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Managing the Re-Employment of Military Veterans through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- Enlisting in the all-volunteer military is often associated with a promise of continued self-improvement. However, in 2009, the unemployment rate for returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (21.6%) was 2.5 times as high as the national unemployment rate (8.6%). To further understand re-employment for military veterans, this study examines whether TAP helps transitioning service members find work.
- Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen, and Baile surveyed 350 Army personnel who have or could have utilized TAP services. They found that 65% of the respondents used TAP services, with a majority (75%) using the services while active duty. Of those who used TAP services, 85% found employment.
- Years of military service seems to impact the effectiveness of TAP services. Participants who served more than 10 years found more benefits from using TAP than participants who served in the Army for less than 2 years.
- Since many returning veterans might have obtained solely combat-related skills while in the military, future researchers should study the effectiveness of TAP services for combat veterans seeking civilian employment.

ABSTRACT

“With the drawdown of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and a \$1.05 trillion dollar cut in the Department of Defense budget over the next ten years, tens of thousands of veterans are flooding the job market at a time when millions of civilians cannot find employment. To fight this high number of unemployed veterans Congress passed the Veterans Employment Bill of President Obama’s Jobs Bill in November 2011. This paper discusses the government sponsored military veteran Transition Assistance Program’s (TAP) effectiveness in reducing the veteran unemployment rate and presents the results of a survey of 350 Army personnel’s perceptions of the utility of the services offered through the TAP.”



IMPLICATIONS

FOR PRACTICE

President Obama has pushed for more individualized assistance through TAP services to help veterans with their post-military goals. Individualized assistance includes more one-on-one counseling, more follow-up, and three separate tracks for those planning to attend college, start a business, or find a job. Returning service members and veterans seeking employment or needing help with their post-military goals should utilize TAP services, remembering that TAP services have been expanded to cater more to their individual needs. Additionally, an independent evaluation of TAP found that veterans who use TAP services find employment three weeks sooner. Despite federal government efforts to secure employment for returning veterans, this study shows that some veterans still have difficulty securing work. Veterans entering the civilian workforce should consider pursuing more education to complement the skills they obtained in the military. Employers should use standardized job descriptions that clearly convey job qualifications.

FOR POLICY

To improve TAP effectiveness, the DoD should focus on assistance service members with only a few years of military service. Increasing workshop quantity and scheduling flexibility as well as utilizing more local facilitators and HR professionals to co-facilitate the TAP classes and workshops may also be helpful. The DoD could also recommend that service members preparing to separate from the service utilize skill translators on Military.com. Congress might mandate the use of a federally supported system of certifying or licensing military skills in line with civilian vocations. It might also increase the Department of Labor's (DoL) budget for veteran employment programming (e.g., DoL-VETS). DoL might consider creating a job database that assists employers with standardized job descriptions to better convey job requirements.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A significant limitation of this study is that Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen, and Bailie only surveyed Army personnel, thus, the findings are, at best, only generalizable to U.S. Army servicemembers and veterans. To increase generalizability, future researchers should survey personnel from all military branches. Furthermore, evaluating TAP is difficult because of the variation of experience and skills of separating military personnel. Future researchers evaluating TAP should account for these experiences and skills. Another limitation of this study is that the sample was somewhat of a convenience sample: the Army personnel interviewed were individuals that were easily accessible to Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen, and Bailie. Future researchers should determine ways TAP services can be improved to better assist veterans with less than two years of service obtain maximum benefits. It would be beneficial to study if veterans use other employment services other than TAP and if they are effective. Since the unemployment rate for veterans in 2009, as reported in 2011, was higher than the national average, other researchers have suggested implementing preferential hiring of veterans across the country. Researchers should evaluate the overall effect on both veteran and civilians in the workforce if veteran preferential hiring was mandated. Additionally, it would be beneficial to conduct a thorough study on the experiences of combat veterans returning to the civilian workforce. The study should explore the unique skills combat veterans bring to the workforce and how to assist combat veterans with skills that do not easily translate to the civilian workforce obtain fulfilling work.

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