

Chapter 1

The Fallacy of the Idea of Military Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author argues that the mainstream Occam's razor narrative of military entrepreneurship as a successful income earning second career for veterans only rings true in intellectual circles. This is based on a presupposed reality that veterans lack challenges building a second career. He uses existing literature to show that contrary to the mainstream narrative, military entrepreneurship is not a smooth-sailing path to a veteran's second career. Entrepreneurs face the same challenges irrespective of whether they are veterans or civilians. Military training might equip someone with discipline, focus, tenacity, and calculated risk avowal approach or risk taking that a civilian may not have, yet it may not ensure entrepreneurial success. A veteran's military background and training, if anything, may be rather inhibiting than facilitating of entrepreneurship. It's a fallacy to stipulate otherwise.

INTRODUCTION

The discourse surrounding the possible career options of a soldier post-military is steeped in the discourse of post-modernity. Among other things, post-modernity brings new insights, concepts and contexts and operates discursively and subjectively to reorient the discussion around new insights, concepts and contexts. The term military entrepreneurship refers to the career paths of a retired soldier, and is an example of post-modern discourse to the extent that it disrupts the authorized understanding and entrenched meaning of entrepreneurship, i.e., the economic

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ventures of a civilian. This chapter argues that the idea of military entrepreneurship is a fallacy and questions the mainstream narrative that sees it as a path to a veteran's successful second career. Entrepreneurs are known to face the same challenges irrespective of whether they are veterans or civilians. And, as the chapter argues, in an attempt to present a counter-narrative of military entrepreneurship, a veteran's military background and training might not necessarily facilitate entrepreneurship.

Retirement exists in the military just as it does with other professions. But, because, military personnel retire on average 15-20 years earlier than their civilian counterparts (Smaliukiene, 2013), it does not carry the same meaning as its civilian counterpart. In the military, retirement does not mean the end of work, but instead means searching for another job. There are a number of reasons for retiring early from the military that include the hazards of going off to war and dying, injury, post traumatic stress disorder and fear of the unknown that lies ahead. Propelled by any or all of these reasons, a soldier may leave the service while still in the prime of life. The early retirement of a soldier and the possibility for a second career, may have led economists and Management scholars alike to see military entrepreneurship as a logical second career for veterans.

What is the basis for military entrepreneurship specifically? No existing or known study presents evidence that there is significant difference between entrepreneurial engagement by a civilian and that by a veteran. Moreover, veteran and civilian entrepreneurs face similar challenges. However, challenges that require spontaneous and flexible responses would be better handled by civilians than veterans as their military training means they are encumbered by rule following and adherence to a command structure that constrains spontaneity and flexibility. Because civilians are not used to obeying commands in a regimented setting like the military, they can more easily respond spontaneously and flexibly to situations. Veterans might easily shed their uniforms on retirement, but this does not mean that they can do the same with their regimented lifestyle, which has become second nature to them. Hence the saying: once a soldier, always one. In other words, veterans are largely set in their ways and like leopards lack the ability to change their spots. As such, veterans face challenges building a second career (e.g., Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010). The challenges may be difficult, but they are not insurmountable.

It is this difficulty that is at the root of this chapter—a sceptical examination of the mainstream Occam's razor narrative of military entrepreneurship as a successful path to second career. This chapter is divided into five sections. Section one looks at entrepreneurship; section two views military entrepreneurship as a discourse with post-modern roots; section three describes the process of turning civilians into soldiers and soldiers back into civilians; section four shows the fallacious problem with the mainstream narrative of military entrepreneurship; and section five offers concluding remarks.

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