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What’s the value in ‘Boot Camps’: Means-end perspectives on motivational intervention in the outdoors.

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Abstract

Motivational intervention courses or ‘boot camps’ for long-term unemployed participants aim to increase self esteem, self confidence and motivation so as to improve employment options and/or outcomes for participants. In New Zealand, such programmes administered by Outward Bound (Catalyst course) and the Army (Limited Service Volunteers, LSV) involve intensive spells of disciplined instruction and vigorous physical activity. In popular terms they may be considered ‘Boot Camps’, and are consistent with the philosophy of changing behaviour through a ‘short, sharp shock’. This thesis evaluates these two outdoor motivational intervention programmes to determine their outcomes and identify the processes involved in producing them. Both programmes are attended by clients of the Ministry of Social Development, drawn from the long-term unemployed population.

This study advances understanding of experiential education through the use of qualitative, interpretive research into how course outcomes are achieved, moving beyond simply measuring outcomes. The research design uses means-end theory applied within a phenomenological paradigm. The means-end method links course attributes to consequences and to the end values that participants attribute to course experiences. One LSV and two Outward Bound courses are evaluated with the data obtained through participant observation and semi-structured interviews at course end, and again at 6 months post course.

This study is the first to focus on the specific population group attending motivational intervention courses, and found that the ‘boot camps’ increased participants’ self esteem, self confidence, self awareness and sense of belonging. These findings are similar to previous research on general enrolment outdoor experiential education courses. Specific course attributes including physical training, personal interactions, expeditioning, activity de-briefs, marching and time management were identified as being the most
accountable for producing course outcomes. Means-end theory and participant interviews are found to be a good fit for the evaluation of outdoor experiential education courses. It links course attributes, consequences and end values and thus provides greater insight into the processes that participants identify with respect to specific course attributes that lead to course outcomes. For example, the course component of *time management* for the LSV participants had a strong direct link to the consequence of *sense of achievement*, which then resulted in links to the end value *transference to work*. This knowledge can be used by providers of motivational interventions to design courses that target particular outcomes by focusing on the specific attributes that have been identified in this study as being important in producing such outcomes.
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