

Military skills go far in civilian life

Barclays is challenging the stereotype that military skills only go as far as the battlefield, with research showing that they are just as valuable in business.

The Barclays military-insights tool asked veterans to undertake a series of game-based psychometric tests which assessed them against key performance traits in the workplace. The findings revealed that service-leavers are not only armed with the right skills to succeed in civilian life, but in many cases, they can also outperform their civilian peers, scoring in the top 30 percentile for social influence, creativity, rational decision making, emotional resilience and dealing with ambiguity.

The results follow previous findings from Barclays which revealed that fewer than half of employers would look favorably at military experience on a CV, with almost one in ten (8 percent) of employers going so far to say they would look unfavorably at a CV that showed previous military experience. A reluctance to hire veterans is already contributing to longer-term problems for this group, with more than one in five service-leavers set to face significant employment challenges in the next five years and one in ten predicted to be out of work indefinitely.

Stuart Tootal, Head of the Barclays armed-forces transition, employment and resettlement (After) program, said: "This research clearly demonstrates the strength and depth of veterans' skills and helps to debunk the myth that military experience is not relevant in the commercial world – a misconception many employers still hold."

Veterans proved to have twice as much potential as civilian workers in demonstrating board-level leadership and developing innovative solutions to problems. One in five (21 percent) also scored at the top end of creative thinking, compared to 16 percent of civilians. This, combined with the conception that veterans are less likely to need rigid structure in the workplace, highlights the powerful role they can play in a team.

The research also identified emotional stability as a key area of strength, with only 9 percent of veterans falling within the lower potential range during the assessment, compared with 16 percent of the civilian workforce. This is significant as previous research from Barclays showed that a third of veterans feel that perceptions around mental-health issues relating to time served in the armed forces, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, harm their career progression in the civilian job market.

Stuart Tootal continued: "A misunderstanding of military experience causes too many employers to write it off as being irrelevant, when it should be seen as a real asset. Through our first-hand experience at Barclays we have seen that veterans have exactly the right skills and culture to add real value to our workforce. We want other companies to join our call to arms to make the most of the stream of talent ex-military personnel can offer to business."

The Barclays After program was set up in 2010 to help all veterans, regardless of circumstances, service and rank, with their transition into civilian employment. The program provides work placements, internships and employment opportunities as well as CV and interview coaching to help service-leavers to present their skills in a way that will resonate with civilian employers. To date, Barclays has helped more than 5,000 service personnel in the transition process and employed almost 500 ex-military within Barclays.

Barclays is also the founding member of the veterans' employment-transition support (Vets) program. Vets is a coalition of willing companies, the Ministry of Defense and military charities, who are working to help veterans to do well in employment while brining benefits to employers and the economy.

Hospitality industry faces skill shortage

The UK hospitality industry faces a skill shortage, with some 400,000 jobs needing to be filled in bars, pubs, clubs, restaurants and cafés over the next 12 months, according to research from the University of Cambridge and SkillSnap.

The research highlights the need in businesses for “matching algorithms” technology to put the right candidate, position and company together to produce time savings, better-fitting candidates and so longer periods in the subsequent period of employment.

Ben Aymé, Founder of www.SkillSnap.com, said: “This is a major crisis for both small independents and large hospitality chains. The CV is 500 years old. It is a flat, unread, old-fashioned document completely unsuited to the needs of the modern post-digital economy. Our mission is to make it as easy and cost effective as possible to get the right employer and employee fit to ensure that not only is the job filled but that the person remains in that employment for as long as possible.”

SkillSnap provides technology to maximize the efficiency of the recruitment process. For job-seekers, SkillSnap helps to convey who the candidate is and what he or she wants to achieve. For businesses, SkillSnap helps to drill down into the depth of prospective candidates, ultimately saving time and money.

The research also found that businesses had to sell themselves to potential recruits. One senior business owner said: “We have to fight for every person we employ.”

Building strengths is more effective than fixing weaknesses

Research from the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) shows that line managers can improve the performance of their teams by focusing on building their strengths, rather than trying to fix their weaknesses.

A study of performance management in the civil service shows that employee performance can be improved by a simple training intervention focused on building strengths instead of fixing weaknesses. These results can be boosted by a more extensive intervention, which includes wider communication and changes to HR policy, as well as manager training.

Jonny Gifford, Senior Research Adviser for organizational behavior at the CIPD, said: “The strengths-based approach marks a big shift in mindset for many, if not most of us. Our default mode when looking for improvements tends to be deficit-orientated – we hone in on what has gone wrong and consider how we can avoid that in the future. There will always be cases where it is imperative to do this, but our research shows the benefit of making the norm in performance conversations to reflect instead on what worked well, why, and how it can be replicated. The research demonstrated that by focusing on the positives and building on what works, we can actually boost employee performance and help with the learning and development of our teams.”

The CIPD research centered on workplace interventions in three government organizations: Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, the National Offender Management Service (now called Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service) and the Valuation Office Agency (VOA), as well as work with the civil service employee policy team. The field study involved before-and-after measures, comparing control groups who were not given any training or support, with treatment groups who attended a training workshop on leading strengths-based performance conversations. In the VOA, there were additional interventions including a change in HR policy on performance management.

The feedback from employees after the study suggests a marked improvement in how useful performance conversations were when they focused on strengths-based conversations.

Andrew Kean, Deputy Director of civil service employee policy, said: “In the civil service, we know that the quality of the performance conversation between the manager and employee is fundamental to any good performance-management approach, so we are delighted that this research, which has centered on the nature and quality of performance conversations, has

provided such clear results – in particular, that a simple training intervention focused on building strengths instead of fixing weaknesses positively influences the performance conversations that take place between managers and their staff.”

Competition for talent expected to rise

Nearly three quarters of HR specialists (72 percent) expect the competition for well-qualified talent to increase and nearly two-thirds (61 percent) predict further difficulty recruiting senior and skilled employees over the next three years as a result of the UK’s decision to leave the European Union.

The latest CIPD/Hays resourcing and talent planning survey of more than 1,000 HR specialists found that recruitment difficulties are already being reported by three quarters of HR people (75 percent), and nearly two-thirds (65 percent) agree that the skills needed for jobs in their organization are changing. People with leadership (58 percent), digital (54 percent) and commercial-awareness skills (51 percent) are most likely to be in increased demand over the next 12 months.

However, despite recognition of the need for smarter, more targeted recruitment, less than a fifth (16 percent) say that their organization currently measures the return on investment of their recruitment activity. Similarly, over half (56 percent) say that their organization does not calculate the cost of people leaving the business, despite labor turnover at its highest since 2007.

Claire McCartney, Associate Research Adviser at the CIPD, commented: “The research highlights mounting competition for talent and the subsequent need for organizations to sharpen their focus on strategic recruitment and effective retention, to attract and maintain the skills they need in an increasingly competitive labor market. Brexit, and its impact on the labor market, should act as a stimulus for organizations to focus their attention on building a stronger, more productive workforce, by staying alert to potential changes in their skill needs and being agile in their response.”

“However, they cannot effectively do this unless they are measuring, evaluating and then strengthening their recruitment and talent strategies, based on a real understanding of their existing talent profile. Even the simplest forms of measurement can be effective, such as tracking the turnover rate of new hires, seeking feedback from candidates on their experience and monitoring the performance of new recruits. This will give organizations the insight to attract, select and retain people with the best skills and potential for their business.”

The research also found that increasing competition for talent is highlighting the need for organizations to position themselves as an employer of choice. Almost nine in ten organizations said that they have been making efforts to improve their employer brand. However, despite this focus on attracting employees, more than two-fifths (41 percent) believe that the length of their recruitment process has led to the loss of potential recruits in the last 12 months.

Nigel Heap, Managing Director of Hays UK and Ireland, said: “As we move toward an EU exit, organizations should consider reviewing their recruitment strategies to help them to secure access to the right talent. Although we are still faced with some ongoing uncertainty, most sectors remain competitive so now is not a time for complacency. Not only do employers need to evaluate how they are perceived in the marketplace so they can attract the people they need, they should also ensure they have sufficient measures in place so they are better able to justify their decisions, continue to secure investment for recruitment and respond to any changes.”

“Organizations need to have an integrated talent strategy in place to support a targeted and measured approach to recruitment. With the skills required for roles changing and an emphasis on strong leadership, digital and commercial-awareness skills, providing professional development and training is key to improving retention and helping to fill skill gaps.”

The following are further highlights of the survey include:

- 61 percent strongly disagree or disagree that technology and automation have replaced some of the jobs in their organization;
- over half of organizations conduct all recruitment activity in-house, but there is an increasing trend to combine in-house and outsourced approaches;

- more organizations are currently offering and plan to offer apprenticeships, although nearly a third believe that the current system of education is poor at equipping young people with the skills their organization needs;
- the most popular method of selection this year is competency-based interviews, overtaking interviews based on CV/application forms in popularity; and
- an increasing proportion of organizations use distance-interview techniques such as telephone and video/Skype.

Apprentice Robbie is a double winner

An apprentice at engineering-solutions provider Boulting Group has won two Electrical Contractors' Association (ECA) awards, in Manchester and the North-West.

Robbie Stanley, who has been an apprentice at Boulting Group since August 2012, won the ECA Manchester branch apprentice of the year award, then went on to win the North-West regional category, which covers north Wales, Liverpool, Manchester, Carlisle and Crewe.

The ECA Edmundson Apprentice of the Year Awards aim to recognize apprentices who not only have good technical skills but are also role models for others in the industry. Following the achievement and the recent completion of his apprenticeship in electrical installation, Robbie Stanley has secured a permanent full-time role as an Electrician at Boulting Group.

"The mentoring and guidance I have been given since beginning work at Boulting Group have been staggering," he explained. "I am particularly thankful to my mentor for his continued support and encouragement."

Robbie Stanley was presented with his award by Stephen Murray, Chairman of the North West ECA, and Steve Bratt, ECA Group Chief Executive.

Boulting Group offers around seven apprenticeships a year.

Confederation of British Industry (CBI) urges stable national framework for skills

Businesses, the government and learning providers must take a fresh approach to skills, says the CBI. A report, "In Perfect Harmony," argues that 28 skills reforms in 30 years have alienated firms, confused learning providers and failed to deliver on skills needs.

The CBI urges policy makers, businesses and providers to collaborate and design a stable national framework for skills, based on the government regulating for quality, rather than designing qualifications as has happened in the past.

Businesses are clear that the current reform program can meet skill needs if the government ensures it reflects businesses' views on new T-Levels, apprenticeship reforms and the National Retraining Partnership.

Neil Carberry, CBI Managing Director for people policy, said: "Skills are vital if we are to adapt to new technologies, increase our global competitiveness and deliver higher wages. They are the heart of a successful industrial strategy. But that means we need a skills approach that lasts for 50 years, not five. Too often, reforms have been well-intentioned but do not work for learners or businesses across the country, so the system is reinvented again. The apprenticeship levy is the latest example of a policy that is not yet right. The CBI has been clear that it must evolve for the levy to work effectively."

"There is an opportunity now to establish a stable framework for skills in England by the Government reviewing the levy and creating a world-class technical system through T-levels. If we all work together to get this right, confidence can be built that the English skill system will not keep changing, enabling firms and skill providers to invest."

"Companies need to get stuck in and engage to help to create a more flexible and business-focused skill system that will benefit their people, their business and the local economy. This report highlights some great examples of innovation and collaboration to create high-quality training – the right national approach can unlock this kind of fantastic local leadership across the country."

Key recommendations in the report include:

- ensure that a national, stable and joined-up skills plan is central to the government's industrial strategy – developed and delivered with business and skill providers;
- give the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education the power to regulate and report on the performance of the skills market;
- evolve the apprenticeship levy into a flexible skills levy so firms can fund training for their people whatever the form of high-quality course they do;
- pilot local apprenticeship levy pooling in at least four English regions – and roll out a full system by 2020 – to better engage smaller firms in new training clusters;
- ensure that firms commit to engaging with skills at a senior level – and assign staff time to ensuring that provision meets their needs; and
- encourage local leaders, including mayors, businesses and learning providers, to create local skill plans that address their skill demands.

Vacalians launches in-house training center

European camping-holiday company Vacalians has signed a deal with Montpellier Business School to launch an in-house training center, Vacalians Academy.

The training programs offered will cover all the jobs within Vacalians. The Vacalians Academy's objectives are to share the group's values, build loyalty among its teams and develop their skills. The new training programs will focus on developing the customer experience and service culture.

Some 70 campsite directors and assistant directors are being trained in an initial five-week program based around seven modules: customers and quality; values and management; people and talents; welcome and services; sales and distribution; performance and tools; and finance. Theoretical classes, case studies and role plays will be led by business experts from Vacalians and Montpellier Business School staff.

Vacalians Academy and Montpellier Business School have chosen a combination of classroom-based training, e-learning and videos.

Vacalians Academy will ramp up the scope of its training in two phases: first, it will cover the group's support and "expert" professions; then, from 2019, it will be opened up to external candidates with redeployment projects, work-based training or apprenticeship programs.

By 2020, Vacalians aims to train up 1,500 people each year and become the benchmark training program for camping-holiday employees in Europe.

The Vacalians board has decided to set aside a minimum annual operations budget of €1 million to develop the training programs provided through Vacalians Academy. This budget will focus primarily on designing the training modules, recruiting external trainers, covering training costs and providing the courses.

Christophe Alaux, Vacalians Chairman, said: "Training is essential for the 2,000 men and women who make up our company as we look to increase our customers' loyalty and develop our brands."

Matthias Bauland, Deputy Dean in charge of development at Montpellier Business School, commented: "We are delighted to link up with Vacalians [...] We share the same goals of excellence and this partnership will formalize our core values and further strengthen our economic and social presence in the region."

Renishaw recruits 50 apprentices

Global engineering-technologies company Renishaw has recruited a record 50 apprentices across its Gloucestershire and South Wales sites. Apprentices gain nationally recognized qualifications, some up to degree level, alongside on-the-job experience.

The Gloucestershire-based technical and manufacturing schemes require applicants to be GCSE qualified. They will begin an advanced apprenticeship through attendance at Gloucestershire Engineering Training, with most going on to Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma studies. For the South Wales apprenticeship scheme, applicants are required to be in the first year of an engineering BTec or EAL Level 3 and must have a PEO Level 2 in engineering. They will study the second year of their qualification, via Bridgend College, with most apprentices undertaking HNC- and HND-level qualifications. Apprentices then move on to rotating placements in different sections of the company. The opportunity for possible continued study toward a degree exists for apprentices who demonstrate potential.

Renishaw also offers degree-level apprenticeships in software and embedded electronic systems design, open to young people who have completed their A-levels. From the first year, apprentices on these programs will study for their degree alongside working on projects at Renishaw, gaining theoretical knowledge that can be applied during hands-on projects.

Embedded electronic systems design apprentices work toward a BEng (Hons) in electronic and computer engineering, accredited by the University of the West of England. Software engineering apprentices study for a BSc (Hons) in digital and technology solutions, in partnership with the University of Exeter.

“An apprenticeship at Renishaw gives you the opportunity to work on ground-breaking engineering projects,” explained Chris Pockett, Head of communications. “As well as gaining hands-on experience in innovative and exciting industries, our apprentices have access to expert training and support, to continually build on the skills they are learning as part of their studies. In addition to our degree-level apprenticeships, around 70 percent of apprentices on our standard schemes go on to achieve a full honours degree.”