

Post-9/11 Veterans' Soft Skill Adaptability: Conversations in Veterans Studies: A Cross-Sectional Study of Self-Directed Motivation to Acquire Critical Skills in Deployed Settings



COLLECTION:
CONVERSATIONS IN
VETERANS STUDIES

ARTICLE

MICHAEL HARPER 

VIRGINIA TECH.
PUBLISHING

ABSTRACT

The transformational change brought about by the Coronavirus Pandemic has not only tested the boundaries of science, medicine, and the welfare of humanity at the onset of 2020, but it has also created an irreversible modus operandi for leveraging highly skilled human capital to drive innovation. In hindsight of organizations acquiring the talent of this veteran cohort before the economic downturn experienced in 2020, employers failed to effectively leverage the adaptability of post-9/11 veterans' soft skills to capitalize on their experience derived from heightened operational demands in deployed settings. Such failures often result in missed opportunities for both the employer and employee to exploit innovation in organizational constructs. As economic instability caused by Coronavirus Pandemic continues to serve as the principal catalyst for the US workforce transforming to a "new normal" during the tumultuous years 2020–2021, organizational leaders should look to research with the idea of prospecting the critical soft skill potentialities of post-9/11 veterans.

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Michael Harper

Robert Morris University, US

mailharper@yahoo.com

HarperHRMC@outlook.com

KEYWORDS:

Post-9/11 Veteran; self-directed motivation; soft skills; adaptability; conversations

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Harper, M. (2022). Post-9/11 Veterans' Soft Skill Adaptability: Conversations in Veterans Studies: A Cross-Sectional Study of Self-Directed Motivation to Acquire Critical Skills in Deployed Settings. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 8(1), pp. 79–82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v8i1.300>

Current discourse contributing to this research aims to determine the level of influence that heightened operational demands have had on post-9/11 veterans' unparalleled propensity to be self-directed by motivational factors to develop competencies in a time of accelerated transformational change. In the lead up to Veterans Day 2021, James Rodriguez, the US Department of Labor's Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy for Veterans' Employment and Training Service, substantiated the notion of adaptability skills by postulating, "post-9/11 veterans have channeled their talent, skills, and leadership into post-military success, achieving higher labor participation rates and over 30% higher earnings than their non-veteran peers, according to the Census Bureau" (DL-Online, 2021, para. 3).

Coincidentally, these patterns of contemporary behavioral research and science-based methodologies involving data analysis have only recently begun to inquire about these veterans' unique adaptability skills to develop advanced solutions for complex challenges in emergency response programs and workforce settings across the US (Der-Martirosian et al., 2019). Moreover, the degree of self-directed motivation among post-9/11 veterans who have exploited the mastery of critical skills derived from the complexities of heightened operational demands in deployed settings is measurable by the effects of self-selection in their patriotic identity within an all-volunteer force, according to a Congressional Budget Office study reported by Golding and Adedeji (2007). The corresponding sense of commitment among post-9/11 veterans' self-selection to serve in an all-volunteer force has had a consequential impact on self-directed motivation and the sense of growth that converges with the mastery of critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills developed in the rigors of deployed settings.

According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs (2018) Population Projection Model 2018 (VetPop2018), Gulf War Era veterans (pre and-post-9/11) account for over 50% of all war veterans and have become the largest veteran cohort in the veteran population projections and are expected to remain so through 2040. With an estimated 200,000 veterans transitioning from the military every year, and the withdrawal of American military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan in 2021, post-9/11 veterans, including all active service and members of the Reserve Components, will continue to transition into a critical skills-based workforce. In years just before the accelerated changes brought about by the pandemic, Davis and Minnis (2017) highlighted the notion of business value that prospective employers may elicit from post-9/11 veterans' military service experience since the onset of the Global War on Terrorism in 2001. In fact, in just the last decade, an

increased emphasis has been placed on the advantages of incorporating the most exceptional soft skills that post-9/11 veterans possess into workforce-planning strategies. The most remarkable soft skills that these veterans acquired through their military service experience primarily center on leadership development (Rand Corporation, 2017), followed by critical thinking and decision-making capabilities to solve complex problems (Oprins et al., 2018; Simpson and Sariol, 2019). The adaptability of these most prominent soft skills among post-9/11 veterans is characteristic of the adaptive performance that is highly sought-after by many employers.

POST-9/11 VETERANS' SOFT SKILL ADAPTABILITY

According to Barrera and Carter (2017), veterans' work performance results are reportedly unsurpassed compared to colleagues without any military experience. The post-9/11 veteran experience, resourcefulness, and ability to adapt quickly to fluid situations are attributable to their response to the complexities of heightened operational demands placed upon them in post-9/11 military operations. These veterans have remained on the leading edge of unprecedented technological advancements, which has raised inquiry into the adaptability of the critical skills they have acquired. "Although adaptability is not a new concept, the pace and types of change we experience continue to grow, [prompting] research sponsors, academic researchers, and practitioners in organizations to become increasingly interested in understanding and enhancing adaptability in the workplace" (Pulakos et al., 2000, p. 612). This notion of "adaptability skills" leverages a broader range of highly adaptive soft skills for more productive outcomes (Kolmar, 2020). Particularly, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills top Zippia's 2020 list of adaptability skills (Ariella, 2020). The idea that "adaptability in the workplace means evolving positively with circumstances" (Kolmar, 2020, para. 2), corresponds with the manner in which post-9/11 veterans articulate the criticality of skills acquired when heightened operational demands compel the profession of arms in rigorous deployed settings. Oprins et al. (2018) suggested that veterans conditioned by this experience have the high cognitive flexibility to quickly assess changes in the performance of their functional role and adapt critical thinking or strategies to new situations. Based on this sense of readiness to assimilate to dynamic change, these veterans' adaptability is a considerable core competency, essential to performing exceptionally in complex and changing situations.

In the translation of military soft skill experience, understanding the capacity or upper limits of post-9/11

veterans' potential to acquire critical skills that prospective employers may leverage as adaptable to their workplace is essential to bridge the all-too-familiar military-civilian divide, or what may be conceptualized as “a disconnect in lived experiences and cultures between military and civilian communities” (Biniecki & Berg, 2020, p. 32). This disconnect is counterintuitive and often characterizes misperceptions, lack of knowledge, and an inability to identify with post-9/11 veterans who bring critical skills to the workforce. In other instances, the intricacies of translating the adaptability of critical skills may confound employers' understanding of a veteran's capacity and the adaptive skills they bring to the workplace. Be that as it may, “veteran-ready” employers (Maurer, 2020) who are intuitively aware of these disparities are more readily apt to ascertain a veteran's capacity by measuring the abilities or proficiency in skills they acquired for navigating complex specializations of military experience.

Compared to the individual capacity to potentially acquire critical skills, capability enables post-9/11 veterans with the power or ability to respond to changing environments to generate probable outcomes. This emphasis on soft skill development prompts a more progressive and holistic, skills-based approach to identify varying perspectives of veterans to confidently adapt the critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making skills they possess across a broad range of workforce sectors in the US. This notion of adaptability advances a cross-sectional analysis that informs the suitability of these most prominent critical skills where self-efficacy of knowledge, skills, and abilities (or KSAs; Kirchner & Akdere, 2019; Wenger et al., 2017) among post-9/11 veterans are leveraged, more clearly identifying specific prerequisites required in the performance between military and civilian occupations, and demonstratable through qualifying experience, education, or training.

CONCLUSION

As organizations move towards cultivating a skills-based approach to developing human capital, more contemporary behavioral research and Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners have pointed out that some of the most critical and highly sought-after adaptability skills include leadership, critical thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making. These highly sought-after skills, circa 2020 and beyond, are hallmarks of post-9/11 veterans' soft skills, acquired through conditioning to the complexities of heightened operational demands placed upon them in rigorous deployed settings. Coincidentally, the mission-oriented commitment to the profession of arms in an all-volunteer force is a testament to these veterans' state of

readiness to assimilate to a varying degree of challenges, evident in military postures where volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity is the norm. As post-9/11 veterans integrate adaptability skills acquired under atypical conditions to the current dynamic state of the workforce, it is imperative that employers now capitalize on these veterans' experience to move beyond the uncertain times in which we live by bridging the all-too-familiar military-civilian divide that has constrained innovative solutions for far too long.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Michael Harper  orcid.org/0000-0002-7563-8848
Robert Morris University, US

REFERENCES

- Ariella, S.** (2020, November 11). *8 important adaptability skills for the workplace (and how to improve them)*. Zippa. <https://www.zippia.com/advice/adaptability-skills/>
- Barrera, C., & Carter, P.** (2017). *Challenges on the home front: Underemployment hits veterans hard*. ZipRecruiter. <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/blog/underemployment-hits-veterans-hard/>
- Biniecki, S., & Berg, P.** (2020). The senior military officer as a veteran in transition: Opportunities for adult learning and bridging the military-civilian divide. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2020(166), 25–36. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20381>
- Davis, V., & Minnis, S.** (2017). Military veterans' transferrable skills: An HRD practitioner dilemma. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 19(1), 6–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422316682961>
- Der-Martirosian, C., Schmitz, S., Wyte-Lake, T., & Dobalian, A.** (2019). US military veterans: an untapped resource as disaster volunteers. *American Journal of Public Health*, 109(S4), S263–S264. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2019.305137>
- DL-Online.** (2021, November 9). *Guest opinion: Post-9/11 veterans are taking the working world by storm*. <https://www.dl-online.com/opinion/7273540-Guest-Opinion-Post-911-veterans-are-taking-the-working-world-by-storm>
- Golding, H., & Adedeji, A.** (2007). *The all-volunteer military: Issues and performance*. Congress of the United States, Congressional Budget Office. <https://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/ftpdocs/83xx/doc8313/07-19-militaryvol.pdf>

- Kirchner, M., & Akdere, M.** (2019). An empirical investigation of the acquisition of leadership KSAs in the US Army: Implications for veterans' career transitions. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 4(1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v4i1.85>
- Kolmar, C.** (2020, November 11). *Adaptability skills: what are they?* Zippia. <https://www.zippia.com/advice/adaptability-skills/>
- Maurer, R.** (2020, October 21). *Employers share veteran hiring, retention strategies.* Society for Human Resource Management. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/employers-share-veteran-hiring-retention-strategies.aspx>
- Oprins, E., Bosch, K., & Venrooij, W.** (2018). Measuring adaptability demands of jobs and the adaptability of military and civilians. *Military Psychology*, 30(6), 576–589. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08995605.2018.1521689>
- Pulakos, E., Arad, S., Donovan, M., & Plamondon, K.** (2000). Adaptability in the workplace: development of a taxonomy of adaptive performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(4), 612. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.85.4.612>
- Rand Corporation.** (2017). *Essential skills veterans gain during professional military training: A resource for leaders and hiring managers.* PDF file. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/tools/TL160z2-2.html>
- Simpson, J., & Sariol, A. M.** (2019). Squared away: Veterans on the board of directors. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 160(4), 1035–1045. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-018-3907-1>
- US Department of Veterans Affairs.** (2018). *Veteran population projections 2020–2040.* National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/Demographics/New_Vetpop_Model/Vetpop_Infographic2020.pdf
- Wenger, J., Pint, E., Piquado, T., Shanley, M., Beleche, T., Bradley, M., Welch, J., Werber, L., Yoon, C., Duckworth, E., & Curtis, N.** (2017). *Helping soldiers leverage Army knowledge, skills, and abilities in civilian jobs.* Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1719.html. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR1719>

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Harper, M. (2022). Post-9/11 Veterans' Soft Skill Adaptability: Conversations in Veterans Studies: A Cross-Sectional Study of Self-Directed Motivation to Acquire Critical Skills in Deployed Settings. *Journal of Veterans Studies*, 8(1), pp. 79–82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21061/jvs.v8i1.300>

Submitted: 09 September 2021 Accepted: 07 November 2021 Published: 28 January 2022

COPYRIGHT:

© 2022 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Journal of Veterans Studies is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by VT Publishing.