

Anna Dimitriadi, Lecturer (407/80)

Department of Sport Management, University of Peloponnese, Greece

MSc in Sport and Leisure Management

Abstract

Adventurous activities can be both beneficial and perilous for health, because the circumstances differ and because of external and not always controllable factors, which may influence the outcomes. Therefore, any company, which organises adventurous activities, needs to present effective risk management and valuable safety measures in order to respond to its participants' safety and satisfaction. This study, which was performed in the Greek company «Trekking Hellas», aimed at asserting the importance of risk management for adventure tourism. The data that were collected through personal, semi – structured interviews with the company's managers and participants have shown that the particular company has made notable attempts to establish an organised and well-controlled risk management. This has been accomplished through implementing a methodical risk assessment and operating all necessary safety measures. The research, also, discussed the influence that the above might have had on the clients' motivation for participation. Finally, the data have pointed out the significance that risk management has for the success of every activity and in extent, for the success and promotion of the company.

Key Words: *Adventurous activities, Risk Management, Risk Assessment, Safety, Outdoor, Recreation, Sport, Tourism, Greece, Trekking Hellas.*

Tourism has always been vital for Greek economy (Boniface and Cooper, 2005). Lately, Greece has also become a destination for special forms of tourism such as sport and adventurous tourism (Galani – Moutafi, 2004). Plenty of organisations in the leisure industry offer a full range of adventurous activities and extreme sports (Costa and Clinia, 2004).

A pioneer in the adventurous activities field has been a company named «Trekking Hellas»; it was introduced in 1986, and in 1992 became the first firm to use the franchise system, uniting twelve collaborators from different places throughout the country (www.trekkinghellas.gr, 08/06/2005). Nowadays, Trekking Hellas has a wide range of customers, that vary according to the activities offered. A great number of activities take place in open environments, where the risks are plenty and the control is little or sometimes even impossible. To cope with those hazards, the company's operators must apply their own controls, have strong knowledge of safety (Dougherty, 1998), adopt all safety measures needed (Chelladurai, 1999; Williams and Buswell, 2003) and try to implement a comprehensive risk management plan (Beech and Chadwick, 2004; Swarbrooke et al, 2003).

The current study attempts to explore the impact that risk management may have on adventurous activities. Moreover, it intends to identify whether the implementation of a methodical risk assessment and the operation of necessary precautions and safety measures can influence the clients' motivation for participation. Finally, an effort is made to explain the development of risk management within the company and the extent to which this is considered to be fundamental, not only for a secure completion of the activities, but also for the company's overall promotion.

Risk and Safety in Adventurous activities

In outdoor activities plenty of risks may occur since other elements, external and not always controllable, can influence the conditions (Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Beech and Cladwick, 2004). These risks, related to human factors or to nature, can be perilous and even cause accidents. Bentley et al, (2001); Bentley et al, (2001a) have distinguished the risk factors concerning adventurous activities into three categories:

The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Trekkling Hellas» company

(a) individual factors, which are related to bad judgements or participants' overconfidence, luck of skills or communication, (b) environmental factors, such as changes in weather conditions, (c) equipment factors, for example, poor equipments or bad maintenance. Finally, mishaps related to vital human needs (for example, lack of food or water) can also take place (Hardman and Stensel, 2003).

People may join adventurous activities in order to explore their abilities and emotions, by facing possible risks and deliberately take themselves beyond their limits (Holyfield, 1999). On the other hand, one of the most important needs people have is the need to feel safe (Maslow, 1943). Thus, in order to make this «paradox» of risk and safety coexistence successful, managers need to perform an efficient and effective risk management (James, 1980).

Risk Management

Risk management is a key factor for the best process of sport management since it can predict and even avoid unpleasant situations, like accidents, injuries or even losses (Fuller and Drawer 2004). Its objectives should be first to identify any possible hazard or risk that someone could face during a sport and recreational activity and then to

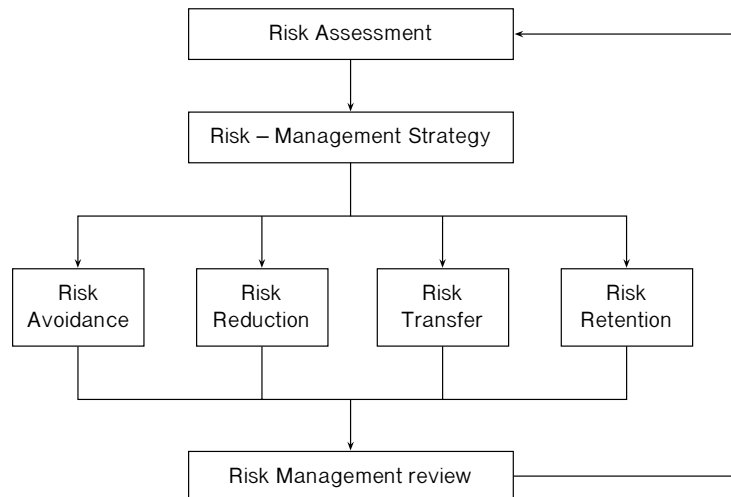


Figure 1: Model of Risk Management (Swarbrooke et al, 2003).

The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Trekking Hellas» company

assess the possibilities these risks have for materialising. It is essential that managers will provide solutions and alternatives, aiming at decreasing or even eliminating the risks. Swarbrooke et al (2003) have suggested a «model of risk management» that can be helpful in adventure tourism (*Figure 1*). According to this model, managers should first conclude a risk assessment process, during which they have to evaluate the circumstances within the environment they are functioning, estimate possible dangers, take precautions and measures according to legislation and ensure that nobody, neither personnel nor customers, will get hurt (HSE, 2003; GNVQ, 2000). Next they have to identify which risk management strategy they will follow and finally, to review their risk management process through a good feedback system (Priest and Cass, 1997).

Safety Measures

The effectiveness of risk management is also related to the safety measures taken. It is of great importance that managers should always attain certain issues:

- The activities to be managed and functioned by well – qualified and skilled people.
- Good leadership; that is, the best way one can provide the kind of direction and support people need in order to be efficient and productive (Covell et al, 2003).
- Information on weather predictions.
- All participants to have covered their basic needs, for example food arrangements (Priest and Cass, 1997).
- Record of participants.
- Record of previous dangerous situations (Connaughton, 2002; Appenzeller, 1998).

Methods

The current study's main objective was to examine whether «Trekking Hellas» operates risk management. On the other hand, though, there was an intention to identify whether and to what point this could influence customers' participation or their need for safety. To examine in depth

The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Trekking Hellas» company

the above, it seemed of better value to have the participants themselves to describe their perceptions, personal ideas and beliefs. Therefore, the qualitative method was used in order to seize the quality and meaning of the responses, that could have been lost if these were converted into figures.

For the collection of the study's data, personal, semi – structured interviews were used, during which the researcher may explore further the personal experiences and views of the interviewees by being more flexible (www.nsf.gov, 9/7/2005). Moreover, in an attempt to avoid jeopardising the results' reliability and validity (Bryman, 2001), the study was developed in different offices of «Trekking Hellas», rather in just one, all interviews were carried out during a sort period of time, people of both genders were interviewed and, to avoid bias.

After completing the interviews, the data collected were analysed in comparison to existing research outcomes, reports, books, company's documents and web pages.

Discussion

The main issues that needed to be examined through this study were: firstly, whether the particular company has been performing risk management as part of its general management and secondly, if the implementation of an effective risk management may influence people's motivation for participation, as well as the company's success and promotion.

The company's managers described the activities that were operated using the words «adventure», «different», «alternative», «energetic» or even in some cases «extreme». Although, the possibility of having an accident is common in classic sports as well, the element of nature is a factor that constitutes adventure tourism as a more hazardous field (Swarbrooke et al, 2003; Beech and Cladwick, 2004). There is a need for constant awareness for possible or unknown hazards, while the human factor may cause even more serious problems. The activity operators must be trained and informed on matters of safety, while participants should follow instructions and regulations, in order to enjoy their leisure time avoiding mistakes and accidents.

The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Trekking Hellas» company

Although, only recently (i.e. after the introduction of the Ministry of Tourism and the Olympic Games that took place in Athens during 2004), some actions were taken regarding safety measures and the circumstances under which these activities should be taking place, all Trekking Hellas managers have answered that the company is one of the few in Greece that has been acting according to an organised and planned design of risk management.

The Hellenic Association of Travel Agents (HATA) first attempted to create a written manual related to the procedures that need to be followed during an activity in order to complete it successfully, or –even further– the actions that should be taken during an unpleasant situation, such as an accident. In order to do so, they were influenced by international and European standards, such as through the Union International des Associations d' Alpine (UIAA) or The Adventure Activities Licensing Regulation (1996). Using the above and with the experience its operators have gained through the years, Trekking Hellas has tried to establish certain rules and regulations that concern the safety of all participants and the procedures that need to be followed in case of accidents.

More specifically, the company is following a common risk management procedure, which has been developed through general meetings and discussions with managers from all offices. However, each office may have some differences or optional parameters in terms of policies, according to its activities, its clients and especially to the territory it is functioning in. Therefore, the company has categorised its activities into different levels, in order to reduce the possible risks (Swarbrooke et al, 2003) and cover the needs of as many clients as possible.

Furthermore, the company's managers, in their attempt to lessen or even eliminate the possible hazards, have tried to conduct a risk assessment procedure (HSE, 2003; GNVQ, 2000. Theory (HSE, 2003) has claimed that this assessment is divided in certain phases, during which people should first identify possible hazards and decide who and how these might hurt, and then, they need to evaluate the risks and take all precaution necessary. Every action must be recorded and revised in order to help in future situations and training. Reviews of the safety measures, before or after the activities, are necessary, in

The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Trekking Hellas» company

order to update the safety guidelines and inform whether changes are required (Priest and Cass, 1997).

Before an activity takes place, the operators carry out a small interview with the customers to inform them about all details relevant to the activity, such as the duration, the circumstances and the difficulties or the risks they might face. They will learn whether the clients have previous experience or if they have any kind of illnesses, allergies or fears. Such information might be proved vital in case of emergency. Moreover, all customers will have a demonstration of the equipment they are going to use, as well as a demonstration of the way to use them. Thus, managers ensure that all clients will be ready to face the potential risks when or if those arise (Fuller and Drawer, 2004).

Risks can be also confronted when using appropriate equipment for protection (such as helmets, ropes, lifejackets, etc) and comprehensive maintenance (Hardman and Stensel, 2003). All equipment is considered to be «safety equipment». Therefore, managers acquire it according to international standards with the guarantee of the CE mark, the international certification of material quality, while they are kept constantly informed whether technology has introduced new and more developed equipment. Finally, there are certain directions that the employees follow after every use, according to which they transfer, clean, disinfect and store up all equipment to last longer and remain reliable (Olson, 1997).

Nevertheless, the elements that seem to have influenced the clients' preference for Trekking Hellas instead of another company was the firm's brand name and its staff; being the innovative company on the particular field, with a history of successful functioning, Trekking Hellas has engendered a feeling of trust and security. A client distinctively mentioned that if he had to choose between a company that offers the best equipment and on that has the best guides, he would definitely choose the latter, because when a problem occurs, the best equipment can become dangerous if the guide is incapable of using it.

Therefore, all Trekking Hellas trainees need to have (a) knowledge of the equipment that is necessary and the way of using it, (b) knowledge of the route they are going to follow and who the participants should be, (c) good and sufficient training, during which one can get the certification

The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Treking Hellas» company

of operating an activity, (d) practice, in real circumstances, during which the managers can identify the trainees' competences and the trainees can gain experiences and learn from their mistakes, (e) good physical condition, since the activities include intense exercise and (f) first aid knowledge. Moreover, guides must be excellent communicators and through discussion, explanation and good cooperation everyone should be able to complete the tasks (HSE, 2003; Fuller and Drawer, 2004). Also, they must be good psychologists, able to realise the level of abilities and experiences their clients have and identify those who might need the most guidance. Finally, it is of paramount importance that they always stay alerted and take responsibility of their actions for the safety of all participants.

On the other hand, even when all possible safety measures have been taken, risk is always possible. To its legal protection the firm collaborates with an insurance agency, which covers the company in case of an accident. Also, customers are required to sign a voucher, according to which they declare that they have understood the potential risks. In this manner, the company's responsibility in case of unpleasant circumstances is limited to the use of appropriate equipment and guidance and the implementation of appointed rules and regulations.

Finally, one could argue that in adventurous activities the most important factor is luck. Then again, people should not count only on it. On the contrary, the company, the managers and the participants must maintain all rules and regulations and take every possible precaution in order to reduce the dangers and provide the major possible security. As a result, in order to generate successful adventurous activities and maintain a prosperous and well-established company, safety should be the main objective.

Recommendations

The arguments presented through the current study suggest that the operation of an efficient risk management and the performance of necessary safety measures are of essential importance for adventure tourism. Treking Hellas is a company that is in the process of establishing a promising risk management programme, which involves the

The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Trekking Hellas» company

implementation of analogous rules and regulations, the training and development of its guides, as well as, the purchase and use of appropriate equipment. However, certain issues need to be strengthened:

- a) Both Ministries of Tourism and Sports should collaborate for improving the current tourism education system; that is, to create authorised schools, responsible for training guides who operate adventurous activities.
- b) Establishment of certain official policies and regulations by the Government, which would concern the limitation of risks and safety measures taken during adventurous activities, in order to improve the operation of administrative mechanisms.
- c) Organising educational seminars, during which managers and guides from all companies such as Trekking Hellas could meet and exchange information, knowledge, problems and experiences.
- d) Be informed on technology, since it can invent products and methods that detect, predict or protect from possible hazards.
- e) Establish official programmes by the tourism administration, which could inform people on adventure activities and the safety standards they should least expect from a company.

To conclude, managing risk is, as Quinn (1998) has summarised, to make the question «What if» and always have an answer for it. Managers have the responsibility to follow policies, consider all possible risks or take precautions and appropriate safety measures in order to reduce risks or even cease them.

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The implementation of risk management in adventurous activities in Greece: The «Trekking Hellas» company

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Address for correspondence:

Anna Dimitriadi

Mesogion 7,

115 26, Athens

Greece

e-mail: annadimi@uop.gr