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Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Perceptions of Subcontracting Training Within the Department of Defense

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Thomas Wayne Krusemark

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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business Perceptions of Subcontracting Training

Within the Department of Defense

by

Thomas Wayne Krusemark

MS, Central Missouri University, 1977

BME, BGS, University of Kansas, 1976

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

November 2019

Abstract

Veteran-owned small businesses that possess ratings as service-disabled companies (i.e., service-disabled, veteran-owned small businesses [SDVOSB]) are 1 of 5 socioeconomic small business contracting goals that U.S. government agencies seek to comply with U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) set-aside goals. Little is known about collaborative strategies for improving training regarding single point of entry into Department of Defense (DOD) subcontracting. The research questions in this study focus on how veteran-owned small businesses pursue acquisition opportunities from training opportunities. Sabatier's advocacy coalition theory was used as the theoretical foundation for this study. This qualitative study was employed using 6 semistructured interviews of small business owners who possessed SDVOSB status and a content analysis of training policies from corporate supplier diversity offices, procurement assistance centers, small business development centers, and DOD Office of Small Business programs from a midwestern city. The emergent themes were (a) availability of training from procurement support assistance agencies is of limited value to mature small businesses; (b) additional support and training are needed for subcontractors desiring to enter the DOD subcontracting market; (c) significant obstacles are present in gaining access to federal subcontracting opportunities, including complex acquisition strategies and selection of contract type; and (d) understanding and enforcement of SDVOSB regulations were perceived as insufficient. SDVOSB entities can use these findings to comprehend what questions to ask about subcontracting training.

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my wonderful spouse, Dr. Renee Butler, who has always shared her love of learning with me and who served her country faithfully in the military for more than two decades. This study is also dedicated to everyone in the United States armed forces who dedicate their lives to doing the very best they can in reentering civilian life after the military and striving to make their communities a better place to live in every day. Communities have so much to learn from their returning home veterans.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The category of service-disabled, veteran-owned, small businesses (SDVOSBs) constitutes an extremely vital sector in the small business socioeconomic population, which necessitates improving communication and training tools for assisting veterans desiring to enter the small business arena (Dilger & Lowry, 2014). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), 2.2 million veteran-owned, small business firms are present in the United States. Of these 2.2 million enterprises, 156,000 claim service-disabled status (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The Department of Defense (DOD) spends more than two thirds of all federal contract dollars expended in the United States (National Contract Management Agency, 2015). Defense spending within the public sector during 2017 was 0.05% of the gross domestic product, representing a resurgence of business interest in the defense industry (Bureau of Economic Advisors, 2017). According to a Congressional Research Report on small business delivered in March 2019, in fiscal year 2017 more than \$18 billion was awarded to SDVOSBs (Dilger, 2019). Within that number, \$6.8 billion went to acquisitions for direct SDVOSB set-asides, \$4.3 billion was specifically a result of SDVOSBs competing within full and open competitive processes, \$6.8 billion was garnered through direct SDVOSB set-asides, and \$7.1 billion was from competitive acquisitions with other socioeconomic small business classification categories (Dilger, 2019).

The same successes were not found in SDVOSB subcontracting involvement. Although DOD procurement regulations require that SDVOSB entities receive at least

3% small business inclusion of subcontracting dollars within prime contracts, SDVOSB subcontracting performance in prime contracting averages only 1.86% yearly (U.S. SBA, 2017). The subcontracting goal of 3% for SDVOSB socioeconomic entities within DOD subcontracting is not being met according to reports from the SBA Procurement Scorecard data dating back to 2008 (U.S. SBA, 2017). Based upon the fiscal year 2016 Procurement Scorecard Summary in the Federal Procurement Data System-New Generation (2017a) report, 67% of federal agencies reporting, including DOD, missed their subcontracting goal for SDVOSB inclusion in prime contracts. Those agencies were: Agency for International Development, Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Department of Education, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Labor, Department of the Interior, Department of Transportation, Department of Veterans Affairs, Environmental Protection Agency, National Aeronautical and Space Administration, National Science Foundation, Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Social Security Administration (Federal Procurement Data System-New Generation, 2017a).

In this study, I investigated the perspectives of SDVOSB owners and representatives concerning what acquisition training protocol sharing strategies exist or need improving among corporate supplier diversity managers, procurement assistance agencies, small business assistance development agencies, and DOD small and disadvantaged business organizations. The results include strategies that will enhance service-disabled veteran access to training concerning SDVOSB subcontracting opportunities within the DOD, which can be a catalyst for other federal agencies to

emulate. In addition to the introduction, Chapter 1 contains the background of small business set-aside programs, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical foundation for the study, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary.

Background

Before World War II, the Roosevelt administration set the landscape for defining the government's responsibilities in improving the economy through maintaining a divergent allocation of federal government contracting opportunities to socioeconomic concerns as well as creating competition between public and private interests for acquiring government contracts (Luckey, Grasso, & Manuel, 2009). The first formal legislation strengthening the requirement to include small business in DOD procurements began with the passage of the Armed Services Procurement Act in 1946 (Armed Services Procurement Act, 1947). The Armed Services Procurement Act (1947) established the basis for small business entry into DoD contracting. During the height of the Eisenhower administration, Executive Order 10943 created the U.S. SBA, which resulted in the delegation of executive functions to SBA ensuring federal oversight of small business programs (National Archives, 1953). Executive Order 10493 enunciated the expressed intent of guaranteeing small businesses would continue to have formal mechanisms in place to grow and improve the economy (United States Small Business Act, 1953). Expanding and improving the economy upholds the concept of the free enterprise system within the United States (Small Business Act, 1953).

As an outgrowth of legislative committee hearings on small business development in 1956, 1958 ushered in the first of several Small Business Acts, becoming the initial legislation to introduce the concept of small business set-asides within the government. Small business set-asides require federal buying activities to apportion a fair share of government contracting award opportunities to socioeconomic entities (Small Business Act, 1958). In 1974, during the Nixon administration, the SBA received formal transfer of responsibility from the Veterans Administration (VA) for managing entrepreneurship and contracting to support small business inclusion in federal contracting (Small Business Act, 1974).

In this study, I researched SDVOSB owner perceptions concerning the degree of subcontracting training collaboration among procurement assistance service agencies and SDVOSB entities. While there is an abundance of research on development of entrepreneurial skills for veterans, there is scant literature on the identification of barriers to SDVOSBs competing for subcontracting opportunities at the DOD level and their access to training and outreach, which is critical to their survival. Subcontracting inclusion is a critical juncture into prime contracting. In this study, I focused on SDVOSB entities who conduct contracting business with DOD. Furthermore, there was a gap in the literature concerning improving awareness of unique aspects of subcontracting training for socioeconomic small business entities and their importance to the DOD. In their study on psychosocial data and trends in veteran demographics, Heinz, Freeman, Harpaz-Rotem, and Pietrzak (2017) found that scant literature existed relative to the attributes of veteran entrepreneurs and business owners across several spectrums,

including the training and reintegration of veterans on starting and developing business ventures.

Blount and Hill (2015) partially found that when government organizations are within closer proximity to small business enterprises (SBEs), there is a tendency for more expenditures to be spent on all aspects of minority and small business development. Blount and Hill further supported the premise that education and training increases as more expenditures are allocated to government agencies to support small business programs. Their findings also pointed out that outreach alone was negatively associated with expenditure of government funds, which highlights the important distinction that must be made that outreach alone cannot overshadow training. With respect to understanding compliance factors in managing minority business enterprises, their results highlighted that compliance in small business goals and policies are not only critical for small business entry into public and government contracting but are also important for agencies meeting their small business target goals.

It was not until 1978, during the Carter administration, that mandatory subcontracting provisions were put into place, requiring prime contractors to acquire goods and services from small, socioeconomic business entities (Small Business Investment Act, 1978). In 1999, during the Clinton administration, the Veteran Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act (1999) was passed by Congress to broaden the capacity of government acquisition divisions to increase set-aside contracts for SDVOSBs and establish congressional committees to oversee the fair apportionment of federal contracts to veteran small business entities. This Act (from now

on referred to as *the Act*) set criteria for how small businesses can obtain necessary qualifications as veteran-owned or SDVOSB entities. This Act additionally created an Office of Veteran Business Development, moving the position of associate administrator for veteran business development within the SBA (Veteran Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999).

During Bush's administration in 2003, Executive Order 13360 strengthened small business set-aside procedures within previous legislation for federal agencies, setting into law a goal of setting aside at least 3% of total government contract value participation by SDVOSB entities (Vet USA, 2019). Provisions within Executive Order 13360 applied to federal contracting prime contract award opportunities, including minimum percentage goals for SDVOSB subcontracting under 15 U.S.C. 657f (Small Business Act, 2003). During the Obama administration in 2010, the Small Business Jobs Act of 2010 (Public Law 111-240, 2010), further strengthened federal contracting laws for veteran involvement in subcontracting. Specific subcontracting provisions required that additional assignment of compliance responsibility be assigned to federal contracting officers and small business specialists to review subcontracting procedures and ensure prime contractors acquire goods, supplies, and services from small businesses (Public Law 111-240, 2010). Prime contractors also have the responsibility to submit either individual subcontracting goals or other forms of subcontracting reporting semiannually (Public Law 111-240, 2010).

Each of the military services and individual federal agencies are responsible for meeting small business percentage goals for inclusion of subcontracting dollars within

prime contracting. The overseeing agency for compliance with this rule is the SBA. The SBA Procurement Scorecard is the sole mechanism for grading how well government entities meet their assigned prime and subcontracting goals (U.S. SBA, 2016a). DOD obligations constituted more than 8 percent of federal spending, with 45 percent of those dollars going to services. The total amount of expenditures by the DOD in 2015 topped the \$290 billion mark (Schwartz, Ginsberg & Sargent, 2015). DOD leadership realizes the crucial impact small businesses, including SDVOSBs, have in supplanting an experienced technical support base for DOD to obtain services and research and development requirements (Kendall, 2015).

In 2016, \$100 billion was obligated to small businesses throughout the U.S. government, with 82% of that amount awarded to small businesses under prime contracts (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2017a). In fiscal year 2017, more than \$300 billion was spent on federal contracts in DOD for supplies and services, which is more than all the other federal agencies combined (Federal Procurement Data System-New Generation, 2017a).

Improving all categories of socioeconomic small business inclusion in federal contracts is vital to growing the U.S. economy. There is room for encouragement and optimism in the long-term survival of small businesses through improving training programs. Based upon 2016 reporting statistics for survival and retention of small businesses by the U.S. SBA (2016), 79.9% of small companies were able to sustain their businesses for more than a year, which is the highest rate of survival in recent decades. Although DOD mandates SDVOSBs receive at least 3% of subcontracting dollars under

prime contracts, SDVOSB entities only achieve an average subcontracting award rate of 1.86% toward an annual performance rate of 3.0% (U.S. SBA, 2015a, 2017). The recently released 2018 US Small Business Administration Procurement Scorecard goal shows that although the SDSVOSB subcontracting achievement rate of 3.0% overall was not met (i.e., 2.10%), this is an increase of 20% (i.e., 1.90%) from 2017 attainment figures (U.S. SBA, 2019a). It is also worth noting that the overall federal government subcontracting goal of 30.22% was surpassed at 32.10%, which is a visible sign that more emphasis is being placed on subcontracting achievement (U.S. SBA, 2019a). During fiscal year 2018, the federal government awarded more than \$120.5 billion to small businesses, which is an increase from fiscal year 2017 of \$15 billion (U.S. SBA, 2019a).

The results of this study provide increased awareness of SDVOSB perceptions about subcontracting training and outreach and the criticality of collaborative potential between small business agency service providers and veterans to improve economic opportunities for SDVOSB entities. However, a gap in the literature exists with respect to how procurement assistance organizations and DOD agencies collaborate on how small business owners gain entry within the DOD subcontracting environment.

Problem Statement

DOD procurement authorities have not paid enough attention to SDVOSB subcontracting goals to assure subcontracting inclusion of veteran-owned small business entities in prime contracts (Best, 2013; Layman, 2016; McGann, 2014). Service-disabled small business entities are furthermore not receiving their fair share of subcontracting awards as mandated by federal law, which is decreasing the opportunities for SDVOSBs

to transition to more substantial prime contract awards at the DOD level. The population of SDVOSB owners historically has had a significant impact on the U.S. economy. One out of every 10 veterans own a business, and 45% of veterans are more likely to be self-employed than nonveterans. Veteran-owned small businesses within the United States employ more than 5.8 million people, which makes improving subcontracting access within prime contracting even more critical (U.S. SBA, 2018).

According to Kidalov (2014) during the fiscal year 2010, major contract awards to SDVOSBs within the federal government were reduced by more than 10%, signaling a need to close this gap by placing more emphasis on bolstering SDVOSB entry into simplified acquisition programs and instituting formal training set-aside programs to strengthen SDVOSB opportunities in subcontracting. From 1978 to 2012, the subcontracting goal retention dollars for small business socioeconomic inclusion in contracts increased by a factor of only 1.6% (House Committee on Armed Services, 2012). The executive program for overseeing voluntary subcontracting integration of small business in contracting saw a decrease from 40% to 35.9% over a 7-year period (House Committee on Armed Services, 2012). The slow growth of percentage requirements and negative trends within subcontracting for small business signaled a downturn in emphasizing subcontracting with small business (House Committee on Armed Services, 2012).

According to a special committee appointed by the Secretary of Defense under the authority of the 2017 and 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, the acquisition process is cumbersome and there is no clear and consistent direction for small business

acquisition outreach and training (Section 809 Panel, 2018). The committee also highlighted that small business programs have weak points of entry and lack alignment with DOD agency missions and requirements, failing to contain standardized entry points necessary for small businesses to effectively make the transition from commercial business to conducting business with DOD (Section 809 Panel, 2018). The Section 809 Panel (2018) committee made three recommendations: (a) establish the necessary infrastructure to support small business inclusion into DOD contracting, (b) build upon current successes within DOD ancillary acquisition research programs, and (c) enable DOD partnering on initiatives to collaborate more with industry on best practices.

Shaheen (2016) further supported a need for additional training and collaboration and found that both prime and subcontractors do not take complete advantage of sharing of resources among agencies that provide training. In a survey of 681 small business leaders, Schilling, Mazzuchi, and Sarkani (2017) found that small businesses, including SDVOSBs as a socioeconomic category, are reluctant to pursue prime and subcontracting opportunities within the DOD because of the complexity of DOD procurement processes as well as the inherent difficulties in navigating overwhelmingly complex contracting requirements. Schilling et al. (2014) suggested changing training methods to counter the challenges small businesses face in interpreting solicitation requirements, navigating differing websites about prime and subcontracting joint venture and teaming arrangements, and improving clarity regarding appropriate contract cost and pricing accounting systems required in DOD solicitations.

Zullo and Liu (2017) posited there is a need for further training on changing market conditions within the DOD procurement environment that can affect entry into DOD acquisition. Zullo and Liu emphasized the criticality of small business owners recognizing emerging trends in defense industry reallocation and how differences between DOD contracting requirements and commercial contracting practices can affect their ability to compete for DOD contracts. Commercial contracting practices emphasize shorter production cycles to market delivery, whereas DOD contracting processes require more lengthy production cycles with indeterminate scheduling.

The primary focus of this research was on developing an understanding of SDVOSB owner perceptions of intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level to improve access to DOD subcontracting opportunities. SDVOSBs require further exposure to sources of acquisition training from all federal agencies engaging in government contracting (Collins et al., 2014; U. S. SBA, 2015b). Few studies involve the discussion of strategies for streamlining communication for strengthening collaboration on training initiatives amongst federal agencies (Dilger & Lowry, 2014; Schilling et al., 2017).

External training is less likely to occur among small business firms than large firms because of the availability of resource allocation outlets and internal work environment peculiarities (Susomrith & Coetzer, 2015). Best (2013) emphasized that not enough attention is paid with respect to enforcing regulations and verifying the socioeconomic certification status of veteran companies. Greater collaboration is needed between veteran support agencies to check the socioeconomic status of subcontractor

participation in prime contracts. While different training options for entrepreneurs can create more opportunities, relevant questions that need addressing are how training adequately prepares SDVOSBs to overcome obstacles in the business market and how can agency training performance standards clearly enunciate a sufficient level of preparedness for veterans entering competitive small business markets (Cumberland, 2017).

Small businesses need training and development to capitalize upon unique market niches that require an understanding of the markets they are pursuing, from a broad knowledge of macroeconomics perspective and how competitors within similar niche areas respond to competing demands (Alstete, 2014). The social change implications are that the SDVOSB community will more clearly understand the various capabilities of small business assistance service providers like the procurement technical assistance centers (PTACs), small business development centers (SBDCs) and corporate supplier diversity management (CSDM) offices in providing subcontracting training. Although large businesses predominantly provide many of the products and services to the DOD, small businesses are more innovative in research and development as well as more resourceful in productivity per ratio of dollars invested in employees to the output of research and development products and services (Section 809 Panel, 2018). A wealth of research information on barriers to small businesses competing within the prime contracting DOD environment exists, but there was a gap in the literature with respect to how procurement assistance organizations and DOD agencies collaborate on how small business owners gain entry to the DOD subcontracting environment.

Investigating SDVOSB owner and representative knowledge of acquisition training protocol sharing mechanisms to improve veteran access to training concerning SDVOSB subcontracting opportunities within the DOD was the purpose of this study. The target group in this study comprised SDVOSB owners and representatives within the midwestern United States who had prime contracts with the DOD. I conducted semistructured interviews with six SDVOSB representative and owners from the midwestern United States that were recruited from a sample pulled from the System for Award Management (SAM; 2017) small and large business profile database available through the General Services Administration. This study was focused on investigating strategies for furthering collaboration for intra agency subcontracting training program best practices.

Improving government oversight of SDVOSB goal programs starts with ensuring federal agencies and their industry counterparts collaborate in strengthening education and training (Cox & Moore, 2013). The community of SDVOSB owners possess the experience in DOD programs and offer talents with which they can provide to DOD contracting (Hardison et al., 2015). The social change implications of this study may additionally include increased collaboration across the state, federal, and corporate small business assistance agencies necessary to assist disabled veterans in pursuing DOD subcontracting opportunities through improved subcontracting training. The employment statistics of individuals with disabilities is less than 50% of those without disability attempting to enter the civilian marketplace (Henry, Petkauskos, Stanislawzyk & Vogt, 2014). Post-9/11 unemployment rates for veterans in 2013 was significantly higher than

that of their civilian counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). Individuals with disabilities seeking employment and career opportunities experienced an unemployment rate of 12.4% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a).

Negative trends in how service-disabled veterans are transitioning into the labor force emphasize the need for advocacy coalition groups to increase pressure on making the transition to civilian life and educational programs for veterans more visible (Kleycamp, 2013). The results from this study may raise awareness of DOD subcontracting training opportunities for SDVOSB companies and communicate a need for improving acquisition small business training requirements. A gap in the literature existed relative to subcontracting training processes. In the findings of this study, veteran companies and acquisition service agencies will discover synergistic strategies for collaborating to improve their preparedness when entering the DOD subcontracting market, which could positively affect veteran employment opportunities.

Purpose of the Study

The results of this study benefit all SDVOSB entities because sharing information about perceptions of collaborative efforts between veteran procurement assistance agencies may improve SDVOSB subcontracting training and, therefore, increase SDVOSB awareness of DOD subcontracting opportunities. The findings of this study may inspire social change by encouraging more transparency into procurement assistance agency training services available at the state, local, corporate, and federal level to SDVOSBs desiring to do business with DOD in a prime or subcontracting capacity. The findings may also reveal synergistic outreach and training collaboration

strategies between these business development entities, providing more insight into how available procurement assistance agencies can potentially work more closely together to collectively improve the local economy by increasing avenues for veteran employment.

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the level of understanding by owners and representatives of SDVOSB entities about intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level?
2. To what degree does the level of exposure to intervention training groups assist those entities in developing their business base to make them more competitive for DOD subcontracting opportunities?

Theoretical Framework

The advocacy coalition theory (ACT) provided the foundational framework for this study. Sabatier in the 1990s authored the seminal literature surrounding the ACT at the University of Bielefeld in Germany. Sabatier (2014) developed this framework that centers around five fundamental premises: (a) policy making is not necessarily unique to one area of jurisdiction; (b) realizing that even within a complicated myriad of bureaucratic rules and regulations, positive changes in policy can occur as a result of groups working together; (c) recognizing that advocacy coalitions can precipitate change more quickly if the focus is on intersections of policy subsystems and how they combine to increase the likelihood of change; (d) policy change does not occur in a vacuum and

does not focus strictly on studying change in government agencies; and (e) policy change can occur at the grassroots level (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

The ACT is well suited as a foundation for analyzing the dynamics of organizations and the existence of argumentative positions in those organizations to ascertain if participants are willing to collaborate to effect change (Jenkins-Smith, Silva, Gupta, & Ripberger, 2014). Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014) elaborated that as a foundation, the ACT promotes beliefs as a key contributor and sustaining factor for encouraging collaboration. The ACT provides cohesiveness by drawing upon similar belief structures that provide a balance between individual choice and authoritative constraints within policy subsystems (Jenkins-Smith, et.al. 2014). Striking a balance between personal choices and authentic constraints affords coalitions greater vision in examining how to study issues in public versus private, federal versus state, or local advocacy forums. Advocacy coalitions additionally recognize public domains that require tacit commitment arising out of policy core beliefs that substantiate responsibilities of institutional advocacy supporting subsystems of those institutional advocacy organizations (Rozbica, 2013). In this study, those subsystems are the procurement organizations implementing broader acquisition policy and the small business service assistance advocacy groups that promote veteran advancement interests within federal contracting.

Sabatier (2014) posited that current systems of study in the late 1970s and early 1980s concentrated primarily on policy processes emanating from the executive, legislative, and judiciary assemblies. The policy stages that organizational entities went through, which are primarily heuristic, mostly ignored the positive value of coalitions in

effecting ultimate policy change (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). One principal focus in this study is on how advocacy coalition efforts can potentially complement support of veterans seeking government contracting opportunities.

Henry, Ingold, Nohrstedt, and Weible (2014) stated that although the predominance of studies in which researchers used the ACT have occurred in North America, the utility of the framework has received growing support among researchers in the Philippines, China, India, and Kenya. According to Henry et al., using the ACT creates a communication bridge for combining normative and empirically grounded belief systems concerning public policy impacts. Using the ACT, Henry et al. focused on partner training and sharing of resources to impact policy change and found that interconnectivity amongst coalition groups creates more significant opportunities to exploit events for a change.

Beland and Cox (2015) supported the quest for more interconnectivity through coalition building by illustrating that ideas created within coalitions can inspire opposing actors in public policy to more readily participate in debate forums to influence change and promote social inclusion. Beland and Cox also asserted that coalition frameworks build foundations to sustain courses of action and inspire valence theme platforms that transcend partisan boundaries. Boscarino (2017) suggested advocacy coalitions facilitate framing of issues by encouraging content analysis of policy, providing a more accurate construction of narratives surrounding institutional practices and revealing positive groundwork gains in outcomes from the contested framing of issues.

Fenger and Quaglia (2015) used the ACT as a basis for explaining opposing factions present during the financial crisis in the European Union in 2007. They analyzed regulatory trends and how coalitions responded to those trends. The ACT was ideal for studying veteran support agencies and how they reintegrate veterans back into civilian communities because the framework provides the researcher with a canvass to analyze the subsystems of policies and how organizations lobby to change plans for the common good. I will elaborate on integration of this theory in Chapter 2. In this study, I investigated SDVOSB owner and representative perceptions of the efficacy of procurement assistance agency collaborative training on subcontracting. The ACT is well suited to analyze small business service provider and SDVOSB collaboration efforts between veteran advocacy organizations and SDVOSB entities. The advocacy organizations such as procurement technical assistance centers, small business development centers, and other organizations such as the National Organization for Veteran Business Owners all assist in helping veterans to assert their rights in access to programs. Organizations such as PTACs, state and local SBDCs, and veteran lobbying organizations (e.g., the National Association of Veteran-Owned Business Association [NAVOBA]) provide a guide to resolving adversarial relationships by formulating coalitions to improve policy recommendations among its members (Sotirov & Winkel, 2015).

Nature of the Study

The three most common approaches to research are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods (Patton, 2015). The qualitative method was most suitable for this study

because of the need to understand SDVOSBs as a specific socioeconomic group of small businesses. A qualitative inquiry emanates from a desire to study individual traits of an organizational entity (O'Sullivan, Rassel, Berner, & Taliaferro, 2017). Qualitative research questions encapsulate the essence and reason for the research and define the interactional relationship between interview subjects, qualitative research processes, and the conceptual framework (Birchall, 2014). For the purposes of this study, the qualitative approach allowed for the investigation of different SDVOSB perspectives on training delivery source collaborative efforts and where improvements are needed. Quantitative methodologies would not have been suitable for this study because they would require framing of the research around one reality and set of circumstances in contrast to multiple realities (see Florzcak, 2017). The qualitative methodology is more suitable for finding relationships in a succinctly definable population (Gerring, 2017), such as is the case with SDVOSB entities.

Qualitative methodology is a well-suited approach for the researcher to find out new aspects about the topic they are researching as an alternative to being bound by the restrictive nature of the response to surveys (Kozleski, 2017). Qualitative research enables the researcher more flexibility to adopt a reflective stance toward research (Yates & Leggett, 2016). Qualitative multiple case study methods allow combining semistructured interviews with content analysis of CDSM organizations, PTACs, SBDCs, and DOD small business training practices to explore experiences of SDVOSB entities pursuing acquisition training opportunities. The discourse during the qualitative research process allows for discovering how methods work and why variations in perceptions

toward the subject can affect outcomes (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2017). According to Miles and Rossman (1994), establishing a relationship and pattern of evidence requires evaluating not only causal links but evidentiary information as well.

Definitions

Commercial marketing representatives (CMRs): SBA employees who are assigned to the Office of Government Contracting and exist throughout the United States at federal facilities that engage in federal contracting. CMRs provide subcontracting training to both federal agency contractors and prime contractors as well as monitor prime contractor adherence to allocated subcontracting percentages within their subcontracting plans (U.S. SBA, 2017d).

Comprehensive subcontracting plan: A program unique to the DOD that is a negotiated plan for utilizing socioeconomic small business concerns in subcontracting on a corporate or plant-wide basis (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2017b).

Corporate diversity inclusion manager: A position at the corporate level that is responsible for managing small business subcontracting. Furthermore, this position ensures diversity of suppliers to satisfy subcontracting requirements at the prime contracting level (Northrop Grumman Corporation, 2017).

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency: This DOD organization facilitates commercial (both large and small business) investigations into a wide range of scientific and laboratory research to acquire full-scale development prototyping in research and development and scientific fields through broad agency announcements (General Accountability Office, 2015a).

Individual subcontracting plan: Required for all full and open acquisitions that exceed \$700,000. A plan of how large businesses subcontract services or supplies to small companies on prime contracts (Williams & Alba, 2016).

Individual subcontracting report: An individual subcontracting Report is a report specifying how much (in percentage) of business the prime contractor allocated to small business (i.e., socioeconomic) entities that is a material requirement of the negotiated contract (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2017b).

National Association of Industrial Classification (NAICS) code: A six-digit code that is used by federal agencies in assigning small business standards to specific types of business operations. In addition to classification as the principal criteria for self-certifying small business size by an establishment to stay in compliance with U.S. SBA size standards, it is also the principal statistical tool for compiling statistical data on small business labor and work differentiators that contribute to the U.S. economic base (NAICS Association, 2017).

National Association of Veteran-Owned Business Association (NAVOBA): A veteran lobbying organization that advocates for veterans and provides input to government agencies to streamline veteran access to DOD contracting opportunities (NAVOBA, 2018).

Prime contractor: This type of contractor enters a contractual relationship with the government. This classification does not include first tier or subsequent tiers of subcontractors for a contractual effort (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2017b).

Procurement technical assistance center (PTAC): Jointly funded through state and federal sources, PTACs are in every state in the United States to provide free counseling, professional small business registration counseling, and interface instructions about how to pursue small business contracting opportunities within the government (Association of PTACs, 2018).

Service-disabled, veteran-owned small business (SDVOSB): This term does not designate a vulnerable population but rather refers to a sector of small business whose ownership is certified by the VA and U.S. SBA. This designation allows this sector of small business to compete for exclusive federal government procurement set-asides for SDVOSBs (Association of PTACs, 2018).

Set-aside: A specific socioeconomic small business classification that can include designations defined by the U.S. SBA (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2017a).

Small business development center (SBDC): Centers that can either be located on a collegiate campus, state economic development agency, or municipal entity office affiliation. Funding for the operation comes from both state and private interests. Their mission is like PTACs but focuses more on business development in the small business incubator stage to include sources for obtaining start-up business capital, marketing assistance, sorting through regulatory business interpretation, international trade, and technology development (America's SBDC, 2018).

Subcontracting plan: This plan specifies how a prime contractor will apportion up to 49% of their planned contractual requirements under a prime contractual effort.

Specific apportionment of subcontracting percentages by socioeconomic status occurs by regulatory allocation requirements and results in agreement of a “good faith” effort in meeting subcontracting goals (U.S. Department of VA, Office of Acquisition and Logistics, 2017)

Summary subcontracting report: A report that is submitted each year by October 30th, is required for commercial contracting plans, and is a detailed review of a contractor’s total subcontracting awards for both commercial and individual subcontracting plans (Dempsey, 2015).

System for Award Management (SAM) database: A database that accesses information relevant to contractor profile information to include small business certifications, NAICS Codes used, corporate legal status, and addresses of the place of business (U.S. General Services Administration, 2017).

Assumptions, Scope and Delimitations, and Limitations

The researcher’s responsibility in a qualitative research endeavor is to establish rigor and richness in the presentation of data and solidify the relationship between data analysis and findings that emphasizes quality and true application of findings (Colorafi & Evans, 2016; Morse, 2015). The researcher accomplishes this through recognizing assumptions, limitations, and delimitations and investigating the *why* and *how* of concept elaboration and analysis of experiences of respondents within the study (Sanjari et al., 2014). Assumptions are assertions you believe are true and additionally validate relevancy within the research (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). The scope of a research endeavor defines the parameters in analysis as well as what the researcher is not

including when framing the overall study (Simon & Goes, 2013). Delimitations are closely aligned with scope determination and are individual choices the researcher makes that limit data gathering (Simon & Goes, 2013). Examples of delimitations include database restrictions, types of literature the researcher chooses to add in order to strengthen thematic paradigms within the study, and specific journals or publications (Snelson, 2016). The researcher analyzes sources and decides whether data should be analyzed collectively or segmented into smaller units (Bengtsson, 2016).

Factors in research can be out of the researcher's grasp. In qualitative case studies, limitations can appear, because, over time, the dialogical framing between case study and theory can potentially change (Rule & John, 2015). According to Eisner (2017), the pursuit of qualitative research is necessary where greater insight is sought concerning the unique qualities of the group and the existence of support mechanisms concerning the environment in which the study group operates.

Assumptions

Assumptions are the building blocks to support theoretical propositions and draw the distinction between what generates a rationale for existing theory and provides additional detail for creating new approaches to explaining predictive outcomes (Foss & Hallberg, 2017). Assumptions constitute propositions that the researcher ascribes are factual, complementing the basis for conducting an exhaustive search of information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). One assumption in this study was that the reality of the experiences of the six SDVOSBs involved in the research were representative of problems and issues that SDVOSB entities face as a unique, socioeconomic, small

business group operating within the subcontracting environment of the DOD. I also assumed that the SDVOSB owners and representatives would be truthful and forthcoming concerning difficulties they may have encountered either receiving subcontracting training or navigating the subcontracting process within DOD acquisition. Reducing bias and the potential lack of truthfulness can occur by ensuring confidentiality and informed consent at the beginning of the interview process (Grady, 2015). In this study I mitigated the presence of bias by exercising a strict protocol of confidentiality toward the research participants, as well as putting in place informed consent procedures before the study began.

There is also a certain degree of risk involved in conducting semistructured interviews in qualitative research because the researcher can ascribe meaning to participants' perspectives to gain a constructivist approach to improving subcontracting training collaboration among procurement assistance agencies within the study. The risk from attributing meaning can be made less by using member checking to ensure the research findings accurately portray the experiences of the interview subjects (Clemins et al., 2015; Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking also provides an additional checkpoint for the researcher, ensuring that the research approach and processing of the information is trustworthy and reflects humane handling of the interview information (Harvey, 2015). Member checking was used in this study by following up with the research participants following transcription of the interview to ensure accurate input of information into the NVIVO 12 software analysis tool.

The SDVOSB entities that I selected for this study possessed the necessary certification from the VA to self-certify service-disabled status within the SAM System. The six SDVOSB entities chosen for semistructured interviews in this study possessed core competencies and self-certification NAICS Code representation within SAM that allowed them to qualify for DOD prime contracts and competitively seek DOD subcontracting opportunities. The selected SDVOSB owner and entities in this study possessed NAICS codes in one of the top five categories of services used by DOD prime contractors: professional support services, maintenance and repair and rebuilding of equipment, defense systems research and development, information technology, and construction of structures and facilities (see GAO, 2017a), additionally reflected in Code of Federal Regulations Size Standard Table (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR, § 121.201, 2017).

Scope and Delimitations

The term delimitations denotes the choices made that restrict data gathering and narrowed the boundaries and scope of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). The restrictions within the data gathering methodology should be replicated in the literature review to inform other researchers of the boundaries of the study (Snelson, 2016). This study involved six SDVOSBs, and I employed purposeful sampling. To be included in the study, the SDVOSB owners and representatives required exposure to subcontracting through prime contracts in one of the five top service industries the DOD contractually obligates against validated through GAO reporting on government contracting trend analysis. The technique I used was necessary because I wanted to capture the lived

experiences of SDVOSB owners and representatives concerning their knowledge about the presence of collaborative methods that PTACs, SBDCs, SBDMs, and CSDMs use to not only counsel SDVOSBs but develop training curriculum specific to subcontracting processes.

Semistructured interviews took place with six SDVOSB owners and representatives. According to Malterud, Siersma, and Guaassora (2015), if the sample size is narrow, a lesser number of participants in the interview pool is necessary than a more significant number, which would be appropriate for a broader topic. Subcontracting training within small business acquisition processes is a very narrow topic and was the basis for this research for two reasons: (a) a gap existed in the literature relative to subcontracting training processes and (b) the DOD experiences the most difficulty in meeting SDVOSB subcontracting goals, second only to Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) Zone entities (U.S. SBA, 2017). Additionally, more than 65% of all federal agencies within the DOD experienced difficulties in meeting their target subcontracting goals, which is not true for prime contracting goals, as most prime goals have been exceeded (U.S. SBA, 2017).

Limitations

When a researcher refers to limitations, they are referring to forces that they have little or no control of where cognizance of achieving neutrality becomes paramount in both designs of the study and conclusions drawn as a result (Kirkwood & Price, 2013). The context of this study was confined to the SDVOSB socioeconomic small business classification and may not have applicability to other socioeconomic areas of small

business. In this respect, socioeconomic small business classification boundaries were established in this study, which compelled me to espouse the utility of research findings to other potential small business socioeconomic training needs. Since this study involved SDVOSB owners who had DOD contracts, the results may not be transferable to service agencies outside of the DOD. A third limitation in this study was that I focused on SDVOSB entities containing industry typology classifications in one of the top five NAICS code categories in the DOD identified by the GAO, which may have limited applicability to other federal agencies or NAICS codes. I minimized the limitations of the study by reducing bias through member checking of interviewee responses and validating respondent content within the interviews (see Arlin & Ostberg, 2015).

Significance

The Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act (1999) put forth requirements allowing veterans the ability to self-certify their service-disabled status to qualify for SDVOSB status as a prime contractor. Executive Order 13360, signed in October of 2004, as an addendum to the Small Business Act of 2003 (2003) provides federal contracting agencies the authority to set-aside procurements exclusively for SDVOSB entities. This act further allowed federal agency Heads of Contracting the authority to develop strategic acquisition planning to allocate at least 5% of their prime contracts and 3% of subcontracts to SDVOSB entities (Small Business Act, 2016).

Senior leaders within federal government activities have direct responsibility for developing an agency's small business plan for carrying out additional SDVOSB provisions within the Small Business Act and report progress on reaching mandatory

prime and subcontracting goals on a yearly basis through the Procurement Scorecard reporting system (U.S. SBA, 2015a). From the period of 2013 through 2015, the DOD has consistently met or exceeded their prime contracting SDVOSB goals; however, they have fallen short in meeting the assigned 3% SDVOSB target subcontracting goal (U.S. SBA, 2015a). DOD goals for subcontracting for 2017 were 34% for general SB, 5% for WOSB, 5 % for SDBs, 3% for Hub Zones, and 3% for SDVOSBs (Department of the Navy, Office of Small Business Programs, 2017). In a DOD Office of Inspector General (2018) Report on Army Contracting Command at an arsenal in Alabama and a large Army Depot in Michigan, inspectors found that small businesses were not afforded adequate opportunity for subcontracting on more than \$900 million in prime contracts. The report further found that inadequate training policies present on contract administration of subcontracting plans contributed to the lapse in oversight (DOD Office of Inspector General, 2018).

The Small Business Act of 2012 (§ 637(d)(4)) stipulated the requirement for large businesses to exercise a good faith effort in meeting subscribed subcontracting goals as stated within subcontracting plans. This Act is also a follow-on to an Interagency Task Force on Contracting (2010) report that found that existing contracting policies were too weak to support contracting officer and program manager leverage capability in encouraging coordination of agency collaboration on small business training and outreach. Current goals for subcontracting plans are required for all full and open competitive procurements awards that exceed \$700,000 for services and \$1.5 million for construction (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2016).

There is no single source for veterans to seek procurement counseling for prime and subcontracting opportunities outside of existing programs offered for veteran small business counseling within the SBA (U.S. SBA, 2015b). Veterans need to know who they can go to if they want to pursue DOD subcontracting acquisition opportunities, whether it is at the local veteran alliance level, state level, or corporate supplier diversity business programs that are currently performing prime contracting work with the DOD. Through joint venture relationships and mentoring with bigger business supplier diversity counseling, subcontracting opportunities can provide veteran-owned businesses with procurement experience and past performance credentialing that can more adequately prepare them for future aspirations to bid on federal prime contracts (U.S. SBA, 2017a).

The share of subcontracting dollars within the DOD is shrinking for small business socioeconomic pools as is evidenced by an overall decrease from \$64 billion to \$54 billion between 2011 to 2015, with SDVOSB categories finishing next to last in subcontracting goal attainment out of the five socioeconomic classes (GAO, 2017a). The federal government's small business certification process is complex and lacks adequate safeguards to ensure SDVOSB effective program management (Best, 2013; Fletcher, 2015). Not understanding where problems are relative to the incidences of fraud in certification and failure of prime contractors to initiate steps to ensure proper SDVOSB certification status can also negatively affect SDVOSB entry into DOD subcontracting (Layman, 2016).

Positive social change can occur from this study because both mature and startup SDVOSB ownership may benefit from the findings of this study because they will more

clearly understand service agency training collaboration shortfalls and know what questions to ask pertaining to subcontracting training at appropriate levels and intersections of business development. The results from this study could highlight emerging training and technical qualification barriers that inhibit SDVOSB entities from pursuing DOD subcontracting opportunities. The findings from this study could potentially complement DOD acquisition training, including procurement training offerings at the Defense Acquisition University (DAU), agency acquisition postgraduate schools, and the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI).

Summary

Veteran entities bring a unique skill set of teamwork and dedication to continuous professional development within the workplace (Hardison et al., 2015). DOD acquisition workforce employees can use these skills to improve the quality of competitiveness for unique military requirements for goods and services. Realizing the potential of sharing veteran entrepreneurial training best practices from different sources of training delivery will provide more focus on what veterans need to increase their competitive stature for entering the DOD subcontracting market. According to Kerrick et al. (2014), as fluctuations occur in the workforce due to military drawdowns, the number of military personnel looking for private entrepreneur activities will increase. The results in this study will provide one avenue for mapping training strategies to qualify SDVOSBs to participate in DOD subcontracting opportunities.

The DOD, Office of Small Business Programs (2017) upholds that veteran sacrifices in their service to their country afford them the right to have access to every

opportunity to take advantage of prime and subcontracting opportunities under the authority of socioeconomic set-aside rules and regulations. The findings from this study may have positive social implications because the discovery of training synergies between the various procurement assistance organizations within the study will emphasize to procurement managers and defense corporate supplier diversity managers the criticality and positive impact to communities from emphasizing the diversity and inclusion of supplier contractor bases through improved subcontracting training. Including SDVOSBs as partners in subcontracting will achieve the goal of increasing socioeconomic diversity and aid the DOD in meeting their SDVOSB subcontracting goals to mirror the success in consecutive years they have experienced in surpassing their prime SDVOSB goals.

Defense acquisition can be broken down into classifying the products and services acquired, how agency procurement officials purchase those products and services, from whom they acquire the services and products, and who performs the acquisition. Reforms within these four stages can occur in milestones, phases, and reviews. Each of these phase points is vulnerable to a mismatch in acquisition milestone direction progress between contracting agency personnel and requirements generators (Gansler, Lucyshyn, Ouimette, & Woollacott, 2015). It is vital for SDVOSBs to understand these phase points and what the optimum transition points are for finding subcontracting opportunities.

The DOD initiated three different versions of the Better Buying Initiative from 2010 through to 2015 (Kendall, 2015). The purpose of these Better Buying Initiatives was to strengthen the relationship between DOD contracting, program managers, and

defense contractors to incentivize them to provide a higher grade of products and services to the DOD at a reduced cost as well as enhance small business performance in DOD contracting as a means of improving efficiency in buying power (Kendall, 2015). Abilities in later versions (i.e., 2.0 and 3.0) of Better Buying Power Initiatives included provisions affecting small businesses. The significant provisions included (a) instituting small business subcontracting participation as an evaluation factor in source selections and (b) allowing past performance criteria to be counted for subcontracting work that small businesses performed on Cost Plus Incentive Fee contracts (Kendall, 2012, 2014).

The findings of this study addressed a gap in the literature in how SDVOSB owners perceive veteran training initiatives in these areas. The U.S. SBA and other veteran support agencies, including PTACs, SBDCs, veteran business outreach centers, university-sponsored entrepreneurship boot camps, veteran career transition programs, and national veteran business development councils, all possess a wealth of resources that can leverage the economic power of veterans. Additionally, the SBA offers programs through the veteran federal procurement entrepreneurship track as well as the service-disabled veteran entrepreneurship training programs. However, there is no single mapping strategy where veterans can go for a single port of entry into DOD subcontracting. Federal agencies do not collaborate with one another to a large extent in economic development support. More emphasis should occur on developing collaborative training models to address socioeconomic training for seeking procurement opportunities (GAO, 2012). The results from this study will encourage entrepreneur training initiative sharing between local, state, and contractor sources of training for SDVOSB entry into

DOD subcontracting. The results from this study should also provide new insight into how different veteran training venues approach acquisition preparedness training for veterans to compete for DOD subcontracting opportunities. Chapter 2 will include a review of literature focusing on training strategies and variables that could potentially impact SDVOSB entry into subcontracting markets.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to investigate SDVOSB owner and representative knowledge of acquisition training protocol sharing mechanisms to improve veteran access to training concerning SDVOSB subcontracting opportunities within the DOD. A literature review establishes the foundation of academic inquiry (Xiao & Watson, 2019) and allows the researcher to identify gaps in existing knowledge (Baker, 2016). This literature review presents a synthesis of the research concerning the evolution of small business set-asides, legislative impacts, misuse and fraud surrounding the small business program, and the research topic of access to acquisition training for veteran owned small business. This section concludes with the research on the theoretical framework within which this topic is discussed.

Literature Review

SDVOSB entities take advantage of intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level to improve access to federal subcontracting opportunities and explore how transitional programs of contracting service providers assist disabled veteran-owned small business owners in developing their business base and acquisition knowledge to make them more competitive for DOD subcontracting opportunities. Literature reviews provide a summary of prior research and synthesize previous research (Rowe, 2014). Conducting literature reviews affords the researcher the capability to gather relevant information regarding the research topic and provides structure to the study (Brandenburg, Govindan, Sarkis, & Seuring, 2014). In this literature review, I

provide a synthesis of contemporary research surrounding the conceptual framework, collaborative networking sources, and improving training delivery regarding subcontracting processes to SDVOSB ownership.

SDVOSB subcontracting achievement statistics lag behind WOSB and SDB socioeconomic categories, finishing next to last in front of Hub Zone subcontracting achievement rates (SBA, 2017). The chart on the following page illustrates the difference between the subcontracting goal and the actual achievement. Out of the four socioeconomic areas, the only category that performed worse than SDVOSB is Hub Zone.

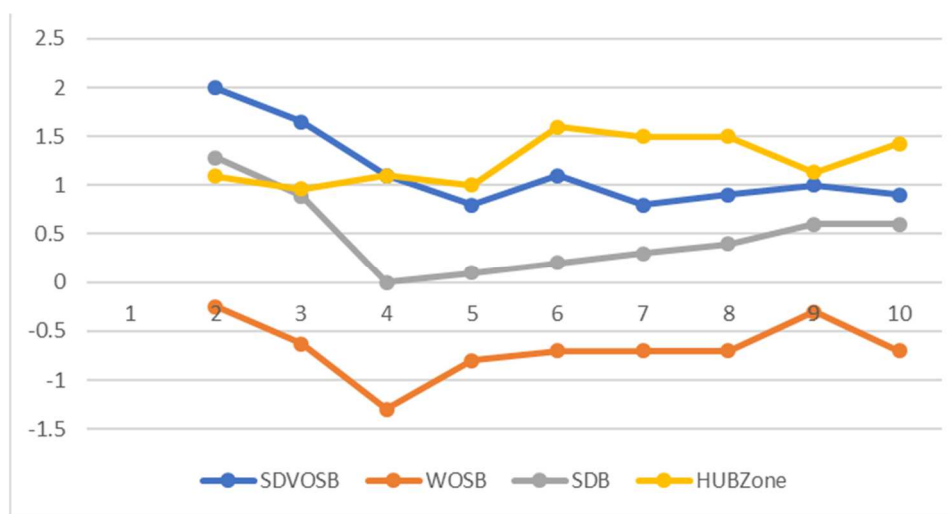


Figure 1. Subcontracting goal versus achievement.

Both mature and startup SDVOSB entities will benefit from this study because they will more clearly understand training agency collaboration shortfalls. The results from this study highlight emerging training and technical qualification barriers that inhibit SDVOSB entities from pursuing DOD subcontracting opportunities, furthering

the importance of advocacy coalitions for improving veteran access to acquisition programs to include subcontracting. The findings from this study may potentially supplement DoD acquisition training, including procurement training offerings at the DAU, service acquisition postgraduate schools, and the FAI.

SDVOSB firms desiring to conduct business with the DOD will benefit by understanding the intricacies and differences between subcontracting and prime contracting laws and policies. Veteran agency activities will more clearly understand the collaboration potential to share information and resources to provide better quality acquisition counseling to service-disabled veterans on subcontracting. To explore factors influencing this reality, I utilized the construct of the ACT framework to investigate how veteran procurement assistance coalitions lobby for and assist veterans in improving outlets for veterans seeking out subcontracting opportunities within the DOD.

The framework in which policy and curriculum training analysis occurred involved six SDVOSB owners and representatives. In this study, I investigated and analyzed perceptions of personnel who administer small business programs within contracting, how coalition groups interact with acquisition agencies, and veteran small business owner and representative knowledge of networking opportunities within existing community coalition groups. Figure 2 is a diagram depicting significant points for thematic consideration when conducting this study using the ACT framework. Figure 2 is a graphical representation of the conceptual communications track for collaboration between SDVOBs, veteran support agencies, and contracting officers awarding prime contracts and administering subcontracts. The arrows pointing in both directions depict

the intersection of continuous interaction between SDVOSB entities and veteran service support agencies on topic areas that can affect the timing of improving subcontracting training process collaboration. The nucleus of the communication chain represents the goal of increasing SDVOSB contracting awards and expanding the visibility of firms eligible to participate in subcontracting on more massive prime contracts. On the left periphery of the communication circle are policy inhibitors that are counterproductive to increasing SDVOSB involvement in subcontracting processes. These negative policy inhibitors may include delays in National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) inclusion in formal regulations and contracting policies and practices, such as sole source contracting and strategic sourcing or category management contracting vehicles, which can potentially shrink the industrial small business base. The left periphery of the figure also includes subcontracting curriculum aids developed by such agencies as FAI, US SBA, and DAU that could provide further knowledge to SDVOSB entities on countering difficult policy affectations to socioeconomic subcontracting inclusion in larger defense contracts. On the right periphery of the communication circle is continuous feedback loops between SDVOSBs in sharing success stories on what works and does not work relative to joint venturing and teaming.

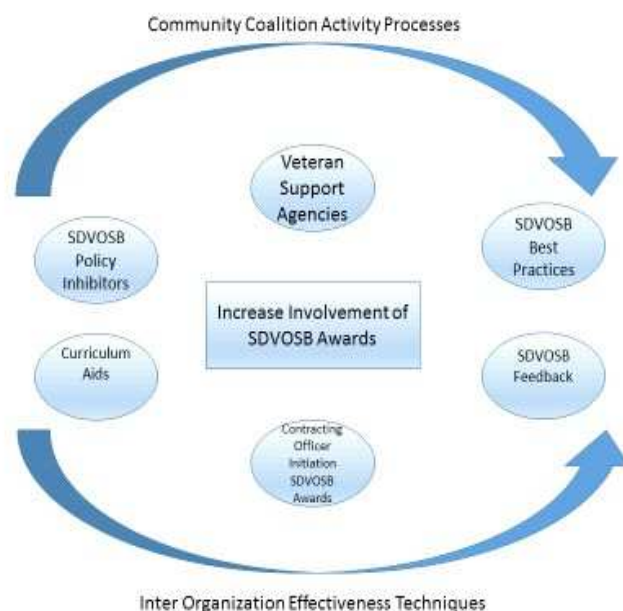


Figure 2. The community coalition activity processes diagram.

Twenty-two million veterans have served in conflicts and/or supporting natural disaster contingencies where the United States has direct influence to maintain global defense stability (Shinseki, 2016). More than 75% of veterans have served directly in a conflict or war, which increases the likelihood that the service-disabled veteran population will continue to grow (Shinseki, 2016). Vietnam veterans make up the most significant percentage of veterans, followed by Gulf War veterans (Shinseki, 2016). Female veterans now comprise more than 20% of the total veteran population (Shinseki, 2016), which is a signal that the veteran community requires diverse approaches to accommodating veteran needs. Since the establishment of the Plymouth colonies in 1636, disabled veterans receive preference for government sponsored programs. In

1776, the Continental Congress formalized the nation's first disabled veteran pension program (McGrevey and Kehrer, 2009).

Today, the VA administers more than 232 community-based centers around the United States that accommodate service-disabled veteran needs (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). In the United States, 2.5 million businesses claim veteran-owned small businesses status, and out of that number, 7.3% have a service-connected disability (U.S. SBA Office of Advocacy, 2017). By the year 2020, 5 million veterans will transition back into our communities and assimilate into the civilian workforce (Stern, 2017). Continuing shifts in the veteran population and fluctuations in the number of veterans with service-connected disabilities will necessitate expanding training and outreach (Goldberg, Cooper, Milleville, Barry, & Schein, 2015).

Evolution of Small Business Set-Asides and Emergence of Veteran-Owned Preferences

As early as 1941, the Roosevelt Administration recognized the need to establish procurement programs that ensured nondiscrimination of marginalized groups in the contracting arena. Roosevelt stimulated the economy by creating jobs through the National Affairs Recovery Administration. This organization was given the task to draft codes of practice for regulating prices and wages in large scale industries that became part of the buildup as a result of economic recovery steps to recover economically from the depression. Small businesses became a dominant force when they took on large businesses in the code drafting process, which was cited as being largely in favor of large businesses (Leuchtenburg, 2019). Ensuing executive orders on the inclusion of

nondiscrimination clauses within contracts continued during the Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations with the institutionalization of procurement policies receiving further emphasis through the SBA in 1953 and Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity in 1965 (Reilly, 2017). In 1969, the 8(a) contracting program first surfaced and became a statutory program in 1978. The program was a combination of two programs designed to assist small businesses in economic development matters as well as provide a launch platform for racial and ethnic groups to gain entry into government contracting (Congressional Research Service, 2019). The 8(a) plan bolsters small and disadvantaged firms who do not have the financial reach-back capacity to compete in the open marketplace (Bates, 2015). Within the small business socioeconomic areas, Section 8(a) companies receive more federal benefits and counseling in achieving financial launch-pad and reach-back capacity, due in large part to mentorship programs put into place (Lewis, 2017). Federal initiatives, such as the All Small Mentor-Protégé Program, sponsored and managed by SBA are a catalyst for small companies, including SDVOSB entities, to develop financial capital and past-performance capacity to enter markets in which they might not otherwise be able to compete in (U.S. SBA, 2017).

Legislative Impacts on Small Business

Determinations of contractor size and whether businesses qualify as small is mainly dependent upon a company certifying their small business status classification by NAICS (Ellinport, 2014). With the passage of the Miller Act in 1935, the contractor community had in place legislation that countered the often-times difficult position that

subcontractors are placed in when seeking immediate payment from prime contractors (Manuel, 2014). Since the government does not have privity of contract with subcontractors to enforce prompt payment from their prime contractors, the Miller Act protects subcontractors who could not otherwise sue contractors for lack of payment for services (Manuel, 2014).

The first organized drive for changes in legislation enacting requirements for prime contractors engaging in subcontracting with small business socioeconomic entities began with the passage of Public Law 95-507 of 1978, which Amended Section 8(d) of the Small Business Act (Amendment to the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, 1978). Prime contractors, who enter into contracts with the federal government exceeding \$700,000 must submit subcontracting plans unless waived (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2017b). Prime contractors must also address how they plan to use small business concerns in socioeconomic categories to meet supply chain requirements within a specific contractual effort (Federal Acquisition Regulation, 2017b).

The Small Business Jobs Act (Public Law 111-240) contained Sections 1312 through 1347 highlighting penalties to prime contractors who misrepresent their subcontractor socioeconomic status and improving procedures for goal reporting and implementing parity among all the socioeconomic categories of small business to bid on government contracts. Subcontracting goals can be individual plans which are unique to one specific contractual action and cover the entire contract period plus any options exercised. Individual plans include types of supplies and services the prime contractor

requires in the performance of their contract, methodology in developing goals, description of indirect costs, types of records necessary for accounting, and goals and dollar apportioning among socioeconomic small business categories (FAR, 2017).

Commercial and master plans apply to all services and commodities sold within a company or plant and are valid for a 3-year period. Commercial and master plans include the goals that cover a company's fiscal year as well as service rates utilized for service contracting applications (FAR, 2017). The Comprehensive Test Program is a research project that was started more than 25 years ago, allowing large business defense contractors to use a single subcontracting plan encompassing all planned small business subcontracting utilization in place of individual subcontracting plans (Office of Small Business Programs: Department of Defense, 2018a). The utility of the Comprehensive Test Program for producing subcontracting opportunities for small business has been questioned by the small business community and those who advocate for small business inclusion in federal contracts (Clark, 2015). Many believe it affords Pentagon officials an unfair advantage in avoiding small business goals that would typically be more prevalent in individual subcontracting plans (Clark, 2015). However, a GAO report (GAO, 2015) found that from 2006 to 2013, the Comprehensive Subcontracting Test Program resulted in the redirection of more than \$93 million in subcontracts from large business to small business. Furthermore, the GAO in their report concluded that elimination of the program would result in a one-time administrative cost to participants of \$22 million.

It is imperative for SDVOSB entities to understand what elements are present that contracting officers within DOD and the Defense Contract Management Agency (DCMA) review in subcontracting plans. Figure 3 depicts the interactive steps a contracting officer looks at within a Master subcontracting plan.

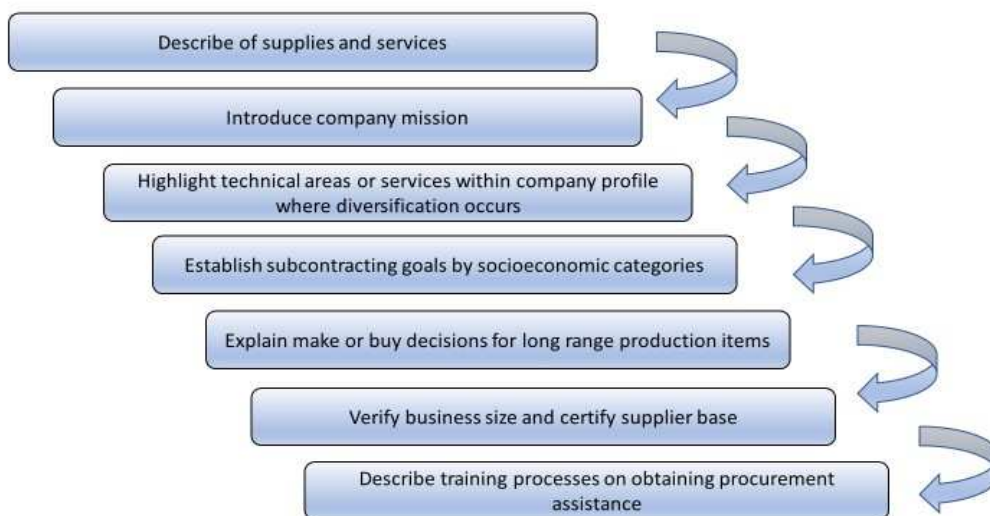


Figure 3. Steps for subcontracting development in master plans.

Table 1

Elements Contained Within Individual Subcontracting Plan

Title	Reference
Description of socioeconomic goals	FAR 19.702a, and FAR 19.705
Description of supplies/services to determine if a small business can support the work	FAR 219-9 (d)(3), FAR 19.704-(a)(3) and FAR 19.705
Percentage of total contract value the prime contractors allocate to small business.	FAR 52.219-9(d)(1), FAR 19.704(a)(2), and FAR 19.705
Description of methodology in developing goals	FAR 52.219-9(d)(4), FAR 19.704(a) and FAR 19.705
Description of how prime contractor locates small business suppliers	FAR 52.219-9 (d)(4), FAR 19.704(a)(6) and FAR 19.705
Description of Indirect Cost	FAR 52.219-9(d)(6) and FAR 19.704(a)(6) and FAR 19.705
Duties of Subcontracting Plan Manager	FAR 19.704(a)(7) and FAR 19.705
Description of subcontracting opportunities within prime contract	FAR 52.219-9 (d) (8), FAR 19.704(a) (8) and FAR 19.705
Flow down clauses within the contract that apply to subcontracting performance	FAR 52.219-9(d)(9), FAR 19.704(a)(9), FAR 19.705, and FAR 52.21909(d).
Requirements from prime to submit surveys to subcontractors and other required reporting mechanisms within contract.	FAR 52.219-9(d) (10), FAR 19.704(a) (10) and FAR 19.705
Description by prime contractor on how they will stay in compliance with stated subcontracting plan	FAR 52.219(d) (11), FAR 19.704(a) (12) and FAR 19.705
Prime contractor's pledge regarding goals	FAR 52.219-9(d) (12), FAR 19.704(a)(12) and FAR 19.705
Notice if they cannot meet stated subcontracting goals within the stated plan	FAR 52.219-9(d)(13), FAR 19.704(a)(13) and FAR 19.705
An affidavit from the prime contractor that they will not interfere with subcontractors notifying contracting officers pertaining to issues of timely payment to subcontractors	FAR 52.219-9(d) (14), FAR 19.704(a)(14) and FAR 19.705.
Contractual enforcement protections for prime contractor timely payment to subcontractors if planned and disadvantaged goals are less than 5%	FAR 52.219-9(d) (15), FAR 19.704(a) (15), and FAR 19.705 DFARS 219-705-4

The annual NDAA is the basis for many of the legal modifications to small business acquisition strategies within DOD procurement processes. Contained within the 2013 NDAA, Congress changed the limitations of subcontracting provisions requiring reporting to keep track of which agencies were not meeting statutory small business subcontracting goals (NDAA, 2013). The NDAA of 2014 afforded flexibility of prime contractors to look at other firms, beyond Tier 1 subcontracting requirements, which provided greater capacity to reach out to Tier 1 subcontractors selecting Tier 2 and 3 supply chain candidates (NDAA 2014). The NDAA of 2015 created sole source contracting authority for WOSB set-asides as well as raising the waiver threshold for contracting officers requiring submittals to the SBA for waivers of the nonmanufacturing rule (NDAA, 2015). The 2016 NDAA allowed small businesses more flexibility in teaming arrangements and improving small business financial capacity to submit proposals on more substantial federal contracts. The increased accountability measures enacted positively affect subcontracting management (NDAA, 2016).

After November 30, 2017, contracting officers were required to include subcontracting data for each task order in multiple award contracts and identify opportunities for subcontractors to receive past performance credit for subcontracting performance under a prime contract (NDAA, 2017). The 2017 NDAA also strengthened electronic mediums for advertising subcontracting opportunities and credentialing of SBA Commercial Marketing Representatives (CMRs) to deliver stronger subcontracting training and assistance. Other key provisions included: (a) More accuracy in goal reporting, (b) allow past performance recording credit on follow-on contracts for first

Tier subcontracting experience, (c) extend research and development programs that traditionally seek subcontracting candidates, and (d) allow for survivors of SDVOSB owners to retain socioeconomic designation if the SDVOSB death was a direct result of veteran member disability (NDAA, 2017).

A separate DOD study conducted in 2018 points out that the key to promoting more efficiencies in DOD acquisition management is to emphasize the value of developing collaborative relationships between the DOD acquisition community, industry and higher education research institutes (Office of DOD for Acquisition Policy, 2018). Highlighted portions containing key NDAA changes relative to small business are contained in Table 2. The NDAA changes are building blocks to improving legislation to make it easier for socioeconomic sectors such as SDVOSB entities to compete within the government marketplace.

Table 3 provides a historical timeline for small business legislation. Policies emanate from laws, which points to the evolutionary cycle of how policy is affected by the passage of legislation. From the onset of the Armed Services Procurement Act in 1947 to the passage of legislation promoting protection of rights to subcontractors, the emphasis has been on increasing small business access to markets they could not otherwise have access to. Table 3 provides a historical timeline of significant small business legislation.

Table 2

Highlight of Significant Small Business Changes in NDAA

Year	Significant Provisions
2013	FAR Clause for limitations of subcontracting included within every contract; expands upon the SBA Mentor-Protégé program; similarly situated entities subcontracting changes introduced affecting findings of affiliation in size standard evaluations for small business
2014	Modification of Tier 1 and 2 subcontracting supply chain access, creating greater opportunities in subcontracting
2015	Sole source authority for WOSBs and modification of nonmanufacturing waiver threshold
2016	Accountability measures in place for agencies who do not comply with subcontracting goals; subcontracting reporting included in multiple-award task order contracts, to include steps in invoking contract penalties for falsely reporting percentages of small business inclusion, and not conducting market research to identify small business subcontracting sources. This would also include failure to correct training deficiencies identified in subcontracting reviews.
2017	<p>Strengthening of electronic mediums for subcontracting access; strengthened credentials of CMRs; allow first-tier subcontractors to report past performance when competing for prime contracts. VA transfers responsibility of certification to US SBA. Clarifies roles of advocates in subcontracting counseling; provides for greater transparency in reporting of small business goals</p> <p>Section 1821 of NDAA 2017 modifying Section 8(d) (9) of the Small Business Act (15 U.S.C. 637 (d) (9)). Indirect costs must be included in all Commercial Subcontracting Plans and establish compliance categories for subcontracting. Also include the requirement for prime contractors to assign specific North American Industrial Classification (NAICS) Codes to subcontracting work under a prime contracting effort. Instituted notification for unsuccessful offerors on subcontracting bids to the prime contractor for work exceeding \$150,000.00. Stronger enforcement tools in place for contracting officers to assess penalties for misrepresenting socioeconomic status when proposing on subcontracting work. Direct communication lines between the prime contractor and government contracting office workforce expanded to discuss subcontracting opportunities. On-time payment rules from primes to subcontractor more strictly enforced.</p> <p>Public Law 114-328 and 115-91-Solidifies changes in approaches to discouraging use of low priced technically acceptable contracting methodologies in DOD acquisitions.</p>
2018	Passage of Similarly Situated Entities Rule and submission to the US SBA for final review and comments
2019	<p>Section 222, Title II of 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) establishes collaborative mechanisms for defense laboratories, industry and academia to discuss business issues. Section 233 incorporates entrepreneurial education into educational venues for the purpose of small business support for national security innovation and research support. Title VIII of NDAA Sections 858 and 859 increases DoD share funding for PTACs. Section 883 establishes formal committees on business for purpose of exchange of information between agencies</p> <p>Section 855, 15 USC 644-Small businesses provided more data on how change orders occur within construction contracts. Increases transparency on how unilateral change order processes for construction occur.</p>

(table continues)

Section 2804, 10 USC 2855-Architect and Engineering contracts no longer are excluded from Section 8(a) consideration for military family housing construction. Below \$1M, the agency must set these projects aside for small business.

Public Law 115-416-Veteran small businesses now can acquire US surplus property

Public Law 115-324-size time limits for prescribing small business status formulas will change from three years of gross receipts to five years with the introduction of the Runway Extension Act.

Sec 861, 15 USC 644-allows for agency double credit for small business participation in contracts related to disaster recovery in Puerto Rico, following hurricanes in 2018. Allows for transferring past performance to prime contracts from Puerto Rico businesses who contract for disaster recovery.

Table 3

Chronological Table of Small Business Legislation

Year	Name of Law and Description
1947	Armed Services Procurement Act-Outlined government solicitation/bidding protocol
1953	Public Law 83-163 created the SBA
1958	Public Law 85-563 introduced the concept of small business set-asides and created conditions to allow the voluntary institution of subcontracting within prime contracts
1961	Section 7 of the amended Small Business Act (15 USC 637(d)) provided oversight authority for the US Small Business Administration to oversee subcontracting processes within the federal government
1974	Small Business Act- (Public Law-386) expanded set-aside programs, emphasized disaster loan responses to small business and attention to urban areas of blight to restore economic recovery. Clarified SBA's role in executing small business assistance programs
1978	Small Business Investment Act-(Public Law 95-507) put into place mandatory subcontracting provisions into prime contracts
1984	Small Business Act-(Public Law 98-577) ensured timely payments to subcontractors for work performed for prime contractors
1999	Public Law 106-50 broadened capability of federal agencies to oversee the fair apportionment of federal contracts to veteran small business entities. Created positions of Associate Administrator

for Veteran Business Development within the SBA. Solidified 3% minimum socioeconomic goal for prime and subcontracting attainment in federal contracts

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2003 | Executive Order 13360 strengthened small business set-aside procedures within previous legislation for federal agencies. Provisions applied to prime contract award opportunities, including minimum percentage goals for subcontracting with socioeconomic entities, to include the category of SDVOSB. Provisions created the requirement for mandated strategic planning on how to manage SDVOSB contracting matters |
| 2010 | Public Law 111-240 increased limits of loans available to small businesses. Created small business credit initiatives and state support programs to develop small business job growth |

(table continued)

- | | |
|------|--|
| 2013 | Public Law 113-66 established authority for federal agencies to assume small business goal credit for small businesses utilized in a subcontracting capacity at any tier |
| 2016 | Establishes penalties, including invoking of breach in contract for not exercising good faith in meeting projected goals in subcontracting plans |
| 2019 | 83 FR 48908-Service-Disabled Veteran companies now can have spouses and family members assume ownership of an SDVOSB up to 10 years following a service member's death. 84 FR 14587-Changes formula for how NAICS Codes are assigned by industry. 83 FR 24919-Waives non-manufacturing rule for surgical and appliances NAICS Codes for airway pressure devices. 84 FR 12794- Provides for consolidating SBIR/STTR directives giving 20-year data rights protection to small businesses. |

Although the SBA regulations reflect updates to recent regulatory changes, DOD has not kept pace with other significant small business-friendly mandates that positively affect the outcome of prime contractors seeking small business subcontracting outlets, especially in socioeconomic areas such as SDVOSB and HUB Zone where subcontracting percentage allocation performance in subcontracting is lower than other socioeconomic areas. These regulatory updates include the similarly situated entities rule which is designed to create more opportunities for socioeconomic entity participation in subcontracting (Prince & Tisdelle, 2017). The similarly situated entities rule affords small businesses of similar socioeconomic status the ability to receive credit for work performed under subcontracts (Koprince, 2017).

In a recent U.S. GAO report, GAO analysts found that delays in implementing statutes that benefit small businesses are due primarily to the extensive screening process and procedural steps that must occur within the Federal Acquisition Regulation rewrite council process (GAO, 2017b). During the initial phase, agencies identify areas of a proposed statute that can result in rule-making. In the second phase, agencies develop the rule-making further through the drafting process and analyze requirements as they apply to federal agencies. In the last stage, the agency receives and reviews public comments, and either elects to modify the rule to include public comments or conversely, endorses proposed rule changes and sends final comments and recommendations. This process could take from several months to years for final implementation (GAO, 2017b).

Further issues complicating navigation of the rulemaking process is the reliability of subcontracting information systems that can enable small businesses to cross-reference contracting data to increase the likelihood contracting organizations remain in compliance with subcontracting rules (GAO, 2017b). Providing electronic interface access for small business subcontractors and their prime contractor counterparts is difficult using databases available to DOD acquisition officials (GAO, 2014). Within the primary data capture methodology tools (e.g., electronic subcontracting reporting system and federal procurement data system-new generation database) there are multiple steps which are required across complex protocol analogs of each system, making navigation difficult for agencies looking for small business sources to establish direct links to prime contracts to find subcontracting opportunities (GAO, 2014).

In a study conducted by the Rand Corporation for the Naval Post Graduate School, Moore, Grammich, and Mele (2015) concluded that contracting officers within DOD need to do a better job of reporting subcontracting data, which is required by law to ensure Tier 1 and Tier 2 supplier shortages remain visible to federal agencies. Furthermore, Moore, et.al, 2015 cited the vital necessity of improving the reliability of subaward reporting systems to counter a growing shrinkage of DOD suppliers, particularly within industrial sectors such as commercial and industrial building construction, surgical, and supply manufacturing. These areas are where DOD has a high volume of contracting activity, and small businesses could potentially capture numerous subcontracting opportunities.

During fiscal year 2017 DOD spend centric categories saw a spend rate in potential small business opportunity areas of more than \$100 billion, to include weapons, ammunition, textiles and subsistence, land vehicles, ships, aircraft, research and development, and information technology services (Federal Procurement Data System-New Generation, 2018b). These are areas that small businesses should pay particular attention to when wanting to pursue subcontracting opportunities with prime contractors who compete for contracts within DOD.

For purposes of illustration, the fiscal year 2018 NDAA included several changes in legislation that benefit the small business community. Section 1703 improved the reporting of small business goals to include greater agency transparency in ensuring socioeconomic categories receive fair apportioning of multiple award contracting opportunities (NDAA, 2018). The research behind this act shows that during 2017, 17 of

the largest 20 major federal contracting opportunities for small businesses contained significant multiple award contract vehicles. Section 1696 of the NDAA act includes strengthening of supply chain management processes that strengthen subcontracting compliance requirements of prime contractors (NDAA, 2018).

Misuse and Fraud within Set-Aside Programs

VOSBs and SDVOSB contracting awards increased significantly, from \$356 million in 2006 to \$4.0 billion in 2014 (GAO, 2016). In the ensuing eight years, the SDVOSB certification requests by the VA increased almost 400%, which signaled a need for improving certification standards for companies desiring to use their SDVOSB status to gain preference for government contracting awards (GAO, 2016). There are many reported instances of misrepresentation by firms concerning their ownership status and size as SDVOSB small business entities (Layman, 2016).

In order to stay in compliance for retaining SDVOSB status, SDVOSB owners must show proof that they make the major decisions in the company and have the most influence over those decisions. Control is either financially or through business ownership, unless the disability of the veteran is so severe that appointing a spouse or permanent caregiver is necessary (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR §125.10). Surveys conducted over the last decade on substantial losses suffered by businesses due to fraud, clearly show that small businesses suffer more significant damage than large companies in recovering from the business effects of fraud (Best, 2013; Moye, 2014). This trend could be reversed if education is made more readily available on why fraud occurs and what to look for in preventing it from happening

(Kramer, 2015). Kramer (2015) maintained that the key to fraud prevention by small business is prescreening job applicants, routinely performing background checks, and ensuring multiple layering of responsibility coverage. Johansson and Carey (2016) asserted that businesses also require the creation of an atmosphere that recognizes the importance of anonymous reporting channels to capture instances of fraud and immediately reporting it when it occurs.

Creating this atmosphere includes publishing company policies and operating procedures. Additionally, making loss prevention more visible as well as establishing Codes of Conduct within the corporate structure for dealing with external customers (Nawawi & Salin, 2018). Hess and Cottrell (2015) maintained that small businesses should take advantage of a consistent group of advisors at the community level to assist in implementing antifraud education. The federal system of subcontracting emphasizes the maximum practicable opportunity for prime contractors to meet agreed-upon subcontracting goals and verification of size standards for qualified subcontracting small business participants (Small Business Jobs Act, 2010a).

Criticism of U.S. current regulations for subcontracting stress that not enough is being done to shore up the opportunities for subcontracting to facilitate entry into the DOD acquisition space (Kidalov, 2013). In contrast, the European Union procurement policies not only emphasize maximum practicable opportunities for small business entry into subcontracting but encompass greater accountability measures to force prime contractors to enact robust small business supplier procedures that result in substantive subcontracting awards (Kidalov, 2013). This differentiation between European Union and

the U.S. handling of subcontracting indicates a more tacit understanding by the European Union of the need to treat small companies differently than large businesses because of the uniqueness of each small business entities' business processes.

During sessions of the 112th Congress, several bills were authored to add additional strength to supporting small business and protecting agencies from fraud. These acts included restoring tax and regulatory certainty to small business and contracting fraud prevention provisions (Manuel & Lunder, 2013). Despite GAO findings that suggest more than \$100 million changes hands each year to businesses who are not being certified in government databases as SDVOSB contract eligible, more than \$16 million in obligations of unverified SDVOSB firms continued for several years following a reported GAO finding in 2012 (GAO, 2016).

One of the many ways the federal government combats fraud in contractor entities claiming preferred veteran status for contract status in federal government contracting is through the VA Center for Verification and Eligibility (CVE) (U.S. GAO, 2016). Although federal contracting agencies outside of the VA allow self-certification through the SAM CVE ensures a more in-depth veteran certification process (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2016).

Training Focus and Resource Collaboration

According to Saastamoinen, Reijo and Tammi (2017) a positive correlation exists between small to medium enterprises (SMEs) that possess a positive attitude toward training and their propensity to engage in pursuing public procurement opportunities. Saastamoinen, et.al asserted that although SMEs label training under the genre of long-

term strategy needs, the training focus should be on short-term strategies that guide a clearer perspective of existing procurement opportunities, developing a highly skilled workforce and more accurately comprehending market factors that lead to supplier selection. Training managers assisting small businesses need to recognize the link between the strength of acquisition training curriculum and perceived proposal preparation readiness; a recognition that circles back to the focus on short-term strategies.

Jones, Beynon, Pickernell, and Packham (2013) posited that small business entities that currently have in place highly skilled workers will be more likely to view training as a positive experience and look for additional local training venues to support strategic objectives. Lacho and Brockman (2015) opined community involvement in small business training and the value of public training resources, to include the local chamber of commerce resources, cannot be overlooked as a contributing factor in agencies at the local level developing collaborative training platforms for small business training. Zeuli and O'Shea (2017) illustrated the need to expand collaborative relationships in small business development training between small businesses, municipal economic development activities, and large businesses to stimulate small business economic growth, and further collaborative training initiatives between state and local governments through networking. Recognition of community workforce development programs, to include veteran assistance programs within the local communities also contributes to business support for veterans within communities (Eyster, Durham, Van Noy, & Damron, 2016).

The vocational rehabilitation and employment training curriculum offerings as well as the Military Reservist Economic Injury Disaster Loan Programs supplement other SDVOSB and disaster assistance programs within communities, providing loans for veteran small business owners who cannot obtain loans directly from the commercial banking sector because of absences from business operations due to deployments and recall to active duty (Collins, et al., 2014). Assistance programs like these are all training support mechanisms that small business assistance agencies at every level of government can take advantage of in collaborating on ideas for coordinating training topic inclusion for SDVOSBs desiring entry into DOD contracting.

U.S. SBA Office of Veteran Business Development. The Office of Veteran Business Development provides services to veterans, members of the reserve, and their spouses in developing business acumen. This office furthermore provides counseling and training services to include its signature Boots to Business and Boots to Business Reboot training curriculum offerings. They also administer the service-disabled veteran entrepreneurship, veteran federal procurement entrepreneurship, and women veteran entrepreneurship training programs. Other partnering initiatives include training with the Institute of Veteran Military Families, Veteran Institute of Procurement, and most recently, coordination with entrepreneur educational programs at the academic level. Noted areas of university partnering include training partnership initiatives with the St. Joseph University Entrepreneurship Jump Start Training Program in Philadelphia, PA (US SBA, 2017).

In an advisory capacity, the Veteran Business Development Office coordinates with the Task Force on Veterans Business Affairs, which is a committee under the direction of the US SBA, comprised of leadership from DOD, DOL, DOT, VA, GSA, and OMB. (US SBA, 2015). The principal goal of this committee is to discuss ways to improve collaboration between national advocacy and coalition groups (US SBA, 2015).

U.S. SBA Procurement Center Representatives and Commercial Marketing Representatives. At the federal level, the SBA offers the services of contracting and small business advisors and subcontracting experts, counseling small businesses and providing advice to federal contracting agencies. Procurement Center Representatives and Commercial Marketing Representatives are located throughout the six SBA Office of Government Contracting area offices throughout the country (U.S. SBA, 2017).

Procurement Technical Assistance Centers. At the state level, PTAC training resources are organizations supported with funding assistance from the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). PTACs have a local presence in more than 50 states, including outlying areas of Puerto Rico and Guam. Many of these organizations are located within state academia circles and receive matching funding from federal and state sources for assisting small businesses based upon cooperative agreements with DLA. PTACs are an excellent resource available to a small business for obtaining counseling services on small business certification requirements to enter the government marketplace, providing a continuing repository of small firms for procurement agencies to select a pool of contractors from (Vitale, 2013). PTACs are an excellent repository for collaborating with agencies on interpreting solicitation requirements, which is a valuable tool for

socioeconomic small business entities understanding procurement opportunities they are pursuing (Ohio University, 2017).

Small Business Development Centers. The 900 SBDCs around the country provide a coalition-centric small business counseling approach between the private sector, academia, and local government. By assisting small business entities in developing business planning, status verification, capital finance strategies, and maximum organizational structuring capability for conducting business at the federal, state, or commercial level, more than 800 other nonprofit agencies align with SBDCs to provide training and directly affect economic stimulus (Kunz & Dow, 2015).

Fairlie, Karlan, and Zinman (2015) maintained there is little research available about the endogeneity problems of screening for this type of training. As a result, there are few data results available pertaining to the effectiveness of SBDC and hybrid small business assistance training programs. In a study on analyzing the effects that small business assistance agencies, such as SBDCs, have on the success of firms growing their businesses, Seo, Perry, Tomczyk, and Solomon (2014) found that introductory training in essential cost management and marketing was more suited to lower performing small businesses which were at risk of having their companies fail. Seo, et.al., 2014 further elaborate that higher performing firms benefit the most from training in human resources and strategies for furthering capital.

According to Bousquet (2015) although veteran companies are not required to have in place formal VA small business certification at the time of competing for prime

or subcontracts for contracting opportunities outside of the VA, companies should realize the positive visual impact that possessing a veteran-owned enterprise certification can have on federal agencies evaluating company capabilities for potential contract awards. Finding the right office to assist veterans can be challenging and should be part of any improvement initiative to enhance subcontracting training. In a study conducted in 2014 on the availability of websites for small businesses being able to access web site information on SBDCs, only 55 sites provided a discernable web resource that could be constructively accessed by small business to obtain information online (Phillips, 2014). Denial to website access highlights a need for procurement assistance agencies to collaborate on verifying web-based information being disseminated by procurement training assistance agencies.

Institute for Veterans and Military Families. SBDCs have discovered their operating niche within the public university educational system. One such flagship program is on the campus of Syracuse University of New York at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF, 2017). The IVMF program offers a 14-month curriculum for training veterans to reintegrate into the community through courses that are specifically geared toward understanding coalition efforts to employ veterans. The IVMF partners with the U.S. SBA and the DOD Transition Assistance Program (TAP) to deliver the Boots to Business curriculum entailing training delivery products relative to capital start-up requirements, technical requirements definition, and introduction to contracting opportunities at the commercial, state and federal levels (Heriot, Dickes & Jaregui, 2017). In their study on the effectiveness of the Boots to Business program,

Heriot, et.al, 2017 found that there is a need for agencies to collaborate further on advancements in how they present entrepreneurial educational information and expand their training programs in a complementary rather than competitive manner. Similar programs should not be in competition with each other. The training curriculum tracks should clearly identify those areas where individuals pursue mid-level transition growth versus entrepreneurship options.

Other initiatives include Business USA and the Veteran Owned Business Advocacy Coalition (IVMF, 2017). Faurer, Rodgers-Broderson, and Bailie (2014) found that veterans were very positive about the utility of long-term benefits from the Boots to Business program, however were fearful that with the drawdowns in military forces, and growing numbers of exiting veterans, the program's effectiveness could wane over time because of lack of standardization amongst the services. Faurer, et.al, 2014 advanced the importance of continually providing and updating education delivery methods to civilian and military users of the program.

The importance of seeking informal networking and collaboration within veteran educational venues like IVMF and TAP to improve training curriculum delivery cannot be understated. In a mixed-methods study of academia, veteran transitional participants who participated in Vet Start programs which is another transitional vehicle for returning veterans, Kerrick, et.al, 2014 maintained that advocacy curriculum offerings provide a platform for veterans to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams. Having more formal programs, such as incubator programs at the beginning of the veterans' transition period is an excellent starting point for understanding the beginning stages of small business

development, (Mas-Verdu, Riberio-Soriano, & Roig-Tierno, 2015). Kerrick et.al., 2014 found that although informal network systems were a more significant influence in the infancy stage of veteran entrepreneurial aspirations, small businesses soon realized the necessity of capturing more formalized networking once contacts within the informal networking structure expanded. This transitional awareness suggests that collaborative veteran training formulation venues need not be restricted to formalized institutional settings and can evolve into small business strategic planning based upon changing market conditions. Changing market conditions are a primary factor of federal agency evaluation of small business capability to satisfy contract requirements, as well as prime contractor selection of subcontractor candidates for their supply chain requirements.

Small business incubator and small business innovative research/small business technology transfer programs. Frequently, maturation in smaller firms and ultimate selection of procurement candidates originate from the success of beginning stage small business incubator programs, which derive benefit from university settings (Al-Mubarak & Busler, 2014). Inter-relationships established between businesses and universities draw upon technological and resource sharing (Ankrah & Al-Tabaa, 2015). The university setting offers sponsored entrepreneurship development programs that complement educational curriculum from entrepreneurial inception through small business incubation (Jansen, et al., 2015). The University of Dayton Research Institute (UDRI) in Dayton, OH is one such program that capitalizes upon the university setting to promote research and development for entry into a business. Within the Air Force, UDRI uses subcontracting platforms to collaborate on research and development programs

through the Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer programs (Subramanyan, 2015). Research concerning these collaborations have resulted in further advancements in business opportunities arising out of technology advances (Subramanyan, 2015). SBIR programs attract private investment and are more likely to be a catalyst for enticing collaborative research and development initiatives (Link, Ruhm & Siegel, 2014). SBDCs offer information regarding SBIR grant programs and allow startup and mature businesses access to a vehicle for taking advantage of research and development grants at the federal level (Qian & Haynes, 2014).

According to Markley, Lyons and Macke (2015) communities must build receptive channeling of resources that are favorable to collaboration and entrepreneurship. While collaboration is acknowledged by many to be a prerequisite to creating favorable business amenable environments, the costs associated with increasing collaboration are not great. Furthermore, the stakeholders within the process of improving receptivity to community integration of collaborative entrepreneurship is not measured (Markley, et.al, 2015). Identifying key stakeholders and actors in this process and how coalitions support business entry through collaboration promotes the use of the ACT framework.

Corporate Supplier Diversity Training Managers. Companies that have strong diversity supplier programs fare better on the average because of the prevalence of mentoring and networking opportunities (Madera, 2013). Madera (2013) asserted that with increasing exposure to mentoring and networking opportunities, corporate commitment and manifestation of diversity within the corporate environment ensures

success of any corporate supplier diversity program. Klocek, Dayib, Mukherjee, and Crespo (2014) posited that by diversifying the supplier base, companies give back to communities and are in a more favorable position to increase economic growth and promote social change. Diversification creates a win-win scenario for both the corporations and the communities in which they operate in. In a study of four major accounting firms in the U.S., Britain, and Canada, Edgley, Sharma, and Anderson-Gough (2015) found that diversity programs require a social justice platform to definitively institute diversity inclusion into the corporate setting. Edgley, et.al., 2015 posited that in pursuing improvement through exercising diversity, corporations must be transparent in how they incorporate corporate diversity inclusion programs into their training programs. Companies are increasingly pledging support for improving programs for training in supply chain processes and how the economic and global presentation of a firm's corporate social responsibility defines their competitive position (Govindan, Shankar and Kannan, 2016).

Mor Barak (2015) posited that diversity inclusion transparency for corporations is necessary for successful strategic planning and ensuring antidiscrimination laws and affirmative action provisions within company policies occur. These laws have helped minorities, people with disabilities, members of sexual minority groups and other marginalized groups become part of the labor force that may have potentially been excluded (Mor Barak, 2015). Recognizing the impact of anti-discrimination laws is an important part of corporate diversity inclusion management programs successfully working with the disabled veteran community to promote social change.

In 2011, JP Morgan Chase, along with other significant corporations formed a contractor business coalition entitled 100,000 Jobs (Hall, Harrell, Bicksler, and Stewart 2014). The 100,000 Jobs Coalition was designed to instill practices within corporate America that would make it possible to stimulate the hiring of 100,000 veterans by 2014. Within the first year, more than 190,000 veteran job placements occurred, with projections of a doubling of that number by 2014. To investigate why this program was so successful and capitalize upon best practices in supporting diversity programs like veteran inclusion, in 2014 JP Morgan Chase commissioned the Rand Corporation to conduct a study on best practices occurring within the 100,000 Jobs program (Hall, et.al., 2014).

In a recent issue of the Vetpreneur magazine, Pavelek (2017) queried several of the top corporate, small business diversity supply managers from significant corporations about what it takes to be a subcontracting provider in the DOD and other commercial activity requirements. The consensus amongst those interviewed was that small businesses seeking subcontracting opportunities need to be able to provide competitive pricing for the goods and services they offer and be vigilant toward giving a detailed profile on the company database site concerning their capabilities that match those of the prime contractor's needs.

Veteran Business Outreach Centers. Veteran business outreach centers are designated locations across the country that serve veterans in assessing their entrepreneurial ideas, putting together plans for business operations, mentorship, and financial advisory services concerning international trade, franchising, federal contracting

participation, marketing, and accounting practices suitable for government auditing systems (U.S. SBA, 2017e). Partner coalitions that work with the veteran business outreach centers include such advocacy organizations as the National Veteran Business Development Council (NVBDC), the U.S. Business Leadership Network (USBLN), National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of Commerce (NGLCC), National Minority Supplier Diversity Council (NMSDC) and Women's Business Enterprise Council (WBENC; U.S. SBA, 2017e).

The NVBDC assists veterans to obtain certification to conduct business as a certified veteran-owned business (NVBDC, 2018). The USBLN is another 501c not for profit coalition that partners with corporations and other government organizations to encourage diversity inclusion in the workplace and business sectors (USBLN, 2018). Each month, the USBLN hosts activities and training opportunities through virtual business networking events, partnering with organizations such as the American Council for the Blind, and support for *ilearning* initiatives, such as *idisability*, which is a trademark process for ensuring employees of corporate entities have the necessary tools to interact with individuals with disabilities seeking employment (USBLN, 2018). The NGLCC is also a not for profit 501c advocacy coalition that works with chamber of commerce organizations around the country to provide opportunities for business who seek certification under the LGBT business certification program (NGLCC, 2018). Events occur around the country at locations such as the National Legal Industry Conference, held in Orlando, FL, NGLCC European Summit held each year, as well as support to activities involved in recognizing NGLCC Global LGBT Business Week

(National Gay Lesbian Transgender Chamber of Commerce, 2018). The NMSDC is a principal organization for obtaining Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) certification and provides a referral service to corporations looking for MBE talent (National Minority Supplier Development Council (NMSDC); 2018). NMSDC also sponsors training events and illustrates centers of excellence who are highlighting MBE corporate entities successful in building their small businesses (NMSDC, 2018). The WBENC provides certification services for the SBA Women-Owned, and Economically Disadvantaged Women-Owned Business programs (WBENC, 2018) WBENC is a coalition that advocates for woman-owned businesses, including those that are dual certified as WOSB and other socioeconomic categories including SDVOSB dual certification (WBENC, 2018).

Strategic Planning

Dibrell, Craig, and Neubaum (2014) maintained that strategic planning affords companies more ability to plan, relevant to changing circumstances that can improve the market agility of a firm. Adamik (2016) posited that focusing on strategic alliances and joint venturing opportunities allow business entities to refocus and restructure business approaches to enter into new markets that would otherwise not be made available to them. Weber, Geneste, and Connell (2015) maintained that small businesses that strike a careful balance between how they perceive their growth and how they prepare for further growth will more often stimulate a corporate growth environment. Small and Medium Enterprises that incorporate small business learning in combination with strategic planning find more success in executing business strategies (Siren & Kohtamaki, 2016).

In changing market conditions, it is vital small businesses embrace strategic entrepreneurial agency orientation toward training; threading a proper balance between individual strategic ingenuity and small business entity strategic awareness, as well as operational planning acumen to respond to emerging markets (Alvi & Carsrud, 2017). In a study on implementing high performance work practices within small businesses, Wu, Bacon, and Hoque (2014) found that small firms may have greater latitude than other companies concerning how they use their employee base to exercise high performance work practices. Wu, et.al, 2014 elaborated that membership in strategic business networking and coalition activities affords greater latitude for small businesses adopting high-performance work practices that influence growth. Rouhani, Ashrafi, Ravasan, and Afshari (2016) expanded upon the positive ramifications of strategic business networking enunciating the importance of business intelligence in decision-making by a business entity. Business intelligence is recognizing where to concentrate marketing research at the right business development stages to achieve successful insertion into markets. Moore et.al, 2015 asserted that procuring organizations possess forecasting and traditional buying tools that can provide insight into a DOD agency's buying activity and history, which would be very beneficial to small business growth.

DLA, which is DOD largest supply buyer, has an active contract file directory that links National Stock Numbers to contract numbers, CAGE codes, and specific ordering amounts (GSA, 2018). The Army and Air Force both possess business intelligence tools that forecast procurement opportunities (GSA, 2018). The GSA provides a history of procurement usage within various schedule contracts (GSA, 2018).

Advocacy veteran assistance agencies would benefit from having these information databases available to them when counseling small businesses. Standardizing how the information transfers to veteran transition assistance agencies could facilitate advocacy coalition efforts to improve transparency of reporting by federal agencies concerning the availability of these procurement opportunity predictive mechanisms.

Strategic Sourcing and Category Management are two acquisition practices that small businesses increasingly are becoming aware of because of their effect on the small business industrial base. Category Management as an acquisition approach mirrors the commercial sector practices by DOD to aggregate purchasing of similar items and leverage supplier/management relationships to gain efficiencies in acquisition management. (Landale, Apte, Clark and Arruda, 2018). Category management is an extension of strategic sourcing because as an acquisition concept, it rolls-up goods and services buying into larger categories of taxonomies established by DOD (Landale, Apte, Clark and Arruda, 2018). By rolling goods and services into larger taxonomies of classifications of services, the resulting contracts become larger and may result in reducing the number of smaller firms who have the capability to compete for acquisitions. In their study on socioeconomic sourcing and the benefits of small business set-asides in public procurement, Hawkins, Gravier and Randall (2018) found no evidence to suggest transactional costs for small businesses was higher than large business, and furthermore the performance level is no greater in large business over small business.

Delineating factors between training for developing business acumen and entrepreneurship. Veterans need more than obtaining a sense of community when reintegrating into civilian communities. An important distinction needs to occur in differentiating between entrepreneurship and a business owner's requirement to develop competitiveness and business acumen (Veliska & Bowie, 2016). Entrepreneur training activities encompass actions that take advantage of emerging market opportunities by analyzing existing resources and applying those resources in new and innovative ways to seek business success (Kerrick, et.al, 2014). Outcomes from the pursuit of entrepreneurship include creating value-added processes in product innovation and developing new technologies which stimulate economic growth (Kuratko, Morris and Schindehutte, 2015). According to Bennet (2014) entrepreneurship focuses on individual change rather than the more legal definition of the boundaries present in principal-agent relationships outside of the context of entrepreneurship. Differentiating between entrepreneurship and developing business understanding is critical to veteran procurement assistance agencies knowing where to concentrate counseling to ease the transition of veteran companies into business.

Cook, Zane, and Campbell (2017) opined entrepreneurial educators need to ascertain what stages veterans are in concerning their business development aspirations. Some veterans are trying to determine if they want to become entrepreneurs, while others have an existing business concept they want to introduce. Others desire to build upon business ideas and ventures they have already started. Jansson, Nilsson, Modig, and Hed Vall (2017) stressed that small and medium business enterprises possess more traits of

sustainability when they have both a market and entrepreneurial orientation. Another factor in SDVOSB training is comprehending the meaning of competitive dynamics. Upson and Green (2017) posited that competitive dynamics encompass motivational factors that drive small businesses to develop greater business insight and capture a clearer understanding of how their competitive business stature rates against their competitors.

According to Chandler (2016) concern over the growing complexity of contracting instruments within DOD, and a historical tendency within DOD to emphasize low price technically acceptable (LPTA) contracting practices makes comprehension of competitive awareness even more crucial when competing within the DOD acquisition environment. Recognition of which acquisition strategy approaches for source selection DOD uses for specific types of services and commodities will better prepare companies to compete in the DOD marketplace (Chandler, 2016). In a study conducted for the SBA comparing socioeconomic procurement award share comparison to overall small business award rates, (Beale, 2014) revealed that SDVOSB award concentrations for federal procurements are consistently lower for wholesale trade, and high for construction and professional services. Knowing where to concentrate counseling and training on prime contracting opportunities geographically and what the award data trends translate into may potentially increase subcontracting opportunities for SDVOSB entities. Punn and Hesse (2015) stated that the most optimum strategies for including socioeconomic participants in subcontracting are to incentivize contracts at the agency level that are very specific regarding outcomes. Punn and Hesse emphasized that questions must address

what procuring agencies expect from prime contractors when using socioeconomic classification sectors in subcontracting and how strategic supply chain apportionment across these sectors can benefit performance.

Communicating with prime contractors that they can gain more success if they practice aligning top-tier suppliers to improve outcome results and mentor entry level small businesses is critical for subcontracting entry. Coetzer, Kock, and Wallo (2017) contend that performance parameters that leverage both job and organizational characteristics to promote informal learning processes about complex business processes are crucial. SDVOSB entities must develop an understanding of where industry opportunity concentrations lie relative to their socioeconomic classification. According to Roseboro and Rutkovitz (2014) more education is needed for small businesses at the program office level, where the generation of requirements occur. Training on small business inclusion in all stages of the acquisition process will lead to improving small business prime and subcontracting goals within DOD.

Joint ventures and teaming arrangements. Small businesses operate in an environment that emphasizes seeking out support mechanisms rather than focusing on formal management development (McKevitt & Marshall, 2015). Joint ventures are formal and informal business management development arrangements between two business entities that identify themselves as a legal business entity (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR §121.103 (h), 2017). Agreements that fall under the classification of joint ventures comprise an inter-cooperative agreement between companies. The agreement stipulates that joint venture entities cannot be awarded more than three

contracts within a two-year time span (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR 121.103 (h), 2017). The joint ventures retain small business status throughout contract duration unless the following occurs: legal novation and small business identity name change occurs because of buyout or merger of the joint venture (JV) with a separate company, or the contract length exceeds 5 years. Before the 5-year contract period ends, the contracting officer would require the JV to recertify their small business size status (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR § 121.404 (g), 2017). In the case of JV's that formulate under the SBA Mentor-protégé program, the JV can bid on any federal procurement, regardless of size as the protégé continues under classifications standards applicable as small under the Section 8(a) program (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR § 121.103 (h)(3)(iii) and § 124.520, (2017).

The size status of joint ventures can affect prime contractors' seeking subcontracting opportunities. McKevitt and Marshall (2015) posited there are inherent differences between small business and large business mentors, with small business mentors practicing mentoring strategies that encompass both indirect and direct support to counsel small businesses through each unique stage of development. Ebbers (2014) posited that joint networking could positively affect alliances pursuing contracting opportunities, thus creating fertile ground for proactive business behavior. The JV arrangement allows members of the venture to combine resources on a temporary basis to propose on prime government contracts and create more competitive posturing to compete for subcontracting opportunities (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR §121.103 (h), 2017). If a small business in a JV does not abide by this 3 in 2 rule process,

the venture may be found to be other than small and will not be allowed to compete for government contracting opportunities (Small Business Credit and Assistance, 13 CFR §121.103 (h), 2017).

Hagedoorn, Lokshin, and Malo (2018) asserted that smaller firms can benefit from joint venturing because larger firms have the added bandwidth of prior experience and more opportunities for networking which they can pass along to smaller firms. Zacca, Dayan, and Ahrens (2015) further posited that strengthening small business networking capacity increases the breadth and depth of outreach, thus improving the chances of smaller firms reaching nontraditional markets and areas expanding to international venues. Brouthers, Nakos, and Dimitratos (2017) stated that in addition to moving firms toward greater competitive capability, alliances and joint ventures can mitigate risk to small and medium companies when they enter nontraditional markets.

The position of a company relative to whether they are well established or are an occasional contractor will determine the value of implementing JVs. According to Shen and Cheung (2018), joint ventures formulated by contractors occasionally entering the market can raise market concentration, whereas, with larger companies, the intent is to synergize multiple JV entry into the market and segment contracts into smaller divisible contracting opportunities. As SDVOSBs look toward building competitive stature for increasing understanding on how to enter subcontracting markets, knowledge of how to formulate and enter into mentor-protégé agreements and other forms of JV arrangements can enhance their perception of how to enter into subcontracting markets. Chakkol, Selviaridis and Finne (2018) in their study on collaboration in industry found that

formulating JVs can prove beneficial to enhancing customer demand. Increasingly, customers are requiring evidence of past performance using collaborative business techniques such as obtaining joint industry certifications that build trust and confidence. The major themes within this literature search focus on the need for drawing a distinction between entry-level entrepreneurial training and advanced training for small businesses entering the federal government marketplace. Furthermore, the literature reveals themes relating to the necessity of strategic planning and the advantages of formulating JV relationships.

Literature Search Strategy

I searched the Walden University library database and Google Scholar search engines to obtain sources. Research databases included (a) ABI/Inform, (b) Business Source Complete, (c) Office of Secretary of Defense Reports, (d) Congressional Research Service Reports, (e) Emerald Insight, (f) Federal Acquisition Regulation and Code of Federal Regulations, (g) GAO Reports, (h) General Services Administration, (i) U.S.SBA information websites, (j) Lexis-Nexis, (k) Naval Post Graduate School and Defense Technical Information Center Studies, and (l) SAGE Journals. Key search words included *veterans*, *supply chain management*, *subcontracting*, *strategic planning*, *department of defense contracting*, *training*, *small business development centers*, *procurement technical assistance centers*, *advocacy coalition theory*, *ACT*, *research methodology*, *US SBA*, *joint ventures*, and *collaboration* separately and in combination with others.

The sources I used to verify the peer-reviewed status of the articles included in the literature review were Crossref.org and Ulrich's Periodicals Directory. The literature review included 338 source references, of which 313, or 92% of the publications were within the past 5 years. The references included U.S. SBA sites, DOD Office of Small Business, NDAA supporting documentation, GAO reports, procurement assistance agency websites, congressional service reports and FAR and Code of Federal Regulation supporting documentation. There was a total of 196 articles referenced, with 89% falling under the classification of peer-reviewed status.

The literature review section of this research included the evolution of small business set-asides and the emergence of veteran-owned business preferences in government contracting, legislative impacts on small business, misuse and fraud within small business set-aside programs, training focus and resource collaboration, and strategic planning. Both mature and startup SDVOSB entities will benefit from the results of this study because they will more clearly understand training agency collaboration shortfalls, which was the basis for undertaking this literature review. The conceptual area builds upon the problem statement and establishes supporting rationale on why the problem of underachievement of SDVOSB subcontracting goals negatively affects SDVOSB small businesses. The legislative impact section highlights not only the changes in legislation that have occurred that have benefitted SDVOSB entities, but additionally covers the rationale for the specific areas of legislation and their intended outcomes. Historical analysis of the small business set-aside programs within the federal government address questions concerning why small business set-aside preferences are

used and what their intended purpose is. The literature review on training focused on the benefits of training and how small businesses can position themselves to take advantage of training venues to increase their exposure to DOD contracting. Mastering a training focus has three outlets in this review of literature. First, to establish that misuse of small business certification status hurts small business and their competitive stature to compete for inclusion in DoD subcontracting programs. Secondly, highlighting the need for strategic planning in small business builds upon the theme that success emanates from long-term planning and understanding where important acquisition phase points are in DOD contracting processes. Understanding differences between entrepreneurship development and increasing market stature is an important distinction to make in companies preparing themselves to compete within the DOD marketplace. The theoretical framework portion of this section covers a discussion of the ACT and investigating other research discipline area uses of the ACT.

Theoretical Foundation

A theoretical framework integrates ideas and concepts to facilitate a backdrop for explaining different approaches to a research problem (Konig & Wenzelburger, 2014). Elgin (2015) opined that an ACT framework allows the researcher to study policy subsystems, both within and outside of government circles. The actors within subsystems of organizations petition for policy change, embrace alliances and share resources to effect positive change. Understanding the learning processes within coalition structures in policy processes is vital to comprehending reasoning behind policy change (Fischer, 2014). I used the ACT as the theoretical foundation to ground this study.

Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1988) discussed policy implementation analyses that previously did not differentiate between embryonic and mature alliance coalition subsystems that can influence policy. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith's seminal work began with a review of regulatory policy-making behaviors that affect the outcome of policy change. Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith posited that coalitions aspire to change policy behavior orientation of governmental institutions to capture policy goals relative to core objectives of coalitions (Sabatier, 1999). According to Sabatier and Weible (2014), a coalition framework contains stable parameters encompassing similar sociocultural values, recognition of the need for consensus among its members, and awareness that coalition strategies may translate into policy impacts without partisan preference. Although mixed theories of policy interpretation and calls for a synthesis of different theories in policymaking occur, complicated mixes of *Knot* theoretical application to approaching policy change can potentially create the same patterns of policy change (Breunig, Kostig and Workman, 2016). Craft and Wilder (2015) reinforced Sabatier's contention that explicit coalitions within a mature theoretical framework can strengthen policy subsystems to initiate recommended policy changes to policymakers. Petridou (2014) maintained that the ACT is grounded in studying beliefs and how they contribute to the cohesiveness of coalitions.

The premise of the ACT is that when organizations possess similar deep core values, those organizations can mobilize across multiple levels of organizational structural architecture and political subsystems to effect policy change (Sabatier & Weible, 2014). The use of ACT within fields that investigate policymaking is growing.

The study of collaborative governance in policy change enhances actor access to knowledge sources, provides a greater repository of ideas to lobby for change, and sets the stage for legitimacy due to the involvement of stakeholders (Kim & Darnall, 2016). Hess (2017) found that even though coalitions may possess similar end goals and deep core values, there is still a need for cross-coalition dialogue between stakeholder sources to achieve desired objectives. Hess further stressed that coalition members must understand what frames of references and interactional dynamics occur between differing groups mean regarding permanent policy implications for desired social change. Moyson (2017) addressed the question concerning whether policy beliefs and outcomes can change in discourse based upon coalition members acquiring new belief systems. In studying dialogical interchange surrounding the Belgium rail and electricity subsystems, Moyson posited that policy actors do not alter policy choices to align with emerging belief systems, but instead recognize internal biases that can hamper progress; ultimately opting in favor of objectively working toward sustaining the higher aspirations of the coalition. In this respect, coalition membership is an objective decision-making process based on recognition of a need for social change.

The ACT is ideally suited for research that encompasses the framing of policy action and introducing programs that further implement agendas for policy change by actors who benefit from policy change (Ritter, Hughes, Lancaster and Hoppe, 2018). The policy actors in this research are the SDVOSB entities themselves as well as the procurement assistance agencies that counsel them on taking advantage of regulatory changes that benefit them directly when pursuing subcontracting opportunities within

DOD. According to Pierce et.al. (2017), the ACT additionally provides a transitional model for accelerating consensus building into developing policy substructures. Many researchers have expanded the ACT framework as it applies to the setting of the debate surrounding energy and climate change management at the international, national, state and local constituency level. Hughes and Meckling (2017) used the ACT framework to explain the conflict between free trade coalitions and domestic manufacturers, and congressional coalition interests over the extent of the trade imbalance with China in the renewable solar photovoltaic industry. Hughes and Meckling's study reinforce the premise that the ACT framework can be useful in explaining leveraging and negotiation strategies in approaches to political motivations and recognizing impediments surrounding policy implementation in many different disciplines. In another study involving climate change and environmental management, Allen, Bird, Breslow, and Dorsak (2017) used the ACT framework to study the interchange of arguments between different groups involving the construction of a coal-shipping port in Bellingham, WA. This study reveals that even though several of the coalitions involved in this dispute may have differing interests, they are still primarily driven by similar policy beliefs that have mutually inclusive end goals of gaining the attention of policymakers and engaging stakeholders that could potentially sustain their argumentative position for positive social change.

When reviewing policies about fracking in the U.S. and European countries, Ingold, Fischer, and Carney (2017) found utility in expanding the ACT framework to address how actors view the issue of support for fracking policies through the same

vantage point before deciding to pursue commitments influencing policy change. In yet another study on spatial land usage in Switzerland, Hersperger, Gennalo-Franscini, and Kubler (2014) found similar positive utility in using the ACT framework to study the interaction between municipalities and private landowners. Other discipline areas that use the ACT framework as the basis of their research include education and health care. In a mixed methods study on local educational policies in Denver, New Orleans, and New York City, Scott et al. (2017) revealed that when intermediary organizations identify themselves with national advocacy coalitions, they become more visible in advocating for policy change. The researchers opined that when political patterns within communities are cohesive, it affects how intermediary organizations, (e.g., think-tanks, philanthropic organizations, and media bloggers) behave in solidifying coalitions for social change.

In a study on understanding the relationship between research and public advocacy, Smith and Stewart (2016) posited that the health profession field needs to study the differences between facilitating advocacy, which seeks more public involvement in influencing trends in health-related areas of research. This study furthered the argument that the ACT framework is useful for shaping the discourse and direction of efforts to initiate positive social change within the health profession. ACT literature in the study of business relationships and networking is numerous. Stritch (2015) used the ACT framework to study disclosure trends in trade unions in Canada and the linkage between policy beliefs and policy enactment. Stritch illustrated that as advocacy coalitions mature, their impact on policy and ability to formulate networks also increases. The ACT framework was ideal for this study because it provided a backdrop for how procurement

assistance agencies act in a collaborative manner to advocate for small business. The ACT framework furthermore builds upon the research questions by studying the advocacy role of procurement assistance agencies and how they impact the development of subcontracting training for SDVOSB entities. In the literature review in chapter 2, I highlighted the background of small business set-asides concerning the evolution of procurement policy of how federal agencies approach small business set-asides. Additionally, information was presented relevant to legislative changes that have facilitated easier entry for small businesses pursuing subcontracting opportunities with the federal government. The literature review also encompassed scholarly discourse surrounding the topic of impediments to small businesses including misuse and fraud in the veteran certification process. Further background information was presented on advocacy organizations that posture veterans to pursue small business opportunities discussing the need to differentiate between different competency levels of training for veterans pursuing acquisition training. Chapter 3 is a discussion of the research design and rationale used in this study, research methodology, participant selection sampling strategy, instrument data collection, procedures for recruitment of participants and data collection, data analysis and transition and summary.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of SDVOSB owners and representatives regarding training and outreach collaboration strategies to improve veteran access to training on the DOD SDVOSB subcontracting processes and opportunities. I focused on the experiences of six SDVOSBs who were actively seeking DOD subcontracting opportunities by conducting semistructured interviews with SDVOSB owners and representatives. This study involved content analysis of procurement assistance agency and contractor supplier diversity training policies and procedures to triangulate the data from the SDVOSB owner and representative interviews. By using the advocacy coalition theoretical framework, I explored access to small business assistance counseling and training resources and further analyzed how those organizations advocate for SDVOSB subcontracting opportunities within the DOD. Chapter 3 includes an overview of the research design and rationale for its use, role of the researcher, methodology and design, integrity and trustworthiness considerations, and a transition and summary.

Research Design and Rationale

This section includes research questions and rationale for using qualitative method.

Research Questions

The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the level of understanding by owners of SDVOSB entities about intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level?
2. To what degree does the level of exposure to intervention training groups assist those entities in developing their business base to make them more competitive for DOD subcontracting opportunities?

Design Rationale

Selecting a research methodology provides a compass to determine the analytical purposes of the study, boundaries, and triangulation protocol used. A research design encompasses (a) the research question(s), (b) theoretical framework, and (c) process of triangulation of data results (Turner, Cardinal, & Burton, 2017). Patton (2017) identified the major qualitative designs as (a) the grounded theory approach, (b) phenomenological, (c) case study design, and (d) ethnographic study. The research design I selected for this study was a qualitative case study design. A qualitative case study design allowed for the investigation of the perceptions of SDVOSB owners concerning access to training curriculum for pursuing subcontracting opportunities within DOD.

As the researcher extrapolates upon new categories further using a grounded theory design, the resulting research evolves into a constructivist orientation toward solidifying theoretical constructs (James, 2017). Using a grounded theory design involves the study of behavioral processes and interactions that lead to the development of a theoretical model (Thappe, Hannes, Buve, Bhattari, & Mathei, 2018). I did not develop theory through this research; therefore, using the grounded theory approach was not appropriate.

An ethnographic study involves investigating interactive social processes and the cultural environment in which they occur (Hammersly, 2018). Ethnography encompasses empathizing with study participants as well as observing societal peculiarities and unique trait characteristics to gain an inductive generalization about the environment (Bass & Milosevic, 2018). Ethnographic research was not suitable for this study because it was not based around the social context or culture of SDVOSB owners and representatives and their access to subcontracting and procurement training.

A phenomenological design involves analyzing experiences of the research population (Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). Although I studied the perceptions of SDVOSB owners and representatives concerning the collaboration on training between procurement assistance agencies, corporate supplier diversity management, and DOD small business liaison offices and SDVOSB owner access to that training, I additionally examined training documents and mission statements of procurement assistance agencies and corporate supplier diversity offices. A phenomenological study was not appropriate because I conducted a content analysis of training samples within these agencies to triangulate interview data I collected from the SDVOSB owners and representatives included within this study.

Optimum use of a case study occurs when the researcher wants to investigate why groups perceive an issue as they do and what evidence convinces them to adopt these perceptions (Yin, 2014). Case studies concentrate on the individual aspects of the population sample under investigation, seeking out complexities that exist either individually or collectively (Yin, 2014). Case studies delve into the implementation

stages of a process, explaining the why and how of a circumstance and guiding initiatives to suggest the change (Yin, 2014). Ponelis (2015) pointed out that case studies are suitable as an instrument for teaching. De Massis and Kotlar (2014) posited that exploratory case studies aid in explaining how a phenomenon occurs.

Case studies allowed for the exploration of the perceptions of SDVOSB owners and representatives relative to their access to training to increase subcontracting opportunities within the DOD. Using a case study design, Guerrero, Urbano, Cunningham, and Organ (2014) explored similarities and differentiation in entrepreneurial university policies, providing insight into how different institutions within two European regions approach the collaborative sharing of ideas and strategic partnerships with industries to improve entrepreneurial education. In a case study on entrepreneurial intentions toward expanding into the international arena, Dimitratos, Johnson, Plakoiannaki, and Young, (2016) used a case study design to explore individual cases where SMEs selected global business expansion strategies beyond exporting and how the framework of organizational behavior contributed to their orientation toward international business growth.

Role of the Researcher

Since there is no statistical analysis in qualitative research, it is incumbent upon the researcher to responsibly interpret information through observation and inductive inquiry and analyze it in combination with an in-depth review of the literature (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheragi, 2014). The researcher strives for acquiring a breadth of understanding that contributes further to the existing body of research (Boddy,

2016). My role in conducting this qualitative study was to responsibly pursue an inductive inquiry and report my findings within boundaries of the ethically responsible handling of research. As a researcher in this study, I was a participant observer. In this capacity, I ensured the participants were aware of the study objectives, what participation entailed, and how participant anonymity occurred throughout the interview process. Researchers should be cognizant of the need to preserve the anonymity of research participants and be vigilant for the ever-present potential for the introduction of bias, which can flaw data results (Robinson, 2014).

In my current professional capacity, I am an employee of a federal agency working with contracting agencies and small businesses to advise them on complying with the Small Business Act. Acting in my professional work capacity was not a factor in influencing participant responses. I do not award contracts; therefore, there was no possibility of an appearance of a conflict of interest in conducting this research. Furthermore, SDVOSBs are public business entities, and all participants were made aware that I conducted this study in my capacity as a private citizen and student at Walden University with no affiliation to my federal agency employer.

It is critical for the researcher to adopt reflexivity and adhere to maintaining an appropriate distance between themselves and the research participants (Greene, 2014). *The Belmont Report* explains the importance of and establishes guidelines for protecting human subjects in biomedical sciences research (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). There is a need to protect not only individual vulnerabilities in a study, but the entire culture of the research

protocol planning process the researcher anticipates executing (Bracken-Roche, Bell, Macdonald, & Racine, 2017). Ethics in research requires the researcher to minimize privacy vulnerabilities of the participants and reduce the incidence of individual and situational judgment, maintaining autonomy and harmony in the research endeavor (Hammersley, 2015).

Initiating the basic qualitative design required selection of the interview location; however, I took every measure to protect the identities of the research subject participants by masking their identities. The research participants were identified with the pseudonyms of Service-Disabled Veteran Business Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. The use of pseudonyms is an essential part of maintaining confidentiality when working with human research participants (Lahman et al., 2015). Masking identities protects the individual perspectives and sensitivities of the research participants (Moulin, 2015). All research strategies begin with the researcher's cognition of the need to maintain confidentiality throughout every step of the research process (Petrova, Dewing, and Camilleri, 2016). I obtained informed consent from each participant before the interviews began to allow for individual choice after full disclosure occurred concerning what the research entails (see Grady, 2015).

I recruited SDVOSB owner and representative participants for this study through accessing both the SAM and Dynamic Small Business Search public databases of small business profile information. I did not experience any difficulty in locating participants, so I did not need to employ my backup plan for networking with members of a midwestern based defense contractor association. Purposive sampling technique was used

in this study because the unique characteristics of the study population were well defined and readily accessible, from both the SAM and Small Business Dynamic Search engine under the U.S. SBA. Although it was not necessary to use the aforementioned defense contractor association for recruiting research study participants, they were chosen as a backup organization for recruiting because there are no restrictions to membership in that organization. This organization hosts monthly meetings to its members and invites speakers to address topics of interests concerning small and large business contracting trends and research developments in aerospace development operations support and information systems.

Because the focus of this study was on SDVOSB entities conducting prime and subcontracting with DOD, the aforementioned defense contractor association was an ideal backup organization for recruiting participants for this study. To mitigate bias, I used member checking. This research process avails the researcher a quality control tool for evaluating their own subjective preferences when approaching the research and provide legitimacy to ascribing the correct meaning to the context of the information they are recording (Kornbluh, 2015; & Anney, 2014). Transcription of interview results was discussed with the participants after interview completion. Member checking allows participants to validate the information in their own context (Houghton, Shaw and Murphy, 2013). Member checking additionally equips the researcher with the tools to strengthen the reliability of interview transcription information by verifying data between participants (Houghton, Shaw and Murphy, 2013). Researchers must maintain transparency throughout the research process by ensuring they communicate the

intentions of their research to participants and how those intentions fit into their research methodology through member checking (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016).

The role of the researcher also encompasses replication. Replication is where the researcher becomes more cognizant of the potential for incidences of subjectivity within their research, thus increasing transparency of processes (Darawsheh, 2014). Replication strengthens data and contributes to reliability in research. The researcher must also be reflexive in their research verification processes with subjects (Morse, 2015). Probst (2015) found in a study on social work practitioner perceptions of reflexivity in research, that consensus can occur by using reflexivity, because it forces the researcher to engage in continuous self-awareness in ensuring objectifying of research steps. Mao, Akram, Chovanec, and Underwood (2016) opined that reflexivity allows the researcher to more clearly understand their own identity in relation to seemingly unjust social environments one may encounter in their research endeavor. A reflexive diary was used throughout my research to document my thoughts and experiences during the research process to maximize objectivity and reduce the potential for the introduction of bias into my research. Responsible qualitative research entails maintaining documentation by a researcher concerning their feelings and responses to interviews and the resulting information that emanates from those interviews (Cleary, Horsfall and Hayter, 2014). By maintaining a journal or notebook, the researcher can more descriptively reflect upon their reactions to the interviewee responses and readily empathize with ideas conveyed by the interviewee to further expound upon themes that emerge (Cleary, Horsfall and Hayer, 2014).

Research Methodology

This section comprises participant selection and sampling strategy, instrument and data collection, and procedures for recruitment participation and data collection. A strong program of recruitment strategy and knowing up front what research methodology is the best choice for the study ensures greater success in the research product.

A qualitative methodology was the best choice to examine the issues surrounding the central focus of the overarching research questions and enable a thorough examination of the study. The researcher must fully grasp the relationship between the underpinnings of the belief system behind the research, be comfortable with the main thrust of the questions, and fully comprehend how the research process relates to those questions to produce rich data results (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadwha, & Varpio, 2015). A qualitative methodology was an optimum choice to address the two research questions because I was seeking a more in-depth understanding of attitudes, behaviors, and motivations relative to the topic I examined (Barnham, 2015). The qualitative research method contains several viewpoints, to include ontological and epistemological orientations within a framework that guides purpose and more easily identifies characteristics of the sample population (Winjngaarden, van der Miede and Dahlberg, 2017).

The experiences of SDVOSB owner and representatives toward subcontracting training opportunities available to them, and their perceptions of collaboration strategies between directors of procurement assistance agencies, DOD corporate supplier diversity management offices, and DOD small business liaison offices on how they approach

procurement counseling and subcontracting training for SDVOSBs is the basis for selecting a qualitative methodology. Researchers who use quantitative methods are concerned with identifying and validating measurements (Groeneveld, Tummers, Bronkhorst, Ashikali, & van Thiel, 2015). A quantitative approach to research encompasses the study of content variables and exploring the binary relationship between subjects that are objective (Williams and Sheperd, 2017; Bernerth, Colle, Taylor, and Walker, 2018). A qualitative versus quantitative approach was more suitable for this study because the intent was to explore the perceptions of SDVOSB owner and representatives; analyzing collaboration strategies in improving subcontracting counseling and training.

The research process I pursued was inductive. According to Wilson (2014), an inductive approach encompasses collecting data and expounding upon theory based on data analysis. Obtaining an understanding of SDVOSB perceptions of subcontracting training opportunities requires an empathic observation that can only occur through use of an inductive inquiry process. Quantitative research encompasses a deductive approach and does not contain specific content of meaning that can establish a clear link to content analysis (Bengtsson, 2016).

Measurement through a mixed method design was also not feasible because the research did not involve answering rhetorical research questions that would require use of both inductive and deductive reasoning approaches (Viswanath, Brown and Sullivan, 2016). In a mixed methods study on determining what competencies business leader and supervisors must possess in motivating workers to return to work after extended absences

due to health concerns, (Johnston et.al., 2015), collected two sources of data (those currently in the job functions where return to work is being measured, and the other, subject matter experts familiar with the job requirements) to determine the optimum competency model business supervisors need to increase return to work rates in their employees. Johnston et.al used both focus groups and surveys of industry experts to develop a return to work competency model. Using a mixed method approach should not be undertaken unless the over-arching research question requires both qualitative and quantitative results to establish the credibility of data (Halcomb & Hickman, 2014).

Participant Selection and Sampling Strategy

To participate in this study, participant and owner and representatives were required to possess SDVOSB certification, verified through GSA and produce proof that certification documents exist within the CVE database that is currently in use by the VA to validate company eligibility for SDVOSB awards. Additionally, participants were required to meet the following criteria: (a) possess core competencies and self-certification NAICS Code representation within SAM or CVE certification that allow them to qualify for DOD prime contracts as an SDVOSB and competitively seek DOD subcontracting opportunities; (b) Have NAICS code self-representation within their SAM or CVE business profiles in categories of services or products used by DOD prime contractors in one or more areas to include professional support services, maintenance and repair and rebuilding of equipment, research and development, information technology, and construction; (c) Have been awarded at least one prime contract with DOD, either on a sole source contractor basis, or as part of a joint venture where past

performance would be visible to DOD prime contractors who select subcontractors for prime contracting opportunities.

I chose purposive sampling because my research goal was to explore the experiences of the research participants which provides rich data for a qualitative study as described by Grossoehme (2014). Purposeful sampling is also appropriate when the researcher establishes criteria for participant selection at the outset of the research creating a more transparent framework for the direction of the study (Grossoehme, 2014; Etikan, Alkassim and Abubakr, 2015; and Leung, 2015). Use of a random sampling strategy to select participants is not suitable. The experiences of the participants within the study may not possess similarities (Nicholls, 2017).

In a case study on succession in family businesses, Bizri (2016) used purposive sampling to ensure there was adequate variation in geographical and sectoral differences with respect to business owners within the sample population to explore how social capital, degree of formalizing business processes, familial stewardship, and size influences how successors within family businesses are selected. I selected SDVOSB owner firms who possessed differences in size, length of time conducting business within DOD and different core competencies to assess the degree of affectation of their perceptions concerning the presence or absence of subcontracting training collaboration in DOD subcontracting training processes.

Creswell (2013) maintained that including four or five participants in case study research allows for easier identification of themes within the research setting. In this

study I used six SDVOSB owner and representatives and did not need more participants to achieve saturation of data. Careful attention was paid to being attentive to when saturation of data occurred in this study.

Qualitative studies quite often use purposive sampling seeking information-rich participants that focus more on quality rather than quantity of research participants (Patton, 2015). Determining sample size depends upon both theoretical and practical assumptions the researcher makes about the research environment and should take place during the early planning stages of initiating research (Robinson, 2014). To determine saturation, the researcher must assess approaches used in similar studies and learn how to document those processes to determine when saturation might occur (Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi, 2016). Saturation will be reached sooner in a smaller study vice a larger one. Furthermore, saturation will vary according to the design of the study (Fusch & Ness, 2016). This study involved interviewing the owner and representatives of six SDVOSB firms. After interviewing six individuals, I determined there was no need to interview more research subjects because saturation of data occurred from the six interview participants. Lower numbers of participants in studies reflect a similar orientation toward research, focusing more on narrowing the range of variation (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom and Duan, 2015). Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2015) explained sample size of population refines aim, further defining sample specificity, theory use, and what methods the researcher uses to analyze the research results.

The focus in this study was more narrow than broad, concentrating on one specific aspect of contractor training (subcontracting) and how procurement assistance

agencies collaborate to improve training delivery in this area. The sample specificity was also relatively narrow because the study concerned one specific socioeconomic classification of small business (SDVOSB) which would lead to more rapid saturation of data than if the study involved multiple socioeconomic categories. This study applied a theoretical foundation (advocacy coalition). The study furthermore, required less of a sampling size because the participants were asked the same research questions and were not subject to cross case analysis.

Instrument and Data Collection

The researcher is an interpretive agent within the confines of the study whose principal responsibility is to ascribe meaning to different perceptions surrounding a topic (Sarma, 2015). As the primary interpretive agent, the primary goal of the researcher is to look at and interpret data results responsibly that can withstand academic scrutiny. Since this study encompassed qualitative inductive processes surrounding perceptions of SDVOSB owner and representatives concerning subcontracting training, my principal research instrument was the use of semistructured interviews. This interview technique in qualitative studies affords the researcher more flexibility in obtaining participant perspectives without philosophical and other social preconceptions, thus allowing more freedom to capture a myriad of ideas (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Semistructured interviews facilitate an environment that encourages a more conversational tone between the researcher and study participant discussion that can lead to increased frequency of actual incidences of disclosure concerning individual perceptions (Ponelis, 2015). Use of the semistructured interviews allows for questions which will clarify and strengthen

dialogue interchange within the discussions (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The interview protocol is at Appendix A.

Rothing, Malterud, and Frich (2015) posited that semistructured interviews allow for capture of individual patterns of thought that the interviewer might not be able to capture within a structured interview environment. Sanchez-Gordon and O'Connor (2016) asserted that semistructured interviews not only allow for considering areas that may seem trivial to part of the research population, however, allow for the interjection of a degree of empathy toward those areas that might seem more important to some but insignificant to others. In a qualitative study of small business engineering firms, Susomrith and Coetzer (2015) used semistructured interviews to investigate employee perception of the efficacy of workplace training. Susomrith and Coetzer found that lack of formal human relations policies, uncertainty by employees relating to management emphasis on investing in training and development, as well as the presence of absence of opportunities for training and development contributed to the growth of employee pessimism concerning opportunities to obtain future training.

In a study on developing e-learning training assets in four different construction and trade industries in Australia, Callan, Johnston, and Poulsen (2015) used semistructured interviews to assess employee perceptions concerning the application and potential use of e-learning. Callan et.al., 2015 found that although e-learning is a valuable resource to reach training audiences within the construction trades, there is a need to strike a balance within between e-learning and formal training mechanisms to prevent reductions and deskilling of training managers. E-learning can be a useful model for

taking advantage of technology advances in 3-D construction modeling, thus highlighting the tangible benefits from modernizing training delivery.

Procedures for Recruitment Participation and Data Collection

Subjects included in this study were SDVOSB owner and representatives who possessed proof of socioeconomic status through either the SAM database or the VA CVE system. Ownership of an SDVOSB firm is defined as 51% primary ownership in the company in which the SDVOSB owner provides the principal direction of the company and holds the highest position within the company. Training documentation as well as policy information relative to training delivery of subcontracting outreach that procurement assistance agency participants in partnership with DOD, to include designated representatives of PTACs, SBDCs, CSDMs and DOD small business liaison offices was used. Kristensen and Ravn (2015) posited that the selection of interview candidates often occurs because of an assumption by the researcher concerning who can best answer the research questions.

I interviewed subjects who are experts on addressing the central issue points in the research because of their involvement in DOD contracting, which is why purposive sampling is most suitable for this study (Elo et.al., 2014) The study took place within a midwestern city where there is a large concentration of DOD contracting activity, supporting all branches of the military services who engage in sustaining defense capabilities within areas of cybersecurity and supplying professional engineering services support for defense systems requirements offices.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), the site where the research is to take place must have relevance to the participants you choose for your research. I held the research interviews in locations in business offices where the SDVOSBs perform a preponderance of their prime and subcontracting work and seek out further subcontracting opportunities with DOD.

Data Analysis

This study investigated perceptions of owner or representatives of SDVOSB entities with triangulation of data from policies and procedures relating to procurement training from procurement assistance agencies, DOD small business liaison directors and corporate supplier diversity managers. The instrument used was semistructured interviews and content analysis of procedures on how procurement assistance agencies, DOD small business liaison offices, corporate supplier diversity managers and small business liaison offices plan for and conduct subcontracting training for SDVOSB entities. The theoretical framework that provides structure for the emerging of themes within this study is the ACT. Theoretical frameworks in qualitative studies offer direction and clarify outcomes with an academic basis to point the researcher in a direction that ensures consistency between data gathering and application of theoretical modeling (Nilsen, 2015).

The knowledge base of the ACT is the theoretical lens in which this study occurred. The premise behind the ACT is actors in coalitions assemble to promote specific policy instruments as solutions to solve problems relative to real-world conditions (Beland, Howitt and Mukherjee, 2018). The situation under exploration within

which this study occurred was the lower subcontracting participation rate for SDVOSB entities within DOD contracts. The ACT framework applies agenda-setting forums within an environment where a problem occurs and actors within an agenda seek to improve the question by competing for policy change to achieve end goals around a common core policy base (Watson, 2014).

In this study, the standard core policy base centered around furthering awareness of training and outreach opportunities for service-disabled veteran owned companies in DOD contracting by exploring the causes for why subcontracting achievement rates for SDVOSB entities are lower than other socioeconomic categories within DOD contracts. Advocacy Coalitions bring actors within the public policy forums together to identify competing agendas and explore ambiguities in arguments, highlighting competing values, and investigating the political implications behind reasons for lack of change (Sowa & Lu, 2017). SDVOSB entities are one set of several socioeconomic small business categories used by DOD in acquiring goods and services, yet SDVOSB entities performing in a subcontracting role in prime contracts are next to last among socioeconomic small business categories in subcontracting achievement within DOD.

During the interviews with the SDVOSB owner and representatives, I captured themes on where obstacles exist for seeking out subcontracting training. The findings that emerged from this study could potentially improve opportunities for SDVOSBs to enter the DOD subcontracting market and likewise provide DOD with a repository of strategies to strengthen collaboration on improving subcontracting training delivery.

The semistructured interviews were transcribed using Express Scribe software. Interview data and content analysis of assistance agency support documentation was coded using NVIVO 12. NVIVO 12 is a software that enables the researcher to code theoretical and empirical clusters of themes that emerge from the interview (Eze & Chinedu-Eze, 2018). NVIVO 12 affords the researcher the ability to store, analyze and code data into themes that provide the researcher reliability and verifiability in thematic development (Yazdani et.al., 2018).

In a study on ethical practices of entrepreneurs, Power, Di Domenico, and Miller (2017) used NVIVO software to provide coding support to interview responses, thus strengthening inter researcher reliability within their study. In a study exploring common character traits of successful young female entrepreneurs, McGowan, Cooper, Durkin and O’Kane (2015) used NVIVO software to investigate human and social capital impediments in business growth stages to include the role of family and friends, the presence of gender discrimination, and impact of prior work experience. In yet another study on business intelligence platform use in management decision-making, Arnott, Lizama, and Song (2017) used NVIVO coding to interpret transcription of audio responses on why leaders adopt different strategies of integrating business intelligence with managerial decision-making. Coding information within this study using NVIVO 12 facilitated identification of themes for analyzing perceptions toward collaboration enhancements in subcontract training.

Issues of Trustworthiness

This section will cover how the researcher obtains validity and maintains the reliability of qualitative data as well as highlighting procedures for informed consent. Informed consent establishes validity for protecting the rights of the research participants through the pursuit of ethical research practices.

Validity and Reliability of Data

Achieving internal validity in data refers to the ability to reach conclusions about cause and effect and other unique interrelationships. External validity is a measure of how the data can apply to situations outside of the immediate area under research (Leedy & Ormond, 2001). Expanding upon this line of reasoning further, Kihn and Ihantola (2015) posited that validity in research is a description of what occurs in the research setting and communicates impacts within conclusions. In the research setting, the researcher strives to achieve both internal and external validity of findings to allow anyone reviewing the research to obtain visible proof of responsible handling of research findings (Welch and Pekkari, 2017). Welch and Pekkari (2017) further asserted research entails being able to readily explain the data and verify the contextuality of the research.

According to Noble and Smith (2015), researchers must identify strategies that strengthen the credibility of research methodology. Credibility occurs by evaluating biases, maintaining records that reflect exact reception of information, elaborating on participant accounts during data collection, and validating participant themes that emerge from transcribing data. Thomas (2017) reaffirmed that member checking is an essential part of ensuring the reliability of research transcription and protecting the credibility of

the researcher by validating underlying themes within the participant response discourse that emerges. Member checking adds to the richness and thickness of data capture by obtaining direct feedback from the participants (Impellizzeri, Savinsky, King and Leitch-Alford, 2017). Thick descriptions of data involve getting to the core nature of data results and flushing out themes to produce a model that the researcher can explain to others who may review their research (Cornelissen, 2016).

A researcher supplements thickness and richness in the research endeavor when they achieve transferability, dependability, and conformability in their research endeavor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Elo et al. (2014) results from the research can be used in various ways within the discipline under study which makes findings transferable. Dependability is the ability to use the conclusions from the study in different contexts. Conformability occurs when the researcher obtains consensus from varied academic audiences concerning the accuracy of the methodology and how the data can be useful in drawing conclusions.

The research I conducted on subcontracting training for SDVOSBs is transferable because the results can potentially be useful for expanding curriculum within the DOD as well as state level and corporate procurement assistance training consideration relative to subcontracting. Although this study primarily concerned SDVOSB perceptions about subcontracting training and outreach availability from DOD and ancillary training organizations, I believe the results are dependable because they have applicability to other socioeconomic classifications of small business outside of SDVOSBs. Because the research participants are experts in their field within the designated socioeconomic

groupings, they are in an excellent position to comment on the conformability of the results in the training contexts where they are experiencing the most difficulties in obtaining subcontracting opportunities.

Methods used to ensure conformability in research include methodological triangulation of data results from agency training documentation to include policies and procedures, applying reflexivity, prolonged engagement with research participants, formulating an audit trail, member checking and peer debriefings (Hadi & Closs, 2016). The next section will highlight the very important area of informed consent and ethical considerations a researcher must be cognizant of when pursuing research.

Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations

Government permission to obtain SDVOSB participants in this study was not necessary because all SDVOSB entities conducting business with DOD have publicly accessible business profiles on either CVE or SAM. Because there are specific NAICS code criteria I used within this study, candidates could be readily selected for study participation by searching on either the SAM or the SBA Small Business Dynamic Search engine for SDVOSB companies that meet the participant selection criteria by socioeconomic self-certification status and NAICS profiles.

In preparation for conducting the study, I secured IRB approval through Walden University. The approval date is 01/25/2018. I also completed the NIH Human Research Participants Extramural training.

Informed consent of SDVOSB participants took place by transmittal of a letter outlining the intent of the research, safeguards for protecting the anonymity of

participants, methodology, and follow-up guidance. If at any stage of interaction during the interview questions, the research subjects felt uncomfortable, they understood they had the ability to request cessation of the interview. All efforts were made to make the research participants comfortable during the interview process

Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced the purpose being to improve awareness of SDVOSB perceptions of procurement assistance center and DOD small business liaison office collaboration for training strategies to improve veteran access to training on DOD SDVOSB subcontracting processes and outreach opportunities. Chapter 1 includes the introduction to the study, problem statement, research and interview questions (Appendix A), and the social change contribution this research makes toward improving the lives of veteran small business owners who have chosen to pursue subcontracting opportunities at the DOD level. Greater transparency into subcontracting training opportunities will foster business growth and development for the service-disabled veteran small business community. Chapter 1 also includes the nature of the study, which validates suitability concerning the use of a case study design. I also provided the supporting rationale behind selecting service-disabled veteran owned companies and the research framework of the ACT for this study, explaining how the major tenets of this theory enunciates actor relationships and collaboration strategies for exploring the dynamics of a unique component of DOD contracting processes. I highlighted the assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations anticipated within the study, which provided greater insight into reflexivity and recognition of internal biases.

Chapter 2 involved the summary of literature review surrounding SDVOSB entry into DOD subcontracting and the legislative background highlighting challenges SDVOSBs face in pursuing subcontracting opportunities within DOD. The scholarly analysis of literature also contains justification for the use of the ACT as a background for studying collaborative relationships between SDVOSBs and procurement assistance agencies. Further areas of inclusion within this chapter are: explanation of the processes of community coalition activities, the emergence of set-asides and preference programs for service disabled veterans, highlights of GAO and naval postgraduate school study analyses, federal small business review programs, discussion concerning misuse and fraud within the set-aside program affecting SDVOSB inclusion in contracting, training focus on resource collaboration, importance of strategic planning, and delineation factors in recognizing distinctiveness between development of business acumen and maturity business models from entrepreneurship training.

In Chapter 3, I detailed the rationale for the study methodology, techniques for data collection, participant recruitment protocol, data analysis, and issues of trustworthiness. I additionally summarized the role of the researcher, which, according to (Fletcher, DeMassis, and Nordqvist, 2016) is to assimilate multiple factors into a level of analyses that establishes linkage. Chapter 4 contains the results from this study, highlighting the themes emanating from the analysis of data using NVIVO 12 software. Direct transcription of interview data from the participants provided the basis for establishing nodes and identifying themes.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to investigate the perceptions of six SDVOSB company representatives and owners in a midwestern city in the United States that are involved in prime and subcontracting pursuits with the DOD and explore their synergistic outreach and training collaboration strategies between business development entities to improve SDVOSB participation in DOD subcontracting. Furthermore, in this study I attempted to provide additional insight into how available procurement assistance agencies can potentially collaborate more closely to improve the local economy by increasing avenues for service-disabled veteran employment by making subcontracting more visible to the service-disabled veteran small business community through the assistance of veteran coalitions. Chapter 4 contains the presentation of findings, data collection strategies, data analysis, and results. The findings include four primary themes: available training and support are of limited relevance to mature small businesses, additional support and training are needed for subcontractors, small business owners face significant obstacles in gaining access to federal subcontracting opportunities, and understanding and enforcement of SDVOSB regulations are perceived as insufficient.

Presentation of the Findings

I conducted a multiple case study of six SDVOSBs, using semistructured interviews of representatives and owners of SDVOSB entities. Twelve training

documents were used to triangulate the data from the interviews and analyze the overarching research questions in this study. The overarching research questions were:

1. What is the level of understanding by owners of SDVOSB entities about intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level?
2. To what degree does the level of exposure to intervention training groups assist those SDVOSB entities in developing their business base to prepare them to be more competitive for DOD subcontracting opportunities?

The documentation I used to triangulate the data included: DOD subcontracting training materials made publicly available on the Internet; training materials provided by the cooperating research organizations (i.e., SBDCs and PTACs); training materials in use by DOD relative to subcontracting, which were publicly available on the Internet; and supplier diversity business development and corporate training from two major defense corporations that were also made publicly available on the Internet. Specifically, the PTAC and SBDC were both approved as cooperative partners in this research endeavor by the Walden University IRB on January 25, 2018.

Participant interviews comprised the most substantial amount of the data gathered for this study. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation will vary from study to study because the design of studies traditionally does not always fit into one particular mode or pattern for data collection. Fusch and Ness further reiterated that the use of data triangulation further solidifies the emergence of data saturation. In this study, I used 12 instruction documents from four distinct entities to triangulate data. Data saturation

occurred when no further data were emerging after multiple interviews. In this study, the analysis of discourse from six separate interviews triangulated through 12 different sources of training and informational data on subcontracting provided the basis of this research. To analyze the data, I input both interview data and training documents into NVIVO 12, which is an analytical analysis tool for developing patterns and themes. According to Bazeley and Jackson (2014), NVIVO assists the researcher in managing ideas and data, which is then translated into visual concepts and timeline relationships.

The six SDVOSB interview participants all met the required small business and socioeconomic profile characteristics for participation in this study. I required study participants to possess SDVOSB certification verified through the GSA SAM database and produce proof that certification documents existed within the CVE database that was currently in use by the VA to validate company eligibility for SDVOSB awards. Additionally, participants were required to meet the following criteria: (a) possession of core competencies and self-certification NAICS Code representation within SAM or CVE certification databases that allow them to qualify for DOD prime contracts as an SDVOSB and competitively seek DOD subcontracting opportunities; (b) possession of NAICS code self-representation within their SAM or CVE business profiles in categories of services or products used by DOD prime contractors in one or more areas, including information technology, professional support services, maintenance technology, and construction; and (c) had been awarded at least one prime contract with DOD, either on a sole contractor basis or as part of a joint venture where past performance would be visible to DOD prime contractors who select subcontractors for prime contracting opportunities.

I verified this information at the beginning of the participant interview process through the company representative providing demographic data to include the above stated information as well as other identifying characteristics of the company. These characteristics included the number of employees and annual dollar revenues of the company. Additional information included the firm history of subcontracting with other business entities (both large and small). I also did a manual check of small business and socioeconomic certification status of each company through both the SAM and CVE database sites. The SAM site also individually lists the primary NAICS codes that the company specializes in to receive contract work at the federal level, which is the basis for their small business socioeconomic self-certification. Women-owned small businesses can also register in the woman-owned small business repository database that is managed by the U.S. SBA. Study participants all qualified as SDVOSB entities and, therefore, were automatically small businesses.

All compilation of data within this study was confidential. Throughout Chapter 4, I refer to interview participants as SDVOSB Participant 1, SDVOSB Participant 2, SDVOSB Participant 3, SDVOSB Participant 4, SDVOSB Participant 5, and SDVOSB Participant 6. Strict confidentiality was exercised during the entire course of data gathering.

SDVOSB Participant 1 was the owner of a company that specializes in information technology, educational services, and professional management consulting services. SDVOSB Participant 1 had approximately 200 employees and reported annual revenue of between \$16 to \$18 million per year. SDVOSB Participant 2 was the owner of

a company that specializes in professional services and information technology support, including cybersecurity, software services, infrastructure services, and audiovisual collaboration and high definition conferencing. SDVOSB Participant 2 had approximately 100 employees with annual reported revenue of between \$12 to \$16 million. SDVOSB Participant 3 was the owner of a company that specializes in professional management services, personnel recovery exercise planning and execution, and program management and acquisition support. SDVOSB Participant 3 had approximately 85 employees, with annual reported revenue between \$12 to \$16 million. SDVOSB Participant 4 was the owner of a company that specializes in national security management, professional support services, program and administrative management services, research and development, installation management, and industrial base management. SDVOSB Participant 4 had nearly 500 employees and a reported annual revenue of \$85 million, with approximately 300 additional subcontractors. SDVOSB Participant 5 was the owner of a company that specializes in cybersecurity, intelligence support, professional support services, and supply chain management. SDVOSB Participant 5 had approximately 60 employees and a total yearly reported revenue between \$12 to \$16 million. SDVOSB Participant 6 provided expert technical support services to various government agencies and commercial entities in the areas of program analysis, project management, budget forecasting and analysis, systems engineering, industrial and technology assessments, system integration, information technology management, functional training development, and physical and biological scientific

research. SDVOSB Participant 6 had between 100 and 125 employees with annual reported revenue of more than \$20 million.

All six of the companies included in this study provide contract support to the DOD and market professional support services and information technology as their primary hallmark service delivery capability. Additionally, all six companies have performed in both prime and subcontracting roles in government contracts with DOD, and additionally possess experience in government contracting, having received both competitive and sole source contract awards at the DOD level. All six of these companies furthermore are similar in contract profile descriptive status in that they take advantage of GSA contract schedule enrollment and are currently on independent delivery/independent quantity (IDIQ) contract vehicles, which is a popular contracting methodology within DOD.

To ensure trustworthiness, during the interviews, I sought further clarification and made sure that all of the interviewees understood the intent of the questions. Several weeks after the interview, I either telephoned or visited the interview participants at their company locations and had them verify their interview responses and the resulting themes that emerged once data were input into NVIVO 12 and analyzed. The process of checking with the research participants the interview responses as well as discussing emerging themes is consistent with ensuring trustworthiness of the research through member checking. According to Madill and Sullivan (2018), a researcher's interpretation of research results can frequently be theoretical, whereas the participant's orientation toward the research information may be more in alignment with actual events within a

specific contextual framework. Verifying interpretation of data, even if it is directly verbatim within an interview context, is essential to properly capturing data for thematic analysis. Member checking allowed proper input of transcribed data from the interviews into the NVIVO analysis tool to capture themes. The four themes that emerged provided the basis for transferring the information into the context of the topic being researched. Additionally, interview data was triangulated into training documents from the DOD procurement technical assistance centers, small business development centers and corporate supplier diversity management briefings, all publicly available on the internet. Member checking afforded a comprehensive interchange between the researcher and the study participants to ensure the accuracy of what information is being conveyed in the final study relative to the accuracy and realism of themes (Candela, 2019).

Trustworthiness also entails reflexivity. Reflexivity strengthens the research through the practice of maintaining a diary of research actions during the course of the research, paying strict attention to recognizing researcher motivations and being cognizant of outside factors that can affect the objectivity in research (Sant. 2019). In this study, the interview atmosphere and confidentiality were ensured. Furthermore, methodological triangulation steps were taken to ensure the research additionally contained characteristics of both transferability and conformability.

Transferability considers the likelihood that the study results can be transferable outside of the context of the research environment or subjects being analyzed in the research (Coy, 2019). In a study on internal constraints on black-owned small and medium enterprises in the construction industry, Mafundu and Mafini, 2019 found that

transferability is enhanced if the researcher understands the contextual environment in which they are studying and uses purposive sampling, thus strengthening the ability to apply the findings to other areas within the discipline being studied. The results from this study are transferable because although the study only deals with one socioeconomic sector (SDVOSB) in government procurement processes, the findings can be useful to other small business entities in other socioeconomic categories becoming aware of questions to ask when inquiring about participation in subcontracting training. Purposive sampling also increased transferability. The participant pool involved selecting candidates that possessed government contracting experience where they intersected with other small businesses in other socioeconomic small business categories. In a study performed on enhancing research on entrepreneurship, Anderson, Weinberg and McMullen (2019) opined that when studying entrepreneurship or business entities within a specific context, there may be numerous definitions, resulting in the need to exercise careful sampling technique of the research population characteristics one is studying to increase transparency and transferability of the data results. In this study, the participant population characteristics of socioeconomic small business status, types of industries the companies specialized in, and experience factors were carefully thought out to ensure transparency and transferability.

Conformability refers to the amount of time the researcher spends ensuring the coding data and extraction practice is rich and adds thickness and meaning to the research endeavor (Dehgani, Kojuri, Dehgani, Keshavarzi, and Najafipour, 2019). In a study on the *ex ante* phase in buying professional services, and how service quality affects

competitive advantage in business, Perner and Skjolsvik (2019) asserted that conformability can be achieved through keeping the interview questions more open-ended, and carefully scrutinizing the process of coding to produce themes. In the course of this research, parent codes were broken down into child nodes to establish themes from the triangulation of interview data with subcontracting training archival documentation.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore acquisition training protocol sharing mechanisms to improve veteran access to training concerning SDVOSB subcontracting opportunities within the DOD. The following research questions were used to guide the study: What is the level of understanding by owners and representatives of SDVOSB entities about intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level and to what degree does the level of exposure to intervention training groups assist those entities in developing their business base to make them more competitive for DOD subcontracting opportunities.

This summary includes information about the setting where the data collection occurred and a description of pertinent details about the SDVOSB company participant profiles. Next, this summary includes descriptions of the implementation of the data collection and data analysis procedures described in Chapter 3. Thematic inclusion to organize the data from the interviews provides the basis for analysis in semistructured interviews, which were conducted one-on-one in person at each of the SDVOSB owner's head corporate offices in the midwestern regional city where this study took place. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon time to make sure that he or she

would have enough time to provide complete answers to the interview questions. There were no known personal or organizational conflict conditions at the time of data collection that might influence the interpretation of results. Interview participants were six service-disabled veteran small business owners.

Data Collection

Archival documents and interview data were collected. Interviews were conducted in person at the SDVOSB contractor's corporate facility, and their duration was approximately 1 hour to 90 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded. There were no anomalies that occurred during the interview process.

Twelve publicly available archival documents related to SDVOSBs were collected from the DOD, SBDC, PTAC, and two CDSMs and analyzed. Documents included: (a) A one page capability statement sample template from the SBDC in this study, (b) A how to do business presentation from a nationally based corporate supplier diversity manager from a major defense corporation that has prime contracts with DOD, (c) A "Boots to Business" recruiting flyer for small business owners from the SBDC in this study, (d) An instructional guide for creating capability statements from the SBDC in this study, (e) instructional training presentation on how to become a corporate supplier from a nationally based aerospace contractor doing business with DOD, (f) A DoD Regional Council brief on subcontracting, (g) A DOD based training summary of subcontracting training objectives (h) An Air Force small business activity presentation on how to find subcontracting opportunities, (i) An instructional presentation by the PTAC in this study on how to make the most out of small business matchmaking events,

(j) A presentation from the PTAC in this study on how small businesses do business with the government, (k) A presentation in this study on available services from the PTAC office to assist businesses, (k) A DoD subcontracting program presentation on business rules and processes and, (l) The PTAC presentation involved in this study on how to respond to a sources sought notice.

Data Analysis

Recorded interviews from the six study participants were transcribed with no editing of the recorded medium. The recorded interview data was input into Express Scribe software and then further input into NVivo 12 software and analyzed thematically. First, the transcripts and archival documents were read and reread several times to gain familiarity with them. Next, phrases and groups of phrases expressing similar themes, experiences, or ideas were grouped into nodes representing codes. Codes that were similar were placed into themes. Next, themes and codes were reviewed and refined to ensure that all data were appropriately placed into groups. Themes were then defined and named, and a presentation of the results was produced. Results are provided below. Table 4 lists the themes that emanated from analysis of the number of units comprised of phrases or groups of phrases. Careful attention was given to ensure the themes were applicable to the principal research question.

Table 4

Data Analysis Themes

Theme	<i>N</i> of data units included
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Theme 1: Available training and support are of limited relevance to mature businesses	40
Theme 2: Additional support and training are needed for subcontractors	30
Theme 3: Small business owners face significant obstacles in gaining access to federal subcontracting opportunities	27
Theme 4: Understanding and enforcement of SDVOSB regulations are perceived as insufficient	26

Results

The research questions guiding the analysis of data were, What is the level of understanding by owners and representatives of SDVOSB entities about intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level and to what degree does the level of exposure to intervention training groups assist those entities in developing their business base to make them more competitive for DOD subcontracting opportunities. The results used to answer the research questions are presented in this section, organized by theme and substantiated by interview participant direct quotations supporting the respective themes.

Theme 1: Available training and support are of limited relevance to mature businesses. Interview participants expressed that the training and support offered through PTACs provided useful instruction in the rudiments of federal contracting, and were helpful for owners of new businesses. This was triangulated in the PTAC presentation on how to make the most out of the small business matchmaker session presentation as well as the PTAC presentation on how to do business with the government. Interview participants perceived the available training and support as less suitable for leaders of

mature businesses who had already learned the rudiments of sustaining a small business (e.g., the creation of a capability statement and identification of contracting agencies), such that participants reported that they did not attend the trainings or did not find them valuable. SDVOSB Participant 2 described the available training as primarily useful to inexperienced contractors:

My experiences with PTACs and the SBA government contracting assistance offices are very good. PTACs are wonderful programs, absolutely wonderful. And I haven't met a small business representative that wasn't friendly and didn't open their calendar to talk to us. I think they provide very good training. Especially training on how to obtain GSA schedules. But like I said, it supports my earlier statement that there's a lot of emphasis on getting people into these programs and educating people. However, not so much on the other end of transitioning out of these programs.

SDVOSB Participant 4 offered a similar perspective, stating:

I think the PTACs and other advocacy coalition organizations like the SBDCs do a good job. [But] I think those organizations in general are all focused on helping companies initially enter into doing government work. So, their primary focus is on preparing entry level companies to conduct business with the government.

Generally speaking, my experience has been, once you're in and you're starting to get work, they don't know how to help you.

SDVOSB Participant 1 also agreed in perceiving the available training offerings as lacking adequate value for mature businesses:

These assistance centers are engaged to look locally at procurement opportunities. We haven't really attended any of the training sessions here locally, because I think some of the training is not so much worth our time. They teach the same topics: how to develop your one-page capability statement; you know, marketing information. We understand how to engage in business development. We understand how to write good quality proposals. Taking the time out for training may not be worth our valuable time. While there's some training venues that go on here through the PTAC and SBA, I think there is a lot of material that is repeated for companies just getting started. I just think that it has lost its value to the small business community--because it's not worth our time to be able to lift our heads from our work to attend these trainings, there's little inherent value.

SDVOSB Participant 5 agreed with previously quoted participants in expressing the following perceptions:

I think some of the training events that are offered [through the PTAC]--people tend to disregard them--I have attended a few of the training events. If you're a mature business, you're often sitting in a room with someone who has no clue on how to even begin as a small business. Right? And there's such variation of stages of developing a business, or for that matter, even familiarity with how the government works, right? It can be very rudimentary for mature small businesses who are looking for further training; we don't find it as valuable being a more developed company. I'm sure for the person who has no idea where to begin, it can be helpful. So, I think that's part of the challenge too, is being able to provide

meaningful training content to people at various stages of their business development maturation.

SDVOSB Participant 3 routinely directed new contractors to the PTAC, but did not personally use its services:

I'll get phone calls from former service veterans I used to work with and they want to start their own small businesses. The first thing I tell them is go see your local PTAC. They'll provide you all the training, walk you through the process of things like obtaining a verification so that you can go after veteran service set-aside contracts. Because without that, you can't even come to the table to compete for veteran set-asides. [But] we haven't used the PTACs maybe because we've been around so long. We've already gone through the early developmental stages that a small business needs to go through.

A review of archival documents made available to contractors and subcontractors by the PTAC provided confirmation that training and support were focused primarily on rudimentary aspects of federal contracting. Relevant to the response from SDVOSB Participant 1 quoted above, two archival documents were found that were intended to instruct new federal contractors in the creation of a capability statement. The document entitled Capability Statement Sample Template included advice such as, "No long paragraphs," "Use short sentences followed by keyword-heavy bullet points," and "Readers will visit your web site for additional information; make sure your website is

constantly updated and government-focused.” Instructional statements resembling these are unlikely to be instructive to experienced contractors.

The document pertaining to PTAC services provides insight into the type of training and support offered to contractors by the PTAC. The presentation consisted of rudimentary information such as, “Federal ≠ State ≠ Local Government,” and the following:

Invest the time upfront to understand the federal government. Research the organization, its mission, how it’s organized, who is responsible for what? Etc. You will save time and avoid looking foolish, i.e. don’t ask the base civil engineering squadron about weapon system procurement.

The PTAC Presentation also included the advice that contractors should identify the periods during the fiscal year when the agency for which they wished to contract with underwent its purchasing cycle, the advice that to develop their businesses contractors should attempt to, “Identify & pursue a set of opportunities proportional to the amount of government business you wish to win versus your ongoing non-government business,” and a summary consisting of takeaway advice apparently meant for inexperienced contractors, such as, “Be realistic, success is not instantaneous.” The archival document on PTAC services available for small businesses included a list of the services and support the PTAC offered to businesses, under the heading “Scope of Services,” which read in full as follows:

Federal, State & Local Government procurement (Certifications – different at every level; SAM registration & migration issues – unique to Federal

government); Capability Statement – one page; How to identify opportunities; How to approach a procurement official; How to respond to government solicitations; Strategy & teaming; Other topics defined by client.

As indicated in the interview responses quoted above, participants perceived instruction and services of the type listed in the presentation on PTAC services for small business as highly valuable to new contractors, but as lacking relevance for more experienced small business owners.

Theme 2: Additional support and training are needed for experienced subcontractors. Results related to Theme 1 indicated that participants believed the support and training offered to federal contractors through entities such as the PTAC were valuable to entry-level small business enterprises, but of less value to more experienced contractors who already understood the rudiments of obtaining federal contracts. Results associated with Theme 2 indicated that participants perceived a need for additional support and training for experienced SDVOSB companies desiring to pursue subcontracting opportunities.

SDVOSB Participant 3 recommended annual meetings at which prime contractors and subcontractors could meet to discuss subcontracting requirements, as a means of helping subcontractors establish contact with primes and learn about existing DOD procurement opportunities. This theme is triangulated in the need for small businesses seeking subcontracting opportunities in both the CDSM presentation where it is stated that small businesses are a critical component in large business primes advancing product and service innovation and a second CDSM presentation on subcontracting supplier tips

for success where the importance of maintaining good relationships with their small business supplier base is crucial to subcontracting success.

I'd love to have some type of training forum that is held once a year that focuses on subcontracting and how to establish further contacts with the prime contractors. We've been to a couple of procurement matchmaking conferences, however, I think much more is needed to satisfy our subcontracting search requirements. We have also been invited to similar small business matchmaking venues the Army provides. However, I'd love to see something that the SBA gets behind and says, we're going to bring these folks together and discuss subcontracting requirements. We're going to have a true dialogue with an industry type of update to promote subcontracting from our prime contractors. (SDVOSB Participant 3)

SDVOSB Participant 4 expressed the perception that growing a small business with a necessity to add the staff and resources to learn about subcontracting requirements might make a small business too expensive to subcontract with, and suggested that the SBA and PTAC might alleviate this difficulty by informing mid-level subcontractors of requirements. This theme is similar to what is triangulated in both CDSM presentations on the need to identify small business capabilities early on in the acquisition cycle:

There's nothing for the companies to pursue as they grow. There's all this training available about how to get in to government business initially, however, from the very beginning, I know I went out and I did a whole lot of research on programs

for women owned businesses and veteran owned businesses, but there was not much available in the way of training for mid-level and experienced small businesses. It all looks so good from the outside looking in, but you know what? Nobody does any of that work for you. You have to do it all yourself. And then when you've grown your staff or your resources to be able to help you with that, then you get to be too expensive. And then you can't get work. (SDVOSB Participant 4)

SDVOSB Participant 5 recommended additional training and education for subcontractors on how to approach primes, and additional venues for posting opportunities for subcontractors:

There should be more venues to show how to obtain opportunities for subcontracting. Perhaps more education on the subcontracting process, how to talk to this company or this company—Education opportunities for more mature companies instead of entry-level small business training . . . I think there's a real sort of black hole pertaining to forecasting of requirements by the DOD. I miss the Fed Bizz Ops announcements sometimes, and there are sites out there that forecast what's coming out. A lot of people use Gov WIN or Del Tek forecasting web tools and you can see what's coming out, but there's nothing like that really for prime contractors to post concerning subcontracting opportunities in supply chain and services requirements that I am aware of.

SDVOSB Participant 6 suggested segregated training venues for mature subcontractors:

It would be nice, I guess, if there was better training or understanding and designing training for companies our size and maturity level, instead of concentrating on entry level entrepreneurs. I know, there are plenty of companies our size that can do the really high-end work and would appreciate more advanced training in subcontracting and higher end prime contracting work opportunity preparation. Perhaps there needs to be segregated training venues to match the maturity of the company. So, it should be geared towards companies that are in that \$10 to \$20 million a year range and are doing services as opposed to entry level companies.

In recommending additional training opportunities for mid-level subcontractors, SDVOSB Participant 1 expressed the perception that contracting officers were focused on prime contractor selection rather than on subcontractor involvement, to the detriment of subcontractors. Although the government does not have privity of contracting with the subcontractors, there is still more that could be done to strengthen contracting officer interest in promoting subcontracting mechanisms within request for proposals:

There is little training on how to develop subcontracting capacity in small business. I've seen some of the veteran bootstrap programs that they've had out there and, while they're good for a person just starting a company or a company that's been around for a year, there is little training for those who have live experience underneath their belt. And the contracting officers don't spend a lot of time looking at enhancing acquisition strategy with subcontracting incentives within the proposal structure. We need to know what the prime contractor wants

in their subcontractors? What would make it easier for them to subcontract to small businesses? The focus is on the prime contractor and making sure everything is in line for award to the prime, not necessarily how that prime will incorporate small business into their subcontracting plans. (SDVOSB Participant 1).

These statements were triangulated in the DOD presentation on the DOD Regional Council briefing on subcontracting, highlighting the proposed restriction legislation being lifted for prime contractors being afforded the opportunity to receive credit for subcontracting at several tier levels. Also, the presentation further points out pending legislative changes pertaining to the mentor-protégé programs, which better enable small businesses to have reach-back capability to pursue larger subcontracting efforts.

SDVOSB Participant 6 also expressed the perception that subcontractors might receive insufficient attention in part because contracting officers might be underprepared to assist them, stating:

Is there adequate training for government contracting specialists and contracting officers for subcontracting? It's adequate. Could it be better? Probably. Just to give you an example, I talked to a contracting officer a couple of years ago. They were going to a class on other than fair opportunity contracting authority (OTA) use in source selections. I could not believe they didn't know what an OTA was.

But, you know, I don't think that's necessarily the person's fault. It could be the training emphasis that occurs within DoD contracting.

A review of DOD archival documents confirmed participants perceptions about the lack of emphasis on assisting and training mature or midlevel SDVOSB subcontractors to identify opportunities and approach prime contractors. The document on DOD Subcontracting Training Objectives indicated the topics on which contract officers were trained. The training objectives were focused on developing acquisition strategies that required prime contractors to solicit the services of certain types of subcontractors, with objectives including “Ensure that the acquisition strategy includes an appropriate subcontracting strategy that maximizes small business utilization” and “Support the acquisition team in evaluating small business participation requirements during the source selection process and in assessing the small business subcontracting plan.” However, it was observed there were no training objectives targeted toward working directly with subcontractors, either to train them or assist them in identifying opportunities and approaching prime contractors. This may be in large part due to the lack of privity that the contracting officer has with the subcontractor and the concerns that brings when working directly with subcontractors. The DOD training objectives confirmed SDVOSB Participant 1’s perception that even when contracting officers developed plans that required the use of subcontractors, their focus was primarily on working with those prime contractors and delegating to them any contact with subcontractors. Although the government does not have privity of contract with the subcontractors, there is still room for developing optimum tools in request for proposal

content that emphasizes subcontracting and high small business immersion in that process.

A review of archival documents also confirmed the perception of SDVOSB Participants 4, 5, and 6 that training and education provided to subcontractors was rudimentary and unlikely to be of use to more mature small business enterprises. The Air Force presentation document entitled on finding subcontracting opportunities included basic advice concerning the kind of training participants described under Theme 1 as useful to new businesses but of lesser value to more mature entities, such as, “Subcontracting opportunities can be with any entity that has a prime contract – Network with large businesses, small businesses, non-profits, academia” and “Respond to all FBO announcements for which your company has applicable capabilities – Specify that your company is interested in subcontracting and which part of the advertised effort your company is interested in working or providing.” Also included in the presentation was the advice that subcontractors frequently review websites such as Federal Business Opportunities (FBO), colloquially referred to as FedBizOpps, described as, “The Government-wide point of entry for any and all Federal acquisitions required to be advertised.” However, SDVOSB Participant 4 expressed the following perception of FBO, based on 20 years of experience:

So how long have I been doing this? Close to 20 years. Any procurement forecasts that you may run across are not current. You know, and the answer from procurement officials is always, well, are you searching on FedBizOpps? . . . By the time they drop a Request for Proposal onto FedBizOpps, you are too late to

the game. It's really too late 99.9% of the time. If the RFP is already dropped on to FedBizOpps and you're just now hearing about it, it's way too late. You missed the boat.

The solution, SDVOSB Participant 4 argued, was to give subcontractors advance notice of federal acquisition strategies without violating the basic tenets of procurement integrity:

And how do you get out in front of it [the opportunity on FBO]? The government has to be telling you as early as possible what their acquisition strategy is as early in the acquisition cycle as possible, with recognition that this information must be fully available to all potential bidders. Early notification of the direction of acquisition strategy allows all of us on the outside of the fence to establish our teaming arrangements.

Theme 3: Small business owners face significant obstacles in gaining access to federal subcontracting opportunities. Interview participants reported that the existing system for granting access to federal subcontracting opportunities for disadvantaged small businesses varies in significant ways, including the complexity of contracting vehicles, the resource requirements for marketing of services, and high overhead costs that make the cost of skilled workers prohibitive for small businesses. SDVOSB Participant 1 discussed the constraints forecasting imposed on small businesses' ability to afford skilled labor:

In order to meet the demands of being a competitive subcontractor [for high-tech requirements], you're going to have to bring some skill to the table as well as across the spectrum. So, let's just do data analytics. A small business can really thrive in the new data analytics environment in terms of what would really bring forward predictive analytics—for example machine learning. I mean the labor market that's coming in, while very gifted, is very scarce, right? Therefore, it is high cost . . . We can't afford high-cost labor because we're driven in a low-price technically acceptable market orientation in the government.

SDVOSB Participant 1 perceived an additional disadvantage to small businesses in recognizing the complexity of the acquisition process, which required expertise that raises labor overhead costs:

One of the largest inhibitors that we see is the availability to resources that assist us in understanding government acquisition through preparation of solicitations and having competencies and skill sets to help business development and small businesses adequately write proposals that are competitive. These are typically an indirect cost expense. One of the challenges that small businesses face is the ability to access these resources in such a way that doesn't overburden your company by increasing indirect overhead costs. The preferred method of acquisition within the government has been leaning toward a LPTA strategy. With small businesses needing to obtain resources, there is a constant force of driving indirect costs up under this strategy which hampers the ability to price contracts competitively.

Thus, SDVOSB Participant 1 indicated that the DOD's strategy of seeking LPTA solutions made the cost of skilled workers prohibitive for small businesses, but the complexity of the acquisition process itself created a need to hire experts who could navigate those processes. SDVOSB Participant 2 cited another cost-related personnel challenge for small businesses in the prohibitive expense of hiring an adequate sales and marketing force to gain access to the desired number of contracts:

I know larger small businesses have the budget to employ a lot of salespeople on the ground, as well as a lot of marketing capability. When you're small and you're growing your revenue in dollars, it becomes difficult at best to dedicate large amounts of overhead dollars to hire business development staff. A great number of business owners find that it's hard to see the rough order of magnitude in investing so much in multiple salespeople. Right? So, I think that's the number one challenge.

SDVOSB Participant 2 provided a response that indicated the compounding effects of the complexity of the acquisition process (cited by SDVOSB Participant 1) and the difficulty of affording an adequate sales and marketing force (cited in the previous quotation from SDVOSB Participant 2) required of disadvantaged small businesses:

Being a small business, we found that we had to establish a priority of being able to reach out and touch different markets, which forces us to look outside of our recognizable competency comfort zone. And that's very difficult given the limited dollars and having a small workforce. So, one of the challenges is to become a

credible known entity, so to speak within the DOD contracting community. So, when we are faced with a proposal, it's very tough to come out of the blue and write this outstanding proposal, coupled with the clientele not really knowing who the company is.

SDVOSB Participant 2's response above suggests that even experienced leaders of small businesses might at times wish to enter into specialties in which they had not already established a reputation. SDVOSB Participant 3 explained why this was a situation in which small business leaders commonly found themselves:

If you want to bring in revenue, and you want to grow as a firm, you sometimes have to move away from your core competencies to pursue these opportunities, even though they are outside of your specialty. We've lost a lot of the boutique capabilities of a small business.

SDVOSB Participant 4 discussed how the complexity of the solicitation and contracting processes made it difficult for disadvantaged small businesses that did not have the resources to sustain themselves through a drawn-out proposal preparation cycle in which multiple changes can frequently occur:

I think that the jobs are more complex and they're more technical than ever before in both subcontracting and prime contracting work. It's a huge maze to be able to understand the contracting and the solicitation process. I spoke a long time ago at a conference I attended about the proposal cycle required for federal contracts and how it wears on your soul and the whole room moaned. The proposal preparation

cycle within DOD contracting processes just seems to drag on forever. They start talking about things way far ahead of time and then the acquisition strategy continuously changes, right? Which makes the teaming process complex. And then at the 12th hour it changes again and then you've already signed joint venture teaming agreements.

SDVOSB Participant 6 described strategic sourcing contracting vehicles as disadvantageous to small businesses:

The impediment to a small business doing business with DOD is the contract vehicles themselves. You may have a lot of expertise, and you know you've created a good company! However, you must have appropriate contract vehicles in your work portfolio. It could be, three or four folks with a lot of capability in your company, but without a workable contracting vehicle that is conducive to contracting with the DOD, you're locked out of competitively seeking procurement opportunities. Which then takes you to your problem of, if I'm a small service-disabled veteran owned business, how do I become a subcontractor to a prime contractor? How do you establish those partnerships and relationships to get your foot in the door with the prime contractors? There is not enough training out there for accomplishing that end goal.

SDVOSB Participant 5 offered more insight into why certain contract vehicles are an impediment to disadvantaged small businesses, stating that the bidding process required

significant investment, and that time frames often preclude the development of a relationship with the customer:

The greatest impediments that have come about in the last five to 10 years is what I'll call the challenges we face with strategic sourcing contracting vehicles. We spend a lot of time and money bidding on task orders that oftentimes restrict a threshold that you have to bid on 50% of the task orders as a contract requirement. So, it's a significant investment and often you are not winning any revenue under these strategic sourcing contracting vehicles. Sometimes it's a LPTA shoot out, and you know, that's not the market that we're accustomed to being in. Sometimes you have to have a lot of customer intimacy; but when you are finally selected for a task order, and in 30 days, it's going to be awarded, there's not a lot of time to get to know the client before performance starts.

A review of the PTAC archival document on sources sought synopsis training provided insight into the requirements placed on contractors and subcontractors during the acquisition process, and confirmed that expertise was needed to develop a viable bid structure to be competitive for DOD contracts. In informing potential contractors of the considerations used by contracting officers, the document stated the following:

“Government awards most contracts using a combination of: 1) Technical & Management capabilities; 2) Relevant & Recent past performance, [and]; 3) Competitive pricing.” Regarding the composition of the bid itself, the document included the language, “Experienced companies that win government contracts create teams that cover all required capabilities with strong, relevant & recent past performances with the end

customer,” confirming the perception expressed by Participants 2, 3, and 6, that strict requirements for a team with a record of proven capabilities were likely to be a significant disadvantage to small business owners trying to expand their capabilities.

Theme 4: Understanding and enforcement of SDVOSB regulations are perceived as insufficient. Participants indicated that the regulations requiring or allowing set-asides in federal contracts for SDVOSBs were poorly understood in the contracting community, and were insufficiently enforced by the DOD. SDVOSB Participant 1 expressed the following, concerning limited understanding of the regulations:

I understand the FAR of course. However, I don't know all of the different requirements, Defense FAR Supplements and how they interact with the Code of Federal Regulations. I do know there are different clauses within the Federal Acquisition Regulations that apply to small businesses, allowing for set-asides within federal government contracts. They further define what a service-disabled veteran owned set-aside requirement is.

SDVOSB Participant 1 believed, however, that the regulations were written in favor of businesses owned by members of historically disadvantaged groups, sometimes to the detriment of veterans:

I think that small disadvantaged businesses receive a lot more attention by the contracting officer community. So, there's a greater preference of directing contracts to a small disadvantaged business, where in contrast, SDVOSB or VOSB small business entities may fall short. Congress and SBA direct 5 percent

of those federal dollars to go to small disadvantaged businesses, therefore, they have much higher access to contract dollars that, you know, could mean contracting officers are more inclined to pursue sole source strategies or use direct award contracts. There's a sense of overlooking those that make greater sacrifice for our countries, as is evidenced by less emphasis on service-disabled and veteran owned set-aside programs.

SDVOSB Participant 2 stated on the topic of disadvantaged businesses, “one of the things that I heard was some years ago, there was going to be parity in all set-aside programs with the socially disadvantaged Section 8(a) program.” However, SDVOSB Participant 2 believed that service-disabled status remained less advantageous than Section 8(a) socially disadvantaged classification:

In pursuing service-disabled veteran owned set-aside acquisitions, people didn't really understand the program a whole lot. So, I put together this marketing strategy with the acquisition folks that I dealt with. I prepared presentation and marketing slides highlighting our ability to perform set asides. I met a lot of resistance from the corporation I worked with at that time and I guess that was in the 2012, 2013 timeframe— highlighting lots of resistance to this strategy at the time. And of course, I entered the Section 8(a) program in late 2014. And you know, we shifted our focus from service-disabled set-asides to Section 8(a) set-asides. I mean, it went from the path of greatest resistance to the path of least resistance.

SDVOSB Participant 3 stated, “My understanding is that outside, with the exception of the VA, the FAR contains language about being able to proceed sole source to SDVOSBs for procurement actions under \$4 million.” SDVOSB Participant 3 agreed with other participants, however, in stating that making contracting opportunities more easily accessible to SDVOSBs was not a high priority for DOD:

We don't see a lot of opportunities being set aside for SDVOSBs outside of the Veterans Administration. It's very rare, and the stars have to line up perfectly in the market research or the request for information phase, which makes subcontracting even more important. SDVOSBs within DOD do not have the same level of importance as they do in the Veterans Administration.

SDVOSB Participant 4 described a lack of understanding in the contracting community regarding how SDVOSB set-asides work:

I don't think anybody realizes the rules behind subcontracting and the general rules of set-asides. I still don't think that they see WOSBs or SDVOSBs as important. I don't believe that there's parity amongst the socioeconomic small business set-aside classifications. The whole concept of socioeconomic parity has been poorly implemented or poorly communicated in training within the contracting communities, both at the government and contractor level.

SDVOSB Participant 5 stated that regulations related to SDVOSBs had not provided any benefits:

We haven't found the regulations to be extremely helpful to date. We feel that the DOD contracting world prefers other easier means, whether it is through sole-source options or use of their strategic sourcing or category management contracting vehicles. We haven't found it to open any doors for us.

SDVOSB Participant 6 expressed the perception that inadequate benefits to SDVOSBs were a result of the way the regulations were written, rather than due to poor understanding on the part of contractors and contracting officers:

If they really wanted to do direct awards under SDVOSB categories, more lobbying would have occurred to push for language entering the entrepreneurial phase in the FAR making it easier to allow for sole source SDVOSB small business set-asides. Or for that matter, basically, the same as the Section 8(a) clauses under FAR 19.4. A contracting officer doesn't necessarily feel as empowered as he or she should be in using the SDVOSB set-aside program, as they are more well-versed in the Section 8(a) clauses within the FAR. (SDVOSB Participant 4)

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the semistructured interviews, which showed that the participants in this study perceived a need for segregation of training levels for service-disabled veteran owned small businesses, based upon their level of maturity in their business growth. It was unanimously agreed upon amongst the participants that PTACs and SBDCs are excellent development mediums for small business training concerning small business registration status and certification, how to

do business with the government, and how to navigate financial tools that help a small business grow beyond the entrepreneurial stage. Both of these agencies were furthermore cited by the participants as excellent catalyst training organizations for preparing small businesses to go to the next level of maturation.

The participants in this study also agreed unanimously that the complexity of the acquisition system within DOD, as well as lack of training on frequent changes in DOD acquisition policy made it difficult for small businesses to take advantage of subcontracting opportunities through partnering and seeking out joint venture potential. All of the participants recognized recent changes by the U.S. SBA to shore up opportunities through the All Small Mentor-Protégé program as being extremely positive but felt more could be done to center education around how to seek out and solidify subcontracting relationships. The overall theme from the interchanges was that more collaboration amongst agencies (PTAC and DOD) was needed to focus on what type of training needs to be delivered at the appropriate stage of small business development. Chapter 4 included a review of considerations of trustworthiness in research, presentation of the findings and triangulation of the participation responses with the archival information. Chapter 5 will discuss the relevancy of the themes from the data to the literature search, validate the use of the theoretical framework as a basis for the study, reflect upon the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research by thematic area, and the study implications for promoting positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The research questions used to guide this study were: What is the level of understanding by owners and representatives of SDVOSB entities about intervention training groups at the state, corporate, and local level and to what degree does the level of exposure to intervention training groups assist those entities in developing their business base to make them more competitive for DOD subcontracting opportunities. Research findings indicated that available training and support are of limited relevance to mature businesses and that additional support and training for subcontractors is needed, particularly in the areas of identifying opportunities and meeting prime contractors. Additionally, the results indicated that small business owners face significant obstacles in gaining access to federal subcontracting opportunities, including a perception of prohibitive costs of expertise necessary to navigate the acquisition process and perform skilled contracts with a corollary-skilled labor force. Given the low overhead costs allowable under the DOD's LPTA solution strategy and predisposition to use strategic sourcing contract vehicles, this problem becomes even more exacerbated. The employment of an adequate sales and marketing force is a prevailing cost issue for small businesses. Lastly, the findings indicated that understanding and enforcement of SDVOSB regulations are regarded as insufficient to promote SDVOSB growth in subcontracting.

Participants expressed the perception that set-asides for SDVOSBs were not as well understood or as rigorously enforced as set-asides for businesses owned by members of socially disadvantaged groups and recommended that regulatory language for SDVOSBs be updated to resemble the contracting practices applying to socially

disadvantaged businesses. This recognition carries with it a corollary responsibility by the SDVOSB community to understand what the legal nuance differences are in allowing parity between the various small business socioeconomic categories. Chapter 5 includes my interpretation of findings, reflection on limitations within the study, recommendations for further research, implications for social change, and conclusions.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from this study are consistent with those of the extant literature I reviewed in Chapter 2. DOD procurement authorities have not experienced the same success they have experienced in exceeding subcontracting allocation goals in the SDVOSB socioeconomic subcontracting category as they have experienced in surpassing SDVOSB prime contracting category goals. Although over the past few years DOD has exceeded many of their prime contracting socioeconomic goals, to include the SDVOSB category, subcontracting retention dollars for small business inclusion in prime contracts increased by a factor of only 1.6% from 1978 to 2012 (House Committee on Armed Services, 2012). SDVOSBs require further exposure to sources of acquisition training on subcontracting from all federal agencies engaging in government contracting. The findings of this study validate that further research is necessary to seek out strategies for streamlining communication for strengthening collaboration amongst federal agencies with respect to how to improve SDVOSB inclusion in DOD subcontracting. These results are consistent with DOD's own study on acquisition policy conducted in 2018 that elaborate on the theme that better relationships in DOD acquisition management can be gained through developing collaborative relationships between the DOD acquisition

community, industry, and higher education research institutes (Office of DOD for Acquisition Policy, 2018).

The study results are similar to the findings of other scholarly works in the field that point to the difficulty of small businesses and the middle-tier businesses within that category possessing adequate tools to successfully compete at the prime contractor level in the federal government, particularly needing advocacy organizations to help them bridge the difficulty gap of entering federal procurement. These findings were also consistent with use of the ACT as a foundation for this study. The acquisition system within DOD is particularly bureaucratic, and modifying regulations can be difficult in the current acquisition environment (Coyne, Michaluk, & Reese, 2017). Northcutt (2017) highlighted the difficulties of midlevel small businesses gaining a foothold in the federal government marketplace due to the increased use of LPTA acquisition strategies as well as a mushrooming use of multiple award contract vehicles across the government. Northcutt's results are consistent with the research findings in this study that showed the difficulties small businesses face in breaking into the subcontracting market because of the federal government's overreliance on use of acquisition strategies like multiple award contracting vehicles. With this study, I strove to provide a roadmap to how small businesses can perform in a public procurement setting, like DOD, particularly in the subcontracting arena. In an article on the role of entrepreneurship in public procurement, Reijonen, Tammi, and Saastamoinen (2014), although not confined to the U.S. marketplace, pointed out the importance of further research being necessary on how SMEs can perform in public procurement, which was a hallmark goal of this study.

The results of this study will make a positive business impact on SDVOSB owners because of the revelation of improved strategies for delivering subcontracting training and further recognition of the challenges SDVOSB companies face in competing in the DOD subcontracting marketplace. The data provided by the six companies in this study provide insight into how procurement assistance agencies can work more effectively together to increase SDVOSB goals in subcontracting. The predominant theme in this study is recognizing what training is appropriate at the corresponding growth stage of a small business, and how advocacy organizations can assist in directing SDVOSBs toward those proper training tracts.

Theme 1: Available Training and Support are of Limited Relevance to Mature Businesses

The importance of overall training improvements in the understanding of procurement processes was supported by extant literature, such as Saastamoinen et al. (2017), Bennet (2014), Heriot et al., Veliska and Bowie (2016), Jones et al. (2013), Coetzer et al., (2017), Kerrick et al. (2014), and Cook et al. (2017). McKevitt and Marshall (2015), Kunz and Dow (2015), and Fairlie et al. (2015) enunciated the need to segregate training into entrepreneurial and midlevel training tracts. Kerrick et al. recognized that once initial entrepreneur training was complete, additional training was needed to expand informal networks to capture business development and grow further as a small business entity. Furthermore, Roseboro and Rutkovitz (2014) highlighted the need for expanding training at all levels. Zeuli and O'Shea (2017) and Lacho and Brockman (2015) reflected on the importance of developing sources of collaborative

contacts to increase small business capabilities, while Jansson et al. (2017) emphasized that small businesses need to possess both an entrepreneurial spirit, yet continuously increase market knowledge to become competitive in different markets.

Theme 2: Additional Support and Training are Needed for Subcontractors

My review of the literature revealed a great deal of merit toward the criticality of the value of joint venture training as well as comprehending the importance of interrelationships between university, scientific, and small business entities. The importance of university and scientific interrelationships in business development was highlighted in the literature by Al-Mubarak and Busler (2014); Subramanyan (2015), and Ankrah and Al-Tabaa (2015). Specifically addressing the benefits of joint ventures were Hagedoorn et al. (2018), McKevitt and Marshall (2015), Brouthers et al. (2017), and Adamik (2017), who all posited that joint ventures allow a degree of enhanced flexibility to enter markets that small businesses might not otherwise consider entering into. Shen and Cheung (2018) pointed to the value of joint ventures in raising market awareness and allowing companies to concentrate on competencies that match both joint venture member capabilities.

Theme 3: Small Business Owners Face Significant Obstacles in Gaining Access to Federal Subcontracting Opportunities

Chandler (2016) expressed concern over the growing complexity of contracting instruments within DOD, citing a historical tendency within DOD to emphasize LPTA contracting practices to the detriment of small businesses. Zacca et al. (2015) maintained that strengthening small business networking capacity increases the breadth and depth of

outreach to a variety of markets. Punn and Hesse (2015) asserted the most optimum strategies for including socioeconomic participants in subcontracting to navigate the complexity of procurement systems are strategies that incentivize contracts at the agency level that have specific outcomes. Ebbers (2014) posited that joint networking can positively affect alliances pursuing contracting opportunities, creating fertile ground for proactive business behavior. Additionally, Chakkol et al. (2018) found that formulating joint ventures can prove beneficial to enhancing customer demand.

Theme 4: Understanding and Enforcement of SDVOSB Regulations are Perceived as Insufficient.

Moore et al. (2015) found that contracting officers within DOD need to do a better job of reporting subcontracting data. This theme had less relation than the other themes in terms of correlation with the literature review results in Chapter 2 but did emerge as a predominant theme during the research participant interviews. DOD Office of Inspector General reports cited in the literature review also substantiated problems with accountability for enforcing subcontracting goals within DOD activities (DOD Office of Inspector General, 2018). All six participants cited difficulties working in an acquisition environment that uses complex procurement instruments. Additionally, the sudden growth of strategic sourcing and category management within DOD procurement were viewed as threatening to the small business industrial base, which could further be an inhibiting factor to SDVOSBs entering the subcontracting market.

Theoretical Framework

The research findings validate the importance of advocacy coalitions in promoting the importance of training, specific to both level of business maturity as well as uniqueness of the socioeconomic category a small business is competing under. Luxon (2019) purported that what advocacy organizations understand about the policy-making process itself is critical to bridging the theoretical gap to empirical practice. The National Contract Management Agency (NCMA) is one such advocacy organization, mentioned by the participants in this study who actively engages in changing policy and bridges that gap through monthly news articles and national seminar training programs that explain the complexities of government procurement regulations and focus on areas such as subcontracting and navigating the difficulties of entering the subcontracting market. Wilder (2017) suggested that advocacy organizations need to be increasingly attentive to the similarities and differences within institutional contexts, and how they can effectively promote changes within regulations to benefit the organizations they are advocating for. This is in line with the study results from all participants that varying degree of training requires a push to emphasize training level segregation for small businesses, depending upon the level of maturity they are in their small business development maturity cycle. The ACT is also an essential framework in understanding the subsystems of policy and the importance of understanding how actors can influence those subsystems (Pierce et.al., 2017).

All participants in this study emphasized the need for providing more collaborative networking amongst advocacy organizations for interpreting policy changes

and how those policies positively or negatively affect veteran small business owners in concert with other socioeconomic categories of small business set-asides. Participants also validated the much value-added roles that PTACs and SBDCs play in the process of advocating for SDVOSB entry into federal contracting procurement processes.

Reflections of Limitations of the Study

After completing this study, I am in awe of the resilience of the six small businesses who participated in this study. While working in an environment of constantly changing procurement regulations and mandates from Congress to reduce acquisition costs, small businesses must be creative and increasingly vigilant on how they set up their staffs to respond to DOD procurement requirements. Small businesses who desire to participate in DOD contracting face a continually changing acquisition landscape, intertwined with contracting agency decisions to migrate toward the use of larger consolidated contracting vehicles. The shift in paradigms from smaller, single source contracts to more significant multiple award IDIQ contract vehicles, presents a new set of challenges to small businesses in addition to learning about entry points on being more competitive for subcontracting opportunities. Small businesses that wish to respond to DOD procurement requirements need access to training that not only instructs them on how to seek out subcontracting and prime contracting opportunities but also instructs them on the mechanics of complex contracting vehicles and how those vehicles affect planning for workforce requirements.

This study concerns one socioeconomic classification, SDVOSB. Each socioeconomic small business category is unique. Nuances within different statutes allow

greater use of sole source practices in some socioeconomic small business set-asides over others. What may be applicable for the SDVOSB population, may not necessarily be translatable to HUB Zone companies. Woman-owned Small Business set-asides require contracting officers to use a repository that lists only specific NAICS codes that procurement officials can use for set-asides, which is unique to other requirements for use of small business set-aside programs. The Section 8(a) Socially-Disadvantaged Small Business Set-Aside program requires the U.S. SBA offer and acceptance before contracting officers can use this set-aside. HUB Zone contracts require continuing monitoring of the percentage of contractor workforce residing in established underdeveloped economic areas to meet the 35% rule for workforce residing in Department of Commerce HUB Zone designated Areas. These examples illustrate the limitation of transferring lessons learned from SDVOSB entities to other socioeconomic classifications.

The overarching utility of this study is better efficiencies in training can always be sought out for improving small business access to subcontracting opportunities. Although regulatory subcontracting allocation percentages are different for each socioeconomic category, the desired result of every small business is to capitalize upon subcontracting opportunities to serve as a platform to move to the next stage of maturity as a small business seeking prime contracting opportunities. With this recognition, this study attempted to illustrate the potential for harnessing advocacy coalition power of procurement assistance agencies to bolster SDVOSB participation in subcontracting by increasing awareness of challenges these companies face.

Recommendations for Further Research

Theme 1: Available Training and Support Are of Limited Relevance to Mature Businesses

This research revealed several areas that may be of interest to scholars who want to investigate further the question of what impediments are present that may hinder improving training delivery for subcontracting entry into prime contracting within DOD contract vehicles. First, there is a clear need for separating levels of developmental training on subcontracting and prime contracting entry for DOD contracting opportunities that are directly relational to a small business entity's stage of maturity in business development. SBDCs and PTACs are excellent venues for accommodating entry level and entrepreneur training to orient companies on how to pursue small business incubator start-up opportunities. They also offer a variety of training to include international trade and export management, marketing, and development of technical competency models.

Other areas include discussion of grants, loan portfolio information, as well as education on the availability of small business incubator entry opportunities within local communities. A suggested further research topic could be: What level of understanding do entry-level small SDVOSB small businesses have on small business incubator services, and how available are those services within the local or state government economic outlets within a given community. This is the juncture where Advocacy Coalition organizations, such as the NAVOBA Veterans Business Outreach Centers, SBA Veteran entrepreneurship development programs, NCMA, and local veteran

business outreach centers play a pivotal role in promoting programs for veteran inclusion in pursuing DOD subcontracting and prime contracting opportunities.

This researcher found there is additionally a need to segregate entry-level PTAC and SBDC training from more mature developmental training for small business competitiveness preparation for government contracting, with a need to focus on initial development of registration and administration profiles of companies, assistance on entering a bid-specialty match database for contracting opportunities, as well as proper registration in the SAM data base and the U.S. SBA Dynamic Small Business System.

Important research topics could include: What level of understanding do entry-level small businesses have concerning the available services PTACs and SBDCs provide, and how do they perceive those services as being instrumental in developing their business base for future growth. Another research topic could be: How active are local small business advocacy coalition groups in promoting SDVOSB subcontracting inclusion in federal contracting.

Participants in this study expressed a desire for more training on how contracting agencies setup subcontracting plans, and more specifically, how small business participation plans intertwine with subcontracting plans to promote SDVOSB inclusion in full and open competitive procurements. Participants in this research expressed viewpoints that the mechanics of pursuing subcontracting opportunities, such as the use of Sub-Net or the GSA Subcontracting Directory as a resource tool was valuable but more information was needed relative to explaining enforcement of subcontracting plans

at the prime contract level. Furthermore, what remedies are available for rectifying poor prime contractor achievement of subcontracting goals.

Another suggested research topic could be: To what extent do small businesses perceive DOD as enforcing existing small business subcontracting plans with prime contractors. Furthermore, what level of interaction occurs between DOD and other agencies, such as DCMA in ensuring SDVOSB subcontracting goals are strengthened concerning using resources specified in available market research. All of these research topic suggestions are in line with the purpose of this study regarding developing collaborative coalition advocacy lines of communication between agencies to strengthen SDVOSB subcontracting inclusion in DOD prime contracts.

Theme 2: Additional Support and Training Are Needed for Experienced Subcontractors

Participants in this study also observed the lack of direct training availability for more mature developmental stages of SDVOSB subcontracting inclusion in DOD prime contracts. This research pointed out that more training must occur with respect to how SDVOSB subcontractors can meet with prime contractors to market supply chain specialty competencies. Participants felt more could be done at the federal level to encourage joint meetings between SDVOSB subcontractors and prime contractors. Potential venues for these meetings could be U.S. SBA-sponsored Small Business Matchmaker events as well as DOD prime and subcontractor small business collider events such as those present in the Air Force laboratory activities for research and development, where companies discuss mutual areas of interest concerning technology

development and patent and data rights protective measures for small businesses. Further topics of research in this area could include: To what extent do SDVOSB small businesses perceive DOD technology collider events as being advantageous to promoting subcontracting opportunities. Or, another research topic could be: What impediments are present that hinder potential SDVOSB subcontractor visibility to prime contractors.

Theme 3: Small Business Owners Face Significant Obstacles in Gaining Access to Federal Subcontracting Opportunities.

Much of the participant discussion under this theme in this research focused on the complexity of the DOD contracting vehicles and how the necessity to remain competitive on those contract vehicles drives up overhead costs. Further research topics could include looking into perceptions of small businesses concerning current IDIQ contract usage within DOD. What are the opinions of small business contractors concerning the propensity of DOD to utilize large IDIQ contract vehicles versus a standard base year with option period single source contract approach. How do small businesses perceive pricing strategies such as LPTA use as ultimately being disadvantageous to entering subcontracting markets.

Theme 4: Understanding and Enforcement of SDVOSB Regulations are Perceived as Insufficient

Many studies focus on how strategic sourcing affects supply chain management but do not address bridging the gap between formulating policy and executing strategic sourcing plans. An example would be how strategic sourcing can affect the small business industrial base, and how small businesses perceive mitigating factors to

counteract a growing trend toward contract consolidation and use of category management strategies. In their study on designing a strategic sourcing framework, Formentini et al. (2019) validate that strategic sourcing plans do not always adequately address action plans. Vitasek and Cambresy (2018) highlight the need to consider business relationships when implementing strategic sourcing, suggesting price should not be the only sole determinant in receiving best value from a buyer and supplier relationship. Further research topics could be: how do small businesses perceive the onset of strategic sourcing and category management as negatively or positively shaping small business competitiveness in accessing DOD subcontracting markets.

Another research question could be: What disconnects, if any, are there concerning supplier integration into subcontracting within strategic sourcing contract vehicles. What are the perceptions of small business concerning the implementation of category management, and how do they view consolidation of contracts as hurtful or helpful in their entry into federal prime and subcontracting opportunities. These suggested topics focus on supplier and buyer relationships, rather than focusing strictly upon cost savings by implementing a strategic sourcing strategy.

Implications for Social Change

This qualitative study contributes to positive social change because SDVOSB small business entities can use these findings to more intelligently comprehend what questions to ask about the type of training they need to focus on to promote themselves for small business growth, thus increasing the economic vitality of the veteran small business community. Recommendations from this study can supplement future programs

for improving training delivery mechanisms and streamlining collaboration amongst small business assistance training agencies for increasing veteran small business opportunities. This qualitative study is meaningful to social change because small business procurement assistance officials at both the local, state, and federal level can analyze the data obtained and work toward creating more collaborative training to increase training opportunities for Service-Disabled Small Business entities. I intend to utilize these research findings to validate the need for establishing collaborative dialogue between the U.S. SBA, DOD small business professionals and procurement technical assistance and small business development centers concerning streamlining entry procedures into subcontracting markets at the appropriate business development entry points.

Conclusion

The conclusions in this study support the proposition that coalition advocacy organizations and procurement assistance agencies such as the PTACs and SBDCs are extremely useful in reintegrating veterans into the workplace. Additionally, CDSMs are an excellent source for verifying what competitive elements are necessary for small businesses to understand the buyer and supplier interface necessary in effective supply chain management within corporate large businesses who hold government prime contracts. The study also supports the assertion there needs to be more visibility in relation to how procurement assistance agencies interact with each other and veteran advocacy organizations to deliver the right training at the right stage of a company's business development.

There are visible signs that emphasis on meeting subcontracting goals in DOD is increasing. This study reiterates the need for acquisition professionals to pay more attention to improving subcontracting achievement rates in areas, such as SDVOSB and Hub Zone categories that have not traditionally performed as well for subcontracting inclusion in prime contracts. As mentioned earlier in the study, 2018 U.S. SBA Procurement Scorecard goal results show that although the SDSVOSB subcontracting achievement rate of 3.0% overall was not met (2.10%), this is an increase of 20% (1.90%) from 2017 attainment figures. It is also worth noting that the overall federal government subcontracting goal of 30.22% was surpassed at 32.10%, which is a visible sign that more emphasis is being placed on subcontracting achievement to mirror successes garnered in prime contracting socioeconomic goal attainment in successive years (U.S. SBA, 2019a). The federal government during Fiscal Year 2018 awarded more than \$120.5 billion to small businesses, which is an increase from Fiscal Year 2017 of \$15 billion (U.S. SBA, 2019a).

There is more reason for optimism from visible signs of initiation by small business offices within federal government agencies, based upon evidence that steps are being taken to encourage growing the small business industrial base by increasing expenditure of small business dollars. As reiterated earlier in this study, there are also signs of caution concerning the reduction in the number of small business vendors, showing a lowering of the small business vendor base by eight percent from 2017 to 2018 (U.S. SBA, 2019a). This cautionary revelation aligns with concerns from participants in this study that strategic sourcing and category management contracting vehicles may be

indirectly, although it has not been substantiated through research, negatively affecting the number of small businesses entering the federal government marketplace able to obtain prime and subcontracting opportunities. The challenge will be to emulate the prime contracting achievements in areas that have traditionally not performed as well in subcontracting, such as the SDVOSB and HUB Zone small business set-aside areas.

The subcontracting training collaboration model on the next page illustrates a schematic outline on how improvements could be made to increase subcontracting for SDVOSB.

Advocacy Coalition Framework

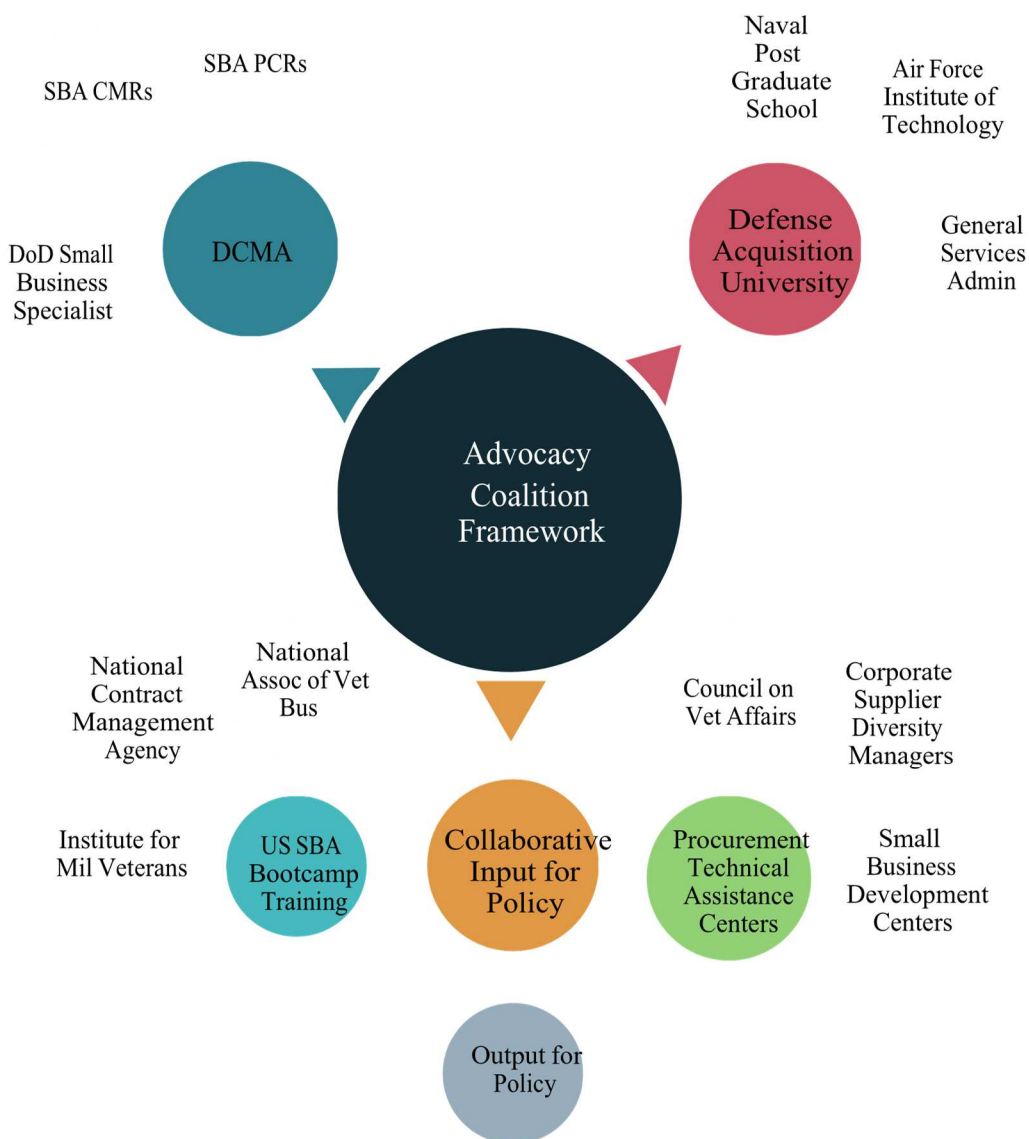


Figure 4. Advocacy coalition model.

In the upper right corner of the model, collaborative training inputs from advocacy coalition groups such as the IVMF, NCMA, SBA Office of Veterans Affairs and the National Association of Veterans would be needed to be disbursed to agencies like the Naval Postgraduate School for Acquisition, Air Force Institute of Technology, Defense Acquisition University at locations around the U.S. as well as the GSA archive of best practices for acquisition. These best practice training inputs could be filtered through the U.S. SBA CMRs, U.S. SBA PCRs at their respective host DOD locations, DOD Small Business Offices and DCMA. In the left-hand corner of the model, DCMA is highlighted because of their responsibility to monitor subcontracting compliance during the post-award phase of DOD contracting activity.

CMRs as the focal point for the SBA in this model could retain responsibility for providing collaborative input to advocacy coalition groups such as the NCMA, NAVOBA, and the U.S. SBA regional advisory council on veteran contracting matters. The small business regional advisory council, headed up by the U.S. SBA is comprised of federal agency small business management leadership across many federal agencies, to include the DOD and GSA. The SBA PCRs would continue to build upon their partnership with their respective DOD Small Business Office customers to flush out policy restraints from increasing SDVOSB access to subcontracting markets, and forward comments through the SBA Office of Government Contracting Policy. From those levels, inputs would flow to the small business advisory offices within DOD and other federal agencies, who in turn, would meet with CDSMs to obtain corporate prime contractor

perspectives on how small business fits into their supply chain subcontracting requirements.

Although federal agencies must work at arms-length with the contractor community at large to preserve procurement integrity and protection of source selection sensitive information, there is still room for developing corporate and federal partnering to improve access to subcontracting opportunities without violating procurement integrity. CDSMs could potentially assume a more active role in working with the DOD in suggesting proactive strategies for increasing percentage of SDVOSB inclusion in federal contracts. Venues could include periodic DOD small business and CDSM collaborative meetings, or perhaps even membership on a joint contractor and DOD small business subcontracting task-force committee formulated specifically for addressing the underperformance of SDVOSB subcontracting goals in DOD prime contracts. The CSDMs could, in turn, establish an SDVOSB best practices interactive log tool that all corporations who participate in DOD contracting could share amongst each other and use to improve subcontracting market outreach training to SDVOSB entities to increase SDVOSB subcontracting goals, as well as retain sharing of best practice supply chain practices across multiple levels.

Accessing SDVOSB sources for supply chain requirements at the subcontracting level could occur at both the PTAC and SBDC levels, with appropriate attention paid to where the company clientele is in their business development stage of maturity. Tailoring subcontracting training to coincide with where a company is in their small business development stage is key to supporting the findings in this study. The analysis from

cooperative meetings would be the basis for determining if further training is necessary from collaborative partners such as NAVOBA, NCMA, IVMF, small business collider activities and the US SBA Office of Veterans Affairs. SDVOSB companies would obtain counseling on retaining access to the Sub-Net database, Fed Bizz Opps, the Defense Innovative Marketplace, Broad Agency Announcements for SBIR opportunities, and DOD acquisition forecasting models that are provided to both of these organizations by the DOD service agency small business director focal points.

The output products could include: a repository of subcontracting competencies by company, supplementing existing past performance databases on prime contractors within regulatory guidelines, and a product that could be used to assess trend analysis on where the marketplace is migrating to in terms of SDVOSB small business competency availability by industry. The latter would provide an easily accessible database for potential SDVOSB entities to seek out subcontracting opportunities with prime contractors. All of these output products could be effectively used by DOD contracting and small business officials to work cooperatively with procurement assistance agencies to concentrate on increasing SDVOSB subcontracting goals.

A similar approach to this concept has been implemented by the Air Force small business community through their Techlink Program, which brings together Army, Navy, Air Force and VA research and development efforts to match small business competencies to laboratory research requirements (Air Force Research Laboratory, 2019). Additionally, the Air Force Research Laboratory sponsors the “Maker Hub” program which facilitates an environment for small business to display competencies in

solving real-world technical issues arising out of DOD service component and VA calls for solutions to research and development needs (Harrington, 2019).

As reiterated earlier in this study, DOD acquisition officials could benefit greatly by increasing efforts to work more with partner coalitions that work with the veteran business outreach centers to include the National Veterans Business Development and Veteran Affairs Business Leadership Councils, headed up by the SBA, and the USBLN, NGLCC, NMSDC, and WBENC. All of these organizational resources could be used more effectively to capture the attention of corporate prime contractors to actively seek SDVOSB small businesses, outside of strictly looking at core competency supply chain requirements from a limited pool of suppliers. Working together and collaborating more effectively with available advocacy coalition agencies, DOD can have at their disposal more tools to increase SDVOSB subcontractor participation in DOD contracts.

Lastly, as this study has shown, more attention needs to be paid to how the contractor community perceives the complexity of the DOD acquisition process. What are the differences between posturing for LPTA bid pricing methodologies versus cost incentive sharing pricing structured methodologies. How can companies posture for overhead cost structuring relative to the proclivity of an agency to favor one cost methodology over another.

Much of this study has been dedicated to looking at stages of development of a small business and matching appropriate training to fit those stages through increasing collaborative processes. One recommendation would be to ensure that training at all levels include policy education on the FAR and VA rules pertaining to small business set-

asides and how the nuances of each agency in FAR interpretation differs based upon statute differences. Additionally, more training is needed at the mid-level small business stage for how strategic sourcing and category management can affect bidding strategy and entry into subcontracting markets.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

Interview Protocol

1. Introduction to Study and Welcome. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for participating in this interview. Your participation in this study on perceptions of service-disabled veteran owned small business owners toward subcontracting collaboration between DoD contracting agencies and procurement assistance agencies is very important to increasing awareness of this topic to improve subcontracting processes within DoD. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and please feel free to stop this interview at any time if you feel uncomfortable with the nature of the interview, or the manner in which the questions are being asked. I will be using audio transcription of your responses to ensure that I accurately portray the information you are providing to me in the interview. The information you provide during this interview is anonymous.
2. Presentation and explanation of interview consent form and answering of any questions the interviewee may have relative to the interview process and intent.
3. Obtain approval by signature and ensure interviewee retains a copy; I will keep a copy for my own records.
4. Start transcription device and note date, time, and place of interview.
5. Proceed with asking semistructured interview questions and elaborate on themes that develop.
6. Wrap-up interview and explain how member checking validates responses.
Schedule an appointment for member checking verification process.

7. Thank the interviewee for participating in the study and emphasize the value of their input.
8. Ensure verification information for interviewee contact.
9. Review transcription information
10. Initiate member checking in follow up meeting with interviewees
11. Assimilate responses
12. Provide assimilated responses to participant (interviewee)
13. Answer any follow up questions concerning process and responses
14. End interview protocol process

Interview Questions

1. What do you feel is the largest impediment to doing business as a small business entity within DoD?
2. Explain your understanding of small business act legislation pertaining to protection of small business set-aside rules for SDVOSB entities within the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) and National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Do you feel current laws and pending legislation is effective in promoting your interests as an SDVOSB and encouraging you to seek more avenues of training and outreach concerning subcontracting within DoD?
3. What is your understanding of training partnership arrangements between federal, local, and state procurement assistance programs for enforcing the SDVOSB Set-Aside program?

4. Have personnel in your firm participated in procurement training programs (either in a formal classroom setting or on-line) specific to subcontracting processes within DoD? What extent have these training programs been beneficial to improving your competitive stature.