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Employability of Returning Iraq Veterans



White Paper # 07-08-01

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February 1, 2008

Background

The Iraq War is the first modern era, major conflict fought by the United States in which the draft has not been employed. For the National Guard this deployment is unusual. Many Guard units have not been deployed since WWII (Buchholz, p. 2). The wide use of the reserve component of the armed forces of the United States is a “shift in national thinking” that redefines the reserve from a strategic reserve housed in the Continental United States to an “operationally ready and relevant force” (Buchholz, p. 2) to be deployed, as active soldiers, around the world.

Since the draft was eliminated in 1973, today’s regular military personnel are volunteers; they know they may be called to active duty. In contrast, for National Guard members, activation is *involuntary* (Buchholz, p. 5). Mobilization pulls them from their careers, employers and families from 7 to 18 months depending on branch of service. This activation is also unique because a significant number of these service members come from the same community. They are sent overseas and return home as a unit. This decision to pull people from their communities can have significant economic impact. Deployment has also become recurring. Some veterans who hold critical Military Occupation Specialties (MOS) have been deployed more than once in a four year period. All these individuals leave their work and return after their tours of duty with changed insights and views of life (Buchholz, p. 162).

Need for Study

The Department of Defense works to support deployments through the Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR). On its web page (<http://www.esgr.net/about.asp>), the DOD helps to “Gain and maintain active support from all public and private employers for the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve” (Mission Statement). Generally, the ESGR seeks to make it easy for reservists to serve and employers to support their service. The extent to which ESGR helps both employers and reservists utilize the deployment experience in support of organizational effectiveness remains an unanswered question.

Existing preliminary data indicates that significant numbers of enlisted veterans have or are pursuing degrees in business and are managers in firms they work for. Considerable numbers of officers (with college degrees) are corporate managers and resume their management careers upon return from deployment. Given the intensity and life-changing feelings that comes with deployment, there is solid reason to believe that both enlisted and officer women and men possess insights into human behavior unique to their military experience. They have been challenged to think differently and they see their civilian world with different “values glasses.” They have been forced to confront their own personal strengths and weaknesses in ways that their civilian world employment would never have challenged them. Most importantly, *understanding the nature of insight depth and breadth will yield revised management and leadership processes which should directly affect the organizational bottom line.*

Research Hypothesis

Military experience changes individuals in way that negatively impact their employability.

Research Questions

1. How does war/reserve military experience impact the work lives of returning veterans?
2. What are the reactions of returning veterans to civilian authority?

3. How can employers facilitate the transition from military service to work and benefit organizationally from the process?

Target Audiences

There are three primary stakeholder groups that must be integrated into this study: (1), the appropriate Federal and State government agencies who deal with veterans and veteran affairs; (2), the veterans themselves; and (3) the employers who support them.

Research Methodology

This research is proposed as involving a two stage process. Stage One is a Pilot Program focused on veterans in the State of Wisconsin. This first study will utilize both qualitative and quantitative research instruments. These instruments include but are not limited to the following:

1. Document Review (statistics and literature)
2. Surveys
3. Interviews
4. Observations
5. Focus Groups
6. Meetings
7. Case Studies
8. Delphi Techniques

The Stage One study customizes the appropriate research tools and provides the focus for recruiting, training, and fielding a research team. This team supports further research. Stage Two extends the initial results beyond Wisconsin to increase the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the initial results to a larger audience.

Research Team

This research requires collaboration with appropriate agencies, institutions, veterans' organizations, and individuals with both experiential and academic expertise. The project research team includes personnel with the following expertise:

1. Business Professor (Lifvendahl)
2. Returning Veteran(s) (To be Recruited)
3. Research Methodologist (To be Recruited)
4. Corporate Human Resources Professional (To be Recruited)
5. Psychiatrist/Psychologist (To be Recruited)
6. Other

References

Buchholz, B. (2007). *Private soldiers: A year in Iraq with a Wisconsin National Guard unit*. Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

Department of Defense. (2007). *Employer support of the guard and reserve*. Web site address <http://www.esgr.net/about.asp>. Acquired November 18, 2007.