

Attract, Recruit, Retain:

Creation of a Systemic Pipeline for Veteran Talent to Address Tennessee's Current and Emergent Labor Shortages

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ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The U.S. Military Veterans experience in the context of their transition towards civilian life after military service has received vast amount of research attention. Recently, the U.S. exit from the 21-year long war in Afghanistan has led to a renewed interest on the U.S. Military Veteran transition and the role of social support in facilitating a successful transition and the effectiveness of different interventions and support programs that claim to help Veterans adjust to civilian life. While this issue is certainly complex, our research is scoped to understand how Tennessee can leverage U.S. Military Veteran talent to improve its current and future labor shortages, and thus, increase Veteran Labor Force Participation Rates (LFPR) in the state.

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Tennessee is geographically positioned to tap into the transitioning Veteran talent pool yet has not formalized a pipeline for recruitment. State-level initiatives have attracted companies to relocate from other locations, creating further demand to fill certain vocational areas within the states labor force. However, Tennessee has no traceable, systematic, or united presence to systematically tap into that talent pool, further to this point, the State's resources are not organized to aid in the transition.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What factors or barriers affect labor participation among Veterans and transitioning military seeking to secure a job as they transition their identity from that of a service-member to a civilian?

What are they and how are they understood and by whom are they acknowledged, if at all?



THEORETICAL, CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Our research was primarily explored through Tajfel's (2019) Social Identity Theory and Social Identity Model of Identity Change (Tajfel & Turner, 2019). The final synthesis triangulated both theoretical concepts with elements of Kotter's (2012) Change Management Theory.

STATE-LEVEL CHALLENGES



1. There is disunification of resources, unaligned efforts, and miscommunication within private, public, partnerships (P3).

- Design and prioritize policies that make Tennessee the most attractive Veteran-Ready state by codifying practices to streamline P3's, insert fiscal accountability performance measures, and alleviate Veteran barriers toward employment.
- Establish a coordination of care network.
- Partner to support research toward strategies for improving Veteran & military affiliate outcomes, and leverage their talents. A research group in a leading university could shift the narrative.

2. Tennessee lacks a system for attracting, retaining, and tracking Veterans.

- Military bases and the State Veteran Affairs (VA) office to track data on all service members regarding their decision to stay or leave the state upon separation.

3. The "Sea of Goodwill" is overwhelming and difficult to navigate.

- Create Tennessee State "Seal of Approval" vetting designation.
- Create an interactive map of resources and state partners.

4. No network, no work. Veterans face unemployment after transition, as there are barriers and not enough time to find their "after."

- Create a pipeline into the labor force *during* transition.

5. The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and Dept. of Defense (DOD) SkillBridge have limitations.

- Codify Veteran employment and education initiatives to break down barriers and serve as interlocutor for retention in the state.

VETERAN CHALLENGES

6. Veterans are unclear of what their vocation should be after transition.

- Implement a Chamber of Commerce-driven, internship model, Veteran Internship & Talent Acquisition (VITA) to expand experience upon transition and retain in the labor pipeline.
- Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) and universities to engage in the retention of transitioning Veterans and explain educational pathways *during* transition.
- Offer college fairs *during* transition on military bases.

7. Veterans are unable to apply relevant military training and education toward state certification, licensure or credit toward upon transition.

- Give credit for relevant military training and education and make a codebook for what accounts as transferable for not only the Veteran, but for the spouse and military affiliates.

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

8. Civilians & Business practices lack military cultural competence, leading to the proliferation of stereotypes and bias.

- Establish a marketing campaign and communication strategy.

*The root cause of challenges to reintegration into the labor force is failing to attend to shifts in identity.

8 AREAS OF FOCUS DURING THE MILITARY-TO-CIVILIAN LABOR TRANSITION



9. "Veteran-Friendly" employers attract, but "Veteran-Ready" workplaces achieve successful integration and retention.

- Operationalize a "Veteran-Ready" Business Model

Veteran-Ready Business Model A FOUR-PRONG APPROACH



Recruitment & Onboarding Practices	Clear Pathways for Growth & Training	Business Resource Group (BRG) & Mentorship	Public-Private Partnerships (P3)
<p>Aim Implement a veteran hiring initiative. Capitalize on the abundance of veteran talent. Create a talent acquisition (TA) strategy to build a pipeline of veteran & military affiliate talent.</p> <p>Outcome</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Leveraging from the talent pool of veterans grants the ability to fill a labor shortage. 2. Will create a pipeline to facilitate military to civilian integration into the labor force. 3. Will deliver a return on investment (ROI) & social return on investment (SROI). 	<p>Aim Provide training opportunities and clear pathways for growth (self-growth and hierarchical).</p> <p>Outcome</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Skill up staff. 2. Ease integration. 3. Ensure retention. 4. Will deliver ROI & SROI. 	<p>Aim Create a veteran (BRG), and/or offer a veteran mentor internally or externally via a P3.</p> <p>Outcome</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Skill up staff. 2. Ease integration. 3. Ensure retention. 4. Add to company culture by building a sense of community. 5. Fosters an environment of comradery and simultaneously builds a network. 6. Will deliver ROI & SROI. 	<p>Aim Make a positive difference with veterans, military affiliates & staff through corporate social responsibility programs.</p> <p>Outcome</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a business culture of "purpose." Contribute to something larger, give meaning to work. BRG can partner with P3 of choice to contribute within the community collectively. 2. Residual effects of contributing to the veteran community by supporting veteran initiatives. 3. Provides an outlet to positively impact other veterans locally, and/or nationally. 4. Will deliver ROI & SROI.

RECRUITMENT & ONBOARDING PRACTICES

Implement a Hiring Strategy

- Execute formal training sessions for HR leaders and hiring managers to educate them on the value of veterans. Hiring managers can be trained on how to translate veteran skills and talents to actual roles at the company, as well as the best techniques for interviewing veterans transitioning out of the military.
- Or
- Include a veterans' voice internally as part of the hiring practice that can liaise the vernacular & onboarding for veterans.
- Place little emphasis on the resume. Conduct a video or in-person interview for all military applicants via trained HR or veteran liaison.
- Incentivize active duty, National Guard, and reserve military & spouses with job security and paid time off.
- Offer Internship (paid/unpaid) for a designated amount of time, before an official hire/contract.
- Commit to a veteran-preferential hiring practice.

Attract

- Business website, call out value of veterans & military affiliates.
- Job descriptions that are Veteran Friendly. Otherwise, they can deter one from applying. A notation for veteran applicants: "Civilian prerequisites not applicable. If you believe your experience aligns, apply, to be discussed further in an interview."
- Veteran-centric social media campaign. Marketing for veteran talent on social media and company websites.
- Post employment opportunities where veterans can find them, i.e. to Military.com's veteran employment center.
- Create job descriptions that align with military occupations. *ADP offers model examples of such practice.
- Ongoing outreach with branding initiatives: branded career site showcasing the value of the veteran, employee testimonials via video discussing how they have applied their military skill set, integrity and passion within their current role.

Recruit

- Live and virtual career events.
- Relationship building and networking within the military community.
- Leverage outside hiring source. Partner with non-profit(s) for onboarding, i.e. "Veterans Jobs Mission" or "US Army Partnership for Youth Success Program," or "US Pathfinder".
- Company recruiters can partner with local military transition assistance program (TAP).
- Have company recruiters attend the Service Academy Career Conference. It aids in identifying many supply chain and logistics candidates for senior management positions.
- Recruiters to partner with university veteran centers to identify veterans and bring them aboard. Both in school and graduates.
- Become a visible presence at the weekly Department of Labor job fairs.

CLEAR PATHWAYS FOR GROWTH & TRAINING

Training

- Guide in facilitating post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to further one's college education, receive additional training, or credentialing.
- Provide training opportunities internally or partner with P3 to either embed monthly, annually or through mentorship with BRG member(s).
- Train veterans about the business brand, its purpose & values.
- Provide veterans an opportunity to contribute & collaborate to the brand/business.

Clear Pathways

- Create job descriptions that offer clear paths within the company.
- Offer a clear trajectory to promotion and upskill. Set goals for the employee and the company.
- Referral program bonus offered, put in place contingencies. Referral programs can extend to spouses and military affiliates.
- Discuss pathways that are available. Conduct a 6-month review to check-in. Is the position a match, or better suited for a different department.

BUSINESS RESOURCE GROUP (BRG) & MENTORSHIP

- BRG members can volunteer their time to coach transitioning service members on writing resumes, interviewing in the corporate world, and transitioning out of the military and into the civilian workforce.
- Group can meet monthly, in-person and via zoom. Opportunity to network with other chapters of BRG's.
- Cultivate leadership and organizational membership. Open to all staff, not only veterans & military affiliates. Grow company culture motto, i.e. "One Team, One Fight." Residual effects of staff collaboration, motivation, & organizational growth.
- Establish a mentorship program that connects new veteran employees to others, can be via BRG.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS (P3)

Examples of Partnerships

- i.e., partner with "Habitat for Humanity" to build homes for veterans.
- i.e., annually work with "Operation Gratitude" to assemble care packages for deployed service members all over the world.
- i.e., annual gala or fundraising event to support a veteran initiative, decided on by BRG & staff.
- i.e., partner with the "Wounded Warrior Project," the State Veterans Affairs Agency, or "Military Spouse Employment Partnership."
- Partner with "Veterans Advantage," a military benefits program, to provide veterans and their families with exclusive national discounts.

Business Policy

- Create a company goal to support veterans by focusing on subcontracting to and acquiring products and services from veteran-owned small businesses.
- Create a company policy to allot a percentage of procurements set aside for veteran-owned small businesses.
- Create a corporate sponsorship commitment to support veteran initiatives.
- Create a Veteran Franchise Model: i.e., 7-Eleven offers up to 20 percent off the initial franchise fee (savings up to a maximum of \$50,000); up to 65 percent financing through 7-Eleven; and other specific financing for the business.
- 7-Eleven implemented "Operation: Take Command." An annual competition that enables a veteran to win a fee-free 7-Eleven franchise (valued at up to \$190,000).