Beyond Active Service: Nigerian Military Veterans' Welfare as Strategic Human Resource Management

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Abstract: Human Resource Management (HRM) scholarship has traditionally concentrated on employment relationships during active service. However, this dimension treats the end of employment as the terminal boundary of organizational obligation. This conceptual study challenges that assumption. It argues that post-employment welfare constitutes a strategically significant HRM instrument with theorized implications for institutional legitimacy and workforce sustainability. Based on the experience of Nigeria's military establishment as an illustrative case, this paper develops a theoretically grounded conceptual framework that reframes veteran welfare from a social policy appendage to a strategic organizational asset. The paper integrates strategic human resource management, which situates HR practices within the competitive and institutional ambitions of organizations. Psychological contract theory, which illuminates how perceived obligations inform employee behavior and social exchange theory, explains the reciprocal dynamics underpinning organizational commitment. The analysis develops some theoretical propositions that link veteran welfare to recruitment attractiveness, employee retention and commitment and perceptions of institutional effectiveness. A conceptual model is presented that maps the strategic pathways through which post-employment welfare may generate organizational returns. The paper contends that organizations, military and non-military alike, that invest meaningfully in post-employment welfare are theorized to create a signaling environment that reinforces the psychological contracts of active employees, strengthens employer brand equity and sustains the institutional trust upon which long-term organizational performance depends on. The paper makes three principal contributions. The first is that it extends strategic HRM theory beyond the active employment period. Secondly, it offers public-sector and military organizations with a conceptual basis for institutionalizing veteran welfare within their strategic people management frameworks. Then, lastly, it establishes a research agenda for empirical investigation of the organizational returns from post-employment welfare investment.

Keywords: Strategic HRM, Psychological contract, Organizational legitimacy, Public sector HRM, Workforce sustainability

1. Introduction

The study of human resource management (HRM) has generated a rich body of knowledge concerning how organizations attract, develop, motivate and retain their workforces. The field has positioned itself as central to organizational strategy. It takes insight from Ulrich's (1996) business partner model to Huselid's (1995) demonstration of the performance-enhancing effects of HR practices. Notwithstanding this maturation, strategic HRM scholarship retains a conspicuous blind spot as it concerns itself with the period of active employment. The moment an employee exits the organization, whether through resignation, retirement or discharge, they largely go missing in action (MIA) from the HRM analytical frame.

This study argues that organizations benefit from what employees do during service and they also derive value or incur strategic costs from how they treat those employees once service ends. Nowhere is this more apparent than in military organizations, where the treatment of veterans informs recruitment decisions among prospective service members and influences the trust and commitment of those still in active service.

As one of Africa's largest military establishments, the Nigerian military faces challenges of retention of skilled personnel and institutional legitimacy, which are not unrelated to public perceptions of how the institution treats its veterans (Oshigbo and Oshigbo, 2019). Veterans in Nigeria report inadequate welfare provisions, poor transition support and a sense of institutional abandonment upon retirement (Matthews, 1981; Chidebe et al, 2023; Chidozie et al, 2025). These perceptions are likely to circulate within recruitment pools and influence the employer brand that military institutions project to prospective recruits.

The conceptual gap this paper addresses is that existing HRM theory does not adequately account for the strategic value of post-employment welfare and existing veteran welfare scholarship, where it exists at all in African contexts, fails to treat veteran welfare as an HRM and organizational effectiveness question. This paper bridges that gap by developing a strategic HRM perspective on veteran welfare that is grounded in management theory, organizational scholarship and the specific institutional context of the Nigerian military.

2. Methodological Note

This paper adopts a conceptual-theoretical approach through systematic engagement with existing literature. The literature informing this paper was selected purposively, based on foundational and recent contributions across strategic HRM, psychological contract theory, social exchange theory, employer branding and organizational legitimacy. The Nigerian military context was not selected as a theoretically generative setting with the precise conditions the framework is designed to illuminate, such as documented welfare deficits and spillover retention pressures. This makes it an appropriate context for conceptual theory-building, in line with the argument for context-sensitive theorizing advanced by Johns (2006).

3. Literature Review

Strategic Human Resource Management

Strategic HRM emerged as a distinct field in the 1980s and 1990s as scholars sought to connect HR practices to performance results (Wright and McMahan, 1992; Boxall and Purcell, 2022). The foundational insight was that HR systems can create organizational capabilities that are difficult for competitors to imitate and that translate into competitive advantage (Barney and Wright, 1998). High-performance work systems, talent management frameworks and strategic workforce planning all reflect the view that people management is a source of organizational value.

Within this literature, HR practices are evaluated against their capacity to influence employee knowledge, skills, abilities and motivation or what scholars have called AMO framework as a means of influencing organizational performance (Appelbaum et al, 2000). However, what is largely absent from this framework is any consideration of how HR practices directed at former employees affect the perceptions and decisions of current and prospective employees.

Employee Retention

The organizational costs of employee turnover are well-established in the extant literature. Cascio and McEvoy (2006) estimated that replacement costs for skilled employees can range from 100% to 300% of annual salary when recruitment, training and lost productivity are factored in. For military organizations that invest extensively in the technical training and tactical development of their personnel, the costs of premature attrition are especially acute (see Dyagi et al, 2020; Griffeth et al, 2000).

The retention literature identifies perceived organizational support (Eisenberger et al, 1986; Eisenberger et al, 2020), fairness perceptions, developmental opportunities and the psychological contract as key determinants of retention intentions. Critically, employees appear to attune their organizational commitment against their own treatment as well as against the treatment they observe being accorded to colleagues and predecessors.

Employer Attractiveness

Employer attractiveness has been largely theorized through the lens of employer branding (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Lievens and Highhouse, 2003). Organizations signal their attractiveness through symbolic attributes like prestige, social identity and organizational values and through non-symbolic attributes such as compensation, career development and job security. Prospective recruits engage in pre-entry psychological contracting. This is a way of forming expectations about the terms of the employment relationship before joining. Most times, these expectations are informed by observable organizational behavior toward current and former employees (Rousseau, 1995). For military organizations, where the symbolic dimensions (honor, sacrifice, service and brotherhood) of employer brand are particularly salient, the treatment of veterans is a crucial signal of institutional values. Organizations that visibly honor their obligations to departing and departed members communicate a credibility of commitment that prospective recruits can reasonably expect to be extended to themselves (see Abasilim et al. 2019 and Cable and Turban, 2003, for the notion of how job seekers develop perceptions from signals about an organization's reputation).

Veteran Welfare Scholarship

The scholarly literature on veteran welfare is more developed in Western contexts, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom than it is in sub-Saharan Africa. American scholarship on veteran welfare has been substantially influenced by the institutional framework of the Department of Veterans Affairs and has tended to focus on healthcare access, mental health issues and economic reintegration (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008; Hoge

et al, 2004). British scholarship has placed emphasis on transition support and the health consequences of combat exposure (Fear et al, 2010; MacManus et al, 2012).

In the Nigerian and broader African context, veteran welfare scholarship is sparse but not entirely absent. Matthews, (1981), Oshigbo and Oshigbo (2019) and Jatau et al (2026) have documented the inadequacy of welfare provisions for Nigerian military retirees. More recent studies by Chidozie et al (2025) and Chidebe et al (2023) noted structural gaps in pension administration, arguing that Nigerian veterans "retire to poverty" (p. 609). However, this literature has not yet engaged with veteran welfare from the perspectives of strategic HRM and organizational management theory.

3.1 Theoretical Perspectives

Strategic HRM Perspective

The strategic HRM perspective holds that HR practices should be designed and evaluated in terms of their contribution to organizational strategic objectives (Wright and McMahan, 1992). A strategic approach to HRM requires vertical alignment, in which HR practices support organizational strategy and horizontal alignment, in which HR practices reinforce one another (Baird and Meshoulam, 1988; Boxall and Purcell, 2022). Applying this perspective to veteran welfare requires extending the temporal boundary of Strategic HRM analysis. Organizations that extend their welfare commitment beyond active employment are theorized to develop HR capabilities such as a reputation for trustworthiness, a strong employer brand and a loyal alumni network that may generate organizational advantage.

Psychological Contract Theory

Furthermore, Rousseau (1989, 1995) defined the psychological contract as an individual's beliefs about the terms of the reciprocal exchange agreement between themselves and their organization. This provides a complementary explanation for the organizational effects of veteran welfare. Psychological contracts are formed through the accumulation of organizational signals such as their policies, practices and observed behaviors that communicate what the organization values and what it commits to deliver.

Social Exchange Theory

Meanwhile, social exchange theory (SET) by Blau (1964), which was later elaborated by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) proposes that social relationships are governed by norms of reciprocity. In other words, actors who receive benefits from others feel obligated to repay them. In organizational contexts, SET has been used to explain why employees who receive organizational support tend to exhibit higher commitment and performance (Eisenberger et al, 1986; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002). This perspective implies that employees who observe that their organization honors its welfare obligations to departing colleagues will perceive the organization as a trustworthy partner and respond with greater commitment.

3.2 Conceptual Development

Veteran Welfare as a Strategic Organizational Asset

That being said, the conventional treatment of veteran welfare within organizational practice has been to discharge the obligation at minimum cost once the employment relationship has terminated. This reflects a tendency to treat post-employment responsibilities as lying outside the domain of people management.

To describe veteran welfare as a strategic asset is to claim that it meets three conditions. Top among them is that it creates organizational value. Then it is linked to organizational strategy. Lastly it is managed with intention not discharged by default. The strategic linkage operates through the alignment of welfare practices with the human capital imperatives of military organizations, i.e., the need to attract and retain personnel of sufficient quality to fulfill complex and demanding operational mandates. The intentional management condition is met when organizations develop systematic welfare frameworks as opposed to ad hoc provisions that are inadequately resourced.

Veteran Welfare and Recruitment Attractiveness

The employer brand literature demonstrates that prospective recruits are responsive to organizational signals about how employees are treated (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004; Lievens, 2007). For military organizations, the treatment of veterans constitutes one of the most visible and credible such signals. Visible because veteran communities are situated within the same social networks from which military organizations recruit. And Credible because veterans are perceived as disinterested witnesses to institutional behavior.

When prospective recruits observe that veterans are well supported through adequate pensions, healthcare, housing and transition assistance, they could form expectations that the organization will also support them throughout their service and beyond. Conversely, when prospective recruits observe poorly supported veterans, they may form expectations of organizational betrayal that reduce recruitment intentions even among those who might otherwise be well-suited to military service.

Veteran Welfare and Employee Retention and Trust

The retention effects of veteran welfare operate through some identifiable mechanisms. The first is that robust post-employment welfare provisions are expected to reduce the perceived costs of long service by assuring active employees that they will be materially supported upon disengagement. Service members who are confident in their post-service welfare are less likely to seek premature departure in search of civilian employment that offers greater post-employment security. The second mechanism is normative and indirect. When employees observe that the organization honors its obligations to those who have served, they may come to believe that the organization will similarly honor its obligations to them. This belief is a form of prospective psychological contract fulfillment and it could elevate affective commitment and reduce turnover intention.

Meyer et al. (1995) argued that organizational trust is the willingness of employees to be vulnerable to organizational actions based on expectations of benevolent intent. This trust is a foundational condition for the high levels of risk-taking and unit cohesion that effective military operations require. Trust is built through the consistent fulfillment of organizational commitments over time and eroded through perceived breaches of obligation. Because veteran welfare practices are observed by active service members as indicators of organizational trustworthiness, they function as trust-building (or trust-eroding) mechanisms across the entire workforce

Veteran Welfare and Organizational Reputation

According to Fombrun (1996) and Gberevbie (2010) organizational reputation is the aggregate assessment of an organization's qualities and conduct formed by multiple stakeholders over time. They imply that the reputation of an organization is a strategic asset with implications for political support and public trust.

Veteran welfare practices contribute to organizational reputation through media channels and community networks. Organizations that invest in veteran welfare build positive reputational capital that strengthens their institutional standing. In Nigeria, where public confidence in state institutions has been eroded by governance failures, the military's treatment of its veterans is one of the observable indicators by which citizens can attune their trust in institutions.

Veteran Welfare and Organizational Effectiveness

It is important to note that veteran welfare does not improve organizational performance in a direct way. Instead, its effects operate through the workforce mechanisms that strategic HRM identifies as foundational to long-term organizational success (Abasilim et al, 2019; Dyagi et al, 2020).

These dynamics have important human resource consequences because prospective recruits are likely to view the organization as an attractive employer. Meanwhile, serving personnel may also be committed and remain with the organization longer. Reduced turnover and improved retention enable organizations to preserve valuable institutional knowledge and avoid the costs associated with replacing experienced personnel.

An Integrated Conceptual Model

This study defines veteran welfare as adequate pension, healthcare provision, housing support, transition assistance and community integration programs. The arguments advanced so far is synthesized into an integrated conceptual model. The model posits that veterans' welfare practices generate strategic organizational returns through these primary pathways:

- improved employer attractiveness to prospective recruits, mediated by employer brand signals;
- improved retention of active service members, mediated by psychological contract reinforcement and social exchange reciprocity;
- strengthened organizational reputation, mediated by public visibility of welfare practices;
- elevated employee trust, mediated by observed organizational trustworthiness.

4. Study's Propositions

On the basis of the theoretical framework and conceptual analysis developed in this study, the following propositions are advanced:

Proposition 1: Organizations that provide adequate veteran welfare will exhibit stronger employer attractiveness among prospective recruits, mediated by positive employer brand signals that are communicated via veteran communities and networks.

Proposition 2: Active service members in organizations with strong veteran welfare systems will exhibit higher organizational commitment and lower turnover intentions than those in organizations with inadequate welfare provision, mediated by the strengthening of relational psychological contracts.

Proposition 3: The relationship between veteran welfare provision and employee retention will be moderated by the visibility of welfare practices within the active workforce, such that welfare benefits that are visible will have stronger retention effects than those that are privately administered.

Proposition 4: Through its effects on recruitment and retention, veteran welfare will contribute to long-term workforce sustainability and organizational effectiveness.

5. Discussion: Some Implications of the Study's Argument

The study introduces post-employment HR strategy as a new analytical domain absent from the mainstream management literature.

The paper also integrates a conceptual framework that explains the organizational mechanics of veteran welfare. This theoretical integration is more compelling than any single perspective alone as it captures the motivational dynamics and the strategic resource dimensions of the welfare-performance relationship.

Furthermore, the paper introduces organizational legitimacy as a strategic HRM consideration. The argument is that HR practices generate reputational and legitimacy capital that is organizationally significant. This contribution aligns with scholarship on stakeholder-oriented HRM and the institutional dynamics of people management practices (Paauwe, 2009; Boselie and Van der Heijden, 2024).

Implications for Public-Sector Organizations

The arguments developed in this paper have particular resonance for public-sector organizations, where the employment relationship is informed by institutional considerations above market conditionalities and where organizational legitimacy in the eyes of the public and the state is a crucial resource. Public-sector employers frequently invest heavily in the development of specialized personnel and face growing competition from private-sector alternatives for experienced talent.

For such organizations, the strategic case for post-employment welfare is compelling. This is because the public sector may not always compete with private-sector compensation packages. Notwithstanding, it must therefore compete on the relational dimensions of the employment relationship via long-term security and guaranteed post-employment support. Robust welfare systems that meaningfully extend beyond active employment are a mechanism through which public-sector employers can differentiate themselves as employers of choice and build the depth of the psychological contract that sustains long-term commitment.

Implications for Workforce Sustainability

According to Boxall and Purcell (2022) and Pfeffer (2010), workforce sustainability is a prominent theme in management scholarship. The veteran welfare framework developed here contributes to the workforce sustainability literature by identifying post-employment welfare as an important condition for human capital sustainability in high-investment organizations.

The sustainability argument is particularly significant in the context of Nigeria's security environment, which has placed operational demands and thinly stretched the Armed Forces over the past two decades across various theaters of operations (Ibrahim and Bala, 2018). Organizations that are engaged in military operations and experiencing human capital degradation due to inadequate welfare for active and veteran personnel face compounding challenges that threaten operational capability. Investing in veteran welfare is, from this perspective, an investment in the organizational resilience that sustainability requires.

Relevance to Military and Non-Military Organizations

Although this paper has developed its arguments primarily through the Nigerian Armed Forces, its conceptual framework has broader applicability. Also, the theoretical claim that post-employment welfare generates strategic HRM returns through recruitment, retention and commitment pathways is applicable to any organization.

Police services, intelligence agencies, emergency medical services and certain categories of professional civil service meet all these conditions. Beyond the public sector, highly specialized private-sector employers like professional services firms and knowledge-intensive enterprises all face analogous dynamics. Law firms whose alumni practice in the same legal community from which they recruit, consulting firms whose alumni serve as clients and referral networks and universities whose alumni are donors and reputational custodians all have strategic interests in post-employment relationships that, while not typically framed as veteran welfare, are nonetheless analytically equivalent.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that veteran welfare is a strategic HRM instrument. Based on insights from strategic HRM theory, social exchange theory, psychological contract theory, the resource-based view and organizational legitimacy theory on the question of post-employment welfare, the paper has developed a conceptual framework that situates veteran welfare within the mainstream of management scholarship.

The case of Nigeria's military veterans is locally significant and theoretically generative. This is because on a local level, it illuminates a gap between the institutional rhetoric of military service as a noble sacrifice and the material reality of veteran neglect. Theoretically, it provides a rich context for developing and testing propositions about the organizational mechanics of post-employment welfare. These contribute to a broader reconceptualization of the temporal scope of Strategic HRM.

The four propositions advanced in this paper provide a research agenda for empirical investigation. Survey-based studies can examine the relationship between veterans' welfare perceptions and active-duty service members' commitment, which would begin to populate the causal pathways sketched in the conceptual model.

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