

Do Outdoor Leaders Have Careers? An Introduction to the Outdoor Leader Career Development Model

Mark Wagstaff
Radford University

Current literature addresses professional outdoor leader development primarily through competencies or skill development (Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006; Priest & Gass, 2005; Shooter, Sibthorp, & Paisley, 2009). This theoretical paper builds upon these perspectives by examining outdoor leader development through the lens of career development theory. A number of professions embrace career development models to explain the developmental cycle of practicing professionals (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006). The outdoor leader literature touches on career practices and trends but with no specific foundation to explain the career cycle of professional outdoor leaders (Loeffler, 1996; Marchand, Russell, & Cross, 2009; Medina, 2001). This abstract presents a seminal outdoor leader career development model for consideration. Based on Albert Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, the Outdoor Leader Career Development Model (OLCDM) consists of five developmental stages couched within three primary developmental orientations supported by five developmental catalysts that promote career self-efficacy.

Theoretical Overview

One's belief in their ability to successfully perform a task or behavior is known as self-efficacy, a concept introduced by Bandura (1977). Bandura's (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory utilizes the construct of self-efficacy as a predictor of human behavior. Bandura theorizes that self-efficacy dictates whether behavior will be initiated, how much effort or energy will be exerted, and the longevity of behavior when facing adverse conditions. Bandura's work inspired the development of career self-efficacy (Betz & Hackett, 2006; Betz, Harmon, & Borgen, 1996). Career self-efficacy takes a cognitive constructivist approach by emphasizing active building of one's career through forethought, anticipation of outcomes, and active construction of meaning (Feehan & Johnston, 1999). In the outdoor leadership literature, Propst and Koesler (1998) found self-efficacy to be a significant factor in outdoor leader development. Berns (2008) explains that

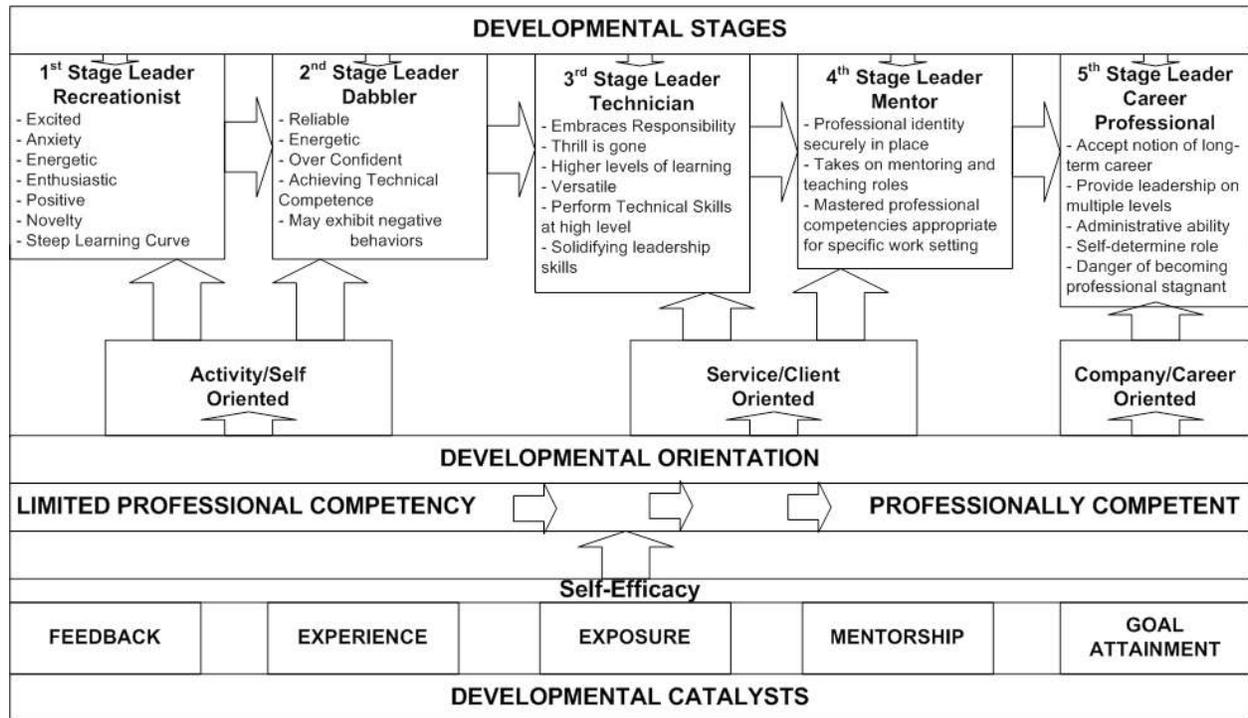
self-efficacy plays a major role if a quality mentoring relationship exists during a college internship in outdoor recreation.

In addition to the theoretical underpinning of career self-efficacy, the OLCDM utilizes stage modeling to explain career development. Stage models of career development are applied across professions such as teaching and nursing to understand career progression (DeMoulin & Guyton, 1988; McNeese-Smith, 2000). These models typically construct a sequence of stages representing higher levels of skill and knowledge acquisition over time. Stage models possess inherent weakness but contribute to our understanding of professional development (Dall’Alba & Sanberg, 2006). While the OLCDM reflects the common progression of skill development beginning with the novice as in other models, it deviates by characterizing attributes and motivations specific to the outdoor profession.

Model Overview

Five developmental catalysts form the foundation for overall professional development and promote career self-efficacy (see Figure 1). Feedback, mentorship, and goal attainment have received formal attention in the literature as positive correlates with outdoor leader self-efficacy (Propst & Koesler, 1998). A fourth catalyst revolves around accumulating on the job experience. Significant time spent in the job setting creates a ripe environment for long-term development. The final catalyst, exposure, is defined by contact with professional development opportunities such as certifications, specialized trainings, professional seminars, educational literature, degree programs, and other educational endeavors.

Figure 1. The Outdoor Leadership Career Development Model (OLCDM)



The outdoor leader bound for a professional career track displays progressive development on two fronts within the model. First, outdoor leaders experience three distinct shifts in orientation or professional perspective as they progress. Initially, outdoor leaders tend to be motivated primarily by self satisfaction and self indulgence. The second orientation shifts the outdoor leader's focus more towards a service ethic with less emphasis on self orientation. The third orientation transitions the outdoor leader's perspective to a long-term career commitment with loyalty to a company or specific area within the outdoor industry.

The final developmental front consists of five distinct stages that are identifiable by specific characteristics and attributes as shown in Figure 1. Stage one, also known as the *recreationist*, holds an entry level outdoor leadership job with no realistic expectation of pursuing the profession. Typical motivators are newness, having fun, hopeful expectations, personal challenge, and other self-oriented stimuli. The second stage or the *dabbler* typifies the employee that experiments with outdoor jobs and lacks desire or vision to pursue an outdoor career. This person fills entry level positions for self-enjoyment or utilitarian purposes. However, confidence and skill competency increase significantly. Dabblers are more willing to take chances and do not always place their client's best interest first. The third stage or *technician* shifts focus from the self to a sound service ethic. In this stage, outdoor leaders engage in more responsible positions and exercise higher levels of leadership. These are versatile employees that exhibit increasing levels of competency in many areas and demonstrate genuine interest in an outdoor career. The *mentor* stage emerges next characterized by employees with professional identities securely in place. Mentors become the keepers of organizational culture, give meaning to traditions, and influence work environment attitudes. Mentors take on teaching roles and have mastered competencies specific to their work setting. Mentors transition to the final stage of the *career professional*. These self effacing professionals embrace long-term commit to the outdoor industry. Career Professionals possess greater freedom to determine their own staffing role such program director, facility manager, senior administrator, or permanent senior field staff. Their long-term commitment results in continued growth or stagnation depending on levels of engagement in professional development. The career professionals eventually become the sages of the profession that leave influencing legacies in the work place or industry wide.

Implications

Significant benefits surface when examining outdoor leader development through a career development model. Many enter the outdoor profession by accident and with the self-centered motives typical of the initial stages. Understanding this behavior as developmental, positions organizations in a proactive role to properly train, mentor, and monitor employees. This has ramifications for the design and implementation of staff development programs. Some organizations choose to bypass individuals at the early stages and hire employees at higher developmental levels. For example, whitewater rafting companies tend to hire guides entering into the initial career stages, while top tier outdoor leadership schools focus hiring practices towards developmentally advanced professionals to meet complex service needs. Also, understanding the stage progression enables organizations to meet employee needs. This insight and willingness to facilitate individual development increases work place satisfaction and prevents burnout.

Professional development programs such as university degree programs or outdoor leadership schools also benefit from this perspective. Students typically enter these programs in the early stages of development. Classes, field experiences, and mentoring exercises will expedite the developmental process and significantly shorten initial stages. Most of these programs take pride in producing new professionals to enter the industry. Utilizing a career development model

provides a deeper and more meaningful theoretical foundation to drive curriculum and instructional methods. Also, providing the model as part of the educational process provides instructors and students a concrete gauge for assessment and a clear path for development.

References

- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychology Review*, 84, 191-215.
- Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy. The exercise of control*. N.Y.: Freeman Press.
- Berns, G.N. (2008, Fall). Perception is reality?: Examining the effect of mentorship on career- efficacy in outdoor recreation. *Journal of the Wilderness Education Association*, 20(2), 17-20.
- Betz, N.E., & Hackett, G. (2006). Career self-efficacy theory: Back to the future. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 14(1), 3-11.
- Betz, N.E. Harmon, L.W., & Borgen, F.H. (1996). The relationships of self-efficacy for the Holland themes to gender, occupational group membership, and vocational interests. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43, 90-98.
- Dall'Alba, G., & Sandberg, J. (2006). Unveiling professional development: A critical review of stage models. *Review of Educational Research*, 76(3), 383-412.
- DeMoulin, D.F., & Guyton, J.W. (1988, November). A measure of common variables associated with career stages as perceived by principals and teachers: Validation of a model for career development. Paper Presented at the Mid-South Education Research Annual Meeting, Louisville, KY.
- Feehan, P.F. & Johnston, J.A. (1999). The self-directed search for career self-efficacy. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 7(2), 145-159.
- Loeffler, T.A. (1996). Leading the way: Strategies that enhance women's involvement in experiential education careers. In K. Warren (Ed.), *Women's voices in experiential education* (pp. 94-103). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing.
- Marchand, G., Russell, K.C., & Cross, R. (2009). An empirical examination of outdoor behavioral healthcare field instructor job-related stress and retention. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 31(3), 359-375.
- Martin, B., Cashel, C., Wagstaff, M., & Breunig, M. (2006). *Outdoor leadership: Theory and practice*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- McNeese-Smith, D.K. (2000). Job stages of entry, mastery, disengagement among nurses. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 30(3), 140-147.
- Medina, J. (2001). Types of positions, job responsibilities, and training backgrounds of outdoor/adventure leaders. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 24(3), 150-159.
- Priest, S., & Gass, M.A. (2005). *Effective leadership in adventure programming* (2nd ed.). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Propst, D.B., & Koesler, R.A. (1998). Bandura goes outdoors: Role of self-efficacy in the outdoor leadership development process. *Leisure Sciences*, 20, 319-344.
- Shooter, W., Sibthorp, J., & Paisley, K. (2009). Outdoor leadership skills: A program perspective. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 32(1), 1-13.
- Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*