

## Education + Training



**Building Heroes: Building bridges to support the transition  
from military to civilian employment in the construction  
industry**

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3 **Building Heroes: Building bridges to support the transition from military to civilian**  
4 **employment in the construction industry**  
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11 **Abstract**  
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13 **Purpose:** Many veterans struggle with the civilian world and the loss of identity  
14 associated with leaving the services. This research investigates the Building Heroes Charity's  
15 role in assisting service leavers transitioning to civil employment, in the United Kingdom (UK),  
16 and what can be learned from the training and support.  
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23 **Design/Methodology:** An exploratory case study design was chosen to investigate the  
24 transition from military to civilian employment. The case study consisted of 12 in-depth  
25 interviews consisting of nine veterans, who had attended the Building Heroes courses, and  
26 three course tutors.  
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33 **Findings:** The Building Heroes Charity does have an important role to fulfil in the  
34 transition of military personnel from the services to civilian work. There are positive outcomes  
35 that complement the work done by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) but there still needs  
36 to be recognition that the needs of the veterans do differ by age, transferability of competencies  
37 and the financial resources available.  
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45 **Originality:** Although there is limited research into the employment of veterans there is  
46 evidence to demonstrate that veterans are more likely to suffer from depression and potential  
47 homelessness than non-service personnel. This research is unique in investigating the role of a  
48 charity whose main purpose is to improve the employability of veterans by reducing the  
49 competency skills gap between the military and construction industry.  
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3 **Keywords:** Military, career transition, work-related identity, construction industry, veterans,  
4 military personnel, charity  
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## 10 **Introduction**

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12 **This paper presents research into the Building Heroes Charity, which provides construction**  
13 **industry training for military service personnel transitioning into civilian employment.** The  
14 charity was founded in 2014 and assists over 1,000 service leavers annually by providing  
15 training and employment support with a network of employers in the construction industry  
16 (Building Heroes, 2021).  
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28 The Building Heroes Charity organises courses that include level 1 construction, level 2  
29 welding and the operation of plant machinery. These courses are taught in partnership with  
30 Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE) providers (Building Heroes, 2023). The  
31 courses are intense and can last up to 5 weeks with the primary purpose of aiding the transition  
32 from the military to the construction industry. **This research paper investigates the transition**  
33 **from military to civilian employment and the assistance Building Heroes Charity gives to the**  
34 **service leavers. Interviews with Building Heroes' students and tutors were conducted to**  
35 **establish the assistance, and benefits, of attending the courses and to establish**  
36 **recommendations of how to improve this transition going forward.**  
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## 52 **The transition from military to civilian life**

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54 It is well documented that ex-military service personnel find the transition from military to  
55 civilian life a difficult one (Burnett-Zeigler *et al.*, 2011). There are many hurdles to overcome  
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3 even though the military teaches important skills and resilience for future employment (Turner,  
4 2021). In the UK around 20,000 service personnel leave the military every year due to the end  
5 of the commission, redundancy or military discharge. The military service has its own Career  
6 Transition Partnership (CTP) that provides training and support for service personnel leaving  
7 the services. According to the Military of Defence (MoD, np, 2012), 'each of these individuals  
8 has access to tailored support and advice years before they are discharged, to ensure they are  
9 as well prepared as possible'. There is, however, evidence to suggest not all service personnel  
10 gain access to this support. Research undertaken by Fisher *et al.* (2021, p.16) found only 52.6%  
11 had support from the CTP when leaving the services, and 16.9% said they received no support  
12 at all. The QinetiQ report (Fisher, *et al.*, 2021) titled 'Longer-Term Employment Outcomes of  
13 Ex-Service Personnel' found 'resettlement support was not felt to be particularly helpful in  
14 securing employment in the short-term (only 45.9% agreed it was), and even less so in the  
15 longer-term (23.9% agreed).

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37 Career transitions happen to almost every person during their working career, be it a transition  
38 to a different role or a changing orientation of a role already held (Sullivan and Al Ariss, 2021).  
39 Several factors contribute to whether the career transition is a positive experience. According  
40 to Schlossberg (1981), these are identified as firstly, the perception of the transition itself,  
41 whether is it a positive or negative experience, secondly, the size of the differences between  
42 the pre and post-transition environment and lastly the actual characteristics of the individual,  
43 for example their values and demography. The individual, who is transitioning, will go through  
44 a disequilibrium in their identity as they adapt to their new environment and the expectations  
45 of the new career. This period of disequilibrium is very destabilising for the individual and can  
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3 be quite traumatic, but for military personnel, it is even more complex due to the added  
4 complexities of social integration and self-realisation after leaving the military (Tütlys,  
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6 Winterton and Liesionienė, 2019).  
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13 Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014) assert that when an individual joins an organisation there  
14 will be a disruption to their work-related identity (WRI). WRI is defined as: ‘aspects of identity  
15 and self-definition that are tied to participation in the activities of work...or membership in  
16 work-related groups, organisations, occupations or professions’ (Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar,  
17 2010, p. 266). An individual negotiates disruptions to their WRI as they surrender their current  
18 equilibrium and enter the liminal period. This WRI loss is represented by the loss of a value or  
19 an aspect of a professional identity. The author’s (2017) research into trainee teachers found  
20 there was evidence of teachers going through a period of disequilibrium as they discovered the  
21 realities of teaching. This was supported by the student-teacher narratives by questioning their  
22 own identities and who they were.  
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38 This WRI loss is represented by the loss of an aspect of a professional identity. An extreme  
39 example would be service personnel who experience a workplace injury and the need to rethink  
40 their work identity. A less extreme example might be a promotion within the military. Whilst  
41 the WRI experiences disequilibrium the individual enters the ‘liminal interval’ (Conroy and  
42 O’Leary-Kelly, 2014). The liminal period is a transition between the old and new self (Figure  
43 1). During this liminal period, the identity experiences a period of disequilibrium as there is a  
44 reconciliation between the personal and professional sides that produces the professional  
45 identity (Evans, 2011).  
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A successful transition to civilian employment, even when relatively smooth, may still be fraught with difficulties due to the cultural and organisational changes experienced. Many ex-military personnel will struggle with their WRI identity and who they are (Herman and Yarwood, 2014). Guthrice-Gower (2022) posits the transition as a ‘reverse culture shock’ as the personnel loses the support and social norms of the military. Many are trained to take orders, in a highly structured way, and struggle with the more laissez-faire approach to management, whilst other veterans thrive with such freedom. As Rutner *et al.* (2012) emphasise military personnel have experienced highly centralised decision-making organisations that favour obedience and loyalty, and although these qualities may be desirable they can also conflict with the values sort in civilian employment.

The transition of service personnel to civilian life can be seamless but can also lead to unemployment and subsequently other issues, such as drinking, debt, homelessness and relationship breakdowns (Ashcroft, 2014 and Atherton, 2009). Common Mental Disorders (CMD), such as depression and anxiety are more prevalent in military personnel. Up to 20% of military personnel have CMD; double that of the general population (Irizar, 2020). Service personnel who do not quickly find employment can experience loneliness and social isolation (Guthrice-Gower, 2022). The British Legion (2020, p.5) found that 65% of veterans experienced loneliness and felt socially isolated since leaving the military. The veterans felt in limbo and detached from both military and civilian society. Many of these problems can be overcome if there is an improved likelihood of finding steady future employment.

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There has been limited research into the transition of ex-military personnel to civilian employment (Ashcroft, 2014). Most of the research has investigated the movement of ex-service persons into other uniform employment, such as the prison service where 75% of the working population consists of ex-military personnel (Turner, 2021, p.71). Turner (2021) suggests military personnel are attracted to other uniform services as they provide a familiar structure. Wang *et al.*, (2023) ascertained it was easier for officers in the services to obtain employment after leaving than the service personnel from the ranks, and this was due to better education and contacts. Officers had more access to the social contacts needed to secure employment whereas the lower ranks did not possess the social capital. Tutlys *et al.* (2019, p.322) argue that ‘...skills and competencies are socially determined, socially constructed phenomena, which makes the social context of their construction highly important’. Occupations have a uniqueness of requirements for their profession which may make it more difficult to transfer between sectors, such as the military to the civilian world. Evidence suggests the skills acquired through the military are just not understood in the civilian workplace which can be an additional hindrance when transitioning to civilian employment (Letonturier, 2011).

There have been several small initiatives encouraging ex-military into industry. In 2013, veterans were allowed to retrain in the ‘wind turbine’ industry. Maersk set up a training programme providing ex-military the chance to work towards a level 2 diploma in safety and working with wind turbines (The Sun, 2013). The Skills for Logistics (SfL) programme, an East Midland Traineeship Scheme, was set up to train ex-military personnel through a 10-week logistics scheme (Skills for Logistics, 2023). Some programmes do exist but it is relatively

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3 small compared to the population of military leavers every year, however, these programmes  
4 are paramount in supporting military personnel in the transition to civilian employment and  
5 building new social connections (Guthrice and Gower, 2022). To improve the transition of ex-  
6 military personnel there needs to be a fostering of professional skills typical of the new  
7 employment sector (Tutlys *et al.*, 2019). The use of recognisable qualifications both academic  
8 and professional will assist in this transition (Proteau and Pruvost, 2008).  
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20 In 2017, the estimated size of the population of ex-service personnel was 2.1 million, 1.45  
21 million of whom were aged over 65 (Fisher *et al.*, 2021, p.36). There is a lack of data on ex-  
22 serving personnel but as Fisher *et al.* (2021, p.36) report ‘around 57% of ex-service personnel  
23 work in the following five industries: manufacturing, transport and storage, public  
24 administration and defence, construction and health and social work.’ Up until 2014, the MoD  
25 published a detailed report of service personnel leavers, and the latest figures showed 67% of  
26 the lower ranks left by the age of 34, with nearly 29% under 24 and 51% under 30 years of age  
27 accumulative (MoD, np, 2014). This shows that just over 50% of lower ranks in the tri-services  
28 left by the time they were 30 years of age with nearly 40 years of their working life left (MoD,  
29 2014).  
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### **The construction industry: employment opportunities for ex-military**

48 The construction and civil engineering sectors in the UK are significant employers in the  
49 economy. In the UK, 2.9 million are employed in construction with the strongest rises in the  
50 steel sector (7.9%), civil engineering operatives (7.1%) and civil engineers (6.9%) (CITB,  
51 2022, p.14). The Construction Skills Network (CSN) report predicts an extra quarter of a  
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3 million extra construction workers may be needed by 2026, with vacancies in the construction  
4 industry recently hitting a 20-year high (CSN, 2022, p.14).  
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8 Over the last decade, the shortages of skilled labour in the construction industry have been  
9 magnified by several factors. One of the reasons is the age of the workforce; the construction  
10 industry has an aging population that is not being replaced by the younger generation. Half of  
11 construction workers are over the age of 45 (McNair and Flynn, 2006). There has been an  
12 uptake in students undertaking apprenticeships in construction, but the apprenticeship  
13 programmes suffer from high non-completion rates (Daniel, 2020). Apprenticeship  
14 programmes are important for the future of the construction industry and for bringing in new  
15 talent to bolster productivity but there can be high dropout rates among apprentices (Berik *et*  
16 *al.*, 2021).  
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33 One of the issues causing a lack of training in the construction industry is the growth in self-  
34 employed workers. Employees, who are permanently employed by a company, are more likely  
35 to receive training at all levels; induction and on-the-job training, but the growth in self-  
36 employed workers means they are less likely to receive this investment (Forde, 2007). In the  
37 1980s government policy and tax changes encouraged workers to become self-employed and  
38 for companies to sub-contract their work. By sub-contracting, the costs to a construction  
39 company are reduced unfortunately leading to underinvestment in training and subsequently a  
40 skills shortage in the industry (Clarke, Winch and Brockmann, 2013). The problem of a lack  
41 of skilled employees is also compounded by Brexit and the lack of skilled staff coming from  
42 Europe, increasing the need to train more domestic staff (William, 2021).  
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3 The Conservative government has promised to build an extra 300,000 homes a year, but unless  
4 there is an increase in skilled labour these targets will not be met (William, 2021). The  
5 Homebuilders Federation reported that for every 10,000 houses being built 30,000 new  
6 construction workers would be needed, comprising of at least 2,500 bricklayers, 1,000  
7 carpenters, and 300 electricians. There is an inbuilt snobbery in society that steers young people  
8 away from the construction industry and other vocational jobs (McInerney, 2013). In 2020,  
9 the Government set up the Construction Skills Delivery Group to investigate ways to improve  
10 training and increase the numbers going into construction but this has had limited success.  
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25 There is much evidence to suggest there are shortages in the construction industry that Building  
26 Heroes Charity is helping to alleviate. The failure to transition ex-military successfully into  
27 the civilian market, as a consequence of mismatched competencies, is a significant loss to  
28 human capital and UK productivity (Tutlys et al., 2019 and Green, 2013). This research  
29 investigates what Building Heroes Charity's role is in assisting service leavers transitioning to  
30 civil employment and what can be learned from this training and support.  
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43 The main aim of this research is to explore the benefits military leavers gain from attending a  
44 Building Heroes' construction course. With sub-objectives to:

- 45 1. critically review the literature on the transition between the military and civilian workplace  
46 and the shortages of labour in the construction industry;
- 47 2. investigate, through semi-structured interviews, the transition to civilian employment by ex-  
48 military personnel who have attended Building Heroes construction courses;
- 49 3. investigate the provision of Building Heroes by interviewing tutors;

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3 4. recommend improvements that could be implemented to reduce the time spent in the liminal  
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5 period and improve the veteran's competency skills needed for the construction industry.  
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## 10 **Methodology**

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12 An exploratory case study design was chosen to investigate behaviours within a situation, and  
13  
14 its surrounding context, using the transition from military to civilian employment and responses  
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16 from veterans as the real-life context (Yin, 2003). The research conducted has been approved  
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18 by the University's ethics committee and met all the necessary standards.  
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### 22 *Sample and Data*

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24 A qualitative approach was used. An invitation email was sent out to 20 alumni of the  
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26 Building Heroes Charity with a request for an interview. The veterans were difficult to  
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28 contact as Building Heroes, so far, did not keep records of contacts post-course, however, the  
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30 charity did obtain permission for us to contact 20 veterans, and nine replied. It has been  
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32 highlighted by Ascroft (2014) the difficulty in gaining information from veterans. Three  
33  
34 course tutors and nine veterans replied and they were followed up with in-depth online  
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36 interviews (Table 1). The purposive sample for the study consisted of nine veterans, all had  
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38 served in the military for at least five years and as long as 31 years. Some of the service  
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40 personnel, although had attended the Building Heroes' course, were still in their transition  
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42 period to civilian life, whereas others had left up to 10 years previously.  
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3 Online semi-structured interviews lasted 30-45 minutes and were carried out by Microsoft  
4 Teams producing recorded transcriptions. Interview questions such as “In what way did the  
5 military service support you?” and “How did Building Heroes help your transition to the  
6 construction industry?” allowed dialogue and an opportunity for respondents to expand on their  
7 answers (Appendix A - Interview Questions). This approach allowed focus on the veteran’s  
8 “perception of self, life and experience” in their own words (Minichiello, 1995, p. 52).  
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21 The interviews produced over 200 pages of transcriptions that were subsequently coded  
22 producing rich data on the transition process. The interview transcriptions were edited,  
23 anonymised, and then uploaded to the NVivo software programme for coding. Constant  
24 comparison analysis was used by in vivo coding, where an actual word is taken from the text  
25 to name the code (Charmaz and Bryant, 2010). There were two cycles of coding used to analyse  
26 the interview transcripts. The first cycle involved a mixture of in vivo, evaluative, descriptive  
27 and simultaneous coding. 16 codes were established and then reduced and categorised into four  
28 secondary categories (Table II). There were other codes but these were then dropped as the  
29 frequency of these codes was low.  
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## 54 **Analysis and Discussion**

### 55 *The Military Support* 56 57 58 59 60

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3 The opinions on the usefulness of military support during the transition phase varied widely  
4 depending on age, time in service, rank and service. The support received for resettlement has  
5 changed drastically over the last 10 years. Several veterans posited how much better the support  
6 was now than 20 years ago. Participant 2 said: “10-15 years ago when you sign off or you'd  
7 get your termination, it was literally you were kicked out the door. You would be given seven  
8 weeks to find a job, going on a course if you needed to”. Fortunately, this has changed, and  
9 although some weaknesses were pointed out the support was far greater than in the past.

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20 Three of the veterans were positive about their experience, with the CTP, and although they  
21 did suggest areas for improvement they were happy with their experiences. Participant 7  
22 posited:  
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28 ...you're basically given an entire package that's based upon an X amount of days...off  
29 the top of my head, I want to say 35 days which is graduated with settlement days. So,  
30 you can go and do courses etc. (You have an) education allowance that you can then  
31 use and every year the army gives every individual £175 towards training that they wish  
32 to do. If you want to go do private courses or personal ones, then there's a possibility.  
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36 Many of the veterans did use their allowances to attend courses, such as Participant 8: “I  
37 actually did a locksmith course which was partially funded through the enhanced learning  
38 credits, which is £2000”. In this case, Participant 8 was leaving the Royal Navy with a pension  
39 but wanted to use her new skills for charity work and the locksmith course enabled her to do  
40 this.  
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46 One of the veterans who was at the Colchester barracks was very positive about their  
47 experience: Participant 2: “... we've got massive barracks here in Colchester, so the Career  
48 Transition Program, I think, is quite good”. This was echoed by Participant 9 who had a good  
49 career advisor and said “...this is where it comes down to your advisor. So, she put me on self-  
50 employment courses, it was a free course. I learned how the CIS (Construction Industry  
51 Scheme) registered and all this sort of stuff, how you do it, how you go about getting your trade  
52 cards, stuff like that”. In these cases, the service personnel found they did have support and  
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3 advice when needed, and there is evidence of support to acquire the competency skills for a  
4 successful transition period to the construction industry (Tutlys *et al.*, 2019).  
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10 Although there were positive comments about CTP, and the support the veterans received, they  
11 also believed there were areas for improvement. One of the biggest complaints about the CTP  
12 was the support received varied between the services and locations; it lacked consistency and  
13 many of the participants discussed this variability. Participant 2 said “I think it very much  
14 depends on where your base is and who's there. So, I think some people come out with hardly  
15 any sort of transition from the military and others seem to get really good help and support. I  
16 do think it also depends on the unit they're in. Some units are really supportive. I don't think  
17 others are. I think they're just kind of being left to their own devices unless you've got someone  
18 to guide you”. This was echoed by Participant 3: “I think sometimes you might find it all  
19 depends on which regiment or which units you're with to the different way it's done”. This  
20 echoes the findings of Fischer *et al.* (2021) that not all military personnel access support from  
21 CTP and the help needed to present their military skills in a format the civilian world  
22 understands.  
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43 The veterans believed the support needed during the transition varied due to numerous factors.  
44 Age was the main factor quoted, unfortunately, the support given was not adjusted for this  
45 variable. There is a difference between the support a young 20-year-old needs, after 5 years of  
46 service, compared to a service personnel who has served 20 years and is leaving with years of  
47 experience and a pension:  
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55 If it's somebody who's perhaps only served four years, and there may be a bit of  
56 disillusionment with the military...they almost leave with a bad taste in their mouth in  
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3 some cases. And they don't think (leaving) through. And other people who have served  
4 for, you know, for many years. They have probably got a better idea of what they want  
5 to do. They're probably better prepared...(Tutor 3)  
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7 Younger guys are going to need more support. And yeah, they're sort of coming out.  
8 They've got a whole career ahead of them, maybe you know, so especially some of  
9 them that may be medically discharged might not be expecting to have left the military.  
10 They might have thought they were going to stay until they're, you know, in their 40s.  
11 And they definitely need support. I think it varies with the older guys (Participant 8).  
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17 According to Participant 3, the younger ones also get a shock as they have "...been living in  
18 rented accommodation, so they're very cushioned" which means they suddenly find themselves  
19 in the civilian world with high accommodation costs and in many cases low wages. This  
20 evidence concurs with Tutlys *et al.* (2019) who argued that the younger staff, of lower ranks,  
21 have fewer competencies and experiences that are recognised in the civilian world and help is  
22 needed to address this misinterpretation.  
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34 It was not just age that impacted the support needed, Tutor 3 recounted that "...you know if  
35 they've got some sort of an engineering background. You know it's easier for them to find  
36 employment, or if it's IT or security, you know they're OK. The infantry I think are probably  
37 the people that struggle the most". Not surprisingly their background and skills are important  
38 and as the research by Wang *et al.* (2023) concluded infantry veterans can find it the hardest to  
39 find employment, due to a lack of social and economic capital. Engineering is a transferable  
40 competence, recognised in civilian employment, whereas some infantry competencies, and  
41 other branches, may be seen as less transferable. Extra help is needed to educate the  
42 construction industry on the transferability of military competencies thus reducing the gap in  
43 understanding.  
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6 Another area of improvement commented on was better signposting for leavers. Usually, the  
7 longer-serving personnel had better access to resources, and as Participant 7 recounts “I think  
8 we could do better because there's so much information out there and we're trying to signpost  
9 people, you only end up signposting people if they come and grab you”. This was quoted by a  
10 Warrant Officer (WO) about his squad and if leavers came to him for help he would help and  
11 “signpost” them but, unfortunately, some of the younger ones just didn’t know what to ask.  
12 Interestingly, the WO also believed that they should be advising on apprenticeship  
13 opportunities more: “I think there are better apprenticeship opportunities where the  
14 resettlement time could be spent going into a company and saying right I'm going to invest in  
15 you if you're going to invest in me, and then being able to this is on the premise that you have  
16 that resettlement time, you've got the full resettlement package behind you. With the younger  
17 individuals, it's about starting at the very bottom going into the apprenticeship, and then  
18 working up”. Apprenticeships can cater to those service leavers, who do not have the  
19 competencies required, and apprenticeships would allow the veterans to gain those skills. With  
20 some of the veterans, there is evidence of a mismatch of competencies which is found in the  
21 literature (Green, 2013 and Tutlys *et al.*, 2019) and it can be argued that Building Heroes is  
22 trying to give the veterans the competencies that are desirable in the civilian world.  
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49 Longer-serving personnel need less advice on finance and careers. A 23-year-old leaving the  
50 services requires different support than a 47-year-old. As Participant 1 recounted “Younger  
51 guys are going to need more support...They've got a whole career ahead of them... I think it  
52 varies with the older guys. So, if they've done 24, even 30 years, then they might not necessarily  
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3 be looking for another career, they're quite self-sufficient; they know what they're doing.....

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5 The younger veterans might need more help with their CVs and 'help to identify the skill sets  
6 they have got'.  
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13 It was noted that more advice needs to be given on the range and benefits of the courses the  
14 service personnel can go on: "I think someone needs to say please do not waste your learning  
15 credits on some random useless course ....in my trade, you have to spend some money before  
16 you even get to Level 3" (Participant 10). This was repeated by other participants that there  
17 needs to be proper advice on the qualifications needed to progress in the industry, as many of  
18 the service leavers have basic qualifications to level 2 but not level 3 which is often required.  
19 Several times, participants talked about the need to include self-employment seminars/  
20 workshops as part of the transition period and how this would be useful going forward by  
21 concentrating on the competencies desirable in the civilian world.  
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38 The interviews show that although many improvements have come, with the introduction of  
39 CTP services, there are still areas of the transition period that need addressing. The liminal  
40 period for a veteran, once in civilian employment, is of paramount importance to achieve a  
41 successful transition. The longer the liminal period is, the more likely the veteran may struggle  
42 with their new WRI identity and consequential difficulties (Fig.2). Restoration orientation  
43 happens when the veteran accepts their new role and identity and starts to focus on who they  
44 are becoming rather than who they were (Stroebe and Schut, 2010). If the new WRI is not  
45 accepted this could lead to the veteran leaving their new civilian role prematurely, and as  
46 Ashcroft (2014, 2017) highlights veterans are more likely to end up as long-term unemployed.  
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**Insert Figure 2 here**

### *Building Heroes Charity Support*

One of the aims of this research was to discover how a charity, such as Building Heroes, assisted veterans with their transition out of the military and into civilian careers. The service personnel identified several advantages to completing the Building Heroes' courses. Most of the veterans were very positive about the course, contents and teaching. Participant 5 said the course was "amazing. I think the method of delivery and the method that we've been taught was fantastic". Many of the service personnel benefited from help writing a CV, specifically for the construction industry, and "linking their skills" to construction jobs (Participant 1). This is important for veterans as it enables them to identify their competencies and how these can be written so appreciated in civilian work. Building Heroes helps connect the veteran's competencies, with those needed by the construction industry, and advises military leavers on how to write their CV in a way that the military competencies can be appreciated.

The interviewees found that it was a benefit that the participants on the course came from the tri-services as it led to a "diversity in the individuals on the course, which made the course more beneficial" (Participant 7). The course gave veterans a foundation in the different trades and educated them on the different specialisms (Participant 3). Again, this socialisation increased the service leavers' social capital, especially with those specifically going into construction. This is of great benefit to the service leavers as Wang *et al.* (2023) discovered

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3 that lower-ranked veterans did not have the same social capital and access to networks as the  
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5 higher ranks.  
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11 A number of the participants appreciated the support and tutorage they received on the courses.  
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13 One of the tutors for Building Heroes recounted a story of how they supported service  
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15 personnel with PTSD:  
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19 (One student) had really bad post-traumatic stress and you would talk to him and he  
20 would sort of be twitching, you know, all the time. It was a bit disconcerting, even  
21 trying to talk to him because he's, you know, his head was twitching so much and when  
22 we have the one-to-ones with them and just, you know, discuss what it is that they want  
23 to do going forward, I said, you know, what do you want to do? And he said 'Oh I think  
24 I can only do it on a voluntary basis now'. Yeah, that, that sort of thing. And I said,  
25 well, that's, you know, that's very solitary, he said I don't want to mix with people.  
26 Anyway, as the course, went on you could see the difference in him and he was  
27 twitching less and less. ...before we went to this site visit I said to him, you know, are  
28 you still of the same mindset? So, he said I don't know.... he said I really have enjoyed  
29 the carpentry on this course. Ah, I don't know year or so later, there was something else  
30 on Facebook from him and he was on the roof of a house putting up the rafters. I sent  
31 him a message as I couldn't believe this was the same person I met years ago and he  
32 said 'Yes, it is...thank you so much' (Tutor 1).  
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38 Service personnel, with PTSD, benefit from the extra tutorial support that British Heroes offer,  
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40 although this is not their prime purpose it is an important benefit, the courses provide a means  
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42 of socialisation outside of the leaver's military unit. Some veterans talked about how the course  
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44 helped them gain employment in property maintenance and more specific careers, such as  
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46 carpentry. One of the colleges, that a veteran attended, benefited from a visit to Davidson  
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48 Homes: "...Davidsons Homes is a multimillionaire construction company. They're massive ...  
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50 they've said they will support the charity. They've given us a building down there which we've  
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52 worked together to do up" (Participant 3). Davidsons also provides placements for service  
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54 personnel and supports veterans after they have finished the course. The contact with  
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3 employers, in the construction industry, increase social networking and the social capital of  
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5 service leavers, an area that the literature found was a weakness of the lower-ranked veterans  
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7 (Wang *et al.*, 2023). Importantly, the Building Heroes Charity is educating building companies  
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9 on the benefits of employing ex-service personnel, which is an important step in educating the  
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11 civilian world on the competencies acquired during the military. As Green (2013) and Tutlys  
12  
13 *et al.* (2019) argue the civilian world misinterprets and misunderstands military competencies  
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15 but in this case Building Heroes is assisting in this understanding, and presently Davidson  
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17 Homes is willing to listen.  
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25 However, similar to the findings from the literature, some of the comments reflected the  
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27 changes in the make-up of employment in the construction industry (Clarke, Winch and  
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29 Brockmann, 2013) as Participant 3 posited of fellow service personnel on the course “...many  
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31 have become self-employed, a few have gone down the role of property maintenance jobs.  
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33 Some became self-employed plasterers...”. Plastering seemed to be a popular choice as the  
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35 tools needed to “start-up” were not as expensive as some of the other trades. As Participant 10  
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37 commented: “...Anyone could be a plasterer, whether they're good or not, they're not going to  
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39 kill anybody...plaster walks around the bucket of tools that cost him £100”. Thus showing  
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41 “start-up” capital was important to service leavers, especially those with fewer economic  
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43 resources one of the interviewees said some of the younger attendees were quite shocked by  
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45 the price of tools but as he said they are a sunk cost and do not have to be bought annually.  
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54 An area for improvement, that was also cited by the veterans, was they would have benefitted  
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56 from more assistance setting up as self-employed in the construction industry: “And then yeah  
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3 do I go with the limited company do I go as a sole trader? What's the risk you know? There's  
4 just there's so much information out there that it's just mind-blowing and it's a complete mind  
5 field and no doubt I'm gonna get you know bitten in the \*\*\*\* at some stage so” (Participant 6).  
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10 As Participant 7 echoed: “...how that transition goes from right, you get the skills within this  
11 part of the charity, which is great. But then what?” There was a call for information on  
12 becoming a sole trader or company from just straightforward advice to more detail on how to  
13 do a tax return and one of the service personnel thought that even the longer serving personnel,  
14 who might only need PT work, would have liked more information on this area, and especially  
15 budgeting and basic finance, such as break-even (Participant 7). The literature does indicate  
16 there has been a move in the construction industry from being an employee of a large company  
17 to the increase of contractors and subsequently self-employed trade personnel (Forde, 2007).  
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32 It seems that, although many veterans do go into very structured careers, which reflects the  
33 military setup (Turner, 2021), on the Building Heroes courses many want to go in the opposite  
34 direction and want control over their own lives and self-employment enables them to do this:  
35 “I think maybe they don't want to go into full-time work. Yeah, they don't wanna manage  
36 people. They don't want people to manage them. They just wanna do their bit of work, go out  
37 and do stuff and, you know, pick and choose what they do. So yeah, we do get quite a few of  
38 the older guys going into self-employment” (Participant 3).  
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52 There were many comments on the positive impact of the Building Heroes Charity but there  
53 were still areas where more support could be given to the service leavers. Several service  
54 personnel thought that more thought/vetting was needed of the service persons before being  
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3 accepted on the courses. This is a difficult process, but as Participant 5 recounted: “There's  
4 only a few of us who are going to go into the construction trade... The others were there because  
5 they wanted to renovate their houses or it was something that sort of interested them. We were  
6 there to get the qualification to the stepping stone to our future career”. One of the tutors said  
7 it was difficult to decide who could attend the course, and although they would like to give  
8 priority to those who wanted to pursue a career in construction the applicants were not always  
9 truthful about why they wanted to attend, and also should this be a barrier?: “ With the  
10 application form we have to be more vigorous now with having people that want to go into the  
11 construction sector in some shape or form...but they can say what they want on that form and  
12 they can say what they want to us and it's not till you've got them on the course and you think,  
13 OK, when we spoke to you, it was the construction sector. When we're face to face it isn't”  
14 (Tutor 3). This is an important area for development and slightly controversial as to who  
15 decides who can attend the courses or not, and should priority be given to those service leavers  
16 who benefit most from the course? In an ideal world, any service leaver should be able to apply  
17 for one of the Charity's development courses, but unfortunately, due to funding constraints,  
18 there is a limited amount of space available. Theoretically one could argue those leavers who  
19 have less social, economic capital and transferable competencies should receive priority, and  
20 according to research this tends to be the lower ranks, but how this is implemented is complex.  
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48 The interviews with the Building Heroes participants showed how important charities are in  
49 reducing the liminal period and the time veterans are in a WRI disequilibrium. There are many  
50 positives from attending the charity's courses: interactive teaching, tutorial support, specific  
51 advice about the construction industry and competencies needed, and most importantly the  
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3 social capital needed to enter the industry through extra talks and links. Also, importantly  
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5 Building Heroes has educated construction companies on military competencies and the  
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7 transferability of these to the civilian world. The benefits of this education reduce the veteran's  
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9 time in the liminal period.  
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25 The course tutors do attempt to follow up with attendees on the courses but it can be a  
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27 challenge, from a funding point of view and time, as Tutor 2 said: "Yeah, we tried to. So, we  
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29 try and stay in touch and for about a year after they've done the course, not all of them, you  
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31 know it's quite hard". But, this could be an important resource for future service personnel and  
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33 course attendees. Increasing the connections and network for new service personnel entering  
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35 the construction industry would increase their social capital going forward, especially the  
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37 younger ones. Mentoring, once in the new role, would help support the veteran during the  
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39 difficult liminal period and re-establishing a new WRI (Fig.3).  
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### 47 **Conclusion**

48 There are many positive outcomes from the Building Heroes' courses that complement the  
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50 work done by the CTP. Building Heroes helps to reduce time in the liminal period by assisting  
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52 veterans to gain the competencies required by the construction industry and also by educating  
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54 the construction industry on the transferability of military competencies. As Green (2013) and  
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3 Tutlys *et al.* (2019) argue there is a lack of understanding of military competencies in the  
4 civilian workplace and, in this case, Building Heroes is working hard to demystify these  
5 misunderstandings.  
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12 The military support for service personnel does have areas that could be improved upon but  
13 using charitable courses does come some way in “filling the gap”; a reduction of the time spent  
14 in the liminal period diminishes the likelihood of unemployment and subsequent CMD during  
15 the transition period (Ashcroft, 2014). Even with the support of charities, there are still areas  
16 that could be improved. The main improvement is acknowledging the needs, of service  
17 personnel, differ depending on age, financial resources, social capital and the mismatch of  
18 competencies that exist with the lower ranks.  
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31 Every year around 16,000 military personnel leave the military, of this number at least 60%  
32 will need to pursue a civilian career (MoD, np, 2022). These veterans have represented our  
33 country in many different capacities, many in dangerous roles, and we owe it to these veterans  
34 to support them in their new careers. There is scope for future research and investigations of  
35 the career trajectories of veterans. At present the majority of research investigates veterans  
36 immediately after leaving the services, whereas research into service leavers after five or ten  
37 years would be highly beneficial for a better understanding of the transition period to civilian  
38 employment.  
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### 50 51 **Limitations**

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53 The limitations of this research are the sample size is small and the majority of the veterans are  
54 from the Army. This is mostly because the Army is the largest of the services.  
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Figures:

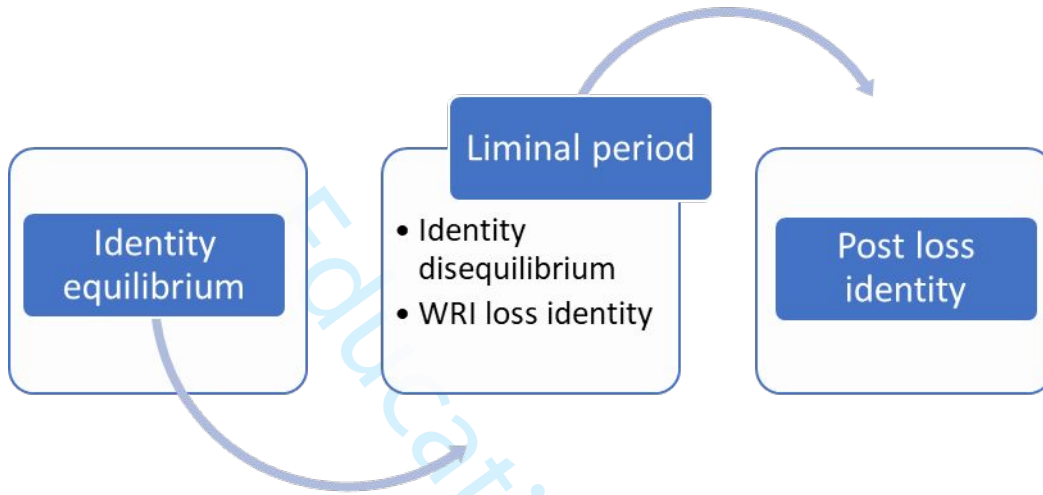


Figure 1. A model of WRI loss and recovery (Adapted from Conroy & O’Leary-Kelly, 2014, p. 70).

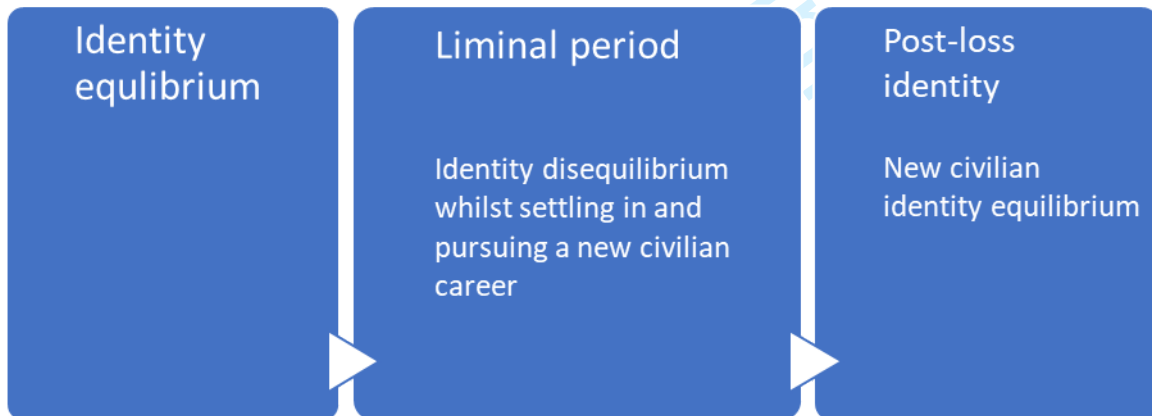


Figure 2: Military career transition

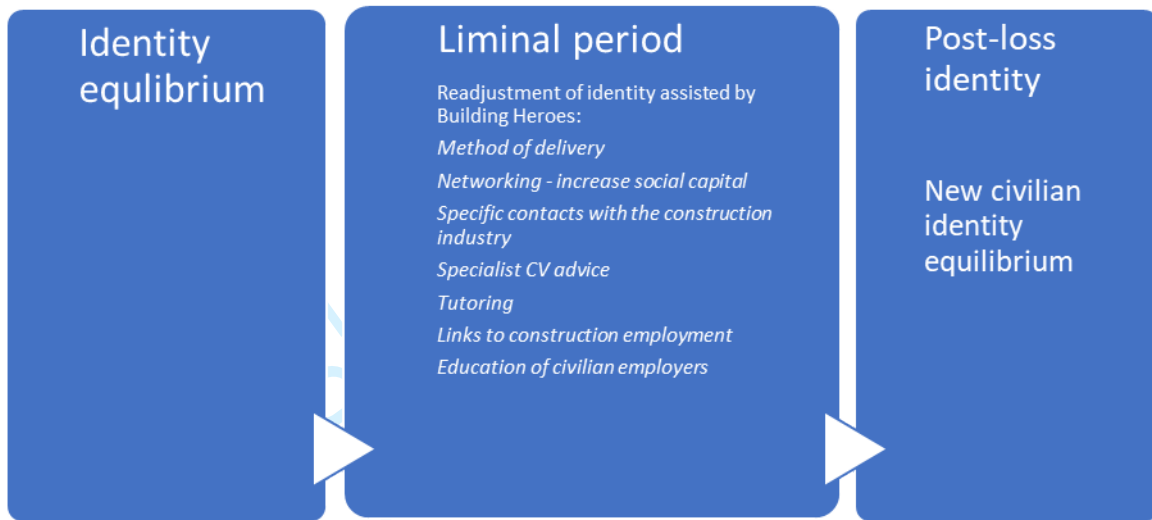


Figure 3 – Building Heroes and the civilian transition

Education + Training

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**Tables:**

Table I: Primary and Secondary Codes

<b>Secondary Codes/ Categories</b>	<b>Primary codes</b>
Benefits of BH courses	Tutorial support, delivery, construction-specific CV advice, company contacts, links to businesses and networking, employment
Improvements of BH courses	Self-employment advice, vetting of attendees – need analysis, marketing
Military support	Training, learning credits, transferable skills, employment, transition
Improvements of military support	Inconsistency, signposting/guidance, age, financial needs

Table II: Research Participants

Participant	Services	Years in service
T1	Tutor	N/A
T2	Tutor	N/A
T3	Tutor	N/A
4 – P1	Army	15
5 - P2	Army	25
6 – P3	Army	25
7- P4	Army	25
8 -P5	Army	15
9 – P6	Army	24
10 – P7	Army	9
11- P8	Royal Navy	31
12 – P9	Army	25



**Appendix A***Interview questions for military leavers:*

1. How long ago did you leave the military?
2. Did you find the military service supported you in finding a new career?
3. In what way did the military service support you?
4. How did you hear about Building Heroes?
5. Did you think you would leave the military for the construction industry?
6. Did you look into any other careers?
7. What area of construction did you go into?
8. How did Building Heroes help your transition to the construction industry?
9. Could Building Heroes have done anything better to help you with your transition?
10. What else could the military of done to help you to find a new career?
11. Did you find being ex-military helped you in your chosen career choice?
12. Did you find you had transferrable skills from the military to the construction industry?

*Interview questions for Building Heroes' tutors:*

1. How long have you worked for Building Heroes?
2. What is your job title?
3. Did you find the military service gives support to the ex-military personnel that you train?
4. In what way do you think the military support the transition of the ex-service personnel?
5. How do you support the ex-service personnel?
6. What area of construction do your students go in to?
7. How do Building Heroes help the transition to the construction industry?
8. What new skills do you teach the ex-personnel?
9. Could Building Heroes do anything better to help with this transition?
10. Do you find the students have transferrable skills from the military to the construction industry?
11. In what way do you connect with the employers of your service leavers?

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12. Do you receive feedback on the military learners from your employers after they finish their training?

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