

CAREER MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY AMONG VOCATIONAL SKILLED MILITARY RETIREES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of transition skills training for military retirees are to prepare them towards their retirement plan. Ability to be employed with ease after retirement indicates that the retiree is competent in planning and implementing his plan on employment post military service. This study aimed to gauge the effectiveness of the skills training attended by military retirees and to examine whether there is any difference in the career management competencies of the military retirees if they are trained by different training centres and /or if they enrolled into different training areas. A quantitative study using survey exploration was carried out on 380 low-ranking military retirees. This study used a set of questionnaire adapted from Career Competencies Indicator by Haase and Francis-Smythe (2007). The results indicated that the level of competencies among military retirees were at moderate or middle level. Further, the study revealed that there were variation in competency results obtained by retirees training in different training centres as well as in different areas of skills. This study is hoped to be used by training centers and department of military retiree welfare to prepare for a more effective program to assist military retirees boost up their competence and confidence in acquiring skills for post retirement employment.

Keywords: Career Transition Training, Career Management Competency

1 INTRODUCTION

Military personnel who have completed their service contract will return as civilians. In general, the transition to civilian way of life is rather difficult for ex- military personnel as they are used to regimented working condition. For those who choose to work instead of retiring completely, adapting to new way of working or work environment can be rather difficult initially, more so if the work undertaken is vastly different from the previously held. Unlike civilian retirement, military retirement requires future retiree to undergo training and courses in order to emulate the civilian way of doing things i.e. a transition from military culture to public culture (Baruch & Quick, 2007).

Effectiveness in managing career transition proves to be crucial for military retirees preparing for comfortable life after retirement. With the formation of good transitional skills training program aimed at providing skills training to transitioned military retirees, enable them to acquire a reasonable skill and experience for entering into a civilian workforce after the regimented work culture (Azizan, Mahmood Nazar & Mohd Taib, 2003. The Transitional Skills Training Program which was initiated in 2012 varies by category and rank and is compulsory for the intended military retirees to attend. Besides Malaysia, other foreign countries such as Great Britain, United States, Singapore, Taiwan and India also have similar programs for their military retirees (Azizan et al., 2003; Mohd Hafiz Noor, 2004).

Organized courses in skills transition program include motivational talk, training programs and vocational skills which are necessary and applicable for the intended military retirees to learn. The aim is to expose them to as much knowledge and skills as possible for their utilization in the new field of work after the retirement (Zabry, 2007). To achieve the desired outcome, the courses offered in the skills transition program must be relevant and effective and skewed towards improving the participant's self-management competency.

This study seeks to identify and measure the existing level of self-management competency of the military retirees after attending the program as well as the effectiveness of the training centers and skills areas chosen for the said programs. It is hoped that the result obtained and documented can be used by the relevant authorities in improving the contents of the program for the military retirees' maximum benefits.

2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to identify and measure the military retirees' level of competence in managing their career post military service. The study is based on the existing skills that they have, the area or type of training skills that they acquired from attending the transitional skills program and the category of training centers that provided them with the program. Accordingly, there are three research questions that require answers, namely:

1. What level of career management competencies acquired by military retirees?
2. Is there a significant difference in the level of competency based on the skills training center attended?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of competency based on the type or areas of skills acquired during the training?

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Transition and Career Training

Transition period in respect of military retirees in this study means making a move from the regimented life to a non-restricted or self-determined life. As mentioned earlier during the transition period, career training in the form of education, skills training and motivation are provided to the military retirees preparing for the post retirement employment. In the public and / or private sector, job competition is usually high thus forcing a job seeker (military retiree) to compete for job or position offered.

Expansion in the economic sector and further technological developments if any can however boost the country's economy subsequently expand job market and thus generate more jobs opportunities and employment (Kuijpers, Schyns & Scheerens, 2006). If this is the case, then it is easier for a military retiree to get a job. In general, a military retiree who has been successful in his service period is usually a competent person (Ilaamie, Zainal & Yusserie, 2008). Thus, if the military retiree already has this competency trait it can be assumed that he could easily adapt and also be successful in post retirement employment.

As implied by the Human Capital theory; investing in education, training, etc, can give good returns to a person since high likely his ability and skills is improved thus enhanced his quality and level of production. This in return can potentially lead to an increase in his earning power (Mercy, 1996). In conclusion, the human capital theory stresses that investing in education and training can give good returns where the beneficiary of the investments can reap the benefits by getting better opportunities in securing the desired and applicable job based on skills acquired.

b. Career Management Competency

Career management competency can loosely be interpreted as the ability of a person to self manage his working and learning experiences in order to achieve and maintain his desired or

targeted career goal. The desired traits that lead to the competency include able to impose self discipline, skillful, knowledgeable, able to adapt quickly to changing work requirements and/or environment, creative, good networking, dependable, perseverance and highly responsible. Individuals who are competent in managing their career will be more confident working in the new environment compared to those who are not (Redekopp, Hache & Jarvis, 2006).

Due to fast technological change and recent economic globalization, the way of making things or handling a task/job has changed drastically for some job sectors. These jobs require the ability, skills and knowledge on the latest technology. This has greatly impacted the military retirees since most of them are of middle aged group who are not savvy in the new technological areas and high likely do not have the qualified skills that are required of them in the current market (Mc Dermott, 2007).

Research conducted on competency in managing a person's career showed that the process in acquiring the competency include a number of stages where it started with basic skills training then on to career development process that evolved into the achievement of self-management, individual career planning, design of career and adapting to the changed situation (Haase & Francis-Smythe, 2006). This process is being emulated in the transition training program where the training offered is in the form of technical and vocational skills where military retirees can choose, learn and develop the capability in handling tasks within that respective scope chosen and eventually be able to take up and handle related jobs within the scope learned.

The competency career management is based on a theory of Career Intelligence developed by DeFillipi & Arthur (1994) where a career role attained by an individual is based on the person's discretion in setting up his goal for the career. Intelligence is built from the concept of career thinking without boundaries and it is related to the concept of protean career.

In career transitioning, some researchers (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Sullivan & Arthur, 2006) described that there exist a necessity for a career to be outside boundaries which often involves interchanging assignments, tasks rotation and jobs swapping from one organization to another. The experience in career transition often times occurs in individuals however; evolution of a career outside the boundaries does not only involve a single individual but involves many who help individuals acquire the information and networking (Cohen & Mallon, 1999). In conclusion, this theory explains that an individual who wishes to maneuver his career into the desired goal would need to think wider than the boundaries of his existing career.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Systematic samplings on 380 non-ranking military retirees from all over Malaysia have been selected for this study. The respondents consisted of Army retirees (147), Navy retirees (117) and Air Force retirees (116). Data collected were in the form of feedbacks from the respondents on the questionnaires mailed out to them. Respondents were given a period of 3 weeks to respond and follow-up were made to ensure all feedbacks from the 380 respondents were obtained.

Career management competency instrument was adapted from "*Career competencies Indicator*" by Haase & Francis-Smythe (2007). The measuring devices have been used in several past studies (Haase & Francis-Smythe, 2006; Haase & Francis-Smythe, 2007). For the purposes of this study, the Researcher has obtained permission to use the indicators that were developed by Haase & Francis-Smythe (2007) and subsequently obtained permission to translate and modify according to the research requirements and findings.

A total of 30 items were adapted from career management competency indicator. Questionnaires were designed to collect information specifically related to the competency to manage a career. The respondents were asked to answer the survey instrument using a five point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Items included in the instrument covered seven aspects namely; Feedback Seeking, Self Performance, Goal Setting, Self-Knowledge, Career Guidance, Knowledge on Jobs, and Personal Skills. Value cronbach alpha for the questionnaire was 96.

All data obtained from the respondents were analyzed using SPSS version 18. To identify the level of personal career management competencies among military retirees, descriptive statistics involving the mean, standard deviation and percentage were used. As for review on the competency differences based on the training centers and training areas, one-way ANOVA test inferential analysis and independent t tests were conducted.

5 FINDINGS

Table 1 showed the results on the mean and standard deviation scores of the Overall as well as each sub-scale of the career management competency for the 380 respondents selected. From the table, it indicated that the mean score of the Overall personal career management competency stood at 3.79 with a standard deviation of 0.36 (the Likert scale scores range from 1 to 5). As for the seven sub-scales, Goal Setting sub-scale showed the highest ranking with a mean score of $M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.64$, followed by the Self-Performance ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 0.47$), Personal Skills, ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.49$), Career Guidance, ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.51$), Self-Knowledge ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.46$), Feedback Seeking ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.69$) and Knowledge on Jobs, ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.59$).

Table 2 on the other hand tabulated the results of interquartile range of the Overall career management competency and its sub-scales. This table indicated that 195 respondents (51.3%) fall under medium category competency clusters while 96 (25.3 %) under the low category cluster and 89 (23.4%) of the respondents fall under the high category cluster. This means that out of the 380 respondents sampled, the majority of the respondents 195 or 51.3% have career management competency of medium level, while 96 or 25.3% respondents, low level and only 89 or 23.4% respondents showed a high level of career management competency.

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviations for career management competency

Pemboleh ubah	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall	3.79	0.36
Feedback Seeking	3.75	0.69
Self Performance	3.87	0.47
Goal Setting	3.92	0.64
Self Knowledge	3.67	0.46
Career Guidance	3.80	0.51
Knowledge on Jobs	3.77	0.59
Personal Skills	3.83	0.49

n=380

Similar to the Overall career management competency, all the sub-scales displayed high clusters around the medium level competency (highest concentration) with Career Guidance being the first, totaling 277 respondents or 72.9%, followed by Skills (270 or 71.1%), Goal Setting (184 or 48.4%) Feedback Seeking (179 or 47.1%) Knowledge on Jobs (173 or 45.5%), Self Performance (146 or 38.4%), and Self Knowledge (135 or 35.5%).

Table 2 also showed only Self Performance, Goal Setting and Knowledge on Jobs sub-scales displayed high competency level as their second highest concentration with 121 (31.8%), 110 (28.9%) and 105(27.6%) respondents respectively. The rest of the sub-scales displayed low competency level as their second highest concentration.

Table 2: Career management competency category

Pemboleh ubah	Category	Freq	%
Overall	Low	96	25.3
	Medium	195	51.3
	High	89	23.4
Feedback Seeking	Low	131	34.5
	Medium	179	47.1
	High	70	18.4
Self Performance	Low	113	29.7
	Medium	146	38.4
	High	121	31.8
Goal Setting	Low	86	22.6
	Medium	184	48.4
	High	110	28.9
Self-Knowledge	Low	127	33.4
	Medium	135	35.5
	High	118	31.1
Career Guidance	Low	64	16.8
	Medium	277	72.9
	High	39	10.3
Knowledge on Jobs	Low	102	26.8
	Medium	173	45.5
	High	105	27.6
Skills	Low	66	17.4
	Medium	270	71.1
	High	44	11.6

a. Assessing Training Centers' impact on Career Management Competency

One-way ANOVA test is used to assess the findings on career management competencies based on different training centers. Comparisons were made between three (3) centers namely; Public Training Centers, Perbadanan Hal Ehwal Bekas Angkatan Tentera (Perhebat), and Private Training Centers. Based on the results obtained; the figures showed that the mean scores for Overall career management competencies and its sub-scales did vary from one training center to another. Tabulation on the mean scores and standard deviations of the competencies are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 concluded that Perhebat has the highest Overall competency mean score of 3.85 followed by Private Training Center at 3.74 and Public Training Center at 3.73. For Knowledge on Jobs sub-scale, the mean score for respondents from Perhebat is 3.90 while Public Training Center trailed at 3.65 and the Private Training Center at 3.62. For the Skills sub-scale, Perhebat's respondents still retained the highest mean scores of 3.91 on the competency followed by the Private Training Center's respondents at 3.74 and Public Training Center's respondents at 3.72.

Table 3: Career management competency based training center

Career management competency and indicator	Public Training Center		Perhebat		Private Training Center	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall	3.73	.37	3.85	.33	3.74	.39
Feedback Seeking	3.75	.71	3.77	.68	3.73	.70
Self Performance	3.80	.45	3.93	.44	3.82	.50
Goal Setting	3.89	.68	3.92	.61	3.91	.65
Self Knowledge	3.62	.49	3.72	.44	3.64	.47
Career Guidance	3.74	.51	3.83	.49	3.80	.52
Knowledge Jobs	3.65	.62	3.90	.53	3.62	.60
Skills	3.72	.47	3.91	.45	3.74	.53

Based on the results of one-way ANOVA analysis, there were significant difference on career management competency between different training centers as depicted by $F(2,379) = 4.69, p < 0.05$. However with respect to Knowledge on Jobs sub-scale, no significant difference is observed between respondents who learned at different training centers ($F(2,379) = 10.14, p < 0.05$). Likewise, the Skills sub-scale also did not display any significant difference ($F(2,379) = 6.69, p < 0.05$).

Tukey HSD comparisons also concluded that Overall, there are significant differences in terms of competency achieved based on different training centers. However, under the Overall significant differences, Perhebat showed a small size effect against Public Training centers ($p < 0.05, d = 0.35$) and also small size effect against Private Training Centers ($p < 0.05, d = 0.31$). In the case of Knowledge on Jobs sub-scale, Tukey HSD comparisons showed that there was a significant difference between Perhebat and Public Training Centers with a small size effect ($p < 0.05, d = 0.45$). and a significant difference between Perhebat and Private Training Centre with large size effect ($p < 0.05, d = 0.90$). As to Skills sub scale, Tukey HSD comparisons showed a significant difference between Perhebat and Public Training Centers with a small size effect ($p < 0.05, d = 0.42$) and also significant difference between Perhebat and Private Training Centers with a small size effect ($p < 0.05, d = 0.35$).

b. Assessing Impact of Skills Training Areas on Career Management Competency

There are two areas of skills training being offered to military retirees namely, the engineering field and the non-engineering field. Engineering field consists of automotive engineering, electrical and construction courses while non-engineering field comprises media & ICT, meals & food, hotels, tailoring and farming courses. Table 4 shows the mean score for skills training of engineering and non-engineering courses.

Table 4: Career management competency based career skills training areas

Career management competency and indicator	Engineering		Non-Engineering	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Overall	3.74	.38	3.83	.35
Feedback Seeking	3.83	.48	3.72	.69
Self Performance	3.88	.48	3.86	.46
Goal Setting	3.86	.62	3.94	.64

Table 4: Career management competency based career skills training areas (Cont.)

Career management competency and indicator	Engineering		Non-Engineering	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Career Guidance	3.82	.51	3.79	.50
Knowledge on Jobs	3.52	.66	3.90	.51
Skills	3.68	.59	3.89	.42

Assessment using t-test indicated that there exist differences in competencies between retirees attending engineering courses and retirees attending non-engineering courses. The t-test revealed that respondents' competencies in non-engineering field were slightly significant if compared to respondents in engineering field where $t(378) = -2.28, p < 0.05$.

The Study further revealed that Overall career management competencies for engineering respondents ($M = 3.74$) was lower than that of respondents from non-engineering field ($M = 3.83$.) The difference between the two mean was 0.09 with modest effect size (d) of 0.52.

For Knowledge on Jobs sub-scale, respondents of non-engineering field showed a significant difference in career management competency over the engineering respondents with $t(378) = -5.65, p < .05$. The mean score for non-engineering respondents were higher ($M = 3.90$) than the respondents in engineering ($M = 3.52$) where the mean difference was 0.38 with size (d) effect of modest 0.67.

Similarly, Skills sub scale result denoted a higher level of competency for non-engineering respondents compared to that of engineering respondents, $t(378) = -3.41, p < .05$. The mean score for non-engineering respondents ($M = .3.89$) is better than that of engineering respondents ($M = 3.68$) and their mean difference is 0.21 where the size d effect is small at 0.44.

6 DISCUSSION

a. Skills Training Centers

In general, every military retiree is aware of his / her own career management competency level. The study undertaken on 380 respondents indicated that Overall, the military retirees' competencies were recorded at medium or moderate level. Likewise, all the sub-scales competencies were also recorded at medium or moderate level.

The research conducted by Ball, (2004), Ball & John, (2005), C Allan, (2005) and Kujipers, Schyns & Scheerens (2006) also showed that many military retirees were aware of the importance of developing competency in career management to cope with the job employment post military retirement. In other words, they know that it helps to focus and develop the skills for the later employment even though the retirees already have some sort of working experience while in the military (Hunt, 2007). Despite the awareness, many however are not eager to learn and/or procrastinate with the thought and confident that they can master /develop the skills as soon as when it is required

According to Ebberwein, Krieshock, Ulven & Prosser (2004) chances of retiring individuals getting a job depend substantially on several factors which include, experience, job status and knowledge, level of skills as well as exposure to the changing circumstance and labor competition. Due to changing job requirements and the necessity to possess applicable skills in joining the increasingly complex and competitive work place, individuals are forced to acquire related skills. These related skills need to be introduced and properly taught to the retiring military personnel in training centers while they are still in service and/or during the transition training program.

At training centers, the content of programs, techniques of teaching and learning, play a role in developing participant's competencies. The theory of Human Capital (Shultz, 1963) emphasizes that the development of certain skills require specialization and experience that can be achieved partly at the training institution or school. Therefore, the relevant training attended by a retiree at a training center can help boost his /her production or productivity and can potentially improve the income earned.

This study is consistent with a study conducted by Ros Hani (2006) and Mohd Zuki (2007) that states; the differences in retirees' places of training affect their competency. As seen earlier, a large size effect was displayed between Perhebat and Private Training Centre in terms of competencies with respect to Knowledge on Jobs sub-scale. This means that awareness and knowledge of military retirees in identifying the right factors for new job's requirements vary with the place from where their skills were acquired.

The way one thinks and reacts to an action differs from one person to another. The reaction usually depends on the earlier experiences, level of maturity, environmental exposures and knowledge acquired. As per statement by Ebberwein, Krieshock, Ulven & Prosser (2004), the job situations change in an increasingly complex and competitive manner which force individuals to acquire skills and competencies in order to stay ahead and manage their careers efficiently. As for the retirees, the beginning of a career management could be instilled and properly developed as early as when they were in service or during the transition training skills courses. The following were comments made by respondents during a interview conducted with them:

"Every training center prepares its skills training programs according to what has been arranged, so education received is different and this affects the way we act"(TL1)

"Unlike Perhebat which emphasize on theoretical / motivational programs, Private Training Centers provide more practical training. Actually the training program materials provided by Perhebat and other training centers are the same except that other training centers emphasize on the practical side of the job and the experience help us feel the civilian way of doing things and, we know a lot of retirees agree with us on this"(TL2)

"The Ministry of Defense should organize more relevant courses since they know better and would have more information on the welfare of the retirees" (TL3)

"Basically both are of equal standing. However it would be even better if Perhebat could also intensify its practical training skills in order to provide added value to the retirees by learning through practice. If this is the case I have more confident in Perhebat ..."(TL4).

The above scenarios indicated that the retirees are also interested in learning and experiencing the practical or the applied side of the skills being trained. Currently Perhebat transition programs are skewed towards theoretical and motivational courses while Private and Public training centers are doing practical or applied side of the skills trained with little or no exposure to the motivational part on the direction of career being pursued. Thus there exist imbalances in the ways training programs are held with respect to the military retirees. The imbalances have somewhat contributed to the less desired result in improving military retirees competencies for post retirement job. As emphasized by theory of Human Capital (Shultz, 1963); the development of certain skills require specialization and experience and this can be achieved partly at the training institution or school. The right training obtained can induce a person to improve his / her production or productivity which eventually can lead to a higher income earned.

b. Skills Training Areas

Based on this study, the skills training area chosen does affect the competency level of the military retirees. As indicated earlier, retirees in the non-engineering skills program do have a higher grasp of competency when compared to retirees in the engineering program. These findings matched with research done by Azizan et.al, (2003), Nor Mohd Hafiz (2004), Hani Rose (2006) and Mohd Zuki (2007) which indicated that matching up the skills training courses with military retirees' interests do have some positive impacts on outcome of their competencies.

Focus on the two sub-scales of competency namely Knowledge on Jobs and Skills, showed that both sub-scales recorded higher level of competencies for the retirees in the non-engineering area. This indicated that a greater number of military retirees are more at ease with non-engineering jobs. However cases were reported where retirees did not even know who to approach or how to go about soliciting for jobs available in the market, which in the end forced them to take on any that was available. Comments made by military retirees revealing this misfortune are appended below:

".....Sometimes retired army officers do not know who can help in providing information on the relevant jobs available. Thus, this makes it difficult for us to get the information and we end up doing the job that we know according to our skills. "(BK1)

"Sometimes we are not sure whether the type of skills training that we take can be of help in managing our own careers. We are not aware of the skills required in a new job as the scope of our previous work and what we are going through today is very different "(BK2).

"We attended the training just for the sake of going through the motion since we are not interested in anything. We just want to qualify for the retirement requirement only "(BK13)

".... I do not know whether to improve the skills by taking the same engineering field or not. What is important is that, if you want to make money then you have to work"(BK4)

As per statement by VETS (2002), training programs provided to military retirees are mainly aimed at a) self achievement, b) career exploration, c) planning for successful job search. 4) examining the career opportunities offered and f) providing preliminary support. However interviews with the military retirees indicated otherwise that is, many saw the transition training merely fulfilling retirement requirement and were not keen to take up the opportunities given for self betterment and preparation for post retirement employment. What is being observed is that there is a lack of commitment and a laid-back attitude on the part of military retirees in preparing for their futures endeavors.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study revealed the followings:

1. The samples examined indicated that the career management competency of the majority of military retirees are at moderate or medium level
2. Many military retirees did not have much interest in learning for preparation of post retirement employment let alone improving their career management competencies.
3. The training centers that conducted skills training did have positive impact on the level of career management competency achieved by military retirees.
4. Skills training area chosen especially the non-engineering area also showed positive impact on the military retirees' career management competency.
5. The training centers' staff hired to teach the military retirees need to be adequately prepared in imparting skills and knowledge to the military retirees.

Following the above findings; the relevant authorities are recommended to do the following:

1. Introduce the skills training to the army personnel some reasonable period prior retiring. Do surveys to find out the length of this reasonable period for skills training and knowledge to be properly imparted to the potential military retirees.
2. Provide practical or on the job training where possible to further improve the retirees' competencies in managing the future respective job.
3. Identify and choose the right skills to be trained to retiring army personnel. This can be done by doing background research, asking retirees' opinions on interest or any other effective method to ensure training skills offered and retirees' interest are matched. This effort can motivate the retirees to learn and potentially increase retirees' competencies in managing their future jobs
4. Provide periodic motivational courses to motivate retiring personnel to think and plan for post retirement period.
5. Identify the right training centers for the retirees' to attend. Ensure the trainers are competent in training and up to date in knowledge to be imparted to retirees.
6. Monitor the personnel's status in acquiring the skills. Find a solution in the event retirees are not able to cope with the training modules.
7. Continue to provide support for a reasonable period after the transition period by continuing skills training, motivation, etc so as to assist military retirees assimilate into the new work environment with ease.

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