

**Evolving Through Experience:
A Reflection on My MBA Journey and Future Growth**

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Building a professional identity is an ongoing and changing process influenced by experience, learning, and personal development. My journey has been shaped by a mix of military leadership, civilian education, and a dedication to learning. I acquired the importance of responsibility, mentorship, and adaptability values that strengthened as I advanced to Staff Sergeant and later to Chief Warrant Officer. In my pursuit to improve my managerial and analytical capabilities, I enrolled in a Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at American Military University (AMU) to combine my military experience with business knowledge. This academic pursuit has enhanced my comprehension of management theories, including contingency and transformational leadership, while enabling me to implement these concepts within practical organizational settings.

The insights gained from AMU's coursework and professional experiences have honed my leadership philosophy, placing a strong emphasis on adaptability, cultural awareness, and decision-making. Looking ahead, I aim to apply these competencies through career development and mentorship while remaining acclimated to emerging trends in leadership and technology. My ongoing professional journey, captured through my ePortfolio, reflects the merging of past experiences, present growth, and future aspirations toward impactful leadership in both military and civilian environments. This reflection will discuss my experiences before pursuing an MBA and the growth and knowledge I gained during the program. It will also present a Career Development Plan (CDP) and discuss how I intend to apply my MBA skills in my future career.

Past: Foundations of Professional Identity

During my education and military career, I built a professional identity through a transformative journey. My commitment to lifelong learning, combined with leadership experiences and a focus on self-improvement, developed my desire to lead. The transition into a leadership role began with my promotion to the rank of sergeant, a position that entailed supervisory responsibilities. Throughout the proceeding years, I had the privilege of guiding and mentoring diverse groups of soldiers. I was fortunate to embrace an even greater challenge when I was elevated to the position of Staff Sergeant, which required me to lead fellow leaders. Recognizing the importance of continuous education, I understood that I needed to further my studies to align with the advancements in my managerial roles.

My decision to pursue an MBA was driven by my career progression from a supervisory role to a management position. While many individuals seek an MBA for career advancement and higher salaries, I pursued it for personal growth, with the understanding that my employability would also benefit. This endeavor was not without its challenges. Before entering the MBA program at AMU, I experienced several personal and career challenges that placed me outside my comfort zones.

Balancing my family life and civilian certifications with my military duties as an initial entry training instructor was the primary challenge leading up to and during my MBA program. This period was a test to time management, as juggling extensive work and family responsibilities was difficult, a common challenge for adult learners returning to education (Kara et al., 2019). By developing strong organizational skills, I was able to successfully navigate this demanding period. This cultivated my focus towards a professional life in business. Observing leaders during administrative meetings was one of my early learning moments that shaped my

business direction towards an MBA. I was fascinated by various leadership styles, particularly the idea that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to decision-making. Before pursuing an MBA, I encountered the emerging concept of contingency theory, where I noticed leaders modifying their strategies based on circumstances.

The contingency theory was a perspective I had before pursuing my MBA, and I realized that I had not been exposed to this theory until my MBA courses started at AMU. This theory concludes that there is not a single best way to manage processes of organizing, decision-making, and leadership (Grotsch et al., 2013). Leadership in the Army is challenged with continuous internal and external changes in the work environment with leaders constrained to adapt to these changes. My pre-MBA contingency theory observances included soldiers cultural and social ethnic differences, consistent leadership changes, and mission changes. The observant experiences in leadership contingencies, combined with the knowledge acquired during my MBA program, have equipped me with the necessary tools to assist in my present managerial position.

Present: Growth and Key Learning

The MBA program provided me with the knowledge and opportunity to apply theoretical concepts in real-world settings. In higher education, project-based learning serves as a vital tool for applying integrated knowledge to real-world scenarios (Moretti & Giovannini, 2011). An academic artifact used in my ePortfolio is from my Strategic Human Resource Management course. I created a 14-page change management initiative proposal for a mock HR department at The Home Depot. The initiative proposed a certification requirement for all Home Depot department supervisors which contained a memorandum, PowerPoint presentation, detailed proposal, and an accompanying survey. It included management course objectives that encompassed the Five-Step Change Management Process and SMART (specific, measurable,

actionable, relevant, and time-based goal) assessment. Next, a business model assessment of my previous job role serves as a strong academic ePortfolio artifact.

In my previous position, I was responsible for the logistics of helicopter components within an Aviation Support Company (ASC). I conducted a Mission Model Assessment of the ASC as part of my Organizational Management course. I organized a thorough review, diagnosis, and enhancement by applying the objectives learned in my coursework. My main takeaway was that I could apply this review process to other organizations I am involved with. This assessment, included in my ePortfolio, shows potential employers that I have the essential skills to evaluate a company's relationships and processes with its beneficiaries, as well as its internal operations. Additionally, a SWOT (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis has been conducted to assess the internal and external factors impacting the ASC. Following this, a reflection on my current key strengths and weaknesses, based on past experiences, will be analyzed.

Employing strength and weakness to my prior and current MBA experience demonstrates a positive shift in direction. A SWOT analysis helps to take a clear and realistic look at what is good and where it falls short (Kenton, 2024). Reflecting on my pre-MBA experience, I faced challenges with time management; however, I showed strengths in being open-minded to different leadership styles. Progressing in my military career from the position of Staff Sergeant to Chief Warrant Officer, all while pursuing my MBA, I have cultivated my leadership style. This experience has enabled me to manage the balance between professional obligations and personal time. During my MBA program, I applied the principles of leadership, organizational change, and stakeholder engagement in practical settings. The following will reflect on how I apply the knowledge gained from these principles in my current management position.

In my present managerial role, I occupy an essential leadership position that entails overseeing an Army aviation battalion's aircraft maintenance program. This role best reflects transformational leadership principles which are key to organizational change in the Army. Army aviation maintenance constantly evolves due to shifts in leadership, technology, organizational structure, culture, and mission requirements. During organizational change, transformational leadership influences the organizational culture of employees (Islam et al., 2020). Leaders must possess the ability to adapt to changes while maintaining a comprehensive understanding of their organization's culture. In practicing transformational leadership, I guide my battalion through transitions by identifying the most effective courses of action and communicating and delegating changes while staying aligned with the prevailing culture. Moving forward, I will draw on my leadership experience, adaptability, and cultural awareness to take on new challenges.

Future: Application to Career and Industry Impact

To effectively plan for my career's future, I must leverage the knowledge gained from my past training, schooling, and career progression. A career plan helps to identify your objectives with realistic goals needed to achieve them. Utilizing a Career Development Plan (CDP) with SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) goals will ensure that your objectives are attainable within a certain time frame (Boogaard, 2023). As part of my 1, 3, and 5-year CDP, my first-year objective is to leverage my ePortfolio during the interview phase of my upcoming Permanent Change of Station (PCS). My third-year objective is to achieve promotion to the next Chief Warrant Officer rank and secure the lead position in Support Operations. My fifth-year objective is to complete my military retirement and initiate a civilian job search. This CDP establishes key milestones for the transition process and defines strategies for overcoming anticipated obstacles. To ensure future career success, I will periodically review,

update, and revise my SMART goals. The CDP will reinforce my commitment to civic and social responsibilities by serving as a constant reminder of how leadership shifts affect soldier morale.

The integration of civic and social responsibility into professional networking and mentorship fosters connections that go beyond personal career progression. Aligning shared values and commitment to the common good fosters relationships and builds a strong network of like-minded individuals (Amoaka, 2024). My professional development is supported by mentorship and networking. I have a mentor in a similar role who is three years my senior, and we have a strong, consistent line of communication. I intend to sustain an ePortfolio that will contain artifacts supporting both my current and future career development. It will serve as a platform to showcase my skills to potential employers, featuring a link to my resume and highlighting the value I can bring to the table. As my ePortfolio develops, it will have a lasting and professional influence on my reflections.

The knowledge and skills acquired through my MBA program will impact on my leadership decisions and strategies throughout my future professional endeavors. In my role as an aviation manager, I plan to apply MBA skills to engage with senior commanders while maintaining soldier morale. These skills and knowledge include problem-solving, understanding organizational leadership, and building executive trust through clear communication and effective leadership. Future career planning will be influenced by my leadership development and prevailing trends in global business.

Leadership and organizational skills are crucial for companies to thrive in uncertain, complex environments. The future of leadership will focus on emerging technologies, remote work, and more digital business practices (Liden et al., 2025). Leaders will encounter increasingly complex and non-traditional circumstances while fulfilling their leadership

responsibilities. These roles will often lack direct, face-to-face interactions, highlighting the importance of aligning career planning with evolving leadership trends. My ePortfolio career plan will evolve with current technological trends while simultaneously maintaining the traditional practice of face-to-face interactions. This is essential for staying well-informed on the predominant technological global trends.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the experience of pursuing my MBA program has been transformative, as it has effectively integrated my military leadership background with the business knowledge acquired through the course objectives. This has significantly shaped my professional identity in meaningful ways. Integrating military leadership experience with MBA concepts has boosted my leadership skills and deepened my understanding of management practices, including contingency theory and transformational leadership. The insights I gained from MBA tools such as the Five-Step Change Management Process, Mission Model Canvas, SWOT analysis, CDP, and SMART goals will serve as a solid foundation for attracting potential employers through my ePortfolio.

Looking ahead, my CDP serves as a roadmap for future growth, combining short and long-term objectives that will guide my transition into new roles and opportunities. As I continue to evolve as a leader, I remain committed to lifelong learning, mentorship, and adaptability, ensuring that I can respond effectively to the dynamic challenges of both the military and civilian sectors. The knowledge gained from my MBA program will allow me to foster organizational growth, support my team, and lead with ethical responsibility in an ever-changing global environment. I am confident that this strategic approach will empower me to make a meaningful and lasting impact wherever my career path takes me.

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