

Career Transition of UK Armed Forces Officers

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Context

Recent conflicts around the world have created an increased awareness and interest in the UK Armed Forces Community (Ashcroft, 2012). As the charity sector plays a key role in providing services and support for the UK armed forces, transition and civilian employment of the armed forces is of great interest to the various services charities in the UK.

Understanding the sub-segments and their specific needs within the UK armed forces community is an under-researched area. Most insight on the subject matter is generated by the key players within the service charity sector (e.g. The Royal British Legion, 2014; Forces in Mind Trust, 2013). However, more specific and detailed research is needed to understand the career transition of the UK armed forces community.

A majority of the academic research that exists on the armed forces focus on the US armed forces (Iversen, et al. 2005). Academic researchers have shown an increasing interest in transition of the armed forces and their mental health (Hatch, et al., 2013; Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milliken, 2006; Iversen, et al., 2005; Jordan, 2011). However, more research is still needed. This is especially relevant now as the UK Ministry of Defence is planning to cutback the armed forces significantly by the end of 2017 (BBC, 2013). As well as understanding the transition process and the influences and consequences of effective transition, it is also important to get an understanding of the nature of jobs and career choices made by the armed forces community. This knowledge will help service charities who are engaged in supporting transition of the armed forces to provide better advice and guidance in terms of career choices.

Purpose

This research aims to understand the career transition of one segment of the UK armed forces – the Officers. Existing research, to a large extent, views the armed forces community as a single segment. However, due to various factors such as education levels and salaries of officer and non-officer ranks, the transition of officers and non-officers are likely to be different (MacManus, et al. 2012; Iversen, et al. 2005). Therefore, more specific understanding of various sub-segments of the UK armed forces is needed and this research aims to partially fill this need by focussing on the officer ranks of the armed forces.

Method

An online survey of 800 ex-officers of the UK armed forces was carried out. The survey focussed on the service career of the armed forces (service, ranks, time in service, etc) as well as current civilian career (salary levels, locations, sectors, functions, etc). The survey findings are currently being analysed using SPSS to understand the various career choices made by officers leaving the service.

Findings to date

Nearly 60% of the sample were part of the Army (RAF – 17%, RM – 4% RN – 19%) which reflected the general population of the Armed forces where Army is the largest of the UK armed forces. Approximately 95% of the sample were male which, once again, corresponds to the overall armed forces population. On average, respondents were in the service for around 20 years and they left the service around 5 years ago. This indicates that the transition to a new career is relatively swift for officers.

Initial analysis shows that the three most popular locations where ex-officers are employed are London, South East and South West of England respectively. Most popular sector for the sample was Defence followed by Banking & Finance and Education. Consultancy is the most popular function/role which the sample entered in their civilian role.

In terms of civilian salaries earned by the sample, there was no significant difference based on which service the sample were part of. Hence, regardless of whether they were in the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines, on average, they earned similar salaries in their civilian careers. With regards to Army, RAF, and RM, there is a significant relationship between their rank when leaving the service and the civilian salaries. For these three services, the higher the rank, the higher their civilian salaries.

Conclusion

The data from the survey are still in the analysis phase and further findings will be available for presentation at the colloquium. The findings from this research will provide insights into the nature of civilian careers that ex-officers enter into along with related career insights including job satisfaction, salary levels, locations and training needs to name a few. Service charities providing employment services to ex-officers will be able to use the data to provide career insights to officers planning transitions which will enable them to make realistic and informed career choices. Furthermore, the charities will also be able to segment their clients based on career choices and aspirations which will enable them to create more targeted services and training opportunities.

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