



PRINT POST APPROVED PPI00008161

CAMARADERIE

Third Edition 2017

VOL. 48 NO. 3

MORE ON
ADF PAY

WARRIOR
ETHICS

PAYMENTS FOR
INJURED VETS

RIFLE COMPANY
BUTTERWORTH

DEFENCE FORCE WELFARE ASSOCIATION

www.dfwf.org.au

THE EMERGENCE OF

MICRO-EX SERVICE ORGANISATIONS

HOW TO UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT THEM

Evan Donaldson and Joseph Norman, PhD - September 2017

Australia has a veterans' crisis involving a multitude of diverse issues. The prevailing assumption is that an explicitly coordinated top-down approach, centrally designed and led by government, is required to address these issues. This assumption is wrong and an alternative has already formed. In the last five years, a collection of self-organized communities has emerged in the veteran community herein referred to as micro-ex-service organisations (micro-ESOs). There are hundreds of micro-ESOs throughout Australia and more are emerging every week. Most micro-ESOs are not recognised as an ESO as defined by Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) - nor do they need to be.

Micro-ESOs have formed in response to gaps in veteran services that were not identified in Canberra, yet are being successfully addressed by these emergent organizations / communities. A design-like order has emerged with no central builder or planner. In contrast to traditional ESOs that are defined by Unit or Campaign, veterans responsible for micro-ESOs have organised themselves around issues. Despite their autonomous origins, micro-ESOs share common characteristics, while simultaneously adapting unique solutions to the issues they address. This is important because if we can identify and understand the common characteristics of micro-ESOs and how they respond to veteran needs, we can form an approach to nurture them without the need to understand or dictate the details of exactly how each organisation solves problems. Indeed, the quest to have such a detailed understanding of how every micro-ESO functions to support the needs of the community could itself harm or destroy the ability to meet those needs. This essay offers a conceptual logic for understanding micro-ESOs as un-designed, emergent entities and promotes a policy of nurturing their organic growth, as opposed to imposing them via construction, as the most effective means of supporting the veteran community.

Characteristics of micro-ESOs

Micro-ESOs are typically composed of an individual or small number of veterans, or close friends or relatives of veterans, with extensive subject expertise on an issue affecting veterans such as entitlements, mental health, transition-employment, or homelessness. Unlike the membership model of traditional ESOs, micro-ESOs develop social networks, which veterans then use as a resource. They emerge in direct response to the needs of veterans via information sharing, often across social media platforms. Typically, there are no membership fees, rather information and personal duty/satisfaction are the main currency of these networks. Advocacy and outreach follow if required. They are largely self-funded

with small donations or reimbursements from others including traditional ESOs, government and private donors.

Micro-ESOs are often mistakenly referred to as virtual ESOs. Although most have an online presence – for instance on Facebook - the virtual element is simply a means of connecting. The interactions, functions, and results often extend well beyond the virtual. Much like a highway does not define the destination or the vehicle that take you there, web platforms are simply the conduit for information exchange.

Micro-ESOs, by their nature, reflect an important element about veteran engagement. They understand that in the first instance, veterans seek information on their issue, not advocacy. There was a time when the holder of that information was the local RSL sub-branch advocate. A veteran would contact the RSL to find out more about their entitlements or other issues and advocacy would follow, if required. Today, that information is accessible online, usually through Facebook groups run by other veterans. There is a Facebook group for every veteran issue. But, although veterans can find the information they need directly from micro-ESOs online, advocacy is stuck in the old model. Qualified advocates, as recognised by DVA, are almost all attached to traditional ESOs. There are practical reasons for this, including funding and insurance. However, micro-ESOs have shown that serving the veteran community need not be through the RSL or traditional ESOs. The challenge is how to train, pay and support advocates who are not part of the traditional ESO network.

The term advocacy is used interchangeably within the veteran community to refer to all forms of representation and support for veterans including lobbying. The authors refer to advocacy herein without defining the context in every instance. We trust that the reader will make the correct distinction. When referring to advocates however, we generally mean those people who are suitably trained and accredited to assist veterans with claims for entitlements under legislation.

Traditional ESOs

The characteristics of micro-ESOs differ from traditional ESOs. Traditional ESOs are formed by Association, defined by where you served in the ADF (Unit) or overseas (Campaign). For instance, if you were infantry, you join the Royal Australian Regiment Association (RAR). If you live in Queensland then you join the RAR Association branch in Queensland. The RSL has a similar State Branch model which traditional ESOs have adopted. This approach imposes artificial and ultimately

limiting parameters on veterans seeking information or advocacy on a multitude of complex issues. It aggregates veterans based on superficial parameters rather than the ones most relevant to an individual and the issues they are experiencing. This is not to suggest that traditional ESOs have not advocated for veterans across diverse issues. Nevertheless, their effectiveness is limited by their constitution. This is not a new problem.

Veteran, advocate, ESO researcher and current President of the Defence Force Welfare Association (DFWA) Kel Ryan, has written extensively on traditional ESOs. Ryan's research shows that traditional ESOs were not established as inclusive veteran advocacy organisations. ESOs have always limited their membership by association and location, constraining who they advocate for and on what issues. Ryan writes;

In 1916 the RSL was established as an organisation for 'returned men' only. This term referred to those who volunteered to join the 1st AIF, had served overseas, and 'returned'. The RSL is not a national organisation but rather a federation of state organisations established under separate state legislation. These two terms, 'AIF' and 'returned men' (now veteran) resonated across the RSL until the 1980s as they meant that membership was restricted to those who met these criteria. Those who enlisted but did not go overseas during the world wars (500,000 men and women) were denied membership of what became the core grouping in local communities across the country – the RSL sub-branch. That included those who defended Darwin against the Japanese because they were not "returned". It is a hurt that resonates even today among their children and grandchildren. Members of militia battalions who fought on the Kokoda Trail and at Milne Bay in the early days of the Japanese War were also excluded – because they were conscripts, not AIF. Even though militia members were accepted in 1944 the damage was done creating a permanent rift among many who vowed never to join. A more recent example is that of a father who served four years during WW2 in Australia whose only son, a conscript, was killed in Vietnam and commemorated by his local RSL. An RSL the father could not join.

Community expectation of the RSL as an all-inclusive, all representative ESO is misplaced. It was never the case. The RSL, and traditional ESOs that adopted the RSL's constitutional framework, have always been exclusive ESOs in some form (Ryan 2013). In addition to the exclusive nature of traditional ESOs, a significant proportion of veterans have issues that simply fall outside their purview. Whether it is because they do not qualify – as members - or that the issue they are facing is not one the ESO is able to address, the outcome is the same: veterans in need of support are turning elsewhere and that's usually to each other. Veterans are bearing the costs and responsibility of supporting fellow veterans.

Marketing ESOs

In addition to traditional ESOs and micro-ESOs, another kind of organization has attempted to posture as a solution to veterans' issues – we call these Marketing ESOs.

Carpet baggers or rent seekers, whatever you call them, these ESOs are formed by opportunists seeking to capitalise both financially and socially on the back of veterans. Because of their public relations (PR) focus and tightly woven narratives, marketing ESOs attract the support of politicians and other public figures chasing public exposure without getting their hands dirty on veterans' issues. Marketing ESOs capture large donations from private donors and members of the public. Funds raised by marketing ESOs are disproportionately directed to employee and director salaries and further fund raising. Marketing ESOs ultimately harm the collective as donations intended for veterans' causes are redirected to a small group of individuals.

Characteristics of ESOs

The table below summarizes and compares the characteristics of the three kinds of ESOs, highlighting the ways micro-ESOs fill gaps that the other models are not able to.

ESOs	MARKETING BASED MODEL	TRADITIONAL ESOs	MICRO-ESOs
Role - real and perceived	Awareness - narrowly defines veterans' issues to avoid controversy - focuses on brand/image/narrative.	The Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO) seeks to be the "voice of the Defence Community". Group of Associations defined mostly by Unit or Campaign that seeks to provide advocacy to veterans and represent veteran issues to government and public.	Responds purely to stimuli - where there is need from the veteran community, a micro-ESO emerges.
Constitution	High profile board, paid executives, defined by physical premises and limited by geography/location, resource intensive.	Formed by Association - Unit or Campaign (mostly) State based branches Membership based	Single founder (up to three founders) - supported by spouse or family, almost exclusively virtual (Facebook), not limited by geography or location, follower based.

ESOs	MARKETING BASED MODEL	TRADITIONAL ESOs	MICRO-ESOs
Approach	Public relations focused, everything by design, carefully controlled, outcomes known.	Advocacy restricted to members and expertise restricted by what the Association can offer. If you served in XYZ Unit you join XYZ Association in the State you reside and they will advocate for you whatever your issue.	Issue focused. No membership required. Information first, advocacy follows. Not restricted by where you served or where you live. Veterans become followers; both veteran and organisation rely on the mutual exchange of information.
Management	Highly paid, corporate structure, much talk of governance yet always poor governance.	Volunteer based - advanced aged - supported by retirees/pensioners from Unit/Campaign.	Volunteer (1-3), but also self-funded (skin in the game), no awards, no recognition - don't want either, bare minimum 'governance' if at all.
Relationship with government/ establishment	Close. Intrinsicly linked through personal and professional ties, social circles. Attracts politicians.	Have access to government, historic professional ties and awards club mentality on the part of government. You have a OAM? Ok we'll meet with you.	Sceptical->cynical of government and the establishment.
Origins and life cycle	Most formed in last 5-7 years. Formed by committee as public showed willingness to donate money to veterans causes in response to media coverage of veterans' issues. Will exist as long as there is money captured from the public on the back of veterans.	Most formed over 20-100 years ago. Ageing membership base, de-acceleration in new membership. Will continue to exist for another 20-50 years as long as the basis of the Association still exists. That is, if the Royal Australia Regiment is still a force the ADF in 20 years, there will be an RAR Association. There is unlikely to be a Vietnam Veterans' Association in 20 years time.	Estimated 95% formed in the last 5 years in response to need. Will cease to exist once need from veteran community diminishes. Natural disintegration.
Response to change / shocks / controversy	Fragile to public opinion. Relies on glossy PR for donations. Therefore, constrained by PR. When these groups have internal problems, the entire organisation becomes ineffectual for the collective (veteran community).	Robust - only relies on the existence of the association / campaign members. So long as the Unit or campaign participants are alive the ESO will exist. Does not have the ability to adapt to change.	Antifragile - when the founders of micro-ESOs differ on how to respond to need they splinter and a new micro-ESO forms which addresses the need in a different way. Conflict amongst and within micro-ESOs benefits the veteran community (the collective). Veterans don't care who runs the ESO. If they address the needs of veterans, they will continue to be in demand. In this sense, they have evolutionary properties.
Effectiveness	Focus is inward (donations, PR). Narrow view of veterans; defined by what's marketable. Unwilling to address awkward issues effecting veterans; victims of ADF abuse, drug/alcohol abuse, crime, homelessness.	Effectiveness limited by structure (Association & state/location based), not suited to many complex issues facing veterans. Reduced by aged and declining membership. Tries to apply order to micro-SEOs	Highly effective at addressing veterans' issues as they were formed in direct response to need (stimuli) not planning, design, assumptions. Extremely low costs base and unlimited virtual reach connects

Continued overpage

ESOs	MARKETING BASED MODEL	TRADITIONAL ESOs	MICRO-ESOs
Effectiveness cont.	Limited reach (operate out of offices) and single point of failure (no overlap in services).	and veteran community to have a united voice. Intervention doesn't work with self-organising entities with emergent properties.	micro-SEOs and veterans who can respond quickly to need. The overlap in services by micro-ESO's creates redundancy and greater options for veterans and their families.
Background of Founders / Board members / Advisors	Generalists; suitability defined by public profile and ability to attract funding (Retired General, business person, marketing/PR type). Access to and influence within government and establishment. Desire to support veterans - very narrowly - but never rock the boat with government or the establishment.	Veterans, many years' experience in traditional ESOs, tireless volunteers for veterans, most of advanced age.	Issue specialist; deep understanding and experience of the issue and need they are responding to. Self-taught - had to do it themselves. Advisors are other veterans or relative/spouse/friend. Often don't have a board, those that do find them a distraction/unnecessary.

The RSL and Legacy are excluded from this table. They are the largest and most recognisable ESOs. Their brand recognition in the Australian psyche dwarf all other ESOs, as does their revenue. Due to their size, they can't be compared with marketing, traditional or micro-ESO's. The author thinks of the RSL and Legacy more of a financial utility for the veteran community than advocacy organisation. Recent and past turmoil notwithstanding, the RSL has the ability - at least financially - to have a positive impact on the veteran community. While the RSL's ability to generate revenues has grown, its role in veteran advocacy has diminished. This is not a criticism of the RSL, but rather an opportunity for the RSL to relinquish its advocacy role and focus exclusively on allocating resources to support the veteran community by empowering micro-ESO's which serve veterans more effectively.

How to nurture micro-ESO's without harming them

Despite the best of intentions, intervention is typically harmful to self-organising entities. Any activity which disrupts the organisation from responding directly to stimuli (need) disrupts its functional attributes, which are often non-obvious. This causes the system to become less effective, and ultimately harms the collective it is intended to serve.

Typical interventions proposed by bureaucratic types include attempts to organise micro-ESO's, "getting them to work together", imposing governance, or providing too much funding which would cause them to change their composition, incentives, and function, affecting their ability to address the needs of the veteran community. Further, attempts to sustain micro-ESO's beyond the need for which they were formed is wasteful and misses what is unique and valuable about them. Ideally, micro-ESO's should be supported in responding directly to the needs of the veteran community and disintegrate when that need no longer exists.

Micro-ESO's perform their function best when they are left alone. However, founders risk financial ruin if left to fund the organisations themselves. As need increases, micro-ESO founders are stretching their finances to respond. As veterans themselves, or someone touched by

veteran plight, they are driven by obligation arising from need in the veteran collective. Many incur significant financial debts in fulfilling this role. However, this self-funding model has the advantage of avoiding misaligned incentives. The authors believe that micro-ESO's are the most effective organisations for supporting veterans and, in economic terms, the most efficient.

In order to nurture micro-ESO's, founders should be supported in responding directly to veterans' needs without risking personal financial ruin. But if intervention is harmful how do you nurture these organisations without detracting from their core function?

The most effective way for the government to play their role in addressing the needs of veterans is not to institutionalize or subsume micro-ESO's, nor is it to directly fund them through one-off grants. Rather, to nurture the organic and spontaneous nature of micro-ESO's, the authors propose a refund model that relieves the burden on those individuals who volunteer their time and resources to aid veterans. A refund model, for certain operating costs, would allow micro-ESO's to serve the veteran community within their means while insulating them from ruin. The refund model supports micro-ESO's without intervening in function of the organisation. But nothing is free. The authors assume that the Australian government is serious about helping veterans, but naturally want to account for how resources are expensed and can measure what impact those resources are having. The value exchange is clear: data for funding. In exchange for refunding direct costs, the micro-ESO would share de-personalised information with government to help them allocate resources most effectively. Conceptually, this approach is sensible but practical implementation of such a scheme will require additional efforts.

Authors: Evan Donaldson B.A is an Australian Army veteran. Joseph Norman is a complex systems and data scientist with a PhD in Complex Systems and Brain Sciences.

Special thanks to Kelynn Ryan PhD, Michael Baron von Berg MC, OAM and Professor Nassim Taleb whose ideas and teachings brought the authors together.