

TELL ME MORE: A QUALITATIVE, BOUNDED CASE STUDY
ON REFLECTIVE LISTENING

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
Art of War Scholars

by

JENNIFER LEE C. RUDOLPH, MAJOR, US AIR FORCE
Bachelor of Arts, Loyola University New Orleans, New Orleans, LA, 2009
Masters of Public Administration, American Military University, Charlestown, VA, 2014

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2022

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited. Fair use determination or copyright permission has been obtained for the inclusion of pictures, maps, graphics, and any other works incorporated into this manuscript. A work of the United States Government is not subject to copyright, however further publication or sale of copyrighted images is not permissible.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 10-06-2022		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2021 – JUN 2022	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Tell Me More: A Qualitative, Bounded Case Study on Reflective Listening				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Jennifer Lee C. Rudolph				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Carl Rogers coined <i>reflective listening</i> in the 1950s as part of client-focused psychotherapy. Since then, researchers have applied reflective listening to a variety of interpersonal and organizational environments to demonstrate empathy through “other-centered” behavior. This study used a communication course teaching a reflective listening model (<i>Our Community Listens</i>) to explore the influence of learning reflective listening in the Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG). As a qualitative, bounded case study using semi-structured interviews, the researcher explored the connection between reflective listening experiences after attending the course, empathy, US Air Force leadership development, and the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Strategic Plan. The results of this exploratory study indicated that participants experienced a unique, different, and introspective course which led them on a journey through self-discovery and self-regulation to other-centered behavior. They transferred these skills to a variety of contexts after attending the course, such as their military and civilian workplace and to their families. Participants also felt organizational and cultural barriers existed that impeded reflective listening to expand past interpersonal interaction and small teams to larger unit culture. The researcher provided recommendations to improve strategic planning, execution, and reception by members, as well as future research opportunities.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Qualitative research; reflective listening; Michigan Air National Guard; United States Air Force; bounded case study, semi-structured interviews, empathetic communication					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	142	

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Name of Candidate: Jennifer Lee C. Rudolph

Thesis Title: Tell Me More: A Qualitative, Bounded Case Study on Reflective Listening

Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
Matthew W. Broaddus, Ed.D.

_____, Member
Lynn M. Soots, Ph.D.

_____, Member
LtCol John W. Schmidtke, M.S.

Accepted this 10th day of June 2022 by:

_____, Assistant Dean of Academics for
Dale F. Spurlin, Ph.D. Degree Programs and Research

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

TELL ME MORE: A QUALITATIVE, BOUNDED CASE STUDY ON REFLECTIVE LISTENING, by Jennifer Lee C. Rudolph, 142 pages.

Carl Rogers coined reflective listening in the 1950s as part of client-focused psychotherapy. Since then, researchers have applied reflective listening to a variety of interpersonal and organizational environments to demonstrate empathy through “other-centered” behavior. This study used a communication course teaching a reflective listening model (*Our Community Listens*) to explore the influence of learning reflective listening in the Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG). As a qualitative, bounded case study using semi-structured interviews, the researcher explored the connection between reflective listening experiences after attending the course, empathy, US Air Force leadership development, and the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Strategic Plan. The results of this exploratory study indicated that participants experienced a unique, different, and introspective course which led them on a journey through self-discovery and self-regulation to other-centered behavior. They transferred these skills to a variety of contexts after attending the course, such as their military and civilian workplace and to their families. Participants also felt organizational and cultural barriers existed that impeded reflective listening from expanding past interpersonal interaction and small teams to larger unit culture. The researcher provided recommendations to improve strategic planning, execution, and reception by members, as well as future research opportunities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I feel grateful for those who directly and indirectly helped throughout this process, because it is truly our enablers who help us achieve our goals. Dr. Gina Wilson provided insight into research that sharpened my approach. Melissa Pagar's coaching helped me ruthlessly prioritize my goals over the past the year. Jan Barker kept me physically fit so that I could perform mentally. My Downtown Kansas City Crew reinforced my social pillar of resiliency—thanks for all the adventures!

Thank you to the various people that provided feedback on this thesis over the past year: Andrew Corcoran, my Art of War Scholar classmates (especially Kim Brutsche and Chris Adams from my peer review group) and Dr. Vanessa Cook whose editing provided many opportunities for me to clarify my writing.

I relied on a spectacular thesis committee. Lt Col John Schmidtke kept me honest and updated on the US Air Force and was a literal lynch pin in connecting me to valuable mentors. Dr. Lynn Soots was indispensable throughout the qualitative research process and even generously acted as my research assistant. Dr. Matt Broaddus was the true epitome of a sponsor, mentor, and committee chair who demonstrated the importance of caring about people through his leadership lessons and guidance.

To my mom, Ramona Cloutier-Rudolph: thank you for always being my editor-in-chief through my academic journeys and for being a role model for women in the military. I know Dad is proud that I followed in your footsteps.

To my husband Jose, there really is no better show of thanks I can give you, except to lay this thesis at your feet and say “we did it!” Without your support since October 2009, we (and I!) would not be here today. Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS.....	ix
ILLUSTRATIONS	x
TABLES	xi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Background.....	1
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of the Study	5
Research Questions.....	6
Assumptions.....	7
Definition of Terms	11
Scope.....	13
Limitations and Delimitations	13
Significance of the Study	18
Summary	19
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	20
Introduction.....	20
Philosophical Framework	21
Social Constructivism	21
Conduct of the Literature Review.....	22
Reflective Listening is an “Other-Center” Skill That Demonstrates Empathy	22
Origins.....	23
Application.....	24
Active Listening.....	24
Clinical Settings	26
Motivational Interviewing	27
Reflective Listening in Education.....	27
Obstacles	29
Listening in Organizations	30

Reflective Listening in Military Leadership Development.....	31
Institutional Competencies.....	31
Types of Listening	33
Formal and Informal Feedback.....	33
Formal Feedback.....	34
Informal Feedback	35
Empathy is Integral to Interpersonal Relationships and Organizational Culture	36
Definition and Framework	36
When Empathy is Not Good	37
Empathetic Leadership.....	38
Full Range of Leadership Model	38
US Air Force and DMVA Culture Requires Empathy	40
Empathy, Diversity, and the Complex Environment of Future War	40
Empathy in the Range of Military Operations.....	41
Across the Services and in Multinational Operations.....	41
Connecting to the Military of Tomorrow.....	43
Empathy in the National Guard Experience	43
DMVA Strategic Plan	44
DMVA Strategic Goal 4: Cultivating a Workplace of Choice	45
Summary	46
CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	48
Introduction.....	48
Qualitative Methodology	48
Philosophical Framework	48
Qualitative Approach	49
Case Study Design.....	49
Bounded Case Study	51
Data Collection	52
Approval to Conduct Research	52
Semi-Structured Interview Design.....	52
Type of Interview.....	53
Number of Interviews	54
Length of Interviews	54
Interview Questions	55
Scripting Interviews.....	56
Delegating Researcher Responsibilities.....	57
Conducting Interviews.....	58
Ethical Considerations	60
Researcher Bias.....	60
Belmont Report Principles.....	61
Respect for Persons	61
Beneficence	62
Justice.....	64
Summary	64

CHAPTER 4 ANALYSIS	66
Introduction.....	66
Data Process.....	66
Familiarization with Data.....	68
Generating Initial Codes	68
First Cycle – Preliminary Coding	69
Searching for Themes	70
Reviewing Themes.....	71
Second Cycle – Eclectic Coding.....	71
Third Cycle – Pattern Coding	72
Defining Themes.....	78
Producing the Report	79
Thematic Analysis	80
Theme 1: Unique, Different, and Introspective Experience	80
Theme 2: The Journey to Other-Centered Behavior.....	83
Theme 3: Applying a new perspective on other-centered behavior.....	92
Theme 4: Barriers Getting in the Way of Possibilities for Workplace Success	98
Deciding to Attend is a Demonstration of Trust.....	98
Conflict with Military Culture and Responsibilities	102
Reflective Listening Stuck at the Interpersonal Level.....	105
Summary.....	107
CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	108
Summary.....	108
Recommendations.....	109
Recommendation 1: Chart a Path for a Reflective Listening Culture.....	109
Recommendation 2: Explore Reflective Listening in the Military Context	110
Recommendation 3: Encourage Deliberate Practice to Impact Climate.....	110
Recommendation 4: Expand on Member for Life Opportunities	111
Recommendation 5: Leaders Walk the Walk	111
Future Research Recommendations.....	112
Conclusion	112
APPENDIX A MEMORANDUM FROM HUMAN PROTECTIONS DIRECTOR	114
APPENDIX B MEMORANDUM FROM MICHIGAN AIR NATIONAL GUARD	115
APPENDIX C INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	119
REFERENCE LIST	120

ACRONYMS

ACA	Airman Comprehensive Assessment
ANG	Air National Guard
CFCC	Chapman Foundation for Caring Communities
DAF	Department of the Air Force
FGO	Field Grade Officers
CGSC	Command and General Staff College
OPR	Officer Performance Report
NCO	Noncommissioned Officer
NG	National Guard
USAF	US Air Force

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. DMVA Organizational Chart.....	12
Figure 2. US Air Force Full Range of Leadership	39

TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Reflective Listening from “Our Community Listens” Course Handbook.....	3
Table 2. Common Components of Listening.....	25
Table 3. US Air Force Institutional Competencies Related to Reflective Listening.....	32
Table 4. First Cycle Preliminary Coding	70
Table 5. Third Cycle Codes, Definitions, and Examples.....	72
Table 6. Categories, Codes, Cases, and Hits.....	78
Table 7. Themes, Associated Codes, Significance	79

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Listen to your people. Communicate with them and be perceptive to their needs...Do not be afraid to empathize when necessary. Listen, listen, and listen!

—USAF, “Advice to Leaders,” in *The Airman Handbook*

Background

This qualitative, bounded case study explored and provided recommendations on reflective listening in the Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG). The researcher used social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The researcher’s experience with *reflective listening* began in 2019 while attending a three-day communications skills course called “Our Community Listens” hosted by the Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG). The course was a mixture of instruction, practice, and experimentation with various skill sets associated with empathetic communication. On the second day of the course, one of the modules focused on reflective listening. During that module, the researcher learned that the most helpful act a person could do when listening was, in fact, *not talk*. While it may seem intuitive that listening means silencing both one’s voice and mind to truly listen to another person, the researcher learned that giving advice, asking questions to fill a need for information or curiosity, and telling one’s own story were the exact opposite of how to reflectively listen and demonstrate empathy. And these were *the actions the researcher specifically used to connect with others*. After many similar experiences throughout the course, the researcher saw incredible potential in helping other members of the MI ANG learn reflective

listening skills to understand themselves and others, express empathy, and deliver effective confrontation as part of building rapport and trust in the “Our Community Listens” course (CFCC 2019). This study focused on one module from within the course to understand the influence of reflective listening on members of the MI ANG.

Reflective listening is a multi-dimensional skill that allows a person to demonstrate empathy through other-centered behavior when listening to another person. Within the “Our Community Listens” course, the purpose of the reflective listening module was to build listening skills as part of a foundation for workplace relationships (CFCC 2019). The reflective listening module taught listening techniques to support emotional intelligence, effective negotiations, conflict resolution, and expressing empathy (CFCC 2019). Table 1 shows the Five Reflective Listening skills with a basic definition and examples from the courseware.

Table 1. Reflective Listening from “Our Community Listens” Course Handbook

Behavior	Definition	Example
Attending verbal/non-verbal	Being fully present through posture, gestures, and attention	Eye contact, open body posture, nodding, leaning forward, giving full attention, being present within
Acknowledgments	Verbal and non-verbal communication that assures attention	Verbal: “uh-huh,” “really,” “no kidding!” “that’s interesting...” “yes, I see...” Non-verbal: head nods, expressive eyes
Door openers	Other-centered conversation that encourages the other to talk (not filling the listener’s need for information)	“Go on...” “tell me more...” “sounds like you have something to say...” “talk more about it!” “Share more about that...” “I’m listening”
Silence	Quieting the mind and the voice	Internal and external
Reflective responses	Conveying understanding facts and feelings to the other as experienced by the other (not inattention, parroting, or paraphrasing)	

Source: Created by author; adapted from CFCC 2019, 1.

“Our Community Listens” found its way to the MI ANG when the Commanding General attended a course in 2017. Brigadier General Bryan Teff saw a strong connection to developing reflective listening skills and their impact on the organization’s goals of developing leaders, taking care of families, and accomplishing the mission of the MI ANG (Eichaker 2021). The commander recognized an opportunity to develop Airmen at every level of the MI ANG critical to be highly-skilled, empathetic leaders (Eichaker 2021) capable of conducting complex future missions. The US Air Force provides this guidance on leadership development in Air Force Handbook (AFH) 1, *The Airman Handbook*, which “guides Airmen’s actions within the Profession of Arms” as the active duty and reserve component source document (USAF 2017c 3). The US Air Force

recognized the importance of empathy by including it in official leadership guidance in *The Airman Handbook*, which defines empathy as “to be understanding of and sensitive to another person’s feelings, thoughts, and experiences to the point you can almost feel or experience them yourself” (2017c, 256). Furthermore, a course that sought to improve interpersonal communication skills would also contribute towards the State of Michigan’s Department of Military and Veterans Affairs’ (DMVA) strategic goals for workplace climate, culture, and interoperability (MI DMVA 2021).

Through this bounded case study of semi-structured interview of members of the MI ANG who attended the course, the researcher used prepared questions and free-flowing dialogue to explore the rich and detailed influence of reflective listening skills. This study used a social constructivist framework for qualitative analysis of subjective meanings that form through the interview participants’ interactions with others (Creswell 2013, 24). The social constructivist framework was consistent with analyzing reflective listening to seek understanding of the world in which one lives and works by interpreting interactions between people. Through that lens, learning reflective listening skills provided a method to demonstrate empathy when seeking to understand interpersonal interactions. By applying reflective listening skills within the workplace context of the MI ANG to express empathy and understand others, leaders in the US Air Force can effectively mentor, counsel, and coach as necessary to respond to the needs of others (USAF 2017c). Reflective listening, empathy, and their connection to US Air Force leadership development, DMVA Strategic Plan, and mission execution are common themes throughout this study. By applying reflective listening skills within the workplace context of the MI ANG to express empathy and understand others, leaders in the US Air

Force can effectively mentor, counsel, and coach as necessary to respond to the needs of others (USAF 2017c). The literature review will examine reflective listening, empathy, and their connection to US Air Force leadership development and the DMVA's Strategic Plan.

Problem Statement

After experiencing a dramatic paradigm shift, the researcher wondered how other members of the MI ANG experienced reflective listening when interacting with others. The question continued as the researcher, a course administrator for six iterations of the course, did not know what experiences members of the MI ANG had with reflective listening *after* the course. To the researcher's knowledge, no study exists of members of the MI ANG on reflective listening beyond the end-of-course surveys conducted by the non-profit that facilitates the "Our Community Listens" course, the Chapman Foundation for Caring Communities (CFCC). Therefore, it was not known how the experience of learning reflective listening in the "Our Community Listens" course, as a component of empathetic communication, influenced members of the MI ANG.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, bounded case study is to explore and provide recommendations about the influences of reflective listening and potential alignment with US Air Force leadership development and DMVA Strategic Plan. The commander of the MI ANG has already hosted the "Our Community Listens" course to support personal and professional development. In the specific module on reflective listening, the learning objectives were to explain the importance of listening and to responding to others using

the five reflective listening skills described in Table 1 (CFCC 2019). The literature review demonstrated a connection between listening, empathy, and leader development. US Air Force doctrine and the DMVA Strategic Plan stated the importance of interpersonal skills to member and leader development, mission accomplishment, and future warfighting. Under a social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology in a qualitative bounded case study, the researcher used thematic analysis to explore how attending the “Our Community Listens” course and learning about reflective listening skills influenced members of the MI ANG.

Research Questions

The primary research question was how does learning reflective listening skills in the “Our Community Listens” course influence the members of the MI ANG? Since this is a broad question, the secondary research questions explored empathetic communication, the connection to the DMVA strategic plan, and the alignment of reflective listening to the US Air Force leadership development in *The Airman Handbook*. The secondary research questions are:

1. How does learning reflective listening influence the behavioral, cognitive, and affective experiences of empathy among members of the MI ANG?
2. How do members’ experiences learning reflective listening contribute to the DMVA’s Strategic Plan?
3. How do members’ experiences learning reflective listening connect to US Air Force leadership development?

These questions formed the foundation for the research design in order to explore and provide recommendations on the members of the MI ANG’s experience, their

interpersonal interactions, and the influence on organizational relationships, climate, and culture through thematic analysis.

Assumptions

Several assumptions were necessary to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. First, the researcher assumed members of the MI ANG learned about reflective listening and that members have some amount of residual knowledge and experience with the skills taught during the course. This is a necessary starting point to conduct the research because if members of the MI ANG did not learn anything from the course, the researcher would have no experience or influence to study. It is a valid assumption that participants took something away from the course because CFCC, the non-profit that provides the content and facilitators, sends surveys to participants after the last day of the course. In the three most recent iterations of the course from the recruited population used in this study, CFCC's end-of-course surveys revealed that 18/29 of the respondents said reflective listening was the skill they chose for their commitment to change after the course (CFCC 2022).

At the same time, research on communications training often finds a difference in retaining communication skills from the initial training to the period immediately following training, and long-term retention and transfer (Heaven, Clegg, and Maguire 2006; Hughes et al. 2018), indicating that barriers to the transfer of skills can exist when leaders do not fully integrate communications skills among the entire organization (Møller et al. 2021); and such training requires a motivational environment (Gautam and Basnet 2021).

While the researcher assumed the participants retained some amount of information during the course, such as to recognizing and utilizing different techniques taught during the reflective listening module, some members may not have practiced the skills in a long time or have not practiced the skill at all, since students attended either a community-based or MI ANG-hosted course as far back as 2017. Similarly, memory decreases as time increases from initial training, leading to the assumption that not every participant will have practiced or remembered every skill (Murre and Dros 2015, 20-23). Additionally, only approximately 4% of the members of the MI ANG have attended the course, which could influence the organizational aspect of training transfer to the workplace setting (Gautam and Basnet 2021). Regardless of how much participants retained, the researcher assumed that members had some type of positive or negative experience they would want to talk about in conjunction with reflective listening.

Second, the researcher assumed interview participants felt comfortable providing candid insight into their experiences with reflective listening according to the risk and mitigations outlined in the consent form. This is a necessary assumption because the researcher conducted interviews from a small population within a relatively small organization. This is a valid assumption since the researcher is a member of the organization (MI ANG) and a member of the bounded population (attendee of the course), and will, therefore, have access to the group and some level of trust since the researcher is not a total outsider. Moreover, the researcher assumed that participants would tell the truth during the interviews knowing the researcher would provide their responses anonymously to senior leaders for future decision-making. While telling the truth is no simple issue to dissect, the researcher can only present the data as received and

take the participants at their word, as Randall and Phenix (2009) discuss in their qualitative research in exercise science. Chapter 3 will address ethical considerations regarding researcher bias and mitigations.

Third, the author assumed that reflective listening is an important skill for the MI ANG because empathetic communication is part of cultivating a culture that enables an effective military workplace. The researcher assumed that the study's recommendations would be important to Michigan Air and Army National Guard leadership in support of the Michigan National Guard (MING) and the DMVA. This also requires an assumption that US Air Force leadership development and the DMVA's goals are based on research and achievable goals linked to success in future operations. These are necessary assumptions because the MI ANG is a reserve component for the US Air Force and thus uses US Air Force leadership development to support the DMVA's strategic goals. These are valid assumptions because the literature review of *The Airman Handbook* and the DMVA Strategic Plan indicated that listening, empathy, and communications are important for personal, professional, and workplace development to conduct future operations.

Fourth, the researcher assumed that the alumni list is complete, and the e-mail-based recruiting process provided all alumni an opportunity to participate in the interview sessions. This is a necessary assumption because the researcher intended to create the largest eligible participant pool possible to create the collective narrative. This is a valid assumption because the MI ANG logistics coordinator for the course maintains a contact roster from initial contact to the course completion. It is possible that members of the MI ANG may have taken the "Our Community Listens" course outside of an MI ANG

offered course without identifying their affiliation to the military organization. The researcher will have unintentionally excluded those members from the invitation to participate. Additionally, members may have attended the course but subsequently no longer meet additional screening criteria before conducting an interview, such as retirement from the military.

Fifth, the researcher assumed that members had a range of motives for signing up for the course: it is possible they were intrinsically motivated or invited by previous alumni, or were filling the minimum number of participants, or perhaps even coerced to attend. It is a necessary assumption because framing the research, recruiting materials, and interview questions solely around intrinsic motivation could have influenced those with negative experiences to decline participation and thus deprive the study of valuable insights. Furthermore, negative or neutral opinions might have skewed the responses to questions that only asked about positive aspects of the course. This is a valid assumption because each base recruited members differently, such as targeting specific rank groups or opening it to anyone who was interested and available.

Finally, every pair of facilitators who taught the various course iterations will likely have their unique styles, experiences, and emphases. This study assumed the basic content, delivery, and practice sessions during the course were consistent between course iterations. This is a necessary assumption because it is beyond the scope of this study to evaluate the consistency of each iteration of the course, and it would not answer the primary research question of how does learning reflective listening skills in the “Our Community Listens” course influence the members of the MI ANG. This is a valid assumption from the researcher’s perspective as a former participant or observer in four

iterations of the course: the material and delivery were consistent, with the facilitators using standardized slide decks to teach the modules.

Definition of Terms

Empathy. As defined in *The Airman Handbook*, empathy is “to be understanding of and sensitive to another person’s feelings, thoughts, and experiences to the point you can almost feel or experience them yourself” (USAF 2017c, 256).

Reflective Listening. Behaviors that demonstrate empathy through attentive behaviors, verbal and non-verbal acknowledgments, phrases to encourage other-centered conversation, silence, and reflective responses to validate understanding (CFCC 2019).¹ Table 1 on page 2 lists examples of reflective listening skills.

Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA). The Michigan DMVA is the parent organization that “synchronizes strategic, legislative, and fiscal initiatives to build and sustain military readiness, care and advocate for veterans, and cultivate purposeful partnerships” (State of Michigan n.d.). The DMVA is comprised of the Michigan National Guard, the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency, Michigan Veteran Homes, and the Michigan Youth Challenge Academy. The Governor of the State of Michigan appoints the Director of the DMVA who is dual-hatted as the MING Adjutant General. Figure 1 depicts the organizational chart of the DMVA.

¹ The preference of reflective listening over active listening is due to both distinguishing and emphasizing repeating and validating the message received in the communication cycle from using verbal and non-verbal communication to express attentive listening in a conversation.

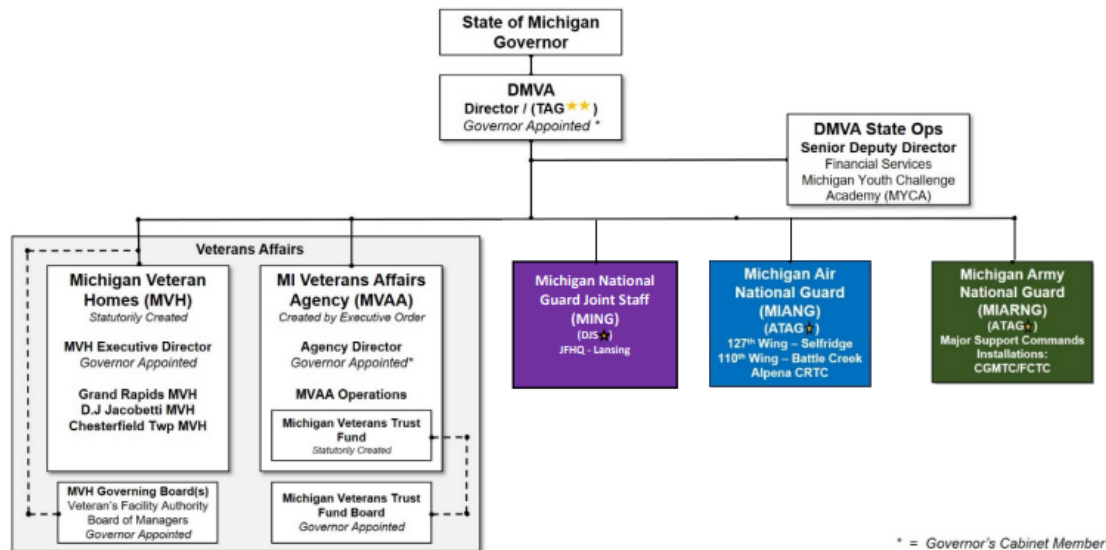


Figure 1. DMVA Organizational Chart

Source: DMVA 2021, 4.

Michigan National Guard (MING). “The Governor serves as the Commander in Chief of the MING. The MING consists of the Michigan Army National Guard (MIARNG) and Michigan Air National Guard (MIANG)...providing emergency response to the State is a core function of the MING and the department as a whole” (MI DMVA 2021, 5).

Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG). The MI ANG provides trained, combat-capable forces in support of the National Military Strategy while simultaneously providing Defense Support of Civil Authorities under guidance, funding, and authorities from the Department of the Air Force, the US Air Force, and the National Guard Bureau (MI DMVA 5-6).

Chapman Foundation for Caring Communities (CFCC). The community organization that “offers transformational learning experiences that strengthen

relationships, align teams, and build stronger communities. We integrate listening, leadership, care, and service to create a “Truly Human Connection” (CFCC n.d.a). CFCC provides facilitators and content for the “Our Community Listens” course.

“Our Community Listens”. A three-day communications course conducted by CFCC for participants to learn about behavioral styles, improve listening and communication skills, learn a method for effective confrontations, and feel empowered to build strong and compassionate relationships (CFCC n.d.b).

Scope

This qualitative study explored the experiences of those who completed the three-day “Our Community Listens” course from 2017 to 2021. In particular, the participants of this qualitative bounded case study engaged in semi-structured interviews to describe their experiences with the reflective listening behaviors taught during the course. The study focused on this specific skill set because of the results of the end-of-course survey data from the last three iterations. The impact of other programs that teach similar skills, evaluations of facilitators, and evaluations of others practicing reflective listening are beyond the scope of this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

The researcher conducted this qualitative, bounded case study with several limitations and delimitations. First, the US Army’s Command and General Staff School Master of Military Arts and Science program limited the depth and breadth of the study because the school required the researcher to complete and defend the thesis before graduation. Therefore, the researcher chose to explore one skillset of the entire “Our

Community Listens” course, how it influenced members of the MI ANG, and understanding their specific experiences with empathetic communication.

Second, a lack of knowledge of the members’ baseline understanding of reflective listening limited the study from a comparison lens. The MI ANG did not establish a baseline prior to hosting the course. In addition to a lack of comparison data, the data collection through members self-reporting limits the experience as told through their perspective and does not include observation or evaluation of members using reflective listening skills during the interview. Third, budgetary and time constraints limited the researcher to virtual interviews to provide a deep, rich narrative on members’ experiences.

A final limitation relates to the members of the MI ANG who made up the bounded case. The researcher conducted interviews from the portion of the MI ANG that attended the course. In 2021, the MI ANG was comprised of approximately 2,500 members that executed the missions of the MI ANG in a variety of state and federal statuses, both as military members and civilians (MING 2021). The MI ANG generally assigns members to one of four bases in Michigan, with some members serving in short- and long-term capacities at many different locations around the world. All members of the MI ANG were eligible to attend the course within similar budgetary and supervisory approval requirements, and participants filled spots on a first-come, first-served basis through outreach at each MI ANG base and not as an intentional test group for a trial program.

Since the MI ANG commander attended “Our Community Listens” in 2017, 110 members of the MI ANG attended the course. From the rank of E-2 to O-6, with two O-

7s, 86 members were enlisted members, and 24 members were commissioned officers. The members were a mixture of full-time and drill status members, and the full-time members included both Air Guard Reserve (AGR) and Title 32 Air Reserve Technicians and Title 10 civilians who are general schedule (GS) federal civilian employees. The researcher excluded spouses who were not also members of the MI ANG who attended a MI ANG hosted-committed relationship version of the course and one part-time member of the MI Army National Guard since the command access approval did not cover their participation. The interviewed population amounted to the seven participants who consented to interviews.

As a part of the discussion on qualitative research, the challenges of transferability limits extending this analysis to every context. While the researcher could argue that an organization that learns reflective listening skills to meet strategic goals relating to workplace culture and leadership development is not unique to the military—especially if members of such an organization have work, personal, and community relationships. On the other hand, the researcher cannot anticipate all the potential sites to which the results of this study might transfer. The researcher’s description of the population within this section aimed to give readers and future researchers enough detail to understand if their context fits the results and recommendations herein (Nowell et al. 2017).

The researcher delimited the study by choosing reflective listening as one piece of understanding the experiences of members of the MI ANG because of the connection in US Air Force doctrine between empathy, leadership, and components of reflective listening. Additionally, the researcher decided to study the experiences of reflective

listening using the social constructivist approach in a qualitative bounded study because the narrated experiences were a way to get as close as possible to the source to understand how the reflective listening module influenced members (Creswell 2013). Furthermore, CFCC found in their end-of-course survey of the three final MI ANG courses of 2021 that 100% of the survey respondents said reflective listening was the most important skill in the course and 18/29 said that reflective listening was the skill to which they made a personal commitment to change (CFCC 2022).

The researcher chose to use interviews in a virtual setting to provide a comfortable and confidential setting for the participants, particularly relating to the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sah, Singh, and Sah 2020). As Robert Yin states, interviews can focus on a specific topic and provide insight into personal views (2018, 114). In-depth, one-on-one semi-structured interviews also allowed the researcher to develop rapport with the participant and dive deeply into their rich narrative while both using and discussing reflective listening skills (Baxter and Jack 2008, 556).

As chapter 3 describes, the researcher designed the study to encourage candid feedback and used thematic analysis of the answers from the bounded case to interpret the data as expressed by participants. The researcher chose the interview questions to answer the research questions as described above. Additionally, the researcher chose not to compare the interview experiences between different demographics to explore the common experiences among the bounded population and not to evaluate the differences between demographic categories, such as rank or base of assignment.

Finally, the researcher delimited the study to qualitative methods and did not conduct mixed methods. While mixed methods might produce qualitative and

quantitative data, it is worth discussing the researcher's rationale. First, the researcher already had "quantitative-like" data from end of course surveys, where many attendees reported reflective listening as the most important skill and the skills to which they decided to make a personal commitment to change (CFCC 2022). Second, if reflective listening enables someone to better understand others, then the reflective listening should be a foundational part of a study on reflective listening. Since this cannot occur without the ability to conduct back and forth synchronous dialogue, an anonymous survey would be unlikely to reach the deep narrative intended as the product of this exploratory study.

Third, the culture and organization of the MING would make multiple requests for research participation challenging given the limited time that members of the MING are at their military work center. A separate survey with a request for interviews would have challenged the time constraints placed on the researcher by the US Army's CGSC program to finish the study prior to graduation. Furthermore, members of the National Guard are not necessarily easily accessible by their official email, which uses encryption to help secure the data and the participant's confidentiality. The members would have had to check their email, answer the survey, type answers to provide qualitative data, and then schedule a follow-up interview. The researcher would have required several months in data collection alone, depending on the drill scheduled for a particular unit. Even under an extended timeline, members of the MI ANG meet monthly or every two months. Numerous requests for Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, and command climate surveys also constrain members' time, leading to the researcher anticipate a low response rate. Under these limitations and delimitations, the researcher

conducted semi-structured interviews to provide a deep, rich narrative understanding of the influences of learning reflective listening in the MI ANG.

Significance of the Study

This bounded case study focused on a portion of the members of the MI ANG who attended the course. It is a starting point to explore how the influence of learning reflective listening impacts members of the MI ANG, and how that influences interpersonal interactions within the MI ANG, and the potential for extending this skill outside the MI ANG: for units in the Michigan Army National Guard and throughout the MING and DMVA; to transfer to other states or active-duty military communities; or to expand to include spouses, families, and veterans within the DMVA's Member for Life construct.

The significance of this study could even expand to reflective listening skills used in the MI ANG outside of the internal workplace. As the civilian workplace focuses on empathy-related skills, the military could compete by seeking an understanding of the experiences and benefits that are important to current and future generations that are a small portion of the population according to current accession requirements—especially as 71% of Americans aged 17-24 are ineligible to serve according to accession guidelines (Spoehr, Thomas, and Handy 2018, 1). Accordingly, the military could use reflective listening as one component of empathetically connecting with the remaining eligible candidate pool to attract recruits.

Leaders who see the potential for transferability of these results could benefit from this study. Within the MI ANG, the analysis and recommendations in chapter 5 could influence the decision to not continue the “Our Community Listens” course or to

shape if and how the MI ANG delivers the course. Several other active-duty military bases, both Naval and US Air Force, have conducted multiple iterations of the “Our Community Listens” course, and could possibly benefit from these results.

Concurrently, decision-makers could use this study to determine if “Our Community Listens” should be a part of on-boarding, if the Director of the DMVA should expand the course into the entire DMVA, and if the department could offer the program to the wider veteran and family community. Furthermore, this study could help decision-makers prioritize the resources and funding for future courses and commit to *train-the-trainer* by having alumni of the course become internal facilitators. Perhaps most importantly, this study may inform decisions makers, commanders, leaders, and every member of the MI ANG the impact that reflective listen can have on the experiences, motivations, and lives of members of the MI ANG in their span of care.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore and provide recommendations on the MI ANG member’s experiences of reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. In chapter 2, the literature review will explore reflective listening, empathy, and the connection to US Air Force doctrine and the DMVA Strategic Plan. In chapter 3, the researcher will explain the qualitative methodology and bounded, case study design. In chapter 4, the researcher compiled the results of the interviews and provided an analysis of the four emerging themes. Finally, chapter 5 provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

All DMVA members Lead! Members who influence, engage and encourage excellent performance to promote the enduring success of the organization characterize Leadership within the DMVA. At all levels, our members eliminate corrosive behavior and toxic leadership to strengthen department cohesion.

—MG Paul Rogers, Director, Michigan Department of Military and Veteran Affairs (MI DMVA), and The Adjutant General, Michigan National Guard, MI DMVA, “Strategic Plan”

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and provide recommendations on the MI ANG member’s experiences of reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The following section provides a review of the literature associated with reflective listening, empathetic communication, and organizational behavior. After discussing a social constructivist and positive psychology philosophical framework and approach, the literature review covers three major themes connected to the research questions centered on reflective listening and empathetic communication, US Air Force leadership development, and the DMVA Strategic Plan. First, reflective listening is an “other-oriented” skill that demonstrates empathy. Second, empathy is integral to interpersonal relationships and organizational culture. Third, military culture requires empathy, which is based on a foundation of reflective listening, empathy, and interpersonal skills. Finally, these themes on reflective listening and empathetic communication are situated in the US Air Force leadership development and DMVA Strategic Plan contexts.

Philosophical Framework

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism was the underlying philosophical framework for this study. According to Paul Adams (2006, 245), social constructivism is understanding the world around the studied population through social interactions. Creswell (2013, 24) posits that a social constructivism theoretical framework helps frame research around such social interactions. Similarly, studying the influence of an individual who is learning reflective listening skills while interacting with others is a balance of both individual and social learned experience (Palincsar 1998). As members of the MI ANG navigate their experiences, it involves constant interaction with other members using their individual skills to understand others and interactions. Therefore, social constructivism was a helpful framework for studying how members of the MI ANG understand their experiences of reflective listening with others.

Positive Psychology

With an epistemological framework that uses social constructivism to understand experiences through social interaction, the researcher would be remiss to leave out the individual psychological considerations that underpin this study. Positive psychology focuses on that which brings fulfilled life, building strengths as a preventative to mental illness, ranging from individual past and present experiences, as well as future outlooks, to group-level virtues that enable positive social living (Seligman 2005). It is with both the individual's positive psychology and the group's social constructivism that this study explored the influence of reflective listening.

Conduct of the Literature Review

The term *reflective listening* from “Our Community Listens” courseware underpinned the literature review, in addition to various listening concepts from US Air Force leadership development publications, and from the DMVA Strategic Plan. The open coding for the literature review (Onwuegbuzie, Frels, and Hwang 2016) used single terms and combinations of the following words and phrases: *reflective listening, other-centered, perspective-taking, empathy, affective, cognitive, behavioral, understanding others, workplace environment, leadership, followership, feedback, coaching, active listening, environment, and culture*. The literature review sources focused on the “Our Community Listens” courseware, scholarly articles, textbooks, academic encyclopedic-style handbooks on various phenomena, US Air Force leadership development publications, and DMVA strategic guidance to produce three major themes.

Reflective Listening is an “Other-Center” Skill That Demonstrates Empathy

Reflective listening has evolved over the years since its conception in the 1950s. Researchers have studied reflective listening skills and empathy in many environments, such as corporate training that can help members transfer skills to authentic settings (Rautalinko and Lisper 2004), managerial skills that evince respect and focus attention (Jonsdottir and Kristinsson 2020), leadership behaviors that build trust in the workplace (Muncy 2020), and clinical health care settings (Tobase et al. 2021). Important to this study, previous research and insight also included the military’s need for strategic and interpersonal empathy “to build cohesive teams and make better decisions in future operating environments” (McDougall 2019, 29). This section will discuss reflective

listening's origins and applications, the connection to empathy, and barriers to reflective listening that can prevent one from displaying empathy towards others.

Origins

Reflective listening has its roots in mid-20th century client-therapist techniques. As envisioned by psychologist Carl Rogers, reflective listening is seeking understanding of another's message through repeating the facts and feelings of the message for verification by the sender (Arnold 2014). Rogers explored engaging in *other-centered* reflective listening during psychotherapy sessions, where he asserted the importance of validating the feelings his clients communicated as both received and understood as the client intended (Rautalinko and Lisper 2004). In this instance, the "other" is the patient and the focus of the conversation is on what the "other"/patient is trying to communicate, instead of directing the conversations without confirming assumptions.

After seeking verification of the message, the goal was to let the other person know that they were both heard and understood (Katz and McNulty 1994). Rogers would eventually settle on the idea that reflective listening was a way for a listener to demonstrate empathy and acceptance while also ensuring an accurate understanding of others (Arnold 2014). The practical application to psychotherapy also connects to humanistic psychology, which generally prefers qualitative over quantitative approaches to research exploring personal and social interaction, as reflected in the research design here (Waterman 2015, 128-129). "Other-centered" behavior is one of the themes woven into this research and will appear in the themes from the data analysis.

Application

Since Rogers' initial use of the term reflective listening in clinical therapy, various disciplines have explored and applied reflective listening and its components. These areas include active listening, motivational interviewing in criminal justice, and expressing empathy in medical and educational fields. The wide application of reflective listening and resulting research suggests benefits of using the skill in environments requiring empathy in interpersonal interaction, which following section explores.

Active Listening

It is important to address the similar term “active listening,” also coined by Carl Rogers with Richard Farson (Rogers and Farson 1957). Readers may be more familiar with active listening or find it in empathetic communication literature. Active listening is another way to describe communication skills between two people, similar to reflective listening. This is the case for US Air Force leadership development publications, which define active listening as “responding appropriately to hear, comprehend, evaluate, and remember the message” (USAF 2017c, 324). According to this definition, reflective listening contains key skills that communicate empathy: paying attention and showing that one is listening, deferring judgment, and providing feedback to respond appropriately (MindTools n.d.; Weger et al. 2014). Table 2 shows the common components of listening using reflective listening from “Our Community Listens,” a composite of active listening, and *The Airman Handbook's* composite of effective and active listening.

Table 2. Common Components of Listening

Common Components	“Our Community Listens” Reflective Listening	Composite Active Listening	USAF Listening in <i>The Airman Handbook</i>
Being present	Attending verbal and non-verbal communication that demonstrates being fully present through posture, gestures, and attention	Paying Attention	Empathy as the first step to understanding the position, motivation, and interests of a diverse workforce
Acknowledgement	Acknowledgements: Verbal and non-verbal communication that assures attention	Showing that one is listening	Two-way communication using verbal, nonverbal, gestures, body language Nonverbal gestures such as eye contact, occasional head nods
Other-centered conversation	Other-centered conversation that encourages the other to talk	Responding appropriately	Open-ended questioning to obtain information or think about a particular situation (note about aggressive perception)
Listening to understand	Silence: Quieting the mind and the voice	Deferring judgement	Listen more than speak
Reflective responses	Reflective response that convey understanding facts and feelings to the other as experienced by the other (not inattention, parroting, or paraphrasing)	Providing feedback	Active listening by communicate verbally and nonverbally that they have received the message ; Responding: verbally summarizing, interpreting, clarifying

Source: Created by author; adapted from CFCC 2019; Weger et al. 2014; USAF 2017c.

As Table 2 shows, common themes exist between the explanation of reflective listening from the “Our Community Listens” courseware, a composite definition of active listening, and the general US Air Force listening construct. Being present, employing verbal and non-verbal acknowledgments, engaging in other-centered conversation, silencing inner thoughts, judgments, and speaking less than listening are common to the three categories. One nuanced difference between active listening and reflective listening, according to these definitions, is how the conversation continues. Weger Jr., et al. (2014) reference providing feedback as the method of closing the communication cycle using

active listening. Conversely, in both the “Our Community Listens” and in US Air Force concepts, listening requires ensuring a person received the message correctly. While this difference could be minor in many situations, the importance of ensuring one understood and received the message correctly appears to be the main distinction between active listening and reflective listening.

Some view active listening and reflective listening differently than empathic listening. Such is the case for Garner, for example, who argues that active listening and reflective listening “never reach a full appreciation” of the message, facts, and feelings the way that “empathic listening” focuses on ensuring the other person feels heard (Garner 2009, 90). Most of the existing literature, however, finds that reflective listening and active listening definitions tend to share common aspects with an intent to demonstrate empathy.

Clinical Settings

Researcher in patient-centered medical care have also connected reflective listening to empathy in the clinical setting (Braillon and Taiebi 2020). Physicians using reflective listening techniques contribute to higher patient satisfaction and perceived support (Pollak et al. 2011). Theresa Wiseman’s 1996 (1166) article also explores the perception of patient care by nurses, which combines perspective-taking, non-judgment, understanding another’s feelings, and communication understanding as defining attributes of empathy. In fact, after a successful empathic interaction, Wiseman states that both parties in a dialogue feel satisfied: both the person being empathetically listened to and spoken to since the person feels valued and heard; and the person who is listening and speaking empathetically since they feel they have helped the other person. The “Our

Community Listens” courseware parallels this concept of communicating an understanding of how one imagines another sees a situation during reflective listening, and participants will describe this experience in chapter 4.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing is an application of reflective listening used in criminal justice research and corrections practice. In this environment, corrections officers facilitate behavioral change with their parolees and balance a relationship that can help induce internal motivation for change motivational interviewing as a practical and humanizing method (Clark, Roberts, and Chandler 2020; Walters, Alexander, and Vader 2008). Since motivational interviewing shares concepts with reflective listening, one can use it outside the criminal justice context to focus the conversation on the other person using open-ended questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries (Zielinski 2020). While members of the MI ANG likely do not expect to experience an offender-officer relationship, the intent to keep conversation other-centered, to provide reflected responses to validate the message sent, and to develop internal motivation for behavioral change appears in US Air Force leadership development principles, as demonstrated later.

Reflective Listening in Education

Within educational disciplines, researchers have explored reflective listening benefits for both teachers and students. Reflective listening, as applied to developmental education, improves motivation, behavior, and growth through conversation (Rollnick, Kaplan, and Rutschman 2019, 3). Later sections will cover applying reflective listening

to the teacher-student role connects to US Air Force leadership development on mentoring and counseling.

In the book *On Becoming an Effective Teacher* (Rogers, Lyon, and Tausch 2014), Lyon extends Rogers' other-centered concept to the learning, mentoring, and teaching that appears important in the lived experiences of exceptionally successful people. In Lyon's study of exceptionally successful people, the ones with mentors outperformed those without mentors (154-6). Lyon continues to explain that empathetic understanding of mentees, demonstrating genuineness through sharing experience and prizing others' unique feelings and experiences are traits most present in successful mentors and are also an important part of building trust (154-6).

Mentoring extends from mentees to all the other areas where mentorship surfaces in relationships with peers, supervisors, subordinates, etc. Lyon uses Rogers' other-centered approach in a mentoring model: get information through actively listening, give empathy through reflective listening, merge intents and thoughts to create a consensus on what the mentee must do, and then go forth with an action plan. Lyon extends this model into mentorship programs in medical universities around the world, connecting reflective listening in interpersonal interactions to effective teaching and mentoring (154-6). The application of reflective listening to mentoring and coaching makes it easy to see that reflective listening can integrate into the discipline of organizational leadership.

As a skill worthy of teaching to parole officers, therapists, educators, physicians, and nurses, reflective listening has a wide application often connected to empathetic communication. Prior to exploring reflective listening in organizational leadership, however, it is appropriate to consider that mere knowledge of a skill that focuses on "the

other” within a wide range of workplace cultures is not necessarily as easy as “doing it.” Therefore, obstacles are worth noting in understanding the full range of experiences with reflective listening.

Obstacles

The “Our Community Listens” Handbook (2019) discusses several obstacles to reflective listening. For example, obstacles to reflective listening and demonstrating empathy can come from a variety of areas, such as wanting to dominate or avoid a conversation, wanting to judge a person or their experiences, not having enough time, using ineffective interpersonal skills, or creating learned helplessness (2019, 12-15). Other obstacles can be environmental due to distractions, as Fisher (1994) points out. Obstacles can also be physiological due to processing what the other is saying; cognitive due to focusing on words and facts and not on the feelings or impact, wanting to debate or rebut the person’s perspective, or speaking only to feel heard; or affective due to discomfort with reflective listening skills (Fisher 1994, 429). Without reflective listening and empathetic communication, high power individuals might not hear valuable advice thus tending toward group think (Tost, Gino, and Larrick 2012), and supervisors can contribute to burnout and stress depending on the morale of their employees (Bélanger et al. 2015). This could provide a unique challenge in our digital age as work places rely more and more on digital communication or telework (Terry and Cain 2016). These types of obstacles to reflective listening indicate the potential challenges facing individuals within an organization, which leaders of the MI ANG could expect when teaching a skill that demonstrates empathy. Participants described many of these obstacles during the

interviews which will inform themes and recommendations in chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

Listening in Organizations

Several researchers adapted Rogers' work on reflective listening to a wide variety of organizational behavior. Rautalinko and Lisper's research with insurance companies, for instance, showed that training increased reflective listening in conversations with customers and, in some cases, transferred to an authentic setting (2004). Many organizational leadership experts have also operationalized Rogers' reflective listening and incorporated it into training modules, such as Gordon Leadership Effectiveness Training (Gordon Training International 2021). A review of studies on Gordon Leader Training yielded that the training has a limited ability to teach knowledge and induce practical application of social and emotional learning skills in various specializations of the material in teacher, parent, youth, and teacher context training contexts (Talvio et al. 2013, 694; Cedar and Levant 2010).

In his book, *Communication in Organizations* (1994), Dalmar Fisher connects organizational effectiveness with a listening-oriented culture. According to Fisher, reflective listening, as a technique of a listening orientation, is about the listener making *conscious choices*, "choosing to do and say certain things and avoiding others" (432). As a series of choices during a conversation, Fisher describes how the listener decides to engage in other-focused listening: 1) choosing to focus on the other, 2) choosing to respond to what the other says about him or herself, 3) choosing to accept and clarify what the other has said at that person's level, 4) choosing to respond to the feelings expressed or implied, and 5) choosing to focus on the ambivalent and negative feelings to

gain information without probing (433-435). These choices in conversation develop the relationship and create a motivating space for the other without taking on their burdens (433-435) instead of creating learned helplessness (CFCC 2019). Reflective listening, either its components or the entire concept, involves common skills associated within the research and literature dealing with organizational behavior.

Reflective Listening in Military Leadership Development

This section will look at US Air Force publications, components of reflective listening, and empathetic communication. Within *The Airman Handbook*, US Air Force leadership development supports reflective listening in institutional competencies, types of listening, and the full range of leadership models. *The Airman Handbook* also discusses using reflective listening during feedback, both formal and informal.

Institutional Competencies

The US Air Force publishes an institutional competency list, which includes communications as a competency with active listening as a sub-competency (USAF 2019). Competencies at the *personal level* focus on interpersonal communication skills, and competencies at the *people and teams level* focus on awareness and application of understanding, as shown in Table 3 below. US Air Force leadership development expects members to demonstrate active listening skills when practicing effective communication. Here the institutional competency definition of active listening specifically includes a reflective listening step to ensure one understood and received the message correctly. As Airmen move from developing at the personal level, a foundation of listening enables three subcompetencies at the *people and teams level*: developing and inspiring others

through mentorship and coaching, enabling diversity by showing respect for others (including listening and not assuming one received and understood a message), and negotiating mission outcomes using appropriate interpersonal styles. This shows an intentional progression and impact of using reflective listening components throughout a member's career.

Table 3. US Air Force Institutional Competencies Related to Reflective Listening

Personal Level	Subcompetency	Definition
Communicating	Active Listening	Fosters the free exchange of ideas in an atmosphere of open exchange Actively attempts to understand others' points of view and clarifies information as needed Solicits feedback to ensure that others understand messages as they were intended
People & Teams	Subcompetency	Definition
Develops People	Develops and Inspires Others	Helps and motivates others to improve their skills and enhance their performance through feedback, coaching, mentoring, and delegating Empowers others and guides them in the direction of their goals and mission accomplishment Inspires others to transcend their own self-interests and embrace personal sacrifice and risk for the good of the organization and mission
	Diversity	Leverages differences in individual characteristics, experiences, and abilities Leverages diversity for mission accomplishment and fosters an inclusive environment Shows respect for others regardless of the situation; treats people in an equitable manner
Fostering Collaborative Relationships	Negotiating	Attains desired mission outcomes while maintaining positive, long-term relationships with key individuals and groups Uses appropriate interpersonal styles and methods to reduce tension or conflict between two or more people, anticipates and addresses conflict constructively, and anticipates and prevents counter-productive confrontations Persuades and influences others; builds consensus; gains cooperation; effectively collaborates

Source: Created by author; adapted from USAF 2017c.

Types of Listening

While the institutional competencies describe the progression of listening skills, *The Airman Handbook* also describes three types of listening: informative, critical, or empathetic listening under the category of *effective listening* (324-5). Informative listening's purpose is to understand the transmitted message, critical listening is actively analyzing and evaluating the information, and empathetic listening is useful for emotional circumstances or when the relationship between speaker and listener is important. Interestingly, *The Airman Handbook* describes empathetic listening as the precursor to informative and critical thinking, implying the importance of listening empathetically *before* listening to gain information or think critically about information (2017c, 324-5). Within the "Our Community Listens" reflective listening courseware, the intent behind reflective listening is to build rapport, "other-centered" leaders, and trust as a part of emotional intelligence, in negotiations and conflict resolution, especially when deciding how to react when someone brings up a problem (CFCC 2019). In this sense, combining the US Air Force's use of informative and empathetic listening is like the intent of reflective listening. The importance of different types of listening applies to effective formal and informal feedback, ranging from official evaluations to mentorship and developmental counseling.

Formal and Informal Feedback

The Airman Handbook discusses listening skills in both formal and informal feedback situations. Formal feedback and evaluations occur through ACAs, EPRs, and OPRs, and informal feedback occurs in events such as mentoring and developmental

counseling (USAF 2017c, 254). The importance of reflective listening in feedback starts with reviewing reflective listening's role in formal feedback and evaluations.

Formal Feedback

The US Air Force expects Airmen to give and receive formal feedback on reflective listening skills as part of the evaluations process. Supervisors formally impart feedback via the Airmen Comprehensive Assessment forms that provide input to the formal evaluations process (USAF 2014; USAF 2017a; USAF 2017b). The Airman Comprehensive Assessment Addendum (SAF 2021) uses sister-service, civilian, and commercial sector best practices to connect AF values to the talent management process, and includes more detail on reflective listening concepts. Even the US Space Force, newly created under the DAF, indirectly addresses listening: team leader responsibilities to create an environment where team members can engage, express thoughts, and seek feedback; and team members' responsibility to encourage others to share their thoughts (USSF 2021). In officer feedback forms, the word *listen* occurs once under the rater evaluation section as a subset of communication skills (USAF 2014).

The junior enlisted feedback form generically captures the description of listening skills under communications skills (USAF 2017a, 1), while senior non-commissioned officer (SNCO) form describes SNCOs with the greatest communication skills as “dynamic communicator and astute listener” (USAF 2017b, 1). The US Air Force has also recently added an Addendum to the current feedback forms described above. The Addendum allows the supervisor to rate Airmen from one end of the spectrum as developing communicator or active listener, to the other end of the spectrum as effective or astute listener who seeks feedback to ensure that one understood and received the

message as intended (USAF 2021). The DAF formalizes the importance and expectations of components of reflective listening in both the US Air Force and the US Space Force.

Informal Feedback

Per *The Airman Handbook*, the components of reflective listening are part of mentoring and counseling to help Airmen continue their personal and professional development as directed by the institutional competencies and as guided by official feedback previously mentioned. Mentorship, in *The Airman Handbook*, requires a genuine understanding of the mentee's needs and perspective, requiring two-way communication (2017c, 262), which is where reflective listening can support.

Developmental counseling specifically requires empathy and active listening to see the situation from the Airman's perspective, and "effective counselors listen more than they speak" (USAF 2017c, 255-256). In both arenas of informal feedback, reflective listening is critical for the leader in a mentor or counselor role to effectively develop Airmen professionally and complement formal feedback and evaluation processes.

Reflective listening is a behavioral skill widely applicable to various settings, where a person intentionally chooses to seek and demonstrate understanding to allow another person the opportunity to feel heard. Within US Air Force leadership development, *The Airman Handbook* describes contain components of reflective listening through institutional competencies, types of listening, and in the formal and informal feedback processes. The next section connects reflective listening to the cognitive understanding, affective feelings, and behavioral actions of empathy.

Empathy is Integral to Interpersonal Relationships and Organizational Culture

Definition and Framework

Reflective listening is one way to demonstrate empathy in interpersonal interactions. According to the *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, empathy is an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone else through knowing another person's internal state as an observer, coming to feel as another feels, or projecting oneself into another's situation to imagine how another person feels (Batson et al. 2002, 494). From Rogers' (1975) own words: empathy is "To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another's world without prejudice." Empathy is, in effect, how we understand and relate to others, and most research acknowledges both cognitive (understanding) and affective aspects (feeling) with some researchers adding behavioral aspects (demonstration) (Clark, Robertson, and Young 2019). This composite definition of empathy as a cognitive, affective, and behavioral experience will provide the foundation for the following sections.

The empathetic framework has connections to social constructivism and positive psychology, as the *Oxford Handbook on Positive Psychology* discusses (2002). First, as we behaviorally participate in the universe, our thoughts and emotions help us organize that understanding to respond to new information and experiences (Mahoney 2002). Second, empathy is part of our mental well-being (Keyes and Lopez 2002), related to Emotional Intelligence (Salovey, Mayer and Caruso 2002), important to authentic relationships (Harter 2002), and fuels acceptance and respect in relationships (Harvey,

Pauwels and Zickmund 2002). Chapter 4 will discuss the participants experiences of reflective listening and the connections to empathy.

When Empathy is Not Good

As a person can choose empathetic behavior to create connections and achieve understanding, so too can a person choose empathetic behavior for less positive social interaction. Bubandt and Willerslev (2015, 6) discuss the connection between “seduction, deception, manipulation, and violent intent” which they call “tactical empathy.” Dekel, Siegel, Fridkin, and Svetlitzky (2018, 216) found that affective empathy during a partner’s display of post-traumatic stress syndrome can negatively impact female spouses. Schabracq and Smit (2007, 118) discuss that while most humans can choose to be empathetic, the situational context of when, how, and if they choose to be empathetic can lead to overwhelming others, trying to control others or the world, or even empathizing differently between peer managers and employees.

Empathy without care has a wide range of influences. It can impact whether people leave negative reviews on travel websites (Pera et al. 2019) or even be a tool for psychopaths to understand and manipulate others (Simon 2008, 22; Konrath et al. Luminet 2014, 129). This does beg a future research question to explore understanding the line between empathizing enough with your organization to care about people, yet effectively empathizing enough to understand the enemy—without converting to their cause. Leaders in the MI ANG should evaluate the potential risk that learning, and teaching empathy can have in future doctrine and educational materials. Whether from positive or negative motivations, these psychological aspects of empathy connect with the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of empathy that can permit members of

organizations to interact with and understand a diverse workforce to accomplish the mission.

Empathetic Leadership

One way that empathy and its components enter the workplace is via the theory of transformational leadership, which relies on expressing empathy for the people whom leaders serve (Arenas, Connelly and Williams 2017). These relationships also contribute to the general well-being Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA) model (Forgeard et al. 2011, 96-97). One prominent model used in *The Airman Handbook* is the Full Range of Leadership Model (FRLM), the origins of which start with James MacGregor Burns' functional relationships designated as either transactional or transformational (Arenas, Connelly, and Williams 2017, xi).

Full Range of Leadership Model

According to *The Airman Handbook*, empathy can be a gateway to the FRLM when leaders, peers, and followers apply it to transformational leadership behaviors and transactional leadership tasks, such as goal setting (2017c, 260). Using the same capabilities captured in US Air Force institutional competencies at the personal level, reflective listening to demonstrate empathy can also contribute to the *people and teams* level of institutional competencies. Figure 2 shows the US Air Force FRLM graphic where active and effective leadership leads to transformational leadership.

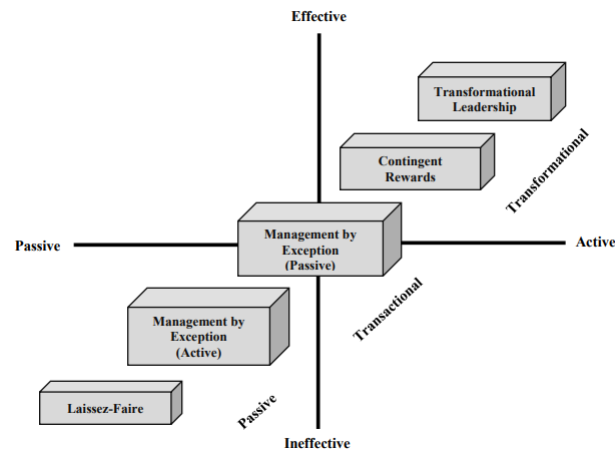


Figure 2. US Air Force Full Range of Leadership

Source: USAF 2017c, 261.

Within the FRLM, transformational leadership is “more active and effective,” and Airman who use empathy to support and nurture those around them demonstrate individualized consideration to enable the successful accomplishment of contingent rewards during transactional leadership (USAF 2017c, 260-2). Listening is also critical for leaders to signal belief in their Airmen by “listening carefully to their Airmen and responding with empathy” (USAF 2017c, 253). Various studies point to the positive effect of practical application of transformational leadership theory, such as yielding higher achievement outcomes (Kovach and Middletown 2019), allowing leaders to develop those around them (Sosik, et al. 2018), having a positive impact on direct and indirect followers (Dvir, et al. 2022), improving training outcomes (Hardy et al. 2010), and enhancing the connection to creativity and innovation in military culture (Kayaalp 2018). Reflective listening can demonstrate the individualized consideration integral to transformational leadership. Empathizing through reflective listening is a practical

application of transformational leadership. Teaching skills that enable demonstrating transformational leadership behaviors are important to both the US Air Force and to the MI ANG. FRLM “behaviors are essential in today’s complex world” (USAF 2017c, 260) for Airmen who conduct highly complex future missions like Joint All Domain Operations (JADO) (USAF 2020, 260).

US Air Force and DMVA Culture Requires Empathy

US Air Force and DMVA’s strategic guidance on how to capitalize on interpersonal relationships for mission success in complex future environments include elements of reflective listening as a part of empathetic communication.

Empathy, Diversity, and the Complex Environment of Future War

The Airman Handbook uses empathy as a vehicle to understand the varied and complex environments of today’s military workforce necessary to fight the nation’s wars: “We must recognize people are vital to an organization’s success. Consequently, we need to understand the motivations and interests of this diverse workforce. . . ‘Air Force diversity is a critical warfighting and readiness issue’” (USAF 2017, 259). Furthermore, the US Air Force recognizes that diversity, enabled by empathy, plays a role in encouraging innovation (US Air Force 2017, 259-260). This strategic view on the importance of empathy to make the US Air Force an innovative, diverse warfighting capability can potentially extend the impact of MI ANG Airmen learning reflective listening skills.

Empathy in the Range of Military Operations

Interpersonal and cultural empathy impacts effectively executing the military objectives in strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war, as exemplified by the following quote: “When a Joint Force commander understands how he or she wants relevant actors to see, think about, and react to their environment, they can synchronize tactical actions based on the story they want their operations to tell; or more accurately, the story they want relevant actors to perceive” (Thompson 2018). In the military, understanding other cultures is also important to successfully achieving goals that are based on an understanding of self (friendly forces) and the adversary (enemy forces). As stated in the Chief of Staff of the Air Force memo to the force in early 2022:

Connecting with our fellow Airmen is a mission imperative and has to be a top priority...what connects Airmen to our Air Force is how we treat each other and the experiences we share while taking on extraordinary things together. Success will be measured when the concept of Airmen’s Time becomes a part of what we do at the foundational level and a natural aspect of our Air Force way of life. (CSAF 2022)

Across the Services and in Multinational Operations

Thompson (2018) connects empathy to operational art within the Joint Department of Defense (DoD) community to the basic values of empathy: “The Joint Force must ensure that planning processes remain rooted in the aim to achieve the strategic dictates, and this requires an understanding of the ways in which others see their world” (20-21). This is similar to the strategic empathy espoused by Grover (2016, 7-8) and Zilincik (2022), which involves information gathering and an understanding of another’s perspective towards accomplishing the national interest or victory. Zilincik (2022) also argues that strategy and emotions are critical to understanding the character

of war through emotional stimuli, necessary in directing cognitive responses to important stimuli, which strive to induce the desired end state or victory condition.

Empathy, and associated emotions, are therefore interrelated at not only the joint and strategic level, but also within each of the US military's services. From the interpersonal level, each branch of military service acknowledges listening skills and empathy in various doctrines and publications.² It is important to note that other branches do not necessarily use the same exact language, an assessment of which could be valuable in exploring the transferability of the skill to other services and components in further research and expansion. Even other countries' militaries see the importance of empathy in cultivating the human domain: for example, in Australia's future operations context (Russell-Farnham 2009) and when curating narratives at the British Imperial War Museum (Koureas 2018).

Improving communication through cognitive, affective, and behavioral demonstrations of empathy is especially critical in the multinational environment. In a report on multicultural operations, the Research and Science Organization of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) recommends improving communication in multinational groups through knowledge of other cultures, "the motivation to understand and be understood," and learning and practicing the skills to conduct effective operations (Febbraro, McKee, and Riedel 2008, 123-4).

2. For additional reading on listening skills and empathy in sister service doctrine, reference: Army Doctrine Publication 6-22 (2019, 46, 50) and Army Tactics Publication 3-13.5 (2020, 12, 46, 53, 58); Navy Doctrine Publication 1 (2020, 56), Navy Leader Development Framework (2019, 7, 10-11), Laying the Keel (2019, 9); and Marine Corps Warfighting Publication 6-11 (2002, 31, 69, 96-99).

Connecting to the Military of Tomorrow

In addition to empathy in interpersonal interactions and the strategic environment, demonstrating empathy can support how we recruit the next generation. We need to know how to connect military service with the values of the recruits of tomorrow (NRC 2003) despite the reality that only 29% of the eligible population is qualified for military service (Spoehr, Thomas, and Handy 2018). As *The Airman Handbook* (2017c, 241) cautions, demonstrating empathy and care are ever more challenging: “In today’s environment of technology and specialization, most leaders tend to find this environment allows them to neglect the need of knowing their subordinate members of the organization, and show sincere concern in their problems, career development, and welfare.” Learning reflective listening skills to demonstrate empathy could help overcome such challenges and enable better connection to the small eligible population that is critical to US Air Force and MI ANG recruiting efforts in the future. Empathy is important in the military, from interactions within the organization to facilitating strategic mission accomplishment and providing connections during recruiting activities.

Empathy in the National Guard Experience

In the military, cognitive, affective, and behavioral empathy is critical to understanding members’ experiences navigating the demands of military service made challenging through part-time status balanced with outside civilian careers. This is particularly relevant to the National Guard experience of the immense support required from National Guard members during humanitarian and natural disaster crises such as the COVID pandemic in 2020-2021 (Winkie 2021). Empathy relates to both operational and organizational success, with “better communication, tighter cohesion, stronger discipline,

and greater morale” (Garner 2009, 84-5). The benefits of demonstrating empathy, such as through skills like reflective listening taught in the “Our Community Listens” course, extend beyond interpersonal interactions into more strategic methods.

These strategic applications of empathy range from special, psychological, and information operations to regional force alignment and intercultural partnerships (McDougall 2019, 33), such as the National Guard’s State Partnership Program with various countries around the world. Many levels of military leadership from joint and strategic to single-service and tactical provide examples of empathy. For example, General Stanley McCrystal’s Task Force 714 built partnerships in Afghanistan (Fontaine 2016). A US Army nurse dealt with interpersonal conflict within a battalion *en route* to deployment by listening (Henrick 2021). A Navy SEAL recalled relying on his own and others’ empathy and teamwork during grueling Hell Week training (Parmar 2016). Finally, a US Air Force comptroller found a need for empathy to deal with hard conversations resulting from the most recent race relations survey (Mitchell 2020). Empathy is integral to the military as an organization made up of people with relationships that determine mission success.

DMVA Strategic Plan

The components of reflective listening and empathy are important to the workplace goals of the DMVA’s Strategic Plan. DMVA statement on Organizational Identity touches on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of empathy:

The DMVA’s cultural identity is that of a values-based organization that sets the standard for expected workplace conduct by all department team members. Our culture builds a sense of community and purpose across the department. Shared values to guide our beliefs and behavior assure the foundation of our team’s success. (MI DMVA 2021, 7)

Two pillars of the DMVA organizational identity also relate to the use of empathy supporting the MING's "Member for Life": Workplace of Choice and Center of Performance Excellence (MI DMVA 2021, 7). First, the organizational identity of a Workplace of Choice links to the strategic goal, Cultivating a Workplace of Choice. The DMVA defines this goal as valuing members and development at the individual and organizational level and breaks the goal into three lines of effort: ensuring a positive workplace environment, developing a culture of exceptional service, and attracting and retaining talent. The second pillar of organizational identity is a Center of Performance Excellence which connects to the strategic goal of Strengthening Interoperability through the importance of collaboration. While this strategic goal mostly focuses on the technological and information-sharing aspects of interoperability, the DMVA cannot accomplish this goal without building understanding between the MI ANG, MI Army National Guard, State Operations staff, and all the external and internal partners. The multinational partners include three State Partnership Program countries, Latvia, Liberia, and US Virgin Islands. The next section will discuss the organizational identity pillar of cultivating a workplace of choice provides even more specific guidance in the objectives.

DMVA Strategic Goal 4: Cultivating a Workplace of Choice

Within this strategic goal, Objective 4.1 is to "cultivate a positive workplace culture of respect, inclusion, and diversity across all branches" (MI DMVA 2021, 43).

The DMCA describes this objective as:

Leaders foster a *welcoming environment* where talented people thrive, and *acceptance* and *appreciation* of everyone is the norm. ...its success requires DMVA team-members to *embody* organizational values through *behavior*. A foundation of individuals making *positive choices about the way they view and*

treat others every day builds a healthy workplace culture... [emphasis added]. (MI DMVA 2021, 43-44)

The direction of the DMVA Strategic Plan directly connects to the cognitive understanding of the importance of developing diverse teams, the affective experience that people feel valued, and the behavioral choices to enable such a workplace culture—all components of empathy, even if not directly stated.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore and provide recommendations on the MI ANG member's experiences of reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Reflective listening in the "Our Community Listens" reflective listening module is a skill set derived from Carl Rogers' work in clinical psychotherapy. Using reflective listening skills as a method to demonstrate empathy enables the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects that comprise understanding others and their perspective. When combined with empathy, reflective listening meets the intent of critical components of the US Air Force's leadership development of self, people, and teams in the institutional competencies, complimented by both formal and informal feedback processes. As *The Airman Handbook* states, our ability to reflectively listen to empathetically understand the needs and motivations of a diverse US Air Force workforce is our critical warfighting function: "the challenge is to incorporate everyone's specific talents into a cohesive and optimal workforce" (USAF 2017c, 259). The next section will discuss the research methods of this qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework

with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis of members of the MI ANG.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explored and provided recommendations on the MI ANG member's experiences of reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. To the researcher's knowledge, no one has conducted research to understand the experience of members of the MI ANG after learning reflective listening skills. This qualitative study was an exploratory, intrinsic, holistic bounded case study where the researcher collected descriptions of experiences in interviews and analyzed them through several rounds of coding for themes. The following section will include a discussion on the research method, data collection, and data analysis, with ethical considerations addressed throughout and at the end.

Qualitative Methodology

Philosophical Framework

The philosophical framework behind this study was based on social constructivism and positive psychology. The researcher derived the data from the subjective experience of the students who attended the course, and capturing their experiences requires getting as close to participants as possible (Creswell 2013). The researcher nested a social constructivism framework under an epistemological philosophy of learning knowledge, because learning how members of the MI ANG used reflective

listening in relationships was a specific experience of social reality and how they interact with others (Creswell 2013; Baxter and Jack 2008).

Qualitative Approach

The researcher selected a qualitative, bounded case study method due to the type of question the researcher asked. As previously stated, the primary research question was: how does learning reflective listening skills in the “Our Community Listens” course influence the members of the MI ANG? The secondary questions were: how does learning reflective listening influence the behavioral, cognitive, and affective experiences of empathy among members of the MI ANG? Also: how does learning reflective listening relate to the DMVA’s Strategic Plan? And finally: how does learning reflective listening relate to US Air Force leadership doctrine?

These questions sought to understand the experiences of the participants and answer *how* questions, such as how do the participants describe their experience? This study filled a research gap since this is the first formal qualitative research using MI ANG members who have attended the “Our Community Listens” course. This research provided a foundation for examining the gap of unknown knowledge on the experience of reflective listening within the MI ANG, and potential future research, both quantitative and qualitative.

Case Study Design

Baxter and Jack (2008, 545) describe a framework for choosing a case study design, starting with underlying philosophy, determining the case and unit of analysis, binding the case, determining the type of case, the data sources, and the analysis. The

following section will cover these concepts. For this study, the case was MI ANG Airmen bounded by their attendance at the “Our Community Listens” course. The military context is closely linked as that is the environment where members learned the skill, practiced, and developed. This specific group of individuals shared the experience of taking the course and exposure to the curriculum. As a result, they all possessed knowledge of the experience the researcher studies.

A qualitative study was appropriate because the descriptive experiences of the members were subjective to each individual and helped to understand their personal opinions and experiences (Creswell 2013, 71). Additionally, qualitative research was appropriate because the researcher could best understand members’ the influence of reflective listening by talking to the members who attended the course and listening to them explain their various experiences as a complex set of interactions between people (Creswell 2013, 48). Qualitative research was also appropriate since the researcher was studying an event with little control over variables that members of the MI ANG experienced, and the focus was on a contemporary phenomenon (Yin 2014, 2).

Since the program required an investment of resources and time, the findings of this qualitative study could help empower individuals to describe their stories (Creswell 2013, 26), which can, in turn, help decision-makers decide whether to invest in the program if it can improve the lives of members of the MI ANG. Finally, a qualitative study allowed the researcher to understand the full range of members’ experiences with reflective listening and to understand the context to help explore when, where, why, and how Airmen used or benefitted from reflective listening (Yin 2014, 16-7). There was also harmony in the research since the researcher had to empower participants during the

interviews to tell their stories by demonstrating reflective listening throughout the communication cycle to ensure researcher received and understood the participant's message correctly.

Bounded Case Study

The researcher further refined this qualitative study as an exploratory, intrinsic, holistic bounded case study. The research was exploratory because the researcher sought to understand *how* (Baxter and Jack 2008) learning reflective listening influenced members of the MI ANG within the context of their relationships as their narrative emerged from the interviews (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012). The researcher chose the exploratory case study method because the literature review proposes a connection between reflective listening and empathy and their importance to US Air Force leadership develop and DMVA Strategic Plan. Furthermore, as Creswell (2013, 100) states, case study design was appropriate because the identifiable case, members of the MI ANG, was bounded by attendance in the "Our Community Listens" course, and the researcher sought to provide an in-depth understanding to evaluate an existing program in this intrinsic case study.

Additionally, the choice of the case study was both instrumental and holistic. The study was instrumental by nature in that it explored the unique experiences of reflective listening within the bounded case (Creswell 2013, 100). The study was holistic since it focused on one case to explore and analyze the themes of reflective listening (Creswell 2013, 100-1; Baxter and Jack 2008). Future studies could explore the MI ANG as a case with embedded military sub-units across the four MI ANG bases, could compare members of the MI ANG who have and have not taken the course, or could explore

different communications modules from the course, such as effective confrontation. The next section will discuss data collection, including approval to conduct research, the interview research design, and a discussion about the interview questions.

Data Collection

Approval to Conduct Research

The researcher collected the experiences with reflective listening through one-on-one interviews from among the approximately 110 members of the MI ANG who attended the “Our Community Listens” course since 2017. First, the researcher gained approval through the CGSC Human Protections Director (HPD) for research involving human subjects (see Appendix A for approval memorandum). The researcher conducted the study per the CGSC HPD approval letter and approved protocol. Second, the researcher gained approval to access the members of the MI ANG who have attended the “Our Community Listens” course through the commander of the Michigan Air National Guard with a legal review by the MI ANG Judge Advocate (see Appendix B for approval memorandum). The CGSC HPD approved any changes to the research plan and exempted the research from further institutional review board procedures before the researcher conducted any interviews. Finally, the researcher filed a close-out report to the HPD for record.

Semi-Structured Interview Design

After acquiring approval, individual interviews across the bounded case provided a combined narrative on the influence of reflective listening in the MI ANG. Designing the interviews included the following process: (1) deciding on the type of interview, (2)

deciding on the number of interviews, (3) determining the length of the interviews, (4) designing the questions for the interviews, (5) scripting the interviews, (6) delegating researcher responsibilities for the interviews, and (7) conducting interviews. The following section addresses these steps.

Type of Interview

The researcher selected synchronous interviews conducted in real-time through a direct audio exchange. Synchronous interviews through common media mutually available to researcher and participant, such as Microsoft Teams or cellular phones, allowed participants to be comfortable navigating familiar technology during the interview and remain focused on real-time dialogue exchange (Brinkmann 2014; Salmons 2012).

Virtual interviews, as opposed to in-person interviews, allowed the researcher to conserve costs and time traveling to each base and to expand the eligibility to those members unable to travel from each base to a central location (Brinkmann 2014). Furthermore, the researcher conducted the interviews at a time that was convenient to each member, increasing their availability (Brinkmann 2014).

Additionally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the same open-ended questions asked in the same sequence with varied follow-up and probing questions to provide consistent yet in-depth dialogue (Brinkmann 2014; Creswell 2013; Patton 2015; Salmons 2012). Finally, the researcher conducted the interviews one-on-one to provide maximum confidentiality and in-depth exploration of the topic, discussed more in later sections on ethical principles (Creswell 2013; Brinkmann 2014).

Number of Interviews

While there is no widely-held formula for the number of interviews required to reach saturation, the researcher used Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) rule of thumb of 15 +/- 10 interviews. The researcher anticipated conducting 15 interviews with a minimum requirement of 10 interviews to reach and validate saturation to identify any new themes after the researcher conducted initial rounds of analytical coding. Despite the lack of consistency with the term *saturation* for qualitative research literature, the researcher used the general definition from Bryant (2014) that saturation occurs when responses yield no new information or insight. Thus, if saturation occurred before 10 interviews, the researcher stopped, which occurred after conducting 7 interviews.

A disinterested third-party sent emails only to the members of the MI ANG listed on the official roster of attendees of "Our Community Listens." Acting as the disinterested third part, the public affairs officer did not take the course nor supervise anyone who did. The researcher provided potential participants a brief summary of the study and a copy of the approved consent form to review, sign, and return to the researcher if interested. The researcher then signed and returned a copy, followed by a request for their availability and preferred method of communication.

Length of Interviews

The researcher conducted a series of individual sessions, allocated for up to 60 minutes as per the consent form, to provide participants with an approximate timeframe for participation. The time-limit on interviews also encouraged the researcher to keep the discussion focused as designed to answer the research questions. As discussed in the following section, the 60-minute sessions allowed for up to 10 minutes per question,

including any probing or follow-up discussion while accounting for the preamble and conclusion.

Interview Questions

Appendix C contains the interview questions, of which questions one through five were the key interview questions to ensure answering the primary and secondary research questions. The researcher acted as the interviewer and focused on the key questions that were critical to honing the narratives concerning the influence of learning reflective listening skills. The researcher produced and consulted an interview guide containing all the questions as found in Appendix D to maintain focus and ensure that the researcher and participant answered the key questions (Patton 2015). Additionally, the researcher did not include “why” questions in order to maintain focus on descriptions and to avoid evaluating and speculation (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). The guide included both a preamble and a conclusion to remind the participants of the overall purpose, risks, and benefits of the study, which mirrored the same topics in the consent form. The guide also included two additional questions should the responses to the key questions not provide the rich narrative required for the study. The researcher included pre-planned non-substantive probing questions to facilitate furthering the discussion should a participant’s responses not provide enough details (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009).

The researcher built the question plan in a standardized open-question format and asked each participant the same key questions framed to guide the participant towards a detailed response and open dialogue (Patton 2015; Simons 2014). Additionally, the researcher considered the language and direction of the questions with consideration for the small network of an ANG unit, without specific reference to evaluating self or others

in their experience of reflective listening skills. Using Patton's (2015) different types of interview questions, the researcher employed a mix of questions: experience and behavior questions to understand the behavioral influence of reflective listening; opinion and values questions to understand the cognitive influence of reflective listening; and feeling questions to understand the affective influence of reflective listening. These question categories aligned with the behavioral, cognitive, and affective aspects of empathy incorporated into the research questions. The researcher's questions also reflected the past, present, and future timeframes, seeking to further enhance the collective narrative of the influence of learning reflective listening over time (Patton 2015).

Scripting Interviews

The researcher created an interview guide to support during the interview process. The guide included a preamble to set the stage, remind the participants about basic expectations during the interview, and provide an avenue to answer any questions prior to starting. The researcher also informed and reminded participants of the length of the session, the value of their inputs, the ability to stop the interview at any time or to not answer any particular question or questions. After the preamble, the questions' sheets contained the questions, and in later interviews, the subsequently developed probing questions, with space for note-taking and follow-up prompts for the researcher. The researcher also included the list of reflective responses used in the "Our Community Listens" workbook and in chapter 2. Additionally, the researcher added generic probing questions to stimulate a deeper narrative from the participant.

The researcher used the probing and secondary questions in a generally receptive interview style to facilitate an open discussion and give the participant wide control over

how they answered questions; however, some moments required a more assertive style to ensure the message was correct or to direct the participant to provide more details or clarification (Brinkmann 2014, 291). The conclusion page prompted the researcher to repeat the major themes heard, provide the secondary researcher a chance to capture any missed highlights, and then conclude the interview with a statement regarding reviewing the transcript and instructions about how to find the final product. The final page of the guide was a list of military mental health, social services, and psychological resources from each base in the MI ANG in case a participant felt distressed during or after the conversation.

The researcher practiced the interview questions with a committee member and practiced using probing questions when the researcher felt the participant's initial responses might contain more details relevant to the study. The researcher also sent the interview questions to a peer group for review to see how the participants might answer the research questions. While the information was not data for use in the study, it was useful to check that the researcher had constructed the questions such that they effectively captured the desired stories and that the timeframe of the session was adequate. Both practicing and conducting the interviews led to updates in the interview guide for subsequent interviews.

Delegating Researcher Responsibilities

The primary researcher asked the interview questions and focused on the responses. The secondary researcher acted as a research assistant and took notes to capture any insights, to create back-up recording, and run a transcribing program on the audio file to record the participants' responses for analysis.

Conducting Interviews

The researcher stored each informed consent waiver, transcripts, and recordings in folders identified by interview number. Both the primary researcher and the secondary researcher recorded separate files which then securely stored. At various points in each interview, the researcher employed reflective listening skills to ensure the message sent by the participant was the message received by the researcher. The researcher also consulted the interview guide often to help prompt probing questions to encourage the participants to continue to elaborate or refine their initial responses to the questions.

At the end of each interview, the primary researcher provided an opportunity for the researcher assistant to provide any additional themes or insights missed by the primary researcher. Furthermore, at the end of the interview, the researcher summarized main points to the participant with an open-ended invitation to allow the participant to provide any additional themes that the participant wanted to include. During the interviews, the primary researcher took hand-written notes to reflect on and to aid with probing and summarizing questions. The secondary researcher ran a voice-to-text transcribing software that auto transcribed the interview in real-time.

After each interview, the researcher listened to the recordings and edited for two purposes: First, the researcher validated the transcripts by correcting any errors from the automatic transcribing software, often referring to both recordings to ensure accuracy in the conversation. Second, the researcher edited the interview to redact information that could identify a participant. These edits ranged from specific names, dates, times, and personal details, to generalities about units, jobs positions, or events that a reader could potentially deduce when consolidating details. It felt especially important to the

researcher, as a member of the researched population, to avoid the potential for connecting details that might not have seemed important to someone outside the MI ANG community. The researcher annotated redactions in the transcript using italics with the general type of information and with any researcher additions in brackets for clarity. Since the interviewed population is a small subset of a small population, the researcher paid special attention to the ability to deduce and identify through the aggregation of information as well as specific details. In addition to the content redaction for anonymity and confidentiality, the researcher also edited the transcripts thorough a denaturalized method, such as correcting grammar and removing stutters, since the detailed dictation and pronunciation of each word was not critical to understanding the meaning of the responses to the interview questions (Oliver 2005).

The researcher provided the participant opportunities throughout the interview to ensure the researcher received the message correctly by using the reflective listening skills. Two more specified opportunities occurred to allow the participant a chance to review their input. First, the researcher reviewed the major themes from the interview at the end, offered the participant the chance to make any additional inputs, sometimes yielding additional messages that the participant wanted captured. Second, the researcher submitted the transcript to the participant for accuracy review, including any inputs to redactions made for confidentiality.

Finally, the researcher logged journal entries to describe the process from answering questions, setting up the interviews, conducting the interviews, coordinating the conclusion, and follow-up. Journal entries also included reflections on the general themes, insights, interpersonal interactions, and details from the researcher's perspective.

After each interview, the two researchers reconvened to open the floor to the secondary researcher to provide one-on-one feedback to the researcher. These opportunities for the researcher to receive participant review and peer feedback addressed the credibility of the subsequent analysis based on transcription, understanding, and interview execution (Nowell et al. 2017). The researcher annotated peer (external) and personal (internal) feedback in the journal after each interview.

Ethical Considerations

Researcher Bias

Objectivity in research is always challenging. It is important to note that the researcher has attended the course twice, once as an individual hosted by the MI ANG and once in a committed relationship version—both courses have the same basic material. Additionally, the researcher oversaw coordinating courses hosted by the MI ANG along with another member while conducting the research. To mitigate the researcher's proximity to the courses and participants, the researcher employed feedback from the secondary researcher post-interview for input on interactions that strayed into less objective interpretation (Walters 2001). The researcher also employed feedback from both peers and from the thesis committee members on the interview questions and an audit of the analysis from committee members. Finally, the researcher sent the codebook used to derive preliminary codes from the first five interviews to the thesis committee to audit and provide feedback.

Belmont Report Principles

The research design and methodology conformed to ethical principles in the conduct of research involving human subjects. Fundamentally, the researcher sought to use the data analysis to continue improving the lives of members of the MI ANG (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Following *The Belmont Report* (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1978), the following section will address respect for persons, beneficence, and justice to enable ethical research, to include the minimal risk associated with participation.

Respect for Persons

First, the researcher treated potential interview participants as individuals with the autonomy to choose to participate. The researcher provided an informed consent form that explained the risks, which the researcher required the participant to sign before continuing to the interview. In the invitation to participate in the study, the researcher provided the purpose of the study and informed the potential interview participant of the benefits of interviewing to aid in the organization's understanding of how reflective listening influences members of the MI ANG.

Before each interview, the researcher reminded participants about their ability to withdraw at any time and reviewed the informed consent, the purpose and procedures of the study, data collection, protection measures, risks, and expected benefits (Creswell 2013, 153). The researcher satisfied the four elements of consent as identified by Sim and Waterfield (2019): disclosure of the study, comprehension and competence of the participant to give consent, and voluntary nature of participating. The researcher did not anticipate that any of the potential participants would be incapable of self-determination

due to the demographics of the members of the MI ANG, but such a situation would have required a follow-on consideration for providing respect for persons in special categories.

Beneficence

Second, the researcher designed the study to minimize possible harms and maximize possible benefits to the participant group. In the role of interviewer, the researcher reviewed lessons on reflective listening from “Our Community Listens,” practiced asking the questions to peers, and incorporated various qualitative research tools for effective interviewing into the interview guide (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). As part of the informed consent waiver, the researcher acknowledged that participants had personal autonomy, that their participation was optional (Sim and Waterfield 2019, 3004), and that their participation would not impact their career. Additionally, participants could terminate participation at any time before, during, or after the interview by informing the researcher before publishing. Finally, the researcher provided mitigation to potential risks in the informed consent waiver whereby the researcher could guarantee taking measures to protect confidentiality with the interview data post-collection, which later sections will discuss.

In addition to potential harm outside the researcher’s control, the researcher made participants aware that the researcher still maintains a duty to warn per the reporting responsibilities as a member of the US Air Force during both the informed consent and the interview preamble. Additionally, participants could experience harm from sharing sensitive issues outside the intended scope of the interview discussion (Sim and Waterfield 2019, 3010-3011). While the researcher encouraged participants to offer their honest input, participants may not be inclined to verbalize negative feedback or may be

hesitant to overshare (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). Furthermore, the questions were open-ended and introspective towards the participants' personal experiences without referencing or evaluating theirs or others' skills in reflective listening.

To enable free-flowing and open dialogue, the researcher conducted interviews on an audio medium familiar to both the participant and the researcher, such as a telephone, cellular device, or online application. During the interview, the researcher was alert to distress, oversharing, and sensitive topics and re-directed the conversation as necessary. The researcher maintained a list of local resources to provide should a member appear distressed, such as the various Directors of Psychological Health, the MI ANG on-call psychologists at each MI ANG base, and the contact information for the Military Family Life Counselors. At the end of the discussion, the researcher summarized the content and provided another opportunity for the participant to ask any lingering questions or add missing information.

Apart from the informed consent waiver completed by each subject, the researcher did not collect or keep any identifying data or demographics. This was to avoid unintentionally identifying a participant, such as referring to a male commander if the rest of the commanders within the MI ANG are female or combining details such as time, location, and event specifics that could reveal a participant's identity (Sim and Waterfield 2019, 3009). If either the researchers or participants mentioned any names or disclosed deductive information, the researcher redacted the information from the transcript and analysis. In situations where a reader could identify a participant from a reference to personal or work details, the researcher redacted the information. The researcher kept all printed copies of the data in a locked drawer of a locked office and

secured digital copies in a password-protected file. The researcher will maintain the data for a minimum of three years before destroying and/or deleting it. Simply put, a better understanding of the benefits of attending the reflective listening course is a potential benefit for MI ANG members. Furthermore, the researcher provided the link to the online location of the published thesis for participants who were interested in the final product.

Justice

Finally, justice is the third ethical principle of *The Belmont Report* which relates to fairness. While the members of the MI ANG who attended the “Our Community Listens” course are accessible, they were not targeted participants because of that reason. Instead, the researcher selected the participants specifically because of their relationship to studying the influence of learning reflective listening on members of the MI ANG. Additionally, the researcher provided open invitations to sign up for interviews, which the researcher scheduled at the convenience of the participant. Justice was also important in both data collection and data analysis. The researcher as interviewer employed the entire suite of communication skills, especially reflective listening, to build trust with the participants, demonstrate the importance of the skill in military interactions, and accurately understand and clarify the meaning expressed by the participants. The researcher reported the data as presented, regardless of the positive or negative influence of learning reflective listening.

Summary

This study explored and provided recommendations on the experiences of members of the MI ANG learning reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case

study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The researcher enacted various mitigation measures to protect participants who had the autonomy to take on less-than-minimal risk of sharing their experiences by following the principles of *The Belmont Report*. Chapter 4 will describe the analytical process and the thematic analysis that arose out of the data to provide context and significance of the influence of reflective listening on members of the MI ANG.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter present analysis of results. This study explored and provided recommendations on MI ANG members' experiences of learning reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. The researcher conducted three cycles of coding, using inductive preliminary and refined codes, both manually and using QDA Data Miner software. Overall, participants experienced a unique and different course that led them to a moment of self-discovery. Through self-regulation, some discomfort, and practice, they improved upon their other-centered behavior. While they transferred reflective listening to their work, family, and community environments through perspective-taking, listening before problem-solving, and in demonstrating empathy, they faced organizational barriers that limited the scope of the influence of reflective listening. This chapter will cover the coding process, presentation of data, and thematic analysis resulting from the study.

Data Process

The researcher analyzed the data from cross-case, thematic analysis, and the information revealed in the interviews (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012; Patton 2015; Nowell et al. 2017). While each participant was likely to provide an interesting individual case as Patton (2015) mentions, the researcher focused on cross-case analysis to answer the holistic purpose of the study, which was a common or general

understanding of the influence of learning reflective listening within the MI ANG. In addition, the researcher used constant comparative to develop the emerging themes and conduct a check on saturation (Hewit-Taylor 2001). While qualitative research literature does not hold to a strict definition of thematic analysis, the researcher saw value in the multiple ways to evaluate the data along the lines of similarities, recurring ideas and concepts, and annotating unusual responses (Nowell et al. 2017) to analyze this initial research into the influence of reflective listening in the MI ANG. The researcher started with open coding from the literature review to maintain familiarity with the concepts and experiences that might be present during the interviews. (Onwuegbuzie, Frels, and Hwang 2016).

Using Saldaña's (2016, 68) coding methods and cycles as a framework from which to choose, the researcher conducted three cycles of coding on the data: preliminary, refined, and software-aided. The researcher conducted the first round of coding on the interview data manually using open coding after the first five interviews to establish preliminary codes. The researcher then conducted a second round of coding, also manual, using the remaining interviews to review, modify, refine, and/or validate the first round of coding as required which yielded *in vivo*, process, structural, and versus codes. QDA Data Miner software aided the researcher's third round of coding. The final process was creating a thematic analysis from the codes to present as findings. A detailed description of the analytic process follows.

For coding the data, the researcher followed Nowell et al.'s (2017) guide to thematic analysis using six phases within the limit and scope of the study: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4)

reviewing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6) producing the report. The next section discusses these phases and the coding process.

Familiarization with Data

The researcher started by listening to each recording and reviewing each transcript several times. The researcher organized each transcript in a question and response format to include any probing or clarifying questions asked by the researcher. These transcripts provided the data for an inductive-deductive analysis (Patton 2015). The researcher sought to connect the participants' meaning coded, condensed, and interpreted from the data to existing concepts (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009) around empathy, US Air Force leadership development, and the DMVA Strategic Plan.

Generating Initial Codes

The researcher expected to use inductive reasoning as a starting point in the analysis and using deductive reasoning throughout the analysis as described by Craig H. Walters (2001). After transcribing the first five interviews, the researcher compiled all the responses and started with a structural phrase and descriptive word coding to create preliminary codes, as suggested by Saldaña (2016). These initial codes included: perceived barriers, climate and culture, communication cycle, conflict management, course experience, empathy, group dynamics, leadership, other-centered, practice, strategic plan, training transfer, and understanding others. The researcher selected these preliminary codes through “lumper” and “splitter” coding to lump and split apart the transcript segments into preliminary codes (Saldaña 2016, 24). The researcher also developed secondary interview questions based on the initial review of the responses to

use as follow-up questions. While these optional secondary interview questions do not replace or take away from the key questions designed in the interview, they provide the researcher with more specific probing questions to seek a deeper narrative by following the initial emerging patterns and to enable the researcher to explore differences and similarities as the interviews progressed. These questions can also provide deeper insight for future research since they are not directly linked to the key questions that answer the research questions of this study.

First Cycle – Preliminary Coding

After establishing preliminary codes, the researcher used a rough ratio of one-fourth of participants to make the code valid and considered three-fourths of participants holding the same code as “common” amongst the participants (Saldaña 2016, 25). The researcher anticipated unexpected and surprising codes to emerge through the inductive process, considered on a case-by-case basis for their insights as suggested by Saldaña (2016, 25).

Table 4. First Cycle Preliminary Coding

Preliminary Codes
Perceived barriers
Climate and culture
Communication cycle
Conflict management
Course experience
Empathy
Group dynamics
Leadership
Other-centered
Practice
Strategic plan
Training transfer
Understanding others

Source: Created by author.

Searching for Themes

After the first round of coding developed preliminary codes, the researcher examined the data using thematic coding among participants for unanticipated insights (Nowell et al. 2017). The researcher found three themes initially among the participants. First, the participants found benefits from learning reflective listening that impacted a wide variety of their relationships. Second, the participants noted several barriers that impeded their successful use or practice of reflective listening in personal, professional, or organizational environments. Third, the participants discussed various ways that the organization could improve learning reflective listening in after the course to reinforce their practice. These initial themes appeared to relate to benefits, barriers, and opportunities related to their personal, professional, or organizational spheres of influence.

Reviewing Themes

After the first round of preliminary coding and themes, the researcher conducted a second round of coding to review, modify, refine, and/or validate the first round of preliminary coding.

Second Cycle – Eclectic Coding

After concluding the interviews, the researcher compiled all the transcripts into a spreadsheet and manually coded a second time using the preliminary codes. The second round of manual coding produced updates and refinements to the preliminary codes, including in vivo, process, structural, and versus codes, which the researcher organized into categories using pattern coding (Saldaña 2016). Initially, these four categories of codes were a unique and eye-opening experience, barriers to reflective listening, benefits of reflective to the self and others, transferring reflective listening skills, and reflective listening within an organization. The researcher further broke these categories down into 42 subcategories and codes. The researcher referenced preliminary codes as necessary and used an additional column in the spreadsheet to track questions, modifications, or refinement during this second cycle. The researcher captured these changes and thought processes in the researcher's journal under analytic memos for reference later. The researcher sent the codebook and table for audit by the thesis committee prior to moving to third cycle coding.

Third Cycle – Pattern Coding

The researcher used QDA Data Miner software to validate and refine second cycle codes to create refined third cycle codes, categories, and added definitions. Table 5 below provides the 22 common codes and definitions found in 6 or 7 interviews.

Table 5. Third Cycle Codes, Definitions, and Examples

Code, Definition, and Short Hand	Example
Reception and delivery: The general reception and overall delivery of the course. UnqExRecpDel	P1: unique, powerful, really nice job presenting the information in a way to connect with folks, which was beneficial P4: I think it did meet my expectations. But again, I was very guarded with my expectations, because of my previous experiences P5: if you think back to our military training, nothing has been about here's how to have a discussion with people P7: out of the box
Follow Through: The post-course experience including the courseware, handouts, podcasts, continuous, learning partners, and other support. UnqExFlwThru	P1: I think the class did a nice job trying to encourage folks to be paired up with the teammates...so you check back in, you actually actively participate, and continue to try to build on this P4: I think I attempted once to listen to the podcast and then I just got sidetracked P7: I truly believe that they have some really good methods in place, theoretically. In one of my classes, they set you up with someone to check in with, and they gave you a workbook
Experiencing Discomfort: Feeling uncomfortable, awkward, or unnatural practicing reflective listening. BarrierExChgDsCmft	P1: I'm not a good feelings person. It's not my style to say, "this is how you make me feel" P4: [It] doesn't feel natural outside of a classroom environment to talk like that P5: There is a certain level of "how deep do I want to go down the rabbit hole?" I mean, there are people that are very comfortable with that. I am not. I am one of those individuals that likes to stay on the surface, "let's deal with what's in front of us" P7: I think anytime that you're told that you're doing something, and if you thought you were doing it right, and a course or a person tells you that you're doing it wrong...that reaction for me is pure defensiveness

Practicing and Recalling Material: Challenges with remembering and/or practicing course material. BarrierExChgPracRcl	P2: I'm trying to remember all the learning objectives on [sic] the course. It's all blurred. It's all vague P3: Most people that went to the course, "awesome, great, loved it." You see them practicing it for a couple of weeks. But then it just goes to the wayside P4: It's been what, three years since I took the class. I don't really remember the specific questions that we went over
Self-Centered versus Other-Centered: Recognizing self-centered or other-centered behavior. BarrierSlfOthCtr	P1: [It's]hard for some senior leaders to embrace listening because we all want to be the smartest person in the room. And it's hard to let that ego go P3: So, you want the person to hear you. But as a result, the other person feels the same way. So how do we adjust the ways that we're listening? P4: It's something that's certainly grown with me when you're empathetically listening to somebody. You're taking your motive off the table, right? You're taking your agenda off, and you're listening to them completely
Organizational stress: Organizational resistance to a listening culture or organizational challenges associated with the training. BarrierMilOrgStrs	P3: The idea of me becoming more listening can have a connotation of being weak, or you know, that you're not strong. You're going against...this bravado identity is in the military P3: I don't know how to get away from that interpretation of the advertisement. That, it's just another sales gimmick. And leadership doesn't really care about it P4: I think in a small group environment, whether it be one on one, you know, I think that definitely opens up the dialogue. But I probably haven't used that enough to actually change the way things are communicated on a bigger level
Military responsibility v. empathetic listening: Legal and ethical requirements for military personnel when reflectively listening. BarrierMilRespVList	P4: I think there's definitely times when in your military career that rigidity is needed. But certainly not all the time, right? P7: The most challenging part of the course for me is that they state that it's 100% applicable at all times kind of thing, like the universality or all-the-time-ness of it, versus where I believe that there's applicable times for it, and there's times where it's less applicable
Self-Discovery: Self-awareness, self-reflection, and/or self-discovery from internal or external input that provides illuminating information that influenced a person's thoughts or behaviors. InfSlfDisc	P3: I started to recognize I still had areas for improvement. Like I said at the end, this isn't just a course where you learn skills and are good to go P6: You know, it's like there's a conduit now that develops, where, at first it starts with awareness. Cognitive dissonance kicks in, to where you've kind of discovered something that is conflicting with your current beliefs about who you are P7: You know, depending on your method of learning that might change, but for me, I had to actually see a conversation and watch how it changed the whole entire conversation just over the place. And "oh, yeah, I guess that is exactly what happens if you don't do that"

Self-Regulation: Intentionally choosing a different behavior than might be normal or comfortable. InfSlfReg	P1: I get to make the choice of how I'm going to be perceived and/or received. So, we're responsible for those behaviors P2: But instead of just me saying, "well, that's wrong and this is what the regulations say we can and cannot do." I asked them, like, "why did you have these reservations?" P6: So, when I've changed to try to be more reflective or being comfortable with silence and things like that, it's a noticeable change for me
Self-Improvement: A Practice of different behaviors as a result of wanting to improve oneself or create a "new normal." InfSlfImp	P3: Yeah, I need to condition myself with the skill set. Even if I don't feel like I need it P5: I mean that takes effort for me to go: I don't have to say what I have in my head. I can wait and see where this conversation is going. And maybe it's more important, what that person has to say than me responding to them P7: The number one change is just not asking leading questions
Perspective-taking: Cognitively understanding and accepting another's experience. InfIPPrspTkg	P2: But, in reality, those issues shape that culture and play a much bigger role. And I need to understand that if I'm trying to effectively work and integrate and communicate with those individuals P4: I think seeing from other people's perspectives is very, very key. That doesn't mean you have to agree with their perspective, right? And then when you get into an area where you're disagreeing with their perspective, I think you can approach that with a manner that acknowledges their perspective P7: If you're talking to somebody who has a completely different belief system or completely different lens of life than you do, you're going to be sitting in that for 30 minutes to an hour without giving your thoughts. It can feel like acceptance over just listening
Conflict management: Preventing, navigating, or de-escalating conflict using reflective listening. InfIPCfltMngt	P1: ...if we can work together, we can actually resolve the problem versus exchanging 15 emails back and forth, before somebody actually said, "oh, that's all you needed me to do? Yeah, I really just needed you to change this statement or upload this one document," but we automatically, it seems, [are] ingrained to read ill intent and the scenarios and believe that P2: I'm more willing to be patient and I'm more willing to work with those individuals that are trying to support whereas other individuals may be more or less willing to be lenient P4: You feel like you've got something that's being misheard, it's always important to go, "hey, well, do I understand this correctly? I think what you said was x," and then if they say "no, you're totally out to lunch." Then you can quickly solve that situation and move on. Whereas if you don't ask questions, like that, on both sides, that can cause a lot of problems in the work environment and potentially, like, days on end, right?
Patience: Taking time to understand or explain to others instead of solving a problem. InfIPPatience	P3: I realized I had to be patient and take time with whoever I was communicating with. There are certain personalities who take time to make their thoughts clear P6: Learning how to stay in that, I guess, it's not as awkward for me now in practicing that skill, but there was that space of awkwardness

where it's like, "okay, I just respond with that empathy statement."
And now awkwardly, just sitting, waiting

P7: For me to let them figure out how they're feeling and work through their own thing without having the pressure of relieving that for them. I felt like I needed to in the past, and now I just—sometimes you don't need a name for it, or you don't have to have the right words, and that's sufficient

Demonstrating empathetic ABCs: Demonstrating empathy using affective feelings, behavioral action, or cognitive understanding. InfIPEmthy	P3: [Reflective listening] impacted my ability to show empathy, I always had it...while I feel like I always have it, because that's what I'm always searching for--what the other person interprets is something else. So that specific skill set is something that I think for those who, again, are slower processing or articulating, we're giving them that space and time, shows "Okay, she's caring, she's taking the time to listen and understand" P4: If you're not getting the response that you're looking for or the message is not being heard, give that person the benefit of the doubt [and] say, "listen, come back in 15 minutes and recoup" and talk about this again P6: Again, this is the power of just trying to like, "less is more." Now I just kind of, you know, I'm trying to sit there and be like, "darn that sucks," and I just sit there in my awkward silence for two minutes and then they generally respond and then it continues
Listening versus problem solving: Choosing to listen first before acting. InfIPListVPbSlv	P3: When I tried to have conversations with them initially, they weren't giving me the response that I was looking for, in terms of explaining themselves, understanding them. So, when we practice this, and we're walking through, and I'm taking the time to give them the space to talk P5: So, the overall change was taking time and listening and then thinking about, critically thinking about how I was going to respond as opposed to responding, maybe not giving the individual enough time to conclude their thought P7: It takes a lot of weight off of the conversation. I used to feel like I had to have answers or solutions or like the perfect response, the perfect response to that stuff and try to understand where they're coming from
Spouse/Adult: Using reflective listening with adult family members or spouses. XfrFamSpseAdlt	P1: My [spouse] always wants me to just listen. That's how we're supposed to work P4: [If] your airmen don't think that you're listening to them, and they can feel that, if your wife or husband or kids can feel that, you lose credibility pretty quickly P5: When [my spouse] and I both had the understanding of what was going on, like why we were doing this. It was almost like a signal to the other individual
Co-workers/Community: Using reflective listening with adult co-workers, in the civilian workplace, or in the community. XfrCwkrCivCom	P1: Drives more ability to be empathetic because you're actually hearing versus the "I just want you to get out of my office" P3: You're not using the skills with a challenging personality, but you're still conditioning yourself. I'm still using the skills with folks that I can easily communicate with P7: Add comment about co-worker

Listening to understand: Understanding teammates through reflective listening. OrgTmListUndr	P1: But after 90 minutes of, I believe at least 70 to 80 of that listening, and I don't believe it was the other way. 10 minutes responding and/or just trying to ensure I heard the message [and] clarify what was being said P3: What I internalized originally as like empathy, saying, "Oh, I understand what you mean." I just stopped and I listened and I let folks finish their thoughts. Even if, like it's difficult for me, because I want to like hurry up and figure out what people are saying and understand them. I just have to stop and let them try to figure out their own words even if they may not know it right away P5: So, when you take that and you apply it to military writ large, right, so if everyone goes through this training, now they only understand this [is not someone throwing something] at the back of your head and telling you to get your [co-workers] back in order. I am trying to connect with you to ensure that you understand what I'm trying to say because it's important. I want to hear from you because, I too, understand this is important
Bridge a Gap: Overcoming backgrounds or differences using reflective listening. OrgTmBrdgGp	P1: It's been a beneficial tool to bridge a gap. We've talked about generational divide, right? I believe I want to be unique and being able to talk to the oldest generation and hear what they had to say, and then come down to our lowest generation, because I get 59-year-olds in the [unit] and I've got 18-year-olds in the [unit] P2: So, I feel like it's helped me a lot because me trying to, say, interact with [another] member, be like going over there and meeting them and seeing the environment, seeing the culture that they're in, really helps shape how I listen to them P6: I'm a drill status guardsman, and I'm not up there full-time...even at some point, I could tell that they were getting to know me in a way that they would never have been able to do if I wasn't in that format. So, I feel like team building and bonding experience of sitting in a classroom of people peeling back the layers a little bit

Accomplishing the mission: Achieving goals and missions.

OrgMsn

P1: We succeeded there and we got XYZ done. What did we burn down in the process? So, trying to grow through that and not leave that path of bad stuff behind but still achieve the same result. It's something I've tried to work on over the years, and I think going from, you know, progressive levels of [leadership], it's forced me to self-reflect on those things and how to do things

P3: If everyone did [reflective listening]? ...There'd be a lot more effective collaboration; therefore, the mission's getting done, versus...being guarded or just questioning motives and behaviors. People would be working better together. So therefore, whatever the task, or the mission is, we get there sooner and better

P4: I will definitely be asking some of those questions. "Hey, what are the three things that you need to learn from me today regarding, you know, this device and what are you looking for?" And if I can hit on those three things, and it's not on my agenda list, like accomplish that, then they're more likely to listen and feel like they've gotten something out of it

Environment: Reflective listening in the workplace.	P1: So, trying to change the environment for folks to deal with those at the lowest level, and to realize that email's not the best way to do business. Teams is a way you know. Face to face conversation is still important
OrgClimCultEnvrmt	P2: I think it would be amazing [to have reflective listening in the military work environment], because how many times do we deal with other offices or entities that we feel are dropping the ball? How many times do those activities feel that we're dropping the ball?
	P4: I think that if you are learning to communicate better at home, that can only translate or transfer into your guard unit as well or military life as well. Meaning that if I've taken care of things at home and I'm not worried about a communication problem at home, I'm better open to hear people at work

Source: Created by author.

Using the themes that met the "common" threshold of 75% or more of the interviews, referred here as cases, provided an understanding of the common experience among participants. It is also important to focus on the codes with the greatest frequency, since the researcher presumed that frequency indicated the topics that participants talked about most, and therefore form the message that they wanted the researcher to hear—in and of itself a form of reflective listening within the research process. Table 6 displays the numbers of cases and frequency among cases.

Table 6. Categories, Codes, Cases, and Hits

Category (and Sub Category)		Code	Cases	Frequency
Different Experience Than Other Training	Reception and Delivery		7	82
	Follow Through		7	27
Barriers to Reflective Listening (RL)	Experiencing Change	Discomfort	7	95
		Practice & Recall of Course Material	7	47
	Military Barriers	Organizational Stress	7	98
		Military Responsibilities vs. Listening	7	37
	Self-Centered V. Other-Centered		7	60
RL Influence is Personal & Interpersonal	Personal	Self-Discovery	7	70
		Self-Regulation	7	94
		Self-Improvement	7	118
	Interpersonal	Perspective Taking	7	70
		Listening vs. Problem Solving	7	66
		Demonstrating Empathy	7	86
		Patience	6	28
		Conflict Management	6	36
Transferring RL Skills	Co-Workers/Civilian Work/Community		7	63
	Family-Spouses and Adults		6	24
RL in an Organization	Climate and Culture	Environment	7	43
		Listening to Understand	7	32
		Bridging a Gap	6	28
	Mission & Goal Accomplishment		6	34

Source: Created by author using QDA Data Miner data for input.

Defining Themes

The refined themes were a unique, different, and introspective experience; thinking about others when interacting; applying a new perspective on other-centered behavior at home and at work; and barriers getting in the way of possibilities. Table 7 connects the themes, research questions, codes, and significance from the results using the 21 common themes from Table 6. While most of the concepts listed under significance derive from the literature review, some are new topics that emerged from the research. The following discussion will cover these concepts and themes.

Table 7. Themes, Associated Codes, Significance

Theme	Associated Codes	Significance
Unique, Different, and Introspective Experience (Primary Research Question)	Reception and Delivery	Adult Learning Model US Air Force Leadership Development
	Follow Through	
	Self-Discovery	
	Self- Regulation	
The Journey to Other-Centered Behavior (Secondary Research Question 1)	Discomfort	US Air Force Institutional Competencies and Types of Listening
	Practice and Recall of Course Material	
	Self-Improvement	
	Self- versus Other-Centered Behavior	
Applying a new perspective on other-centered behavior (Secondary Research Question 3)	Perspective-Taking	US Air Force Full Range Leadership Model Communication Training Transfer
	Listening Instead of Problem Solving	
	Demonstrating Empathy	
	Patience	
	Conflict Management	
	Transfer of Skills to Civilian, Military, and Community Workplaces	
	Transfer of skills to Spouses and Family Adults	
Organization Barriers and Military Culture Getting in the Way of Possibilities (Secondary Research Question 2)	Organizational Stress	DMVA Workplace of Choice & Member for Life US Air Force Airmen's Time Memo ADKAR Model, Kotter's Strategy for Change Management
	Military Responsibilities	
	Culture/Climate Environment	
	Understanding to Understand	
	Bridging a Gap	
	Mission & Goal Accomplishment	

Source: Created by author.

These four themes and their insight into the answers to the research questions provide the foundation for the thematic analysis section discussed later.

Producing the Report

The researcher used tables to display the data as derived from the interview transcripts. After completing the thematic analysis of the response to the interview questions, the researcher organized the themes that emerged from each question's answers, using deductive and inductive themes as the data presented. Additionally,

moving from a description of the theme to analyzing the significance of the theme provided an additional level of understanding of the interview responses, especially when connected to existing literature (Nowell et al. 2017).

Thematic Analysis

The following thematic analysis will explore the themes and codes from Table 7 above, key insights, and answers to the research questions. This section contributes to the recommendations and future research opportunities explored in chapter 5.

Theme 1: Unique, Different, and Introspective Experience

This theme answered the primary research question: how does learning reflective listening skills in the “Our Community Listens” course influence the members of the MI ANG? Overall, *participants described a uniquely delivered, eye-opening experience that provided an opportunity for understanding and regulating their reflective listening behavior.*

Most participants previously explored similar concepts in psychology and sociology through counseling and social psychology degrees, previous professional military, education, or consuming content on empathy from a self-motivated mindset. Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 found it eye-opening or surprising. Participant 5 described learning reflective listening as “eye-opening in the sense that I had no idea that there was this whole way of communicating” (Participant 5).

Participant 1 described the course as “unique, powerful really nice job presenting the information in a way to connect with folks, which was beneficial.” (Participant 1), and Participant 7 described the course as “out of the box” (Participant 7). Participant 2

stated the focus of “Our Community Listens” was different: “I think this course did a little bit better job of focusing in on, making sure that communication is a two-way street” (Participant 2). Participant 3 used an athletic conditioning analogy: “It was the first time that I’ve ever seen a communication *listening* course and program, that I analogize it to like an athletic training approach. Rather than, you know, a one-week course, okay, we did it and then disappears” (emphasis added) (Participant 3).

Participants found the course met their expectations (Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7). Some, admittedly, had no or low expectations due to previous training, such as “when you walk into it without any expectations, that in itself, it met my expectations” (Participant 1) and “I think it did meet my expectations. But again, I was very guarded with my expectations, because of my previous experiences” (Participant 2).

Participants found the continuous learning framework valuable. In particular, Participants 1, 4, 6, and 7 referenced the value of an assigned accountability or connection partner with whom they attended the course “to continue to try to build on [the skills]” (Participant 1), “to hold each other accountable outside the class...because just like any training unless you are actively doing it, the skills are going to go away” (Participant 4), to have “someone to check in with” (Participant 7) to reflect and process using continuous learning prompts (Participant 4, 6, and 7). While participants generally felt like the course met their expectations and had a framework for follow through, participants felt the *organizational* follow through was lacking, which theme two will address.

Participants echoed that practicing the skills and receiving feedback during the course was unique. Even though practice and feedback during the course did not reach

the 75% threshold, *it is poignant for exploring the value of practice during professional development training*. Participants felt grateful that facilitators pointed out specific behaviors to change (Participant 3); valued feedback and perspective from other participants on their behavior and getting the initial experience of awkwardness out of the way (Participant 6); and got to realize the impact of their behavioral styles and choices when listening (Participant 7). *One side effect of a unique course was self-discovery and self-regulation*. They:

1. learned new skills: “I’ve never had anything like that...there’s never been a, ‘here’s how you communicate with people’ in any of my lifetime schools or even through college” (Participant 5).
2. evaluated and saw a difference between their own behavior and the new skills: “being able to recognize that going, ‘alright, this isn’t working...it’s because of me, right?’ And I can reflect on that” (Participant 4).
3. leading to a decision to self-regulate and adjust: “it makes me more aware of when I’m screwing up and then how to be better or try to do better” (Participant 1).

The participants found value in a communications training course that was different and unique among their experiences with training. The combination of interactive and experiential learning are key aspects of successful adult learning models (Tweedell 2000). Participants experienced this combination when they learned, practiced, and experimented with reflective listening during the course. The MI ANG should apply a combined approach to adult learning to any specialized content or locally derived continuous learning materials to continue the interactive and experiential learning. Using

three theories identified by Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy (2011), a combined approach could: 1) apply andragogy to explain why learning reflective listening is important in the military context and to reinforce with skills and feedback, 2) provide a framework for self-directed learning to allow the member to choose what and how to incorporate reflective listening skills in their daily life, and 3) include concepts from transformational learning to create an environment responsive to the needs to the learners to explore multiple points of view.

As part of self-discovery and self-regulation, the self-awareness participants experienced in the course connects to the role of the leader to be “fully aware of their own values, needs, and biases” when it comes to their skills towards reflective listening (USAF 2017c, 256). Answering the primary research question, learning reflective listening skills in the “Our Community Listens” course influenced the members of the MI ANG to think about how they can communicate with others in a different way. This started them on a journey to other-centered behavior, as described in the next theme.

Theme 2: The Journey to Other-Centered Behavior

The journey to other-centered behavior answered secondary research question one: how does learning reflective listening influence the behavioral, cognitive, and affective experiences of empathy among members of the MI ANG? By changing their reflective listening behavior to demonstrate empathy, participants initially felt unnatural or uncomfortable understanding others’ feelings. *Through practice and recalling reflective listening skills, participants felt more comfortable understanding and validating their interpretation of others’ feelings.* This section will first explore the discomfort or unnatural feeling associated with incorporating reflective listening.

Participants felt unnatural when reflectively listening, at least at first, due to their background or previous habits surrounding other-centered conversation. Feelings are not everyone's forte, and participants referenced the overall challenge when dealing with feelings, with comments such as: "I'm not a good feelings person. It's not my style to say, 'this is how you make me feel' (Participant 1). Participants also remarked about feeling disoriented during the course. Some referenced cognitive dissonance between their previous self-evaluation when considering learning new ways to demonstrate empathy (Participant 6), or even feeling defensive: "I think anytime that you're told that you're doing something, and if you thought you were doing it right, and a course or a person tells you like that you're doing it wrong...that reaction for me is pure defensiveness" (Participant 7).

Participant 5 discussed discomfort with where reflective listening can lead: "there is a certain level of like, 'how deep do I want to go down the rabbit hole?' I mean, there are people that are very comfortable with that. I am not. I am one of those individuals that likes to stay on the surface" (Participant 5). In a related sense, reflective listening also connects to the importance of demonstrating authenticity and vulnerability when others reflectively listen: "I don't want to go any further with this conversation if I'm talking to perfection" (Participant 7). Later sections will discuss this discomfort with the information that reflective listening reveals within the military context.

Experiencing reflective listening as unnatural is very telling for how participants viewed listening prior to attending the course. While the classroom was a space to practice the skills, for some, it "doesn't feel natural outside of a classroom environment to talk like that" (Participant 4). Silence was challenging: "you know how difficult that is

for somebody who's typically just immediately on, saying, responding, always has something going on as you're talking" (Participant 5). Some participants felt the unnaturalness of existing in a silent space while face-to-face with another person: "Who wants to sit there and just stare into someone's face for five minutes, not saying anything? Right? It's kind of not natural" (Participant 6). For some, it was lasting through awkward silence to keep the conversation other-centered: "it was just super uncomfortable. And I felt like I had to fill that space." (Participant 7). Participant 4 echoed that it was the other-centeredness of the conversation that was unnatural: "you're taking your agenda off and you're listening to them completely, and that is not normal" (Participant 4).

The participants did not perceive they were the only ones that felt unnatural when they reflectively listened to others. It could also extend to the person to whom someone was reflectively listening. For example, Participant 5 explained, "I would tell you that for the people that know me for a while and made that very uncomfortable, because a majority of the time they're used to me responding immediately. When I gave my dramatic pauses, they are like, "what's wrong? What's going on?" (Participant 5). Conversely, when Participant 5 reflectively listens to "individuals that don't know me, there's that, "okay, am I supposed to continue the talking thing that's going on?" Because I don't think it's very natural for a majority, at least our culture, let's just say, US culture, to allow an individual to just express themselves like that" (Participant 5).

Participant 7 also keyed into a particular barrier with integrating the skill and how to navigate the conversation back into a "normal" two-way conversation:

So, there's times when you're having conversations with a friend. And if they're doing really good reflective listening, or if I am, if you never kind of participate yourself, it can feel very one sided and that's where I see the biggest hindrance, or the biggest roadblock is. When to kind of shift gears to "okay, this this portion of the conversation has lent itself to what it can do and that point is over." And now it's like a transition piece to like two-way communication or changing the subject or you know what I mean? Kind of like the segue out of it. (Participant 7)

Some participants recognized difficulty in the challenge of choosing to reflectively listen instead of relying on their previous habits. Participant 5 focused on the importance of background in:

...challenging in trying to change a way of thinking--a way of communicating has been...with me for over 30 some years... you're a product of your environment, and that's something that's learned over time...especially when you're trying to overcome environmentally learned behavior, it's just, it's very difficult to do so unless you're actively trying to do that and being held accountable. Difficult to make that change. (Participant 5)

Participant 3 discussed how an individual's background influences their ability to demonstrate a new skill, coming into conflict with organizational goals:

We're spending all this money, all these resources, all these man hours and we want it to be lasting. The reason why we want to be lasting is because the expectations of our leaders. They read the handout. They read the course. And they have this broad general concept of what the Air Force is trying to push. Whether or not that person actually gets it or not, is up to is based on that situation. (Participant 2)

Sometimes the challenge of reflective listening manifested as discomfort during interpersonal interaction. For example, when reflectively listening to accept another's perspective versus agreement:

...if you're talking to somebody who has a completely different belief system or completely different lens of life than you do, you're going to be sitting in that for thirty minutes to an hour without giving your thoughts. *It can feel like acceptance over just listening.* And I think that in our culture, if you don't interject a thought, then you accept a way of thinking [emphasis added]. (Participant 7)

Participants felt reflective listening was exhausting. Participant 3 acknowledged the time and effort requirement of a new practice for reflective listening: “it’s no different than working out or like doing physical training. Let’s say you’ve been out of work for a year, and you haven’t been to the gym for a year. And you’re wanting to run a marathon. It’s gonna be really exhausting the first couple of months” (Participant 3). Participant 5 also referenced the energy required in reflective listening, “for you to get a better understanding what the individual is going through requires a level of empathy that puts you into the same position. Like I said, it’s very difficult for me to actively do that. It still takes a lot of energy for me to do that” (Participant 5). Participant 7 acknowledged that the change is long-term: “the short term--how it feels uncomfortable, especially with what we are raised in the military culture with it feels like it’s gonna take forever. It feels like the really long thing, or a really hard thing” (Participant 7).

While the code for reflective listened as energy and/or time consuming did not meet the 75% threshold, feeling exhausted and the connection to time is worth mentioning. Participants referenced the challenge of prioritization and carving out time to practice the skills (Participant 1); feeling exhausted taking time to let others process, multiple rounds of reflectively listening to others, hours long conversations (Participant 3); balancing time and energy required against energy and time available and developing a listening culture as a “career’s worth of work” (Participant 4); and the time it takes to develop proficiency and patience (Participant 6).

Doing something that feels unnatural is hard, but it does not mean that it is impossible to develop a “new normal.” As Participant 6 remarked, “at some point—and this goes into rewiring—it’s really not awkward. Once you realize it’s normal and

healthier than the way it was before, I think the awkwardness does start to go away”
(Participant 6).

Participants desired a refresher on the course materials, external accountability, and a focus on small teams to impact the wider organization. The members of the MI ANG who attended the course during this research did so during course offerings from 2017-2021. Many participants were cognizant that the course occurred in the distant past, contributing to the challenge of “trying to remember all the learning objectives on the course. It’s all blurred. It’s all vague” (Participant 2) and that it was “three years since I took the class. I don’t really remember the specific questions that we went over” (Participant 4). Participant 1 noted that time since the course also connected to the need for refreshing the material:

...it’s been years since I went through it. It was either 19 or 18. So three to four years removed. Having that you know, the Course Reference Guide one pager thing sitting out. I don’t go back and plow through the litany of other material that we got, but I do look at it once in a while. But that’s the hard part--is constant reminders. (Participant 1)

Sometimes it was not only the time since the course, but not having other members around who have taken the course to share the burden of change. Participant 1 described trying to create deliberate opportunities to practice: “And was just a way for the tactics, the skill sets to be reminded. That kind of died away with other challenges. And I felt, I honestly felt like a lot of weight on me to keep that going. And I’ve got plenty of other [higher ranking members] above me, especially officers that are like, ‘we don’t have time for this’ (Participant 3). Participant 7 discussed receiving positive feedback from practicing a new habit, say that, “we’re all human, so if we don’t get positive feedback from something, we’re not going to repeat it over and over again” (Participant

7). Other participants reported trying to keep the skills refreshed but got “sidetracked” (Participant 4).

Using Participant 3’s analogy of an athletic conditioning program, many participants saw the need to start somewhere to eventually get better at reflectively listening:

You’re going to be tired, frustrated. You won’t be able to do the routines that you want to do... But as you continue, and as you practice, the habits and the routines become easier to do. Hiccups happen along the way. You get sick, you get tired, maybe you messed up or you know, just it’s an off day. So that’s something I try to tell myself is you know, if I’m communicating with someone whose, our personalities just don’t naturally, easily communicate with each other. (Participant 3)

Participant 4 saw practice requiring self-discipline, that “it’ll feel awkward but it’s also something that unless practiced...it is not easy or natural to talk or listen empathetically” (Participant 4), especially if looking for long-term impact:

If we don’t go back and practice the skills of our three-day course, of listening empathetically, we are naturally going to go back to what we are comfortable with. And so, in order for this to actually take hold, we have to come back and revisit, just like a tactics talk, right? Something that’s in the forefront of your mind, right? What does it look like? Why is it important? (Participant 4)

Participant 1 agreed that personal changes from learning reflective listening were “short lived. So, I think the class did a nice job trying to encourage folks to be paired up with the teammates or whatever we want to call them as we leave the class, so you check back in you actually actively participate and continue to try to build on this. That takes self-discipline” (Participant 1). Participant 3 found the same potential for reflective listening skills to fade, stating that “the world is filled with competing interests. That I think as a result for, say 70% of the course. It kind of just died away for folks. I don’t think they

necessarily wanted that. It's just there's competing interests and priorities that everyone has" (Participant 3).

Continuous learning partners were important for providing a method of feedback and accountability. Participant 5 stated this was because "you could continue to hold each other accountable outside the class right so that's hugely important, because just like any training unless you are actively doing it, the skills are gonna go away." (Participant 5). Participant 4 appeared to agree with needing someone "that calls you out on it" during practice, and to that reflective listening:

...is something that has to be practiced, and you have to hold yourself accountable for that. And unless you have somebody who's going to call you out on it, it's probably something that you're not going to practice repeatedly. Unless of course we come back and we revisit it and we try to do it as organically as possible, which is really difficult to do. (Participant 4)

Practicing reflective listening is also time consuming, since "if we're talking about talking and listening to people, so you probably can't do that in 15 minutes and have a meaningful impact, right?" (Participant 4). It may also take time to see the impact of reflectively listening, especially "if I'm not forced to or if it's not if it's not on my schedule, it's just not going to happen" (Participant 7) because "it takes a while to see the payout of it" and "we if we don't get positive feedback from something, we're not going to repeat it over and over again" (Participant 7).

The researcher was surprised to hear that some participants found it easier to practice reflective listening with children, since the messages children send are often less complicated and do not have the same reaction as an adult that is practicing reflective listening (Participant 7). Participant 6 said:

...[my child's] a great example of this whole experience in many ways. When I first got back, I practiced reflective listening and other things too, and right off the

bat was noticing a big difference. And we've really bonded in general, but our relationship is really tight down because the course is really improved it.
(Participant 6)

Participant 7 also found that children offered a way to see the impact from practice, as discussed earlier when exploring how participants experienced reflective listening: "You get to hone that skill, but...the most important part of it is that you get to see the fruits of that labor, which is enough to make you want to do it at work. It's enough for you to go out on that riskier limb and do it other places, because you know it's worth it and you do see the results" (Participant 7).

Self-discovery and self-regulation led participants to inculcating those behaviors into a long-term self-development practice. Participants recognized needing it in daily practice, to "try to use it in day-to-day life, just need to keep working on it" (Participant 1) and that "once you realize it's normal and healthier than the way it was before, I think the awkwardness does start to go away. I mean, I don't really feel that as much right now" (Participant 6). Participant 7 acknowledged, "Instead of it sounding canned, it sounds more natural now, which obviously leads to more natural conversation...I've developed my own voice" (Participant 7). Participants noted a connection from the initial discomfort to practice that made reflective listening more natural.

From self-discovery, self-regulation, and self-improvement, it is logical that participants became aware of self-centered versus other-centered behavior. They not only recognized the behavior in themselves as discussed above, but "start to become hyper-aware of what's happening to you. So now when someone is acting like they're listening, but all they're doing is trying to over engage and solve everything for me, it does sort of drive me nuts" (Participant 6). This experience:

...drives me absolutely crazy. I'm talking to somebody and I can clearly see that they're not listening and they're just thinking about their next question, right? ...the first thing I want to do is get out of the room...because you're now wasting my time. And there is an immediate lack of respect that's lost.
(Participant 4)

In effect, participants could spot someone not demonstrating reflective listening and felt the subsequent impact of the interpersonal interactions. This initial, and uncomfortable, experiment with other-centered behavior relates to the definition of empathetic communication from the literature review: using it as the first step in communication and valuing the relationship (USAF 2017c, 325). The experience of learning and improving one's communication skills also connects to the US Air Force's Institutional Competencies, which also include "Develops Self" to assess developmental needs, awareness of personal impact on others, and continually increase knowledge and skills (USAF 2017c, 230).

The journey to other-centered behavior answered secondary research question one: How does learning reflective listening influence the behavioral, cognitive, and affective experiences of empathy among members of the MI ANG? Participants felt more comfortable understanding and validating their interpretation of others' feelings through practice and recalling reflective listening skills. *When participants learned reflective listening and changed their empathetic communication behavior, they felt responsible for demonstrating it themselves and became aware of it—or the lack thereof—in others.*

Theme 3: Applying a new perspective on other-centered behavior

This theme answered secondary research question three: how do members' experiences learning reflective listening connect to US Air Force leadership development? Other-centered behavior to understand another's perspective, listening

instead of problem-solve, demonstrating empathy, and practicing patience and conflict management were common among participants. Participants transferred these skills from the training classroom to various environments. When used in the military workplace, these concepts are directly related to US Air Force transformational behaviors and guidance to the force on engaging and connecting with Airmen.

Participant 1 told a story about how listening to another's perspective influenced a behavioral choice which resulted in "a point where we could make that influence. So being able to listen and hear the message, hear what they're saying" (Participant 1). Participant 4 saw the value in considering a student's perspective in a training environment: "when you're teaching a new skill set to an airman, you can be more patient. You can ask those questions. You can seek to understand what they're saying and find out whether or not they're getting a message" (Participant 4). Participant 7 realized the difference between a listener's need to ask questions and the talker's need to be heard, realizing, "it really doesn't matter what they're saying. Like if their cat died and I don't care about cats at all, I don't need to categorize it in my head. I can just listen to what they're feeling and it doesn't really matter what situation provoked [it]" (Participant 7).

In applying reflective listening in various environments, participants described demonstrating empathy through affective, behavioral, and cognitive empathy. Participant 7 talked about how through listening, "you can feel what they're feeling" and:

...you're going to be able to relate to those feelings based on something in your own experience, and doesn't have to be the same thing that triggered those feelings for you. You can hone in on that when you're reflectively listening, instead of worrying about getting advice, or worried about a solution, or worrying about sharing your own stories so they feel less vulnerable. (Participant 7)

Participant 3 echoed the behavioral component already prevalent throughout this chapter: “when I communicate with people, rather than leading it, trying to figure out what they’re saying—what I internalized originally as like empathy, saying, ‘Oh, I understand what you mean.’ I just stopped and I listened, and I let folks finish their thoughts” (Participant 3). Participant 5 discussed the cognitive understanding that accompanied demonstrating empathy: “I can feel or understand how people are dealing with things and then make a quick assessment on ‘okay, how do I approach this knowing what this person’s going through” (Participant 5).

If we consider empathy a triad between affective feelings, behavioral actions, and cognitive understanding, *learning about reflective listening helped participants evaluate the aspect of empathy upon which they could improve and make small changes toward strengthening the triad*. Participant 5 summed up the connection between perspective-taking and demonstrating empathy:

If you truly want to understand an individual and what they’re going through, you need to find a way to put yourself in that hole. To me that’s helpful in communicating...For you to get a better understanding what the individual is going through requires a level of empathy that puts you into the same position. (Participant 5)

When participants reflectively listened to understand others better, they used that perspective-taking to demonstrate empathy and come up with better solutions.

Participants commonly experienced another aspect of empathetic communication in connection with perspective-taking, which was listening over problem-solving.

Cognitively, there was a difference between their previous behavior to start with problem-solving instead of listening to “trying to get to the root cause of either a problem or just trying to get a person to open up” (Participant 5). Participant 6 talked about a

recent example involving a co-worker going through a death in the family, how “[My co-worker] doesn’t really need problem-solving. [My co-worker] just needs people to listen” (Participant 6). Interestingly, participants seemed to feel *relieved* at not taking responsibility for solving others’ problems when not responsible for the decision:

Taking the pressure off of that, and just being able to listen and not have my brain going, you know, 1000 miles per hour, and trying to hit everything that I know in the past I’ve wanted to convey to them, not having any message that I have. That’s been the biggest change for me is not having my own message going into a conversation that wasn’t about me. (Participant 7)

Participant 7 talked about how reflective listening allowed *better* problem-solving: I got to get the whole story and got to give [my co-worker] the resources. Got [my co-worker] the things that were actually productive to [my co-worker] for where [my co-worker] was at, instead of if I was [my co-worker], where I would be” (Participant 7).

Identifying reflective listening in oneself and others seems like a logical prelude to transferring the skills to various environments. The sections above discussed examples of transferring to the workplace, but there are three additional areas where transfer occurred: civilian workplace (Participant 7), community work centers (Participant 1), and among adults in their families (Participant 4), particularly spouses (Participants 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7). Additional areas for transfer were children, friends, and even, unexpectedly, in written communication: “I know that a lot is being missed by just communicating over text, but it seemed [my co-worker] responded positively and continued to open up...I just felt like as much as you can check over text, it did improve it” (Participant 6). The diversity of relationships and environments where the skills transferred speaks to the idea that these skills are potentially not just workplace skills, but that *reflective listening skills*

have the potential to apply holistically to a member's civilian and military workplace, family, spouse, and community relationships.

The other common area for participants to transfer to was with adults in their family, particularly with spouses. Participant 5 talked about the benefit of common language and the intent signaling with a spouse that had also attended the course:

When [my spouse] and I both had the understanding of what was going on, like why we were doing this. It was almost like a signal to the other individual. Like, “hey, I’m trying to connect with you right now.” And I’m like, “hey, I feel like you leaving your shoes out here is a sign that you don’t care about me.” It’s like a signal to them: “I’m trying to communicate to you. This is not being confrontational--this is not me being competitive.” (Participant 5)

Success in practicing and using the skills for perspective-taking, demonstrating empathy, and listening before problem-solving involves interpersonal skills among small teams. Moreover, what is a committed romantic or familial relationship but a small team? A person can choose to make behavioral changes and develop a practice that extends to those in their span of care.

A common thread among environments where transfer occurred was conflict management. While reflective listening was not the only skill that participants referenced, it contributed to conflict management at home and at work. In the military workplace, participants saw reflective listening as helping “avoid conflict and manage conflicts and challenges in a better way” (Participant 1). When looking at the potential for miscommunication, reflective listening can help sort out:

...two different messages...unless you know their personality, or where they’re coming from, could be taken completely differently. And so, when you feel like you’ve got something that’s being misheard, it’s always important to go, “hey, well, do I understand this correctly? I think what you said was x,” and then, if they say “no, you’re totally out to lunch.” Then you can quickly solve that situation and move on. (Participant 5)

Similarly, when at home with a spouse, Participant 5 discussed the importance of sending signals to provide an opportunity to reflectively listen to de-escalate a potential conflict: “when I say, ‘I feel...’ right then, as soon as you hear those words...it’s not about faults, just trying to address the issue” (Participant 5). As part of a broader effort to clarify instead of conflict with others, participants discussed how reflective listening can provide opportunities for better understanding when interacting with others.

The transfer of skills from the classroom to the workplace and family reflects previous research on training transferring to other environments, as described in the literature review. The insight that reflective listening training transferred *outside* the workplace speaks to the potential secondary benefit of teaching this skill: teaching reflective listening to change workplace relationships may also help members in their civilian workplace and family relationships. This could be critical to supporting the DMVA’s Member for Life concept, as discussed in theme four and the connection to the DMVA’s Strategic Plan.

Other-centered behavior is also reflected in the US Air Force Full Range Leadership model to integrate the leader, follower, and situation to develop relationships, (correctly) identify areas for improvement, and apply the four “Is” of transformational leadership: individual consideration through empathy and support, intellectual stimulation by seeking different perspectives, inspirational motivation to create an environment that motivates others through patience and conflict management, and idealized influence that sets aside personal interests for the sake of the group (USAF 2017c, 261-262). These transformational leadership skills are reinforced in the CSAF’s Airmen’s Time Memo:

Airmen's Time is a way of life - not a program. Care cannot be outsourced. Getting to know and see our Airmen beyond the uniform is how we build connection. It must be intentional at every level to create trust and belonging. During these moments, we will continue to be open, show consideration, value differences, and seek to understand multiple perspectives. (CSAF 2022)

The answer to secondary research question three was that learning reflective listening connected with the US Air Force's concepts behind transformational leadership skills and connecting and engaging with Airmen. As described above, participants experienced various opportunities inside and outside the military workplace to transfer reflective listening skills at the personal and interpersonal level. The final theme will explore the influence of reflective listening beyond the interpersonal level, the barriers that participants experienced, and the connection to the DMVA's Strategic Plan.

Theme 4: Barriers Getting in the Way of Possibilities for Workplace Success

This theme answered secondary research question two: how do members' experiences learning reflective listening contribute to the DMVA's Strategic Plan? *Participants described a connection between reflective listening to understand, bridge a gap, and accomplish the mission and goals and contributing to organizational climate and culture. However, organizational and cultural barriers to reflective listening were common among participants, similar to the obstacles identified in the literature review in chapter 2. The following section will discuss barriers to reflective listening broken into three sub-themes: trust, culture, and the expansion dilemma.*

Deciding to Attend is a Demonstration of Trust

The first barrier to reflective listening is getting members of the MI ANG to attend the course. *Participants felt skeptical before and after the course and struggled to*

see organizational intent behind learning reflective listening. Many participants referenced a previous experience in military training or education that included “high paid folks that actually probably never practiced any of their crap. So, value in that isn’t strong” (Participant 1). Participants were “very guarded with my expectations, because of my previous experiences” (Participant 2), and left wanting a different type of training experience:

We’ve all taken the classes, where they tell us how to listen. You have two ears and one mouth. You’re supposed to listen more than you talk, and ask questions, and those things that are always being told to us that are like old hat stuff. Where you’d sit and listen to the same thing being told to you again and you’d say, “yep, good reminder.” (Participant 7)

Some participants said that the way the course was advertised was not necessarily motivating: “I don’t know how to get away from that interpretation of the advertisement, that it’s just another sales gimmick. And leadership doesn’t really care about it. But it’s definitely interpreted, I can say that, at least from the folks I’ve talked to, that that’s the way it’s interpreted” (Participant 3). Leader endorsement does not always provide motivation to counteract previous experience: “‘Here’s another communication course leadership is saying that they want to endorse.’ You don’t really care about it, but it’s a nice feather in their cap to say that that’s what they’re doing” (Participant 3).

While exploring the idea that members of the military are guarded is out of the scope of this study, it is important to understand that perceived distrust could be a barrier to attending the course or practicing the skills (Participant 3). Participant 4 participated in:

...countless commanders calls where the messaging is just spoken differently from somebody, but the message is the same, right? People, People, People. And we are like, alright, “well, I’ve heard this speech the 37th time, right...do we mean this or is just the platitude?” (Participant 4)

Participants saw the potential for motives to play into attending or offering the course for the sake of a line on a performance evaluation: “Because it takes time, it takes energy to actually want to push that versus ‘hey, here’s a three-day course, we want you guys to come, and self-improvement looks good on the EPR.’ You know, check the box type thing” (Participant 4). Participant 1 also stated that “sometimes we encourage folks to fill squares for the mere fact of filling the square, versus understanding what that square brings and/or how they can help a person” (Participant 1).

Participants saw a connection between guardedness and distrust influencing the long-term viability of the program and, ultimately, mission accomplishment. Lack of trust in leadership motives could lead to Participant 2’s concern about potential long-term negative experiences without member buy-in leading to negative experiences and “*miscommunication between the mid-level and the upper-level leadership*” [emphasis added](Participant 2). Participant 3 saw guardedness and suspect motives as a barrier to effective collaboration and mission accomplishment, as opposed to “everyone being guarded or just questioning motives and behaviors” (Participant 3). Participant 2 charged leadership with the responsibility to “lead the new thought process.”

I think the biggest thing that I wanted to share with you is making sure that the Air Force understands that courses can be vetted, courses can have good intents, good purpose. But if they’re not able to effectively administer, or lead the new thought process, that it can be extremely difficult and also kind of counterintuitive to the goals. And that’s the biggest thing that I’ve seen out of, not just in this course, but other courses similar to it. (Participant 2)

While participants appreciated the materials and accountability framework provided as part of the course, *participants felt organizational follow through after the course was lacking*. From an organizational standpoint, some participants expressed concern about organizational goals and intent. Participant 2 saw challenges in following

through with a difficult skill from an Air Force that did not acknowledge the nuance of behavioral change, saying defining reflective listening is easy; however, “for people to accept it and to employ it effectively, it is extremely hard, and the way the Air Force pitches is that, ‘it’s easy.’ Just do what the training says and you’ll succeed” (Participant 2).

Participant 4 distinguished between the expectations of the course overall and expectations with follow through after the course:

I think it’s people getting together that have gone through this class and go...we’re going to refresh what we’ve learned real quick in like 5-10 minutes, and then we’re going to go out we’re going to do three days of drill. We’re going to come back we’re going to go, alright, what worked what didn’t work? But that takes a lot of effort. And I don’t see that effort being done in that manner...I think those expectations were definitely set but the enforcement of them from the people within the class to reach back out and talk to them. That’s a very difficult thing to do. (Participant 4)

If reflective listening helps make the conversation other-centered, allows the other person to feel heard, perhaps it can improve the trust that seems to be missing in relation to the common training experience in the military when launching new initiatives.

Moving from the US Air Force level to local implementation at the MI ANG level, Participant 3’s concerns were about “how the guard is delivering it, is most people that went to the course. “Cool. Awesome. Great. Loved it.” You see them practicing it for a couple of weeks. But then it just gets it goes to the wayside. So many other things going on, so many other efforts” (Participant 3). Again, Participant 3 desired for a more work-proximity-centered roll out of the course to facilitate follow through after the course:

I wish that course would have been afforded to rather than random people, directorates, sections, people who work with each other day-to-day basis, so that these skill sets can be practice for this specific group that work with each other every day...now, you know you guys practiced this a little bit with each other. Now continuing practicing every day with each other. (Participant 3)

Participant 7 was mostly satisfied with the follow through, but saw a need for annual refresher training, “I truly believe that they have some really good methods in place, theoretically. In one of my classes, they set you up with someone to check in with, and they gave you a workbook. I think it just needs to be an *annual refresher training*” (Participant 7). Participant 7 also connected the lack of purpose or intent communicated to accomplishing the mission: “I reflectively listened and I’m glad I’ve checked off the empathy box in my life. But what’s the payout to the mission? What’s the payout for the wing? How does that help the Air Force?” (Participant 7).

The trust required after poor experiences with military training is a challenging barrier to overcome. It would seem to necessitate the transformational leadership principles discussed earlier to create functional relationships with others and within a team to develop trust and motivation. The DMVA’ Strategic Plan also directs the department to invest in DMVA talent management through staff and leadership development (MI DMVA 2021, 44). Objective 4.2 also states that by 2025, 80% of employee surveys should “indicate that they have an effective career management plan that includes professional development and performance recognition”—also requiring individual consideration from transformational leaders to develop meaningful rewards.

Conflict with Military Culture and Responsibilities

Participants discussed workplace cultural challenges to reflective listening, which included resisting the urge to interact solely through electronic communication, such as email (Participants 1 and 4); employing reflective listening despite the potential “connotation of being weak or that you’re not strong. You’re going against whatever this bravado identity is in the military” (Participant 3); and “students are shutting down and

not willing to communicate their discrepancies or where they think they may be not grasping the concept as much because they're afraid" (Participant 4).

The researcher found the discussion on "Type A" personalities interesting among the participants when discussing the conflict in military culture. Three participants stated that Type A personalities had their limits in the military, whether from "personalities that we promote, and they get to tell everyone what to do most of their career versus developing the art of influence" (Participant 1). Perhaps this is related to a tendency to problem-solve rather than listen "especially if you're action oriented like I am, and many of us in military, you're Type A....so the whole course was a great reminder that sometimes you really just need to sit there and kind of go "mmhm" or literally reflect back" (Participant 6). There is an underlying tension in recognizing that action-oriented is not always effective, although it may seem efficient when:

...we are in a Type A environment, which is military in general, I think. And that is shifting in general with just generations changing...seeing how, I think, we want to be efficient with our time always, and we want things to be done as quickly as possible. And I think this class makes it very obvious that what feels like inefficiency in a conversation is actually more effective and efficient in the long-term. (Participant 7)

From both an Air Force and MI ANG cultural level, it is worthwhile *to (re)evaluate the qualities that make great leaders, perhaps accepting an interpretation of leadership behaviors that accommodates personal talents as well as the ability to flex as the mission and situation requires*. While the impacts of these points related to career field and job assignment are outside the scope of this paper, the topic of leader qualities is important to discuss within the culture of the MI ANG.

Other participants perceived a lack of alignment with reflective listening and military responsibilities. Participant 7 referenced the need to transition to supervisor

responsibilities. For example, “when you’re doing a feedback session, you’re going to be practicing these skills, and they absolutely apply. But knowing how to transition to that “okay, well, here’s what we can do.” I’m no longer reflectively listening; I am giving you solutions—I’m doing my job” (Participant 7). Participant 7 went on to point out the important legal and ethical responsibilities that might *require* military members to do more than just reflectively listen: “The part where I struggle with it is, if an airman comes to me and was sexually assaulted, say the conversation is over, and they never say that they want to report it or they never say that they wanted to go up the chain of command. There is an actual step that I have to ask—I need to know (Participant 7). Participant 4 slightly contrasted, seeing the need to blend reflective listening in the military context: “But even in the military, not every single communication that we do is an authoritative communication. I would say that only 1% of our communication is probably authoritative, if that. Most of the time, it’s a two-way street” (Participant 4). *Participants perceived a lack of tailoring of reflective listening skills within the military context.*

Two participants discussed reflective listening’s ability to provide the total framework in reaching a desired outcome with another individual. Participant 3 described a specific interpersonal struggle where reflective listening fell short of building trust with one particular co-worker. Again, lack of success is connected to the feeling of exhaustion: “I feel like I’m getting a very resistant, closed-off personality where the [“Our Community Listens”] is just not letting me break through. I get exhausted and like “okay, I’m not going to practice it anymore on you today.” This led Participant 3 to reflect that “the irony of it is that [relationship] was the whole reason I went to the class” (Participant 3).

Participant 4 remarked on the challenges a squadron commander would face if everyone came for reflective listening: “if you’re the squadron commander, and your door’s open, and you have somebody coming in, and you have a 15-minute conversation that takes 20 minutes to solve, and empathetically listen to, and you’ve got 30 airmen that you can listen for days. By the by the fifth guy that comes in the door, you’re probably not listening, right?” (Participant 4).

Participant 4 summarized that there is currently a disconnect between reflective listening at the small team climate and as a greater part of the unit culture:

...maybe you start in in smaller sections where you can build that environment where, I don’t know if we have that environment where you can do that on the on the big stage...I think if you were to do that on a wing level or squadron commander level, I don’t think that people feel like they really can have a free conversation without any kind of consequence. (Participant 4)

Changing or aligning culture is challenging and starts with setting the climate. As the CSAF recognizes:

We are initiating *Airmen’s Time*. In the past few years, we’ve learned vital lessons from the Resiliency Tactic Pause and the need for crucial conversations within our formations. We specifically acknowledged that building trust and belonging is never a one-time event - it is a daily commitment to those we serve. To further advance this cultural shift, leaders at every level are entrusted to prioritize time to elevate connection, growth, and enhance the well-being of individual Airmen while building unity within their teams. (CSAF 2022)

This disconnect between the influence of reflective listening at the individual and team level and the potential for it to expand to the organizational level creates a dilemma, which is the next and final theme.

Reflective Listening Stuck at the Interpersonal Level

Participants felt stuck applying the skills in one-on-one or interpersonal interactions. For example:

I think in a small group environment, you know, whether it be one on one, you know, I think that definitely opens up the dialogue. But I probably haven't used that enough to actually change the way things are communicated on a bigger level, right? I don't think we do that frequently...we probably don't use reflective listening enough in those small meetings to make it a bigger change in a bigger meeting like a squadron commander's meeting, right? (Participant 4)

Participants saw the ability to practice within small work centers or teams, but some saw how a lack of work-center proximity made follow through challenging:

It's just a bunch of random people in different sections. Only maybe a group of five of us all work with each other on a daily basis went to this course. So, you had onesie-twosies [sic], out of a shop of maybe six or seven, who came back with the skill set. But did they apply it with other people or did they teach it with other people? (Participant 3)

Participant 7 a similar feeling: "I think it works best in small groups where you can build that skill set, like we talked about...we just went through this course. We're now three years from it. We're still having the conversation because we think both of us agree that it's important and can open up doors and make a difference" (Participant 7).

Despite organizational and cultural barriers, participants saw reflective listening as having potential beyond setting the climate, but in creating cultural change. The concepts described above relate to the goals for the DMVA to create the foundation for a workplace of choice, where members treat each other with respect and allow members to serve through their talents in a positive culture, as described in Objective 4.1 of the Strategic Plan (MI DMVA 2021, 43-44). Using a model such as Prosci's ADKAR model (Prosci n.d.) or Kotter's Strategy for Organizational change (Kotter n.d.), reflective listening, and potentially the remaining concepts and skills from "Our Community Listens," could influence accomplishment of the DMVA's Strategic Goals. In the two models referenced, the delivery appears to be stuck at the strategic vision and initiatives

(Kotter n.d.) and ability to implement the change (Prosci n.d.), respectively. Chapter 5 will explore this recommendation to invigorate strategic planning.

Altogether, secondary research question two asked how do members' experiences learning reflective listening contribute to the DMVA's Strategic Plan? By connecting interpersonal concepts to organizational climate and culture, participants felt stuck incorporating reflective listening into their interpersonal interactions as part of a military organization's climate and culture. As part of the DMVA's organizational identity as and strategic goal to be a Workplace of Choice, addressing the application and barriers of reflective listening—and empathetic communication—could contribute to accomplishing the DMVA's Strategic Plan.

Summary

Overall, this exploration of the MI ANG member's experiences of reflective listening used a social constructivist framework through a qualitative, bounded case study with elements of positive psychology. The researcher created a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews to provide recommendations. Four themes emerged from the thematic analysis of seven interviews: a unique and different course that influenced introspection and started a journey towards other-centered behavior and transferring the skills to various areas of members' personal and professional lives. These themes answered the primary and secondary research questions to create a collective narrative on the influence of reflective listening and the connection to empathetic communication, US Air Force leadership development, and the DMVA's Strategic Plan. The following chapter will provide recommendations and future research considerations.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Infinite-minded leaders understand that “best” is not a permanent state. Instead, they strive to be “better.” “Better” suggests a journey of constant improvement and makes us feel like we are being invited to contribute our talents and energies to make progress in that journey.

—Simon Sinek, *The Infinite Game*

Summary

This study explored and provided recommendations on the MI ANG member’s experiences of reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Becoming a better listener was the purpose of the “Our Community Listens” reflective listening module. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked how learning reflective listening influenced demonstrating empathy, connected to US Air Force leadership development, and aligned with the DMVA strategic plan.

The common experience among participants was attending a unique and different course than they had experienced before. Participants experienced self-discovery moments and then integrated some aspects of reflective listening skills into many aspects of their personal and professional lives. Reflective listening influenced their interpersonal skills through perspective-taking, listening over problem-solving, and demonstrating empathy. The skills transferred from training classroom to the workplace, as well as to civilian and community work centers. Additionally, the training transferred to family relationships, particularly with adult family members and spouses. They navigated

barriers associated with changing behaviors, such as discomfort or the challenges of practicing and recalling the information. Participants described a connection between reflective listening to understand, bridge a gap, and accomplish the mission and goals and contributing to organizational climate and culture. However, organizational and cultural barriers to reflective listening were common among participants. The following section will provide five recommendations on the program and input on future research.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Chart a Path for a Reflective Listening Culture

As the participants experienced, learning a new empathetic communication skill and developing new habits are difficult. If the results of empathetic communication in the workplace align with both US Air Force doctrine on leadership and promote the qualities of the DMVA's workplace of choice, then charting a strategic path to make the delivery, execution, and inculturation is critical. This includes an overall strategy addressing the intent and purpose behind taking the course and an end goal for what the impact the command desires to have in teaching this course. Such a strategic plan inherently requires roles and resources to enable execution. Feedback from alumni and non-alumni alike could help inform the strategy, as well as using both adult learning and organizational change models to develop a sound plan to drive long-term cultural change. The strategic plan should also mirror local MI ANG instructions on force development. Finally, the strategic plan should include how following up on reflective listening or other empathic communication skills.

Recommendation 2: Explore Reflective Listening in the Military Context

Since “Our Community Listens” is not a military program, blending reflective listening into the military context should address participants’ experience with feeling vulnerable reflectively listening to others and when others reflectively listen to them to reduce friction in accepting the skill. The military has unique responsibilities and reporting requirements that the MI ANG should address through both the strategy recommendation above but also in the execution and delivery of the course. Content creators should tailor the course to the military context and could also capitalize on tailoring specific role-playing during the course, especially since participants felt this was a valuable and different aspect from other training experiences. Discussions on reflective listening in formal and informal feedback and practicing the transition from reflective listening to military responsibilities can also supplement the change process through added vignettes or through continuous learning sessions. Essentially, the members of the MI ANG could benefit from practicing the very scenarios where the MI ANG wants to see reflective listening occur. Beyond the delivery of “Our Community Listens” in the MI ANG, charting a path for reflective listening could also apply to *The Airman Handbook*, to address the transition space between empathetic communication and military responsibilities.

Recommendation 3: Encourage Deliberate Practice to Impact Climate

From the strategic culture and the daily climate, encouraging opportunities to refresh, review, and practice the skills could come from deliberately targeting small teams and work centers. This comes into play in how the MI ANG recruits and targets members for the course without losing the diversity of the participants’ backgrounds and

cross-base exposure. The deliberate practice can also occur with continuous learning sessions, in-person to target teams and daily interactions, and as virtual sessions to bridge across the geographically separated bases.

Recommendation 4: Expand on Member for Life Opportunities

As one alumnus of the course described during a continuous learning session, holistically providing “better Airmen, better families” and, in fact, better Michiganders means that the influence of reflective listening could bolster the DMVA’s Member for Life. Participants are already transferring their skills to family and spouses and in their civilian and military workplaces. Looking to partnerships with the Michigan Army National Guard, the Michigan National Guard, and the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs are all places with the purpose to serve the Member for Life (MI DMVA 2021, 5). This support could particularly benefit during important milestones that touch every aspect of service life: deployments, retirements, separation from service, family milestones, veterans’ needs, and emergency and disaster management in community response. And reflective listening is already in active-duty populations, as demonstrated by “Our Community Listens” courses already held on Naval and Air Force active-duty bases.

Recommendation 5: Leaders Walk the Walk

Critical to organizational change is setting the expectation for integrating senior and mid-level leaders responsible for setting the example. The strategy recommendation should include senior- and mid-level leaders who could balance focusing on teams and

focusing on themselves, find the time and resources to attend in person, with their Airmen in their span of care or in a peer-level iteration of the course.

Future Research Recommendations

Future research could explore a variety of topics from the “Our Community Listens” course associated with climate or cultural changes. The application of reflective listening skills in telework or written communication environments holds potential. The acknowledgment of friction with the “type-A” personality deserves a deeper look, both from the larger leadership lens to dispel myths and address the angst associated with it in the workplace. In particular, the MI ANG exploring the behavioral tendencies within the organization would shed light on this specific tension in how leaders behave and how the MI ANG can integrate every member’s strengths in the organization. The transition from small teams to larger units also deserves careful study to anticipate and prepare for expansion, should that be the charge of the strategic plan. Similarly, this study focused on reflectively listening to others, and did not explore the members’ experience as recipient of reflective listening, which would provide MI ANG leadership with the site picture of one aspect of organizational climate and culture. A review into the impact of reflective listening on spouses and families would also benefit in understanding the connection to the DMVA’s Member (and Family) for Life. Finally, a deep dive into the military context can help members of the MI ANG synthesize the skills.

Conclusion

Learning how to reflectively listen to others involves all the challenges and benefits of transferring a complex interpersonal skill to many areas of life. This study

explored and provided recommendations on the MI ANG member's experiences of reflective listening through a qualitative, bounded case study using social constructivist framework with elements of positive psychology to create a collective narrative from semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis. Strategy and execution can encourage or hinder teaching a complex empathetic communication skill such as reflective listening. In the end, the influence of learning reflective listening skills is about how an organization teaches and supports a difficult skill that can contribute to organizational climate and culture and that reaches into the personal and professional lives of those in its span of care.

APPENDIX A

MEMORANDUM FROM HUMAN PROTECTIONS DIRECTOR



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
U.S. ARMY COMBINED ARMS CENTER
U.S. ARMY COMMAND AND GENERAL STAFF COLLEGE
100 STIMSON AVENUE
FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS 66027-2301

ATZL-LSA-H

March 8, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR: MAJ Jennifer Rudolph, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, KS 66027

SUBJECT: Approval - Modification to Conduct Human Subjects Research

1. Following careful review of your request for modification of CA-2022-95 "*Tell Me More: A Qualitative Bounded Case Study on Reflective Listening*", dated 7 MAR 2022, I have determined the requested changes do not alter its exempt status. The study remains exempt under Exemption #2 of 32 CFR 219.104(d)(i.): "*Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).*" The modification request involves a change from "focus group sessions" to "one-on-one interviews".
2. Your modification is approved with no additional stipulations. This modification is in effect on 8 MAR 2022. The study has been assessed as No Greater Than Minimal Risk and you are approved to enroll up to 15 subjects. Your protocol approval number 22-95 and the "acknowledged stipulations" of the approval letter dated 19 JAN 2022 remain in effect.
3. Any modifications to this study (including, but not limited to, changes in recruitment materials or procedures, investigators, inclusion/exclusion criteria, interview/survey questions, or data collection procedures, or increases in the number of participants enrolled) must be submitted as a written amendment for review and approval prior to implementing the change.
4. The data belong to CGSC and may not be shared, transferred, or exchanged with anyone outside your research team without prior authorization, except as specified in the protocol. POC is the undersigned at michelle.a.miller48.civ@army.mil at (913) 684-7311 or (913) 682-1185.

MILLER.MICHELLE.ANN. Digitally signed by
1123931048 MILLER.MICHELLE.ANN.1123931048
Date: 2022.03.08 10:29:58 -06'00'

MICHELLE A. MILLER, PhD
Human Protections Director
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

APPENDIX B

MEMORANDUM FROM MICHIGAN AIR NATIONAL GUARD

RE: SUSPENSE: 7 Mar 22; IDE Thesis Research Command Access

LOWENSTEIN, STEVEN M Lt Col USAF ANG HQMIANG/JA <steven.lowenstein@us.af.mil>

Sun 3/6/2022 10:23

To: TEFF, BRYAN J Brig Gen USAF ANG HQMIANG/NG MI ANG, ATAG-Air <bryan.teff@us.af.mil>

Cc: RUDOLPH, JENNIFER L Maj USAF ANG 217 ACOS/CPD <jennifer.rudolph.2@us.af.mil>

Brig Gen Teff

As reflected in red in the ESS, below, I've reviewed the attached and recommend your endorsement with FWing to Maj Rudolph.

V/R

STEVEN M. LOWENSTEIN, Lt Col, MIANG
State Staff Judge Advocate - Air
NGMI-JA-A

JFHQ Michigan Air National Guard
3496 N Martin Luther King Jr Blvd
Lansing, MI 48906

(517) 481-8205 (DSN is 623 - both inop/pending repair)
(713) 539-0473 (civilian cell)
Steven.Lowenstein@US.AF.mil

From: RUDOLPH, JENNIFER L Maj USAF ANG 217 ACOS/CPD <jennifer.rudolph.2@us.af.mil>
Sent: Saturday, March 5, 2022 2:17 PM
To: LOWENSTEIN, STEVEN M Lt Col USAF ANG HQMIANG/JA <steven.lowenstein@us.af.mil>
Subject: SUSPENSE: 7 Mar 22; IDE Thesis Research Command Access
Importance: High

Lt Col Lowenstein,

Good morning, sir! We haven't met before, but I'm assigned to the 217 COS down in Battle Creek. I'm currently at IDE (Army's CGSC), and I was just informed that Col Maltbie is retiring this weekend. He had been helping me with reviewing the access approval letter I need signed by Brig Gen Teff prior to commencing research.

BLUF: Could you please review the attached access approval letter?

Details: Col Maltbie and Brig Gen Teff already reviewed/signed the previous approval letter. I have to adjust from focus groups to interviews due to not having enough participant responses. The Army's Human Research director has already conditionally approved the change to interviews, and the research is categorized as exempted research since it does not pose more than minimal risk and does not involve medical research. The updated eSSS is below, including the email traffic between Col Maltbie and Brig Gen Teff. Both the previous and current access approval letters are attached.

like being on a student research deadline! My cell phone is below if you have any questions, and I'll be around all weekend.

Thanks sir!

-Maj Rudolph

v/r,

JENNIFER "SWAT" LEE C. RUDOLPH, Maj, ANG
Michigan Air National Guard
Cell: 248-231-3062
NIPR: Jennifer.Rudolph.2@us.af.mil

-----COORDINATION-----

Office	Action	Last Name/Rank/Date
MI ANG/SJA	Coord	Lowenstein, Lt Col, 6 Mar 22
MI ANG/ATAG-Air	Appr/Sig	Teff, Brig Gen, 25 Feb 22

-----STAFF SUMMARY-----

AO: Maj Jennifer Rudolph, CGSC Student, Comm 248-231-3062

SUSPENSE: 25 Feb 22

1. PURPOSE: The ATAG-Air approve Maj Jennifer Rudolph access to members of the Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG) to conduct research as described in Tab 1.

2. BACKGROUND:

- This research supports a Professional Military Education (PME) research thesis at the U.S. Army's Command and General Staff School for a member of the MI ANG.
- The purpose of this study is to explore how learning reflective listening influences members of the Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG) after attending the Our Community Listens course.

3. DISCUSSION:

- Doctrine and previous research discuss the value of demonstrating empathy and the connection to reflective listening.
- There is a gap of knowledge in understanding the narrative experiences of the MI ANG members who learned specific skills in the reflective listening class during the Our Community Listens course.
- The proposed study requires access permission to members and a human subjects protection review to conduct focus groups as detailed in Tab 1.

4. VIEWS OF OTHERS: None.

5. RECOMMENDATION: Brig Gen Teff approve/sign Tab 1.

//SIGNED//

JENNIFER LEE C. RUDOLPH, Maj, USAF
Student, U.S. Army CGSC
COMM 248-231-3062
Jennifer.Rudolph.2@us.af.mil

1 Tabs

1. Appendix A MI ANG Command Access Memo



HEADQUARTERS, MICHIGAN AIR NATIONAL GUARD

MICHIGAN NATIONAL GUARD JOINT FORCES HEADQUARTERS
3411 N MARTIN LUTHER KING JR BVLD
LANSING, MICHIGAN 48906-2934

23 February 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR MAJ JENNIFER RUDOLPH

FROM: ATAG-AIR

SUBJECT: Thesis Research Command Access

References: (a) Title 32 Code of Federal Regulations, Par 219, Protection of Human Subjects
(b) Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 3216.02, Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in DoD-Conducted and -Supported Research
(c) Air Force Guidance Memorandum to DODI3216.02_AFI40-402, Protection of Human Subjects and Adherence to Ethical Standards in Air Force Supported Research

1. I approve the request for access to members of the MI ANG for the study described below.

a. Name of Researcher: Maj Jennifer Rudolph, Student, U.S. Army Command & General Staff School (CGSC), Leavenworth, KS 66027

b. Title of Research: Tell Me More: A Qualitative Bounded Case Study on Reflective Listening

2. Summary: This research supports a Masters of Military Arts and Science thesis at the U.S. Army's CGSC. The purpose of this study is to explore how learning reflective listening influences members of the Michigan Air National Guard (MI ANG) after attending a communications course, titled Our Community Listens.

a. Doctrine and previous research discuss the value of demonstrating empathy, and the connection to reflective listening and leadership development. However, there is a gap of knowledge in understanding the narrative experiences of the MI ANG members who learned specific skills in the reflective listening class during the Our Community Listens course.

b. The study seeks to identify themes within the narratives of individual interviews among the members of the MI ANG who attended the Our Community Listens course since 2017. Leaders, current alumni of the course, and potential future alumni of the course will benefit from this methodical case study to understand how the reflective listening class influences members in making future decisions to provide resources for the course.

3. This approval is conditional on the researcher providing the CGSC Human Protections Director a copy of the protocol, informed consent forms from all participants, and institutional review board (IRB) approval. The researcher will conduct research only in accordance with the

IRB approval letter to answer the following research questions: How does learning reflective listening skills in the Our Community Listens course influence the members of the MI ANG? The secondary questions were how does learning reflective listening influence experiences of empathy among members of the MI ANG? How does learning reflective listening relate to the DMVA's Strategic Plan? How does learning reflective listening relate to US Air Force leadership doctrine?

4. Scope. I give permission for the researcher to use a third party to notify members of the MI ANG that have attended the course that the research is occurring. Participation in the interviews will be entirely voluntary and will be no longer than one hour. Members are authorized to participate while in duty status or on their off-duty time as their schedule permits.

a. Since the research involves human subjects, this conditional approval is based on the researcher conducting the study in accordance with the IRB approved protocols and DoDI 3216.02, to include maintenance and destruction of records. The researcher will inform me regarding any relevant unanticipated problem involving risk to subjects or others, or serious or continuing noncompliance.

5. The researcher will provide the MI ANG a copy of the findings after publishing and upon successful thesis defense. The data collected will not be shared, disseminated, or exchanged outside the research team without prior authorization, except as specified in the IRB approval letter.

6. The POC for any questions or concerns is Maj Jennifer Rudolph who can be reached at (248) 231-3062 or jennifer.rudolph.2@us.af.mil.

TEFF.BRYAN.JA
MES.1099500430

Digitally signed by
TEFF.BRYAN.JAMES.10995004
30
Date: 2022.03.06 12:52:15 -05'00'

BRYAN TEFF, Brigadier General, ANG
Assistant Adjutant General – Air

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was it like learning about reflective listening in the “Our Community Listens” course? (Key Question, Primary Research Question)
2. Can you tell me about any changes to your reflective listening as a result of taking the class? (Key Question, Primary Research Question)
3. How do you feel learning these skills impacted or did not impact your empathy skills? (Key Question, Secondary Research Question 1)
4. How do you envision learning reflective listening skills changing your military work environment? (Key Question, Secondary Research Questions 2 and 3)
5. Can you tell me how learning reflective listening skills did or did not meet your expectations? (Key Question, Secondary Research Question 3)
6. If you have used reflective listening, describe an example of a time or place where you used it (Secondary Research Questions 1, 2, and 3).
7. Are there any other experiences or situations that you want to share that involve using reflective listening? (Primary Research Question)

REFERENCE LIST

- Adams, Paul. 2006. "Exploring Social Constructivism: Theories and Practicalities." *Education* 3, no. 13: 243-257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004270600898893>.
- Arenas, Fil J., Daniel Connelly, and Michael Williams. 2017. *Developing Your Full Range of Leadership: Leveraging a Transformational Approach*. Maxwell Air Force Base. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press.
<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/AUPress/Books/AU-26.PDF>.
- Arnold, Kyle. 2014. "Behind the Mirror: Reflective Listening and Its Tain in the Work of Carl Rogers." *The Humanistic Psychologist* 41, no. 4: 354-69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873267.2014.913247>.
- Batson, C. Daniel, Nadia Ahmad, David A. Lishner, and Jo-Ann Tsand. 2002. "Empathy and Altruism." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, 485-98. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baxter, Pamela, and Susan Jack. 2008. "Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers." *The Qualitative Report* 13, no. 4 (December): 544-59. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573>.
- Bélanger, Jocelyn J., Antonio Pierro, Barbara Barbieri, Nicola A. De Carlo, Alessandra Falco, and Arie W. Kruglanski. 2015. "One Size Doesn't Fit All: The Influence of Supervisors' Power Tactics and Subordinates' Need for Cognitive Closure on Burnout and Stress." *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 25, no. 2: 287-300. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1359432X.2015.1061999>.
- Benson, J., & Dresdow, S. 2015. "Design for Thinking: Engagement in an Innovation Project." *Journal of Innovative Education* 13, no. 3: 377-410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dsji.12069>.
- Braillon, Alain, and Francoise Taiebi. 2020. "Practicing 'Reflective Listening' Is a Mandatory Prerequisite for Empathy." *Patient Education & Counseling* 103, no. 9 (September): 1866-67. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2020.03.024>.
- Brinkmann, Svend. 2014. "Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing." In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Patricia Leavy, 277-99. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bryant, Antony. 2014. "The Grounded Theory Model." In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Patricia Leavy, 116-136. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Bubandt, Nils and Rane Willerslev. 2015. "The Dark Side of Empathy: Mimesis, Deception, and the Magic of Alterity." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 1: 5-34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417514000589>.
- Carlsen, Benedicte, and Claire Glenton. 2011. "What about N? A Methodological Study of Sample-Size Reporting in Focus Group Studies." *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 11, no. 26: 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-26>.
- Cedar, Bruce, and Ronald F. Levant. 2010. "A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Parent Effectiveness Training." *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 18, no. 4: 373-384. DOI: 10.1080/01926189008250986.
- Chapman Foundation for Caring Communities (CFCC). 2019. "Our Community Listens Communication Skills Training." Barry-Wehmiller Companies, Inc., St. Louis, MO.
- . 2022. "Our Community Listens Course Evaluations." Barry-Wehmiller Companies, Inc., St. Louis, MO.
- . n.d.a. "Home." Accessed 29 April 2022. <https://www.chapmancommunities.org/>.
- . n.d.b. "Our Core Class." Accessed 29 April 2022. <https://www.chapmancommunities.org/learn>.
- Chief of Staff, United States Air Force (CSAF). 2020a. *Accelerate Change or Lose*. Washington, DC: United States Air Force, August. https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/csaf/CSAF_22/CSAF_22_Strategic_Approach_Accelerate_Change_or_Lose_31_Aug_2020.pdf.
- . 2020b. *CSAF Action Orders: To Accelerate Change Across the Air Force*. Washington, DC United States Air Force. https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/csaf/CSAF_Action_Orders_Letter_to_the_Force.pdf.
- . 2022. Memorandum. Subject: Airmen's Time. United States Air Force, Washington, DC, 8 April.
- Clark, Melissa A., Melissa M. Robertson, and Stephen Young. 2019. "I Feel Your Pain': A Critical Review of Organizational Research on Empathy." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 40, no. 2 (February): 166–92. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2348>.
- Clark, Michael D., Todd A. Roberts, and Teresa Chandler. 2020. "Motivational Interviewing for Community Corrections: Expanding a Relationship-Based Approach with Exemplar Implementation." *Federal Probation* 84, no. 2: 35–43. <https://www.uscourts.gov/federal-probation-journal/2020/09/motivational-interviewing-community-corrections-expanding>.

- Creswell, John. 2013. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Dekel, Rachel, Alansa Siegel, Shimon Fridkin, and Vlad Svetlitzky. 2018. "The Double-Edged Sword: The Role of Empathy in Military Veterans' Partners Distress." *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 10, no. 2: 216-224. <https://doi.apa.org/doi/10.1037/tra0000265>.
- Deployable Training Division, Joint Staff J7. 2020. *The Joint Command Senior Enlisted Leader Insights and Best Practices Focus Paper*. 3rd ed. Washington, DC: J7 Deputy Director for Joint Training, Joint Chiefs of Staff, January. https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/fp/csel_fp3rd_ed.pdf?ver=2020-01-13-083410-863.
- Dvir, Taly, Dov Eden, Bruce J. Avolio, and Boas Shamir. 2022. "Impact of Transformational Leadership on Follower Development and Performance: A Field Experiment." *Academy of Management Journal* 45, no. 4: 735–44. <https://doi-org.lumen.cgscarl.com/10.2307/3069307>.
- Eichaker, David. 2021. "Michigan Air National Guard Invests in Airmen; Families through Communication Training." Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, 19 April. <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/394158/michigan-air-national-guard-invests-airmen-families-through-communication-training>.
- Febbraro, Angela R., Brian McKee, and Sharon L. Riedel, eds. 2008. RTO-TR-HFM-120, *Multinational Military Operations and Intercultural Factors*. Brussels, Belgium: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Science and Technology Organisation. [https://www.sto.nato.int/publications/STO%20Technical%20Reports/RTO-TR-HFM-120/\\$\\$TR-HFM-120-ALL.pdf](https://www.sto.nato.int/publications/STO%20Technical%20Reports/RTO-TR-HFM-120/$$TR-HFM-120-ALL.pdf).
- Fisher, Dalmar. 1994. *Communications in Organizations*. 2nd. ed. St. Paul: Jaico Publishing House.
- Fontain, Matthew J. 2016. "Understanding a Complex World: Why an Emphasis on Empathy Could Better Enable Army Leaders to Win." Master's Thesis, US Army Command General Staff College, June. <https://doi.org/doi:10.7282/T37H1GJS>.
- Forgeard, Marie J. C., Eranda Jayawickreme, Margaret L. Kern, Martin E. P. Seligman. 2011. "Doing the Right Thing: Measuring Wellbeing for Public Policy." *International Journal for Wellbeing* 1, no. 1: 76-106. <https://www.internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/view/15>.
- Garner, Harry C. 2009. "Empathy: A True Leader Skill." *Military Review* (November-December): 84–92. https://usacac.army.mil/sites/default/files/documents/cace/DCL/DCL_GarnerArticle.pdf.

- Gautam, D. K., and D. Basnet. 2021. "Organizational Culture for Training Transfer: The Mediating Role of Motivation." *International Journal of Organizational Analysis* 29, no. 3: 769-787. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-04-2020-2147>.
- Hardy, Lew, Calum A. Arthur, Graham Jones, Adie Shariff, Kathy Munnoch, Izzy Isaacs, and Adrian J. Allsopp. 2010. "The Relationship between Transformational Leadership Behaviors, Psychological, and Training Outcomes in Elite Military Recruits." *Leadership Quarterly* 21, no. 1: 20-32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.10.002>.
- Harter, Susan. 2002. "Authenticity." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, 382-94. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, John H., Brian G. Pauwels, and Susan Zickmund. 2002. "Relationship Connection: The Role of Minding in the Enhancement of Closeness." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, 423-33. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heaven, Cathy, Jenny Clegg, and Peter Maguire. 2006. "Transfer of Communication Skills Training from Workshop to Workplace: The Impact of Clinical Supervision." *Patient Education and Counseling* 60, no. 3: 313-325. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2005.08.008>.
- Henrick, Amy. 2021. "Empathy: A Leader's Greatest Skill." Bass Military Scholars Program at Vanderbilt University, January 12. <https://www.vanderbilt.edu/bass-military-scholars/2021/01/12/empathy-a-leaders-greatest-skill/>.
- Hewitt-Taylor, Jaquelina. 2001. "Use of Constant Comparative Analysis in Qualitative Research." *Nursing Standard* 15, no. 42: 29-42. <https://doi.org/10.7748/ns2001.07.15.42.39.c3052>.
- Hughes, Ashley M., Stephanie Zajac, Jacqueline M Spencer, and Eduardo Salas. 2018. "A Checklist for Facilitating Training Transfer in Organizations." *International Journal of Training and Development* 22, no. 4: 334-345. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijtd.12141>.
- Gordon Training International. n.d. "Leader Effectiveness Training (L.E.T.)." Accessed 21 January 2022. <https://www.gordontraining.com/leader-effectiveness-training-le-t/>.
- Guest, Greg, Kathleen. M. MacQueen, and Emily E. Namey. 2012. *Applied Thematic Analysis*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Jonsdottir, Inga Jona, and Kari Kristinsson. 2020. "Active Listening: Is It the Forgotten Dimension in Managerial Communication?" *International Journal of Listening* 34, no. 3: 178-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2019.1613156>.

- Kattan, Ayelet. 2013. "Conceptualization Cognitive-Behavioral Supervision: An Exploration Study of Supervising Psychologists." Ph.D. diss., Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, October. <https://doi.org/doi:10.7282/T37H1GJS>.
- Katz, Neil, and Kevin McNulty. 1994. "Reflective Listening." Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs, Syracuse University. <https://www.maxwell.syr.edu/uploadedfiles/parcc/cmc/reflective%20listening%20nk.pdf>.
- Kayaalp, Alper. 2018. "Transformational Leadership, Organizational Climate and Individual Creativity from a Military Culture Perspective." *Electronic International Journal of Education, Arts, and Science* 4, no. 9: 91–110. <http://www.eijeas.com/index.php/EIJEAS/article/view/136>.
- Keyes, Corey L.M., and Shane J. Lopez. 2002. "Toward a Science of Mental Health: Positive Directions in Diagnosis and Interventions." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, 45–59. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Konrath, Sara, Olivier Corneille, Brad J. Bushman, and Olivier Luminet. 2013. "The Relationship Between Narcissistic Exploitativeness, Dispositional Empathy, and Emotion Recognition Abilities." *Journal of Non-Verbal Behavior* 38: 129–143. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-013-0164-y>.
- Koureas, Gabriel. 2018. "Selective Empathy in the Re-designed Imperial War Museum London: Heroes and Perpetrators." In *Perpetrating Selves: Doing Violence, Performing Identity*, edited by Claire Bielby and Jeffrey Stevenson Murer, 199–220. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-96785-1_10.
- Kotter. n.d. "The 8-Step Process for Leading Change." Kotter, Inc. Accessed 29 April 2022. <https://www.kotterinc.com/8-step-process-for-leading-change/>.
- Kovach, Mary, and Miami Middletown. 2019. "Transformational Leadership Produces Higher Achievement Outcomes: A Review in Education and Military Contexts." *Association for University Regional Campuses of Ohio Journal* 25 (Spring): 137–47. https://www.aurco.org/Journals/AURCO_Journal_2019/Kovach_Transformational_AURCO19.pdf.
- Krueger, Richard A., and Mary Anne Casey. 2015. *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Kvale, Steinar, and Svend Brinkmann. 2009. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Marriam, Sharan B., and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. 2016. *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. 4th ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Mahoney, Michael J. 2002. "Constructivism and Positive Psychology." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, 745–50. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McDougall, John. 2019. "Empathetic Leadership: Understanding the Human Domain." *Military Review* (November-December): 28–34.
<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/ND-19/McDougall-Empathetic-Leadership.pdf>.
- Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MI DMVA). 2021. "Strategic Plan." Lansing, MI. <https://minationalguard.dodlive.mil/Portals/58/Documents/2021%20DMVA%20Strategic%20Plan.pdf?ver=TJh11bgBhbdkdOmrwNSsTw%3d%3d>.
- Michigan National Guard (MING). 2021. "Brig. Gen. Bryan Teff." Michigan National Guard Leadership. <https://minationalguard.dodlive.mil/About-Us/Leadership/Article/2554060/brig-gen-bryan-teff/>.
- Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña. 2014. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- MindTools. n.d. "Active Listening." Accessed 24 January 2022.
<https://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/ActiveListening.htm>.
- Mitchell, Nelson. 2020. "Empathy: Pass it On." Lessons in Leadership: A Commentary Series from the Leaders of the Mighty Ninety, September 14.
<https://www.warren.af.mil/News/Commentaries/Article/2347465/empathy-pass-it-on/>.
- Møller, Jane Ege, Louise Binow Kjaer, Emma Helledie, Lone Folmer Nielsen, and Bente Vigh Malling. 2021. "Transfer of Communication Teaching Skills from University to the Clinical Workplace – Does It Happen? A Mixed Methods Study." *BMC Medical Education* 21, no. 1 (December): 433.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-021-02834-1>.
- Muncy, Lucinda M. 2020. "Experiences of Human Resource Professionals Regarding Empathy in the Workplace." PhD diss., Capella University, September.
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/d6eac8a3cb39bcbbc799c696439d8977/1?cb1=51922&diss=y&pq-origsite=gscholar>.
- Murre, Jaap M., and Joeri Dros. 2015. "Replication and Analysis of Ebbinghaus' Forgetting Curve." *Public Library of Science One* 10, no. 7: 1-2. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0120644>.
- National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. *The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research*. 1978. Bethesda, MD: US

- Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed 24 January 2022.
<https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/read-the-belmont-report/index.html>.
- National Research Council, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Board on Behavioral, Cognitive, and Sensory Sciences, and Committee on the Youth Population and Military Recruitment (NRC). 2003. *Attitudes, Aptitudes, and Aspirations of American Youth: Implications for Military Recruitment*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. ProQuest Ebook Central.
- Nowell, Lorelli S., Jill M. Norris, Deborah E. White, and Nancy J. Moules. 2017. "Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16, no. 1: 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1609406917733847>.
- Oliver, Daniel G. 2005. "Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflective in Qualitative Research." *Social Forces* 84, no. 2: 1273-1289. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2006.0023>.
- Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J., Rebecca K. Frels, Eunjin Hwang. 2016. "Mapping Saldaña's Coding Methods onto the Literature Review Process." *Journal of Educational Issues* 1, no 2: 130-150. <https://doi.org/10.5296/jei.v2i1.8931>.
- Ogola, Mary Ganga Ogutu, Damary Sikalieh, and Teresia Kavoo Linge. 2017. "The Influence of Individualized Consideration Leadership Behaviour on Employee Performance in Small and Medium Enterprises in Kenya." *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 8, no. 2:163–73. https://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_8_No_2_February_2017/19.pdf.
- Palincsar, A. Sullivan. 1998. "Social Constructivist Perspectives on Teaching and learning." *Annual Review of Psychology* 49: 345-75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/Annurev.psych.49.1.345>.
- Parmar, Belinda. 2016. "Want to be More Empathetic? Here's Some Advice from a Navy SEAL." World Economic Forum, December 13. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/12/what-a-navy-seal-can-teach-business-leaders-about-empathy/>.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. 2015. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Pera, Rebecca, Giampaolo Viglia, Laura Grazzini, and Daniele Dalli. 2019. "When Empathy Precent Negative Reviewing Behvavior." *Annals of Tourism Research* 75: 265-278. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2019.01.005>.
- Pollak, Kathryn I. 2011. "Physician Empathy and Listening: Associations with Patient Satisfaction and Autonomy." *The Journal of the American Board of Family Medicine* 24, no. 6: 665–72. <https://www.jabfm.org/content/24/6/665>.

- Prosci. n.d. "The Prosci ADKAR Model." Accessed 29 April 2022.
<https://www.prosci.com/methodology/adkar>.
- Randall, William L., and Cassandra Phoenix. 2009. "The Problem with Truth in Qualitative Interviews: Reflections from a Narrative Perspective." *Qualitative Research in Sport and Exercise*, 1, no. 2: 25-140. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19398440902908993>.
- Rautalinko, Erik. 2013. "Reflective Listening and Open-Ended Questions in Counselling: Preferences Moderated by Social Skills and Cognitive Ability." *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research* 13, no. 1: 24–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733145.2012.68738>.
- Rautalinko, Erik, and Hans-Olof Lisper. 2004. "Effects of Training Reflective Listening in a Corporate Setting." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 18: 281–99. <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:JOBU.0000016712.36043.4f>.
- Rautalinko, Erik, Hans-Olof Lisper, and Bo Ekehammar. 2007. "Reflective Listening in Counseling: Effects of Training Time and Evaluator Social Skills." *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 61, no. 2: 191–209. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2007.61.2.191>.
- Rogers, Carl R. 1975. "Empathic: An Unappreciated Way of Being." *The Counseling Psychologist* 5, no. 2: 2–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001100007500500202>.
- Rogers, Carl R., Harold C. Lyon, and Reinhard Tausch. 2014. *On Becoming an Effective Teacher: Person-Centered Teaching, Psychology, Philosophy, and Dialogues with Carl R. Rogers and Harold Lyon*. London: Routledge.
- Rogers, Carl R., and Richard E. Farson. 1987. "Active Listening." In *Communicating in Business Today*, edited by Ruth G. Newman, Marie A. Danziger, and Mark Cohen, 1-5. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company.
https://wholebeinginstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/Rogers_Farson_Active-Listening.pdf.
- Rollnick, Stephen, Sebastian G. Kaplan, and Richard Rutschman. 2019. *Motivational Interviewing in Schools: Conversations to Improve Behavior and Learning*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Russell-Farnham. 2009. "Empathy as a Combat Capability." *Security Challenges* 5, no. 1: 1-13. <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/52347>.
- Sah, Lalita Kumar, Devendra Raj Singh, and Rajeeb Kumar Sah. 2020. "Conducting Qualitative Interviews using Virtual Communication Tools amid COVID-19 Pandemic: A Learning Opportunity for Future Research." *Journal of the Nepal Medical Association*, 58, no. 232: 1103–1106. <https://doi.org/10.31729/jnma.5738>.

- Saldaña, Johnny. 2016. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London: SAGE.
- Salmons, Janet. 2012. *Cases in Online Interview Research*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Salovey, Peter, John D. Mayer, and David Caruso. 2002. "The Positive Psychology of Emotional Intelligence." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, 159–71. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Secretary of the Air Force Public Affairs (SAF). 2021. "Air Force Announces Airmen Leadership Qualities." United States Air Force, 2 February. <https://www.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2490030/air-force-announces-airmen-leadership-qualities/>.
- Secretary of Defense (SECDEF). 2021. Memorandum for all Department of Defense Employees. Subject: Message to the Force. Washington, DC, 4 March. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Mar/04/2002593656/-1/-1/0/secretary-lloyd-j-austin-iii-message-to-the-force.pdf>.
- . 2018. *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Defense. <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.
- Seligman Martin E.P. 2005. "Positive Psychology, Positive Prevention, and Positive Therapy." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez, 3-9. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2011. *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.
- Schabracq, Marc J., and Iva Embley Smit. 2007. "Leadership and Ethics: The Darker Side of Management." In *Research Companion to the Dysfunctional Workplace: Management Challenges and Symptoms*, edited by Janice Langan-Fox, Cary L. Cooper, and Richard J. Klimoski, 110-124. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Sim, Julius, and Jackie Waterfield. 2019. "Focus Group Methodology: Some Ethical Challenges." *Quality & Quantity* 53: 3003–22. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-019-00914-5>.
- Simon, Robert I. 2008. *Bad Men Do What Good Men Dream: A Forensic Psychiatrist Illuminates the Darker Side of Human Behavior*. Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, Inc.
- Simons, Helen. 2014. "Case Study Research: In-Depth Understanding in Context." In *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Patricia Leavy, 455-70. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Snyder, C. R., and Shane J. Lopez, eds. 2002. *Handbook of Positive Psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sosik, John J., Fil J. Arenas, Jae Uk Chun, and Ziya Ete. 2018. "Character into Action: How Officers Demonstrate Strengths with Transformational Leadership." *Air & Space Power Journal*, 32, no. 3: 4–25. https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/ASPJ/journals/Volume-32_Issue-3/F-Sosik_etal.pdf.
- Spoehr, Thomas, and Bridget Handy. 2018. *The Looming National Security Crisis: Young Americans Unable to Serve in the Military*. Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation. <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/the-looming-national-security-crisis-young-americans-unable-serve-the-military>.
- State of Michigan, n.d. "About DMVA." Accessed April 29, 2022. <https://www.michigan.gov/dmva/about>.
- Talvio, Markus, Kirsti Lonka, Erkki Komulainen, Marjo Juusela, and Taru Lintunen. 2013. "Revisiting Gordon's Teacher Effectiveness Training: An Intervention Study on Teachers' Social and Emotional Learning." *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology* 11, no. 3: 693-716. <https://doi.org/10.14204/ejrep.31.13073>.
- Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy Center (TEAL). 2011. "Adult Learning Theories Factsheet No. 11." Literacy Information and Communication System (LINCS). US Department of Education, Washington, DC. https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/11_%20TEAL_Adult_Learning_Theory.pdf.
- Terry, Christopher, and Jeff Cain. 2016. "The Emerging Issue of Digital Empathy." *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 80, no 4: 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe80458>.
- Thompson, Scott K. 2018. "Empathy: The (Missing) Foundation of Effective Operational Art." In *What Do Others Think and How Do We Know What They Are Thinking?*, Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) White Paper, edited by Mariah Yager, 17-21. Washington, DC: J39, Joint Staff, March. https://nsiteam.com/social/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/White-Paper_What-Do-Others-Think_March2018_FINAL.pdf.
- Tobase, Lucia, Sandra Helena Cardoso, Renata Tavares Franco Rodrigues, and Heloisa Helena Ciqueto Peres. 2021. "Empathic Listening: Welcoming Strategy for Nursing Professional in Coping with the Coronavirus Pandemic." *Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem* 74, supplement 1: 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2020-0721>.

- Tost, Leigh Plunkett, Francesa Gino, and Richard P. Larrick. 2012. "Power, Competitiveness, and Advice Taking: Why the Powerful Don't Listen." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 117, no. 1: 53–65. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2011.10.001>.
- Tweedell, Cynthia Benn. 2000. "A Theory of Adult Learning and Implications for Practice." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL, October 25-28, 2000. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED446702.pdf>.
- US Air Force (USAF). 2014. Air Force Form 724, *Airman Comprehensive Assessment Worksheet (2dLt Thru Col)*. Washington, DC: USAF, January.
- . 2017a. Air Force Form 931, *Airman Comprehensive Assessment (ACA) Worksheet (AB Thru TSgt)*. Washington, DC: USAF, July.
- . 2017b. Air Force Form 932, *Airmen Comprehensive Assessment (MSgt Thru CMsgt)*. Washington, DC: USAF, September.
- . 2017c. Air Force Handbook 1, *The Airman Handbook*. Washington, DC: USAF, October.
- . 2019. Air Force Policy Directive 36-26, *Total Force Development and Management*. Washington, DC: USAF, October.
- . 2021a. Air Force Doctrine Publication 3-99, *Department of the Air Force Role in Joint All Domain Operations*. Washington, DC: USAF, November.
- . 2021b. Air Force Form 724-A, *Airman Comprehensive Assessment Addendum*. Washington, DC: USAF, January.
- US Space Force (USSF). 2021. "The Guardian Ideal." *Air Force Magazine*, September. <https://www.airforcemag.com/app/uploads/2021/09/21SEPT-USSF-GUARDIAN-IDEAL.pdf>.
- Vest, Bonnie M. 2013. "Citizen, Soldier, or Citizen-Soldier? Negotiating Identity in the US National Guard." *Armed Forces & Society* 39, no. 4 (October): 602–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327X12457725>.
- Walker, Lisa. 2019. "The Importance of Cultivating Empathy in the Workplace." *Forbes*, November 18. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2019/11/18/the-importance-of-cultivating-empathy-in-the-workplace/?sh=77dc38d17851>.
- Walters, C. H. 2001. "Assumptions of Qualitative Research Methods." *Perspectives In Learning*, 2, no. 1: 60-62. <http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil/vol2/iss1/14>.

- Walters, Scott T., Melissa Alexander, and Amanda M. Vader. 2008. "The Officer Responses Questionnaire: A Procedure for Measuring Reflective Listening in Probation and Parole Settings." *Federal Probation* 72, no. 2: 67–70.
- Waterman, Alan S. 2013. "The Humanistic Psychology–Positive Psychology Divide: Contrasts in Philosophical Foundations." *American Psychologist* 68, no. 3: 124–133. <https://doi.apa.org/doi/10.1037/a0032168>.
- Weger Jr., Harry, Gina Castle Bell, Elizabeth M. Minei, and Melissa C. Robinson. 2014. "The Relative Effectiveness of Active Listening in Initial Interactions." *International Journal of Listening* 28, no. 1: 13–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2013.813234>.
- Winkie, Davis. 2021. "New in 2021: The National Guard Will Stay Busy in 2021." *Army Times*, 4 January. <https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2021/01/04/new-in-2021-the-national-guard-will-stay-busy-in-2021/>.
- Wiseman, Theresa. 1996. "A Concept Analysis of Empathy." *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 23, no. 6: 1162–1167. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2648.1996.12213.x>.
- Yin, Robert K. 2014. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- . 2018. *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*. 6th ed. Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Zielinski, William J. 2020. "A Listening Approach: Equipping Leaders to Listen for PTSD." Research Report, Air University, April. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1108147.pdf>.
- Zilincik, Samuel. 2022. "The Role of Emotions in Military Strategy." *Texas National Security Review* 5, no. 2: 11–25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/24029>.