Research Article

Stress and Absenteeism in Civilian Employees Supervised by Army Sergeants: Empirical Evidence from Fort Belvoir, Virginia

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Abstract: Past literature suggests that leadership style impacts employee attitudes and job performance in organizations. Given the broad scope of military operations, there are many situations in military where military managers supervise civilian employees. Our empirical study explores the effects of Army sergeant supervision of civilian employees at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Several themes in Army sergeants' perceptions as supervisor of federal civilian employees were studied in-depth: (a) task, (b) education training, (c) family, (d) rules & regulations, (e) open communications, (f) last minute task, (g) direct leadership, and (h) experience. Our findings show that a mismatch between leader perceptions and employee expectations leads to stress and absenteeism. Implications for future research and suggestions to reduce stress and absenteeism are discussed.

Keywords: Military Managers, Civilian employees in military, Stress, Absenteeism, Supervision.

1. Introduction

The United States Army staffs more than one million military and civilian men and women, many who are extremely young and inexperienced; they then find themselves thrust into positions of high responsibility (Hargrove & Sitkin, 2011). The Army conducts many lessons for its military leaders in organization for problems it faces (Hargrove & Sitkin, 2011). Military leaders are trained to follow rules, military laws, and regulations under a rank structural base process.

In the face of adversity, leaders must know each member of the organization in an effort to be effective and avoid derailment (Yukl, 1990). Military leaders' influence over civilian personnel has been studied since the 1960s, examining the effects military leaders have on civilian employees and their work relationships (Kelier, 1965). Dvir, Eden, Avolio, and Shamir (2002) examined the impact of military leaders in charge of federal employees, on self-development, and direct performance.

Thousands of civilian employees work for military organizations (Powers, 1999). The general problem is civilian personnel working under the supervision of military leaders are often treated as soldiers by military leaders and this may cause stress and conflict in the workplace (Cazzaniga, 2009). There is a specific problem of stress and absenteeism of civilian employees working for United States Army sergeants at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. This empirical study aims to investigate this phenomenon to propose mitigation strategies.

2. Literature Review

Military organizations are increasingly integrated with the civilian workforce since the 1960s (Kelier, 1965). The relationship between civilian and military

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leaders has been at the forefront of society in the political and historical realm, realigned with peacetime and wartime threats (Langston, 2008). Military organizations have three components (superiors, supervisors, and subordinates) that is found in both military and civilian environment, which involves various psychological and social dimensions to organizational leaders' relationship uncommon in nonmilitary organizations (Holloman, 1967). A large percentage of federal employees have military experiences or are retired from the military. Many of them served in positions that were abolished by the new military structure at the start of the Gulf Wars in 2003 (Copeland, 2008).

Their experiences support the military war fighting efforts as civilian employees (Copeland, 2008). A large portion of federal employees are military spouses, some are stationed abroad and had to place their careers or jobs in the United States on hold. Frequent deployments of service members and federal employees resulted in high demands of military families. High levels of stress became a common trend among military families, soldiers, and federal employees (Allen et al., 2010; Karney & Crown, 2007; Rosen & Durand, 2000).

Fort Belvoir, Virginia, which has a multicultural and diverse population, consists of more civilians than military members. The base primary role is to support war-fighting organizations prepare for future deployments. There are more senior civilians than senior military leaders working on the installation. The Fort Belvoir, Virginia military base expanded its civilian population because of the war on terrorism and base realignment that began in 2011. Several hundred diverse federal employees workforce from Department of Defense organizations, and Department of the Army agencies relocated to Fort Belvoir, Virginia military installation for national security purposes. The installation expanded its infrastructure to accommodate military and federal agencies within the Washington, DC capital region.

Marina and Ellert (2009) States that Army personnel, he or she is either civilian or military has a military hierarchy. According to Marina and Ellert (2009), the Army (2006b, 33), influenced beyond the chain of command, has four competencies: "(a) understanding the sphere of influence and limits of influence, (b) building trust, (c) negotiating to build consensus and resolve conflict, and (d) building and maintaining alliances". Hickman (2010) argued that an organization faces many challenges with responding to diverse environments. The acceptance of a colorblind or multicultural diversity workforce faces scrutiny from within (Hickman, 2010). Primarily, non-minority individuals have a much harder time working in an environment in which attention is given to certain groups of people (Hickman, 2010). A minority who experiences exclusionary behavior feels isolated and devalued as a member of the team, and member alienation ensues (Hickman, 2010).

2.1 Leadership Styles

Yukl (1989) argued that for leadership effectiveness in an organization, there must be an environment that is considerate, supportive, and caring for subordinates in the organization. Displaying a high level of trust, confidence, friendliness, consideration, and open-mindedness to understand individual problems, including careers, and rewarding good performances are signs of an effective leadership style (Yukl, 1989). Leaders who used a general style of supervision versus a close supervision tend to have a more effective organization (Yukl, 1989).

Senge (1990) highlighted two vision attributes: positive and negative. Positive vision emphasizes change and aspirations for development, and negative vision continues the status quo under the complex challenges of environments (Hickman, 2010; Senge, 1990). "Although vision is emphasized as a core issue in the prevailing vision-based leadership theories (Bass, 1990; Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Tichy & Divanna, 1986; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989) several characteristics of effective vision are shown, but no prevailing theories has exhaustively explained how each characteristic might create change in the organizations performance" (Hickman, 2010, p. 263).

These role senders exert pressure on the manager to conform to their beliefs about the correct way to act (Yukl, 1989). Role expectations for leaders are influenced by cultural norms and values (Yukl, 1989). He argued that the role expectations from subordinates and peers communicate orally, while the role expectations from supervisors and managers are often in writing and orally (Yukl, 1989). Leaders in organizations are given written job descriptions and guidance enumerating their duties, roles, responsibilities, authority, organization policies, and regulations pertaining to their administrative position (Yukl, 1989). The perception of the leader's role requirements is shaped around these prescriptions and prohibitions, as well as the day-to-day functional role as the leader (Yukl, 1989).

According to Kean and Haycock (2011) "…understanding the relationship of followers and

leaders" suggested mainstream leadership development frameworks appear fixated on the idea leaders are always in control and leading. Kean and Haycock (2011) stated, "At the same time, leadership development frameworks, and many contemporary leadership approaches, make the assumption that followers make up a homogeneous group that unquestioningly follows a leader" (p. 32). Military leaders are motivated to accomplish his or her mission; however, last minute tasks shifts leadership styles from participatory to a direct approach with military and federal civilian employees. Direct leadership styles could bring about more stress to the work environment. A survey of 210 personnel at the Inspectors General Auditor Training Institute (IGATI) indicates that 39% of subordinates reject leaders' direct style of leading (Campbell, 1993).

The study underscores the importance of leaders who fail to recognize the needs of followers in the organization. Kean and Haycock (2011) described the perception of managers and leaders who feel that if subordinates stand by for instructions they are a good follower. Many leaders who allow followers to standby on the sideline and wait for someone to offer instructions can become problematic in the organization (Kean & Haycock, 2011).

Salimi, Karminia, and Esmaeili (2011) discussed various management styles and conflict management within a military environment relating to styles of leadership of military organizations. A variety of different instruments were used to assess the style of conflict methodology adopted by management for problem-solving (Salimi, Karminia & Esmaeili, 2011). The majority of respondents preferred to use a participatory type of leadership style to communicate with members of the organization. Based on the study, compatible personality traits are the most frequently used by senior level management (Salimi et al., 2011).

Compared to findings conducted in the United States, Turkey, and Jordan, a degree of consistency with trust, cooperation, and good deeds was discovered with each person from the study to have the same compatibility (Salimi et al., 2011). The study found that eight of the individuals who were compatible were together for more than eight years and deployed with the same organization for war, and to date, personality traits were consistently kept the same (Salimi et al., 2011).

Changes in leadership style can place a great deal of pressure on personnel in the organization (Bons, Bass & Komorita, 1970). When new leadership takes over, such as change of commanders in the military chain of command, everyone in the organization is affected (Bons et al., 1970). Bons et al. (1970) investigated organizational leadership dynamics and the impact they have on members of the organization. Bons et al. (1970) argued that a great amount of research involving leadership styles and organizational effectiveness with teams however, very little change was found with individual scores as relate to task based on peer pressures.

According to Covey (1991), there is great diversity and mobility in organizations today, and leaders are challenged in congruent leadership styles. Leaders' styles can be situational; however, before one can make a difference in organizations, new mentors and models must be in place (Yukl, 2010). Bons et al. (1970) used a combination of instruments to assess the predictors of effectiveness of leadership. Two frequent used approaches was adopted from Fiedler's (1964) study between opposites; (1) rating of the person *most preferred*, and (2) *least preferred* (Fiedler, 1964) and the Ohio State leadership study on consideration and initiating structure, Likert, attitude scale (Bons et al., 1970; Stogdill & Coon, 1957). The two leadership styles (ASO-LPC and Consideration Initiating Structure) were used at the beginning of the assessment to assess personality characteristics between leaders (Bons et al., 1970; Fiedler, 1964).

The purpose of the Bons et al. (1970) study was to measure the effectiveness of leaders who are similarly situated in organizations using Fiedler's (1958) ASO-LPC and Consideration Initiating Structure. The Contingency Model of Fiedler (1964) suggested that both concepts can be equally represented when placed in certain situation or groups. Additional research was recommended to determine if the leadership styles are related to changes in the effectiveness of the leader (Fiedler, 1964).

De Vries, Bakker-Pieper, and Oostenveld (2010) investigated the relationship between leaders' communication style, knowledge sharing, and the outcome in organizations (Devries, Bakker-Pieper, & Oostenveld, 2010). The authors compared non-interpersonal relationships of leadership styles and the challenges on individuals interpersonal aspects of leadership surrounded planning, organizing, and decision-making and/or problem solving (De Vries et al., 2010). The purpose of the previous study was to understand the commonality of leadership styles as it relates to leader communication measured by the authors. There is a growing interest in the predictors of knowledge sharing (De Vries et al., 2010). Leadership has a central responsibility to inspire and support

knowledge sharing and behavior (De Vries et al., 2010).

2.2 Job Satisfaction of Employees

Leaders of the 21st century should know that once leadership roles have been distributed to members in the organization, the next goal is to ensure the employees in the company are satisfied with his or her jobs (Wren, 1995). In previous years, leaders received solid results from employees for short term, using non-empowering methods, including intimidation tactics, force, and care taking (Wren, 1995). Concerned with preparing people for jobs with higher responsibility, some agencies ignore research literature stating the difficulty in managing and leading (Kotter, 1990/2008). Taking care of members in the organization is a leader's responsibility (Yukl, 2010). An unhappy employee tends to look for a new job when they are not satisfied with the one they currently hold (Yukl, 2010).

Job satisfaction is defined as "…the individuals' attitudes toward the various aspects of their job, as well as towards the job in general" (Gill, Sharma, Mathur, & Bhutani, 2012, p. 191). Locke (1969) defined job satisfaction as the pleasurable emotional state that results from the appraisal of one's job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one's job values (as cited in Gill et al., 2012). Perceived job satisfaction creates positive feelings among employees, which in turn, represents positive emotional reactions towards desire for empowerment (as mentioned in Gill et al., 2012).

Satisfied employees desire an environment created for the team and one that pays a salary that is suitable (Bennis & Mische, 1995). An environment with dedicated working space must present free and have an open exchange of ideas and information (Bennis & Mische, 1995). According to Gill et al. (2012), the perception in which job satisfaction leads to job involvement that workers begin to involve in their roles as employees (Gill et al., 2012). As stated in Taylor and Vest (1992), "Public sector managers found that those public sector employees who compared their salaries with private sector employees, had lower levels of job satisfaction, thus concluding that pay levels affect job satisfaction" (p. 120).

2.3 Stress in the Working Environment

Leadership and management styles have a direct connection to employers and employee stress, which has positive and integrative styles related to transformational leadership that engender participants at every level of leadership (Sisley, Henning, Hawken, & Moir, 2010). Workplace stress exists when undue pressure is applied as a consequence of tasks or conditions that occur in the work environment during the course of an employee's assignment to the organization (Sisley et al., 2010). Factors contributing to stress are related to demographic factors, job-demand characteristics, leadership and management, working in interdisciplinary teams, and the advent of conflict scenarios' (Sisley et al., 2010, p. 4).

Army sergeants in charge of federal civilian employees grew as a result of the Gulf Wars in 2003, after several hundred military members were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (Copeland, 2008). Military leaders experienced stress related disorders during and after returning from deployments (Smith-Forbes, Najera, & Hawkins, 2014). Smith-Forbes et al. (2014) underscored the importance of the military working environment and the interaction of stress rather adaptive or maladaptive for survival for mission accomplishment, which could lead to misconduct and disciplinary action, ranging from discharge to imprisonment.

Combat Occupational Stress Reactions (COSR) are a combination of expected, predictable, intellectual, physical, emotional, or behavioral reactions of military members who have been exposed to combat stress or training operations simulation of wars (Smith-Forbes et al., 2014). Studies of troops returning from deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan agreed that there is an increase prevalence of behavioral health issues found among service members who returning from combat (Mattila, Crandall, & Goldman, 2011). Recent literature reported approximately 20% to 40% of over 2 million service members who have deployed in support of Iraq or Afghanistan between 2003-2010, did so with some type of behavioral health issue such as depression, anxiety, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or substance abuse (Mattila et al., 2011).

2.4 Gaps in the Literature

The review of the literature demonstrated a need for more empirical studies focused on military supervisors. Previous literature failed to yield enough peer-reviewed research journals on the lived experience of Army sergeants in charge of federal civilian employees who may suffer from stress or absenteeism. The existing literature does not include studies about the central phenomenon of Army sergeants' experiences of supervising federal civilian employees. A gap remains in the literature regarding Army sergeants who may suffer from stress or absenteeism in leading federal civilian employees in the 21st century. The current study aims to fill this gap in extant literature.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the current study was to explore and understand in more depth the phenomena of lived experiences of Army sergeants who supervise federal civilian employees working under the leadership of military leaders. The data includes interviews from 15 Army sergeants' feelings, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and their personal insights with federal employees on the job at the United States Army Fort Belvoir, Virginia military base. The research strategy focused on the use of open-ended questions with purposeful sampling strategies. Moustakas (1994) argued that phenomenological reduction is not just a way of viewing, but listening attentively with awareness and deliberate intention of opening to phenomena as phenomena in one's own perspective, texture, and meanings. The phenomenological design may provide answers for the study by helping to understand the lived experiences of Army sergeants who supervise federal civilian employees at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

3.1 Research Questions

Phenomenological study aims to identify the relationship of federal employees working under the leadership of military supervisors on a joint military environment. According to Neuman (2007), research questions drive the need for the study and are the central focus for researchers (Neuman, 2007). Qualitative research questions must be presented in a general, broad type form so that research participants can share their lived perspectives/experiences (Creswell, 2005).

RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of Army sergeants who supervise federal civilian employees working under military leaders who may suffer from stress related disorders?

The purpose of research Question 1 was to evaluate the participants' perceptions about past experiences and their beliefs of the working relationship between their federal civilian employees at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

RQ 2: What communication styles promotes a positive work environment of military leaders who supervise federal civilians and why?

The purpose of research Question 2 was to understand the lived experiences of participants, and personality, emotions, and perceptions of a military supervisor leadership style in a diverse working environment.

RQ 3: What are the Army sergeants' perceptions of leading federal civilian employees in the 21st century?

The purpose of research Question 3 was to understand through the lens of participants' lived experiences the day to day working condition and environment of how military leaders impact federal employees with stress and absenteeism in the 21st century.

RQ 4: What leadership behavior if any, influence absenteeism?

The purpose of research Question 4 was to understand the Army sergeants' attitudes, feelings, patterns of leadership behavior that influence federal civilian employees behavior while living and working in a military environment.

3.2 Sample

The Fort Belvoir, Virginia is managed by military leaders under careful directions of a deputy civilian leader. A deputy civilian leader is equivalent to a chief executive officer (CEO) of a company. The deputy is next in charge of the organization under military general officer or a colonel (O-6) in the military. The majority of the workforce is federal civilian employees whose salaries range from $15,000 to $150,000 annually (Labor Statistics, February 2012).

The research sample included 15 Army sergeants who supervise federal civilian employees' lived experiences while working at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Leedy and Ormrod (2007) recommended a sampling size of 5-25 participants for qualitative research for qualitative research study (Creswell, 2007; Leedy & Ormrod, 2007). These 15 Army sergeants have been in the Army for more than five years, and currently have more than one year of supervisory experience of federal civilian employees at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. The five step process identified by Groenewald (2004) served as a guide for the data collection: (a) bracketing and phenomenological reduction- closely listening the recording of the data; (b) delineating units of meaning-units, issues of relevance, frequency of occurrence, and manner of statement as each played a pivotal role to eliminate redundancies; (c) clustering of meaning units to form themes-this process opened opportunity for areas of significance to serve as bases for emerging themes; and (d) summarizing each interview-revisit the data after theme has been finalized (Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).

The selected participants for this study represented diversity of military leaders serving in leadership roles as Army sergeants in charge of federal civilian

employees with profound experiences. There were 15 total participants in this study. The sample consisted of 53% females and 47% males. The ethnicity of each participants included 13% Hispanic, 20% Caucasian, and 67% Black. The age of the participants ranged between 26-65 years old; 40% were between the ages 26-40 and 60% were between 41-65 years old.

More than 87% of the participants had at least 15 years of active military service in the United States Army. There were more than 93% of participants with 10 or more years as a leader. Deployment was not a requirement to participate in this study; however, the study showed 67% of the participants deployed to combat zone at least twice in his or her career, 27% had deployed to combat at least three times. Only one (6%) of participants never experienced deployment to a combat zone. At least 60% of the participants spent 12 months deployed in a combat zone; and 13% served more than 18 months in a combat zone.

At least 53.3% of the participants had more than five years of supervision experience of federal civilian employees. Participants must have served at least one year as a supervisor of federal civilian employees. The sampling and interviewing process moved along in a purposive fashion, keying in on the individuals who had important information pertaining to the study. In-depth unstructured interviews began with all participants using bracketing techniques moving from specific to personal details and more global and abstract process of the participants lived experiences (Shank, 2007). Interviewees were contacted through personal communications by the investigator at Fort Belvoir, Virginia and by e-mail.

3.3 Geographic Location

The geographic location of the United States Army sergeants is at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, in the Eastern part of the United States. There are 6,732 federal employees employed at Fort Belvoir, Virginia and 5,093 military personnel. The military base is located outside the city limits of Alexandria, Virginia, and approximately 10 miles from Washington, District of Columbia. The Fort Belvoir military base is two miles from the home of the first President of the United States, George Washington, (City of Mount Vernon, Virginia) attracting thousands of tourists year round.

3.4 Interview questions used for this study:

➤ Please describe your perception and experience of stress in the workplace.

➤ How does your level of experience as a sergeant in the Army relate to supervising military members and is there a difference?

➤ How does your level of experience as a sergeant in the Army relate to supervising federal civilian employees?

➤ Based on your position as a sergeant in the Army in charge of civilian employees, please describe how it affects your ability as a leader.

➤ What kind of experiences has caused stress to you that has affected your team or employees work habits?

➤ Please describe how you deal with employees who take frequent sick leave.

➤ How do you assist employees in dealing with uncertainties and challenges facing the Army during time of war?

➤ Please describe your style of leadership and a time when it worked best for you.

➤ Please describe your perception of how your behavior or attitude shifts when faced with stressful situations.

➤ What impact might stress or absenteeism have on the Army and your personal life?

➤ As a participant in this interview and your discussion on stress and absenteeism, what perceptions do you now hold about stress or absenteeism?

➤ Do you have any thoughts or concerns you would like to share about your perceptions and experiences as a sergeant in Army in charge of federal civilian employees not covered in this interview?

4. Results

Eight common themes emerged through the data analysis process: (a) treatment of people, (b) communication, (c) supervision of military v. civilian members, (d) rules and regulations, (e) style of the leader, (f) training, (g) hostile working environment, and (h) experience. Analysis of the data followed the application modified van Kaam method by Moustakas (1994). Qualitative analysis software NVivo 10® was used to systematically code, organize, and categorize the data in revealing similar patterns and themes. The research instrument template and interview scripts were developed before the start of the interview in an effort to manage and control the data. Participants' code, time

and date were recorded and placed in the audio recorder folder.

The computer software program NVivo 10®, was used to analyze the data for patterns, clustering, and themes. The program combined efficient management of non-numerical, unstructured data with powerful processes of indexing, searching, and theorizing (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, NVivo 10® software program helped to make sense of complex data; as it was an excellent tool for rapid coding, thorough exploration, and rigorous management and analysis of this study (Creswell, 2008). This concept is called horizontalization or listing of every relevant expression of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

4.1 Findings

Question 5. Question 5 was, "What kind of experiences has caused stress to you that have affected your team or employees work habits? As shown in Table 1 below, four out of 15 (27%) participants believed that last minute tasks or short suspense causes stress and affected his or her team and employees work habits. Participant PS005 expressed,

"Some of the things that I have experienced could be, that we as sergeants in the United States Army have a task and purpose as compared to my civilian counter parts; they go day by day or as time progresses. They really don't have a 'things to do list' I write myself a things to do list; I write them down and prioritize. My counterparts or civilian leaders would say that they would get to that whenever they can if it is not a hot issue."

Table 1: *Response to Question 5 (N=15)*

Prevalent Themes	Frequency	%
Last minute tasks/short suspense	4	27
Disciplinary actions	3	20
Push Back	2	13
Sequestration	2	13

Participant PS012 stated,

"I sometimes tend to internalize it and carry it home, so that stress I bring back to the workplace, and of course my employees or team members are going to experience it. I do control anger pretty well, but it is probably like, "Hey look, I just need this now or I needed it yesterday and you still don't have it done," so my tone will change in terms of how I'm asking for something. That's not how it was yesterday. I think the

stress is because I will be internalizing a lot of the issues that are unresolved."

Participant PS009 described,

"The kind of experience I have that causes stress for me and affects my team and the work environment is last minute tasks that the employees know about beforehand; last minute tasks or missions that have to be accomplished."

Participant PS010 shared,

"Not meeting deadlines or mission due to one of my civilian employees dropping the ball, and not being able to discipline the civilian in the manner in which I would do for a military personnel."

As shown in Table 1 above, three out of 15 (20%) participants believed disciplinary actions caused stress and affected his or her team. Participant PS009 expressed, "I had a lot of stress would try to curb my authoritarian voice, wording, and behavior when speaking with civilian employees for disciplinary actions."

Participant PS013 explained,

"I have had a few experiences where it becomes stressful when it comes to disciplinary actions when a federal employee does not do his or her job or specific task or duty like they are supposed to. Not doing the things that they are assigned or does not show passion, and not doing what they know is the right way. Because of this we have learn how to deal with soldiers when they have issues rather than simple corrective training, Uniform Code of Military Justice [UCMJ], counseling."

Participant PS014 expressed,

"When you are working with civilians, the ripple effect is worst, for example, last year when the federal employees experienced sequestration and furloughs. That was probably the most stressful time for me on the team, I could see part of what civilians were going through, but I really didn't know because I am a soldier, and how it affected me and how it affected them was going to be totally different."

Question 6. Question 6 was, "Please describe how you deal with employees who take frequent sick leave." As shown in Table 2 below, seven out of 15 (47%) believed you should talk with the employee or soldier and see what services is needed.

Participant PS011 explained,

"As part of the program and services, we provide support to Army casualty assistance, funeral honors,

congressional, sexual assault response and prevention, evaluations, voter assistance, publications, DDR which is drug demand reduction program, and safety. All of these programs fall under well-being, so for us we have to be available to assist where we are needed in our respective programs. That is not always from 7:30-4pm Monday through Friday. Folks notice this, particularly when you conduct casualty training, and some casualty trainings are offered Monday-Friday and maybe one or two days a week throughout the month."

Table 2: *Response to Question 6 (N=15)*

Prevalent Themes	Frequency	%
Talk to the employee/soldier	7	47
Provide Counseling	3	20
Check for Medical Reason	5	33

Participant PS005 stated,

"I will talk with the individual first, but if it's a reoccurring thing and not really legit that I am aware about as the supervisor, I might question it and talk one on one to see what is going on with that person or family. If it affects the workload, then I seek out a plan of action to put in place."

Participant PS015 described,

"The way I deal with it, I try to have a talk with them to see if there is something going on that I can't see that they may need help or advice on as to why they are being absent more than normal. Best to get to know the person to see if there is any way I can assist in taking care of the situational problem that they may have."

Participant PS007 stated,

"They talk to our soldiers and help them improve on their physical training, weapons qualifications. I would send our civilians to talk with them as well, everything is confidential, and it is not like they would tell me what the member said. I think this is a good avenue to go."

Participant PS014 expressed,

"Depending on their demeanor or if it is something that they feel that we can talk about in their areas we will talk or we can talk in my office. I would not be in direct conversation telling them that they have been gone all this time, ok what's going on. It would be a more subtle approach, because if you come in too hard they will look at you as if you were crazy and shout

down on you. You have to ease into it, that's what I would do."

As shown in Table 2 above, three out of 15 (20%) participants deal with employees who take frequent leave of absent through counseling.

Participant PS012 stated,

"Due to the unions and regulations I am not a judge of whether it is a true sickness or not, it is just if they have the sick days to do it. It is an issue of pre-planning for me, and an issue of ensuring that I have other employees cross-trained; that way, during sickness or emergency or leave, we can still accomplish what we need done."

Participant PS006 described:

"If an employee takes frequent sick leave or leave of absence, first, I am going to make sure to get with the employee and let them know my concerns about the frequent leave of absence. We have regulations in place to address this problem."

Participant PS006 shared the following:

"By regulations civilians who are absent more than three days must produce a doctor's excuse. I stick with the regulations, policies, and procedures for employees who I feel are abusing it. I can follow the regulations that allow me to place them on leave restrictions. I would counsel the employee and let them know my concern and or place them on leave restrictions."

Participant PS010 expressed,

"If they have medical documentation and it is legit I have no problems with absenteeism. When it becomes excessive, then they would need to seek employment elsewhere."

As shown in Table 2 above, five out of 15 (33%) participants believed medical reasons could be the cause for employees taking frequent sick leave.

Participant PS010 explained,

"People become ill; however, when it becomes chronic behavior of calling out sick, and there is no documentation to support the illness, I take action to retrain or replace, or accommodate them, based on a disability. The employee may need to tele-work. At the end of the day we have to complete our mission."

Participant PS011 stated:

"I personally have employees who take frequent sick leave, and I have no problem with that, some people do and I'm not one of them. Some employees have medical situations that they don't discuss with you

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and I'm ok with that as long as I know you are performing whenever you are at work. It is not the absenteeism; it is whether or not you meet the requirements of your position, your duties and responsibilities."

Participant PS009 expressed, *"I must make sure that they have all their documentations in order."* Participant PS010 stated, *"If they have medical documentation and it is legit I have no problems with absenteeism."*

Participant PS008 shared,

"One the guidelines for civilians are s to provide medical notice after 2-3 days to support their time out of the office or took off. I think you have to take a moment and analyze what the time off sick leave is for, i.e., surgery, or after effects of having a surgery or things of that nature. Implement a policy and when there is a violation of that policy, you have to reprimand accordingly."

5. Discussion

The synopses of the responses encapsulated the essence of the voices of the participants pertaining to his or her lived experiences for this study. The voices and perspectives of participants integrate the firsthand knowledge of the Army sergeants who participated in the study and provided insights about supervising federal civilian employees who may suffer from stress and absenteeism. The research questions were intended to appropriately support the purpose of this investigation, and to gain knowledge and understanding from the experiential perceptions of Army sergeants in charge of federal civilian employee who may suffer from stress and absenteeism. The question design set the activity, mode and mood for open and honest sharing of Army sergeants lived experiences from his or her perspective (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The objective of the investigator is to present and interpret conclusions drawn from the literature review, the methodology, and the analysis of the data.

Values play important roles in determining how we function as individuals, family members, and members of work teams. Values drive behaviors. A value is "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach, 1979). Our study reveals that Army Sergeants' values (e.g. focus on mission accomplishment) may not be fully shared by civilian employees and this mismatch may be causing some stress and absenteeism. Goal congruence between military managers and civilian employees can mitigate this source of stress and absenteeism (Kouzes and Posner, 2012). We recommend regular workshops on mission and goals between the military managers and civilian employees as a way to coalesce the military and civilian mindsets at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

5.1 Limitations and Implications

The findings for this study are not generalizable to the entire population of Fort Belvoir federal civilian workforce, who serve under the leadership of Army sergeants. Following the same aspects of this study, a quantitative or mixed approach to this research study may provide positive and or negative impacts to military leaders' style and influence in the federal workplace. Such replication studies with a larger number of respondents can lead to statistically significant relationships that would enhance the generalizability of these findings. Below are several suggestions for directions for future research.

Expanding the study to include Army Officers in charge of federal civilians working under the leadership of military leaders across the United States or Virginia might show stronger data relating to stress and absenteeism in the workplace. This information would provide the federal civilian and military communities with additional knowledge, awareness, and understanding for improvement, and to develop federal civilians' and soldiers' critical skills necessary for future challenges emerging in the 21st century.

Another possible area for future study is cultural diversity in the workplace, and how it relates to population of a different generational era (Fisher & Crabtree, 2009). Depending on the generation from which the leaders are from versus the federal employees' generational era, there could be an effect on the environment that he or she leads in the future. Based on organization shortages of critical skills in the commonplace today, domestic and global organizations must focus on workforce optimization for bottom-line results (Hickman, 2010; Moran, Harris and Moran, 2011).

Examining how military leaders design and manage working conditions in other services will provide the Army sergeants and military communities with recommended standardized operating procedures (SOP) for achieving organizational mission and goals. Research shows that stress is a multifaceted phenomenon. Stress is a complex entity, and what may be stressful to one person is not always the same for another (Gilchrist-Petty & Folk, 2014). Another possible area for future research study is job satisfaction. The data only provides information on

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small sample (15) Army sergeants' lived experiences in charge of federal civilians regarding stress and absenteeism working under the leadership of military leaders at Fort Belvoir, Virginia.

Expanding to other services will define trends on a larger scale outside of the Army to include Navy, Coast Guard, Marines, and Air Force Sergeants or officers in charge of federal employees who are similarly situated in a global perspective. For leaders to be successful in the future, individuals and organizations must expand their knowledge and understanding of leadership and how it is practiced. Strong leadership is important to the success of organizations to foster a more inclusive approach to leadership in the 21st century (Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2006).

Every leader and employee wants an opportunity to advance in his or her career; however, if they are dissatisfied with leadership or unhappy with their job then it is difficult for them to succeed or reach their full potential in a hostile working environment, which could cause stress and absenteeism. A more in-depth analysis of stress and absenteeism from other experiences in the community will support the need for cultural change.

Changing an organization's culture is another area for future research. Changing an organization's culture is not an easy process (Brown, 2011). Culture derives from an organization's shared behaviors and the working relationship that members have developed over time (Brown, 2011). Military and civilian culture carries two different set of rules, regulations, and policies. It is critical for Army sergeants to understand and apply them effectively and fairly in application of his or her duties. The transformation of an organization, consequently, takes much time to be effective (Brown, 2008).

Pettigrew (2000) stated, "Emergent change consists of ongoing accommodations, adaptations, and alterations that produce fundamental change without prior intentions to do so" (237). Organizations must be able to change on continuous bases if they expect to survive and thrive in the 21st century (Medley & Akan, 2008). The results of the study will also benefit military leaders in an effort to develop policies that require mandatory conflict management training for all military leaders who supervises federal employees.

Research shows that how leaders manage conflict in the workplace impacts productivity and outcomes of conflict, for both the individual and the organization (Trudel & Reio, Jr., 2011). Poorly managed conflict or workplace environment will have a negative impact on the level of frequency of future conflict, which has a direct negative effect of employees' performance, learning, and work productivity (Trudel & Reio, Jr, 2011).

This study contributes to new ideas, and knowledge discovered during the research. The results show how Army sergeants in charge of federal employees' leadership style influences behavior, and affects attitudes, work productivity, quality of life, and absenteeism, which is the driving force for motivating employees. The study also shows how a lack of *effective communication* from military leaders causes a breakdown in communications between employees and his or her leader, which could lead to a stressful environment.

Organizational leaders today want employees who can respect one another in the workplace regardless of the individual ethnicity, age, gender, religion, national origin, disability, or sexual preference. Another benefit of the research study is that it promotes and defines environments that is free of hostile working environment, is considered a healthy working environment, and a sign of good leadership. Good leaders open opportunities for future possibilities for younger leaders to develop and embrace change without any forms of prejudices.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study will benefit the military leadership in fostering an environment that is knowledgeable and trained in supervising federal civilian employees well into the 21st century. Work stress has been identified as a causal agent in several physical, mental, and organizational environments (Ganster & Schaubroeck, 1991). Job stress affects not only individuals, but has cost American industry more than $100 billion annually in absenteeism, loss of productivity, and health issues associated expenses (Hendrix, Spencer, & Gibson, 1994). A strong relationship between Army sergeants and federal civilian employees and followers is critical to the success of the overall mission. It is known that excessive absenteeism in the organization could be expensive (Brown & Lam, 2008). Reducing absenteeism is a goal for many organizations, and the leader should focus on factors that cause individuals to be absent (Brown & Lam, 2008).

"You're a leader only if you have followers, and that always requires the development of relationships—the deeper the relationships, the stronger the potential for leadership" (Maxwell, 2007,). Federal employees have an essential role in supporting the military in sustaining the current fight on global terrorism, and

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building a culture that embraces the future of national security. "Culture is the life force of an organization" (Hickman, 2010). "In organizations, much as in society, culture is where the real values and underlying beliefs, practices and behavioral norms, symbols, ceremonies, and customs exist" (Yukl, 2002, p. 24).

The study was valuable for newly appointed Army sergeants who may find themselves thrust to lead federal civilian employees in joint military and diverse civilian organizations. The working environment should be free of stress to minimize health risk and lower the chance of depression, anxiety, suicide by employees, family members, and leaders (Karney & Crown, 2007).

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