

Expedition Leadership Utilized in Corporate Training

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Abstract

The wilderness is an unparalleled venue for highlighting team and individual strengths and learning to compensate for shortcomings. (Gans, 2011) Experiences gained in adventure programming helps build competence in doing something one never thought was possible.

Whereas, business leaders can then tie these experiences back into the business world using the lessons learned to realize potential change, confidence and support of each other. (Williams, Graham, & Baker, 2003)

Outdoor adventure learning in regard to corporate training programs has the ability to build stronger organizations and allow companies to deviate from a historical command-and-control model of leadership into one that supports a more active follower model. This type of leadership empowers all members of a team to make decisions and play a larger role in the organization which in turn brings clarity to meet the needs, goals and objectives of the business.

Keywords: corporate adventure training, outdoor adventure learning, team development, adventure learning, corporate culture, leadership, outdoor leadership

Review of the Literature on Expedition Leadership Utilized in Corporate Training

This literature review will discuss the unique modality to promote change in leadership. The literature is replete with examples of how corporate adventure training, or sometimes called outdoor adventure learning, or expedition leadership can facilitate collaboration, team building and mentorship in an organization. The key issues regarding the purpose of this study that have been previously addressed involving the use of executive leadership expeditions to develop business leaders better understand teamwork, ethics and judgement. Sibthorp, Paisley & Gookin (2009) explored team development through adventure-based programming. The authors also examined how expedition participants gained critical skills including effectively handling of difficult circumstances, the ability to work as a member of a team, strategic planning and how to communicate positively with diverse types of people. (Sibthorp, et al., 2009) The concept of Expedition Leadership, or Corporate Adventure Training, or Outdoor Adventure Learning has taken hold in the last 30-years. (Anamika, 2019) This can be seen in the corporate environment because most companies are moving away from traditional hierarchal command-and-control structures and towards looser networks of active followers. (Gans, 2011)

In business, the ability to engage and lead are valuable. Organizations are dynamic and ever changing. This change is constantly modifying the corporate world and lessons in leadership are valuable to organizational leaders. By in large, people strive for comfort but having the ability to disrupt that comfort in a meaningful way is to push and stretch leaders to try new things and help them change their understandings of unfamiliar environments. The lessons learned about leadership cultured in the wilderness are tantamount to the issues that organizations face on a daily basis; unpredictability, challenges and dynamic. The wilderness is an unparalleled

venue for highlighting team and individual strengths and learning to compensate for shortcomings. (Gans, 2011) Experiences gained in adventure programming helps build competence in doing something one never thought was possible. Whereas, business leaders can then tie these experiences back into the business world using the lessons learned to realize potential change, confidence and support of each other. (Williams, Graham, & Baker, 2003)

The understanding of the key issues of Expedition Leadership, Corporate Adventure Training, and Outdoor Adventure Learning is important to the investigation and their influence on corporate development and training. These leadership skills learned in this environment will build on the context of corporate adventure learning programs and help corporate leaders stimulate change.

Corporate Adventure Learning

Corporate Adventure Learning provides a unique modality to promote change in leadership. Adventure programs, executive leadership expeditions, and outdoor adventure learning programs have a rich history of producing change among different settings. One such program is the Executive Leadership Program offered through the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). More widely known is the program, Outward Bound that was organized by Kurt Hahn in 1957. Outward Bound was designed to accelerate the development of independence, initiate physical fitness, self-reliance and resourcefulness. (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). NOLS took these ideals further and developed an executive leadership program framed around backpacking, sea kayaking and other adventure sports to instill leadership principles that can be used in today's business organizations. These types of programs utilize specific outdoor activities to foster calculated risk taking and creative problem solving, team building and group dynamics.

Benefits. Training methods of the past are not always appropriate in today's ever-changing business environment. Many organizations today still use training techniques such as manuals, lectures and in-service sessions. These methods have been shown to have limited effectiveness in imparting communication skills, leadership and teambuilding. (Goleman, 2000; as cited in Fragoulis, & Phillips, 2008) A study by Rhodes & Martin (2014) looked at the benefits of outdoor adventure education in the workplace with a group of soldiers. These soldiers participated in a multi-day experiential leadership development activity and the findings found that almost all participants (97%) perceived improvements in their attitudes and/or behavior. This study is relevant because it provides evidence of the benefits of adventure education in regard to intra- and interpersonal skills in the workplace. (Rhodes & Martin, 2014)

Mentoring. Mentoring as it is traditionally viewed is an ongoing association between a senior level employee and a protégé focused on the protégés growth and development. (Kram, 1986; Montgomery, 2017; Ragins & Kram, 2007; as cited in Riley, 2019). Across the literature, mentoring has been associated with positive career outcomes for mentees including increased job satisfaction, greater career related attainment, and advancement (e.g., Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lent, & Lima, 2004; as cited in Riley, 2019) This mentor/mentee relationship offers many psycho-social benefits including cultivating a sense of organizational belonging or increasing job-related self-efficacy. (Dawson, Bernstein, & Bekki, 2015; as cited in Riley, 2019) Organizations that participate in Corporate Adventure Training, Expedition Leadership or other Outdoor Adventure Learning training programs are likely to develop these types of mentor/mentee relationships.

Theories Explaining Adventure Learning

Several theories have been used to explain the benefits resulting from Outdoor Adventure Education, Expedition Leadership, and/or Corporate Adventure Training. One of the earliest is

Dewey's experiential learning theory (1938) which emphasizes the importance of learning through direct experiences. (Cooley, Burns, & Cumming, 2015) As opposed to traditional settings Outdoor Adventure Education instructors do not typically dictate what is learned by students but instead create an environment where learning has the potential to occur through exploration and reflection. (DeLay, 1996; as cited in as cited in Cooley, Burns, & Cumming, 2015) This type of learning, or training, results in a deeper approach and students are more likely to remember and apply what is learned in the future. (Dewy 1938; Dart et al., 2000; as cited in Cooley, Burns, & Cumming, 2015)

One such theory is that of Albert Bandura who describes self-efficacy as one's ability to organize and execute courses of action required to produce given attainments. (Bandura, Freeman, & Lightsey, 1999) Belief in oneself is the first action to help individuals see the picture more clearly. Outcomes are often determined by the judgements of how acceptable their performance is under given situations. (Bandura et al., 1997) The ability to overcome failure can allow individuals to exercise self-control and gain a better understanding of the big picture. Providing employees, the opportunity to use what is learned in outdoor adventure pursuits as part of a training exercise, not only builds confidence and healthy attitudes but also provides team development.

Adventure Learning Effectiveness. Wilderness expeditions are a form of wilderness experiences that offer opportunities for educational experiences and promote leadership and character development. (Asfeld & Hvenegaard, 2014) These expeditions can vary in format, duration and personal growth focus (e.g. leadership, personal or organizational development; Dawson & Russell, 2012). Existing literature also suggests that the effects of wilderness expeditions increase and are maintained over time and that experiences as a result of a

wilderness expedition could have long lasting effects. (Barton, Bragg, Pretty, Roberts, Wood, 2016)

Team Development

Corporate Adventure Training programs have demonstrated the ability to produce beneficial outcomes in critical areas of organizational development. (Bronson, Gibson, Kishar, & Priest, 1992) One of these critical areas is team development. Being in the outdoors, places clients in unfamiliar settings where they are vulnerable and willing to accept new information. In adventure experiences participants are uncertain about their outcomes and often find themselves in unfamiliar environments facing novel and sometimes difficult situations. (Gass & Priest, 2006) Adventure programs and activities can provide many benefits to teams and team building in the organizational environment. This environment can play a pivotal role in developing trust in the workplace, engage in healthy dialogue and engage in conflict and risk management.

Collaboration. Forming intimate relationships in the organization creates a sense of culture and team dynamics developed through good communication, clear vision, flexibility, training and development opportunities. (Nancarrow, Booth, Ariss, Smith, Enderby, & Roots, 2013) Garcia-Torres' (2019) study examines how professional collaboration is a factor associated with job satisfaction, work commitment and self-efficacy. A study by Blake, Leach, Robbins, Pike, & Needleman (2013) took this a step further in their work in studying a population of nurses and determined that healthy work environments promotes collaboration, communication, leadership and even improved job retention.

Company Culture

An organization's culture builds unity and loyalty among its employees because of the sense of commitment that is built between them. Culture is an important aspect for

interprofessional teamwork, treatment, quality and success. (Körner, Wirtz, Bengel, & Göritz, 2015) One example of developing a company culture is through transformational training which is a term applied to training that focuses on individual relationships in the workplace. (Mendel, 1993) This type of training often developed in outdoor adventure educational settings, or adventure learning, goes beyond empowerment and motivational training and can have far reaching effects on the individual and the workplace. (Mendel, 1993) Kucharska, & Kowalczyk's (2019) study took this a step further in examining the structure of relationships between company culture, performance, corporate responsibility and reputation from an employee's perspective. The study found that a company's social responsibility has a strong correlation between an organization's reputation and their perceived culture.

Innovation and Change

While a strong organizational culture can create cohesiveness, it can also promote innovation and change. A company's leaders and employees must be in agreement of these expectations to work towards developing motivation and growth. Overcoming obstacles can help meet the demands of leading a team toward rapid innovation and change that can be paramount to moving forward. A study by Bock, Eisengerich, Sharapov, & George (2015) examined how ensuring that organizational innovation generates value increasingly requires effective marketing methods. This is interesting as it relates to outdoor adventure education because many prospective hires are looking for employment in an organization that promotes a sense of innovation, culture and change.

Judgment and Decision Making. Martin et al. (2006; as cited in Culp, 2016) suggested that leadership is multifaceted and intentional with an aim toward the accomplishment of particular goals and outcomes. Outward Bound trains leaders to see what needs to be done and

getting a group of people to do it. (Raynolds, et al., 2007; as cited in Culp, 2016) Graham (1997; as cited in Culp, 2016) defines leadership as the capacity toward goals shared with a focus and competency they would not achieve on their own. Having the ability to recognize when change and innovation are a prescription toward the success of a company or organization, can have a positive impact on team building in teamwork and to achieve strategic competitiveness. (Handiwibowo, & Suef, 2019)

Summary

Outdoor adventure has the capacity to build stronger organizations and allows individuals to deviate from a historical command-and-control model of leadership into one that supports active followers. This leadership model empowers all members of the team to make decisions and through their efforts have a role to play bringing clarity to the larger group vision. (Gans, 2011) By embarking on an Expedition Leadership, Corporate Adventure Training, or other outdoor adventure education program, organizations have the ability to build strong teams, develop a more robust company culture and develop relationships that will have lasting effects well after the teams leave the wilderness. Lastly, these outdoor training programs, and even extended wilderness expeditions develops one's understanding of leadership, teamwork, ethics and judgement. (Gans, 2011) All of these skills are easily transferable to the daily activities of a business or organization and can go a long way in fostering self-reliance, judgement, respect and a sense of responsibility that can help leaders thrive in today's shifting landscape. (Gans, 2011)

While there are recent contributions to the literature involving studies on team development through outdoor adventure education, the literature is lacking on how expedition leadership can be applied in today's corporate environment. What is missing in the literature is bringing real-life experiences as seen in an expedition setting and applying those principles to a

corporate training environment. While the outdoor education literature regularly references the importance of mentor relationships, team building, developing a corporate culture and the development of self-efficacy, research has not been fully documented. The experiences, affordances and limitations of expedition leadership in the corporate training field has not been well studied. Therefore, the overarching purpose of a study in this area will provide a better understanding of how to apply this leadership model in a corporate training environment.

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