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Evaluating the Transition Assistance Program for Twenty-first Century Military Retirees

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Evaluating the Transition Assistance Program for Twenty-first Century Military Retirees

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Abstract

This study addresses the need to enhance the preparation of military retirees for comparable job opportunities after their service. Military retirees who serve over 20 years, and sometimes 30 years or more, are left to enter a job market they are unfamiliar and unprepared to compete in. This study focuses on the preparation of the veteran through the Department of Defense (DoD) Transition Assistance Program (TAP), how the DoD TAP can better meet the needs of military career professionals, and how the DoD TAP can connect military retirees to private or public job opportunities. This study has gathered and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data through a mixed-method research approach. The research has uncovered the expectations of the program versus the program's effectiveness in preparing military retirees as they transition to the civilian workforce. The research discovers both overt, and veiled disparities in the DoD TAP and provides recommendations for the future of the program.

Chapter 1: Introduction

People who serve their country for over 20 years and are retiring in the 21st century often find it difficult to find good-paying, comparable jobs after their United States military service. United States Code (USC) Title 10 has very specific Department of Defense (DoD) Transition Assistance Program requirements. According to *10 USC Ch. 58: Benefits and Services for Members Being Separated or Recently Separated, Sec 1142 (a)(3)(A)* states, “In the case of an anticipated retirement, preseparation counseling shall commence as soon as possible during the 24-month period preceding the anticipated retirement date” (Govinfo, 2021). This is the foundational prescribed action for military members to prepare for their transition into the civilian workforce.

Background of the Problem

US Code Title 10 requires the specific military service to provide information regarding civilian occupations to include applicable certification and licensure requirements and civilian occupations that correspond to military occupational specialties. Additionally, there is also a requirement to cover government and private-sector programs for job search and job placement. This requirement is typically met by simply providing the retiree a printout of websites to retrieve the information on their own. Next, the USC Title 10 identifies “Counseling Pathways.” The services are required to establish a minimum of three pathways for members to receive individualized counseling. The pieces of demographic information used to tailor individualized

counseling are: rank, term of service, gender, whether the member was a member of a regular or reserve component of an armed force, disability, character of discharge health (including mental health), military occupational specialty; whether the member intends, after separation, retirement, or discharge, to seek employment, enroll in a program of higher education, enroll in a program of vocational training, or become an entrepreneur (Govinfo, 2021). Although many twenty-first century military retirees may eventually find sufficient employment, highly qualified and educated veterans still have a difficult time breaking into the civilian workforce. This research may enhance preparation for military veterans who have served over 20 years as they transition to the civilian workforce in pursuit of comparable positions and pay.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, the DoD should prepare their retiring veterans for entering the civilian workforce with knowledge of how to gain comparable positions and salaries. The problem is, the mandated DoD Transition Assistance Program (TAP) designed to close the gap of two to three decades away from the civilian job market is a five-day crash course. Based on the requirements of USC Title 10, it seems like a very daunting task to be able to prepare twenty-first century military retirees in a 5-day course, especially when they are in the same class with junior members who are separating with completely different experience levels. There may be a better way to prepare military veterans who have served over 20 years to enter the job market and have success finding comparable positions and pay to their military jobs.

Purpose of the Study

This study addresses the preparedness gap from the DoD TAP and provides recommendations to close that gap. By identifying this gap and assessing why it exists, or what would help the problem, this study has the opportunity to improve the DoD TAP course and

better prepare our retiring servicemembers in the twenty-first century for post-military job opportunities.

Significance of the Study

Not only have veterans been an important piece of the public enterprise (federal and state) during their service, but veteran services are a large public administration issue at all levels of government. This research highlights the benefit to stakeholders of veterans in the civilian workforce. This information is significant to the many private and public who hire veterans, to help them understand the transition challenges many military retirees face. The study is also of importance to the DoD and the military service leaders, who are charged with meeting the requirements outlined in 10 USC Ch. 58, Sec 1142. Finally, this research is beneficial to a myriad of public administration offices whose role is to help veterans with employment, housing, service-connected disability benefits, compensation and pension benefits and medical benefits.

Research Questions

Would job-seeking skills improve if the DoD TAP course for retirees was longer than five-days? Would the focus shift to career professionals if there was a retiree-only TAP course? Would hosting a job fair for public and/or private organizations lead to career opportunities? Sub-questions are based on three separate themes to include an extended Transition Assistance Program: Is there a specific number of days that would be more appropriate for an effective DoD TAP course, and how many days is the optimal number? Career Professional Transitions: Do retirees and separatees (under 20 years of service) have different transition requirements? If so, should retirees and separatees (under six years of service) be in different classes? Are retirees

more likely to be career professionals than entry level employees or students, and if so, does the TAP course prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market? Finally, Job Fairs: Are job fairs valuable to retirees, and if so should the DoD TAP course offer a job fair? Are job fair interviews good practice for retirees? Finally, will job fairs lead to job opportunities for retirees?

Theory of Change and Assumptions

The theories of change for this research project are:

Assumption 1 (A1). If the DoD TAP was longer than the current five-day course then retired military veterans could gain comparable employment pay and positions during their transition to the civilian workforce.

Assumption 2 (A2). If DoD TAP was geared towards career professionals, and retirees and junior military did not attend the same class then retired military veterans could gain comparable employment pay and positions during their transition to the civilian workforce.

Assumption 3 (A3). If local private and public organizations were hosted for a job fair on behalf of the service members, then retired military veterans could gain comparable employment pay and positions during their transition to the civilian workforce.

Limitations

Much of the job seeking skills will have to be measured by secondary sources to include literature and opinions from interviews. The focus on career professionals will be similar, and largely based on derivative research and surveys of recent retirees. Finally, the hiring event likelihood of success will be measured by surveys and data from transition hiring event results from private institutions. The focus of the research will need to be limited to these variables, although the scope may be much larger. There will no doubt be other ideas and possibly

newfound variables, but these variables alone should showcase the need for enhancing veteran transition assistance prior to retirement.

Definition of Terms

For the purposes of this study, “career professional” is defined by the joining of the two words, whereas “career” is a “profession for which one trains, and which is undertaken as a permanent calling” and a professional is person engaged in a “profession” which is “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2022).

For the purposes of this study, “civilian workforce” is defined as all citizens not serving in the armed forces.

“Comparable employment” is a position that is similar in status, scope of duties, reporting requirements, authority, responsibilities and compensation to the position held by the employee at the company prior (Law Insider, 2022).

“Job fair” is defined as an event where employers offer information about their companies to people who are looking for jobs (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2022).

For the purposes of this study, “Junior military member” is defined as a service member serving 6 years or less, regardless of rank.

For the purposes of this study, “Military retiree” is a member who served more than 20 years and was honorably discharged on the occasion of their retirement.

For the purposes of this study, “Transition” is defined as a military member’s departure from military service and arrival back into civilian status.

“Transition Assistance Program (TAP)” refers to the presidentially mandated program which requires information, tools, and training to ensure service members and their spouses are prepared for the next step in civilian life (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022).

“Veteran” is used to describe “a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable” (USDVA, 2019, p. 1).

Expected Impact of the Research

The potential impact of this research is the future creation of new DoD TAP requirements at the federal level. The enhancements to the program could impact how retiring military members in the twenty-first century are prepared for transition into the civilian workforce. Subsequently, the research sheds light on how the military is focused on compliance, but not necessarily focused on the performance or results when it comes to preparing military members for life after their service. By identifying the gap in preparation for civilian work, this study could, through cascading effect, impact federal, state, and local municipality funding which pays for programs like education, vocational rehabilitation, healthcare, welfare, and even homelessness. Better prepared veterans may lead to fewer veterans in crisis (homelessness or mental health crisis) in our communities.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

People who serve their country for over twenty years and retire in the twenty-first century often find it difficult to find comparable jobs. These retiring service members are not always prepared to compete for the positions and pay they earned during their military service. While

preparing each and every service member to enter into good paying comparable positions may not be likely, there are avenues to explore regarding this topic. The literature review focuses on three specific themes: Transition Assistance Programs, Career Professionals and Connecting Military Retirees to Employment Opportunities.

The United States Code (USC) Title 10 has very specific Department of Defense (DoD) Transition Assistance Program requirements. The requirements are meant to be tailored to each individual separating member, which is a huge task for the government employees executing transition assistance on behalf of each military service. The process is broken up into counseling sessions, information packets and websites, and the TAP class itself. Additionally, there are optional workshops for entrepreneurs and education seeking members.

The transition for career professionals is not equivalent to the transition for a junior military member, or someone who may have served only four or six years. For members who dedicated two or three decades to the Profession of Arms, there is a different level of assistance needed to navigate the civilian job market in search of comparable positions. Recruiters spend a lot of time and energy in finding the best talent for their organization. Some avenues often used by companies are job fairs, social media and digital or physical advertising.

Intentional exclusions of literature review include: the impact of transition assistance on specific genders, races, sex, and ethnicity and how specific military branches and installations execute the DoD TAP compared to that of another military branch or installation. Finally, the study excludes transitions prior to the twenty-first century, as to focus on recent retirees versus pre-Gulf War era retirees.

Literature Review

Transition Assistance Programs. The DoD Transition Assistance Program (TAP) is not preparing retirees at a heightened level to compete for positions in the civilian market. There needs to be either more time, or more focus on the DoD TAP requirements for retiring service members.

Many advancements have been made through the years to address the DoD TAP. In the article *Understanding Transition GPS (Goals Plans Successes or T-GPS)*, Cleymans and Conlon (2014) highlight the changes to TAP forged by President Obama's Executive Order No. 13,508. Subsequently, Congress passed the Vow to Hire Heroes (VOW) Act of 2011. Cleymans and Conlon (2014) state, "VOW mandates that all service members attend T-GPS, participate in pre-separation counseling, attend VA benefits briefings and attend the Department of Labor Employment Workshop (DOLEW)" (p. 154). Counterintuitively, members who are retiring after 20 years of service may request and exemption from attending the DOLEW. This program is supposed to be an "an intensive, three-day learning experience that provides an overview and practical application in the job search and hiring processes" (p.157). Unfortunately, the goals of T-GPS do not always correlate to successful outcomes.

One reason veterans have trouble transitioning into the civilian job market is the stereotypes associated with retiring service members. In research conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA), Christopher Stone, et al., addresses this issue in the article, *Do Stereotypes of Veterans Affect Chances of Employment?* The study was conducted using a unique data collecting method. The study participants were asked to review a series of job descriptions and correlate provided resumes on perceived job fit. The results showed that veterans were likely stereotyped as a group and those perceptions impacted their job fit. According to Stone et al. (2018), "When these veterans return to civilian life, larger than average proportions of this group

struggle to gain suitable civilian jobs” (p. 9). There is evidence in this study to support positive and negative impacts of stereotypes. For example, veterans were rated higher for leadership and teamwork skills, while rated lower for social skills when related to job fit. However, the grouping of veterans into a hiring manager’s decision matrix continues to be a topic that requires further research.

The Journal of Veteran Studies published an article titled, *Reconceptualizing the U.S. Military’s Transition Assistance Program: The Success in Transition Model*. The article, by Whitworth et al. (2020), “addresses key flaws with the current TAP and is grounded in human and military transition theories and research into optimal ways to foster improved outcomes for transitioning military members” (p. 25). The article serves to outline a new TAP model, called Success in Transition (SIT). The article identifies multiple issues with the current TAP model, to include a narrow focus, a lack of an individually tailored approach, use of outdated learning approaches and flawed data collection and reporting. The focus is really not on a successful transition, but merely a successful compliance of TAP requirements. The T-GPS model fails to separate service members with different transition needs, most notably a retiring member versus a 4-year enlistee. Most of the learning in TAP is antiquated and uses the lecture method, and a heavy dose of Microsoft PowerPoint visual aids. Finally, as stated by Whitworth et al. (2020), “DoD data on TAP continues to lack information on timeliness of member attendance, completion of all TAP requirements, or results-focused data that reflects impacts of the program for actual military members’ outcomes” (p. 28). Therefore, it is fair to ask if the program positively affects a retiree’s transition into the civilian workforce.

The aforementioned Journal of Veterans Studies article synthesizes well with an article titled *The Use of Prior Learning Assessment for Enhanced Military-to-Civilian Transition*

Outcomes. Bergman et al. (2020) suggests, “one of the major struggles for veteran students when they transition to the civilian workforce is the translation of their military experience into terms that civilian employers understand” (p. 38). The research is conducted through a higher learning lens but applies to what the DoD TAP is trying to accomplish. This research points out the fact that while military occupations often have a one-to-one correlation to a civilian occupation, military jobs come with a much broader duty description. For example, an Air Force service member may be a graduated expert at repairing fighter aircraft avionics systems. This job translates well into the civilian workplace in the aerospace industry. However, this service member may have also had years of leadership and management positions, with completely different job descriptions. Although each service member performs a gap analysis during TAP, a needs assessment or prior learning assessment might be beneficial prior to placement in a more targeted TAP cohort.

In research article, *The Veteran Employees: Recruitment, Career Development, Engagement, and Job Satisfaction of Veterans Transitioning to the Civilian Workforce*, discusses the transitioning of veterans and more specifically mature workers, and anoints the transition from military to civilian life as the ultimate career transition (Hunter-Johnson, 2020). Even though veterans are more present in their communities than ever before, finding a new career is a transitioning service member’s greatest challenge. From the human resources perspective, there are a multitude of strategies an organization can take to be a “military friendly” organization. While many organizations self-proclaim this title, they lack some of the basic understanding of what the military to civilian transition is really like. This is why it is so imperative that the DoD TAP program prepare veterans for this challenge. Hunter-Johnson, et al. (2020) asserts, “The overarching transitional challenge of veterans to the civilian workforce specific to recruitment of

veterans, is their ability to articulate skills, experience, and qualifications obtained in the military to a resume which can be effectively understood and translated by employers” (p. 141).

Career Professional Transitions. The transition for career military professionals is especially complex. Trying to find a place in society, and in an unfamiliar culture is extremely difficult. When a service member retires after twenty to thirty years of military service, there are unique challenges they face. There needs to be a cohort specific to those who have served over twenty years in the armed forces, independent of junior military members who are separating from service.

A few of the challenges facing transitioning military retirees are the competitive job market, the culture shock and networking. The article *Military Transition Management* highlights how veterans have to catch up to their civilian peers. While veterans were advancing in their military career, their civilian counterparts were building their professional network, advancing through the “ranks” of their particular civilian enterprise, and strengthening relationships in their industry, which could lead to career advancement. The cultural imperatives may not be the same, and almost certainly will not be executed in the same way military retirees are accustomed to. Finally, networking for that dream job is of supreme importance. Gaither (2014) insists, “Networking is the number one way that people find job leads. Eighty-five percent of recruiters and employment specialists say that there’s more emphasis on hiring through networks” (p. 218). These are all areas which need to be addressed in some capacity in TAP program.

Another study, *Human resources challenges of military to civilian employment transitions*, addresses the sudden immersion back into civilian society for transitioning service members. The three main challenges veterans face during their transition are: civilian employer’s

military job knowledge deficit, anxiety from civilian employer's lack of clearly defined new-hire processes and civilian employer lack of knowledge regarding veteran compensation and benefits (Dexter, 2020). One example from the study was an interview conducted with a 27-year-old HR project manager. She stated, "some of these guys (veterans) have served as Nuclear Reactor Operators in the Navy. They had responsibility for managing a nuclear power plant when in the Navy but when they are discharged as an E-4 or E-5, they end up working at low end menial jobs with little to no real responsibility and quit after a short time" (489). This is common for longer serving veterans as well.

Some retiring veterans may be an intermediate or senior manager for a multi-million (or billion) dollar enterprise, and simultaneously directly supervise dozens of employees, and indirectly lead hundreds. When they retire and enter the civilian job market, there is a misunderstanding or a devaluation of the scope of responsibility and breadth of experience. IN the article *Let's Connect: Diversity, Inclusion and Career Development of Veterans Within the Civilian Workforce*, Hunter-Johnson (2021) explains, "within a civilian workforce, veterans are often misunderstood and stigmatized, that results in misconceptions and misinterpretation regarding transfer of professional experience and training" (p. 86). The theory of work adjustment (TWA) posits that employees (military and civilian) are in a constant state of transition, between jobs, specialties, departments, and organizations (Hunter-Johnson, 2021).

There are many factors affecting military retirees as they prepare to seek a new career. The article, *Factors in the Transition of Career Military Personnel to the Civilian Workforce*, claims that approximately 18,000 transition back to civilian life each year. The research sheds light on the fact that veterans continue to struggle with finding comparable positions, and pay, in their civilian jobs. Krigbaum (2021) notes that "reintegration programs are challenged in

bridging the gap between veteran skills and employer understanding of equivalent skills in civilian positions” (p. 3). Although life-satisfaction and self-worth are identified as positive influencers of success, support is required in any cases to help achieve such self-assessments.

Connecting Military Retirees to Employment Opportunities. Hiring events are a tool for human resource experts and prospective employees to meet and determine if there is a mutual interest. The premise of these events is often job placement, and more often in collegiate settings. Additionally, organizations often hold recruiting fairs to attract talent. The DoD TAP does not currently sponsor such an event, although career transition for veterans has been priority of the DoD and even past presidential administrations. There is a lack of literature on military transition job fairs, thus collegiate job fairs and organizations who hire the most veterans will be the focus.

The article *Recruiting at Campus Job Fairs: Matching Candidate to Individual Industry Requirements*, identifies recruiter preferences when evaluating and selecting candidates they would like to hire. Many college campuses host these job fairs as not only a service to their students, but also as an opportunity to gain employment. Many of these job fairs average 25 participating hiring organizations and host as many as 400 job seekers (Minifie et al., 2018).

The Journal of Veterans Studies released a study, *The Business Case for Hiring Military Veterans/Reservists: Stock Price Performance of Military Friendly Firms*. The premise of the study is to quantify the results on an organization’s bottom line when they employ veterans. The study unveils key information about veteran hiring. Veterans were found to have a higher job performance, lower turnover, slower career advancement, and higher earnings than their non-veteran counterparts. The earnings are a contradictory topic, however, because veteran earnings are predominantly lower following separation from service. Pollak (2019) points out, “while

veterans often earn less than their civilian peers in the years immediately following military service, they eventually catch up” (p. 54).

An article by the US Black Engineer and Information Technology lists the following organizations as the top employers for veterans: The Department of Defense, Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), Booz Allen Hamilton, Northrop Grumman, BAE Systems, Lockheed Martin, The Boeing Company, Department of Veteran’s Affairs, Raytheon Company, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and General Dynamics Corporation (Deen, 2020). These organizations have the desire and need to hire veterans, largely based on the services provided to the government. Michael F. Mahoney, chairman and CEO of Boston Scientific Corporation, stated, “the unique experiences that members of the armed forces bring to the company are invaluable” (p. 21).

The Employee Relations Law Journal published an article titled, *Best Practices in Veteran Hiring: Balancing Employer Risks and Goals With Applicant Rights*. This study highlights the recent uptick in unemployment for veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan service era. One of the disparities in veteran hiring is that preference for a predominantly male veteran pool may be inherently discriminatory of women. McNichols and Anderson (2020) assert that “making an employment decision based on an applicant’s military experience or discharge status is a potential source of liability” (p. 12). The legal ramifications would be a factor when considering hosting organizations for job fairs.

Conclusion

The review of literature provides a basic framework for this research paper. The TAP class has many areas for improvement, specifically the focus of the course, and whether or not the class meets the intent of the mandate, or merely complies on paper. Next, military career

professionals continue to struggle with finding comparable positions and pay after retiring from the armed forces. Although, there has been success improving this over the years, there are still many veterans returning to the workforce in lower-level positions. Finally, job fairs are sometimes a valuable resource and present opportunity to those who participate. The major limiting factor of job fairs would be any perceived discrimination towards other protected groups who aren't veterans.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

This study has determined that there is sufficient research data to suggest those who serve their country for over 20 years and are retiring in the 21st century find it difficult to compete in the civilian job market. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from veterans who have retired after 20 years of service, in the 21st century. Surveys were generated on Survey Planet and deployed via social media platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn. Although numerous Facebook military retiree groups were requested to deploy the survey, they all declined. Additionally, current DoD TAP class attendees at Beale Air Force Base, CA, were disallowed from participating in a focus group by the TAP career counselor. Finally, key informant interviews were conducted with two current and previous DoD TAP career counselors, the Sacramento County (CA) Veterans Services Officer, a Ventura County (CA) Veterans Claims Officer, and the First Vice President of the San Diego (CA) Veterans Coalition. The mixed-method approach fostered diversity in research and minimized bias.

Research Question and Sub Questions

This study provides answers to the following questions: Would military retirees' rate of comparable employment increase if the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was longer, if the TAP class was geared towards career professionals, and if local private and public organizations were hosted for a job fair?

The goal of this research paper was to also answer the following sub-questions: How long should the TAP be? Should retirees and junior military be in the same TAP class? Are there different requirements for retirees and junior military separatees, and retirees considered career professionals? Are job fairs valuable to retirees? Should the TAP class offer job fairs? Finally, will job fairs, or connecting retirees to employment opportunities create job opportunities?

Theory of Change and Assumptions

The theories of change for this research project are:

Assumption 1 (A1). If the DoD TAP was longer than the current five-day course then retired military veterans could gain comparable employment pay and positions during their transition to the civilian workforce.

Assumption 2 (A2). If DoD TAP was geared towards career professionals, and retirees and junior military did not attend the same class then retired military veterans could gain comparable employment pay and positions during their transition to the civilian workforce.

Assumption 3 (A3). If local private and public organizations were hosted for a job fair on behalf of the service members, then retired military veterans could gain comparable employment pay and positions during their transition to the civilian workforce.

Operational Definitions

Career professional: In the current research, the term “career professional” is defined by the joining of the two words, whereas “career” is a “profession for which one trains, and which is undertaken as a permanent calling” and a professional is person engaged in a “profession” which is “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2022).

Civilian workforce: For the purpose of this study, the civilian workforce is defined as all citizens not serving in the armed forces.

Comparable employment: Employment in a position that is similar in status, scope of duties, reporting requirements, authority, responsibilities and compensation to the position held by the employee at the company prior (Law Insider, 2022).

Experience: For the purpose of this study, different job experience levels distinguish those with a strong background in an industry from those who may still need guidance to succeed.

Job fair: For the purpose of this study, a job fair is defined as an event where employers offer information about their companies to people who are looking for jobs (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2022).

Junior military: For the purpose of this study, a junior military member is defined as a service member serving 6 years or less, regardless of rank.

Private organization: Private organization refers to any person, partnership, corporation, association or agency, which is not a public body, that is operated for profit (US Legal, 2022).

Public organizations: For the purpose of this study, public organizations are defined as all government organizations, whether local, state, or federal, as well as non-governmental (NGO) and not-for-profit (NFP) organizations.

Retirees: For the purpose of this study, a military retiree is a member who served more than 20 years and was honorably discharged on the occasion of their retirement.

Transition: For the purpose of this study, a transition is defined as a military member's departure from military service and arrival back into civilian status.

Transition Assistance Program (TAP): The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provides information, tools, and training to ensure service members and their spouses are prepared for the next step in civilian life (U.S. Department of Labor, 2022).

Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Class: For the purpose of this study, TAP Class is a compilation of the following events: DoD Transition Day which includes curriculum modules on building resiliency by managing your own transition, defining and translating military skills, and the financial plan for transition. The Department of Veterans Affairs provides a VA benefits brief on the services available to service members and veterans. The Department of Labor will provide a required one-day brief on preparation for employment. The class will also include a service member election of two days of instruction; these include the: DOL Employment Track, DOL Vocational Track, DoD Education Track, and the Small Business Administration Entrepreneurship Track (Air Force Personnel Service, 2022).

Population Sampling Strategy

Participants in the research population are veterans who retired in the 21st century. This is important so that the data is relevant to current TAP class effectiveness. For the sampling to yield sufficient qualitative and quantitative data, a minimum of 50 respondents was required. The goal for this study was 10 key informant interviews (KIIs) using a mixed methods approach, and open-ended and closed questioning techniques.

Procedure

To achieve the research goals, this study showcases the processing and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data via online survey tools (Survey Planet). Surveys were conducted through social media reaching 58 retired veterans. Five Key Informant Interviews capitalized on expert experience in the field of military veteran transitions. Examples of experts in the field are two current and previous DoD TAP career counselors (confidential), the Sacramento County (CA) Veterans Services Officer, a Ventura County (CA) Veterans Claims Officer, and the First Vice President of the San Diego (CA) Veterans Coalition.

Data Processing and Analysis

For the survey results, the results have been aggregated and quantified to paint a clearer picture of the needs of retirees in transition. Additionally, through qualitative methods, interview results were compiled and articulated to either support or challenge the research assumptions. The goal has been to validate and/or invalidate all or part of the Theory of Change and Assumptions. Finally, the data is extrapolated to identify trends and create a narrative for the research.

Internal and External Validity

Once internal interviews were finalized from experts in the field and external surveys were completed and returned, the was analyzed for validity. The intent was to validate results by identifying commonalities in the target population and discerning perceptible feedback from the KIIs. The quantitative data has been charted in Chapter 4 to represent the survey responses, while the qualitative data has been compared and contrasted with the surveys and the literature.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are time and geography. There was a finite amount of time to complete this specific research. Deadlines were established, and the volunteer nature of the

surveys via social media limited participation amongst the target group. Additionally, the key informant interviews were conducted in email/chat format, which eliminated the geography gap. One other limitation was a current employee of the DoD was not comfortable participating in a non-DoD sponsored research project and unfortunately cancelled a previously agreed upon opportunity to host a quick focus group with current TAP class attendees.

Conclusion

This research was conducted by gathering both qualitative and quantitative data by way of the mixed-methods approach. The goal of the research has been to determine if enhancement of the Transition Assistance Program would better prepare retiring military veterans as they transition to the civilian workforce.

Chapter 4: Results and Findings

Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the results and findings from the primary research. The primary research consisted of 58 survey respondents and five Key Informant Interviews (KII). The five Key Informants are:

1. Rochelle Arnold (Retired Air Force Senior Master Sergeant) – Sacramento County Veterans Services Officer, California County Veterans Services Officer Executive board member and Women's Veterans Committee chair, Sacramento County Veterans Advisory Committee member and Mental Health Steering Committee member as well as Post Traumatic Growth board member.

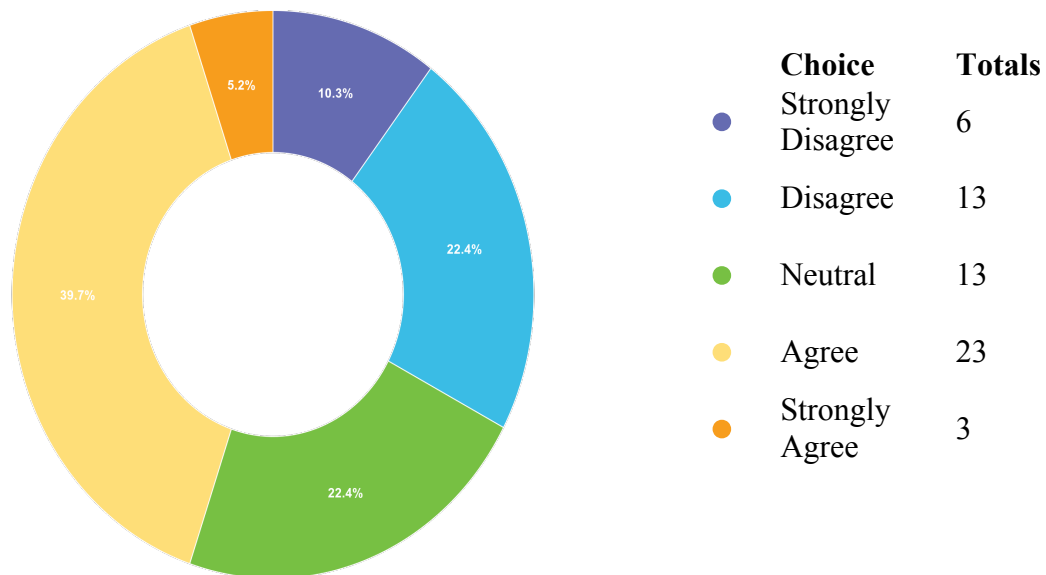
2. Christopher McVicker (Retired Marine Corps First Sergeant) – Ventura County Veterans Claims Officer
3. Maurice Wilson (Retired Naval Chief Petty Officer) - President/Executive Director, National Veterans Transition Services, Inc aka REBOOT.
4. Confidential Informant – DoD TAP Career Counselor (previous Army and Air Force)
5. Confidential Informant – DoD TAP Career Counselor (previous Army, current Air Force)

Assumption 1: IF the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class was longer than 5-days, THEN it would more effectively prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market.

Quantitative Results: The survey results from Question 7, Q8 and Q12 are sufficient enough to support Assumption 1. Although the data is a small sample size, 58 respondents, all 21st century military retirees, largely favor a longer course and do not believe the current TAP construct effectively meets the DoD TAP requirements. Q7: The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class is long enough to effectively meet all DoD TAP requirements? The results of this questions are interesting when compared to the results from Q8. Q8: What would be the most effective length for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class? 33 percent of the respondents feel the course is not long enough to effectively meet all DoD TAP requirements while 45 percent believe the course is long enough to meet the requirements. The remaining 28 percent was neutral. This would seem to indicate that the course length is sufficient, however Q8 follows-up this question with a preferred day-count for the class and only 29 percent of the respondents believe 5-days is the appropriate length for the course. Although 5 days is the most popular single answer, the other 71 percent feel the course should be longer, with the results varying from 6-7 days to more than 21 days. There are optional workshops for

retirees, so it is plausible that the answers of 6-7 days are including those experiences, which would be exactly 50 percent of the respondents. If this was assumed, the research would still validate that 50 percent of 21st century military retirees would like to see a course of 8 days or longer. However, 5-7 days is the most popular concentration of days.

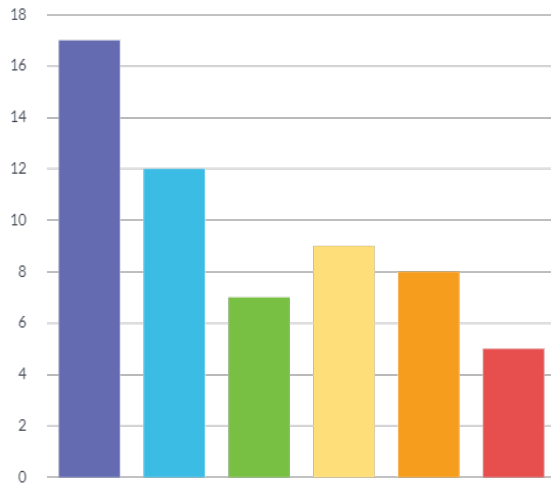
Q7: The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class is long enough to effectively meet all DOD Tap requirements ?



	Choice	Totals
●	5 Days	17
●	6-7 Days	12
●	8-9 Days	7
●	10-13 Days	9

Q8: What would be the most effective length for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class?

●	14-21 Days	8
●	21+ Days	5

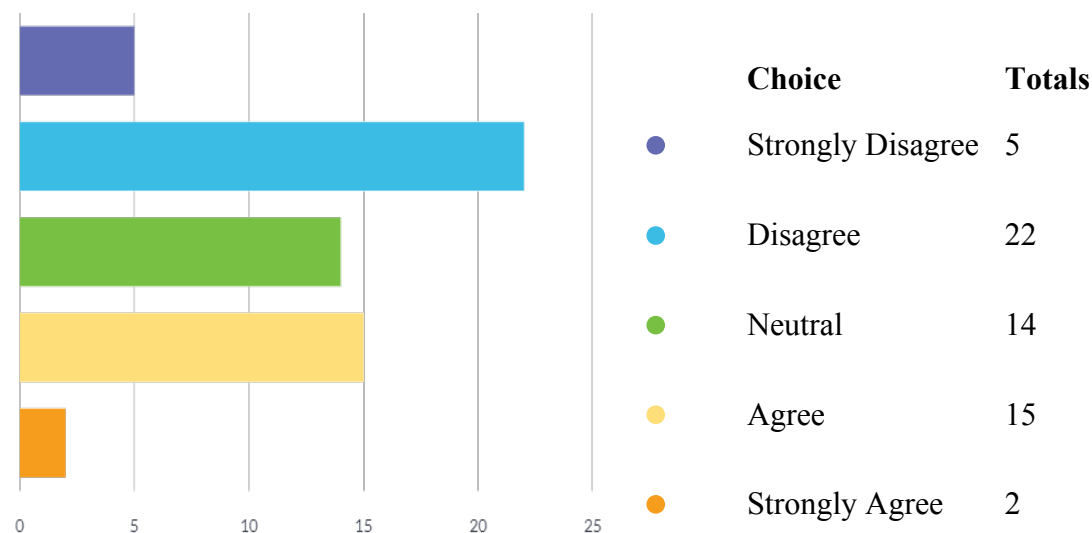


The last survey question related to Assumption 1 was Q12. Out of 58 respondents, 47 percent felt that the TAP class did not effectively prepare them to compete in the civilian job market and 29 percent felt that they were prepared. The neutral respondents made up 24 percent of the sampling population. It is impossible to gauge favorability of neutral respondents without personally contacting them one by one, so the data for this question would substantially lean towards an ineffective preparation of retirees to compete in the civilian job market.

Q12: The TAP class effectively prepares retirees to compete in the civilian job market?

The theme for Assumption 1 is the DoD Transition Program. As mentioned in *Understanding Transition GPS (Goals Plans Successes or T-GPS)*, Cleymans and Conlon (2014) members who are retiring after 20 years of service may request and exemption from attending the department of Labor Employment Workshop, “an intensive, three-day learning experience that provides an overview and practical application in the job search and hiring processes” (p.157). During this period of transition, retirees have a lot of tasks to complete to retire, like moving, applying for

jobs, finding schools for kids, and on top of that working full-time. The fact that the overwhelming majority of survey respondents would want a course longer than 6 days, this workshop should not be optional. We will address this workshop again when evaluating interviews from our key informants.



Additionally, Whitworth et al. (2020) identified that TAP has a narrow focus, a lack of an individually tailored approach, use of outdated learning approaches and flawed data collection and reporting. The fact that 71 percent of respondents want a course longer than 5 days and 47 percent did not feel prepared to effectively compete in the civilian job market could signal that there is some disparity in the compliance of the program versus the results of the program. Furthermore, the broad range of preferred timelines for this course by the respondents identifies the need for an individualized approach to TAP. Whitworth et al. (2020) previously identified this need and developed the Success in Transition (SIT) Model, which may be a path for the DoD to start down in the future.

Finally, Hunter-Johnson, et al. (2020) identified the transitional challenge of veterans to the civilian workforce. Since 47 percent of respondents did not feel prepared to effectively

compete in the civilian job market, there may be a need to further evaluate veterans' ability to articulate their skills, experience and qualifications prior to retirement.

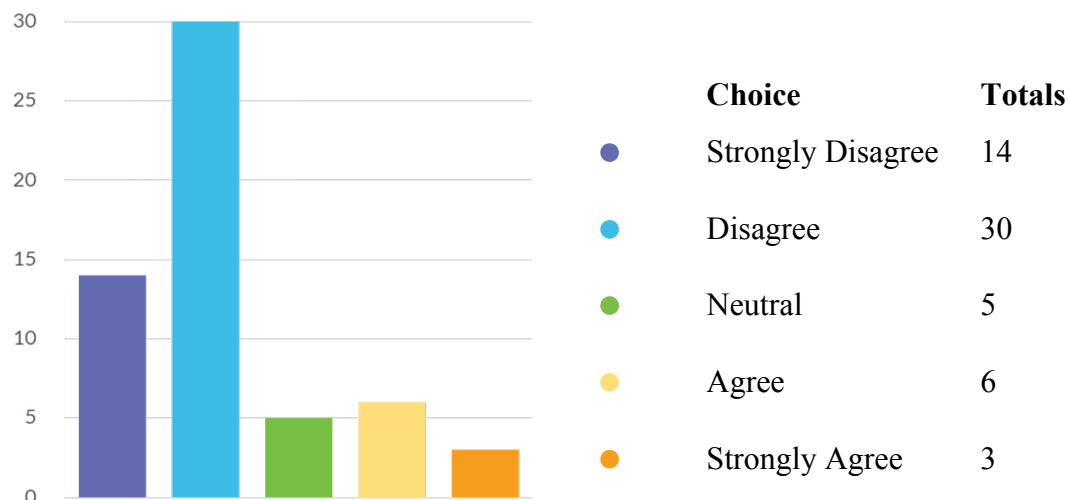
Qualitative Results: These results are predominantly derived from five KIIs and comments from survey respondents. There were two interview questions which specifically contribute to Assumption 1. Overall, the KII results do not validate or invalidate Assumption 1, with some caveats which will be discussed. First, Q1 addressed the actual days spent in the DoD TAP class. Q1: Do you think the current TAP class is long enough to effectively meet all DoD TAP requirements for military retirees? Q5 asked the informants, how does the current TAP class prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market? Of the five key informants, three feel the DoD TAP class offers the right number of days, but one current TAP career counselor stated that "five days should be enough time if structured properly, but I think there could be improvements." Two active or recent TAP career counselors for the DoD, both have experience with the Army and the Air Force TAP programs. For confidentiality, these informants will be referred to as Counselor 1 (C1) and C2. C1 asserted in her interview, "if retirees take advantage of all the courses offered, and not only the mandatory ones, but there is also plenty of information to help them appropriately prepare for retirement." As mentioned previously in this research, retirees are allowed to forego certain portions of the TAP curriculum. This may be an issue since it is a recurring theme. C2 believes that at her military installation, too much time is spent on LinkedIn profiles and networking and more time could be spent on the federal hiring process and the entire retirement timeline. One of the survey respondents, who is anonymous, stated, "I think the current five day model would be fine if a) the briefers showed up; b) the briefers that showed up actually knew what they were talking about; and c) we didn't watch half of the videos from the online TAP CBT...if that's all we were going to do, I could have watched

it on my own time and in the comfort of a room that had climate control.” This points out the fact that not all TAP programs are created equal. Conversely, two other informants do not believe the course is long enough. Chris McVicker opined that “the current class is a 5-day process that is packed with many agencies all competing to provide the most information possible. The result is an overload of information which creates more confusion for the retirees.” Rochelle Arnold agrees and does not feel the course is long enough. Finally, the fifth key informant, Maurice Wilson, concluded that “DoD TAP is not designed to be a solution” and that “the allotted time is ok.” For purposes of this research, it is important to contrast Mr. Wilson’s position with the position of the DoD. According to the DoD, “the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provides information and training to ensure service members transitioning from active-duty are prepared for their next step in life - whether pursuing additional education, finding a job in the public or private sector or starting their own business.” The DoD further defines the program as “an outcome-based curriculum that transforms the way the military prepares Service members for transition back to civilian life” (*DoD Transition Assistance Program*, 2022). Mr. Wilson, who is a champion for veteran transition also stated, “TAP is not designed to prepare you for a civilian career.” In contrast, Ms. Arnold explained, “there is only one or two days to create a master resume which is not sufficient to use in applying for civilian jobs” and that “mock interviews are conducted, but the service members are interviewing each other.” What is for certain, is that there are differing opinions out there about what TAP ought to be doing and what the program is actually doing. As mentioned previously, the program seems to be compliance based and not performance based.

Assumption 2: If DoD TAP was geared towards career professionals, and retirees and junior military did not attend the same class then the DoD TAP would more effectively prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market.

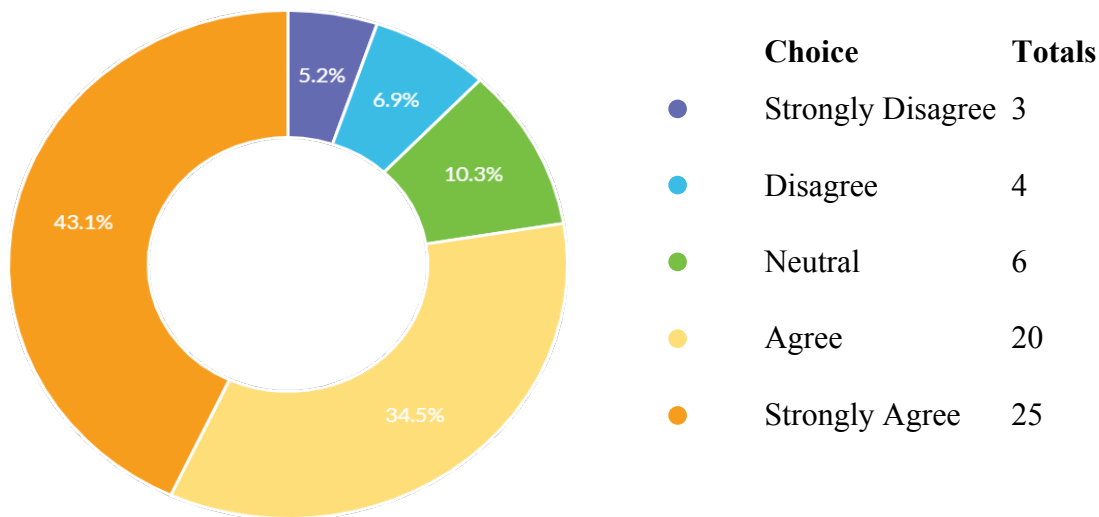
Quantitative Results: The survey results from Q9, Q10 and Q11 are sufficient enough to support Assumption 1. Once again, there were 58 21st century military retirees who responded to these questions.

Q9: Retirees and separatees (less than 6-years of service) should be in the same TAP course.



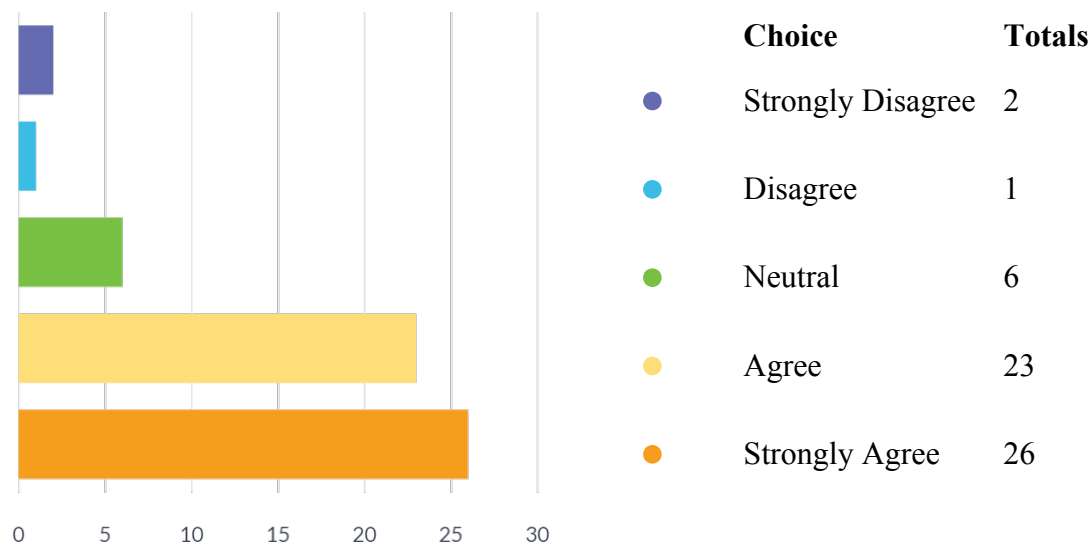
This question was overwhelmingly in support of the assumption that retirees and separatees would have different classes. Although there are differing opinions on this matter, the preference from those who are retiring is abundantly clear. As mentioned in Chapter 2, veterans are behind their civilian counterparts in building their professional network, advancing through the “ranks” of their particular civilian enterprise, and strengthening relationships in their industry (Gaither, 2014). Retirees have experienced this gap exponentially, and the data shows that they prefer to work in a cohort of similarly challenged peers versus being mixed with a generation that may not completely identify with their career experience and aspirations.

Q10: Retirees have different transition requirements than separatees (less than 20-years of service). Once again, there is an abundance of support for identifying the transition differences for retirees versus non-retirees. Those who retire in the military have served between 20 and 30 years, and 78 percent of the respondents agree they have different transition requirements while only 12 percent disagree. One anonymous respondent commented, “having just attended TAP, I can attest to the fact that there needs to be separate courses for retirees - the needs and type of information needed for retirees are just vastly different than that of a 6-year separating service member.” While there is no doubt that junior military members deserve the same level of transition assistance, the material covered is not always relevant to both retirees and junior separatees.



Q11: Military Retirees are career professionals. From Chapter 3, the term “career professional” is defined by the joining of the two words, whereas “career” is a “profession for which one trains, and which is undertaken as a permanent calling” and a professional is person engaged in a “profession” which is “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2022).

Finally, 84 percent of respondents would classify military retirees as career professionals while five percent would not. It is unclear why the five percent believes they are not career professionals, but in some career fields in the military there is not a strong civilian equivalent. For example, a career infantry servicemember or a long-time bomb builder may not feel they have the skills to translate to a successful civilian career.



Qualitative Results: These results are derived from the same five KIIs and comments from survey respondents. There were three interview questions which specifically contribute to Assumption 2. Overall, the KII results validate Assumption 2. Q2: Should retirees and separatees (less than 6-years of service) be in the same TAP course? Why or why not? C1 and C2 both think that retirees add value to separatees, but not necessarily the other way around. If the research and conversation is to enhance DoD TAP for retirees, their impact on junior separatees would not be a factor. C2 seemed very aware of the conundrum, and stated, “retirees tend to ask more/better questions. I think they benefit from being in class with other retirees and I think separatees benefit when there are retirees in their class because they tend to spark conversation/questions.” C2 also went on to explain how at her current installation, retirees can attend a retiree only class. However, it has been discovered through interviews that not every

base has the same scheduling capacity, and therefore only Senior officers and E-9 retirees are scheduled for “senior TAP.” Both Ms. Arnold and Mr. McVicker agree that retirees should not be in the same class as separates, citing different experience levels and often different priorities. Mr. Wilson stated the question was “irrelevant”, and that “it is best to view TAP as a pre-release brief.”

Q3: Do Retirees have different transition requirements than separates (less than 20-years of service)? Why or why not? All of the informants agree there are a difference in transition requirements for retirees versus separates, in varying degrees. C1 summed it up perfectly, she explained, “This all depends! Each branch operates their Transition Assistance Program slightly differently. For example, the Navy and Marines does not make everyone go through the courses and will provide them with their required document (DD 2648) after one class. The Air Force has their own process of a week-long commitment of classes that everyone takes. The Army has a distributive model for everyone to take certain classes in a certain timeframe and they also have 3 different tiers of courses and requirements based on their future plans and goals. I personally think that having different requirements for each person based on their goals instead of based on rank and status is more effective.” Her experience has shed light on another issue which was not specifically being studied for this research, but it is known that different services have different methods for executing the DoD TAP requirements. Likewise, different military installations, within the same services, have disparities in their program’s capabilities. Some of these disparities are the number of TAP personnel on-site, local private sector engagement, skill level of TAP career counselors and local interpretation of the requirements. Once again, compliance versus performance-based results seems to resonate across the program.

Lastly, the interviewees were asked to respond to Q11: Military Retirees are career professionals. Sixty percent of informants agree with this statement. Mr. Wilson opined, “This is an academic question and is up to the individual to decide.” C1 used infantry as an example of one who would probably not be a career professional but explained that if the retiree had a translatable career field, education, and skills then yes they would be a career professional. Ms. Arnold agreed, asserting that military retirees are “often proven leaders with decades of leadership and management experience that would benefit civilian companies if they were hired into mid-level or upper-level management positions.”

In Chapter 2, Hunter-Johnson (2021) was cited as stating, “within a civilian workforce, veterans are often misunderstood and stigmatized, that results in misconceptions and misinterpretation regarding transfer of professional experience and training” (p. 86). This was echoed by Krigbaum (2021) who agreed that there is a gap between a veteran’s actual skills and how the civilian enterprise equivocates those skills. There appears to be a strong appetite to establish a DoD TAP curriculum geared towards career professionals, and specifically the translation of skills.

Assumption 3: If local private and public organizations were hosted for a job fair on behalf of the service members, then the DoD TAP would more effectively prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market.

Quantitative Results: The survey results from Q13- Q16 strongly support Assumption 3. For Q13, 84 percent agreed that recruiting and/or hiring events (job fairs) are valuable to retirees. Q14 yielded 91 percent who believe the TAP program should offer at least one recruiting and/or hiring event. Next, when asked if recruiting and/or hiring event interviews would be good practice for retirees, 95 percent were in favor, while zero respondents disagreed; there were three

neutral responses. Finally, 88 percent of respondents believe that recruiting and/or hiring events would lead to job opportunities for retirees. If you combine all of the responses of these four questions, it is clear that recruiting or hiring events are heavily favored, 90% favor these events, while only 1% provided unfavorable responses.



The US Black Engineer and Information Technology organization listed numerous organizations who heavily employ military veterans, while also pointing out that the experiences of veterans are vast and impressive. The survey results indicate that being linking some of these veteran friendly private organizations with retiring veterans would be of great value to the retirees, whether the interviews are informational or culminate in future employment.

Qualitative Results: Four of the five informants agree that job fairs or hiring events are doable, and valuable, which is enough to substantiate Assumption 3. Some of the concerns would be whether or not retirees and separatees would need to be enrolled for different events. When addressing whether hiring events were valuable, C2 answered, “Yes, but I would not limit

the event to retirees only. Nearly everyone is looking for a job when they get out & separatees have many skills they can bring to a civilian job as well.” This was echoed by C1 as well, who made the point that the diversity of talent is better for the organizations when all retirees and separatees are included. Although there was overall support, there were plenty of important factors when determining feasibility. Ms. Arnold astutely pointed out that “not all retirees stay in the local area of their last base.” This would be an important factor when inviting private or public organizations in the local area because some TAP attendees may have no use for a local job fair. Additionally, as touched on earlier, not all military installations have the same DoD TAP capabilities. Some of the limiting factors to capability are personnel, geography, time zones, local community, etc. Some examples of challenging locations are overseas and rural installations. However, as pointed out by Pollack (2019) in Chapter 2, veterans were found to have a higher job performance, lower turnover, slower career advancement, and higher earnings than their non-veteran counterparts. There seems to be an opportunity for these types of events. How these events are standardized and executed is a great topic, requiring further research.

Conclusion

The research data supports that IF the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class was longer than 5-days, THEN it would more effectively prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market. There are differing opinions, but 5 days is in a minority of preferred days for this course. Additionally, the research concludes that IF the DoD TAP was geared towards career professionals, and retirees and junior military did not attend the same class, THEN the DoD TAP would more effectively prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market. While there may be value added for younger separatees to have retirees in their class, the overall curriculum for retirees should harness two-three decades of unique experiences and post military expectations.

Finally, the data overwhelmingly supports that IF local private and public organizations were hosted for a job fair on behalf of the service members, THEN the DoD TAP would more effectively prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market. There are logistical factors to work through, but 9 of 10 retirees favorably view a job fair or hiring event opportunity while transitioning.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Areas for Further Research

Introduction

Overall, the study's Theory of Change and assumptions were validated by the survey results and key informant interviews. The 58 survey respondents overwhelmingly supported a longer DoD TAP class, with a 71 percent favorable response rate for more than five days. Additionally, 47 percent did not feel prepared to effectively compete in the civilian job market. The key informants challenged Assumption 1 by majority but provided ample feedback on where some of the concerns with the allotted time may be derived from. Next, the survey results were lopsided toward developing DoD TAP for retirees with a focus on preparing career professionals. Forty-four of the 58 respondents favored retirees having their own DoD TAP class cohort and 78 percent agreed that retirees have different requirements when separating than those separating after just six years. Furthermore, 84 percent of the respondents would consider military retirees career professionals. The qualitative data also supports Assumption 2, whereas the value of retirees being mixed with junior military was likely of more benefit to the junior members than the retirees. Also, one key informant provided valuable insight into the disparities between the military services and each installation with the execution of the TAP class. Finally, 90 percent of the survey respondents were in favor of connecting retirees to employment opportunities, e.g., job fairs. The key informants were very helpful in pointing out feasibility issues with these

events but believed they could be beneficial if executed correctly. The data from the research is solid enough to draw substantive conclusions.

Conclusions

The research conducted has provided substantial evaluation of the DoD TAP program and the surveys and interviews are reliable enough to draw five main conclusions.

Conclusion 1: The current number of days (5) may not be sufficient for the DoD TAP class. The vast majority of the survey respondents were in favor of a class 6 days or longer. If retiring service members choose to opt out of the Department of Labor workshop, they will only have a two-day TAP class. It is not reasonable to transition a 20–30-year veteran from a career in the profession of arms in two days. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the DoD defines the TAP program as “an outcome-based curriculum that transforms the way the military prepares Service members for transition back to civilian life” (*DoD Transition Assistance Program*, 2022). This class needs to be less focused on timelines and compliance and more focused on measurable results for transitioning service members.

Conclusion 2: The DoD TAP curriculum needs to be tailored to the individual. For example, which standardized classes or counseling a member receives should be based on their experience, education, and employment qualifications. As one anonymous survey respondent remarked, “Getting work after the military should and does depend on the amount of effort you put into getting a job. The TAP Program just helps individuals maximize their potential to getting the job they are looking for.” The emphasis of this response is that TAP is believed to *maximize* the retiree’s potential to find work. One of the key informants, C1, stated “I personally think that having different requirements for each person based on their goals instead of based on rank and status is more effective.” When you combine the data with expert opinion, it is fair to

draw the conclusion that tailoring each servicemember's TAP program may have some weight behind it.

Conclusion 3: The DoD TAP programmatic requirements need to be standardized. The DoD TAP program may be more reliable if it were standardized. For example, different military installations should not offer better or worse opportunity to veterans. As a reminder, in Chapter 2, the key informant C1 was quoted saying, "each branch operates their Transition Assistance Program slightly differently. For example, the Navy and Marines does not make everyone go through the courses and will provide them with their required document (DD 2648) after one class. The Air Force has their own process of a week-long commitment of classes that everyone takes (except retirees who opt out). The Army has a distributive model for everyone to take certain classes in a certain timeframe and they also have 3 different tiers of courses and requirements based on their future plans and goals." The DoD is very specific about what the minimum requirements are for all service members, so why the disparity in execution?

Conclusion 4: The DoD TAP should have a retiree specific curriculum. The survey results and informant interviews were heavily in favor of a retiree only cohort. Although C1 and C2 somewhat dissented from that opinion, their argument was mostly based on the value retirees have to separatees in the classroom, which while interesting, may not be a compelling reason to share the same curriculum and be in the same class.

Conclusion 5: The DoD TAP program would benefit retirees and separatees by connecting them to career opportunities. With the caution that not all separating military members will stay in the local area of their final installation, these events were 90 percent favored by the survey respondents. There are many logistical hurdles to job fairs, or career fairs, but some installations already do this, so there is a roadmap for success.

Recommendations

The conclusions derived from the research provides a framework for clear recommendations. The DoD TAP program, like any government program, is dynamic and evolves as the requirements and needs of transitioning service members change. There was a time in the not so distant past where veterans were greeted with hostility after returning home from conflict. Many of these veterans separated from service and were not cared for the way veterans are today. Our nation has made great strides to improve life after military service for our veterans, but there is always room for improvement.

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the DoD deploy an after-retirement assessment of job placement for retirees. A certain number of days for the class is important, but simply expanding the timeline arbitrarily is not a solution. It is recommended to deploy the same assessment to all separatees, even if they aren't retirees. Although compliance with the requirements of 10 USC Ch. 58, Sec 1142 is necessary, seeking data to evaluate the program's success is more important. The metrics should include how long before the veteran found employment, the type of employment (full-time, part-time, etc.), the member's education level, and the salary of the member. This information coupled with the pay grade, years of service, and specialty should provide some tangible evidence to whether or not comparable pay and positions are being achieved. Likewise, the length of the TAP class and other curriculum-based decisions can be tied to the results. The assessment could be deployed in phases to veterans, e.g., six months, 12 months, 18 months and three years after separation. The recommendation is that the DoD develop and institute this assessment no later than January 2024. It is understood that it takes time to create policy and programs, but 18 months should be more than enough to adopt and implement an effective TAP assessment program.

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that the DoD employ an individualized approach to the TAP program. Once again, this is only as it relates to which standardized material or opportunities each service member should receive, based on their individual qualifications. The article mentioned in Chapter 2, by Whitworth et al. (2020), identified multiple issues with the current TAP model, to include a narrow focus, a lack of an individually tailored approach, use of outdated learning approaches and flawed data collection and reporting. Whitworth also pointed out that “TAP continues in practice to employ a ‘one size fits all’ approach that does not reflect the broad range of military members and their different capacities to manage the transition. It overlooks the benefits of providing individually tailored support and training based on the specific needs, strengths, and goals of each member (p.27). The Key Informant C1 agreed and specifically suggested a tailored approach. The recommendation is for the DoD to develop a timeline, e.g., each month in the last year of service, where the servicemember meets with their career counselor and reviews their specific needs, strengths, and goals and the progress of each, Of course, this will take resources, so implementing this change without appropriate funding allocated and personnel to take on the task is likely not possible. The timeline to implement would be 3-5 years. This seems like a long time, but getting it right is more important than checking the compliance box. It is recommended that by year three, some version of the tailored approach is in practice, even if at test installations.

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that the DoD TAP develop a retiree only curriculum. If the individualized approach is favored, then having a 30-year veteran meet the identical requirements as a four-year veteran is not logical. While the end results are the same, the pathway to achieve a successful transition for a service member may be vastly different depending on their experiences. Although not all classes or curriculum should be open only to

retirees, each installation should at a bare minimum offer a retiree class. This can be implemented immediately. Even without changing the curriculum, allowing retirees to collaborate in a classroom environment would be beneficial. A curriculum aimed at 40-50+ year old members, largely with families, children in high school and college, with mortgages, and decades of experience will require some time. The 3–5-year plan mentioned for the tailored approach counseling would be a fair timeline for an all-new curriculum.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that the DoD TAP program be standardized across the DoD. Standardization is not to take away from tailored career counseling, but to ensure that the DoD at large is tapping into those ideas that the most exceptional TAP programs are employing and standardize those processes for the masses. Currently, there are too many disparities in execution. Although they all meet the basic requirements of compliance, this is merely a checklist of actions for the service member to complete. There are some installations who are able to support multiple different cohorts depending on rank and time-in-service. There are also installations who conduct job fairs and connect with civilian companies, e.g., Home Depot LinkedIn posts seen “tagging” certain installation’s TAP programs. Transitioning service members need to have the full weight of the DoD behind their journey and being unfortunate enough to have your last installation be a small rural base in rural America, an overseas post or an installation with less funding, should not limit the servicemember’s opportunities. There is too much technology for so many installations to be meeting bare minimum requirements while others are putting forth immense effort. The DoD need to identify the programs who have results (through the aforementioned assessments) and employ their practices worldwide. This should be started immediately. The standardization should fall into the same 3–5-year timeline for full beta and execution, but assessing which installations are most successful should be on

that 18-month timeline. Some programs could be implemented quicker if the DoD does the research and pushes guidance out as best practices are identified and codified.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that the DoD TAP program connect servicemembers to employment opportunities during their transition. Rochelle Arnold mentioned in her interview that when she attended TAP they conducted mock interviews, and the service members interviewed each other. Keep in mind there was a modest sentiment that the retirees will get out of TAP what they put in. While this may be theoretically true, there is no logical explanation for someone who hasn't had a civilian job since the age of 18, who served 24 years, "interviewing" a fellow service member. While the interviewer may have great insight to what they believe a hiring manager would ask, they do not work for a current organization who actually hires people. By developing a DoD TAP employment opportunity program, the DoD can connect public and private organizations to transitioning service members. Once again, through the technology of applications such as LinkedIn, there are plentiful opportunities for pre-separation connections. There are already a myriad of private organizations who make it their purpose in life to help transitioning military, like Hire Military and Hire Heroes USA. There are also many mentoring and recruiting opportunities through organizations like Veterans and the Lucas Group. However, these connections need to be made well in advance and that is where the DoD TAP program can offer lessons in establishing a professional network and a professional brand. A current list of resources and a job fair (in-person or virtual) could be achieved within six-months. Each installation will have its local challenges, but through collaboration with fellow TAP programs, every servicemember should have the opportunity to connect with prospective employers looking to hire veterans.

Areas for Further Research

There does need to be further research regarding pay or position disparities for retiring service members. Unfortunately, there is no current data source for post service income and positions, which is why it has been recommended that the DoD deploy an after-retirement assessment of job placement for retirees. The DoD already has pay scale data by Time in Service and Time in Grade, and they generate total benefits packages annually to servicemembers. Since they are aware of what the total benefits is/was for a transitioning member, what they need is to determine what the servicemember's total compensation is post service. This is echoed by Whitworth et al. (2020), as his study referenced flawed data collection and reporting. The goal is successful preparation for transition, and not simply the compliance with the DoD TAP requirements.

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APPENDIX A.

RAPID SURVEY: Transition Assistance Program for Twenty-first Century Military Retirees

Informed Consent: My name is Richard Johnson, and I am an Executive Master of Public Administration candidate at Golden Gate University. My capstone project is on the topic of evaluating the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program (TAP) for Twenty-first Century Military Retirees. I am asking you to take less than 3 minutes to help move my research forward. Your responses are secure and anonymous. The demographics, e.g., age, gender, race, education, and rank are required for accurate analysis of the data. Please return this survey in 10 days. If you have any questions regarding this survey please contact me at rjohnson111@my.ggu.edu.

Definitions:

TAP: Transition Assistance Program

Demographic Information (Please select one):

Race:

- 01- White, not Hispanic or Latino
- 02 - Black, not Hispanic or Latino
- 03 - Hispanic or Latino
- 04 - American Indian or Alaska Native
- 05 - Asian or Pacific Islander
- 06 - Race and Ethnicity Unknown

Year retired:

SELECT YEAR from 2001 - 2022 or within next 12 months

Branch of Service:

SELECT from Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines

Category of Service:

SELECT from Active Duty, Reserve, National Guard

Years Served:

SELECT from 20-30+

Military AFSC or MOS:

Please ENTER your military Career Field or Specialty

Education Level:

High School or GED
Some College
Associates
Bachelors
Masters
PhD or Doctorate

Survey Questions:

1. The Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class is long enough to effectively meet all DoD TAP requirements?
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
2. What would be the most effective length for the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) class?
 1. 5 days
 2. 6 to 7 days
 3. 8 to 9 days
 4. 10-13 days
 5. 14-21 Days
3. Retirees and separatees (less than 6-years of service) should be in the same TAP course.
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
4. Retirees have different transition requirements than separatees (less than 20-years of service).
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree

5. Strongly Agree
5. Retirees are career professionals.
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
6. The TAP class prepares retirees to compete in the civilian job market.
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
7. Recruiting and/or hiring events (job fairs) are valuable to retirees.
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
8. The TAP program should offer at least one recruiting and/or hiring event.
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
9. Recruiting and/or hiring event interviews would be good practice for retirees.
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree
10. Recruiting and/or hiring events would lead to job opportunities for retirees.
 1. Strongly Disagree
 2. Disagree
 3. Neutral
 4. Agree
 5. Strongly Agree

APPENDIX B.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW: Transition Assistance Program for Twenty-first Century Military Retirees

Informed Consent: My name is Richard Johnson, and I am an Executive Master of Public Administration candidate at Golden Gate University. My capstone project is on the topic of evaluating the Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program for Twenty-first Century Military Retirees. I am asking you to take 15-30 minutes to interview with me and help move my research forward. Your responses are secure and will be made confidential, if requested. Please return this survey in 10 days. If you have any questions regarding this survey please contact me at rjohnson111@my.ggu.edu.

Definitions:

TAP: Transition Assistance Program

Key Informant Interview Questions:

1. Do you think the current TAP class is long enough to effectively meet all DoD TAP requirements for military retirees?
2. Should retirees and separatees (less than 6-years of service) be in the same TAP course? Why or why not?
3. Do Retirees have different transition requirements than separatees (less than 20-years of service)? Why or why not?
4. Should military retirees be considered career professionals? Why or why not?
5. How does the current TAP class prepare retirees to compete in the civilian job market?
6. What could be added to the TAP class to better prepare retirees for the civilian job market, if anything?
7. What would it take for the TAP class to host a recruiting or hiring event?
8. Are recruiting or hiring event feasible for the TAP Program to host for retirees? Why or why not?
9. Is there anything you would like to add regard the effectiveness of the TAP program in helping retirees secure comparable employment after their military service?