving it in a more positive light, and managing the stress of transition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model**
- Transitions of individuals from one work-related role, job, or career to another (Brown, Webb, & Bullock, 2018; Danielle, 2015; Haim & Amdur, 2016; Smith, 2015).
- Transitions of students in higher education settings (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jamieson, 2012; Marks & Jones, 2004; McCoy & Gardner, 2011; Ryan, Carlsstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Wheeler, 2012).
Moos and Schaefer’s (1986) model of life crises and transitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basis of Model</th>
<th>Moos and Schaefer (1986) reported:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Model is based on research in psychiatry and behavioral sciences and grounded firmly in aspects of crisis theory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model attempts to describe and understand crises and transitions in the lives of individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual resources represented by personality traits and environmental resources in the form of social support influence the ability of an individual to cope with a transition or life crisis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The terms transition, crisis, and event are used interchangeably.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Model</th>
<th>Moos and Schaefer (1986) posited:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model</td>
<td>Model represents coping with transition as a linear process with either a positive or negative outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process has three components that recognize the interaction of various factors in determining the outcome of transition: general determinants of outcome, resolution, and outcome of transition or crisis.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General determinants of outcome</td>
<td>Factors that influence how one person responds differently from another person to a transition or crisis, which include the background and personal factors of the individual in transition, various event-related factors, and physical and social environmental factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution</td>
<td>Factors that include the individual’s perceptions about the event, the tasks that allow the individual to adapt to the change, and the skills that allow the individual to cope with the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome of transition or crisis</td>
<td>Factors that flow directly from the resolution phase and the goal of which is to minimize any negative impacts and foster potential for personal growth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Personal growth entails  
  - a reconsideration of familial and social support systems;  
  - an underpinning of personality traits like maturity, self-awareness, and empathy; and  
  - the development of coping skills, including effective problem-solving and help-seeking behaviors.  
- The person’s inability to navigate the transition effectively could adversely affect the ability of individual to deal with future transitions in life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model</th>
<th>Primarily transitions related to health-related issues:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey on the factors associated with the symptoms of anxiety and depression among male Turkish prisoners (Senol-Durak &amp; Gencoz, 2010)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examination of stress-related growth among women living with HIV/AIDS (Siegel, Schrimshaw, &amp; Pretter, 2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study of the burden of informal caregivers of stroke survivors (Tsai &amp; Pai, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Study of stress and coping among bone marrow transplantation patients with cancer (Widows, Jacobsen, Booth-Jones, &amp; Fields, 2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Model #6 | Hudson’s (1991) cycle of renewal**

**Basis of Model**

Hudson (1991) reported:
- A transition in life is “a natural process of disorientation and reorientation that alters the perception of self and world and demands changes in assumptions and behavior” (p. 96).
- Understanding adult life with its transitions is seen as a cyclical pattern that moves from stable periods of one’s life to unstable periods and then commences into new life chapters (Hudson, 1999).

**Description of Model**

Hudson (1991) posited:
- Model is cyclical with four phases, each with unique characteristics and associated activities for the individual in transition.
- The four phases of transition are (1) *Go for it*, (2) *The doldrums*, (3) *Cocooning*, and (4) *Getting ready*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase I: Go for it</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals carry out a current vision for themselves in a status quo state.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase II: The doldrums</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals become ambivalent with current situation and are torn between holding on to current vision or letting go for something new.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase III: Cocooning</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If individuals decide to let go of current vision, they turn inward and reflect on current situation and what will be needed for change.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase IV: Getting ready</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals focus on needed resources for new situation and move toward equilibrium by creating a new life situation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- People in transition need to possess skills to navigate each phase of transition and achieve the overarching goal of personal self-renewal.

**Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model**

- Interviewing senior citizens who decided to relocate late in life (Baker, 2000)
- Assisting adults transitioning in higher education (Butler, 2005)
- Counseling and coaching individuals through transition (Foley & Bergquist, 2010; Hudson, 2001; McLean, 2012)
Appendix B
Overview of Predominant Models of Individual Transition in Career or Work-Related Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model #1</th>
<th>Nicholson’s (1984) transition cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basis of Model</strong></td>
<td>Nicholson (1984) reported:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Model is based on data analysis of cohort of workers experiencing job and work-related changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Model was developed to aid the effectiveness of transitions for individuals experiencing work-related transitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description of Model</strong></td>
<td>Nicholson (1984) posited:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>▪ Model is a four-stage cycle for characterizing transition in any type of work-related role, with such transitions deemed as being either positive or negative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage &amp; Description</strong></td>
<td><strong>Positive Aspects in This Stage</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1: Preparation</td>
<td>Psychological readiness before starting new work role, when individual anticipates forthcoming changes and wonders about new job duties and work relationships and how to deal with them effectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Encounter</td>
<td>Emotional and sense-making activities that occur within first few weeks of new role, when individual makes sense of new situation and considers similarities and differences between their previous and new roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Adjustment</td>
<td>Personal development and role development for person-environment fit, when people find their own way of doing job by either changing themselves to match role or changing role requirements to match their needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Stabilization</td>
<td>Concentration on full performance whereby individual is fully integrated into new system and when everyday routines are established and there are few new things remaining to learn.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- When a work-related transition occurs, either the person, the role, or both need to be changed to ensure better alignment between the person and the work environment.
- Model focuses primarily on work-related contextual factors without consideration of personal non-work-related factors that might influence an individual’s transition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition of business school graduates to jobs in range of occupations (Ashforth &amp; Saks, 1995)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-career transitions of managers with substantial work experience (Blenkinsopp &amp; Zdunczyk, 2005)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative learning in managerial role transitions (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2008)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering the role of chief librarian of an academic library (Matthews, 2002)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career transitions of dual career couples (Smith, 1997)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Model #2: Gabarro’s (1987) leadership transition model

#### Basis of Model

- Gabarro (1987) reported:
  - Model is based on his study of management transitions of 17 general and functional managers in four organizations over three-year period, including transitions deemed to be both successful and unsuccessful.
  - Key factor distinguishing successful leadership transition from unsuccessful one is quality of working relationships that a new manager developed on job by end of first year in role.
  - Poor working relationships with superior and subordinates is the most common cause of failed leadership transitions.
  - Other factors that influence success of leadership transitions include being aware that differences in interpersonal styles can cause conflict, recognizing personal weaknesses and leveraging strengths of others, and recognizing need to establish credibility through action yet not act too quickly without understanding reality of situation.

#### Description of Model

- Gabarro (1987) posited:
  - Model consists of five expected stages of learning and action for assimilating into new roles: taking hold, immersion, reshaping, consolidation, and refinement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking hold</td>
<td>A period of orientation where the manager attempts to understand the landscape of the new situation and acts on issues and problems that are familiar (lasting 3 to 6 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immersion</td>
<td>A period of learning where the manager has a deeper level of awareness and evaluates actions taken during previous stage (lasting 4 to 11 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reshaping</td>
<td>A flash of activity where the manager reconfigures aspects of the job based on lessons learned during previous stage (lasting 3 to 6 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidation</td>
<td>A period of evaluation where the manager assesses the progress made during previous stage and embeds improvement into processes and practices (lasting 3 to 9 months)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refinement</td>
<td>A period of little significant change where the manager assimilates fully into new role and makes small adjustments based on assessments from prior stage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- New managers can better adapt to leadership transitions by recognizing that transition process occurs in stages with learning and action.
- Manager’s prior experience greatly influences his or her actions and can be decisive factor in successful progress through stages.

#### Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model

- A study of new headteachers in large cities in England (Earley & Bubb, 2013)
- A three-year case study of a dean at a university in the United States (Gmelch, 2000)
- An analysis of executive succession in the context of organizational learning (Grossman, 2007)
### Model #3  Gilmore’s (1988) framework of leadership transition

#### Basis of Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gilmore (1988) reported:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Model is based on his work as consultant working with employees of numerous organizations and relying on action research, a process of inquiry in which those who carry out the day-to-day work are actively involved in exploration of problems and decision making about how to proceed in addressing identified problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organizations often poorly planned and managed leader transitions by disengaging too quickly once a job candidate is selected rather than making the additional effort to ensure that new leader is ready for new role.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Description of Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gilmore (1988) posited:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- This conceptualization of individual leader transition is chiefly from the perspective of the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Eight-stage model of leadership transition consists of first seven stages outlining recruitment and selection of managers and the eighth stage describing transition period of individual manager.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Diagram

1. Decide to seek a change in leadership  
2. Design a search and selection process  
3. Assess the strategic challenges facing the organization  
4. Translate the strategic assessment into specific leadership needs and job qualifications  
5. Search for prospective job candidates  
6. Screen job applicants  
7. Interview and select final job candidates  
8. Provide new leader with support in the transition

- During eighth stage, several actions are crucial for new supervisors in transitioning to new role:
  - develop and communicate new or reinvigorated vision for team,
  - assess team members’ strengths and weaknesses and then delegate effectively,
  - consider staff concerns without directly attributing concerns to employee resistance,
  - manage working relationship with boss,
  - cultivate productive working alliances with stakeholders,
  - guide pace of organizational change, and
  - balance leadership attention on both external and internal issues.

#### Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model

- A study of the role of board of governors in transitions of college presidents in Canada (Braithwaite, 2003)
- A case study of newly appointed leaders in the human resources profession (Manderscheid, 2006)
Model #4  Hill's (1992) process of becoming a manager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basis of Model</th>
<th>Hill (1992) reported:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Development of model formed from her seminal research of newly promoted managers at two companies, where she studied 19 first-time managers for one year and documented the challenges they encountered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• New managers are often surprised to discover that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– new role is more demanding than anticipated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– skills and approaches required for success as manager and those needed for success as individual contributor are distinctly different.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– position requires dealing with conflicting demands from superiors, direct reports, and other key stakeholders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• New managers need to master key strategies such as understanding what it means to be a manager, developing judgment in dealing with others, acquiring knowledge of self, and coping with stressful situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of Model</th>
<th>Hill (1992) posited:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transition to management is a process that involves two elements: “a process of learning from experience” (p. 121) and “a transformation of professional identity” (p. 121).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Learning from experience: Managers mainly learn managerial skills and behaviors chiefly while on the job through trial and error by facing real problems with real consequences instead of relying primarily on personal reflection.
- Transformation of professional identity: Becoming a manager requires a psychological adjustment and a transformation of professional identity that challenges new managers to redefine expectations and develop new skills.
- First-time managers must let go of attitudes and habits developed when they were responsible for own performance as individual contributors.

<p>| Example of Research and Analysis Using Model | An extension of Hill’s work focusing directly on leadership transition experiences of new managers who had recently completed a graduate business degree program (Benjamin &amp; O’Reilly, 2011). |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model #5</th>
<th>Ciampa and Watkins’ (1999) leader transition framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Basis of Model**  
Ciampa and Watkins (1999) reported:
- Model is based on their interviews of over 125 executives to explore the personal accounts of leaders’ own successes and failures in leadership transition.
- New leaders should try to secure visible, early wins where improvements can be made within relatively short period of time and help to set foundation for positive change.
- New leaders, particularly those new to an organization, need a framework of practice guidance to follow because these leaders can face immense challenges in adjusting to new organizational culture and a lack of an existing network of support.
- Research focused on transitions to executive leadership roles at new organizations, and thus results may not be as relevant for lower-level managers and those managers who were promoted to new leadership roles from within their organizations.

**Description of Model**  
Ciampa and Watkins (1999) posited:
- Framework focuses on strategies to implement and common traps to avoid with minor reference to three phases of leadership transition.
- New managers should implement strategies to make successful transition to new leadership role during first few months in position:
  - build personal credibility by finding ways to address problems that have been hindering the organization;
  - foster a working environment that exhibits enthusiasm for change and supports problem-solving among employees;
  - establish and convey a vision that is a clear picture of the future;
  - establish new working relationships and build coalitions to encourage an open flow of information and gain a base of support;
  - set priorities and manage expectations with key stakeholders;
  - have strong self-awareness of one’s needs, motivations, and interpersonal style; and
  - manage one’s emotions by staying focused, calm, and clearheaded.
- New leaders often fall into unsuspected traps that can hamper effectiveness, including (a) failing to learn as much as possible before starting role, (b) coming into role with pre-set answers and quick-fix solutions to problems, and (c) trying to tackle too much at one time in attempt to appear decisive.
- Leaders move through three phases over time: *transition*, *transformation*, and *succession*.

![Transition: A period of orientation, evaluative learning, and corrective action (lasting about 6 months)](image1)  
![Transformation: A period of attention on leading change in the organization](image2)  
![Succession: A period of attention on identifying and grooming a successor](image3)

**Example of Research and Analysis Using Model**  
Referenced heavily in development of another conceptual model of leadership transition by Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008), which directly linked successful leadership transitions to healthy team relationships and decreased leader stress.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Model #6</strong></th>
<th><strong>Watkins’ (2003) leadership transition strategies</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Basis of Model** | Watkins (2003) reported:  
- Framework was conceived by studying dozens of leadership transitions at various levels over a three-year period.  
- Key goals in leadership transition are building credibility, creating value, and improving results.  
- Aim of new leader in transition is to reach “the breakeven point” (p. 3), the point in time where value of leader’s contributions begins to exceed amount of value leader has consumed in transitioning to new role.  
- Following a systematic approach for transition can lessen likelihood of failure and reach breakeven point more quickly, thus becoming net contributor of value to organization. |
| **Description of Model** | Watkins (2003) posited:  
- Framework of leadership transition is three-phase process along with set of success strategies to be implemented in first 90 days of becoming a manager.  
- Framework identifies 10 key strategies for successful transition to a leadership role:  
  1. Promote oneself by moving from specialist to generalist.  
  2. Accelerate learning by focusing on what needs to be learned and how to do it efficiently.  
  3. Match strategy to the situation by developing an action plan.  
  4. Secure early wins to build credibility and momentum.  
  5. Negotiate success by building a strong working relationship with one’s boss through discussions about expectations.  
  6. Achieve alignment by linking organizational structures with systems, strategies, and skills.  
  7. Build the team by honestly and fairly assessing current members and actively recruiting new members.  
  8. Identify internal and external stakeholders and build supportive relationships to create needed coalitions.  
  9. Maintain personal and professional balance by seeking advice and counsel from one’s network.  
- First three months in new leadership position will chiefly determine whether new leader will succeed or fail in that role. |
| **Examples of Research and Analysis Using Model** | Survey of 175 managers on the 10 key strategies for successful leadership transition (Appelbaum & Valero, 2007)  
- Case study of new middle school principal at turnaround school in California (Britz, 2007)  
- Exploration of nurse leaders in transition (McNamara, 2015) |
Appendix C

Informed Consent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Investigators:</strong> Principal Investigator – Dr. William Ewell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Researcher – K. Scott Derrick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title of Project:</strong> Becoming the Boss: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of New Supervisors’ Transition to Supervisory Roles at a Federal Government Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 this person 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 ensure that you have a copy to keep.

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

We are asking you to participate in this study because you are a supervisor at [female], the organization selected as the research site for this study. To be included in this study, new supervisors at the agency must (a) have served in the supervisory role for at least one year but not more than two years and (b) have not held a supervisory position previously. The student researcher will interview you to gather your personal perspectives about transitioning to a supervisory role. The researcher seeks both male and female supervisors with varying occupational backgrounds and geographic locations, with the goal to gather multiple perspectives. Ethnicity/race, socio-economic level, literacy level, disability status, and health will not limit inclusion in this study. Some demographic information will be collected from each participant to be able to describe the group of supervisors to be included in this study. Field notes will also be maintained by the researcher as part of the study.

**Why is this research study being done?**

The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the experiences of new supervisors in their transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. The researcher will rely on an interview with each participant to gather relevant data on each supervisor’s personal experiences. Although the study is part of a personal doctoral dissertation [female], permission to conduct the study was coordinated and approved through [female]. A permission letter [female] was signed on December 14, 2018.

**What will I be asked to do?**

If you decide to take part in this study, the researcher will ask you to respond to a series of questions about your experiences in navigating the transition to a supervisory role. Participants agree to be interviewed and agree to answer the interview questions openly, honestly, and thoroughly so as to obtain a realistic, supportable, and accurate description of each individual’s experience with the supervisory transition. The interview will be audio recorded and then transcribed using Rev.com, a professional transcription service. After completion of the interview, you will be provided with a draft copy of the interview transcript so that you can make sure you are comfortable with your responses and that the transcripts accurately reflect your experiences. After completion of the data collection and analysis process, you will also be offered the opportunity to examine the emergent themes identified by the student researcher.

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

The interview with you can be held in person, via telephone, or via video conference. You and the student researcher will agree on a mutually convenient time during non-work hours (such as lunchtime) for the one interview, which should last between 45 and 60 minutes. For in-person interviews, participants will choose a mutually convenient location for the discussion. Official travel or official travel time is not authorized by the agency to complete these interviews. In addition, after the interview is transcribed, you will need to spend a few minutes reviewing the draft transcript of your interview for accuracy.
**Will there be any risk or discomfort to me?**
There are no known significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

**Will I benefit by being in this research?**
There are no direct benefits to you for your participation in the study. Based on the study results, federal agencies might gain new insights on ways that new supervisors can effectively transition to their supervisory positions.

**Who will see the information about me?**
Your participation in this study will be confidential. In the collection, analysis, and publication of the data for this study, participant numbers and pseudonyms will be used rather than actual names. The researcher will ensure that all necessary procedures are taken to protect your private and sensitive information. Also, the researcher will ensure that all necessary procedures are taken to protect [redacted] information that might be mentioned by you. In addition, the name of the agency [redacted] will not be identified as the research site when reporting the study results.

The student researcher, principal investigator (i.e., doctoral adviser), and interview transcriber (from Rev.com) will be the only individuals to have access to the audio recording of your interview session. The audio recording, any demographic information, and all analysis related to your interview will be stored on the student researcher’s password-protected personal computer with back-up on a password-protected flash drive. The flash drive will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s personal residence. The audio recording of the interview will be destroyed once the interview has been transcribed and approved by you and the researcher.

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 the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board to see the raw study data. No identifying information will ever be shared with [redacted]. The collected data will be used only for this doctoral thesis project and potentially for future journal articles or presentations, always adhering to strict confidentiality.

**If I do not want to take part in the study, what choices do I have?**
You are not required to take part in this study. If you do not want to participate, you do not have to sign this consent form.

**What will happen if I suffer any harm from this research?**
There are no known significant risks involved in being a participant in this study.

**Can I stop my participation in this study?**
Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may opt out of the study at any time. You can also refuse to answer any interview question. 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.

**Who can I contact if I have questions or problems?**
The researcher for this study is K. Scott Derrick. You can contact Scott via telephone at [redacted] or via his Northeastern University student email address [redacted]. You can also contact Dr. William Ewell, the Principal Investigator (doctoral adviser) for this research, at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may call anonymously if you wish.

**Who can I contact about my rights as a participant?**
If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, Mail Stop: 560-177, 360 Huntington Avenue, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. [redacted] You may call anonymously if you wish.
There is no compensation for participation in this study.

There is no cost to participate in this study.

I have read, understood, and had the opportunity to ask questions regarding this consent form. I fully understand the nature and character of my involvement in this research program as a participant. I agree to participate in this study on a voluntary basis, and I understand that I can depart from the research study at any time.

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 D

Study of Supervisory Transition:
Demographic Questionnaire for Participants

Participant #____

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study of supervisory transition entitled *Becoming the Boss: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of New Supervisors’ Transition to Supervisory Roles at a Federal Government Agency*. Please complete the following short questionnaire of demographic information as part of the study. The purpose of asking for this demographic information is to present a short, one-paragraph description of each study participant when reporting the results of the study. If you do not wish to answer one or more of the 13 items on this survey, feel free to skip them. Please note that your name will not be associated with this description in any way; you will instead be assigned a participant number and pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Please return this completed questionnaire to researcher Scott Derrick at his Northeastern University email address at derrick.k@husky.neu.edu. If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Scott at (703) 927-6860 or at the above email address.

1. Length of service in current supervisory position (check one):
   - [ ] Less than 1 year
   - [ ] 12 to 24 months
   - [ ] Over 2 years

2. Supervisory experience (check one):
   - [ ] This is my first supervisory position
   - [ ] This is not my first supervisory position

3. Occupation (fill in the blank): ______________________________________

4. Total number of direct reports (fill in the blank): _____ employees

5. Work Location (check one):
   - [ ] Headquarters
   - [ ] Field

6. Years of professional work experience (fill in the blank): _____ years

7. Years of employment in the federal civil service (fill in the blank): _____ years

8. Years of employment at your current federal agency (fill in the blank): _____ years
9. Gender (check one):
   - Male
   - Female

10. Age Group (check one):
    - 18 to 25 years old
    - 26-29 years old
    - 30-39 years old
    - 40-49 years old
    - 50-59 years old
    - 60 years or older

11. Ethnicity (check one):
    - Hispanic/Latino
    - Non Hispanic/Latino

12. Race/National Origin (check one):
    - American Indian or Alaska Native
    - Asian
    - Black or African American
    - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - White
    - Two or more races

13. Highest level of education completed (check one):
    - Less than High School
    - High School Diploma/GED or equivalent
    - Trade or Technical Certificate
    - Some College (no degree)
    - Associate’s Degree (e.g., AA, AS)
    - Bachelor’s Degree (e.g., BA, BS)
    - Master’s Degree (e.g., MA, MS, MBA)
    - Doctoral/Professional Degree (e.g., Ph.D., MD, JD)
Appendix E

Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Location:

Interviewer: K. Scott Derrick, Student Researcher

Interviewee: [Participant Number]

The purpose of this study is to explore and describe the lived experience of new supervisors in their transition to supervisory roles at a federal government agency. Data collection will include individual interviews with new supervisors.

Introduction

Thank you again for agreeing to participate in an interview for this doctoral study. You have been identified as someone who has perspectives and insights to share about the experience of transitioning to a supervisory role. My research project focuses on the lived experiences of new supervisors in navigating their transition to a supervisory role at a federal government agency. The central research question for the study is the following: How do new supervisors at a federal government agency describe their experience of transitioning to a supervisory role?

Specifically, I hope to gain insights on the situational conditions, personal characteristics, social support, and coping strategies of new supervisors in their supervisory transitions. A key benefit of the study would be to identify ways that new supervisors can effectively transition to their supervisory roles.

To comply with the ethics requirements at the university, study participants must sign a consent form confirming that they have read, understood, and agree to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. I have received your signed consent form. Do you have any additional questions about the form or its contents? [Answer any questions.]

Before we proceed with the interview, I would like to confirm the demographic information that you provided on the short demographic questionnaire. [Clarify any incomplete or confusing responses.]

I would now like to hear your perspectives and experiences about your supervisory transition in your own words. Because your responses are central to this study and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio record our conversation today. Do I have your permission to record the audio of this interview? [If yes, thank the participant, and let the person know that you will ask the question again as you start recording.] I will also be taking written notes during the interview. I can assure you that all responses will be confidential and
only a participant number and/or a pseudonym will be used when quoting from the interview
transcript. Pseudonyms will also be used for the names of any other individuals you reference
during the interview. The audio recording of the interview will be destroyed once the interview
has been transcribed and approved.

This interview should last about 45 to 60 minutes. During this time, I have several questions that
I would like to cover. You are free to decline from answering any question if you feel
uncomfortable for any reason. If time begins to run short, it may be necessary to interrupt you in
order to push ahead and complete the questioning. Do you have any questions of me at this
point? [If yes, answer questions. If no further questions, inform the participant that you are
now going to start the audio recording. Begin recording.] We are now recording. To confirm
your agreement to be recorded, do I have your permission to record the audio of this interview?
[Wait for verbal approval.] Thank you. Let's begin the interview for [say participant #].

Part 1: Question on Background of Professional Work History

For the first question, I would like to learn a little about your professional work history prior to
the supervisory role.

1. Could you please tell me briefly about your professional work history?

Part 2: Questions on Supervisory Transition – Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies

Situation: One of the areas that I am interested in learning about relates to the conditions that
exist for new supervisors when transitioning to their supervisory roles.

2. What prompted you to transition to a supervisory role?
3. How would you describe the degree of role change with your transition to a supervisory
   position?
4. How would you describe the degree of control that you have had in the transition?
5. What previous experience, if any, have you had with a similar transition as your move to a
   supervisory role?
   a. How did this previous experience help you with the transition to a supervisory role?
   b. How did this previous experience hinder you in the transition to a supervisory role?
6. What were your initial feelings when transitioning to a supervisory role?
   a. How did your feelings change, if at all, as you moved through the transition to a
      supervisory role?

Self: Another area that I am interested in learning about involves the personal characteristics
that helped and hindered new supervisors when transitioning to their supervisory roles.

7. What personal characteristics about yourself helped you in transitioning to a supervisory
   role?
   a. How did they help you?
8. What personal characteristics about yourself hindered you in transitioning to a supervisory
   role?
   a. How did they hinder you?
Support: Another area that I am looking at is the social support that new supervisors have when transitioning to their supervisory roles. This support could perhaps be individuals, groups, or organizations, such as significant others, family members, friends, colleagues, supervisors, mentors, membership groups, institutions, or communities.

9. Who helped you in your transition to a supervisory role?
   a. How did they help you?

10. Who hindered you in your transition to a supervisory role?
    a. How did they hinder you?

Strategies: I am also interested in learning about the coping strategies that new supervisors apply when transitioning to their new supervisory roles.

11. What strategies did you use to cope with your transition to a supervisory role?
    a. How did these strategies help you?
    b. How did these strategies hinder you?

Part 3: Questions on Lessons Learned

Finally, I would like to ask you about your current situation and lessons learned.

12. Do you consider your supervisory transition to still be going on?
    a. If not, how did you know when you were no longer transitioning?
    b. If so, how will you know when you are no longer transitioning?

13. What, if anything, has been missing from your experience in transitioning to a supervisory role that you believe might have helped you?

14. How have you personally changed, if at all, as a result of your experience in transitioning to a supervisory role?

Closing

That concludes the questions for the interview. Do you have any further comments that you would like to share or any questions for me?

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. [End audio recording.]
Appendix F

Member Check Form

Date of interview:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

I, ________________________, a study participant, have read the transcript of my interview, [print name]
and I attest to the following statements (check appropriate boxes and sign).

☐ I have verified the accuracy of the interview transcript.
☐ I agree that the description in the interview transcript is complete and realistic.
☐ The interview transcript is not accurate (see comments below).
☐ The description in the interview transcript is not complete or realistic (see comments below).

_____________________________________________
Interviewee signature                            Date

Comments:

______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________