

Evaluation of an outdoor experiential training in Greek volunteer rescues on leadership and teamwork competencies

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Abstract keywords

Leadership, teamwork, competencies, outdoor experiential training

Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The purpose of this outdoor experiential training study was two-fold: (1) to determine the internal-consistency reliability estimates of the questionnaires used in this study (MLQ and TDI); (2) to identify statistical differences between pre and post measurements a) in leadership competences and outcomes; and b) in teamwork competencies.

Theoretical background or literature review*

According to the Full Range Leadership development model of Bass and Avolio (1997) there are 3 leadership styles: (1) transformational where leaders build trust, act with integrity, inspire others, encourage innovating thinking and coach others, (2) transactional, where leaders reward achievement and monitor mistakes, and (3) passive/avoidant, where leaders are able to fight fires and avoid involvement. Both transformational and transactional leadership are closely related to outcomes such as the ability to generate extra effort in their followers, the ability of being efficient in meeting organizational objectives and the ability to generate satisfaction in their followers. Referring to the development of all aspects of the team, Bronson et. al (1992) focused on competences such as feedback, listening, diversity and decision making as important key factors in the existence and the effectiveness of any team. Finally, to gain understanding of the experiential training Luckmann (1996) defines experiential as a process through which a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experiences.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

This was a pilot study with a retrospective pretest-posttest design evaluating if there were any changes in the perceptions of leadership and teamwork competencies. The sample consisted of thirteen volunteer rescuers from Greece, of whom ten were male and only three female. Their age ranged from 19 to 47 years old, with a mean age of 39.9 years old and they had been member of a rescue team/club on average for 4.9 years. The data were collected through two different questionnaires: the Multifactor Leadership

Questionnaire (MLQ-self report) of Bass and Avolio (1997) and the Team Development inventory (TDI-S) of Bronson et. al (1992) at the end of the 2-days outdoor training. The nonparametric Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test was used to analyze the data in this study.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions**

Estimating the internal-consistency reliability with $N = 13$, the alpha coefficients were .96 and .89 for the MLQ (45-items) and TDI (10-items) instruments, respectively. The null hypothesis for the difference between the pre and the post test score was accepted for all the MLQ factors except 'effectiveness' and 'satisfaction'. The median of pretest effectiveness was 1.75 (SD = 1.03), while the posttest effectiveness was 2.25 (SD = .85), showed a significant change ($z = -2.55$, $p = .011$). The median of pretest satisfaction was 2 (SD = .88), while the posttest was 2.5 (SD = .75) showed a significant change ($z = -2.45$, $p = .014$). Finally, participants showed a significant ($z = -2.81$, $p = .005$) change also in teamwork, with pretest median 4.10 (SD = .63) and posttest median 4.60 (SD = .45). More specifically, the participants increased significantly: (1) their understanding and commitment to goals ($z = -2.33$, $p = .020$); (2) their concern and interest in one another ($z = -2.65$, $p = .008$); (3) their high standards for own and team's performance ($z = -2.25$, $p = .024$) and (4) the recognition and reward of team efforts ($z = -2.33$, $p = .020$).

Overall, the results of this study provide support for positive changes among the volunteer rescues both in leadership and teamwork competencies. Significant changes were observed in two outcomes of leadership, effectiveness and satisfaction. In the context of effectiveness, leaders meet the professional needs of their followers, they are more efficient in meeting organizational objectives and personally involved in any organizational process. In the context of satisfaction, leaders generate interpersonal satisfaction in their followers and colleagues by being more open, authentic and honest people. Such competencies are important to rescuers as well as to other emergency personnel because they are exposed to real dangerous life threatening operations. The study also shows some significant positive changes in teamwork, which is another important factor of operational effectiveness of a rescue team. The unique setting of a rescue operation faces a constantly changing environment, where the whole team members have to cooperate in a short time, following a direct decision making and rely on their sufficiency. The results of this pilot study also point out the need for developing leadership and teamwork competencies in rescue departments, possibly through a structured intervention designed to bring about a positive change in employee and volunteers confidence, attitudes and performance in order to meet one of the critical challenges of the 21st century. The importance of development leadership and teamwork competencies in the volunteer environment has to offer valuable insights in sports setting, where volunteers are the lifeblood of sport and play an incredible role in sport system.

References – limited to 5

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