

Measuring the impact
of outdoor
management
development- a
literature review
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Despite the increase in popularity of Outdoor management development courses, there is a significant lack in proof of the effectiveness of an OMD.

This paper looks at the various researches that has been done in the field of OMD and identifies the expected outcomes of an OMD as personal development, managerial development, team development and organizational development. It also points out the various characteristics that is required for an OMD to be branded effective and have a significant development on the participants. It then looks at the various studies that has been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of an OMD and concludes that due to sustained lack of convincing evidence, evaluation of OMD is still based on personal experiences. There needs to be more research done to get concrete proof for proving that an OMD facilitates better development by incorporating the ten factors as pointed out by McEvoy and Buller.

Outdoor management development (OMD) has become increasingly popular as a method of developing managerial effectiveness. The use of OMD seems to be increasing in step with the rapid introduction of team-oriented approaches to total quality and re-engineering initiatives in organizations (Filipczak, 1995). The power of outdoors was recognized with the inception of Outward Bound. The military incorporates the harshness and changeability of outdoors to test and challenge its members.

For example, it is believed that in unfamiliar surroundings managers are stripped away from using learned 'organizational behavior' and fall back on behaviors that are undisguised by hierarchical or 'classroom' norms. By placing managers in a situation of unfamiliarity, the outdoors provides a

living workshop for managing uncertainty of change- something that textbooks and lectures just cannot emulate. As a vehicle for learning it can be more powerful than classroom simulations, in that real consequences are produced by the actions (or inactions) of those involved. The transfer to management development began when trainers noticed that some elements of the Outward Bound experience were common to management practice; risk-taking, challenge, teamwork, problem solving, self-confidence, and the importance of trust (Bank, 1983). Defining an OMD Outdoor management education consists of a series of structured exercises, or “ initiatives,” which are undertaken outdoors by groups of program participants and which by their design require risk-taking, problem-solving, and teamwork for successful completion. Interspersed with these exercises are review or “ debriefing” sessions in which participants analyze their experiences and share their learning with OMD colleagues (Buller, Cragun, & McEvoy, 1991).

Another definition mentions it as a set of carefully sequenced and integrated experiential learning activities conducted (primarily) in the outdoors and designed to facilitate participant behaviour change. Various experiential learning activities are used in OMD programmes, from river rafting and rock climbing to solving problems in teams with a variety of challenges (e. g. ith all team members blindfolded).

The activities are important only in the sense that they provide the vehicle for learning. The design, facilitation and debriefing of activities are the critical parts of the programme (McEvoy, Buller, 1997). It includes a broad range of training interventions, premised on the assumptions of experiential

learning theory, which use structured tasks and exercises as consciously
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designed metaphors and isomorphs of managerial and organizational processes. The training is conducted in an outdoor setting and requires some physical exertion from participants. It is often used as part of wider managerial training and development programmes, the general aims of which are to achieve improvements in organizational functioning via the transfer of learning from the OMD intervention to the workplace (Jones, Oswick, 2007).

The foundation of OMD is experiential learning. David Kolb's experiential learning model (1984) - one of the most commonly used models of learning styles defines four stages in the learning cycle: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations. Experiential learning increases our reserve of reliable experiences that can help us adapt to any challenging situation we come across. When attempting to learn through experience, we first have to have a concrete experience of a scale such that it is brief enough to be analyzed in detail, contains enough detail to draw learning from and has meaning for the group analyzing it. In an OMD, concrete experience is provided through training exercises, outdoor adventure activities and team building games.

Processing experiential learning activities through group discussions and debriefing sessions help learn from even seemingly mundane events. Dainty and Lucas (1992) suggest that "... the outdoors provides one of the most powerful mediums for the development of self and other awareness".

The rationale offered is that; " An individual's behavior is often clearly visible during outdoor development programmes. It is impossible to hide behind

organizational and educational norms in an environment where these no longer exist". Similar arguments are propounded by Long and Galagan (1984, 1987). Thus, the principle is that the outdoors provide activities and/or environments devoid of traditional organizational and educational norms. For norms to exist, participants must have previously experienced the activity and/or environment. Ideally, therefore, the activity and/or environment must be novel to the participants.

Outcomes of OMD OMD is sometimes used with intact work teams, at other times with "stranger" groups of individuals from various parts of an organization. The choice depends on the goals of the programme. There are multiple possible objectives in OMD programmes, which include personal development, managerial development, team development and organization development. Dendle (1989) during his study of impact of outdoor management development programmes surveyed managers, providers and government agencies.

Ninety five companies replied to the questionnaire and of the benefits of outdoor development, the top three chosen were personal development, team development and leadership development. OMD programs come in two major types: low impact and high impact. Low-impact programs generally use initiatives with limited physical risk. Activities tend to involve an entire work group.

* High-impact programs use initiatives that have a relatively high level of perceived risk. They can involve individuals as the focus of the activity.

Richard Wagner and Christopher (1992) looked at one type of OMD program

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that is commonly used by organizations today—the one-day, low-impact, team-focused program. In such programs, the primary training objective is to improve the overall functioning of a group or team of workers.

They studied six organizations, which have conducted more than 80 OMD programs and trained more than 1, 200 employees in them. They studied the participant responses, supervisory reports and conducted interviews with the managers other than the immediate supervisors to get their reactions to individual and work-group performance after an OMD program. They evaluated two types of behaviors: individual behaviors (including self-esteem, locus of control, and faith and confidence in peers), and group behaviors (including group cohesiveness, clarity, homogeneity, problem solving, and the overall process of the group). The reports showed a significant improvement in the overall functioning of a work group after the group attended an OMD program. On the other hand, no significant changes were reported in individual behavior after an outdoor-based program. Thus low-impact OMD programs are effective in improving group process and interaction skills.

But the results might vary if the OMD program under evaluation is a high impact one. Characteristics of an effective OMD To ensure maximum transfer of learning it is necessary to ensure that the programs are designed and implemented effectively. An effective OMD is one- * That is based on a thorough needs analysis and custom designed to meet the unique needs of the client (and tied clearly to the vision and business strategy of the organization); * That possesses clearly articulated, overarching

learning/development goals, combined with an opportunity for individuals to
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set personal goals for themselves; * Where adequate preparation ensures that participants show up with realistic expectations and an understanding of why they are there (this includes an understanding of conceptual frameworks underlying the skills to be developed); * With a clear emphasis on the safety of the participants, both their physical safety and their psychological safety; * Where outdoor events are carefully chosen and sequenced, each event being followed by a thorough debriefing discussion; * Where activities are multi-task oriented Where facilitators have the breadth of experience required to design and implement a programme consistent with adult learning theory (Knowles, 1990), and then lead debriefings which simultaneously keep participants focused on the applicable learning achieved in each event, distinguish and reinforce valuable participant contributions, and model the key attributes of effective interpersonal behaviour taught in the programme * Where multiple arrangements are made for the transference of learning back to the workplace (this includes learning contracts and follow-up) (McEvoy, Buller). There are many factors that affect the effectiveness of an OMD.

Some of them include whether a program was conducted with intact or non-intact work groups, whether participation was voluntary or mandatory, gender composition of the group, whether the group's supervisor was present for the program, the training program design and selection of activities, the facilitators and the use of follow-up programs. Measuring the Impact (learning and transfer of management skills) of an OMD Anecdotal case study evidence provided by program developers is inadequate. The most "objective" evidence to data for OMD effectiveness comes from a

small number of studies using self-report data collected before and after training. McEvoy and Buller (1991), for example, reported improvements in self-rated job performance for 47 managers after a week-long OMD program.

Wagner and Weigand (1993) reported similar improvements for a group of 16 managers using measures of group communication, team spirit, interpersonal relations, and group effectiveness. After a one-day OMD program in which 358 employees participated, Baldwin, Wagner, and Roland (1991) found self-reported improvements in questionnaire data dealing with group effectiveness and individual problem solving (but not in other areas). Wagner and Roland (1992) summed up the results of their evaluation of 80 one-day OMD programs in which roughly 1,200 employees participated. Again, the primary data source was self-report questionnaires collected before and after the training.

On the whole, the training appeared to have had a positive impact on group outcomes such as group awareness and group effectiveness but had no impact on individual outcomes such as self-esteem. While suggestive, none of this research is convincing. Without control groups it is not possible to rule out myriad alternate explanations for the measured effects. Without data from other than self-reports, it is difficult to ascertain the objectivity and validity of the measures; and without multiple dependent variables and a model of training effectiveness, it is difficult to determine how and why the training may be having an effect. One of the major recommendations of Dendle's study (1989) was that there should be more research into how learning generated from outdoor experience gets transferred to workplace.

Kirk (1986) suggests that this is an important concern for supporters of OMD, <https://assignbuster.com/measuring-the-impact-of-outdoor-management-development-a-literature-review-flashcard/>

because the environment in which the learning takes place is unlike a work setting, and thus links must be carefully established between the various outdoor tasks and the workplace.

Indeed, when managers do return to work after the experience, they are often under pressure to behave as they did before receiving the training and thus, any learning that has occurred is not reinforced because of insufficient support. Critique OMD has been described by Bank (1994) as a powerful vehicle for the growth of self-awareness and the awareness of others through insight into one's "real" behavior. McEvoy and Buller (1997) lists ten features of OMD which they thought result in superior learning outcomes. Other development approaches may have many of these features, but OMD incorporates all of them and hence facilitates better development. These ten features are- (1) Emotional intensity; (2) Psychological safety; (3) Consequentiality; (4) Enhanced self-confidence; (5) Use of metaphors; (6) Unpredictability; (7) Experiencing peak performance; (8) Multiple knowledge/skill types; (9) Developing the whole person; and (10) Focus on transfer.

However, Dainty and Lucas (1992) conceded that outdoor development is an area of activity that is more often misunderstood than managed. They went on to cite three reasons for this: 1) The absence of critical articles about it 2) The lack of research into the area and 3) The absence of evaluative frameworks. There is wide disparity in opinions when it comes to the effectiveness of Outdoor development programs. The Kirkpatrick's four-level framework (1994) for evaluating a training program says that we must first identify what training outcomes it will measure. LevelCriteriaFocus
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4ResultsBusiness results achieved by trainees 3BehaviorImprovement of behavior on the job LearningAcquisition of knowledge, skills, attributes behavior 1ReactionsTrainee satisfaction It suggests that higher level outcomes should not be measured unless positive changes occur in lower levels and also that changes at higher level are more beneficial than changes at a lower level.

To evaluate the outcome of each level, there should be sufficient proof and mere evidence is insufficient. But there is a sustained lack of convincing evidence one way or the other, possibly due to product variability, incoherent marketing, a paucity of research data, etc. In the case of outdoor management development and the decisions concerning outdoor development programmes are therefore often acts of faith or based on highly personal experiences. Hence this model fails to be suitable for evaluating an OMD.

More work has to be done for ensuring effective assessment and subsequent development of effective Outdoor management development modules.

Conclusion The paper attempts to understand the term OMD and its various dimensions. The major objectives of an OMD are found to be personal development, managerial development, team development and organizational development. For an OMD to have a significant impact on the participants and to ensure transfer of learning to workplace, ie, for an OMD to be effective, it needs to have certain characteristics that have been listed out in the paper.

An OMD is theoretically said to facilitate better development than other methods of learning due to the fact that it based on experiential learning and because it incorporates the ten factors that has been pointed out by McEvoy and Buller (1997). But due to the lack of concrete proof, the evaluation of OMD still remains based on personal experiences.