Human Resource Training and Development: The Outdoor Management Development (OMD) Method

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Abstract

In the age of international competition in today's economy, companies must train their employees and prepare them for jobs in the future. There are many different types and educational approaches in human resource training, but the present study will focus on the Outdoor Management Development (OMD). For better understanding, the particular training method and the core stages of the training process will be examined and the definitions of OMD as an educational tool for management development will be presented. Basic theories and models will be analysed as well as the benefits earned and evaluation concerns about the effectiveness of such training programs.

Training and development is at the heart of an organization that seeks continual growth and improvement. It is a process of learning provided to new and existing employees acquiring knowledge and technical skills and developing attitudes of behavior in order to be more effective in their jobs. In the world of competitive economies, the globalisation of markets and the technological frenzy, are not enough for the enterprises to be productive. Their survival and growth depend not only on the speed of their adaptation to new technological, economic and consuming conditions but on the level of their human resource development as well.

One of the contributing factors to increasing interest in workplace training is that the workplace is considered a multimillion-dollar enterprise in which employees learn new skills designed to help them keep their organizations competitive in an increasingly global economic environment. In a study published in Workforce Economy (2001), it was reported that more than 90 percent of the companies provided a variety of management, leadership and communication training to employees. This included such training topics as «time management, problem solving and decision making, public speaking and presentation skills, management change, and strategic planning» (Corporate Training Delivery, 2001, p. 7).

Having realised the importance of training in contemporary organizations this paper will address the introduction of a recent type of development: the Outdoor Management Development (OMD). As it is considered a process of learning, a description of the training environment will be presented in the first part of the paper, including the objectives and benefits of training, as well as the process and the variety of training methods. The second part of the paper, will present an inclusive approach to OMD by giving the basic characteristics, the different types, the goals, the process of learning, the benefits and its impact, theories and models of OMD and the evaluation process as well. The main purpose of this review paper is to examine if the OMD as a training method follows the standards of valuable corporate training by having a significant impact to the organizational performance.

The main reason for this review paper is the perception stemming from empirical experience that OMD programs are rarely used in Greece by organizations and companies. When Greek organizations implement an OMD program, they do not seem to have an in depth understanding of this program and they do not value its significance as an effective training tool. This perception has risen from the fact that organizations require the provider (outdoor company) to plan the training activities and recommend a trainer from the field of business consultants. Most of the times the trainer covers the theoretical body of knowledge without being concerned about the experiential part of the training (participating to the training activities), that leads to a gap between the theory taught and the path of learning that takes place through the outdoor challenges. What is coming next is the debrief session which is very

generalised including questions to each team about their performance in the training activities. However, in this learning process, the observation of the trainer is limited and there is an overlooking of effective feedback after each training activity. By analysing the core issues of the training process and covering the unique nature of outdoor management development programs, this paper will address some useful implications for practitioners and a more clear understanding of the power of OMD for the organizations that apply this method of training.

Objectives and benefits of training

Employers invest in employee training as a method to meet a need or solve a problem within the organization/company. Due to increasing international competition in today's economy, companies must empower their employees and develop skills to maximize productivity and profits. The fast-moving, ever changing global economy calls for a new work order and requires a flexible, multi-skilled, knowledgeable and adaptable workforce at all levels.

Traditional training has provided the knowledge, facilities and the teaching of the skills necessary to perform a job well. Employee development, however, focuses and prepares an employee for jobs in the future (Kennedy, 2004). Specific employee training benefits such as increased profits, higher productivity rates, lower turnover rates and increased company loyalty are some of the main benefits that were revealed through the literature. Finally, Centron and Davies (2005) suggest that «…life-long learning is nothing new; it's just a way of life. Companies that can provide diverse, cutting-edge training will have a strong recruitment advantage over competitors that offer fewer opportunities to improve their skills and knowledge base» (p. 46).

Training process

According to Dressler (2003) a five-step training and development process is recognized as useful for any organization. Step one is to complete a «needs analysis», in which the organization identifies the necessary skills for its employees, analyses the current skills base and develops specific training objectives. Some usual methods of gathering information for the training needs, as Stredwick (2001) reports, are the questionnaires, data research, interviews in individual and team level, evaluation of performance, written test, observation, recording of critical cases, analysis of duties and analysis of organization's strategy. Step two involves planning the actual training program, which may be done internally or externally (using external training provider such as a university or consultancy firm). Step three, refers to the validation, in which the organization is able to confirm that the training program developed satisfies the needs analysis. The next step is that of the implementation

of the program, which could vary from one day to as long as it takes (e.g., 2-year master degree). Training evaluation consists the fifth and final step.

Warr, Allan and Bird (1999), reported four control-stages for the evaluation of training: (a) the reaction of employees, that is their degree of satisfaction; (b) the degree of learning, that is the level of acquisition/comprehension of values, knowledge, information and skills; (c) the change of behavior, as the acquisition of knowledge has little value, while the transformation of knowledge in the work environment is considered more important; and (d) the performance results, including measurements of main effects on e.g., productivity, profits, retirement rates and the cost of production.

The extent to which organizations support employee training and development certainly varies. According to Wentland, (2003) the four key variables or P's are: (1) place (on/off-the-job, equipment required), (2) product (purpose, content & constrains factors, presentation options), (3) promotion (strategic planning involvement, company newsletter, personal communication, word-of-mouth) and (4) price (budget allocation, employees, facility, material, equipment, travel). Micro-organizational analysis using these four variables is a useful managerial and planning tool.

Variety of Training Methods

Corder (2002) suggested that there are two types of teaching and learning methods: teacher-centered methods and learner-centered methods. The teacher-centered methods comprehend lecture, explanation, talks and presentation, and demonstration. Learner-centered methods include such activities as simulation, role-play, games, discovery learning, experiential learning, tutorials, brainstorming, buzz groups and snowballing, case studies and problem solving, flexible learning, open learning, and distance learning, group discussion, seminar, small groups, displays, project, and field trips. Additional types of human resource training and development are: simulation training, job rotation, coaching, mentoring, behavior modelling, action learning, outdoor training and new age training.

Combs (2002) when comparing six of the most used training methods of creativity (brainstorming, games/puzzles, role playing, analogies, six thinking hats and hypnosis), indicated that brainstorming appeared the most used method from the majority of instructors. However, the most important finding was that a variety of development methods exist and that there are many factors to be considered. The particular needs, the conflicts, the environment, the culture and the strategy of the organization are some important factors that should be taken into consideration for the appropriateness of each method.

In summary, it is evident, based on the training knowledge base that every training program aims at an effective investment on employees' empowerment and an increase of organizational performance. The main stages of the training

process are the needs analysis, planning the program, its validation, and finally its evaluation. Some evaluation elements are the degree of satisfaction, the level of skills acquisition, the change of behaviour and the performance results. Due to the fact that there is a variety of training methods, special attention should be given to the selection of the most appropriate training method.

Outdoor Management Development

In this part of the review a new approach to management training will be introduced namely the Outdoor Management Development (OMD). Outside the UK, the equivalent terms for these areas of practice are Outdoor Experiential Training-OET, Experience Based Training and Development-EBTD, Corporate Adventure Training-CAT, Adventure Learning-AL, or/and Outdoor Challenge Training-OCT. Additionally, this study will explore and present the main learning theories and models associated with this experiential type of learning.

This type of training (OMD) represents a form of experiential learning, which has its roots in the Outward Bound movement, which was first developed in Scotland by Kurt Hahn. The program was originally designed to build personal qualities as well as to discover meaning through personal and group encounters with unfamiliar situations whilst under psychological and physical exertion. It also involves multiple approaches, including outdoor and experiential activities, for the purpose of developing the members of organizations to be more effective. OMD is engaging in experiential learning, or learning by doing with reflection (Greenaway, 2002). Another description of outdoor experiential training was given by Thompson (1991) who stated that «is a blend of cognitive learning plus subjective interpretations based on the learner's feelings and values» (p. 46).

Giving the meaning of outdoor activities, they take place in an environment away from and in contrast to the usual workplace of participants. Everyone involved has to negotiate new situations and respond to challenges with which they are unfamiliar. They have to use personal resources in different ways and adopt new roles strategies and skills, not used in every day life. Given such circumstances, initiative, stamina, fear, self confidence, talents and vulnerabilities emerge that may not have been previously recognised. Teamwork and co-operation are fostered through activities that cannot be successfully accomplished without a high level of communication and working together.

What for?

These kind of outdoor programs are most often used to teach about teamwork including cooperation, trust, and collaboration. Additionally, this style of training increases creativity, develops skills like problem solving, leadership, communication self-esteem motivation, and risk taking. The three most com-

mon types of this training are: wilderness experience, the high-ropes course, and low-ropes course (McEvoy, 1997).

Some of the main management goals of this kind of training found in the literature are the empowerment of leadership skills and teamwork (Ibbetson & Newell, 1999; Mazany, Francis & Sumich, 1995), more effective problem solving, and development of trust and internal communication (Williams, Graham & Baker, 2003). On a personal level some of the goals appeared to be the increase of self-confidence and of the level of risk taking

Clements, Wagner and Beker (1995) also pointed out that in outdoor settings, participants are not engaged in role-playing but they experience real emotions. When faced with risk, participants must confront their own limitations and understand their behavioural choices. They are also forced off of their old patterns of thinking. Problem solving takes place outside of normal organisational hierarchical constraints. That factor makes this training unique from one point of view as the environment where is taking place is outside of the workplace and often in a nice natural landscape and people's involvement makes a big difference to the process of training.

Benefits/impact of OMD

As any training method aims to increase the organizational performance, it is necessary to review the impact on individual or organizational level. Certain changes of behavior on an individual level have been reported by Keller and Oslon (2000) such as the improvement of leading skills, the development of a team spirit, a more effective problem solving, the increase of self-confidence and of interpersonal communication. On the other hand, the changes that are transferred in the workplace are higher productivity, quality, job performance and reduction of systematic absenteeism.

Results from a team building training program using the outdoors (rope courses) indicate that participants managed successfully the challenges by solving problems of communicating and working together. This behavior is characteristic of groups in stage one of team development. In order to proceed to the next stage, group members need to understand one another and the goals they are trying to accomplish. This training enables the groups to get to know one another, which increases communication. Each activity allowed participants to complete tasks in a non-threatening environment. As a result of the ropes course each group was able to function as a team. This was illustrated by increased communication and improved efficiency of the activities throughout the day. This was also proven in the surveys conducted before and after the training (Wiltscheck, 2000).

In an outdoor training program which aimed to establish objectives for the creation of vision and the future orientation of the organization, the researchers focused on the outcome of the learning process related to the skills

development of team problem solving and the improvement of team collaboration. The main results showed improvement in collaboration among the members of each team, customer-orientation, and management of quality and leadership. Certain other individual results showed 43% reduction on employee turnover as well as an increase of productivity (McEvoy, 1997).

Bronson, Gibson, Kishar & Priest (1992) found important improvements in teamwork development, when managers participated in a OMD session, in the following areas: (1) the comprehension and engagement of goals, (2) concern and interest for their fellowman, (3) hearing with more attention and understanding, (4) direct decision-making and problem solving, (5) recognition and respect of individuality, (6) high standards for their team performance, (7) recognition and reward of team effort, and (8) encouragement of feedback.

A more recent research work by Gass and Priest (2006) reported that CAT programming was able to increase measures of teamwork from about 40% to as much as 80% depending on the approach used to facilitate the learning experience. The most interesting result of this research was that the duration of the benefits in teamwork is highly related to the debriefing session.

Priest, Gass and Fitzpatrick (1999) presented findings where 120 managers, directors and superior executives participated in a Facilitation Training Program (FTP). The majority of participants after a 6-month period were able to recall often points either from the theoretical part of the training or elements from the practical courses, brainstorming or meetings of departments and management of team discussion whenever needed. Moreover, new-coming executives indicated that a higher degree of encouragement and application of knowledge was needed. Specifically, they reported that more training time was needed in order to achieve trust between them. They also mentioned that further training would contribute to the maintenance of knowledge and the assimilation of experience offered by such type of training programs.

Theories & Models of OMD

As models of OMD are mainly based on an experiential theory framework, it is important to present theories and models for the better understanding of the nature of this kind of training method. The underlying theory of OMD advocates that there are unique metaphorical links between the activities and processes, which constitute OMD and those found in organisational settings (Hovelynck, 1998; Jones, 1996). Activities take place in real time, there is no ambiguity about success and failure, and the participants receive immediate feedback about the efficacy of their actions. The many distracting and extraneous aspects of the worksite are eliminated by the creation of a carefully-designed metaphor which involves and empowers the learner. The fundamentals behind training professionals in the outdoors is using the environment to create a metaphor for business applications. The role of metaphor is that it gives

the participants the opportunity to encounter new problems, experience new feelings, and try new solutions to real problems (outdoor activities), and use these decision making skills in other (equally real) situations back in the business environment.

Another significant attribute is the level of the novelty of the activities. All participants start from the same learning base. According to Wagner and Campbell (1994), OMD is defended on the basis that it is a process learning which is the significant outcome of the program and it seems unlikely that all participants start from, or need to start from, the same knowledge position in relation to the processes required to complete the task. As a result, the training process eliminates many role conflicts in day to day work environments and emphasises interpersonal skills which are considered important to work.

As OMD considered that it is grounded in the theory of experiential learning it would be useful to analyse the main learning process. Kolb (1984) proposed that experiential learning involves a number of steps as part of a cycle: (a) having a concrete experience; (b) observing and reflecting on this event; (c) formulating ideas on how to improve one's performance or outcomes and (d) experimenting by applying these ideas when a comparable experience or situation is next encountered.

An examination of OMD by Broderick and Pearce (2001) illustrates how these learning cycle stages match the experiential training experience. First, participants are asked to undertake an activity. Having done this, they reflect on what happened and why. The next stage involves determining how to handle the experience in the future. The final stage may involve doing the same or similar exercise again putting into action those ideas generated in stage three. This is repeated for as long as needed.

An important part of the success and impact of the used outdoor management games is the debriefing session at the end of every game. The importance of this session can be underlined within the following phrase «playing a game without debriefing is like playing a soccer game without scoring goals». Through the debriefing session the participants are given the chance to clarify and express what they have experienced. In addition, at the same time participants listen to the experiences of others and realize that people learn different things from performing the same activities. In the end, the reflections on the differences in perceptions and emotions that are elicited via the games are extremely valuable. They can reflect on how they may use the lessons they learned in their personal and professional lives (Dieleman & Huisingh, 2006). In this style of facilitation, a metaphoric client dialogue can focus for example on the way the participants planned the training exercise to be exactly the same plan at work (Schoel & Maizell, 2002).

A model of the Outward Bound explains the experiential educational process, which began with the participant undertaking a series of physical activities and group problem solving tasks. Walsh and Golins (1976) suggested

that the tasks needed to be introduced incrementally and have real conse-
quence. The problem solving tasks should be holistic; their solutions requiring
the fullest complement of the individual's mental, emotional and physical re-
sources. A state of «adaptive dissonance» whereby a person has two differ-
ent and conflicting thoughts was then reflected upon. This led to transfer of
learning to future experiences.

Finally, a recent model is presented by Burke and Collins (2004) which
links the role of knowledge in skill acquisition to the issue of learning transfer
to propose two distinct design pathways. Each of these is related to three key
components of programme design – namely: (1) the knowledge base (i.e. pro-
cedural or declarative); (2) the learning approach (tactical or strategic); and
(3) the practice setting (high or low fidelity). Hence, the left-hand design path-
way represents programmes which utilise procedural knowledge (i.e. knowing
how) to develop tactical approaches to conflict handling developed via high fi-
delity experiences. Conversely, the right-hand design pathway represents pro-
grammes which focus on the development of declarative knowledge (i.e.
knowing that) to optimise the development of broader based strategic ap-
proaches to conflict handling via low fidelity experiences, i.e. where there is a
close match between the cognitive processing requirements (but not the task
elements) in each situation.

Evaluation of OMD

The approaches used to examine benefits in the past have ranged from
well-structured traditional quantitative approaches, in which participants are
asked to complete a measurement scale or inventory of benefit items accord-
ing to a particular longitudinal or pre-post design, to more open-ended quali-
tative approaches, that rely on observation and in-depth interview techniques.
The quantitative approaches that have been used have generally focused on
examining the extent to which a given benefit or set of benefits is important
or not, while the qualitative approaches have focused on using the respon-
dents' perspective and language to identify and develop a better understand-
ing of the key benefits. Another research approach is the means-end, which
is similar in emphasis to the qualitative approach in that the goal is to un-
cover benefits and develop a richer understanding of them.

Krouwel (2002) refers that one end of OMD benefits are usually unmea-
surable, sometimes immeasurable. The other end is that the package of train-
ing methods/lectures, competences, and exercises with predictable outcomes
provide the measurable factors by which buyers judge a training program.

In a review article, Lynhan (2000) presented possible explanations of the
weakness of the OMD programs due to the big difference in duration and the
great variety of outdoor training activities. Furthermore, there is a number of
factors that can act as potential barriers to the effectiveness of such programs

(e.g., the follow-up of the outdoor training activity, reinforcing practice and feedback). Also, the majority of evaluation results are based on participants' self-assessment reports and 3600-type feedback instruments, which are merely reporting on perceptions of behavior and attitudes changes. At the same time, Lynhan (2000) stated that directly observable bahavior and attitude/performance changes and reports are mainly missing from this field of study.

Conclusion

The present review focused on the type of OMD training method, by analysing the specific characteristics/nature, the goals (empowerment of leadership skills and teamwork), presenting the main theories and models for the better understanding of the value of the outdoors as a tool for management development and reviewing some impacts and evaluations of such programs.

As every training program has to respond to a variety of needs (necessary skills) and accomplish specific goals, it should take into consideration all the factors applied in planning the training program. It is also significant for the training program to satisfy the employee's needs analysis and to be evaluated for the quality of perceived training as it is considered a valuable investment for the organization. An organization which will choose an external provider (company for outdoor training) should pay special attention to the training needs identification and transfer that knowledge to the provider. The organization should also communicate information about the training program to its employees. These are important steps on planning a training program, according to Dressler (2003), that also OMD programs have to take into consideration.

Some implications for the provider of OMD programs are to develop clear and specific goals of the training program to every participant from the very first moment. The promotion of every training program, as Wentland (2003) mentioned, is one of the four key variables of organizational support. If there is an absence of detailed information about the specific kind of training there is the threat of misunderstanding the power of it and be prepared for just a nice break of work in outdoors. Another fundamental variable is the encouragement of metaphoric themes in client debriefings as a valuable means to construct elements for valuable and effective impact on organization. Such a process could create significant advantages in both developing and maintaining a positive client change (Gass & Priest, 2006; Hovelynck, 1998; Jones, 1996). According to theories and models used in the OMD field, the participants (employees) must be involved in the experiential activity. For effective learning the participant's decisions must directly affect the outcome of the exercise, whether it is completing a high ropes course, a low ropes spider web,

or doing a three day mountaineering traverse. The use of metaphor to create learning experiences is a very important factor. By using metaphors to relate adventure activities to real world decisions, participants are being taught to think, and to problem solving and as Schoel and Maizell (2002) stated, they transfer this experience at work. Dieleman and Huisingh (2006) indicated that the most valuable element is the level of reflections of lessons that they learned on their personal and professional lives. Much like Socrates, who felt that the process of learning was more important than the answer, OMD instructors or facilitators strive to teach the skills necessary for success and not teach answers. Through the use of adventure metaphors the process becomes more important than the outcome.

A better explanatory framework for this type of training is a combination of knowledge from different kinds of professional fields that consider the client educational needs as very important and satisfy those needs from different aspects. Experiential learning in general- and more specifically OMD- has become a useful approach to eliminate the gap between management theory and practice. Specifically, combinations of OMD and metaphor intervention promote awareness of the interplay among organizational performing, assessing, visioning and strategy.

In this point, is important to be mentioned the role of instructor in the process of effective learning as she or he is considered very crucial factor of the earned experience of the participants. The role of the instructor is that of a coach and mediator and not of a lecturer. She or he is there to give just enough assistance to keep the exercise safe, but no more. The most effective instructor will do almost nothing more than to explain the exercise and let the participants go to it. More importantly, when the trainer's role is seemingly reduced, the participants will complete the challenge on their own and will feel they have overcome the obstacle/challenge placed on their way by the training. The second aspect of the instructor's role is the debriefing of exercises and adventures. Some practitioners argue that this is the most important role. If we consider that the journey is more important then the destination, it is the role of the instructor to relate the exercise and the process of completing the exercise to the training objectives. An exercise designed to simulate uncomfortable experiences during training must be related to work experience, so that the participants be able to respond effectively to the experiential problem, and take the appropriate decisions.

As far as the evaluation of the OMD program is concerned, there is a gap in establishing measurable main effects of this type of programs. Possible reasons for that may be the variance in time duration of these programs and the variety of specialized outdoor training activities (Lynhan, 2000). Future research on OMD programs and their impact on organizational performance should be more carefully designed and controlled including observation and report activities to lead to more valid results.

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