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■ The emergence and impact of the military veteran entrepreneurship industry

AUTHORS: Mirza Tihic, Adam Pritchard, & Alexander McKelvie

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ABSTRACT:

"In the past decade, the Veteran Entrepreneurship Industry (VEI) has seen a remarkable expansion in the U.S., yet its effectiveness remains largely unexplored. Utilizing data from the National Survey of Military-Affiliated Entrepreneurs with 2222 respondents, we delve into the effectiveness of VEI and the general Entrepreneurship Industry (EI) to address veteran-specific challenges of military veteran entrepreneurs. Building on cultural and social support theories, we broaden the existing literature on EI by focusing on the specific subset of military veteran entrepreneurs. We propose an outcome-based model to measure the impact of EI on this group, emphasizing factors such as a sense of belonging, sense of purpose, transition difficulties and social capital, thereby extending the potential benefits of EI. We find a mixed impact of VEI and EI on these key outcomes, suggesting a nuanced and equivocal role of the entrepreneurship industry on military-affiliated entrepreneurs. We highlight policy implications to better serve the diverse veteran population."

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:

- This study examines the association between the Veteran Entrepreneurship Industry (VEI) and sense of belonging, sense of purpose, military-to-civilian transition difficulty, and social capital using data collected from the 2020 National Survey of Military-Affiliated Entrepreneurs (NSMAE).
- Among the 427 veteran entrepreneurs included in the analysis, 43% utilized at least one veteran-specific entrepreneurship resource and 42% utilized only non-VEI resources.
- The authors find that engagement with veteran-specific entrepreneurship resources is not significantly associated with a veteran's sense of purpose, but VEI resources are significantly and positively associated with sense of community support and belonging. The authors also found that use of VEI and non-VEI resources is associated with greater perceived social support among veteran entrepreneurs. Finally, there is limited evidence to support the notion that VEI, relative to more general entrepreneurship resources, is more effective at addressing military-to-civilian transition concerns.

Implications

FOR PRACTICE

The authors find that the impact of VEI resources across the various outcomes differ by background characteristics such as officer status, service-connected disability status, and time since military separation. VSOs should further develop VEI programs and resources to support various veteran subgroups in their entrepreneurial pursuits. For example, resources specific to enlisted veterans should consider how their military experiences (e.g., length of service, deployments, and military hierarchy) and other skills or qualifications (e.g., educational background and prior leadership responsibilities) differ from those among officers. An increasingly tailored approach to delivering VEI resources, taking into account important differences within the veteran population, may clarify the extent to which VEI resources improve sense of purpose, sense of belonging, social capital, and transition difficulty among veteran entrepreneurs.

FOR POLICY

The authors find that veterans utilize only one to a few VEI resources, limiting their ability to compare the impacts across specific programs. Policymakers should consider their continued support of VEI programs and services as well expand funding to include program-specific evaluations. Resources dedicated to the collection of program evaluation data may help identify aspects of VEI resources that are associated with the success of veteran entrepreneurs.

FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The authors suggest several avenues for future research. First, the authors find that VEI is associated with several measures of veteran wellbeing, extending the entrepreneurship literature beyond financial and firm-level outcomes. Future research should include these non-economic indicators to further explore the benefits of general entrepreneurship resources with a broader set of outcomes for different populations. Second, while the authors found mixed evidence of the impact of VEI resources on sense of purpose, sense of belonging, social capital, and transition difficulty, future studies should apply a cultural framework to further examine the impacts of VEI, generally as well as relative to non-VEI resources, for various veteran subgroups (e.g., enlisted, women, disabled, etc.).

AUTHOR INFORMATION

Mirza Tihic, PhD

Syracuse University

Syracuse, New York, USA

mtihic@syr.edu