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Mapping how military veterans transition to self-employment



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Background to the research

- The statistics:
 - ADF has 60,000 personnel
 - Around 5500 ADF members transition out annually
 - There are 641,000 veterans or 2.56% of the total Australian population
 - There are no accurate statistics at this stage on the number of veteran entrepreneurs but Census 2021 promises to provide some data.
- The Australian Government has recently recognised the opportunities for veterans transitioning into their own businesses through the Prime Ministers veterans' employment program with Defence and DVA sponsoring some ex-service organisations and charities to provide support training and mentoring of veteran entrepreneurs.
- Data was gathered via interviews with military veterans that transitioned to self-employment.

Australia vs US Veteran Entrepreneurialism

- The US appears to have a more veteran entrepreneurial orientation than Australia.
- Military.com reports that:
 - US veterans are 45% more likely to start their own business than non-veterans.
 - 10% of small businesses in the U.S. are veteran-owned (2.4 million businesses).
- The US Small Business Administration reports that veteran-owned businesses employ 5.8 million Americans.
- Veteran entrepreneurs appear to be an untapped resource in the Australian economy when compared to US statistics.

The researchers



Dr. Saskia de Klerk is a Senior Lecturer in International Business and the Higher Degree by Research Coordinator. Her teaching focuses on entrepreneurship and international management at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, while her research interests are entrepreneurship development, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and business support programs. She has led multiple research teams exploring these areas.



Professor Karen Becker has been researching and teaching management and development of people in the workplace for over 15 years. Prior to this, she worked in corporate human resource management and consulting roles. Her mix of industry and academic experience gives her an applied approach to her work and she has a passion for bridging the gap between universities and industry. Karen's research focuses on workforce development, unlearning, innovation, and change in the workplace, looking at these issues as they apply to individuals, in organisations, and across industries. Her research projects have been funded by the public sector, cooperative research centres, and directly by industry partners.



Dr. Margarietha de Villiers Scheepers research focuses on entrepreneurial decision-making and innovation within existing and new business contexts. She works closely with industry to ensure research findings have a meaningful impact.

Margarietha has led four projects that examine the evolution of regional entrepreneurship ecosystems and how heterogeneous groups of entrepreneurs gain resources and collaborate with other entrepreneurs and economic development actors. Her research also extends to how entrepreneurial careers develop over time.



Dr. Matthew McCormack has completed over 31 years' service as a logistician in the Royal Australian Navy. He was awarded his Ph.D. for a thesis entitled Physical Asset Spares Determination - A Human Factors Perspective, in 2017. He lectures in Asset Management, Sustaining Capability, and Logistics Management courses. His research focuses on human behaviours, individually and collectively, around established business or bureaucratic systems, especially those related to veterans' and defence issues.

Findings summary

- Few military veterans considered self-employment as an obvious career choice when they transitioned.
- Military veteran entrepreneurs use a combination of their military acquired skills and develop new skills to develop their ventures.

The participants

- We interviewed 20 military veterans and 3 Veteran support organisations.
- Line of business:
 - Professional services (security, legal, accounting, consulting, psychiatrist).
 - Manufacturing (IT and software, security systems, printing, mounting).
 - Training and education (acting, dog training, digital platforms).

Where the venture ideas originated from

Previous training/skills/education
acquired during service.

Identified a gap while in service.

Side-hustle turned serious
business.

Always wanted to do something
like this.

Skills acquired in service used for venture

Technical skills

Management skills (analytical, planning, decision-making, methodological mindset, communication).

Team management skills (personal knowledge, teamwork, task setting).

Personal traits (professionalism, respect, integrity, attention to detail).

New business skills acquired post-transition

- Marketing, promotion, and sales.
- Accounting.
- New personal branding and business branding.

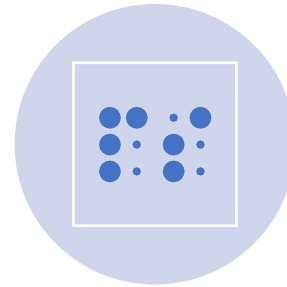


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Transitioning process challenges



Problematic (impersonal, broken, difficult, complex).



Lack of information.



Lack of emotional support.



Financial adjustment.

Sources of support during the transition

Military support organisations

Personal and family networks

Professional networks (pre and during military)

Other veterans

Mentors

Benefits of self-employment

- Autonomy: Flexibility to manage their wellbeing, freedom to do what makes them happy, and create their own space.
- The satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment.
- Mental health improved – success.

“... that’s why a lot of the veterans go into their own businesses, partly to be able to leave all that stuff behind without people bringing it up all the time. And so to create their own space. Yes, so that it is safe and manageable for us. So we don’t have to deal with all the dramas and all the other stuff that so many of the organizations go on with.”
(Participant 2)

Post-transition challenges when starting their venture



Settling in (finding like-minded people, finding routine and structure, not having the right qualifications).



Difficult to articulate skillset (lack of opportunity, formal assessment, to change mindsets).



Isolation (stigma, personal struggle, loss of 'mateship', tall poppy).



Risk (personal and financial).



Pride (self-esteem and ego).

Tips for future veteran entrepreneurs

- Reflect, do something you enjoy and feel passionate about.
- Collaborate: “pay it forward”; get a mentor and link with veteran support organisations.
- Have realistic expectations: plan, be flexible, and stay positive.
- Outsource and consider using existing experience.
- Test your idea first – go Part-time; and continue to learn.

Recommendations

- Develop a special category for government bus support.
- ADF to promote self-employment as a transition option.
- HRM should educate about an exit strategy.