VETERANS SERVING THE FRANCHISE SECTOR: EXPLORING THE APPEAL

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study aimed to understand the motivation of former service members to become franchisees. The population of veterans targeted, many of whom were entering the civilian workforce for the first time, have been franchisees for less than five years. The specific objectives of this exploratory investigation were to (1) develop a greater understanding of veterans' situation, orientation, and motivation for becoming franchisees, and (2) investigate the veterans' process for selecting a franchisor. We found that there are three emotional motivators behind veterans' choice of self-employment: control, value, and fear. Further, we found veterans' choice to purchase a franchise came after they decided on entrepreneurship, and this decision was based on a practical assessment of their own Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (KSAs). This exploration can provide insight into veterans' pursuit of self-employment that will help those working with transitioning soldiers as well as identify areas for theory development.

Introduction

Veterans face a plethora of challenges as they integrate back into the civilian population. Among these are a lack of understanding of their skillsets and experience that inhibits employment (Davis & Minnis, 2017; Ford, 2017), a dissonance of organizational citizenship behaviors in civilian organizations (Rose, Herd, & Palacio, 2017), and a lack of psychological support for the difficult transition to a non-military way of life (Miller, 2017). Yet, veterans offer transferable skills that create a unique and versatile addition to the workplace (Harrell & Berglass, 2012; Syracuse University, 2012; U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2011). Furthermore, these former service members can facilitate economic expansion by engaging in entrepreneurial endeavors. Data available from the most recent U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of Small Business Owners 2012 (released April 2017) shows that 2.52 million establishments in the U.S. today are majority-owned by veterans, representing 9.1% of all businesses.

Entrepreneurial activity is critical for introducing innovations, advancing technical change, and propelling job growth (Schumpeter, 1934; Shane, Locke, & Collins, 2003). Researchers have long been interested in the human motivation to pursue entrepreneurship given the high risk of new business ventures failing. Individuals who invest in a franchise system (the franchisee) differ from traditional entrepreneurs in that they are not the inventors of the concept or business idea; rather, they are entering a contractual relationship with the franchisor to operate a proven concept where business operations are already established (Spinelli, Rosenberg, & Birley, 2004). Similar to the traditional entrepreneur, however, franchisees are business owners who commit a certain amount of risk-taking and proactiveness to help ensure their firm succeeds (DiPietro, Severt, Welsh, & Raven, 2008).

There are over 745,000 business format franchised establishments in the United States (International Franchise Association [IFA], 2018). In 2017, this sector accounted for $425.5 billion of the United States (US) Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (IFA, 2018). Furthermore, franchising in the U.S. is expected to grow 1-2% annually (IFA, 2018) with expansion coming from new franchisees entering established systems, small businesses and entrepreneurs turning to franchising as a growth platform, as well as conversion franchising, whereby either independent businesses are rebranded to create a franchise system, or current managers are encouraged to become self-employed franchisees of their stores.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s numerous studies (Knight, 1986; Hing, 1993; Withane, 1991) investigated the incentives for franchising from the franchisee's perspective and a broad spectrum of personal motivations, as well as external economic factors (e.g., recessions; downsizing of large corporations), were linked to why people become franchisees (Frazer, Merrilees, & Wright, 2007). In recent years, franchising has been touted as an opportunity for women, minorities, and veterans to pursue the American dream of business ownership. Yet, research on the motivation of these subgroups to become franchisees remains underdeveloped.

The franchise business model has proven particularly attractive to veterans (Hope, Oh, & Mackin, 2011; McDermott, Boyd, & Weaver, 2015). While veterans account for 7% of the general population, 14% of franchisees are veterans (Schenck, 2019). The International Franchise Association (IFA) offers specific assistance to veterans interested in pursuing a franchise opportunity and many franchisors offer lower entry fees for those who have served in the military. Given the continued growth of franchising in the U.S., it is not surprising that franchise organizations have targeted the transitioning military and veteran populations as potential franchisees.

Problem

Shane, Locke, and Collins (2003) suggest that because people differ in their willingness and abilities to act on entrepreneurial opportunities, this variation has important effects on the entrepreneurial process. This exploratory study aims to understand the motivation of former service members to become franchisees. The population of veterans targeted

in this study, many of whom are entering the civilian workforce for the first time as an adult, make critical career-path decisions as they exit the military and enter into their civilian lives. This study fits Stebbins (2001) definition of exploratory qualitative research in that we investigate an underexplored phenomena to generate new ideas. While there is a vast array of franchising literature we are just at the beginning of the chain with respect to how or why this form of entrepreneurship appeals to veterans.

The specific objectives of this exploratory investigation are to develop (1) a greater understanding of veterans' situation, orientation, and motivation for becoming franchisees, and (2) investigate the veterans' process for selecting a franchisor. From a practical standpoint, these findings could provide insight into the pursuit of self-employment and will help those working with transitioning soldiers as well as franchise organizations understand what influences veterans' decision-making with respect to becoming a franchisee. From an academic perspective, exploratory qualitative research can help garner early insights useful to scholars for generating hypotheses for later investigation (Baskarada, S., 2014; Stebbins, 2001).

Literature Review

Why Veterans Become Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship has proven to be an attractive option for transitioning service members during post war periods, with over 49% of World War II veterans and 40% of Korean War veterans becoming owner/operators of a business (Broughton, Dyer, Haynie, Shaheen, & Tihic 2015). This aligns with Fairlie's (2004) analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor data that shows between 1979 to 2003 veterans had a higher rate of self-employment than non-veterans. Possible explanations for what attracts veterans to self-employment have been borrowed from entrepreneurship literature and include both the 'pull' and 'push' factors that were introduced by Gilad and Levine (1986). Pull factors favor higher-order motivations, suggesting individuals seek self-employment for emotional reasons such as independence and self-fulfillment as well as the desire for wealth creation. Push factors assume lower-order motivation, suggesting individuals are attracted to entrepreneurial activity because they are dissatisfied with their jobs or are unable to find a job due to some type of discrimination. While entrepreneurial intentions have been investigated by numerous researchers and various models proposed (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Shapero, 1982; Segal, Borgia, & Schoenfeld, 2005) limited work has been conducted to understand veterans' motivations for pursuing self-employment (Heinz, Freeman, Harpaz-Rotem, & Pietrzak, 2017).

One effort to gain insight on whether U.S. military service has a statistically significant impact on veteran entrepreneurship was conducted for the SBA by Hope, Oh, and Mackin (2011). These researchers constructed two experimental groups (veterans and non-veterans) using governmental employment data. In comparing the two groups, they confirmed military service has a significant positive effect on entrepreneurship, with veterans 45% more likely to be self-employed than non-veterans. Interestingly, the high percentage was driven by those who served in World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam, with fewer veterans since 2001 pursing the self-employment option. Using the

veteran only group data, the researchers next investigated three potential explanations for the appeal of entrepreneurship, including the intrinsic characteristics of the veterans, qualities and training imparted through their military service, whether the "safety net" of veteran benefits and military pensions provided aircover, as well as possible combinations of all three. Among the entire veteran sample they found no evidence that suggests military training, education, or culture predisposes service members toward entrepreneurship. The data suggested that those serving in the military a shorter period of time (4 years or less) were more likely to pursue self-employment. But, among career military retirees (those with 20 years or more) those who chose self-employment were more likely to be officers than enlistees. It was posited that this positive relationship was likely attributed to the larger military pensions of these retirees providing the economic security for this group to pursue self-employment.

Conversely, in a study of 500 Israeli veterans, Polin and Ehrman (2018) found certain aspects of military service to be associated with higher levels of entrepreneurial intent (EI). First, those veterans who had command experience had higher EI. Second, those who served in technological units versus combat units had higher EI.

Possible explanations for differences in these studies' findings with respect to whether aspects of the military itself influences entrepreneurship are offered. First and most obvious is the samples were cross-country with one study based in the U.S. and one based in Israel. Second, Hope, Oh, and Mackin's (2011) sample was based on archival employment data from the 2007 Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Current Population Survey (CPS) March Supplement, the 2007 CPS Veterans Supplement and the Defense Manpower Data Center's (DMDC) 2003 Survey of Retired Military. Polin and Ehrman (2018) conducted an empirical study using Israeli veterans studying at colleges and universities to understand EI.

The limited attention, as well as the discrepant findings in whether military service instills qualities to orient individuals toward entrepreneurship suggests more research is needed. Greater insight on this topic will be valuable to those who help service personnel consider career options as they transition back into civilian life.

Support for Veterans Pursuing Entrepreneurship
ZGiven the importance of entrepreneurship to the economy, it is not surprising federal legislation was enacted to assist veterans with forming and expanding small business enterprises (Cumberland, 2017). In 1999, Congress passed the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act (Public Law [PL] 106-50). One outcome of this law was the creation of the SBA's Office of Veterans Business Development, the Department of Veterans Affairs' Center for Veterans Enterprise, and the National Veterans Business Development Corporation. In 2003, a second piece of major legislation was enacted as part of the Veterans Benefits Act (Public Law 108-183). Section 308 called for the creation of a Veterans Procurement Program and made it mandatory that federal agencies and prime contractors procure a minimum of 3% of all of their goods and services from service-disabled veteran owned businesses.

Despite the historical trend of veterans being more likely to start their own business (Hope et al., 2011), policies and laws aimed at supporting veteran entrepreneurship, and educational programs designed to influence critical entrepreneurial attitudes such as self-efficacy and passion, as well as develop foundational skills for operating a business (Kerrick, Cumberland, Church-Nally, & Kemelgor, 2014), veteran entrepreneurship has been declining. Only 4.5% of exiting military personnel since the start of the 21st century have gone on to launch a company (Schenck, 2019). Policy makers, educators, and others interested in assisting veterans as they engage in entrepreneurial activity have subsequently taken an interest in the efforts that the franchise community has launched to attract this important group of citizens toward self-employment.

Motivations to Franchise
Franchising has played a major role in shaping the U.S. economy over the last 50 years. At its core, franchising is a business model where the franchisor and the franchisees work together in a contractual network (Gauzente, 2002). This business model enables an entrepreneur (the franchisor) to expand their business by attracting individuals (franchisees) with an entrepreneurial spirit who will invest their capital to license the trademark of the franchisor and who will agree to operate the business by the franchisor's brand standards. The franchisee–franchisor relationship is interdependent with each partner relying on and influencing the other (Morrison, 2000). Franchisees consider themselves entrepreneurs rather than employees of the franchisor (Dandridge & Falbe, 1994; Dant & Nasr, 1998; Fulop & Forward, 1997), but most scholars agree that it is the franchisor who has the most power (Frazer et al., 2007).

Franchising literature has heavily explored the driving factors behind the firm's rationale for entering into these licensing agreements with agency theory and resource constraints heavily offered as key explanations (Combs & Ketchen, 1999). There is also a base of empirical literature that helps provide an understanding of the motivational incentives for individuals to pursue this line of self-employment. Early research of what attracts individuals to become a franchisee found that several factors contribute to the attraction: the trademark of the brand, a "package" offering training and assistance, along with lower development and operating costs which were perceived to decrease the individual's risk of pursuing a business as a solo entrepreneur (Izreali, 1972; Knight, 1986). Using franchisees from service-based organizations, Peterson and Dant (1990) found similar results and reported that the top reasons to pursue franchising included: (a) an established brand name; (b) greater independence; and (c) training provisions from the franchisor.

In addition to the rational economic reasons for becoming a franchisee, on a more emotional level, the desire for autonomy sparks individuals to pursue franchising (McDermott, 2017). Stanworth and Curran (1999) suggested that franchisees' motivations may lie somewhere in between profit and self-actualization. As entry franchisees are generally in the middle of their career path between the ages of 30-50 with access to capital, other 'push factors' such as a family situation or a stalled career also make self-employment attractive (Frazer et al., 2007). Finally, there are also external reasons for why individuals pursue a franchise venture. When recessions occur or there is an economic downturn, the impact is often felt with corporate downsizing and higher

unemployment. Self-employment and franchising become attractive during such periods (Frazer et al., 2007).

Veterans in Franchising

In both the popular and trade press it is often suggested that military personnel are uniquely qualified to become successful franchisees when they exit the service. Their discipline, ability to follow rules, confidence, leadership skills, personnel management experience, and ability to deal with ambiguity and tolerate risk are frequently cited as reasons franchisors should be wooing retired service members (Libava, 2018). Academic research on the subject of veterans and franchising in the U.S., however, is extremely limited.   A literature review (McDermott, 2010) found comparable traits among franchisees and veterans to include discipline, cooperativeness, risk-taking, and the ability to follow a system. From this analysis the author suggested that "franchising can be a benefit to veterans and veterans can be a benefit to franchising" (McDermott, 2010, p. 400).   An empirical study across four distinct franchise brands covering three industries did find that those with former military experience had a higher level of job satisfaction in owning and operating a franchise than those who had no military experience (McDermott, Boyd, & Weaver, 2015).   As such, McDermott, Boyd, and Weaver's (2015) study provides tangential support for the popular belief that veterans are good candidates for becoming franchisees.

The focus to recruit veterans into the franchise sector began in earnest in 1991 when the International Franchise Association (IFA) initiated the VetFran Program to help transitioning services members from the Gulf War. Since that time VetFran has focused on educating veterans on how to investigate and become franchise owners, while also encouraging franchisors to offer discounts and incentives to attract those service members exiting the military. It is reported in the IFA's trade journal that 650 franchise systems across the country have helped more than 6,500 veterans and military spouses acquire a franchise business (Greenbaum, 2019). VetFran itself reports results of their own research survey, which indicates that 97% of franchisors believe veterans make excellent franchisees (IFA, 2018).

While 1 in 7 franchises in the U.S. are owned by veterans (IFA, 2018), neither academic nor practitioner research has identified the motivation or reasons behind veterans pursuing the franchising route of starting a business.   Are veterans 'pushed' into franchising by lack of opportunities for a career? Or, are veterans 'pulled' into this form of self-employment by the desire for financial success, achievement, autonomy, familiarity with franchises, or some other core belief or attitude about self-employment? Are marketing and educational efforts playing a role in veterans' intentions to start a franchise business? What influences these veterans to select specific franchise systems? Only limited empirical work has investigated veterans and franchising and no studies have focused specifically on what motivates veterans to opt into the franchise sector or why they select a specific franchisor. In the next section, the design, procedures, and analysis plan for carrying out the purpose of this pioneer study are presented.

Method

This qualitative exploratory study used a multiple case research design (Stake, 2006) to understand the subjective nature of the decision-making process for veterans who have become franchisees within the last five years. In each of the cases, the veteran franchisees had their own stories to tell. Using this social constructivist lens, our findings can be converted into a set of decision-making criteria that can be applied to future studies that may opt to understand the relative importance of each of those criteria with a larger sample frame.

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) (Chell, 2015; Ellinger & Watkins, 1998; Flanagan, 1954) was selected as the method for eliciting the veteran's decision-making process to purchase a franchise. CIT has been employed specifically in the field of entrepreneurship (Chell, 2015; Cope & Watts, 2000) and is a powerful technique as it "focuses on the subject's actions – behaviors, thoughts, decision, feelings – in both positivist and social constructionism versions, and the critical events that shape those actions" (Chell, 2015, p. 221). To that end the researchers captured the critical incidents of veterans with less than five years of franchise ownership to explain their choice of franchising as a career path, as well as the opportunity identification process they employed.

The researchers collected data for the study through 30-60 minute in-depth interviews with veterans answering questions about life before becoming a franchisee, their career ambitions, what sparked their thinking about pursuing a business venture, and finally how they selected their franchisor. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and reviewed multiple times.

A nonprobability, purposive sampling strategy was used for the purpose of selecting veterans who had become franchisees within the last five years and who represented multiple franchise systems. The franchise systems were from industries including business coaching, pest control, and health care. There was no pre-set number of interviews established prior to the onset of interviewing. The researchers, using an exploratory approach, adhered to qualitative researchers' experience that data collection needed to continue until the point where no new patterns or themes emerged (i.e. saturation had been achieved) (Twining, Heller, Nussbaum, & Tsai, 2017). As Morse (1995) notes with respect to determining a qualitative sample size, "the tighter and more restrictive the sample and the narrower and more clearly delineated the domain, the faster saturation will be achieved" (p. 148). A total of eight veteran franchise owners who had assumed this form of self-employment in the last five years are included in this study.

The CIT approach relies on unstructured interviews, but due to time constraints it is imperative for the research to maintain focus and direction. The intensive interviewing used allowed for a deep exploration of the veteran's decision-making process. Using a few broad, open-ended questions (Charmaz, 2006) the researchers solicited detailed discussion about the participants' lives before becoming franchisees to understand the veteran personally. Questions then transitioned to the veterans' career ambitions and

went deeper on what sparked the participants' thinking about pursuing a franchise, and then closed on how they selected their franchisor.

The data collected from each interview was analyzed individually using NVivo to conduct a thematic analysis and develop codes. Line by line analysis and open coding were used to categorize the data. Open coding is the process of assigning units of meaning to the data discovered in each interview, which reflects the issues of importance as seen through the perspective of the eight participants interviewed (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011; Merriam, 2002). Through the use of the NVivo software, the researchers were able to upload the anonymized transcriptions of the recordings, and organize the data in a manner that allowed visualization of inductive and deductive codes. The final organization established selective codes that ensured the saturation of themes (Merriam, 2002).

Findings

The critical incidents collected in this study identified that the veterans interviewed pursued self-employment for emotional reasons, while they opted to purchase a franchise for practical reasons. Through the veterans' stories we also shed light on advice these veterans offered to other former military who are interested in franchising.

The Critical Incidents and Motivations Behind Why Veterans Choose Franchising
Table 1 synthesizes the critical incidents and motivations behind why veterans choose franchising into a neatly organized manner.

Table 1 – Critical Incidents and Motivations Behind Why Veterans Choose Franchising

Analysis Unit	Themes	Categories	Situations & Contexts
Critical Incident	Emotional Drivers	Control (pull factors)	Freedom; Self-identity; Work-life balance
		Values (pull factors)	Continue to serve; Give back to the community; Humanity

		Fear (push factor)	Loss of a job; Career stall; Being transferred
	Practical Drivers	Knowledge, Skills, Abilities (KSAs)	Missing the business model; Missing the idea; Missing the resources

Through the Critical Incident Technique utilized, it became clear that there is a distinct decision order during the decision-making process.

Decision order

1. The decision to become an entrepreneur occurs first, with or without knowing that a franchise will be the form of entrepreneurship. This decision is driven by a veteran's emotions. The critical incidents that led to this are divided into three main categories: control, fear, and values.

Control

All eight veterans that were interviewed found that they wanted to lead themselves and have the freedom to not take orders. In several cases, the veterans had incidents that showed them that the corporate organization for which they worked would not allow them the leadership opportunities they had previously experienced in the military, and their desire for autonomy led them toward self-employment. This belief is represented by comments such as:

I didn't want to leave this Earth and not be myself, or have the courage to jump out and try to bet on me.

I wanted the freedom to be what I wanted to be and do what I wanted to do when I want and how I want to do it. I've been successful at making other people successful in making money but I never had the courage to try to do it for myself.

The best aspects are waking up every day with the feeling that I'm not working for the man. I wake up every day smiling more than I have ever in my entire life.

There's autonomy, even though I was a company commander earlier in my career…there is still one aspect all the time: we were given a mission where and we were told to go execute the mission. But, I could go figure out how to execute it in my own way. When you get into the corporate world that all goes away very quickly even if you're a manager.

. . I have spoken to like a lot of veterans in big corporate America and we all have been through the same struggle of wanting to have the leadership that we had in the military, but dealing with the corporate structure that won't let you do that.

Other ways that the desire for control was expressed focused on being able to achieve work-life balance, as evidenced by remarks such as:

I wake up every day [to] enjoy these people that I call family and get to see them actually grow up and be a part of their life.

My two sons are approaching the last two years of high school…The idea that you know what? I can control my schedule! I'll build a team that doesn't always need me to be present and I'll have a chance to really participate…It's a big deal…There are times I just walk out the door and say, "The boys are racing today."

Values
The second emotional driver category relates to the strong desire for veterans to continue to serve in some capacity, even after leaving service. All eight reference this desire to serve, whether it be to give back to the community, help humanity, or simply feel as though there is value in their work; to make an impact to clients and/or customers. Veterans stated:

I wanted to have the opportunity to do something that I enjoy that I thought could add value to clients and people because I still have a service mentality. The last 34 years I've had service to the country, but I wanted to see if I could monetize that and still give value to people. To still serve and I wanted to be active in the community.

So my ambitions were, first and foremost, to contribute to the world. I wanted to do it where I could serve and contribute and drive the level of excellence that I wanted to drive and helping the people I wanted to help. What I was doing was good. It was great. I didn't have any complaints, but there was a higher calling. There was something bigger. There was something I thought I could do more. I thought I could contribute more, and that was really the driver to trying to figure that out -- do I really want to work for somebody else and punch the clock into the corporate gig and just ride this until I'm old and ready to retire?

Fear
The final emotional driver category that surfaced in all eight of the interviews was fear. This equated to the instability of the corporate world. Evident in the interviews, there was a sense of fear behind losing a job, stalling in their careers, and/or being transferred to an undesirable location when holding corporate positions. The ability to choose entrepreneurship helped dispel this fear, noted from statements such as:

When I worked for [a corporation], we had to cut the bottom 10 percent of our team every year and that never really sat well with me and then in the last two companies I've worked

with, the industry goes up and down and in the end you have to make really substantial cuts many times and I've done it more than I can think of…or it could happen to me at any point.

In the original [corporate] program that brought me down here, there was about 25 of us that were Academy grads. It was a complete failure. Of the 25 of us, only four remain with the company and only one ever made it into middle management. Because of that and a number of other issues, I was trying to interview to find another position outside of my current company. However, that was not happening. I was constantly being told that a lot of people logged into my resume, but I showed no career growth or progression. That was a concern. So a friend of mine introduced me to a franchise consultant.

About two years ago, [the corporation] went through a reorganization and they wanted to move my position to Hong Kong, which was headquarters, and that was a "Thanks, but no thanks" package.

2. After the decision to become an entrepreneur, driven by emotions, a secondary decision occurs to choose franchising. The decision to become a franchisee is driven by practicality. The critical incidents that led to this decision are, simply, the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) held by the veteran.

KSAs

This practical driver category that arose through all eight interviews, was the belief by these veterans that they were missing some of the necessary KSAs needed to become an independent entrepreneur. They were either missing the business model, missing the idea, or missing the resources, and none had a strong desire to fill the KSA gap when franchising provided the opportunity to fill that gap. Franchising provided a support network and intellectual property that could not be found through a traditional entrepreneurial path.

I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do and I couldn't come up with a sustainable business model on my own. I just couldn't come up with a great idea and so I wanted some certainty because you know, my military background, I wanted to have a model for success and I thought franchising was the way to go about having a proven system and repeatable success and have an intellectual property and just training systems, so that when I ventured out I would know exactly what to do as far as client acquisition, and how to set the business up. You know, I didn't want to have to guess at all. That's the reason I chose a franchise, because I didn't know exactly how to become a business owner on my own. I didn't have a great idea and I wanted a little bit more certainty in the decision-making process.

When my franchise consultant said, "Hey! What about [name of franchise]?" I literally was like, "You've got to be kidding me…Do you know my background? I mean, you know I went to West Point…I led 1,000 troops in Iraq. You're kidding me right?...I was one of the top 10 Aids in the country." But I ended up looking into it. I listened to what the CEO and founder had to say and it really resonated with me and just the on boarding process has been great: everybody that is directly associated with the franchise, or

indirectly. So some of the support network systems that we have…I mean everybody across the board has been phenomenal to work with. They've been very patient and very helpful, very responsive across the board.

I still have somebody I can go to help me out. I mean, that's the nice part about the franchise. Instead of just doing my own thing, with a franchise you have people there that are going to help you out that want to help you succeed. [They] provide the support structure, but at the end of the day it's still your business. You still are making business decisions.

Franchise Selection Process

The second objective of this exploratory study was to investigate the veterans' process for selection of a franchisor. Each of the eight interviewees provided insight into why they chose a specific organization. Specifically, common subthemes that all eight commented on were the franchise companies' values, culture, and training.

Values

  The values of the franchisor was a strong subtheme that arose. Values are instilled in military training, thus the ability to continue to work with an organization that has strong values resonated with the veterans interviewed.

When I looked into it and I interviewed,…their value system…was really easy for me to select.

I can connect to organizations that have already achieved the pinnacle of excellence out there, like in my case with [name of franchise] -- based on, you know, best practices of business and proven tactics and strategies. So, I connect to [name of franchise] mainly because they already had a lot of proven strategies you could add to my portfolio and it's a perfect match between my values and principles.

Culture

Similar to values, all veterans interviewed commented on how they resonated with the franchisor's culture before selecting their particular franchise.

So through working with my franchise consultant, I kind of established a bunch of different things of what I would be looking for. Number one, in terms of the culture of the franchise, my kind of adopted saying, my motto, is work hard, play hard. Work hard? Absolutely. But, the "let's have fun doing that; life's too short not to enjoy it" [culture] of the franchise that I selected embodied that. Everything I saw from the CEO and a bunch of other people that were in that selection process, it was about work hard, play hard. "We're going to work, we're going to talk, we're gonna make sure this is the right fit, but at the same time, we're gonna share life together, we're going to have fun, we're going to crack jokes."

So with the franchise, they kind of sling shot you down the road further than you could do on your own…so that you can strategically put yourself in a position in the market where you can hit the ground running. We have 300 or so coaches around the world and no one coach is the same. We all have our strengths and our weaknesses. Some people are experts

on business valuation, some are experts in leadership, some are experts in time management and so you have the ability to connect with 300 people in that space that you can learn from, you can partner with. If I was not with the franchise I think how much hard that would be on me. How much time away from my family would that pull for me to put that much effort and energy into it by myself versus being connected to 300 people in the [name of franchisor] enterprise that's constantly innovating and doing new and exciting things. I just get the benefit of participating in that.

Training

Training was another critical piece of the discovery process that resonated with veterans.

I wanted to have a model for success and I thought franchising was the way to go about having a proven system, repeatable success, and an intellectual property. Plus there were training systems so that when I ventured out I would know exactly what to do as far as client acquisition. How to set the business up. You know, I didn't want to have to guess at all.

I had a team from corporate here all week training my staff and making sales calls with me and it's still very positive.

[The reason I chose this particular franchise] was the training and…the people there. I felt really embraced by that whole process. I really love the [franchisor] community. It's very clearly collaborative. We all, when we get together, we share information and then we see what works and we share thoughts. That's strong to me. I love that.

They were great. They have an onboarding program. There's a certification program/training for you to kind of get up to speed on the different things that they do and offer; how you can leverage that.

Advice to Other Veterans Who are Interested in Franchising

Due to their experiences, the veteran franchise entrepreneurs were all eager to give advice to other veterans interested in franchising. All eight agree that speaking to veteran franchise owners while exploring their options would be critical. In fact, one interviewee specifically stated that:

I would suggest comprehensive and exhaustive research -- looking at all the options that being a veteran presents. I would advise veterans to take very copious notes and I would say that, you know, start the process maybe a year out from the decision. Actually, while you are still employed go out and do some of the things that are consistent with what you're embarking on. If the franchise that you're looking at requires you to go out and secure your own clients, then go out and do some of those activities. See how you feel about that. Are you able to connect with people? Are you comfortable doing those things?

This same veteran stated that if he had known more about the resources available to him and had spoken to other veterans in franchising, he very likely would have made a different decision on the type of franchise he ultimately chose.

Others (three out of the eight interviewed) commented on the importance and critical impact that discovery days had on their decision. It was at these events that they were able to resonate with the values and culture of the franchises and learn about the training, all of which were critical in their decision-making process for choosing their ultimate franchise opportunity, as expressed in the previous section.

Finally, it is important to note all of these veterans used a franchise coach to help them through the decision-making process, and this made a positive impact on the decision-making process. In fact, one veteran commented that:

> It begins with knowing yourself. Do some assessments to kind of figure that out. That helped me. I was pretty self-aware, and that just kind of confirmed for me the choice.

> Look at both sides of it: What do I enjoy doing? How do I want to spend my time? What are the outcomes for?

FranNet, the franchise coaching company that helps guide potential franchisees through the franchising process, provides self-assessments to help match their clients to relevant franchise opportunities. From those options, these veterans provided additional insight:

> Just explore all of the possibilities out there. Keep your eyes open. Keep your options open. Because if you want to be a leader, you want to be a manager, you want to lead organizations, you want to do something good in the world, you can do that with a franchise and you can accomplish those things in almost any franchise. But, what do you connect with? Is that tree trimming services? Is that fast food? Is that haircuts? What do you connect with? If you can connect those dots, that's where the magic is.

Implications

Our study offers a path for future research and underscores the need to examine veterans' decision-making processes for pursuing entrepreneurship. These exploratory interviews extend support for Gilad and Levine's (1986) 'push' and 'pull' theory of entrepreneurial pursuit. A clear limitation of the study, however, is the sample size of eight veterans. It would be necessary to expand the study to other veterans who have pursued franchising to confirm the finding that emotional reasons led the veterans to entrepreneurship, while practical reasons pushed them toward franchising. Furthermore, uncovering the level of priority that veterans give to these factors is key to those accountable for franchisee recruitment. Hence, it is suggested that this research be followed up with a survey to secure statistical validation to isolate which of the motivators most heavily influence veterans' decision-making. A larger sample could help identify moderators (e.g. gender, age, military rank) that also may influence the decision-making process. Furthermore, quantitative research would be able to look specifically at the choice of the franchisor, helping to identify whether and how much the variables we found (KSAs, values, culture, and training) play a role in that significant decision on which franchise to "sign-up" for.

This study has several implications for policy makers, those who assist service personnel transition back into civilian life, and for both corporate and franchise companies. It is well documented that navigating this transition phase is a complex process involving identity construction / reconstruction (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper, & Fossey, 2018). Scholars in the human resource development field (HRD), such as Minnis (2017), Miller (2017), and Dirani (2017) suggest we need to better understand veterans' strategies and mindset for re-entering the civilian workforce. This type of information can improve how we support military men and women who are transitioning to a civilian workforce. Furthermore, given veterans face suboptimal workforce opportunities, supporting entrepreneurial ventures may address unemployment among this group (Heinz et al., 2017). Franchise organizations benefit from having greater understanding about what veterans desire and how they make choices.

This study found the emotional driver of controlling their own destiny is a powerful motivator for veterans. Additionally, the value of the work and the impact of that work on themselves and their community is crucial to a veteran's career choice after their military service. These veterans emphasized their continued desire to serve in some capacity. This ties into work-life balance, as after having served in the military anywhere from three to thirty years, these individuals want a better balance of supporting their family while having a meaningful and impactful job or second career. Their decision to choose franchising as their path to entrepreneurship is based on the veteran's practical assessment of their own KSAs. This information can be used to better shape the job descriptions for corporate positions to meet the motivations of veterans, while also providing insight to franchise organizations on how to market their opportunities specifically on the four categories discussed previously: fear, control, values, and KSAs. For example, those who left the military in higher ranks, and are currently working in low mobility corporate jobs, may gravitate to the lure of a message regarding how a franchisee is an owner-operator in charge of their own destiny. Finally, both corporations and franchises can use this insight to shape onboarding and continuing professional development for veterans that tie into these motivators.

Conclusion

The specific objectives of this exploratory investigation were to (1) develop a greater understanding of veterans' situations, orientations, and motivations for becoming franchisees, and (2) investigate the veterans' process for selecting a franchisor. Through this study we successfully accomplished these objectives and found evidence of three emotional motivators behind veterans' choice of self-employment: control, value, and fear. Further, we learned veterans' choice to purchase a franchise came after they decided on entrepreneurship as their next opportunity, and this decision was based on a practical assessment of their own KSAs. Additionally, while researching and discovering franchise opportunities, veterans are specifically looking at the franchisor's values, culture, and training provided. These findings can positively impact the messaging and support provided to veterans as they consider franchising, specifically by enabling the authors to develop an instrument to measure these influencers for more precise assistance with messaging to this audience.

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