Creating Hope: Assisting Veterans with Job Search Strategies Using Cognitive Information Processing Theory

PUBLICATION

ABSTRACT

"Providing effective employment services to today's veterans is essential. Given the high unemployment rate that currently exists for the veteran population, it is essential that career development professionals consider ways to effectively address their needs. This article highlights the complexities veterans experience in the job preparation and job search processes, as well as current efforts addressing the veteran unemployment concern. A clinical case study shows how cognitive information processing (CIP) theory, a theory of career problem solving and decision making, can be used as a foundation for assisting veterans in the job search process."

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- Previous research describes veterans' employment experiences, including their support systems and mental and physical health. In this study, the researchers highlight research on common challenges veterans face during their career search, and presents recommendations for meaningful change.

- The authors recommend addressing the employment needs of veterans in a way that is relevant to veterans. This can be done through cognitive information processing, a career problem solving and decisions making theory that involves defining goals, understanding options, ranking options, making a choice, and reflecting on the decided choice.

- To help veterans transition into civilian employment, career development professionals should discuss affective and cognitive concerns, such as making employment choices, with veterans in addition to practical strategies for seeking and gaining employment.

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IMPLICATIONS

FOR PRACTICE

Transitioning service members and veterans should continue utilizing career transition services available to them. When seeking transition assistance, transitioning service members and veterans should consider discussing with their advisor how to navigate the nuances of the professional market. Considering entering the civilian job market after military service can have challenges, veterans should consider discussing their employment seeking experiences with other veterans who are experiencing similar struggles or who have successfully entered the civilian job market. Gaining first-hand knowledge from other veterans could help veterans gain strategies on addressing specific employment-related challenges. Career development specialists should evaluate if integrating theories such as cognitive information processing (CIP) theory into their practice would be beneficial to their veteran clients. Practitioners should also consider using CIP as a tool to learn more about veterans' career readiness and factors that might affect a veteran's ability to make career decisions, such as familial concerns and stress or anguish.

FOR POLICY

The Department of Defense (DoD) might continue its transition assistance programs that introduce many transitioning service members to potential career tracks. Considering service members come various backgrounds and have varied career interests, the DoD might evaluate if their transition assistance programs should offer individualized options. The DoD might consider offering more workshops that are focused on crafting a resume for the civilian workforce. The VA might provide additional services to help veterans understand workplace accommodations they could be provided based on their disability, and how to discuss accommodations with the workplace. Policymakers might continue allocating funds to support education and employment transition programs for transitioning service members and veterans. Policymakers might collaborate with the DoD and VA to ensure career development specialist are able to receive training on career development theories, such as CIP. Policymakers and the Department of Education might evaluate if career development theories should be a foundational requisite for career development specialists and mental health practitioners.

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FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A limitation of this paper is that a clinical case study was the only data point for demonstrating how CIP can help veterans seeking employment after their military service. Future studies should explore if CIP is applicable among a larger group of veterans, which could improve representativeness. Future studies on career development and readiness should build upon the diverseness of this study by including veterans of multiple race/ethnic backgrounds, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and educational backgrounds. It would also be beneficial to sample veterans of various physical and mental health concerns who are seeking employment. Including veterans with various physical and mental health concerns could help researchers identify how CIP can be applied to veterans with particular employment concerns, including stress and high anxiety. Since veterans often seek work that is meaningful to them, future research should examine what type of work is most meaningful to veterans. Additionally, future researchers should examine how meaningful work applies to various veteran populations. Future researchers should continue to study how career problem solving and decision making theories can be applied to both veterans and civilians seeking employment. Researchers should also examine the effectiveness of these theories in practice.