



5

Veteran Experts: Transitioning Military Expertise into Civilian Work

Sarah E. Minnis and Michael Kirchner

For generations, military veterans have comprised a critical demographic of the United States—in both proportion and contribution to society. World War II saw the largest number of US veterans in history, with 16 million having served during the war (Millet & Maslowski, 1994). In 1968, during a time when the United States still had a draft, roughly 3.5 million were serving on active duty (Bialik, 2017). That number has decreased to present levels of approximately 1.3 million (Department of Defense, 2020). Each of these generations have gone on to make an impact on the national and global economy. After World War II, roughly half of all veterans went on to own and operate their own business (Weisul, 2016). In fact, the last 75 years have seen at least two and a half

S. E. Minnis

Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC, USA

e-mail: sminnis@wcu.edu

M. Kirchner (✉)

Purdue University-Fort Wayne, Fort Wayne, IN, USA

e-mail: kirchnem@pfw.edu

million companies started by veterans, including Walmart, FedEx, and RE/MAX (Akhdar, 2019). Whereas 40% of Korean War veterans went on to start their own business, a shockingly low 4.5% of Post 9/11 veterans have become entrepreneurs (Weisul, 2016). This decline may be a signal that instead of starting their own business, more veterans are applying their military expertise in an existing non-military workplace. Although the percentage of citizens with military experience has ranged over time, today's 19 million veterans (7.6% of the population) and more than two million veteran-founded companies demonstrate the rate and reach of the US military's influence on training and expertise development (Department of Veterans Affairs, *n.d.*; Schultz, 2017).

The US military heavily invests in the development of its members, yet few civilians know about the processes used to develop service members' work expertise (Kirchner & Akdere, 2019). Beginning in basic training, service members are continuously engaged in new training, as part of the military's on-going and intentional development of its human resources. Each training contributes toward developing the technical skills needed to perform military operations, as well as acquiring soft skills that can be applied across disciplines (Kirchner & O'Connor, 2018).

Expertise in the Military

Becoming an expert in any field requires extensive education and training, which leads to in-depth learning and application from participants. Learning is a process of gaining knowledge and expertise in an area (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2014). The US military is reflective of a learning organization. In fact, the US armed forces comprise one of the largest training organizations in the world, with extensive time devoted toward the development of its members (Kirchner & Akdere, 2014, 2019). As opposed to a traditional workplace, consisting of goals related to profitability and market share, the military devotes much of its attention to the training and mission-readiness of its members. The result is a highly-trained and disciplined workforce who have committed thousands of hours toward becoming experts in their professions. The training is

highly structured through a combination of classroom instruction and practical application.

Professional military education maintains a balance of education and training to enhance service members' learning. Beyond a method to break people down, basic training is the first extensive exposure new service members have toward military education. Upon completion of basic training, service members receive further instruction regarding their military job. Regardless, expertise is generally developed through a two-step process, with education being offered in a traditional classroom-type format. After classroom education is provided, it is through hands-on training that service members develop and refine their skills to reach mastery of individual tasks or competencies (Pierson, 2017). For the Army, education is about the why, whereas training emphasizes the process (Pierson, 2017). These two aspects are complementary to one another, ensuring members understand their jobs and are able to successfully perform when called upon.

Whether in a classroom or on the job, the learner needs to receive and process the information they are provided. Thus, learning is primarily internal to the learner, whereas education is mainly external, and considers strategies for presenting information or concepts to the learner (Pierson, 2017). A college classroom, training room, or exercise in the field all represent environments where education is provided unto learners, as part of their expertise development. Education offers a foundation for understanding content and developing new knowledge, which in turn can be applied into training (Pierson, 2017). The knowledge and skills developed are unique to the learner, as a result of their education, training environment, and related work experiences.

Similar to other industries, the military contributes a specific service to society that society cannot provide on its own (Department of the Army, 2015). To fulfill its mission, the armed forces maintain countless job fields for service members. The US Army alone has roughly 190 different job types available, ranging far beyond the stereotypical infantry, field artillery, and other combat-related positions (Powers, 2019a). Though not an exhaustive list, these jobs range from office/administrative work to maintenance- and healthcare-related positions—each of which may readily be translated into jobs outside of the military. The intensive, on-going

investment in training allows each branch to develop its members' expertise within their chosen or assigned job.

Both the soft and technical skills service members learn, through a range of education, training, and experiential learning opportunities, enables the military to execute its primary function—to protect and serve the nation (Kirchner and O'Connor, 2018). Upon completion of service, military veterans are considered experts in their profession and are frequently credited with possessing desirable industry-recognized technical and soft skills (Harrell & Berglass, 2012).

Soft Skills Expertise

Though each branch maintains their own set of core values and every job requires a unique skill set, a number of soft skills are frequently attributed toward being developed during a veteran's time in service. *Soft skills* can be defined as skills that enable someone to work well with other people, for example being able to communicate effectively, or to work in or lead a team (MacMillan Dictionary, n.d.). More simply, soft skills often relate to who someone is, as opposed to what someone knows how to do. Soft skills require extended practice and exposure, and may require a longer development period prior to achieving expertise. In many cases, soft skills relate closely to one's leadership qualities and contribute toward a leader's effectiveness (Department of the Army, 2019).

Harrell and Berglass (2012) found employers seek to hire veterans based on their leadership, teamwork, and discipline. Interestingly, veterans are frequently cited as being leaders, despite little investigation regarding how the military develops leadership competencies of its members (Kirchner, 2018). In fact, 68 of 69 participating organizations suggested veterans' leadership skills are a direct influence on their hiring decisions (Harrell & Berglass, 2012). Other studies have identified decision-making, dependability, and critical thinking skills as being particularly valuable with veteran employees (Hardison et al., 2017). The soft skills being developed complement the technical aspects required of the service member within their branch of service and job.

Technical Skills Expertise

Although military veterans are often credited as having desirable soft skills, the technical skills developed while serving may be more important in the former service members' acquisition of expertise. Even military jobs generally considered outside the scope of non-military alternatives may still develop service members' technical skills expertise in ways that could be beneficial for non-military organizations. As noted earlier, the armed forces maintain hundreds of distinct job specialties for current and future service members, each of which has its own unique set of technical skills being developed. Although the technical skills are often position-specific, many could be translatable to a non-military career. More challenging, however, may be aligning technical skills acquired through service with career options in the civilian sector.

Technical skills relate to the skills and competence needed to be able to physically perform a job. They are less difficult to identify than job requirements and are easier to evaluate. These skill sets generally correspond with a particular job and are often assessed during performance evaluations. Examples of technical skills for an administrative assistant might include being able to create a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel, being able to process payroll, and being able to scan a document. Technical skills are easier to demonstrate than soft skills, and thus are easier to evaluate. The necessity of technical skills varies greatly between positions, as there are only a small number of jobs requiring one or more of the described examples.

Unlike soft skills, technical skills are developed early during a service member's enlistment. Class or training time is devoted and structured to teach and evaluate a service members' learning and competence. Beyond basic training or boot camp, service members attend a specialization school to learn the technical skills required of their job. Depending on the job, specialization schools can range from a few weeks to several months. The schools are highly structured with training developed to address each of the job requirement's required technical skills. Once the specialty school is complete, service members are expected to reach

proficiency within their job and continue developing expertise through the remainder of their service.

Veterans' Expertise Redevelopment

Authors have variably defined *expertise* over time as they sought to understand the way in which human skill is achieved. Within the field of human resource development (HRD), more refined definitions have emerged as expertise has become better understood through research and practice. For the purposes of this chapter, we will be using Grenier and Kehrhahn's (2008) definition stating that, "Experts, in the process of engaging in their craft, combine the objective characteristics of knowledge, experience, and problem-solving with subjective characteristics that are perceived by someone else as an indication of their knowledge, abilities, or skills" (p. 184).

Considering this definition of expertise, we see a significant challenge to veterans in how to demonstrate and apply their skills expertise in new civilian work situations. Expertise is a development process experienced by an individual over a period of time through engagement in various positions and kinds of work. Like expertise models that utilize a linear process to describe the ascent to expertise status, the military's process for developing expertise may similarly be a linear process during a service members' time. As referenced by Kem, LeBoeuf, and Martin (2016), the early stages of a soldier's career tends to focus on development of the technical aspects of their job. Upon becoming experts in how to perform their job, a shift transpires where soldiers seek to increase their intellectuality and become more adaptive and innovative (Kem et al., 2016). This structured process ensures that service members have the minimum technical skills necessary to perform their primary job responsibilities, before shifting focus into attributes that can be more-broadly applied across disciplines.

The models suggesting a starting point upon which the employee proceeds forward in developing their knowledge and skills within defined areas of expertise offer a clear distinction regarding the end result of expertise. These models suggest that once expertise is achieved, it cannot

be rescinded, whereas other models consider the need to maintain practice at one's craft if expertise is going to be retained (Glasser & Chi, 1988; Herling, 2000; Shanteau, 1992). This second group of models is supported by Herling (2000) who notes expertise is not a fixed state to be attained, meaning that an expert must be dedicated to keeping up to date with their knowledge and skill within a particular area (Glasser & Chi, 1988). Regardless of the model, expertise begins with a learning and information acquisition phase before integration into a more holistic expertise development experience. Grenier and Kehrnhahn's (2008) MER with its three states of expertise redevelopment *dependence* to *independence* and ultimately *transcendence*, when applied to military veterans with recognition of the effect of a change in *environment*, *content*, or *constituency*, can offer a productive way to understand and support veterans as they transition and redevelop their expertise and prepare for non-military careers. Expertise redevelopment is a vital aspect of veteran career transitions. This is because the MER allows us to explain veterans' shifting expertise when moving from the military into civilian employment with the territory of expertise playing perhaps the most significant role in the veteran's expertise transition.

When considering the transition from military to civilian work veterans are, perhaps, best suited for understanding expertise redevelopment through the MER more so than any other employable population. As Grenier and Kehrnhahn (2008) note, "the complexity of influences and the overall context of one's expertise that can challenge an individual's existing knowledge, skills, and knowing" (p. 206). Looking first to the territories of expertise, each territory offers a particular way for translating veterans' expertise while allowing for the natural overlap that occurs when their lived experiences do not sit in any one territory. Such overlap is not uncommon and can have an impact upon the capability one has in employing their expertise as they navigate anew, how to do so in a new territory.

Grenier and Kehrnhahn (2008) use a non-linear model to describe expertise redevelopment. Through the model (see the previous chapter for more details on MER), three contexts comprise the territory of expertise: content, environment, and constituency. These may be independent or dependent of one another, but each can potentially influence the other.

When service members are navigating their military workplace transition to a civilian organization, the contexts identified in the MER are readily apparent. The first context, *content*, “describes the knowledge an individual has to demonstrate a skill and the specific information needed to function in a role” (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008, p. 209). Content represents the subject expertise one has related to a job or role, potentially including functions, procedures, and intended outcomes. For example, a mail carrier is likely required to be an expert in the following content areas: safe handling of packages, operating a mail delivery truck, and scanning packages into the system. Each skill set is appropriate for the job of a mail carrier and is essential to being able to perform their job. Though the content may lead to successful implementation of processes in one setting, that does not suggest the content can be universally applied in all environments. Adaptations or additions to the content may be required in order to successfully apply an individual’s content to a different setting. For example, a soldier who served as a military police officer may receive interrogation training similar to those of civilian police officers. However, the procedures, policies, and guiding principles will likely differ at least somewhat for a state trooper. That soldier’s existing content expertise would require adaptation, as well as redevelopment of new content expertise if they are to operate at an expert level as a state trooper.

The second context, *environment*, details how a change in environment can impact the need for expertise redevelopment. A transition into a new environment impacts how expertise is reapplied, as well as reveals needs for development of new expertise. Environment describes “the locale a person operates within, together with its culture, organizational structure, and geographical location or layout” (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008, p. 209). As such, the environment extends beyond simply starting a similar job at a different company. In fact, a move into a different environment can be completed in many ways including: being transferred to a different city or region, a move into an alternative part of an organization, or shifting work away from a physical to virtual location. This is an experience many service members are familiar with as they are transferred to a new post or begin a new duty. As such, service members may be adept at even small changes in the environment that require them to redevelop expertise.

The last context, *constituents*, addresses how expertise can be impacted by stakeholders who may influence or be influenced by the expert (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008). Even when an individual transitions into a similar work role and industry, those around the individual play a role in shaping the necessary expertise. Examples of these individuals include supervisors, direct reports, peers, clients or customers, and collaborating partners. For example, a commanding officer with extensive experience managing a unit will need time to redevelop that same expertise with a different unit.

While a veteran's expertise in a particular skill may sit at a high level when engaged in the familiar military environment, taking that same skill into a new environment, applying it to new content, and implementing it with a new constituency can have the effect of the veteran appearing to be a novice.

Environment

Even though the new job may be similar, veterans hired into a non-military workplace will likely encounter a distinguishable work environment from the one they were familiar with while serving. The military's structured and disciplined work environment, as well as overall function, is generally a common denominator across service branches and job types. Upon transitioning into a new civilian work environment, veterans may encounter novel environments that will require a redevelopment of expertise. The reason an organization exists can be a key influencer in shaping any work environment. For-profit companies or corporations primarily exist to provide a service or product to society. To survive, these organizations need to eventually make money. Non-profit organizations exist to also provide or produce goods or services, but do not have a profit-building orientation. In that way, the military and non-profit organizations are similar, though the military differs in that its primary purpose is to protect the nation and its allies. The distinct purpose of the military reduces focus on profitability or sustainability and highlights the essential needs to ensure safety and security. Service members transitioning into another work environment may perceive a lack of purpose or

meaning in their work, due to the distinguishable function of a for-profit organization.

The military's structured environment is widely-visible when considering chain of command. In basic training and boot camp, service members are required to learn the rank structure and reporting lines. A superior is identified for the service member, who also provides direction for other points of contact. Essentially, a clear point of contact is always available and service members are very clear about who they report to. A new environment outside of the military might have numerous points of contact, and experience infrequent contact with their superiors. Similarly, the levels of autonomy, amounts of decision making, and required teamwork, among other military attributes, may significantly shift, and make for a more-difficult transition or ability to demonstrate prior expertise.

Constituents

The overarching purpose of the military is to protect the nation's residents. This function is understood across the service branches and remains at the forefront of all operations for service members. Few non-military organizations operate with the same functional purpose. Thus, veterans may not be able to apply existing expertise to this new constituency because of a struggle to reintegrate with a new population who may be motivated by an alternative set of guiding principles, such as status, money, or recognition. When meeting non-military affiliated employees, veterans may find understanding existing workplace stressors that appear insignificant challenging. For example, a veteran with multiple deployments and several combat engagements may struggle to communicate and understand why their counterparts who have not served are highly-stressed because of an approaching deadline. In this and other similar examples, the veterans' expertise may be underutilized because their motivation is lower and impacts their overall performance.

Similar to organizational norms, the new workforce may be less structured, top-heavy, or disciplined. Some of the more common characteristics of the armed forces is the discipline and engrained structure that allows communication to cleanly flow across the organization. Less

structured organizations may leverage word of mouth communication strategies or empower employees to make decisions based on available information. The challenge for veterans becomes redeveloping expertise in order to distinguish appropriate times to expect flexibility and autonomy in decision making and day-to-day operations.

Content

Since expertise in one specialty does not necessarily translate into all contexts, veterans and non-military employers need to consider how content expertise can be adapted to fit the new work environment. This means understanding what content is and is not transferable because whether soft or technical skills, the application of these competencies will differ depending on military and civilian jobs. As we'll see in a case study presented in the next part of this chapter, an 88 M (motor transport operator) is an expert in operating wheeled vehicles over diverse terrains and employing combat defense techniques (Powers, 2019b), but those content and skills are not simply transferred into a non-military role. This is because operating a truck on challenging terrains or using combat defense strategies is not usually necessary when operating a school bus or delivering soda.

Redevelopment of Expertise for Successful Career Transition

The Model of Expertise Redevelopment (MER; Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008) effectively captures both the situation within which the veteran's transition takes place, as well as the impact to the veteran in the experience. For example, as represented by the MER, veterans redeveloping their soft skills expertise for the civilian workforce will need to attend to the differences in territories of expertise (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008). The change of environment and constituency will certainly have an impact on how veterans understand and use their soft skills because "existing knowledge and skill may be unusable after the influence of

contextual forces within the territory” (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008, p. 207). They may also need to alter the content of their soft skills, because although much of the content will remain consistent, in non-military contexts this skill will be enacted differently in new environments with different constituents. For a period of time, these changes will most certainly move a veteran into a state of *dependence* in the MER as they adjust their expertise. Although they will, for example, maintain their expertise in leadership, changes in particular to the environment and constituency means veterans will have to relearn how to lead.

Indeed, because the military is so comprehensive in developing service members in their use of soft skills, there are some veterans who will experience challenges in unlearning and redeveloping soft skills as they adjust their expertise to the non-military environment. As civilian employers become more adept at engaging military veterans in the workplace, they will become more accustomed to providing the opportunities for veterans to practice and perfect their soft skills expertise in growing independence as they move toward full transcendence and are able to fully develop civilian leadership expertise.

The often-unexpected shift in capability with a much-used skill can be both jarring and disheartening for veterans seeking civilian employment. Explained through the MER, this experience of seemingly changed levels of skill competence can be understood “where an expert experiences dramatic shifts in territory requiring an expert to operate in a new state of dependence, moving to independence, and back to transcendence” (Grenier & Kehrhahn, 2008, p. 207). Offering a more productive way of understanding how one’s expertise may change depending on the career transition preparation means that military veterans have a way of revising their capabilities for civilian work. Understanding the natural shift in their expertise may also alleviate much of the anxiety and confusion veterans have about the civilian career transition (Davis & Minnis, 2017; Minnis, 2020). To better understand what these changes mean for veterans’ expertise we now look at a case of veteran transition to civilian work.

A Case Study of Service Member Expertise Redevelopment

Service members become experts at their jobs, called military occupation specialty (MOS), while serving; however, upon transitioning into a new career, that expertise may regress, depending on changes to content, environment, and constituency. Using a scenario of a motor transport operator in the military (known as 88 M MOS), we consider how these three factors impact veterans' expertise post-military service.

The skills learned by motor transport operators in the military are often transferable in a non-military setting. The Army outlines several civilian jobs that can leverage an 88 M's (motor transport operator) skill sets, including working for moving companies, bus companies, and working as tank truck operators. This is because skills such as safely transporting personnel and overseeing proper loading and unloading of materials can be clearly articulated on a resume. Still, one cannot assume that an 88 M is an expert school bus driver since there is new content to learn. During the expertise redevelopment process the 88 M veteran would need to know the proper procedures for transporting children, what to do in the case of an accident, and how to perform maintenance on a school bus. These skills and knowledge extend beyond what was learned and used in the military, but are essential in ensuring a veteran with an 88 M MOS can successfully become a bus driver and once again operate on an expert level.

The military environment is unique from other organizations and thus plays a significant role in how one can translate expertise to non-military workplaces. After serving for years and potentially completing multiple deployments, military culture can become ingrained in how a service member interacts with their environment. The social norms, culture, and physical location of a non-military workplace can lead to a regression of sorts as the former service member acclimates to a new work environment. For instance, because work-life boundaries are largely non-existent in the military, veterans must learn how to navigate the lines between application of their skills in work separately from other areas of their lives. Building on Goffman's (1961) work identifying the military as one

of a number of total institutions, Zurcher (1965) looked at how the military works to indoctrinate members early on into the military's culture in a manner that cannot easily be mirrored in another setting. As such, the most significant challenge for military service members seeking to transition their skills outside the military may be adapting to a new work culture.

Regardless of their previous military jobs, veterans moving into non-military employment settings will find themselves in unfamiliar environments. These new non-military work settings influence the ability of veterans to demonstrate the expertise shown while in the service. As Grenier and Kehrhahn (2008) outlined, environment includes the physical location, organization structure, culture, and layout of an organization. For example, veterans are sometimes perceived as being too rigid or formal (Nagomi & Pick, 2012), at least in part due to their military service experience, so a less regulated or organized work environment encountered in civilian organizations may impact a veteran's ability to demonstrate their expertise. Take a former service member who was an expert Humvee driver in Iraq. It might be assumed they would maintain that level of expertise as a driver for Coca-Cola in the United States; however, roads, safety hazards and risks, and domestic delivery vehicles are all distinct from the experience of driving Humvees in Iraq in a hostile and dangerous environment. The new environment experienced as a delivery driver may call for expertise redevelopment, since things like vehicle safety and operation, the routes and road conditions and the addition of tolls and traffic signals will distinguish an expert truck driver transporting beverages with an expert who is transporting cargo under warlike conditions.

Finally, expertise redevelopment may require adapting to changes in stakeholders. While serving in the military, service members of a particular MOS are perceived as, at a minimum, competent after completing training for their job specialization. Young adults, ranging from 18 to 24 years old, may find themselves responsible for millions of dollars' worth of equipment or a handful of direct reports. By age 30, it is not unrealistic for a Soldier, Marine, Sailor, or Airman to be responsible for 10, 20, or more personnel, all of which is part of the military's continuous investments in the development of its members. The direct reports

are likely to also be young adults—slightly younger than the leader, with slightly less work experience, but near identical training. And in the case of an 88 M, their direct reports likely have similar education backgrounds and frequently associate with other service members. All these characteristics are shared amongst service members due to similar completion of schooling, promotion structure, and the corresponding MOS knowledge, skills, and attitudes. This means the constituency needed for maintaining expertise is consistent, but upon transitioning out of the military, the work community of a motor truck operator shifts significantly.

Bus operators who previously were 88Ms face a significantly distinct constituency from the military. In a new role, such as a school bus driver or shuttle drive for senior citizens the primary constituency becomes children or the elderly. Thus, expert communication strategies used in the military must be altered for a new population. Colorful language considered acceptable in the military or jargon is no longer appropriate. At the same time, the passengers may be less aware of their surroundings or the general safety requirements when riding in a vehicle. That means veterans who transition into a bus operator role will need to re-learn how to effectively communicate with passengers. To do so, they may need to learn the local phrases or names of neighborhoods passengers are familiar with, develop new generation-specific knowledge, or find ways to present expectations for riding the bus that are age appropriate. For example, disciplining a direct report in the military may include assigning extra duty, a write up, or demotion, but that will not work with civilians. The expert driver will know that a child may simply need to be scolded, moved to a new location on the bus, or told to sit silently in order to address the issue.

Valuing Military Veterans' Expertise for Civilian Employment

Veterans are often credited by non-military employers as having desirable skills that can be leveraged in the traditional workplace (Kirchner & Akdere, 2019). The training received extends beyond what service members' similarly-aged civilian counterparts generally receive (McCausland

et al., 2017). During basic training and job specialty schooling and through years of direct experience, the knowledge and skills developed are continuously refined. As a result, service members preparing to transition have a distinct advantage when applying for civilian employment (McCausland et al., 2017). So while expertise developed in the military is widely regarded as transferable in the non-military workplace (Kirchner & Akdere, 2019; McCausland et al., 2017), translating and transferring knowledge and skills developed while serving is a challenge for veterans (Kirchner & O'Connor, 2018).

Recent years have seen significant improvements on the military side of the transition with programs and services established to help service members acclimate to the civilian side. Whereas previous generations received little if any support, today's service members often begin their transition process no later than 90 days prior to their exit date (Kamarck, 2018). During the transition, service members are informed about their education options and benefits, their career options, short-term training programs available, all while being taught how to successfully transition out of the military (Kamarck, 2018). Though the impact of investing in transition programs has been mostly overlooked, it remains important to consider each of the options available.

In 2011, the US Department of Defense developed a new transition assistance program (TAP) intended to support exiting veterans by helping them prepare for post-military life (Kamarck, 2018). Service members receive training around core topics, such as finances, family adjustments, and mentorship; career-related workshops, including job searching and resume building; and an elective component emphasizing in higher education, work, or as an entrepreneur (Stull, Herd, & Kirchner, 2020). During TAP, service members are exposed to new job fields and may even have the opportunity to participate in an employer-sponsored career skills program, which provides extended training for those who have a clear idea of their next career path. This cumulative approach has assuaged many of the transition issues service members face; however, time and resource constraints, combined with a plausible lack of direction on the transitioning service member, can still lead to many struggling to successfully transition.

Veterans who do not communicate their expertise to potential employers risk being screened out of career transition opportunities for which they could compete. Likewise, managers who do not understand how expertise can be redeveloped may miss candidates who could fulfill organizational needs and set a deep bench of talent. While we advocate for veterans to have a clearer understanding of how they can apply the concept of expertise redevelopment in changing careers, we also believe that non-military employers must understand how to conceptualize work from a skills-based perspective and recognize the value of skills expertise gained through different kinds of functional tasks. As such, we now consider the role of the veteran and the organization in supporting veterans' expertise redevelopment for civilian employment.

The Veteran's Role

Veterans often lack the knowledge about how to construct a skills-based resume to highlight their expertise garnered through military experience. Instead, veterans' resumes tend to focus on the functional tasks completed in addition to the awards received, which does little to identify for potential employers their potential capability to use their expertise in civilian employment. Veterans often do not conceptualize their military work in terms of skills or skills-based expertise which adds to the difficulty that employers have in understanding veterans' resumes in hiring processes.

In order to most effectively present themselves as exceptional candidates for civilian work, veterans need to understand how to separate the skills expertise from the functional tasks. Though still a pressing need, training or education about how to construct an expertise-focused resume is provided in TAP as service members prepare to exit the military. Additionally, in response to the challenges expressed by veterans in not being able to find adequate civilian employment, along with civilian employers' difficulty in making sense of veterans' experience in military work, the Department of Labor and a number of non-profit organizations began developing services aimed at filling the experience translation gap. Veterans can find effective information for understanding the skills

expertise used in their military service through sources like O*Net and CareerOneStop, which provide military work translators that separate skills and knowledge gained through military work from the functional tasks completed in the job (Davis & Minnis, 2017). By giving veterans the ability to conceptualize their military work through the lens of skills expertise, these kinds of resources provide the tools needed for veterans to reframe their resumes and better understand the value of their work as it can be applied in the civilian workforce.

Additionally, veterans need to be honest with themselves and the organizations they apply to about their expertise. Determination of one's current level of expertise requires objectivity and established standards, which presents a unique challenge for veterans and their employers.

Regardless of the job or organization, any new employee—veteran or non-veteran—can enter the workplace with a high level of confidence in their abilities. When new employees perceive themselves as experts at a job early on, there are at least two potential consequences: (1) they may overlook the necessary training which will allow them to integrate existing skills into the organization and (2) their colleagues, supervisors, and direct reports may perceive them as closed-minded or arrogant about their level of expertise, potentially causing conflict among the groups.

The Organization's Role

Interest in hiring military veterans has grown and changed over time with the amount of ongoing training and education conducted by the military supporting service members' knowledge and skills has made their expertise highly sought-after. Veterans have been identified as effective candidates for non-military employment due to their positive interpersonal attributes as well as their ability to raise the level of professionalism of those around them by engaging the skills expertise acquired through their military work. Indeed, it is this expertise they will be reliant upon to engage future employment.

Recently, employers have focused on establishing military veteran hiring initiatives because of the value veterans bring to the workplace (Kirchner & Minnis, 2018; Pollak, Arshanapalli, Hobson, 2019).

Perspectives on hiring veterans in the civilian employment community have changed in the intervening years as employer understanding about the value of veterans' transferrable skills and capabilities has evolved. Early focus of veteran hiring as troops began exiting the Post 9/11 wars was in the area of law enforcement as the understanding of veterans' transferable skills had not yet taken hold. One of the first research articles addressing veterans' post-military employment needs in the career-oriented literature looked at veterans transitioning into federal jobs, which at the time were seen as a fit for their overall expertise and knowledge (Orlando, 2007). Additionally, attention to the needs of veterans with disabilities increased, with a focus on returning injured veterans to work while making use of their skills and abilities gained through military service (Rogan, Banks, & Herbein, 2003).

Civilian employers can take a number of steps to better identify and support military veterans' expertise redevelopment. From the initial job announcement to onboarding, hiring practices that recognize veterans' expertise can be adapted to provide opportunities for them to be more effectively engaged in the selection and hiring process. More clearly understanding the expertise veterans bring to civilian employment and the diverse ways in which their expertise can be redeveloped will enable civilian recruiters and human resources practitioners to make better selection and hiring decisions.

First, veterans need to be received as experts within their fields. A substantial transition issue relates to veterans being offered employment that does not utilize their expertise (Prudential, 2012). Consider, for example, a 28-year-old Army veteran, who served three tours in Iraq, was responsible for the safety of ten soldiers and successfully executed 30 combat missions. While this level of responsibility and accomplishment is tremendous for someone under 30 years of age, a civilian job rarely requires similar levels of responsibility, potentially impacting the perceived qualifications of the veteran applicant. For a constituent who only sees limited professional work experience, the described soldier might be viewed as a qualified candidate for an internship. This challenge is frequently encountered by those leaving the military.

Expert performance is more difficult to evaluate when the work is centered on people as opposed to specific objects or events (Grenier &

Kehrhahn, 2008). Although veterans are frequently credited with soft skills, articulating and clearly defending them on a resume or during an interview is more difficult. As Kirchner and Akdere (2019) found, veterans may struggle to distinguish the knowledge, skills, and abilities acquired during military service. Further contributing toward potential transition challenges, veterans may be hard-pressed to defend the soft skills they report having on their resume, which no doubt influences their likely job prospects with non-military employers. Skills translators, among other resources, are continually being developed and refined to help reduce the likelihood of a similar encounter with future job applicants who are military veterans with limited non-military professional work experience.

Alternately, job descriptions may be written to reflect the functional tasks of positions with less attention paid to the depth and breadth of skills required to effectively do the work of the position (Rios, Ling, Pugh, Becker, & Bacall, 2020). While noting perfunctory skills such as timeliness, effective communication, and use of general computer programs many job descriptions may not elucidate the necessary finer skills and expertise. Broadly constructed position descriptions lack clarity about the level and type of expertise needed which means there may be no effective basis for veterans to consider how their expertise might apply to the intended work. The lack of articulation of desired skills expertise results in civilian employers' inability to access effective candidates with sought after, highly developed soft and technical skills (Davis & Minnis, 2017).

Employers can also do more to develop a better understanding of the ways in which the expertise gained through military work can be viewed in their organizations. While they should not need to comprehensively know each aspect of military jobs, it would be beneficial for those responsible for reviewing and evaluating candidate expertise to understand how to effectively interrogate veterans' resumes for skills expertise rather than a cursory review of functional tasks. When the candidate is a veteran, the resume may appear to be a list of entirely unrelated tasks, awards, and abbreviations, but there is valuable expertise to be uncovered. As Davis and Minnis (2017) note, it is veterans' soft skills, which are easier to recognize and evaluate from the employers' perspectives, but it is the full

value of veterans' expertise, which they bring to bear as they move forward in their career transition.

Soft Skills Expertise

Some of the expertise most highly-sought by those interested in hiring military veterans are the soft skills gained through work in the military (Davis & Minnis, 2017). Current research (Hardison et al., 2017; Kirchner & O'Connor, 2018) and practitioner-oriented guidance focuses on veterans re-engaging in the workforce through application of their soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication, and decision making as these represent some of the most needed and highly desired qualities of today's employees. With the potential to be high contributors in organizations, employers need to be attentive to the ways in which a veteran's soft skills expertise might relate in the non-military environment. For instance, soft skills such as leadership and teamwork may look very different in practice outside of the military. In the military, leadership means being fully responsible for the lives and equipment of all those under one's command. In many cases, even lower ranking service members leading others have responsibility for multiple lives and tens of thousands of dollars' worth of equipment at all times. Thus, decisions made by service members often have significant implications for the life and safety of themselves and those they are leading. This is a decidedly different aspect of leadership than most employers expect from job seekers, yet with the redevelopment of that expertise, the veteran is likely to be a strong leader and manager in the company.

As noted previously, service members undergo significant training and ongoing education in their technical fields. Expertise is the standard they must meet in order for the military to determine they are capable in their jobs. Indeed, expertise in one's job can often have life-and-death implications on the battlefield, on the deck of an aircraft carrier, or in a medical unit. Training is done until the service member no longer needs to think about the technical task itself and can attend to the tertiary soft skills of decision making, leadership, or communication. And much like the technical aspects of riding a bicycle, service members are able to accurately

describe, or do, the task for which they were trained long after they have left the military. Unlike soft skills, however, most service members will not continue to engage their specific military job expertise once they leave military service. For example, a retired fighter pilot can't get the same job once they retire from the Air Force, but that doesn't mean that the technical skills of piloting an aircraft and maintaining flight safety can't be identified by an employer in Kansas looking for a crop dusting pilot.

We believe that for veterans to effectively engage in career transition from military to civilian work, employers must be able to understand the expertise redevelopment process. In doing so, non-military employers can mediate the impact of the transition and support the redevelopment of veterans' soft and technical skills expertise for the benefit of the organization.

Conclusion

Applications of military expertise in the non-military workplace have been mostly overlooked by scholars, which limits our knowledge of how veterans leverage their service experience after leaving the military. Whereas constituents, environment, and content each factor into the transfer expertise, their influence may not be unilaterally felt by veterans. Scholars and practitioners would benefit from exploring the comparative effects of the three areas of expertise on veteran career transitions, as findings could influence the development of future onboarding programs for military veterans. There may also be additional challenges not yet identified for military veterans regarding how they leverage their expertise in the non-military workplace. Study results could further shape our understanding of the barriers to successful career transitions and inform new workplace integration strategies. Finally, research examining strategies used by veterans to redevelop and leverage expertise in the non-military workplace may influence how non-military organizations utilize the skill sets of their veteran employee population.

As discussed in this chapter, there are challenges to the way in which military veterans' expertise is conceptualized by the veterans themselves,

as well as by the non-military employers hiring for the job-openings veterans are seeking following military service. Being able to effectively articulate and engage their previous expertise in soft and technical skills is vital for veterans to make a successful transition to civilian employment. Doing so is also an important part of veterans' overall understanding of the value they bring and shift in confidence they may experience as they find new ways to use their skills. Given the importance of this transition, we believe the MER is a useful way for military veterans' skill transition to be represented. As further research into the military veteran to civilian transition is explored, the MER can provide a useful perspective to explore expertise utilization, development, and redevelopment involving former service members which includes challenges that need to be considered. Although scholars recognize the need to cultivate expertise in individuals, understanding *how* to retain and redevelop expertise—especially with military veterans—requires further discussion (Grenier and Kehrhahn, 2008).

A better understanding of the influence of a veteran's new environment, new constituents, and new content acquired may be useful in engaging military expertise but remains a challenge for all involved stakeholder groups. The translation of military expertise in non-military organizations requires further scrutiny from the military, veterans, non-military employers, and society at large. Unrealistic expectations or assumptions about retained expertise may impair the likelihood that veterans will be able to transition and redevelop their expertise and that non-military employers will be able to effectively recognize and make use of veterans' expertise. Given the importance of veterans effectively transitioning into civilian employment and making use of their skills gained through military experience, it will be important for research to continue exploring how the MER can be applied to understanding veterans' transition from military to civilian work.

References

- Akhdar, A. (2019, May 27). 9 incredibly successful companies founded by military veterans. *Business Insider*. Retrieved from <https://www.businessinsider.com/companies-started-by-military-veterans-2016-11>
- Bialik, K. (2017, November 10). *The changing face of America's veteran population*. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/10/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/>
- Davis, V. E., & Minnis, S. E. (2017). Military veterans' transferable skills: An HRD practitioner dilemma. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 19(1), 6–13.
- Department of the Army. (2015). ADRP 1: The army profession. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/adrp1.pdf>.
- Department of the Army. (2019). ADP 6-22 Army leadership and the profession. Department of the Army Headquarters. https://fas.org/irp/doddir/army/adp6_22.pdf.
- Department of Defense. (2020). *DoD personnel, workforce reports & publications*. Retrieved from https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/dwp/dwp_reports.jsp
- Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). National center for veterans analysis and statistics. Veteran population. Retrieved January 19, 2021, from https://va.gov/vetdata/veteran_population.asp.
- Glaser, R., & Chi, M. T. H. (1988). Overview. In M. T. H. Chi, R. Glaser, & M. J. Farr (Eds.), *The nature of expertise* (pp. 143–172). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday & Co.
- Grenier, R. S., & Kehrhahn, M. (2008). Toward an integrated model of expertise redevelopment and its implications for HRD. *Human Resource Development Review*, 7(2), 198–217.
- Hardison, C. M., McCausland, T. C., Shanley, M. G., Saavedra, A. R., Clague, A., Crowley, J. C., Martin, J., Wong, J., & Steinberg, P. S. (2017). *What veterans bring to civilian workplaces: A prototype toolkit for helping private-sector employers understand the nontechnical skill developed in the military*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation Santa Monica United States.
- Harrell, M. C., & Berglass, N. (2012). *Employing America's veterans: Perspectives from businesses*. Center for a New American Society. Retrieved from <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/employing-americas-veterans-perspectives-from-businesses>
- Herling, R. W. (2000). Operational definitions of expertise and competence. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 2(1), 8–21.

- Kamarck, K. N. (2018). *Military transition assistance program (TAP): An overview* (CRS in focus, IF10347). Congressional Research Service (CRS). Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF10347.pdf>
- Kem, J. S., LeBoeuf, E. J., & Martin, J. B. (2016). Answering the hottest question in army education: What is Army University? *Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 64*(3), 139–143.
- Kirchner, M. J., & Akdere, M. (2014). Examining leadership development in the U.S. Army within the human resource development context: Implications for security and defense strategies. *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis, 26*(3), 351–369.
- Kirchner, M., & Akdere, M. (2019). An empirical investigation of the acquisition of leadership KSAs in the U.S. Army: Implications for veterans' career transitions. *Journal of Veterans Studies, 4*(1), 110–127.
- Kirchner, M., & Minnis, S. (2018). Engaging military friendly in organizations: An empirical-based definition. *Journal of Veterans Studies, 3*(2), 94–108.
- Kirchner, M., & O'Connor, K. (2018). Incorporating reflection exercises to identify soft skills in Army education. *Journal of Military Learning, 47*–57.
- Kirchner, M. J. (2018). Veteran as leader: The lived experience with Army leader development. *Human Resource Development Journal, 29*(1), 67–85.
- Knowles, M., Holton, E., & Swanson, R. A. (2014). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (7th ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Macmillan Dictionary. (n.d.). *Soft skills*. Retrieved from <https://www.macmillandictionary.com/us/dictionary/american/soft-skills>
- McCausland, T. C., Shanley, M. G., Hardison, C. M., Saavedra, A. R., Clague, A., Crowley, J. C., Martin, J., Wong, J. P., & Steinberg, P. S. (2017). *What veterans bring to civilian workplaces: A prototype toolkit for helping private-sector employers understand the nontechnical skills developed in the military*. RAND Corporation. Retrieved from <https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL160z1-1.html>
- Millet, A. R., & Maslowski, P. (1994). *For the common defense: A military history of the United States of America*. New York: The Free Press.
- Minnis, S. E. (2020). Fostering infantry veterans' civilian cultural adaptation for employment. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 2020*(166), 11–24.
- Nagomi, L., & Pick, D. (2012). 5 reasons why employers are not hiring vets. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Retrieved from blogs.va.gov/VAntage/7232/5-reasons-why-employers-are-not-hiring-vets/.

- Orlando, D. P. (2007). Uniform to business suit: Helping the military professional transition to federal employment. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 23(3), 67.
- Pierson, D. (2017). Reengineering army education for adult learners. *Journal of Military Learning*, 31–43.
- Pollak, M., Arshanapalli, B., & Hobson, C. (2019). The business case for hiring military veterans/reservists: Stock price performance of military friendly firms. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 4(2), 52–63.
- Powers, R. (2019a, June 18). *Complete list of Army enlisted MOS*. The Balance Careers. Retrieved from <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/complete-list-of-army-enlisted-mos-s-3346173>
- Powers, R. (2019b, October 7). *What does a U.S. Army 88M motor transport operator do?* Retrieved from <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/88m-motor-transport-operator-3346094>
- Prudential. (2012). Veterans' employment challenges: Perceptions and experiences of transitioning from military to civilian life. Retrieved from <https://www.prudential.com/documents/public/VeteransEmploymentChallenges.pdf>.
- Rios, J. A., Ling, G., Pugh, R., Becker, D., & Bacall, A. (2020). Identifying critical 21st-century skills for workplace success: A content analysis of job advertisements. *Educational Researcher*, 49(2), 80–89.
- Rogan, P., Banks, B., & Herbein, M. H. (2003). Supported employment and workplace supports: A qualitative study. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 19(1), 5–18.
- Schultz, J. (2017, November 10). *Veterans by the numbers*. National Conference for State Legislatures. Retrieved from <https://www.ncsl.org/blog/2017/11/10/veterans-by-the-numbers.aspx>
- Shanteau, J. (1992). The psychology of experts: An alternative review. In G. Wright & F. Bolger (Eds.), *Expertise and decision support* (pp. 12–21). New York: Plenum.
- Stull, F., Herd, A., & Kirchner, M. (2020). Learning challenges faced by transitioning military service members. *Journal of Military Learning*, 2–22.
- Weisul, K. (2016 October). *Where are all the missing veteran-owned businesses*. Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/magazine/201610/kimberly-weisul/missing-veteran-owned-businesses.html>
- Zurcher, L. A., Jr. (1965). The sailor aboard ship: A study of role behavior in a total institution. *Social Forces*, 43(3), 389–400.