

## **REJUVENATING OUTWARD BOUND PROGRAMME DESIGN**

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### Abstract

This paper explores and advocates a holistic approach to experiential programme development, following instructor interviews undertaken at Outward Bound Czech Republic (OBCZ). The paper compares the traditional Outward Bound outdoor activity approach with the courses at OBCZ, which are developed for the specific needs of the individuals and group, and are characterised by a wide variety of cultural, social, creative, and psychological activities. The findings suggest that the use of *dramaturgy*, a theatre term, is an effective method of course design, which links, integrates, and intertwines this range of innovative and creative games. The diverse nature of these activities and ‘tailor made’ approach has implications for the design of both personal development and management development programmes.

## REJUVENATING OUTWARD BOUND PROGRAMME DESIGN

During the 1990s, reports from Outward Bound (OB) schools around the world stated that many were facing problems of declining enrolment and financial instability. There was an increasing competition from other outdoor providers and growing concern that the OB schools had not kept pace with rapid cultural, organisational, and technological changes (Outward Bound International, 1997). In 1995, the original Outward Bound in the UK (OBUK) was saved from financial collapse by a merger with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (D of E) scheme. OBUK had sustained a loss of around one million pounds in 1994 but received an equivalent loan from the D of E to prevent bankruptcy (Anonymous, 1995). Issues of falling enrolments and financial instability have also applied to Outward Bound in a number of other countries. For example, Outward Bound New Zealand (OBNZ) reported a loss of \$0.5M at the end of 1997 (OBNZ, 1997) - although strategic marketing initiatives throughout 1998 and 1999 led to increased enrolment numbers and a small surplus (a little over \$100,000) at the end of 1999 (OBNZ, 1999).

The sometimes conflicting demands of philosophy and finance furnish a recurring debate within Outward Bound and other outdoor providers. Providers, often with idealistic roots may find themselves confronted with a conflict between these root philosophies and the need to generate income (see, for example, Everard (1993) for the roots of a number of British providers). Morgan (1996) examined whether OBNZ should be driven by its philosophy or the needs and demand of the market, and concluded that it was difficult to separate one from the other and that OBNZ should utilise both forces by marketing its philosophy. Krouwel (2000) suggested that philosophy was currently very much a secondary consideration, and that much management development practice in the UK, had abandoned its idealistic roots.

Krouwel and Goodwill (1994) note that 'outbreaks of fundamentalism' mar relationships with clients and lead to destructive conflict. Further, the world is in a constant state of change and a nostalgic return to root-philosophies may be inappropriate to the needs of people in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The balance of this paper explores a holistic approach to course design, which Doughty (1991) indicated should balance physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of personal development.

### **Outward Bound Czech Republic (OBCZ)**

In 1997, OBCZ became a full member of Outward Bound International. However, the organisation began in 1977 as Vacation School Lipnice (VSL) and became an associate member of Outward Bound in 1991 following the visit of two trainers (instructors) from OB in the UK. Both organisations shared similar experiential education approaches and the international nature of OB provided VSL with the opportunity for further development. A year later, VSL founded its subsidiary company *Ceská Cesta* (Czech Way), which mainly focuses on management training for domestic and foreign companies using the experience and methods of OB and VSL (OBCZ, 1999b). *Štúdio Zážitku* (Studio of Experience) was registered as Outward Bound Slovak Republic (OBSL) in November 1993 (in the year when Czechoslovakia was split into Czech and

Slovak Republics), as a partner organisation of VSL (OBSL, 2000). Whilst the roots of OB are based on Kurt Hahn's educational philosophies, Holec (1994b) indicated that VSL is based on the Greek philosophy of *kalokagathia*<sup>1</sup>:

.... Vacation School, cut off from foreign experience and methods was seeking its own way. The philosophical roots of its programme were far reaching to the ancient world: at the background of many experiments was *kalokagathia* as an idea of the beauty of body and soul (p.145).

The VSL methodology aims for the balance implied in *kalokagathia*. Its peaks and dynamism are based on interweaving a balance of effort and relaxation, physical and mental activities, individual and group events (OBCZ, 1999b). VSL's philosophy runs counter to the idea of frontloading (Priest & Gass, 1993) or of using developmental methodology in the service of pre-prepared learning objectives, instead idealistically seeking to help people discover solutions to their own issues within themselves, as indicated by Holec (1994b):

All the problems and conflicts of the world are reflected in each of us and the world is a reflection of ourselves. Therefore we must seek the key to their solution from within...by inducing powerful experiences and intensive human relations, our objective is to help everyone find within themselves unsuspected sources of energy, self-confidence and spontaneous creativity (p.146).

VSL offers centre based, expedition or combined courses, usually lasting seven to fourteen days for groups of twenty-five to thirty people each summer. These courses are filled with physically and mentally challenging games, creative workshops, discussions and periods of reflection. There are about 400 to 500 course participants each year (OBCZ, 1999b).

## **Dramaturgy**

Holec (1994a) believed that the uniqueness of the VSL courses was brought about by the use of *dramaturgy* as a method of course design. *Dramaturgy* means 'the art of theatrical production' (Shantz, 1998). The main task of 'dramaturgy' is to examine the links between the world and the stage (Shantz, 1998). The 'dramatist' chooses themes from society and a place that reflects these themes. Pieces of work and music are then chosen to reflect these themes (Shantz, 1998). At VSL *dramaturgy* is a method used to plan, select, and then order the individual programmes and other events with the goal of maximising the final course effects (Holec, 1994a).

This term, known rather from the sphere of theatre, film and TV, became one of the most often used in the recent years. *Dramaturgy* is a method of selection and time order of the programmes with the aim to reach the maximal pedagogical effect. It integrates, within itself, the questions (and also answers) concerning the participants of the course (their age, mental and physical maturity...) time and space. The key thing for all dramaturgical consideration is to determine and realize the pedagogical, educational, recreational and other aims, which the course wants to reach (Holec, 1994b, p.147).

As Holec (1994b) implies, this term has been borrowed from the theatre. It is more than a catchall term for a course design process however, conferring on the Czechs and Slovaks a unique mental framing of that process. It aims to produce a programme, which will stimulate

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<sup>1</sup> Kalokagathia is a Greek word made up of two others: kalos-beautiful, agathos – benign. In ancient Greece Kalokagathia stood for an ideal nurture concept that featured harmonious development of outward merits and an inner world based on spiritual moral principles ([www.shaping.com/marathon1/main.htm](http://www.shaping.com/marathon1/main.htm))

self-development rather than to produce one which will fulfil prescribed course objectives (Krouwel, 2000). Research into the outcomes of these courses has indicated that personal and interpersonal development was still evident up to two years after these courses (Martin & Leberman, 2000; Martin, 2001).

## **Methodology**

Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with seven VSL trainers. Notes were taken during the interviews as suggested by Merriam (1998). Trainers were encouraged to respond as fully as possible. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (1991) suggested that a semi-structured interview is an appropriate method to understand the respondent's opinions and beliefs about a particular situation. The following two questions were asked in the semi-structured interviews:

- What are the key factors of the VSL educational process?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the 'Czech way'?

Content analysis was used in the analysis of the interviews. Content analysis is a way of classifying material into various categories, using words, phrases, codes or themes that capture relevant characteristics of the data (Burnard, 1991).

## **Discussion of results**

The trainers indicated that the key elements of the educational process were the course design, group of participants, range of activities, the atmosphere and the trainers, which supported Martin and Leberman's (2000) and Martin's (2001) findings from participant questionnaire responses about VSL courses. The following typical comments illustrate the instructor's responses about these key elements:

Course design: Good preparation, to know what is the course about (themes, issues), to know why we are doing it (motivation).

The group of participants: Participants' willingness to join programmes and to think about themselves and their openness, need to want to be there, need to be able to listen, open to everything they are told about themselves.

Range of activities: Balance of activities (physical, social, creative challenge). Variety, element of surprise, change of pace (rhythm) of the program. Gradation, gradual development of activities, e.g. creative activity, more demanding activity, independent preparation (theatre).

The atmosphere: Setting is also important; the right setting governs inspiration and motivation.

The trainers: Experiences, quality team of individuals of different strengths, abilities and skills.

The trainers confirmed that *dramaturgy* was seen as vital to their work and understanding of the process, as indicated by the following typical responses:

...it's taken from the theatre theory and it's all about the fact...what to put on the programme, how to do it, and why to do it, and maybe when – exactly – to do it. So it's like an art of putting pieces together so that it's a balance of activities – so that it's on the right place at the right moment for these people who come on this course, and it has to be flexible so that you can change it.

Dramaturgy is the way how to put different programmes together to have in a whole picture a balanced result...creating the course is, can be, an art thing sometimes.

...the most important thing is the theatre, its dramaturgy in a course as well as to design it. The dramaturgy is in the course as well as before it.

A key point regarding *dramaturgy* that emerged from the interviews is that it allows for, even encourages, changes in programme content. A different sort of professionalism is at work, one which constantly re-examines what the goals might be and rewrites the programme (sometimes on a nightly basis) to meet those objectives. In this it resembles *self-development* as opposed to *training* (Mossman, 1983) in that:

- It uses outdoors (and other experiential media) to help *delegates* develop in areas identified by *delegates* as important.
- Serendipitous learning is experienced and welcomed.
- It is based on holistic ideas.
- There is high programme flexibility (Mossman, 1983).

VSL recruits its trainers (of whom there are over 100) exclusively from the ranks of delegates perceived as having had a successful course. This means that trainers come from a range of experiences rather than from outdoor skills backgrounds, although it could be argued that recruitment just from VSL courses is a limiting factor, running the risk of building a self-perpetuating insularity of approach. Only a very small core of full-time staff exists, so the voluntary trainers are absolutely vital to the continued provision of training.

The peaks and dynamism of a VSL course are based on interweaving a balance of effort and relaxation, physical and mental activities, individual and group activities (Martin & Leberman, 2001; OBCZ, 1999a, 1999b). While Schoel *et al.* (1988) illustrated how a sequence of activities could be briefed and debriefed as part of the ‘adventure wave’, Mikšicková (cited in Martin, 2001) suggested that the ‘Czech way’ offers not just a physical wave, but different kinds of waves (social, physical, creative, and reflective) all intertwined with associated peaks and troughs (‘bottoms’). The course design maintains a holistic balance and a variety of challenges. This combination of psycho-emotional, physical and intellectual engagement is part of the ‘active learning cycle’ (Sakofs and Armstrong, 1996). The following typical responses from trainers indicate that this holistic approach was a strength of the VSL approach:

Overall a more holistic challenge, people taken out of comfort zones physically, spiritually, emotionally, creatively and socially. Activities are generally achievable by all participants independent of fitness levels or disability.

Allows for comprehensive self-examination and self-exploration of the individual in a supporting and caring environment. A true time and place apart. Lots of opportunities for self-reflection.

Krouwel (2000) indicated that this combination of elements provoked excitement and energy; there was no difficulty in triggering streams of interesting, animated, intense discussion and debate. However, the exercises are so exciting and full that review may become an afterthought. “It may not even be utterly necessary; over twelve days of intensive, surreal, constantly modified

activity, the lessons may emerge in an unforced way” (Krouwel, 2000, p.71). In this the ‘taken for granted’ need for *review* - facilitated structured reflection (Hopkins & Putnam, 1993), may be challenged. The reflection component so important to experiential education (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Dewey, 1938) is integrated as part of the *dramaturgy*. This holistic approach is in contrast to the traditional outdoor development approach, which involves a series of activities, each followed by a review (Doughty, 1991; Schoel *et al.*, 1988). By incorporating reflection into the whole experience, it can be argued that *dramaturgy* rather more accurately reflects life – most of us *reflect* on our day-to-day activities but few of us actually *review* them. To summarise, Figure 1 compares the OB *dramaturgy* approach with the traditional OB outdoor approach (Krouwel, 2000).

OB DRAMATURGY APPROACH	TRADITIONAL OB OUTDOOR APPROACH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple media – art, outdoors, music, video, drama, ‘happenings’, reflection and review.</li> <li>• Constant on-course staff reflection and redesign of programme, based on evolving perception of delegates’ needs.</li> <li>• Multiple (changing) objectives.</li> <li>• Programme subject to constant change as objectives change.</li> <li>• Long indeterminate days and often unreasonable hours.</li> <li>• Surprises and unpredictable outcomes expected.</li> <li>• Very high staffing ratio (about 1:4).</li> <li>• Staff (unpaid) drawn from all walks of life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominated by outdoor media, others also used. Planned and structured review after activity.</li> <li>• Constant on-course staff reflection on whether the course is meeting its pre-agreed objectives.</li> <li>• Objectives clearly fixed beforehand</li> <li>• Programme subject to some change if change is seen to meet objectives better.</li> <li>• Duration of days determined beforehand. Usually reasonable working hours.</li> <li>• Predictable outcomes valued.</li> <li>• Staff ratio about 1:8.</li> <li>• Staff (paid) often outdoor or group work full time trainers.</li> </ul>

*Figure 1* A comparison of the OB dramaturgy and traditional OB outdoor approaches (adapted from Krouwel, 2000, p.67)

In personal and management development training generally, the outdoor is seen as the main medium, although Broderick & Pearce (2001) advocated indoor adventure training using drama/theatre activities. Krouwel (1994) indicated that “these days the outdoors is quite ‘old hat’ to many people, and at least a leavening of other challenges, especially ‘real ones’, can only help personal and team development” (p.142). Broderick & Pearce (2001) suggested that the use of the indoors and drama was a dramaturgical approach, but fail to point out that dramaturgy is much more than just drama. At VSL the outdoors is just one option, as is drama, and the wide use of media has other benefits in that it allows trainers and participants to exercise their imagination. This point is illustrated by the following typical instructor comments:

We think that every person has something which is easy for them to do and other things which are beyond their, you know, zone, whatever you call it... we don’t do it only for the art or, you know, it’s not art itself; it’s finding creativity in people.

I think our philosophy is that it’s not important what the person creates exactly, but the process. And some people, they’re afraid of the result...so they don’t like – or think they wouldn’t like – the process as well.

*Dramaturgy* requires that each activity or ‘game’ is part of a whole. A common factor is the unexpected, with the result that a kind of surrealism often features. Examples of these games are: an exercise set in a dance-hall in which delegates find themselves interacting with people

and events from earlier generations, experiencing world war, the roaring twenties; a concert in the middle of a forest; a garden party populated by iconic characters from fiction; a 'blind walk' ending in a planetarium; exercises based around the milieux of science fiction novels (Fahrenheit 451, the Day of the Triffids) (Krouwel, 2000).

### **Application of VSL methods to management development programmes**

The ability to learn specified sets of behaviours only equips managers to deal with the immediate demands of their current (and maybe next) job. Provoking the imagination may well be infinitely more useful, helping them to think (and see) for themselves, not to simply behave as they have been programmed (Krouwel, 2000). This may help managers to see further than the "distracting and specious assistance of codes, competencies, catch phrases and mission statements" (Reed and Anthony, quoted in Reynolds, 1998) and help them to "an awareness of their own significance and responsibility" (ibid).

The VSL methods have been applied to management development programmes through its subsidiary company Česká Cesta (Czech Way). This provides the following opportunities (Krouwel, 2000):

#### **1. A wider range of activities**

Released from the confines of the outdoors, a wider use of activities, for example, arts and drama are available as experiential tools, helping to reintroduce the element of the unexpected, which once featured strongly in management development programmes.

#### **2. The tailor-making approach**

The Czech approach offers a much more flexible and energised approach for trainers and, for participants, the benefit of programmes aimed exclusively at them.

#### **3. Self-development**

The VSL approach is focussed on self-development. In particular, the surreal nature of the exercises aims to broaden and open the mind. This surrealism neatly avoids the trap of isomorphic framing (Priest & Gass, 1993). Krouwel (2000) indicated that it was important for the participants to form their own isomorphic metaphors rather than have them externally imposed. One does not need to pretend that a rope spider's web is a distribution network at VSL. The skill is to make these highly colourful exercises act as a blank sheet onto which delegates project themselves as they are, opening them up to self-examination and the counsel of others. Dainty and Lucas (1992) asserted that the development of self and other awareness is potentially the most important outcome of management development programmes - and regretted its absence from programmes of the day.

### **Disadvantages of *Dramaturgy***

The trainers work long hours in planning and facilitating the courses. The problem of trainer burnout was indicated by half of the trainers interviewed, as illustrated by the following comment:

Incredible work-load whilst running course. Facilitators need good time off after a gruelling course of this nature.

The high level of preparation and the high number of trainers are unlikely to be financially viable in a commercial setting in which competitors are promising to deliver significant change in one day, and even three-day programmes are seen as unnecessary luxuries.

Even OBCZ finds this to be a problem. For *Ceská Cesta* (Czech way) management development courses, the team of trainers is normally three or four. The preparation time is considerably shorter than for VSL programmes, but once again each course is unique, as indicated by these typical instructor responses:

Well, one of the things which is interesting is every course is unique, it's original which is created by a team of three instructors which only comes together for the purpose of this course.

The planning of the course is done from other experiences. The course is for these participants; it is not possible to repeat. It is for these people, this time, this place.

Further issues identified were the potential emotional demands due to the diverse nature of the activities, which may not suit some participants and places extra pressure on staff. These points are illustrated by the following responses:

The effect of the programs on the participants may be deeper than staff are able to deal with.

Huge emotional input required from staff.

*Ceská Cesta* management development courses are typically three or four days, which makes development of *dramaturgy* difficult, often resulting in the courses following an activity/ review cycle. Interviews with trainers indicated there was an anxiety about the short time period and how best to review on these courses. *Ceská Cesta* staff are working on the issues raised above and are keen to blend the distinctive methodology of VSL with traditional OB practice, but not to lose the innovation and creativity from the VSL approach. Trainers were emphatic that the relationship between the two is symbiotic, with the focus of debate being how to keep the essence of VSL methods, but to translate them into a management context and to include more focussed review.

## Conclusions

*Dramaturgy* is a method of course design, which links, integrates, and intertwines a range of innovative and creative games. During the course, trainers change the scenario to react to the needs of participants. The planning of the course *dramaturgy* is a continuous process that ensures that the course themes provide a thread throughout the scenario. A range of activities is carefully sequenced to maintain a holistic balance of intensity and 'rhythm'.

The findings of this study suggest that the course *dramaturgy* and range of games and activities of the 'Czech way' have much to offer in terms of training of staff and course development. The 'Czech way' offers a more holistic challenge than traditional outdoor approaches in providing the next generation of effective personal and management development programmes.

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