

FROM LEWIN TO LAWMOWER RACING IN TWENTY YEARS.....

Reflections on the current state of outdoor Management Development

Journal of the Institute of Training and Organisational Learning

November 2001

"Former SAS soldiers faked the kidnap of a senior partner in an accountancy firm while shocked colleagues watched in horror, reports today's Daily Mirror. The 'kidnapping'....was all part of a team-building exercise....."

"Company executives of the accountancy firm thought that they were attending a black-tie dinner when six men burst through false windows into the hotel conference suite, firing sub-machine guns (loaded with blanks) over the diners heads. The 250 guests were plunged into darkness whilst around them gunfire and flares exploded. Four of the six-man team continued to fire over the heads of the diners whilst the other two 'snatched' the firm's senior partner."

"Two of the diners had previously been identified as having medical conditions which might be upset by the exercise and they were pulled out of the room prior to the staged event on the pretext of having phone calls to take. After the kidnap, the exercise continued with a mission to rescue the partner and defuse a nuclear bomb"

From "HR Briefing", Issue 46 (19 July 2001)

The activity described above summarises for me all the sins of the lunatic fringe of Outdoor Management Development (OMD). Objectively, these include the use of shock tactics, sensory deprivation, and a scenario in which the daily working realities are utterly suspended in the cause of a toxic fantasy. Subjectively, I reflect that the utilisation of loudmouthed bullies in the cause of teambuilding speaks volumes for the mentality of whoever organised the event.

It also highlights one of the problems of OMD – that people can misuse it to such an extent paints a disturbing picture of how misunderstood the medium may be by buyers, and has led me to a reappraisal of its current state. The balance of this paper is taken up with that reappraisal.

INTRODUCTION

Outdoor Management Development (OMD) has been the way I have made most of my living since 1980. During those years I have seen it proceed from an early "pioneering" phase through to becoming a very popular medium (reaching fad status in the late 1980s and early 1990s), perhaps declining in popularity in recent years.

The aim of this paper is to chart the reasons for that apparent decline. In doing so, there may be warnings for other areas of management development.

In particular, the paper will examine the type of issue to which OMD has been applied and contrast this with the wider possibilities presented by the medium. In doing this, some current "taken-for-granted" regarding management development as a whole may be gently challenged.

The stance taken unapologetically attempts to combine the subjective with the objective, to develop arguments rather than merely list facts.

OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT - A BRIEF HISTORY

During the late 1970's, the already-established world of young peoples' development training was in the throes of a change away from an approach in which, to quote an Outward Bound instructor of the day "the mountains speak for themselves" towards one in which methods adapted from the worlds of groupwork and Lewinian group process were adopted to supplement outdoor exercises with guided reflection. At the same time, a growing interest in using the outdoors as a vehicle for developing managers began to manifest itself.

Why this should have happened may be a comment on the state of indoor management development at the time: Beeby and Rathbornⁱ note that Creswick and Williams, early practitioners with extensive conventional management development experience, were drawn to the outdoors through "complaints from managersof unreality, of lack of bite, of a lack of relevance to their jobs", of (indoor) training which seemed "inadequate when dealing with issues related to managers' actual behaviour"ⁱⁱ

Others echoed that dissatisfaction:

"Those for whose development I was responsible weren't complaining, but equally it became clear to me that what they were experiencing was seen as something very separate from the job, and with no bearing on it....."ⁱⁱⁱ

and found a rationale:

"The power of the outdoors comes from the immediacy of the consequences of success and failure. The tasks involve the whole person, not just the intellectual part"^{iv}

From 1971, Brathay Hall and H.P. Bulmer ran a series of "Management in Action" programmes (Everard 1993)^v. Although these focussed on action-centred leadership, they still harked back to an earlier era, featuring daily early-morning cutter races and "pure" outdoor activities.

A more avowedly "management" focus on the outdoors, drawing on extensive experience in group process work was promoted by Roy Williams and Chris Creswick^{vi}. This approach had some influence in shaping British OMD. As one admirer wrote^{vii}:

"...they pioneered the application of real management development disciplines to outdoor programmes....Among other things they established effective methods of review; they allowed groups to live with the consequences of their own actions, they designed exercises to address particular developmental needs; they used the physical, but dispensed with the unnecessary and pointless cult of physicality"

By 1980, sufficient interest had been generated for the Leadership Trust to have become an established and active participant in the U.K. management development scene, and for Challenge Training (the first British business entirely dedicated to OMD) to have commenced operations.

THE RANGE OF OMD

From the earliest days, OMD practitioners took elements from the worlds of outdoor and organisational development. This is illustrated by two articles which appeared in the same edition of the same magazine:

1) The first article is by David Williams^{viii} and is interesting for the fact that what it describes is Adventure Education. The author displays his youth-work based roots, speaking of transitional learning for those on the threshold of adulthood more than of OMD. Although the article was "badged" as OMD, the focus is clear:

"The courses are designed to develop personal qualities, attitudes of mind, and skills in those attending them.....a progression of experiences and situations in a number of contrasting environments can bring about an increase in personal and social awareness....they can best be described as involving social needs of the individual, e.g. creating a sense of achievement or an increase in self-confidence...."

Rhetoric largely of an old outdoor training paradigm – of bringing out personal qualities, of the environment delivering increases in personal and social awareness.

Drawing heavily on experience gained working with Roy Williams and Chris Creswick, I wrote the second article^{ix}. The rhetoric is somewhat different:-

"Our objective is limited to providing a framework of exercises within which managers can test their powers to cope with an accelerating rate of uncertainty and change.....much of the learning takes place in review sessions.....it is vitally important to get the right balance between exercises and review"

Different rhetoric – recognisable for an emphasis on review....

Within a few years, the latter approach was in the ascendant as the basis for a business which experienced mushroom-like growth, giving birth to a host of organisations whose brutal names - Challenge, Adapt, Impact – often belied some subtlety of approach.

Nevertheless, some survivalists survived and even prospered, especially during the years when OMD became a fad. The result was the coming into being of a range of OMD offerings, the differences between which were not always apparent to prospective users.

CLASSIFYING OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

Beeby and Rathborn noted in 1983 that:

"it is possible to detect amongst many managers and trainers a degree of uncertainty and confusion about the operation of the outdoor approach and what it seeks to achieve with relevance to the workplace....the very richness and variety of programmes, reflected in these numerous objectives, make the outdoor approach a difficult one to communicate easily.....the immediate requirement is for greater clarity of terms in future discussions and presentations of the approach" x

(BEEBY, J.M. and RATHBORN, S(1983) "Development Training – Using the Outdoors in Management Development" *Management Education and Development*" 14, 3 pp 171-181)

Subsequently, various writers have tried to classify types of OMD.

Doughty^{xi}, in asserting that "Perhaps some of the discontinuity between the understanding of providers and clients lies in the confusion over the differing outcomes of management development and personal development" believes that OMD and personal development training can be classified by what he terms "generations". These are:

FIRST GENERATION	SECOND GENERATION	THIRD GENERATION
Growth through physical challenge	Growth through physical activity	Seeks to balance physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual aspects of personal development - Indoor or outdoor as need dictates, in a programme aimed at holistic learning
Little review or facilitation	Process assisted by facilitation - review may take a large part of the course indoors	Equality-centred style
Participants take from the experience as they are able. A confused, painful experience for many	More participant-centred than Generation 1	Power lies equally with the trainer and the participant
Trainer-centred and didactic style for Inputs, etc.	Delivery more interactive	

Figure 1: Doughty's three generations

Without a specifically management agenda, Priest and Gass (1993)^{xii} also adopt a generational approach. They list five:

- 1) Letting the experience speak for itself:** Letting the learning which may take place on an activity take place (or not as the case may be). They point out that "when properly designed, adventure activities are inherently enriching" adding that "this approach is fine provided the intrapersonal and interpersonal goals of adventure education are not sought" (p23)
- 2) Speaking for the experience:** The instructor interprets the experience for the learners – telling them what they (should have) learned from it.
- 3) Reflection, inquiry and discussion:** "In this model, participants enjoy learning through reflection under the facilitation of an instructor introducing carefully designed questions and guiding them to discover their own learning". The authors correctly note that this model was popularised in the U.S. as the "Outward Bound Plus" model from 1987, but fail to point out its adoption in the U.K. as early as 1974^{xiii}
- 4) Frontloading:** In the model as presented, the instructor:

“(before the briefing, possibly during, or just after it)explains several key learning points. These points may include, but are not necessarily limited to: sharing the learning objectives for the activity and any related motivational benefits, stressing the desired positive behaviours in advance, warning learners of the consequences of negative behaviours and asking learners to review or revisit earlier commitments to change before beginning an activity” (p 24).

5) Isomorphically framing the experience: Trying to turn the experience into a metaphor for work, for example by reframing a “spider’s web” exercise as a distribution network.

Beeby and Rathborn (1983)^{xiv} cite two classes of OMD: **adventure education** – where the medium (the outdoors – climbing, caving and so on) is the message – so review is seen as unnecessary, and **development training** (in an employment context) as a training method which is:

“.....a special class of experiential learning which distinctively incorporates use of the outdoors (experience) with process reviews (assessment)” (p 171)

Dainty and Lucas (1993)^{xv} present a framework for evaluating Outdoor Development (their term) rather than defining classes, but which has similarities to Beeby and Rathborn. They suggest that evaluation should come from looking at three continuums, one of which (outcomes) is dealt with in the next section. The other two are **Tasks undertaken** - from highly prescribed (high technical support required, structured, narrow objectives) to very flexible (low technical support, unstructured, broad objectives); **Review Processes** - from low intensity (General focus, low personal focus) to high intensity (specific focus, personally challenging and direct). These two are combined to form a matrix (fig. 2)

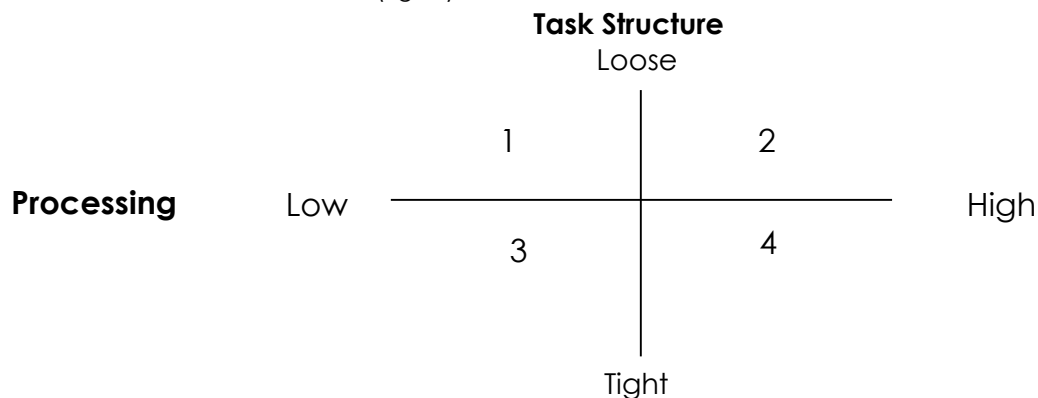


Figure 2: Task/Process structure (After Dainty and Lucas)

CAN CLASSIFICATION BE A LIMITING FACTOR?

Whilst a desire to classify OMD is understandable in terms of clarifying the confusion (cf. Dainty and Lucas, 1992), it can result in limited learning options. For example, Dainty and Lucas characterise abseiling (the descent of cliffs by use of ropes and a friction device) as an activity requiring high technical support and structured, narrow objectives (Dainty and Lucas, 1992).

Leaving aside the option of using abseiling as part of some wider, perhaps highly flexible task, limiting the learning allowed to that dictated by one’s narrow objectives is a remarkably confining thing to do. An abseiler (particularly a first-time one) might experience a wide variety of thoughts, feelings, emotions, as a result of the experience; the learning potential for each individual is different. For one, the support of fellow team members may trigger reflection about their behaviour in managing their own people. For another, it may provoke reflections on trust, for yet another it may highlight ways of coping with fear. The experience of abseiling (or indeed of choosing *not* to abseil) provides a wide range of learning opportunities.

What if we then review an abseiling exercise around structured, narrow objectives? *We limit the experience*, corraling it to our own purposes, whatever they might be. *We dictate* the learning agenda by only *allowing* people to learn whatever it is we expect them to learn.

The idea that an activity should meet structured, narrow, learning objectives denies the essential autonomy of human thought – the “*active sense-making process which addresses itself to all experience*”^{xvi} It also limits the potential of outdoor development to meet real (but different) people’s real (but different) needs.

Although Dainty and Lucas provide a convenient example, this underplaying of human autonomy also applies to Beeby and Rathborn, Priest and Gass and to Doughty’s first two generations. All imply that people only

learn (or at least learn best) through some form of structured (although maybe democratic) "review" process when an expert – a teacher or facilitator - is present.

Doughty demonises the purely activity-based approach as "a confused and painful experience" (Doughty, 1991). It may be, but powerful transformational learning is often, whatever the medium, confused and painful.

Priest and Gass privilege the trainer/paying customer even more. Whilst the first three of their generations bear a strong resemblance to the three generations posited earlier by Doughty, the potential for instrumentalism creeps in thereafter. The fourth generation (front loading) is particularly open to this, seeming to enable trainers to tell people what they will learn. A kind of ersatz experientialism, a substitution of free group process with a training cycle set up to prove the trainer's point rather than provide material for reflection. The objective of such an exercise can only be to send delegates home at the end of a programme carrying with them *exactly* the lessons the designer wanted them to take away, whether or not these have relevance to their actual lives or their experiences during the exercise.

Another problem with hard categorisations is that they impoverish perception by lumping together various characteristics which may have nothing to do with each other. Thus Doughty's "generations" ignore the fact that it is perfectly possible to combine little formal review and facilitation (first generation) within a warm and caring atmosphere which utilises outdoor activities (second generation). Dainty and Lucas seek to avoid this by using continuums but lose flexibility by combining them to form a four-choice box diagram.

To summarise, dividing OMD into hard classes is unhelpful in two small ways and one very large one:

- 1) It unnecessarily freezes various approaches to the medium into "good" and "bad" classes.
- 2) It does the same for the media themselves, for example by characterising a particular technique as having "narrow" or "broad" objectives.
- 3) Most importantly, the very act of classifying OMD limits the learning we allow to emerge from it. Instead of an approach wherein whatever happens is food for reflection in which learning *appropriate to the learner's needs in the here-and-now* emerges, we are left with a process in which delegates carry out an exercise and, in review, find their learning channelled into areas desired by the trainers or their customers. Instead of being travellers on a voyage of discovery, the delegates are participants in an illustrative charade where, whatever they need to learn, they get what we want them to learn.

This, it seems to me, is a particularly subtle form of instrumentalism, and not one limited to OMD. We may have taken on board rather too much of a reductive and limiting approach to non-vocational training of all types, seeking to teach customer-dictated competencies instead of delegate-enabling capability.

APPLICATIONS OF OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT – ACTS OF FAITH?

As Dainty and Lucas put it,^{xvii}

"There are a number of commonly held beliefs some accurate, some erroneous, about outdoor development programmes. These range from a view of it as a masochistic experience and SAS training, to claims that it can foster emotional rebirth."

They also point out that:

"Programmes can differ quite considerably not only in terms of the type of tasks that participants are asked to perform, but also in terms of the type of review process utilised, and the overall outcomes that are intended by the course organisers.....the problem is that there is a real danger that its diversity is misunderstood rather than managed, ignored rather than used for improving programmes, and can lead to confusion rather than clarity about the advantages and disadvantages of using this development activity"^{xviii}

So for what purposes is OMD used?

A number of writers have examined this issue and arrived at conclusions which can be categorised into two distinct classes; skills development, and a wider, more ambitious type of human development. Chapman and Lumsdon (1983)^{xix} reflect that:-

"Development training (their term for OMD) provides the opportunity for individual needs to be met through the less structured format and delegation of responsibility to the individual participant

for deciding his own role, level of participation and, therefore, performance”^{xx}

They develop this thought in a construct which seeks to categorise learning into four classes – long or short-interval and behaviourally specific or non-specific, (fig. 3), adding that they believe outdoor development best addresses quadrant 4 - behaviourally non-specific short-interval “insight” skills such as coping with ambiguity and change, building trustful relationships, developing realistic negotiating skills, and working effectively in groups. They interestingly speculate that these are important but more difficult to evaluate than the Quadrants 1 and 3 skills that many traditional management development programmes seek to address.

Dainty and Lucas (1992) categorise four classes of outcome from OMD:

- 1) Development of self and other awareness
- 2) Broad concrete skills
- 3) Narrow concrete skills
- 4) Fun/enjoyment

Of these, the second and third clearly fall into the category of skills development, the first is behaviourally non-specific, depending on the different needs of different individuals.

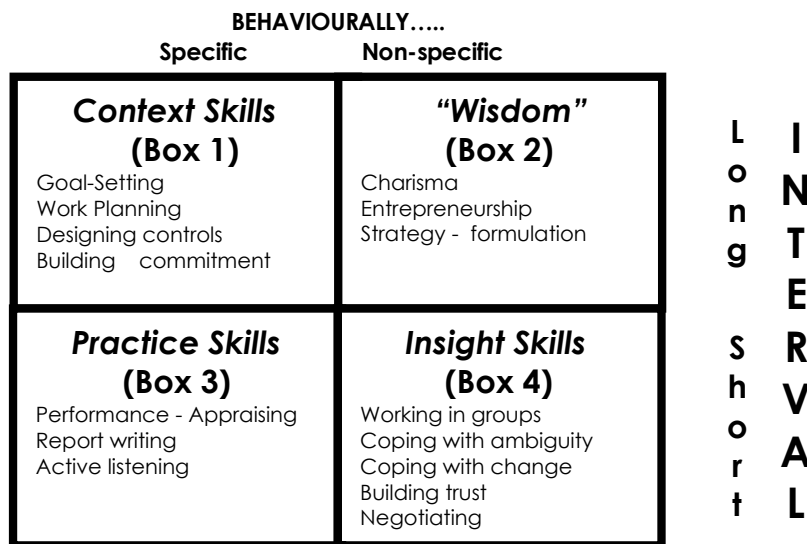


Figure 3: Chapman and Lumsdon's Behavioural/Interval Box

Mossman^{xi} (1983), like Dainty and Lucas, also notes a dichotomy in OMD, identifying two distinct philosophies: “There seem to be two distinct manager development philosophies at work outdoors just as there are in more conventional MD....the Management Training approach and the Self-Development approach.... At the most basic level two questions distinguish Management Training from Self Development (after Boydell and Pedler 1981 p7):

- To what extent are learning needs defined by the delegate (as opposed to the trainer or manager?)
- To what extent does the delegate take responsibility for meeting those learning needs (as opposed to the trainer)?”

He compares the two in a table, summarised below¹ (see figure 4).

In highlighting approaches which “require the participant to engage their whole selves” Mossman takes a slightly different tack to Chapman and Lumsdon or Dainty and Lucas, all of whom specify particular skill-sets for which OMD might be useful. Mossman specifies what he perceives to be the benefits of the *medium*, not the messages for which it might be a vehicle.

¹ The original table includes two other categories - adventure education and assessment centres, which I have omitted as *ultra vires* this paper.

This approach has the distinction of emphasising intensity of experience over a skills-driven approach. In a rather shaky analogy, the difference between the various “what you can use the outdoors to teach” approaches and Mossman is like the difference between ways of viewing the advent of the internet. One group says “you can use it to advertise, send cheap mails, join chat rooms, post bulletins, read academic papers, research any topic you like, buy books!” - what might be, in Jungian terms a sensing and thinking approach. Another group says “it can transform your life!” - in Jungian terms, an intuitive, feeling approach. Mossman supports this approach to OMD by asserting that:-

“In pursuit of certain of the personal growth objectives the programme may also include various activities designed to stimulate individual creativity or personal awareness.....” P184

In my view, Mossman raises issues which have practically been forgotten in the rush by OMD to commodify itself - that there are options other than competency development which can be fulfilled by the medium, such as facilitating self-development, the importance of which is addressed below.

SELF-DEVELOPMENT

***“....without judging me, diagnosing me, appraising me, evaluating me.....
When someone really hears you without passing judgement on you,
Without trying to take responsibility for you, without trying to mould you,
It feels damn good!^{xxii}***

In attempting to facilitate self-development, practitioners might make a more long-term and far-reaching contribution to human potential, fulfilment and happiness than the mere fulfilling of focussed training needs.

A quotation from Mossman^{xxiii} illustrates this:

“David Hall has the nice notion of the difference between the role-person and the whole-person. Role-persons have a restricted set of behaviours open to them – those that they perceive as appropriate to their role. It is almost as if the whole-persons hang up a certain range of behaviours with their coats when they arrive in the morning and only resume them when they leave in the evening.”

OMD's role could be to release the whole-person, rather than just making better role-persons. This would seem to be a powerful and appropriate role for OMD, and yet, as Dainty and Lucas put it:^{xxiv}

“The development of self and other awareness is possibly the least straightforward outcome, yet potentially the most important. Nevertheless, it is an aspect which seems to be minimised by executive developers

Philip Kirk (1986)^{xxv} further highlights the impoverishment of ambition by OMD providers, asserting that:-

“Pre-prepared packages of outdoor management development events which are applied in the same way to any and every group of participating managers will limit the usefulness of the programme, especially if the design rests on the premise that managers are the same everywhere”

and echoes Creswick and Williams and Chapman and Lumsdon in declaring that:-

“By the very nature of the outdoors and its immediate and direct impact on participants, the OMD programme has the capacity to address all the dimensions of management: physical, intellectual and emotional. This, perhaps, is its greatest strength.”

Kirk also cites Stuart and Binsted^{xxvi} in raising one of the more exciting potential outcomes of OMD:-

“A third possibility however is that they may suddenly realise that their new behaviour as learners (which may be very tentative and experimental) could perhaps be put to some future role and experience at work. In this case, there will be what Stuart and Binsted call a “flash-over” and the learners' perception of the learning event will change from one of low reality to one of high reality and with it will come the prospect of increased learner-transfer.....”

These “flashovers” are recognisable as a phenomenon which sometimes occurs during longer (5-day, for example) programmes. For me, they generate an exciting fulfilment which (and I speak only for myself) transcends professional satisfaction. They rarely occur (for me, at any rate) on the one or two-day fare which is now the OMD staple. Flashovers are powerful moments of revelation, often extending into relationships outside the work environment. At its most extreme, this type of flashover is a kind of developmental Damascus road, leading people to fundamentally realign the way they do things, often in terms of human relationships.

MANAGEMENT TRAINING	SELF-DEVELOPMENT
<p>Uses outdoors to help delegates learn specific skills. The needs of the delegates are assumed to be similar.</p> <p>Tasks and activities are formally reviewed, focussing on social and interpersonal issues of a group or inter-group nature</p> <p>Based on a desire to improve delegate behaviour in the workplace</p> <p>Delegate is seen as a manager</p>	<p>Uses outdoors to help delegates develop in areas identified by delegates as important. Serendipitous learning is also experienced and welcomed.</p> <p>Review focuses on personal as well as interpersonal / Intergroup issues.</p> <p>Based on holistic ideas of humanistic psychology</p> <p>Delegate is seen as person</p>
<p>Philosophical basis is that there are experts who know what is best, what managers need</p> <p>Objectives pre-set by trainers and/or sponsors</p> <p>Tasks are pre-set to meet trainers/sponsors objectives</p> <p>Delegates control the way in which they tackle the task (no frontloading), which may be influenced by trainer inputs/learning from previous tasks</p>	<p>Delegates know more about their own needs than do others</p> <p>Objective negotiated personally by each course member with staff /course members</p> <p>Delegates work with tutors to select tasks to explore the issues they have decided upon. Specific tasks may surprise, but the learning objectives will not.</p> <p>Delegates control the tasks, but roles may be set within them based on individual learning objectives</p>
<p>Review dominated by trainers who draw out the learning points they wish to emphasise</p> <p>Group tasks, with little individual focus in review.</p> <p>Course designed without reference to delegates</p> <p>Limited programme flexibility</p> <p>Delegates can choose to opt-out of a given task. A straight on/off decision.</p> <p>Staff roles are safety, technical instruction, and process consultancy.</p> <p>Attitudes: Staff - “we know what you need” Delegates – “You’re the experts” Sponsors – “This event is designed to meet our definition of your needs”</p> <p>Delegates are sent or volunteer to attend</p> <p>Actively engages the intellectual, social, and physical, and sometimes also the emotional</p>	<p>Management of the review process is shared by all – delegates and trainers.</p> <p>Group tasks, with individual, as well as interpersonal and intergroup matters reviewed.</p> <p>Course designed with delegates</p> <p>High programme flexibility. Event process can be re-negotiated</p> <p>Delegates have the choice of which needs they should work on and the tasks and activities to meet those needs</p> <p>Safety, instruction, technical instruction, process consultancy, and feedback</p> <p>Attitudes: Staff – “delegates know what they need, our job is to help them find it” Delegates – “How can you help me?” Sponsors - “How can we help you develop yourself”</p> <p>Delegates seek to attend, sometimes volunteering on the advice of trusted others.</p> <p>Actively engages the physical, emotional, intellectual, social, aspects of each person</p>

Chapman and Lumsdon, Mossman, and Dainty and Lucas all in their own ways point to two schools of practice in OMD. Figure 4: Management Training and Self- Development (After Mossman)

The first - which Mossman has termed management training - is one in which delegates learn, through a process of activity and review, what the sponsor wants them to learn. The most extreme manifestation of this is

frontloading, but a more subtle approach, with cunningly designed exercises and review questions crafted to bring out the “right” answers amounts to much the same thing.

There are all kinds of reasons for this approach – it can help people to understand how best to work in organisations which have travelled the “downsize-and-empower” route, it smooths the human path of reorganisation, it allows practice in and adoption of externally-imposed new ways of doing things. It can level the path of imposed transition. It is a useful tool of human resource management.

The second school of practice – akin to Mossman’s self-development (see figure 4) – holds out a different promise. Chapman and Lumsdon allege that OMD is more effective than traditional management development at “*dealing with the idiosyncratic needs of the individual*”^{xxvii}. Dainty and Lucas state “*the development of self and other awareness is possibly the least straightforward outcome, yet potentially the most important*”^{xxviii}. So it would seem that OMD has (at least potentially) an application outside (some might say beyond) its competency-fulfilment and coping-with-change functions.

Does it attempt to do this?

If not, what might the reasons be?

I attempt to answer these questions in the next section.

DOES OMD ATTEMPT SELF-DEVELOPMENT?

Several things have happened in the world in which (British) OMD operates which may have worked against its use as a vehicle for the self-development of managers (or others). These are:-

Domination and Submission – OMD and the business scene

The notion that organisations have responsibilities other than to their shareholders has taken something of a pounding in recent years. Lewis and Lawson^{xxix} assert that individuals feel alienated as their employer’s expectations become more task-centred. My own work in career development confirms this - people involved often complain of overwork, and of a feeling that they are a disposable function, not valued for themselves. They also complain of policy being subject to wild swings, apparently dictated by the needs of a short-termist bottom line.

Bottom lineism militates against a long-term view (and reasonably long periods away from the job) that self-development implies and requires. So does the oft-expressed view that people are more busy. This has been famously characterised as “half the people working three times as hard for twice the money”. Greenaway^{xxx} notes that staff at Brathay remarked in the 1980’s on the diminution of course duration from four weeks to five days. Five days? *Luxury!* In 2001, courses last one or two days. Serious self-development in an OMD context is problematical in such circumstances, and clients are more likely to buy (and OMD providers to sell) “teambuilds” – which can range from serious attempts to address team issues to simple fun and games with no developmental agenda. Pre-agreed competencies can also still be addressed by smart exercise design and review-management. Self-development becomes a back number by default – hard to sell, no apparent demand.

A survey of OMD promotional literature confirms this:

“The working combination of established and new staff will give us a market lead in the Team building field....and help you develop your staff through competency lead (sic) initiatives and personal aspiration that provides for a competent and flexible workforce of the future”^{xxxi}

The same organisation also claims to:-

“...deliver a step change in performance linking strategic business objectives with on-the-ground actions so important for delivering a seamless transition and workforce participation”^{xxxii}

Other organisations offer competency-based programmes using less extreme versions of business rhetoric:

“.....we can help you to create a realistic competitive advantage. Plus, by showing you how to develop continuous improvement tools and techniques for your organisation, you can ensure that your advantage is sustainable”^{xxxiii}

The same brochure promises that:

“Our innovative, client-centred courses are designed to be exciting, challenging and dynamic. Typical programmes include: Teambuilding, visionary leadership, change management, cultural change, personal development, communication, effective decision making, problem solving tools and techniques, multi-skilling”^{xxxiv}

“Personal development” is at least included in that list – sandwiched between “cultural change” and “communication”. A discussion with a member of the provider’s staff clarified that in their case it was seen as a desirable but incidental benefit on, for example, teamwork programmes, wherein a delegate might experience individual development as a result of facing a difficult challenge. This seems a valid use of the term, but is not part of any intentional self-development programme.

In the chase for business, less is sometimes promoted as more, and wild promises are made. One organisation, promoting a one-day team challenge event, asks “What will your organisation get out of the day?” and responds:

*“Improved – Teamwork – Planning – Communication
Help employees manage change within an organisation more effectively
A neutral base for learning and team building
Cost effective and flexible training programme
Help staff work towards a common goal
Course participants will learn to think on a more lateral basis
Progress from working as individuals.....to working as a team”^{xxxv}*

Two facts stand out:-

1) The jargon of modern HR management (sometimes in extreme form) is much to the fore; the organisations presumably believe that this will attract customers.

2) Providers are anxious to meet whatever the clients say are this year’s (or this decade’s) needs. One successful provider acknowledges this pragmatism:

“...if we look back on course content and titles we can see that it has reflected the themes that have been prevalent in training in recent times: Leadership in the 70s – Team-Building in the 80s – and Empowerment in the 90s”^{xxxvi}

Both of which point to an attitude of compliance on the part of providers.

A Commodity

The brochures serve to illustrate that, rather than attempt self-development, OMD has become a commodity, ready to be sold in the service of whatever its buyers desire. The application of imagination and a questioning approach are no longer welcome. Chapman and Lumsdon, writing in 1983 said:

“Development training (their term for OMD) provides the opportunity for individual needs to be met through its less structured format and the delegation of responsibility to the individual participant for deciding his own role, level and participation and therefore performance...”^{xxxvii}

Creswick and Williams (1979)^{xxxviii} and Mossman (1982)^{xxxix} spoke of the “potency” of the outdoors. Beeby and Rathborn (1983) put much the same case:

“...use of the outdoors which is both potent and perturbing would seem to us to be the first distinctive characteristic of development training insofar as it is used as a means, not an end”^{xl}

By 1992, about ten years after the quartet cited above, Dainty and Lucas were writing:

“The development of self and other awareness is possibly the least straightforward outcome, yet potentially the most important. Nevertheless, it is an aspect which seems to be minimised by executive developers.”^{xli}

To underline OMD’s failure to deliver its “least straightforward outcome”, one of those executive developers was writing (in the same year):-

“Just as there are only a limited number of plots for a novel (excuse me?) , there are only a few basic exercises which, with embellishment, serve a variety of needs”^{xlii}

Potent? Perturbing? Hardly.

OMD is currently in a blind alley. A trade for people who want to work in beautiful surroundings. If that involves going along with the latest HR-speak, then so be it. But it is failing to meet its potential as a tool of self-development.

THE WIDER WORLD OF MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT

The ills of OMD may reflect a malaise in the wider world of management development.

Twenty three years ago, I attended a training event which changed my life. Someone in the deeply conservative tobacco company for which I then worked had contrived to import a team from the Tavistock Institute into the Company's (deeply conservative) training centre and given them a one-week slot at the start of a four-week development programme.

The results were powerful indeed. We wrestled with the openness, the stress, the long silences, the pressure to be honest, the pressure to be open, the pressure to *listen* to each other. We became *involved* in the *whole* experience, and learning, we discovered, was something that was a *part* of that experience, not something externally imposed by "experts". This discovery had a profound effect on me.

The "T" group was my first exposure to a truly developmental learning experience. For me, powerful, uncomfortable and ultimately life-changing.

This Lewinian experience forms one end of a spectrum. Its benefits are usually unmeasurable, sometimes immeasurable. The other end of the spectrum is that package of training methods – lectures, competencies, exercises with predictable outcomes – which provide the "measurables" by which buyers judge much training. Sadly, I think the latter end of the spectrum – encouraged by pressure to make training specific, measurable, achievement-focussed and time-bound – has almost overwhelmed the self-development end of the spectrum. The pity of this is that SMART training tends to be present rather than future-focussed. Demonstrable (and preferably instantly applicable) outcomes may obscure a need to develop people for (and in) the long term.

Certainly my life would have taken a different (and less useful) course had I not been fortunate enough to attend the Tavistock event and (a year later) a self-development-focussed outdoor programme. I am concerned that my children won't have that opportunity.....

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

-
- i BEEBY, J.M. and RATHBORN, S(1983) "Development Training – Using the Outdoors in Management Development" *Management Education and Development*" 14, 3 pp 171-181
- ii CRESWICK, C and WILLIAMS, R (1979) *Using the Outdoors for Management Development and Team Building* ,Gloucester, Food, Drink and Tobacco Industrial Training Board
- iii KROUWEL, Bill (1980) "Management Development Using the Outdoors", *Training Officer* 16, 10
- iv MOSSMAN, Alan (1983) "Making Choices about the Use of the Outdoors in Manager and Management Development" *Management Education and Development*" 14, 3 pp 182-196
- v EVERARD, Bertie (1993) *The History of Development Training*, Welwyn, DTAG/ICI
- vi CRESWICK, C and WILLIAMS, R (1979) *Using the Outdoors for Management Development and Team Building* ,Gloucester, Food, Drink and Tobacco Industrial Training Board
- vii KROUWEL, Bill and GOODWILL, Steve (1994) *Management Development Outdoors*, London, Kogan Page
- viii WILLIAMS, D.H. (1980) *Adventure With a Purpose* Training Officer, 16,10
- ix KROUWEL, Bill (1980) *Management Development Using the Outdoors* Training Officer, 16,10
- x BEEBY, J.M AND RATHBORN, S (1983) *Development Training – Using the Outdoors in Management Development* in *Management Education and Development* 14 (3)
- xi DOUGHTY, S (1991) *Three Generations of Development Training* in *The Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership*, 7 (4)
- xii PRIEST, Simon and GASS, Michael (1993) *Five Generations of Facilitated Learning from Adventure Experiences* in *he Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Leadership* 10,3
- xiii MARSH, Ian (1974) *Influencing Attitudes towards Work and Society*, Industrial and Commercial Training, May, 1974.
- xiv BEEBY, J.M AND RATHBORN, S (1983) *Development Training – Using the Outdoors in Management Development* in *Management Education and Development* 14 (3)
- xv DAINTY, Paul and LUCAS, Donna (1992) *Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers*, *Management Education and Development*, Lancaster.
- xvi BURGOYNE, John G (19???) "Learning from experience – From Individual discovery to meta-dialogue via the evolution of transitional myths" London, *Personnel Review* 24,6
- xvii DAINTY, Paul and LUCAS, Donna (1992) *Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers*, management education and development, Lancaster.
- xviii DAINTY, Paul and LUCAS, Donna (1992) *Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers*, management education and development, Lancaster.
- xix CHAPMAN, A. and LUMSDON, C.A. (1983) *Outdoor Development Training: A New Tool for Management*, in *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 4,4
- xx CHAPMAN, A. and LUMSDON, C.A. (1983) *Outdoor Development Training: A New Tool for Management*, in *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 4,4
- xxi MOSSMAN, Alan (1983) "Making Choices about the Use of the Outdoors in Manager and Management Development" *Management Education and Development*" 14, 3 pp 182-196
- xxii ROGERS, C.R. (1980) *A Way of Being*. Boston, Houghton Mifflin
- xxiii MOSSMAN, Alan (1983) "Making Choices about the Use of the Outdoors in Manager and Management Development" *Management Education and Development*" 14, 3 pp 186-192
- xxiv DAINTY, Paul and LUCAS, Donna (1992) *Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers*, management education and development, Lancaster.
- xxv KIRK, Philip (1986) *Outdoor Management Development: Cellulose or Celluloid?* In *MEAD* 17,2 pp 85-93
- xxvi STUART, R AND BINSTED, D (1981) "The transfer of learning: Designing reality into management learning events", In Nixon, B (Ed.), *New Approaches to Management Development*, Farnborough: Gower.
- xxvii CHAPMAN, A. and LUMSDON, C.A. (1983) *Outdoor Development Training: A New Tool for Management*, in *Leadership and Organization Development Journal* 4,4

-
- ^{xxviii} DAINTY, Paul and LUCAS, Donna (1992) *Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers*, management education and development, Lancaster.
- ^{xxix} LEWIS, R. and LAWTON, J. (1992), *The Four Functions of Organisations - Where does the Individual fit in ?* Journal of Strategic Change
- ^{xxx} GREENAWAY, Roger (1995) *Powerful Learning Experiences in Management Development and Learning* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Lancaster University
- ^{xxxi} ANONYMOUS (2000) *Welcome to Whitwell*, Rutland: Whitwell News, Summer/Autumn
- ^{xxxii} ANONYMOUS (2000) *Welcome to Whitwell*, Rutland: Whitwell News, Summer/Autumn
- ^{xxxiii} ANONYMOUS (2000) *Lakeside Management Development – a great source of ideas and inspiration for your business.* Brochure of Lakeside Management Development.
- ^{xxxiv} ANONYMOUS (2000) *Lakeside Management Development – a great source of ideas and inspiration for your business.* Brochure of Lakeside Management Development.
- ^{xxxv} THE ACKERS TRUST (2000) *Is your team on the right track?* Brochure
- ^{xxxvi} NEAL, A (1992) *From panacea to pragmatism*, Training Officer 28,7
- ^{xxxvii} CHAPMAN, A. and LUMSDON, C.A. (1983) *Outdoor Development Training: A New Tool for Management*, in Leadership and Organization Development Journal 4,4
- ^{xxxviii} CRESWICK, C and WILLIAMS, R (1979) *Using the Outdoors for Management Development and Team Building*, Gloucester, Food, Drink and Tobacco Industrial Training Board
- ^{xxxix} MOSSMAN, A (1982) "Management Training for Real" Unpublished address to the 1982 National Conference of the Institute of Personnel Management
- ^{xl} BEEBY, J.M AND RATHBORN, S (1983) *Development Training – Using the Outdoors in Management Development* in Management Education and Development 14 (3)
- ^{xli} DAINTY, Paul and LUCAS, Donna (1992) *Clarifying the confusion: A practical framework for evaluating outdoor development programmes for managers*, management education and development, Lancaster
- ^{xlii} NEAL, Andy (1992) *From Panacea to Pragmatism* Training Officer 28, 7