Hiring Heroes: Employer Perceptions, Preferences, and Hiring Practices Related to U.S. Military Personnel
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background
• Military personnel face many challenges competing for and transitioning into civilian jobs.
• Unemployment rates for recent veterans are significantly higher than rates for other veterans and the civilian population.
• Empirical research on specific success criteria for transitioning into a civilian career is limited; most literature on how employers perceive military applicants is anecdotal, and so a comprehensive understanding of what employers value and do not value in military personnel is needed.
• Educators and those providing educational and career guidance need to be equipped with information that can better help military personnel understand the perceptions, preferences, and hiring practices of civilian employers.

Purpose
• The purpose of the current quantitative exploratory research was to (a) better understand employer perceptions, preferences, and hiring practices with regard to military personnel; and (b) provide useful information to individuals charged with helping servicemen and servicewomen transition into civilian occupations.
• Results of the current study enhance understanding of employer perspectives and preferences, which may impact hiring practices related to military personnel.

Method
• An online survey was sent to a random sample of more than 20,000 employers across industries.
• To narrow the sampled panelists to only those who met the population criteria, screening questions were included at the beginning of the survey.
• Completed surveys were received from 831 survey respondents who were employed as managers, or in higher-level positions, and were regularly involved in employee recruiting and hiring.

Results
• Results of the study revealed four important themes: (1) military experience is highly valued and viewed positively by employers; (2) military leadership skills are highly valued and transferable to civilian leadership jobs; (3) when compared with civilian employees, veterans, reservists, and National Guard members were frequently perceived to perform better on a wide variety of work-related characteristics (e.g., teamwork, reliability, work ethic); and (4) a college degree is perceived to add significant value to applicants with military experience; however, majoring in a specific area is not critical for career success.
• Results were further analyzed by a variety of respondent demographics and groupings, revealing some important differences in perceptions by group.
Conclusions and Implications

• Results from the current study will be helpful to educators, individuals providing guidance and support to military personnel entering the job market, and organizations competing for talent. Given the slow recovery of the U.S. economy and the number of personnel returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, results of the current study have clear implications for military personnel.

• While civilian employers greatly value military character, other attributes such as transferable skills and higher education could be critical in overcoming employers’ concerns in the hiring process.

• In a highly competitive labor market, military personnel need to become adept at effectively translating and communicating their experience, training, leadership skills, and other qualities to potential employers. Job search efforts should be focused on industries and companies that have pro-military hiring policies and a direct need for military-trained personnel.
Hiring Heroes: Employer Perceptions, Preferences, and Hiring Practices Related to U.S. Military Personnel

Veterans, reservists, and National Guard members face many challenges competing for and transitioning into civilian jobs. Unemployment rates for veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are significantly higher than rates for other veterans and the civilian population. Reasons for the disparity are diverse—injuries suffered on the battlefield, difficulty translating military experience to employers, not enough transition assistance from the military, and negative stereotypes about these veterans’ skills and emotional stability (Kleykamp, 2009; O’Keefe, Birger, & Burke, 2010; Unemployment Rates Are High, 2011; Ure, 2010). Evidence exists, however, that some of these challenges will dissipate as more organizations look to gain a strategic advantage by recruiting and hiring from the military, especially for leadership roles (G.I. Jobs, 2011; O’Keefe et al., 2010).

Given the potential influx of military personnel transitioning into civilian careers as a result of the U.S. withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan, a significant amount of career guidance and training will need to be provided to these individuals (Maxwell, 2011). A consistent challenge is understanding employers’ criteria for success so any coaching and guidance will result in better hiring rates. Some important data to gather include the (a) positive and negative beliefs employers have about military personnel that could affect hiring, (b) critical work characteristics/attributes and skills that military personnel can use to naturally differentiate themselves from the general population, and (c) value and impact of higher-level education. The current study attempts to fill this void in the literature by surveying employers on their perceptions, preferences, and hiring practices related to military personnel.

The report begins with a general review of the literature on military personnel transitioning into the civilian workforce—specifically, employment issues faced by veterans, reservists, and National Guard members; trends in hiring; and employers’ perceived value of military experience. The Purpose section includes the research purpose and guiding research questions. The Method section includes a description of the target population, the derived sample, and the data collection process. The Results section includes demographics of the respondents, overall findings for key items in the survey, and statistical comparisons across demographic groupings. Finally, the Discussion section includes the implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further research.

BACKGROUND

Unemployment Trends of Military Personnel

As the employment landscape becomes more competitive, it poses a greater challenge for all entering the workforce, including military personnel. Employment statistics for the most recent group of veterans (Iraq War–era) indicate that these veterans are most at risk compared with veterans from previous eras. The unemployment figure among this group averaged 11.5% in 2010, compared to 8.7% for all other veterans, and has been consistently higher than the rate for other veteran groups for several years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). Current and past members of the Reserve and National Guard also had high levels of unemployment (14%), according to a July 2010 survey (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The reasons given for the disparity between recent veterans (including Reserve and Guard) and those from previous eras are diverse—injuries suffered on the battlefield, difficulty translating military experience to employers, not enough transition assistance from the military, employer concerns about time away from the job and potential calls to active duty, and negative stereotypes about veterans’ skills.
and emotional stability (Kleykamp, 2009; O’Keefe et al., 2010; Unemployment Rates Are High, 2011; Ure, 2010). In addition to these challenges, only 23% of Iraq War veterans had college degrees, compared with 27% for all veterans (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). The data also indicate that overall, veterans, reservists, and Guard members without degrees have significantly higher unemployment rates than those with degrees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). According to Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2010), jobs requiring a college degree will increase from 59% to 63% in the next 10 years, posing a significant challenge for all entering the labor market, including military personnel.

An argument exists, however, that the statistics for the most recent veterans are perfectly normal and can be due to several factors. For example, job searches take time, many recent veterans are taking time off before pursuing careers, and many are going back to school (Black & Lane, 2007; G.I. Jobs, 2011). The point can be made that in the long term military experience and training actually enhance employability. The statistics support this notion as the average unemployment rate over the past 20–30 years for all veterans has been lower than the rate for the general population—8.7% in 2010, versus 9.4% currently (G.I. Jobs, 2011).

An empirical study on the effects of prior military experience on hiring for entry-level jobs sheds some light on the extent to which a military background is beneficial to employment (Kleykamp, 2009). The results suggest that veterans fare just as well as, and in some cases, better than their civilian counterparts in the hiring process, particularly when their skills are highly transferable (e.g., clerical military experience to clerical civilian job). African American veterans with clerical experience seem to benefit the most as they are preferred over their civilian counterparts (non-veteran African Americans) applying for the same job. When the skills are not highly transferable (e.g., veteran combat experience vs. clerical civilian job), veterans are at a disadvantage, and employers favor civilians in the hiring process (Kleykamp, 2009). This finding is significantly pronounced for African American veterans, as they receive no preference in the hiring process compared with their civilian counterparts or White and Hispanic veterans (Kleykamp, 2009). These results, therefore, suggest that the type of training and experience gained in the military has an effect on employer perceptions of employee qualifications. They also suggest that race plays a role in how employers perceive the transferability of military experience.

**Negative Stereotypes of Military Personnel**

While the military has consistently produced top-notch talent in the civilian world (G.I. Jobs, 2011; Zicarelli, 2006), employers have held onto a variety of negative stereotypes about the skills and attributes of military personnel. In a 1995 report to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the experience of veterans seeking private sector jobs, research uncovered a corporate bias against veterans (Wesley, Brown, & Bartle Company, Inc., 1995). Researchers claim that this bias still exists today to some degree and is a result of several historical events and demographic changes in the human resources (HR) ranks of companies.

The corporate bias can be traced to the 1960s, when the unpopularity of the Vietnam conflict negatively affected the public’s perceptions of Vietnam veterans. In 1971, the military became an all-volunteer force, and corporations became less aware of the military skills that transfer easily to civilian jobs. As a result, those making hiring decisions had no experience with career military people and were screening them out well before the interview stage. Today, 1 in 150 corporate executives has a military background, but in HR the ratio is 1 in 600. Furthermore, since 1995, the HR field has become younger and predominantly female, which potentially increases the unfamiliarity with the capabilities and makeup of candidates with military experience (Zicarelli, 2006).

One pervasive stereotype is that military personnel are inflexible, lack innovation, and are unable to adapt. Before 2003, this stereotype may have been partly true, but this is changing as the complexity and ambiguity of the Iraq conflict has required soldiers and officers to take the initiative, make decisions in times of chaos, and execute counterinsurgency strategies while engaging in nation-building operations (Wong, 2004). Employers have taken note, and are seeing the overlap between the ambiguities faced in war and those being increasingly faced in the rapidly changing business world.
Changes in Employer Perceptions of Military Personnel

Growing evidence exists that organizations increasingly see employees with a military background as a strategic advantage (O'Keefe et al., 2010). In 2008, Wal-Mart was faced with a leadership crisis: It needed to hire hundreds of managers for its rapid store expansion, and could no longer rely on promoting from within or wooing talent from other retailers. One solution was to begin recruiting junior military officers (JMOs) to fill junior leadership roles. The idea was that these individuals were already trained to lead and were “battle-tested.” All the company needed to do was to teach them how to manage a retail business. To date, the initial program of 150 officers has been a great success, and Wal-Mart has now modified and expanded its military recruiting strategy to encompass all levels and divisions of the business (O'Keefe et al., 2010).

There is a growing notion among headhunters and HR executives that young veterans who have led units into battle have leadership skills far beyond those of their civilian peers. The experience of exhibiting leadership in life and death situations, combined with a college education, elevates these young veterans to star status (O'Keefe et al., 2010). Home Depot has also recognized the capabilities of military personnel and has incorporated veteran recruitment into its strategic plan. Since 2004 more than 60,000 veterans, reservists, and National Guard members have been hired by the organization (Home Depot Military Commitments, 2010).

Further evidence of the changing trend in how employers view military personnel can be drawn from the list of “Top Military Friendly Employers” that appears periodically. This list has grown significantly from Top 10 in 2003, to Top 50 in 2006, to Top 100 in 2011 (G.I. Jobs, 2011). Companies in the Fortune 500, including Home Depot, Lowe’s, AT&T, Bank of America, PepsiCo, GE, and Merck, appear on this list. According to the Top 100 list, 23% of new hires were military veterans, up from 20% in 2010, and almost all companies had at least one hiring manager dedicated to recruiting military personnel. A telling sign of the value of these employees to corporations is that 78% of companies on the list pay the difference between military and civilian salaries when Guard and Reserve members are deployed (G.I. Jobs, 2011).

While many employers are now increasingly interested in hiring military personnel, at the highest levels of corporate leadership, CEOs with military backgrounds have been a constant and are overrepresented in the S&P 500 (Korn/Ferry International, 2005). As of 2005, 12% of CEOs in the S&P 500 were veterans, and 8.4% of them were military officers, compared to only 3% of all enlisted males who served as officers (Korn/Ferry International, 2005). Korn/Ferry’s research indicates that CEOs with military service had longer average tenures than those without military service (7.2 vs. 4.6 years), and that organizations in the S&P 500 with veteran CEOs at the helm outperformed their counterparts each year over a 10-year period (Korn/Ferry International, 2005).

In summary, while a potential problem exists for recent veterans in finding jobs, there is a growing indication that organizations are increasingly recognizing the advantages of recruiting and hiring these individuals, especially for leadership roles. More empirical research is needed, however, to better understand these trends.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the current quantitative study was to (a) add to the research by examining employer perceptions and hiring practices related to veterans, reservists, and Guard members, and (b) provide useful information to individuals charged with helping servicemen and servicewomen transition into civilian occupations. The study was guided by five research questions:

1. What is the degree of affective/emotional response employers have towards the military?
2. To what degree are employers concerned about hiring military personnel?
3. How valuable and transferable is military leadership experience to civilian leadership jobs?

4. Are employees with military backgrounds superior to civilian employees on critical work characteristics/attributes?

5. How is higher-level education perceived by employers of military personnel?

**METHOD**

**Population**

The population of participants in the current study was drawn from MarketTools Zoom Panel, whose role is to pre-identify potential participants based on research criteria and ensure that survey participants are real and are of high quality (MarketTools, Inc., 2011). Surveys were sent to over 20,000 potential respondents who met four criteria: (a) at least 18 years of age, (b) employed as managers or higher, (c) regularly involved in personnel recruiting and hiring, and (d) represented a broad range of industries.

**Data Collection**

Respondents were asked to complete a 40-item survey (see Appendix). Items focused on topics related to the five research questions. In addition to items related to these topics, respondents were asked to answer several demographic and grouping questions (e.g., age, experience, job level, industry). For most items, respondents rated their degree of agreement (6-point Likert-type scale with a “cannot rate” option) or extent to which they agreed with or believed the item statement (4-point Likert-type scale with “cannot rate” option). A 5-point comparison scale was used for the subset of items comparing employees with military experience and civilian employees.

Data were collected over a 5-day period using Zoomerang’s online survey research software. For each survey, participants received an email that included a hyperlink to the survey. Prior to accessing the survey, participants were asked to read an informed consent form. Only participants who provided informed consent received access to the survey.

Upon providing consent, participants were asked a screening question to ensure they met the research criteria. Participants who did not meet the criteria were screened out and thanked for their time. Those meeting the criteria were given access to complete the survey. Statistical analyses conducted on the survey data include descriptive statistics (frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, measures of central tendency, and inferential statistics; e.g., t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square). Overall results are presented for key items across all respondents, and then comparative analyses are presented to assess differences in responses for select demographic and grouping variables.

**RESULTS**

**Sample Demographics**

Completed surveys were received from 831 respondents. Because the number of people who met the research criteria in the ZoomPanel population is unknown, it is difficult to calculate a response rate. A sample size calculator, however, would indicate a sample size of approximately 660 respondents would be needed to generalize the results to populations over 100,000 (raosoft.com, 2011). Therefore, a sample of 831 respondents should provide the data necessary to generalize the results at a 99% confidence level and 1% margin of error to most U.S. employers.
Table 1 displays the demographics of survey respondents. Approximately 50% of respondents held senior manager positions or higher. Most (68%) worked for organizations with fewer than 500 people.

While most respondents (75%) had more than 5 years of experience screening and hiring employees, many (65%) also had more than 2 years of experience specifically screening and hiring employees with a military background. Most (83%) had a bachelor’s or graduate degree and were 41 years of age or older (57%).

A wide cross-section of industries was represented in the study: retail (11%); healthcare and social services (11%); finance and insurance (10%); and professional, scientific, and technical services (18%) were the most represented. As shown in Table 2, 12% of respondents were currently serving or had a history of military service, and 42% had personal affiliations with the U.S. military (e.g., current or past family members served in the military).

Four demographic/grouping variables were used to further analyze results in each topic area—military service vs. no military service, military affiliation vs. no affiliation, experience hiring military vs. no experience, and in some instances, comparisons by industry. To more effectively assess differences in overall results, categories for three of the demographic/grouping variables (military affiliation, experience hiring military, and industry) were collapsed into smaller groupings. The frequency distribution of each demographic/grouping variable is depicted in Figures 1 to 4.

**Research Question 1:** What Is the Degree of Affective/Emotional Response Employers Have Towards the Military?

Three questions were analyzed to assess the degree of employer affective/emotional responses to military service (Q6A, Q6D, and Q7A). Overall distribution of results indicated that employers are very positive in their views about military service (Q6A; 93% fav), agree that perceptions of military personnel have improved since the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Q6D; 85% fav), and feel that military personnel deserve some leniency in the hiring process (Q7A; 75% fav).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Sample Demographics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior manager</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO/owner</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational size</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49 or fewer</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–99</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100–499</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000–4,999</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000–24,999</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000 or more</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience screening and hiring employees</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–5 years</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience screening and hiring employees with a military background</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2 years</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2–5 years</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5 years</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 21</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21–30</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31–40</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51–60</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 60</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Military Status of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Currently or in the past served in the U.S. military</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military affiliation</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have military affiliation</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have no military affiliation</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Military service vs. no military service. Analyses of the aforementioned items, by military service, using independent sample t-tests, revealed no significant difference in perceptions between responding employers who served or are currently serving in the military and those without military service.

Military affiliation vs. no affiliation. Independent sample t-tests were conducted by military affiliation to assess whether personal affiliations affected respondents’ affective/emotional response to military service. Results indicated that responding employers were equally positive about their views on military service (Q6A), but significantly different on the degree to which employer perceptions of military personnel have improved since the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Q6D). Those with military affiliations were significantly more favorable (84% fav, $M = 4.76, SD = 1.18$) than those with no affiliations (75% fav, $M = 4.58, SD = 1.17$), $t(767) = 2.08, p = .038$. Respondents with military affiliations were also more favorable (80% fav, $M = 4.49, SD = 1.34$) than those with no affiliations (68% fav, $M = 4.23, SD = 1.35$) on item Q7A, military personnel deserving some leniency in the hiring process, $t(804) = 2.67, p = .008$.

Experience hiring military vs. no experience. Comparisons between respondents with experience hiring military personnel and those with no experience revealed no significant differences in perceptions, except on Q7A—military personnel deserving some leniency in the hiring process. Responding employers with experience hiring military personnel were significantly more favorable (77% fav, $M = 4.42, SD = 1.33$) than those without experience (70% fav, $M = 4.13, SD = 1.38$), $t(804) = 2.76, p = .006$.

Comparisons by industry. One-way between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted to compare the effects of responding employers’ industry on items related to affective/emotional responses to military service. Results revealed a significant difference between industries on Q6A, the extent to which military service is viewed positively, $F(10, 687) = 1.883, p = .044$. A rank ordering of the mean ratings indicated that employers in the manufacturing industry had the most positive affective/emotional responses ($M = 5.43, SD = .694$), and employers in the accommodation and food service industry had the least positive affective/emotional responses ($M = 4.73, SD = 1.50$). Post hoc analyses, using the Tukey HSD Test, further indicated a significant difference between the two industries; however, no differences were found between any of the other industries.

No significant differences between industries were found for Q6D (perceptions of military personnel have improved since the 9/11 terrorist attacks) and Q7A (military personnel deserve some leniency in the hiring process). However, the rank ordering of means ratings across items consistently shows manufacturing as the highest or second highest mean.
Research Question 2: To What Degree Are Employers Concerned About Hiring Military Personnel?

Three questions were analyzed to assess the extent of employer concerns about hiring military personnel (Q6B, Q6C, and Q6E). Overall results are mixed. Employers are generally very positive about hiring military personnel as long as they have the right knowledge and skills (Q6B; 92% fav), and are positive about hiring Reserve and Guard service members (Q6E; 74% fav). However, the latter result is significantly less favorable than the former. Respondents also indicated that employers are relatively less favorable about hiring military personnel when considering war-related psychological disorders (e.g., post-traumatic stress; Q6C, 61% fav).

Military service vs. no military service. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing results by military service revealed no significant differences in perceptions about hiring military personnel, except on item Q6B (employers have few reservations about hiring military personnel as long as they have the right knowledge and skills). Respondents with no military experience were significantly more favorable (93% fav, M = 5.09, SD = 1.04) compared to those with military experience (80% fav, M = 4.79, SD = 1.29), t(117) = –2.22, p = .028.

Military affiliation vs. no affiliation. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing results by military affiliation revealed no significant differences in perceptions, except on item Q6E—concerns about hiring Reserve and Guard members. Respondents with military affiliations were slightly more favorable (77% fav, M = 4.40, SD = 1.32) than those without military affiliations (72% fav, M = 4.14, SD = 1.29), t(791) = 2.77, p = .006.

Experience hiring military vs. no experience. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing results by experience in hiring military personnel revealed no significant differences in perceptions across any of the items related to employer concerns about hiring military personnel.

Comparisons by industry. One-way between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted to compare the effects of respondents’ industry on items related to “concerns about hiring military personnel.” Results revealed a significant difference between industries on item Q6B—employers having few reservations about hiring military personnel, as long as they have the right knowledge and skills, F(10, 689) = 2.68, p = .003. A rank ordering of the mean ratings indicated that employers in the manufacturing industry were the most comfortable (had the fewest concerns about) hiring military personnel (M = 5.38, SD = .640), and employers in arts, entertainment, and recreation were the least comfortable (had the most concerns; M = 4.62, SD = 1.35). Post hoc analyses using the Tukey HSD Test further indicated a significant difference between the two; however, no differences were found among any of the other industry comparisons.

Significant differences were also found for item Q6E (concerns about hiring Reserve and Guard service members), given their potential to be absent from work, F(10, 681) = 2.52, p = .005, and item Q6C (concerns about hiring military personnel when considering war-related psychological disorders), F(10, 689) = 2.68, p = .003. Tukey HSD post hoc tests on item Q6E by industry revealed a significant difference in mean ratings between manufacturing (M = 4.73, SD = 1.13) and retail trade (M = 3.91, SD = 1.44). Employers in the manufacturing industry reported more comfort hiring military personnel (fewer concerns), compared with retail, where employers reported less comfort (more concerned). Finally, Tukey HSD post hoc tests were also performed on item Q6C by industry, revealing a significant difference in mean ratings between manufacturing (M = 4.35, SD = 1.30) and educational services (M = 3.45, SD = 1.40), and manufacturing and public administration and government (M = 3.22, SD = 1.29). A significant
difference in mean ratings was also found between construction/home improvement ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.33$) and public administration and government ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.29$). The rank ordering of means illustrates that employers in manufacturing and construction/home improvement are less likely to be concerned about hiring military personnel (higher means = most favorable ratings), while educational services and public administration appear more likely to be concerned (lower means = least favorable ratings).

**Research Question 3: How Valuable and Transferable Is Military Leadership Experience to Civilian Leadership Jobs?**

Three questions were analyzed to assess the value and transferability of military leadership experience to civilian leadership jobs (Q7E, Q7F, and Q8). Overall results indicated that military leadership skills are highly valuable when hiring for leadership positions in civilian jobs (Q7E; 92% fav) and that military
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Leadership skills transfer easily to the leadership skills required in most civilian jobs (Q7F; 86%). When asked to select the top three leadership skills that are enhanced the most by military leadership experience (Q8), most respondents chose teamwork (26%), striving for results/execution (16%), and planning and organizing (15%; see Figure 5).

Military service vs. no military service. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing results by military service revealed no significant differences in the perceptions of the value (Q7E) and transferability (Q7F) of military leadership experience. The rank ordering of the most important leadership skills (Q8) was also the same regardless of the history of military service.

Military affiliation vs. no affiliation. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing results by military affiliation revealed significant differences on item Q7E—value of military leadership experience to civilian jobs, t(794) = 2.45, p = .015. Respondents with military affiliations were more favorable about the value of military leadership experience (91% fav, M = 5.02, SD = 1.06) than respondents with no military affiliations (86% fav, M = 4.84, SD = 1.02).

Those with military affiliation were also more favorable (88% fav, M = 4.81, SD = 1.14) on item Q7F—transferability of military leadership skills—than respondents with no military affiliations (85% fav, M = 4.54, SD = 1.12), t(797) = 3.30, p = .001. However, there was no difference in the rank order of the most important leadership skills based on military affiliation.

Experience hiring military vs. no experience. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing results by experience in hiring military personnel revealed no significant differences in perceptions
across items related to the value (Q7E) and transferability (Q7F) of military leadership skills to civilian leadership jobs. In addition, both groups of respondents selected the same set of top three leadership skills—teamwork, striving for results/execution, and planning and organizing.

**Comparisons by industry.** Similar to the other comparative analyses, one-way ANOVAs revealed no significant differences between industries on items related to the value (Q7E) and transferability (Q7F) of military leadership experience.

**Research Question 4: Are Employees With Military Backgrounds Superior to Civilian Employees on Critical Work Characteristics/Attributes?**

Respondents were asked to rate the average employee with military experience against the average civilian employee on 10 important work characteristics (Q9A–9J) using a 5-point comparative scale. Overall results in Table 3 illustrate that employers perceive employees with military backgrounds to be superior to their civilian counterparts on most characteristics/attributes. Perceptions of superiority are especially strong for team orientation (81%), work ethic (77%), reliability (77%), and assertiveness (76%), and less so for openness to other cultures (53%), creativity/innovation (50%), and flexibility (49%).

### Table 3
**Comparisons Between the Average Employee With Military Experience and the Average Civilian Employee on Critical Work Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quest. 9</th>
<th>Work characteristic</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent rating military employees as performing better or much better than civilian employees</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Reliability (punctual, delivers on commitments)</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Selflessness (unselfish)</td>
<td>775</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Team orientation</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Work ethic</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Goal orientation/ambition</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Openness to other cultures/races</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>0.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>783</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Resilience (ability to “bounce back”)</td>
<td>782</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Flexibility (willingness to change own opinions and thinking)</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Creativity/innovation</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Military service vs. no military service.** Independent sample t-test analyses comparing work characteristics by military service revealed significant mean differences in perceptions on openness to other cultures (Q9F), \(t(771) = 2.75, p = .006\); flexibility (Q9I), \(t(778) = 2.38, p = .017\); and creativity/innovation (Q9J), \(t(779) = 3.35, p = .001\). For all three items, respondents with military service reported higher mean ratings for employees with military experience than for civilian employees. Across both groups, however, there is consistency in the rank order, as these characteristics were in the bottom four.
Military affiliation vs. no affiliation. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing work characteristics by personal military affiliation revealed similar findings as in the previous comparison by military service. Results indicated significant mean differences in perceptions of openness to other cultures (Q9F), \(t(771) = 2.69, p = .007\); flexibility (Q9I), \(t(778) = 2.89, p = .004\); and creativity/innovation (Q9J), \(t(779) = 3.74, p = .000\). For all three items, respondents with personal military affiliations reported higher ratings for employees with military experience than for civilian employees. Across both groups, however, the rank order is exactly the same and the aforementioned characteristics were the bottom three.

Experience hiring military vs. no experience. Independent sample t-test analyses comparing work characteristics by respondents’ experience in hiring military personnel, revealed several significant differences in perceptions. Respondents with experience hiring military personnel (vs. those with no experience) reported significantly higher mean ratings for employees with military experience on selflessness (Q9B), \(t(773) = 2.43, p = .015\); team orientation (Q9C), \(t(785) = 2.17, p = .030\); work ethic (Q9D), \(t(428) = 2.02, p = .044\); openness to other cultures (Q9F), \(t(771) = 3.03, p = .003\); resilience (Q9H), \(t(780) = 2.19, p = .029\); flexibility (Q9I), \(t(386) = 4.31, p = .000\); and creativity/innovation (Q9J), \(t(394) = 2.92, p = .004\). Across both groups, however, the rank order was exactly the same.

Research Question 5: How Is Higher-Level Education Perceived by Employers of Military Personnel?

Respondents provided input on four questions related to higher-level education of military personnel (Q11–Q14). When asked to select the top two degrees that potential students with military backgrounds should pursue given the job market (Q11), most respondents chose technology (26%) and business, finance, and accounting (21%; see Figure 6). However, respondents indicated that having a successful career is not dependent on a specific bachelor’s degree (aside from requirements for certain professions—engineer, nurse, etc.), as long as individuals have a degree (Q12; 49% agree to some extent and 22% agree to great extent).

In addition, just over half of respondents believed that the reputation of the college attended by military personnel impacts the hiring decision (Q13; 43% agree to some extent, 15% agree to great extent). When asked about the combination of military experience and education that would be most valuable to an employer (Q14), most respondents chose “10 years military experience with a degree” (60%) over “retired military (20 plus years experience) without a degree” (13%). A large proportion of the sample, however, selected “cannot rate/don’t know” (28%).

Military service vs. no military service. Chi-square analysis of the top four recommended degrees for military personnel (Q11; see Figure 6) revealed little difference between respondents with military service and those without, except for technology. Respondents without military service were significantly more likely to select technology as one of their top two choices, \(\chi^2(1, N = 831) = 8.66, p < .005\). The significance of this finding, however, is unclear, given that both groups had the same top four degree selections. Independent sample t-test analysis revealed that respondents with military service were significantly more likely than their civilian counterparts to believe the statement in item Q12—that career success is dependent on a bachelor’s degree, but not a specific degree (\(M = 3.07, SD = .83\) vs. \(M = 2.84, SD = .86\)), \(t(800) = 2.54, p = .011\). Those with military service were also significantly more likely than their civilian counterparts to believe item Q13 (that college reputation affected hiring decisions related to military personnel; \(M = 2.86, SD = .90\) vs. \(M = 2.66, SD = .84\)), \(t(120) = 2.00, p = .048\). Finally, when asked to select the combination of military experience and education that would be most attractive to an employer (Q14), both groups predominantly selected “10 years military experience with a degree”; however, respondents without military service were significantly more likely to select this option than those with military service (84% vs. 69%), \(\chi^2(1, N = 602) = 10.86, p < .001\).

Military affiliation vs. no affiliation. Chi-square analysis of the top four recommended degrees for military personnel (Q11; see Figure 6) revealed little difference between respondents with military affiliation and those without, except for technology. Respondents without military affiliation were
significantly more likely to select it as one of their top two choices, $\chi^2(1, N = 831) = 6.22, p < .05$. Again, the significance of this finding is unclear, given that both groups had the same top four degree selections.

Independent sample $t$-test analyses revealed that respondents with military affiliations were slightly more likely than those with no affiliations to believe the statement in item Q12—that career success is dependent on a bachelor’s degree, but not a specific degree ($M = 2.95$, $SD = .84$ vs. $M = 2.81$, $SD = .87$), $t(800) = 2.32$, $p = .021$. No significant difference was found between those with military affiliations and those without on item Q13 (college reputation affecting hiring decisions for military personnel).

Finally, when asked to select the combination of military experience and education that would be most attractive to an employer (Q14), both groups also predominantly selected “10 years military experience with a degree”; however, respondents without military affiliations were significantly more likely to select this option than those with military affiliations (87% vs. 75%), $\chi^2(1, N = 602) = 14.45$, $p < .000$.

**Experience hiring military vs. no experience.** Chi-square analysis of the top four recommended degrees for military personnel (Q11; see Figure 6) revealed little difference between respondents with experience hiring military and those without, except for technology, where respondents with hiring experience were significantly more likely to select it as one of their top two choices, $\chi^2(1, N = 831) = 8.66$, $p < .005$. Again the significance of this finding is unclear, given that both groups had the same top four degree selections.

![Figure 6](image-url)

*Figure 6. College degrees potential students with military backgrounds should choose to pursue*
No significant difference was found between the two groups when asked about their belief in item Q12—the statement that career success is dependent on a bachelor’s degree, but not a specific degree. Also, no significant difference was found between the two groups on item Q13—college reputation affecting hiring decisions for military personnel. Finally, when asked to select the combination of military experience and education that would be most attractive to an employer, both groups also predominantly selected “10 years military experience with a degree”; however, respondents without experience hiring military were significantly more likely to select this option than those with experience (91% vs. 79%), $\chi^2(1, N = 602) = 11.00, p < .001.$

Figure 7. Perceived value of military experience versus education by industry
**Hiring Heroes: Employer Perceptions, Preferences, and Hiring Practices Related to U.S. Military Personnel**

**Comparisons by industry.** Analyses by industry were conducted on three questions (Q12–Q14). One-way ANOVAs on item Q12 (respondents’ belief that having a successful career is not dependent on a specific bachelor’s degree, as long as individuals have a degree) and Q13 (respondents’ belief that reputation of the college attended by military personnel impacts their hiring decision) revealed no significant differences in mean ratings across industries. However, a chi-square test of independence on Q14 (combination of military experience and education that would be most valuable to an employer) revealed some significant differences across industries, $\chi^2(10, N = 528) = 23.33, p < .05$. Although most respondents in every industry selected “10 years military experience with a degree,” respondents in accommodation and food services selected “retired military (20 plus years experience) without a degree” at a higher rate than respondents in other industries (see Figure 7).

**DISCUSSION**

**Conclusions and Implications**

The purpose of the current study was to (a) better understand employer perceptions, preferences, and hiring practices with regard to military personnel; and (b) provide useful information to individuals charged with helping servicemen and servicewomen transition into civilian occupations. Five research questions were explored through analyses of the survey responses to achieve the study’s objectives. The following discussion summarizes the meaning of the study findings, and where applicable, the practical implications. Limitations in the design and method are presented and ideas for future research proposed.

**Research question 1: What is the degree of affective/emotional response employers have towards the military?**

Overall, results for the first research question were very positive. Employers expressed sentiments that are widely held among the general public—the U.S. military is held in very high esteem. These sentiments have increased since 9/11. Further, many employers believe that due to their sacrifice, military personnel deserve some degree of leniency in hiring processes.

Comparative analyses indicated clear results: Regardless of their own military service status (military experience vs. no experience), employers have a strong positive emotional response to the military. Given the result found for service status, a similar result would have been expected for affiliation; however, respondents with military affiliations were more positive than those with no affiliations, indicating a positive bias. One explanation for this result could be that individuals with military affiliations are more likely to have a stronger affective/emotional response, given hardships they may have had to endure and insights gained as a result of exposure to military personnel or military environments.

A third comparative analysis between respondents with experience hiring military and those without experience also yielded a significant result. Respondents that had experience in hiring military personnel were more favorable about giving military personnel some leniency in the hiring process. This finding could be explained in terms of them having greater sympathy as a result of having deeper familiarity with the challenges faced by military personnel on the battlefield and in the hiring process.

Finally, comparisons by industry indicated that respondents in manufacturing had a slightly more affective response to military service than others. This finding could be due in part to the technical trade skills military personnel can bring to many manufacturing jobs. Research by the National Association of Manufacturers’ Center for Workforce Success indicates that skilled workers are in very short supply and that the military is one of the few places manufacturers can find complementary skill sets (Miller, 2009).
Overall, it can be argued that the nature of the attacks on 9/11 unified Americans, increased levels of patriotism, and propelled support for the military. In a 2008 Gallup survey, 62% of Americans say serving in the U.S. military reveals a “great deal” about one’s patriotism (Morales, 2008), second only to voting in elections. Furthermore, the value of what the military does and of the visible sacrifices of men and women in combat has been enhanced by instant news and civilians’ ability to see what happens on the battlefield. It is possible also that the results here are amplified due to a “bin Laden effect”—survey data collection began the day before Osama bin Laden’s death was announced. Gallup polling after the killing of bin Laden indicates that Americans largely credit the military and CIA over the presidents (George W. Bush and Obama), and that the event spiked positivity on a number of different frequently measured perceptions—e.g. the extent to which the war in Afghanistan was going well and overall satisfaction with Congress and the President (Newport, 2011).

The implications of these findings are that the positive affective/emotional response employers have towards the military should logically help veterans in the hiring process, in terms of first impressions. Beyond this statement, it is unclear how much impact affective/emotional responses have on employer hiring practices. Given the higher unemployment rate among recent veterans, some would argue that American employers generally pay lip service to the notion of supporting the military. In other words, their sentiments about the military do not match their actions. Discussion of the second research question (employer concerns about hiring military personnel) may clarify the issue to some degree: How do employers truly feel when faced with the specific issues associated with hiring military?

**Research question 2: To what degree are employers concerned about hiring military personnel?**

Results for the second research question are mixed. Respondents report that in general employers are very comfortable hiring military personnel, as long as they have the right knowledge and skills. However, when considering hiring Reserve and Guard service members, results are less favorable (employers are more concerned), and even less favorable (even more concerned) when considering the issue of hiring military personnel with psychological disorders (e.g., post-traumatic stress).

Comparative analyses revealed interesting findings. Respondents with military service were significantly less favorable on employers having few reservations about hiring military personnel than those without service. A possible explanation for this result is that respondents with military experience are more aware of employer concerns because of their first-hand exposure to and insight into the challenges of being “military” in a civilian hiring process.

Comparative analyses by military affiliation indicated that respondents with military affiliations were more likely (higher ratings) than those without affiliations to report that employers have concerns about hiring Reserve and Guard members. This finding is counterintuitive. It would have been more logical to see lower ratings for respondents with military affiliations (more perceived employer concerns about hiring Reserve and Guard members), given the finding for military service vs. no military service.

Comparisons by industry revealed that ratings from respondents in manufacturing, and in some cases the construction/home improvement industry, were more favorable on items related to employer concerns about hiring military personnel. It is possible that these industries are more tolerant than others when dealing with the potential issues associated with hiring military personnel (e.g., psychological injuries, absence due to being called for duty). Part of this tolerance is due to the supply and demand for skilled labor—there is a shortage of skill labor in the civilian population and a heightened demand for the skills military personnel can often bring to jobs in these industries (Faram, 2009; Miller, 2009).

Results indicate a possible bias towards answering favorably when the questions posed about the military are general—concerns about hiring military personnel. However, when specific concerns are targeted in the questions (employer concerns due to Reserve and Guard absenteeism, psychological disorders), ratings are significantly lower.
The findings here that are related to specific employer concerns support some of the literature that explains reasons for higher unemployment rates among veterans, reservists, and Guard members (Kleykamp, 2009; O’Keefe et al., 2010; Unemployment Rates Are High, 2011; Ure, 2010), two of which were incorporated in the current study. Employers are generally more concerned about the business impact when they consider the potential absence of Reserve and Guard members. Research by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) indicates that organizations are impacted by (a) the uncertainty about how long such employees will be away and how to plan work around this uncertainty; (b) the effect on the workload of other employees; (c) the need to sometimes hire temporary employees; and (d) the costs of benefits and compensation for employees on active duty, coupled with incurring the costs of temporary workers (SHRM, 2010). Employers are also more concerned when having to deal with potential psychological disorders (post-traumatic stress disorders) suffered by military personnel. Research by SHRM (2010) indicates that employers rank post-traumatic stress disorders as third on their list of challenges when hiring employees with military experience (SHRM, 2010).

Although the law protects military personnel from discrimination in the hiring process (decisions based on factors other than qualifications), perceptions could have an impact on the recruitment process. It is clear from the results of the current study that certain industries are more likely to minimize these concerns and recruit military personnel specifically because of skills that cannot be readily found elsewhere. In other words, the transferability of military training and the demand for that training possibly trumps potential concerns about hiring military personnel.

The implications for the findings are threefold. First, we must better educate military personnel on the types of concerns employers may have and their employment rights under the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (U.S. Department of Labor Employment Law Guide, 2009). Second, we should provide job search skills to overcome employer concerns and issues, such as resume writing (being able to properly document transferable military skills) and interviewing skills. Third, we must educate and train military personnel on how to target specific industries and companies. For example, we could help military personnel understand which companies to target, what the general requirements are, and what upgrades are needed in education and skills. We need to help military personnel target those companies that are military-friendly.

Research question 3: How valuable and transferable is military leadership experience to civilian leadership jobs?

Results for the third research question indicate that military leadership experience is highly valuable and transferable to civilian leadership positions. In addition, three leadership skills appear to be most valuable: teamwork, striving for results/execution, and planning and organizing.

Comparative analyses revealed few differences between grouping variables. Respondents with military affiliations were more favorable in their perceptions about the value and transferability of military leadership skills, compared with those without affiliations. However, there was no difference between respondents with military experience and those without. One would have expected similar findings across both grouping variables. Explanations for this finding are not apparent, and the implications may not be meaningful.

Comparisons by experience hiring military personnel and by industry also yielded no significant differences. Comparisons across the different grouping variables on the leadership skills that are enhanced the most by military experience yielded very similar rank orders. Regardless of grouping, the top three leadership skills were the same: teamwork, striving for results/execution, and planning and organizing.

A possible explanation for similarities in the results across the different grouping variables could be due to the perception that excellence in leadership is so synonymous with the military that perceptions are equivalent regardless of respondent background. History is filled with the stories of extraordinary military men leading nations and organizations. It is possible that the concept of leadership effectiveness includes the belief that the military is the best training facility for developing leadership capabilities.
Overall, the findings on the value of military leadership experience supports the literature (Korn/Ferry International, 2005; O’Keefe, et al., 2010; Zicarelli, 2006) and indicates the need for civilian entities to further capitalize on the skills being learned by men and women in the armed forces. The literature on leadership continuously cites the frantic need to find talent to successfully guide organizations into the future. DDI’s Global Leadership Forecast for 2011 (Boatman & Wellis, 2011), concludes that leaders in organizations around the world are having a hard time keeping pace with changes in the marketplace. The report also indicates that organizations are suffering from a lack of quality and bench strength in their managerial ranks. Wong (2004) discovered that the war in Iraq created a more adaptive and innovative military leader—just the skill sets required in organizations to manage rapid change in the 21st century. Moreover, the top three leadership skills identified in the current research as being the most developed by military experience (teamwork, striving for results/execution, planning and organizing) are core to most organizations’ leadership competency models. O’Keefe, et al. (2010) in their study of Wal-Mart, concluded that military leaders enter the corporate world battle-tested and ready to lead, requiring significantly less training that their civilian counterparts.

The implications are clear for civilian recruiters and hiring managers. The next generation of top leaders may not come from the top business schools, but rather from the officer ranks in the armed forces. A systematic revamping of how organizations recruit may need to be initiated in order to effectively compete for this talent.

Research question 4: Are employees with military backgrounds superior to civilian employees on critical work characteristics/attributes?

Overall, results for the fourth research question indicate that employers perceive employees with military backgrounds to be superior on most characteristics/attributes, compared with their civilian counterparts. Perceptions of superiority are especially strong for team orientation, work ethic, reliability, and assertiveness, and less so for openness to other cultures, creativity/innovation, and flexibility.

Comparisons on critical work characteristics/attributes by grouping variable between employees with military backgrounds and civilian employees revealed specific results. In general, regardless of the extent of exposure to military personnel (actual service, affiliation, and hiring experience), openness to other cultures, creativity/innovation, and flexibility, are perceived to be relatively weaker characteristics for military employees, while team orientation, work ethic, and reliability are seen as relative strengths, compared with civilian employees. Essentially, regardless of group, the rank ordering of attributes was the same, although respondents with more exposure to the military (military service, affiliation, and experience hiring military) rated these characteristics higher than those without military exposure.

Overall, these findings possibly add some level of validation to what the general public perceives as relative strengths and weaknesses in military personnel. Given the discipline required, the hardships and long hours endured, the code of honor, and the notion of being part of a team, it is not surprising that teamwork, work ethic, and reliability are perceived to distinguish military personnel from the average civilian. Conversely, creativity/innovation and flexibility, stereotypically, have been perceived to be weaker areas for the military; only recently have these areas significantly improved (Wong, 2004). The lower rank for openness to other cultures was unanticipated since the military has a history of inclusion and diversity (segregation was abolished in the military in 1948, long before it was abolished in civilian society, “Diversity in the Military,” n.d.). Further, military personnel are frequently deployed to bases across the country and the globe, providing them more exposure to different cultures and peoples than the average civilian.

Finally, the analysis of work characteristics/attributes by experience in hiring military, revealed noteworthy findings—there were seven significant mean differences between respondents with experience hiring military personnel and those without. Respondents with experience hiring military rated higher on selflessness, team orientation, work ethic, openness to other cultures, resilience, flexibility, and creativity/innovation. These results possibly indicate that those with military hiring experience have a deeper understanding of how these characteristics/attributes are portrayed by military employees and the positive effect they have on job success and business outcomes.
The overall implications for findings related to this research question are twofold. First, there are several clear strengths that military personnel need to capitalize on in the job market. Educators and those providing guidance need to help military personnel effectively express these work characteristics/attributes in resumes and in job interviews. Second, the perception that military personnel are relatively weaker on openness to other cultures, flexibility, and creativity/innovation could be problematic. The work environment is more diverse than ever before, and organizations are placing a high value on employees who are flexible and innovative. Additional training may be required to help military personnel understand and internalize these characteristics/attributes into their work behaviors. Some caution is necessary, however, as more research is necessary to fully understand the relative strengths and development needs of military personnel so as to more effectively target areas truly in need of training.

**Research question 5: How is higher-level education perceived by employers of military personnel?**

Overall, results for this research question indicated that “technology” and “business, finance, and accounting” were perceived to be the two best degrees to pursue, given the job market. In a recent poll of hiring managers across the private sector, public agencies, and nonprofits, business- and information-technology-related degrees were two of the most frequently cited degrees to pursue, given job growth and starting salaries (Kyle, 2011).

Results also indicated that having a successful career is not absolutely dependent on a specific bachelor’s degree, as long as individuals have a degree. This finding may depend on how one defines success. If success is highest starting salary and availability of jobs, then picking a specific degree could be critical for career success (Kyle, 2011). On the other hand, it is obviously important to build a career on personal interests and passion, and there are many examples of people achieving success in areas very different from their degrees. Given the hiring obstacles military personnel sometimes face, and the downturn in the U.S. economy, military personnel need to consider both.

Results further indicated that just over half of respondents believed that the reputation of the college attended by military personnel impacts hiring decisions. While this is not a particularly strong result, it is possible that the finding is due to military personnel being more inclined to attend online degree programs, which vary in levels of perceived acceptance and are generally viewed less favorably by employers (Columbara & Monaghan, 2009).

Finally, analysis of respondent perceptions on the value of a college degree vs. military experience, demonstrated that the combination of a college degree and 10 years of military experience trumps 20 years of military experience alone. This is not a surprising result, given the research by Carnevale et al. (2010) that there will be a significant increase in the number of jobs requiring a college degree in the next 10 years.

Comparative analyses of perceptions of higher-level education related to military personnel revealed several noteworthy results. Regardless of exposure to the military (service, affiliation, and hiring experience), technology and business, finance, and accounting were perceived to be the two best degrees to pursue. This finding was not unexpected, as respondents possibly answered based on the degrees they perceive to be most in demand within their industries and organizations.

When asked about the importance of getting a “specific degree” to career success, respondents with military service and those with military affiliations were more likely to agree with the statement that “a successful career is not dependent on a specific bachelor’s degree, as long as individuals have a degree.” It is possible that respondents with military service, and those with affiliations, see military training as a more valuable credential than respondents with no military experience or affiliations. As a result, these groups are less likely to perceive that a specific bachelor’s degree is critical to career success (except where the degree is critical training for the job, e.g., nursing, engineering).
Comparative analyses of the value of a college degree vs. military experience revealed that respondents with no exposure to the military (actual service, affiliation, or hiring experience) were more likely to choose "10 years military experience with a degree" over "20 plus years military experience without a degree" than respondents with exposure to the military. This finding indicates that exposure to the military may impact the degree to which employers value military experience and training.

When results were analyzed by industry, respondents in accommodation and food services were significantly more likely to select "20 plus years military experience without a degree" than respondents in other industries. A specific rationale for this finding is unclear; however, it could be that having a college degree is not as important for job success in accommodation and food services as it is in other industries.

Implications for research question 5 are fourfold. First, in a hyper-competitive labor market with 9.1% unemployment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011), military personnel should be strongly encouraged to pursue a college degree. Second, while the results of the current study indicate that a specific degree is not important to career success, there is a compelling argument that to improve chances of success, the degrees that are in demand should be strongly considered. Third, some degree-granting institutions are certainly better than others; military personnel need to research their choices thoroughly to ensure that all the required standards are met in order to improve hiring success. Fourth, military personnel not inclined to attend college and struggling to find employment should target industries (e.g., accommodation and food services) and employers that possibly value their experience over a college degree.

Study Limitations and Further Research

Conclusions derived from the current study results may be affected by several limitations. One limitation relates to the skewing of the sample demographics. The sample demographics were negatively skewed in terms of job level, experience, education, and age, which was to be expected given the study participation criteria (employed as a manager or higher and regularly involved in recruiting and hiring decisions). Almost half the sample (47%) reported being a senior manager or CEO and more than half the sample was 41 years of age or older. Moreover, most respondents were from organizations with fewer than 500 personnel. The perceptions of more junior personnel in recruiting and hiring, and from larger organizations, are therefore missing in this study and could be an important factor in fully understanding hiring practices towards military personnel.

A second possible limitation is that some industries were underrepresented (pharmaceuticals and biotech, n = 8; and mining, n = 2). The extent to which results can be generalized to these industries is, therefore, limited.

A third limitation may be self-selection bias. Participation is not completely random, as those choosing to participate in ZoomPanel and those who chose to participate in this study were possibly motivated to do so based on incentives. It is possible that respondents who chose to participate in the study may differ in unknown ways from the total population of ZoomPanelists and from other managers in the general population. These differences may limit the generalizability of findings from the current study to ZoomPanel and the general population of managers responsible for recruiting and hiring.

A fourth limitation is the design of the study. While some trends in perceptions were established, it is impossible to say with certainty the impact of these perceptions on employer hiring practices. Experimental and quasi-experimental research designs need to be employed to truly test how employer perceptions impact their actions with regards to recruiting and hiring military personnel.

Further research should incorporate race/ethnicity and gender into the study of employer perceptions of military personnel. It is possible that minority respondents may reflect some different employer perceptions than nonminorities. It would also be important to assess the effect of race and gender on employer hiring practices related to military personnel. The research question would be: Are minorities and women with military backgrounds treated differently in the hiring process than their nonminority
and male counterparts? While a survey research design like the one used in this study could provide some insight into this question, a more rigorous approach would be to replicate Kleykamp's (2009) blocked experimental design. In her study, job applications and resumes representing African Americans, Hispanics, and Caucasians were manipulated by military experience and then sent to an employer in response to a real job posting. Outcomes were measured by the callback rates for each resume type and race. A replication of this design incorporating gender could significantly help in completing the picture of employer perceptions and hiring practices related to military personnel.

Summary

The five research questions addressed in the current study have facilitated deeper insight into employer perceptions, preferences, and hiring practices with regard to military personnel, and have added to the literature on the topic. The results indicate that:

- Military experience is highly valued and generally viewed positively by employers; however, employers are less positive when asked about hiring reservists, Guard members, and personnel with psychological disorders.
- Military leadership skills are highly valued and transferable to civilian jobs.
- When compared with civilian employees, veterans, reservists, and National Guard members are perceived to perform better on a wide variety of work-related characteristics (e.g., teamwork, reliability, work ethic).
- When compared to civilian workers, there are some areas where military personnel are rated lower (openness to other cultures, flexibility, creativity/innovation).
- Results for the best college degrees to pursue align with the literature on degrees in most demand.
- Respondents believe to some extent that college reputation impacts hiring of military personnel and that a college degree is perceived to add significant value to job applicants over and above military experience alone.
- Majoring in a specific discipline is not perceived to be critical for career success.

Comparisons by demographic variables (military service vs. no military service, military affiliation vs. no affiliation, experience hiring military vs. no experience, industry) revealed mixed results. In some cases, exposure to the military (military service, military affiliation, experience hiring military) elevated ratings in the logical direction; for example, respondents with experience hiring military personnel were more likely to rate employees with military experience higher than civilian employees on numerous work characteristics. In some cases there was no significant difference between groups on the research question; for example, respondents with military experience and those without were equally favorable on their affective/emotional response to military service. Comparisons by industry revealed some interesting results. It is clear that respondents in the manufacturing industry are generally more favorable and amenable to hiring military personnel.

Results from the current study will be helpful to educators, those providing guidance and support to military personnel entering the job market, and to organizations competing for talent. Given the relatively poor condition of the U.S. economy and the increasing number of personnel returning from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the message to military personnel is clear: (a) While civilian employers greatly value military character, other qualities such as transferable skills and higher education could be critical in overcoming concerns employers have in the hiring process; (b) in a highly competitive labor market, military personnel need to become adept at effectively translating and communicating their experience, training, leadership skills, and other qualities to potential employers; and (c) job search efforts should be fine-tuned to industries and companies that have pro-military hiring policies and a direct need for military-trained personnel.
Finally, for organizations competing for high-caliber talent and looking for a competitive edge, military-trained personnel offer character and personal traits that can reduce labor-related overhead and boost productivity (G.I. Jobs, 2011; O'Keefe et al., 2010). Leadership skills learned in training and on the battlefield can produce men and women with a significant head start in the ability to successfully lead people and execute under pressure (O'Keefe et al., 2010).

REFERENCES


Unemployment rates are high among today's veterans. (2011, April 1). PRIME Military CME. Retrieved from http://militarycme.com


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**APPENDIX**

Survey—Employer Hiring Practices of Military Personnel

**Question 1**

Welcome to the Apollo Education Group survey on Employer Hiring Practices of U.S. Military Personnel. Thank you in advance for sharing your views and opinions. The purpose of the survey is to better understand employer hiring perspectives with regard to veterans or those currently serving in the armed forces.
Your voluntary participation will involve taking a survey with no risks to you. The survey should take approximately 20 minutes. Your identity will be kept confidential, your name will not be collected or disclosed to any outside party, and results will be stored on a secured website and published in aggregate form only.

If you have questions about survey participation or wish to withdraw your responses after survey participation, please contact the survey administrator at the email address provided. If during survey participation, you decide not to participate, just exit the survey at any time.

Please indicate your consent to participate by selecting one of the following options.

☒ I understand the above statements and voluntarily consent to serve as a participant in the study described. I also confirm I am 18 years of age or older. (If you select this option, when you hit the submit button, you will be taken directly to the survey).

☒ I understand the above statements and do NOT voluntarily consent to serve as a participant in the study described. (If you select this option, when you hit the submit button, you will be exited from the survey). [Screen Out]

**Question 2**
Are you employed as a manager or higher and regularly involved in employee recruitment efforts and hiring decisions?

☒ Yes ☒ No [Screen Out]

Please answer each of the following questions to the best of your ability. If at any time you would like to go backward in your survey and change responses to previous questions, just use your browser’s back button.

**Question 3**
How many years experience do you have screening or hiring (e.g., reviewing resumes, interviewing) employees?

☒ more than 5 years ☒ 2–5 years ☒ less than 2 years

**Question 4**
How many years experience do you have screening or hiring (e.g., reviewing resumes, interviewing) individuals with a U.S. Military background?

☒ more than 5 years ☒ 2–5 years ☒ less than 2 years ☒ None

**Question 5**
In your work history, have you ever worked closely with individuals with a military background for an extended period (6 months or more)?

☒ Yes ☒ No

**Question 6**
Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements based on your experience and general knowledge of organizations and their hiring practices.
A. Military service is generally viewed positively by U.S. employers

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

B. Employers have few reservations about hiring people with military service as long as they have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to do the job.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

C. Today, war-related psychological disorders (e.g., Post Traumatic Stress) are of little concern to employers when making hiring decisions about military veterans.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

D. Employers generally have more positive perceptions of military personnel today compared to 11 years ago (before the 9/11 terrorist attack).

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

E. Employers generally have little concern when hiring people who are part of the Military Reserve or National Guard, given their potential to be absent from work.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

**Question 7**

Please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements based on your experience and general knowledge of organizations and their hiring practices.

A. Military veterans, reservists, and National Guard members deserve some leniency in the hiring process, given their service to the country.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

B. Employees with a military background are typically easy to work with.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

C. People with a military background generally make excellent employees.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know

D. Military experience, in addition to a college degree, can often put a candidate at the top of the hiring list, assuming all other candidate qualifications are equal.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly disagree
- Slightly agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Cannot rate/don’t know
### Question 8
Please select the top 3 leadership skills from the list below you think military experience enhances the most in a civilian work environment:

- Communication skills
- Striving for results/execution
- Analysis and problem solving
- Leading teams
- Teamwork
- Coaching and developing subordinates
- Planning and organizing

### Question 9
How does the average veteran, Reserve, or National Guard employee compare to the average civilian employee on the following characteristics?

#### A. Reliability (punctual, delivers on commitments)
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know

#### B. Selflessness (unselfish)
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know

#### C. Team orientation
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know

#### D. Work ethic
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know

#### E. Goal orientation/ambition
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know

#### F. Openness to other cultures/races
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know

#### G. Assertiveness
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know

#### H. Resilience (ability to “bounce back”)
- Much worse
- Worse
- Same
- Better
- Much better
- Cannot rate/don’t know
I. Flexibility (willingness to change own opinions and thinking)
☐ Much worse  ☐ Worse  ☐ Same  ☐ Better  ☐ Much better  ☐ Cannot rate/don’t know

J. Creativity/innovation
☐ Much worse  ☐ Worse  ☐ Same  ☐ Better  ☐ Much better  ☐ Cannot rate/don’t know

**Question 10**
To what extent do you think employers in your industry are comfortable hiring veterans directly out of the military, without civilian work experience?
☐ Great extent  ☐ Some extent  ☐ Little extent  ☐ Not at all  ☐ Cannot rate/don’t know

The next 4 questions address employer perspectives on college education as it relates to individuals with a military background.

**Question 11**
If you had to advise a potential student with a military background (a non-traditional adult learner) on the type of undergraduate bachelor's degree to pursue, given the job market today and assuming he/she had the qualifications and a variety of interests, which of the following degree areas would you most encourage (select your top 2)?
☐ Arts (Languages, Literature, Fine Arts, Music, Drama, etc.)
☐ Business, Finance, and Accounting
☐ Education/Teaching
☐ Engineering (Civil, Electrical, Mechanical, etc.)
☐ Health/Medical (Nursing, Lab Technician, Health Administration, etc.)
☐ Natural Sciences (Biology, Chemistry, etc.)
☐ Social Sciences (Psychology, Sociology, Political Science, Economics, etc.)
☐ Technology (Computer Science, Computer Information Systems, Network Management, etc.)

**Question 12**
To what extent do you believe the following statement: “Aside from the requirements for certain professions (e.g., Engineer, Nurse, Accountant), conventional wisdom says that career success is not dependent on what bachelors degree you have, as long as you have a degree.”
☐ Great extent  ☐ Some extent  ☐ Little extent  ☐ Not at all  ☐ Cannot rate/don’t know

**Question 13**
When reviewing resumes of people with military backgrounds, to what extent does the reputation of the college they attend impact the hiring decision?
☐ Great extent  ☐ Some extent  ☐ Little extent  ☐ Not at all  ☐ Cannot rate/don’t know
Question 14
What combination of military experience and education do you think would be most valuable to an employer?
- Retired military (20 plus years experience) without a degree
- 10 years military experience with a degree
- Cannot answer/don’t know

Question 15
What is your age?
- Less than 21
- 21–30
- 31–40
- 41–50
- 51–60
- More than 60
- I prefer not to answer

Question 16
What is your highest level of education completed?
- High School Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree (e.g., BS, BA, AB)
- Graduate Degree (e.g., MS, MA, MBA, Ph.D, EdD, MD, DDS, JD, LLB)

Question 17
What is your current job level?
- Manager
- Senior manager (managing other managers)
- Owner/Chief Executive Officer

Question 18
How many employees work for your organization?
- 49 or less
- 50–99
- 100–499
- 500–999
- 1,000–4,999
- 5,000–24,999
- 25,000 or more

Question 19
How would you classify your organization?
- Publicly traded
- Privately held

Question 20
What is the hiring status of your organization?
- In a hiring freeze
- Open to accepting applications, but not actively seeking candidates
- Actively seeking candidates
Question 21
In which industry is your organization?
- Accommodation and food services
- Agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting
- Arts, entertainment, and recreation
- Construction/home improvement
- Educational services
- Finance and insurance
- Healthcare and social services
- Law enforcement (police, FBI, homeland security)
- Manufacturing
- Mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction
- Pharmaceutical and biotech
- Professional, scientific, and technical services
- Public administration, government
- Retail trade
- Transportation and warehousing
- Utilities
- Wholesale trade
- Other, please specify

Question 22
Which of the following best describes your personal affiliations with the U.S. Military? (Select all that apply)
- I am/was the wife/husband of someone in the U.S. Military
- I am the parent or close relative of someone who was/is in the U.S. Military
- I grew up in a military environment
- I am currently working or have worked as a DoD civilian or civilian contractor with the U.S. Military
- None of the above

Question 23
Have you or are you currently serving in the U.S. Military?
- Yes
- No [Skip to End]

Question 24
In which of the following services have you or do you currently serve? (Select all that apply)
- Army
- Navy
- Coast Guard
- Army Reserve
- Navy Reserve
- Coast Guard Reserve
- Army National Guard
- Air Force
- Other, please specify
- Marine Corps
- Air Force Reserve
- Marine Corps Reserve
- Air Guard
- Other, please specify
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