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The Impact of Effective Outbound Training Programs on Changing Employees' Behavior in Parliament of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the effectiveness of outbound training (OBT) programs on changing employees' behavior in Parliament of Sri Lanka. Even though, there has been several researches done in international level on the area of outbound training, very few evidence can be found in Sri Lankan context relating to the area of outbound training. Therefore, this research is filling the empirical gap of the area of outbound training and its effect on employee behavior. The main objective of this research is to identify the effectiveness of outbound training programs on changing employees' behavior in Parliament of Sri Lanka. The data was collected from 138 employees of Parliament who recently participated in an OBT program by using non probability sampling method. Sampling technique used for this study was convenient sampling where the data was collected from the employees who were conveniently available. This study was carried out in two phases. At the first phase, data were collected from employees before the outbound training program and in phase 2, data was collected from employees after the outbound training program. This study found out that, the effectiveness of outbound training methods positively correlated with employees' behavior. Moreover, it was proved that the effectiveness of outbound training method is positively correlated with two dimension of employees' behavior namely skills and attitude. And researcher found there is no relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and knowledge dimension of employees' behavior. It is concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training method and employees' behavior. In addition, the effectiveness of outbound training method has a positive impact on two dimensions of employees' behavior (skills and attitude) and it does not have any impact on knowledge dimension of employees.

Keywords: Outbound Training, Employees' Behavior, Skills, Knowledge, Attitude, Training Evaluation

Introduction

According to Opatha (2009), training & development is a formal process of changing employee behavior and motivation in the way that will enhance employee job performance and then organizational overall performance.

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There are many training methods to fulfill employees' skills, attitudes and knowledge deficiencies. Among those training methods, OBT programs aim to produce positive changes in participants by exposing them to outdoor activities designed to encourage self-discovery and character building and these changes may include self-esteem, social attitudes, leadership, problem-solving skills and team cohesion (Cason & Gillis 1994).

The concept of outbound training (OBT) was first developed in the 1940's by Dr. Kurt Hahn. It implies that participants will be taken out of their familiar boundary (may their classrooms or college or from their office premises) in a scenic outdoors where training will be provided in an exhilarating way.

This training may take any form such as conducting Management games, Fun games, involves bracing journeys, expeditions or wilderness programs or adventurous or obstacle or challenging activities or by experimentation through role plays. But, there is no standard pattern or design for experiential learning. It is a training program which is aimed to fine tune the creative abilities and inculcate real-life learning situations to the participants (Boopathy & Radhakrishnan 2013). Through these programs, skill improvement takes place in the areas of teamwork, team bonding, communication, leadership, time management, problem solving, decision making, motivation, and personality development (Wagner & Campbell 1994). Furthermore, the natural environment and outdoor activities add enjoyable atmosphere to outdoor training programs which help in increasing the acceptance and participation of the participants while enabling them to take calculated risk, move out of comfort zones and to do experiments.

Wang, Liu, and Kahlid (2006) stated that, the activities presented in these programs are designed to encourage participants to discover their 'true' potential by overcoming their limitations and fears. Therefore, it can be identified that the OBT programs have high impact on employees' behavior.

As per Opatha (2009), training evaluation is an element of any training program. Comparing to other training methods, OBT programs are expensive (Opatha 2009). Each and every organization expect long lasting benefits from outbound training programs as they bear considerable cost to offer such programs to their employees.

Researcher has identified that, in Sri Lankan context, both public sector and private sector organizations tend to offer OBT programs to their employees. The setting up of the Outward Bound Trust of Sri Lanka in collaboration with Sri Lanka Business Development Centre (private, non-profit, non-stock consultancy company established in 1984 with the participation of both public and private sectors to develop, strengthen and stimulate business and industry in Sri Lanka) also an example for the popularity of OBT programs in Sri Lanka.

Parliament of Sri Lanka is a well reputed organization in Sri Lanka. It has unique staff who perform their jobs which directly affect to operations in parliamentary procedures. Therefore

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it is necessary to offer effective training programs to the staff, in order to gain maximum performance from them. Currently, Parliament of Sri Lanka has offered three OBT programs to the staff. However, further studies on the effectiveness of those OBT programs on employees' behavior need to be evaluated. Therefore, this research will help to identify the effectiveness of those OBT programs. Moreover this research will provide information on the necessity of OBT programs to all other organizations. And, this will also help to further develop OBT programs to gain maximum benefit.

Problem Background and Problem of the Study

OBT is an established corporate training tool in Western countries and many other countries around the world even though the effectiveness of those programs on employees is questionable. Wagner, Baldwin and Roland (1991), Nadler (1980) and Taylor and Hayllar (1993) raised questions on the effectiveness of OBT programs.

Hattie et al. (1997) examined the effects of adventure programs, specifically Outward Bound, and concluded that Outward Bound programs can have positive effect on participants' self-esteem, leadership, personality and interpersonal relationship. Martin (2001) indicated that the main outcomes for participants, relative to the course objectives of an Outward Bound course, were personal and interpersonal development, specially improved self-confidence, and better interpersonal relationships. According to the above mentioned scholars, outbound training programs effect on employees' behavior. Although many researchers research on the benefits of outbound training programs based on the immediate program effects (e.g., Hattie et al. 1997; Martin 2001; Goldenberg, McAvoy & Klenosky 2005; Wang, Liu & Kahlid 2006), further studies on the total effectiveness of OBT programs after the trainees return to their organization need to be done (Taylor & Hayllar1993; Wang, Liu & Kahlid 2006).

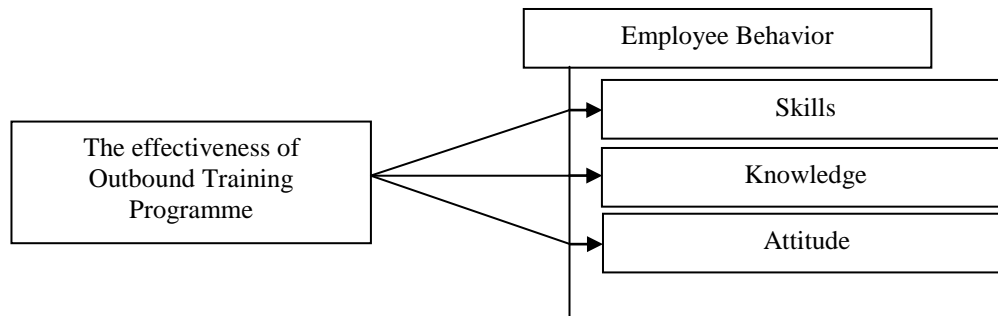
Furthermore, OBT is gaining increasing popularity in Sri Lanka today as more and more organizations offer OBT programs to their employees rather than offering indoor training programs. Therefore the need for further studies pertaining to the sustenance, transference, and application of the knowledge from an OBT program after the trainee has returned to organization is high. In order to fulfill the above mentioned need, the effectiveness of OBT programs on employees' behavior is necessary to be identified in Sri Lankan context. Parliament of Sri Lanka is also an organization which expends considerable cost annually to provide OBT programs to its employees. But the real impacts of those programs are questionable in changing employees' behavior positively.

Therefore, the research problem addressed under this study is to investigate the effectiveness of outbound training programs on changing employees' behavior in Sri Lanka Parliament.

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Research Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



As per the previous researches, many researchers have identified a relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training programs and employees' behavior. Georgi (1978) found that, outbound training method generally rotate around activities, which are designed to improve leadership, communication skills, planning, change management, delegation, teamwork, and motivation and those activities are positively affect to change participants' behavior. Huie (1983) described the positive relationship between participants' behavior and natural environment where the outbound training is conducted. Rohrs (1970) defined outbound training programs as a unique educational experience which is directly related to change participants' behavior positively. Wagner and Campbell (1994) identified outbound training programs relate to participants' behavior in terms of their level of trust in their peers, their problem solving ability and generally the level of interpersonal communications between group members.

Method

Study Design

The type of investigation of this study was experimental since the objective of this research was to identify the impact of effective outbound training programs on changing employees' behavior in Parliament of Sri Lanka. This was a field study which was conducted in a non-contrived setting with minimal researcher interference to the normal work setting. None of the variables were controlled or manipulated. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), a study can be conducted in which data are gathered just once/over a period of days/ weeks/ months, in order to answer a research question. Such studies are called as Cross-Sectional Studies or On Shot Studies. In this research, data were gathered twice, one week before the OBT program and after the participants returned to their normal working environment finishing the OBT program. Therefore, according to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), this research is a cross sectional study. Unit of analysis of this research was individual employees in Parliament of Sri Lanka. Currently Sri Lanka Parliament has 838 employees and they are working under 8 departments and all the staff members of this organization have been considered as the population of this study. Researcher chose 138 employees as the sample of this study who were recently selected to participate in an OBT program by using non probability sampling method. Sampling technique used for this study was convenient sampling where the data is collected from the employees who were conveniently available.

Measures

This research adopted quantitative approach to conduct the research. In order to carry out quantitative approach, data collection of this research was done in two phases. In phase 1, data was gathered from the employees who were selected to participate a one day OBT program by using pre – outbound training questionnaire which was distributed among the selected employees one week prior to the program. In phase 2, data was gathered from the same employees who participated in the outbound training program by using post – outbound training questionnaire.

The questions used to measure the effectiveness of OBT program were adapted from the questionnaires of previous researches on outbound training programs conducted by, Albertson (1995), and Hattie et al. (1997). And some questions were originally developed by the researcher.

Questions in the questionnaire for measuring employees' behavior before and after the OBT program were also adapted from several studies done by different scholars such as questionnaire of Experiential Leadership Development Activities (ELDAs) by Rhodes and Martins (2013), USA's National Outdoor Leadership School's (NOLS) NOLS Outcome Instrument (NOI) developed by Sibthorp et al. (2007) and the Treatment Motivation Questionnaire (TMQ) of Wang et al. (2004). Also, some questions were originally developed by the researcher.

All question statements were positive question statements and they were scaled according to five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). Researcher distributed 138 pre outbound training questionnaires before the outbound training program and 138 post outbound training questionnaires after the outbound training program. Researcher received back all the questionnaires which were distributed.

Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's Alpha Test and coefficient of the Test – retest method were used to measure the internal and external item consistency and reliability of the instruments used to collect data. To test the external reliability of the pre – outbound training questionnaire (which accessed employees' skills, knowledge and attitudes) and section A of post outbound training program (which accessed the effectiveness of outbound training program), a pilot test was carried out using 10 respondents (representing two levels in organizational hierarchy) in Parliament of Sri Lanka who got selected to participate to outbound training program. Test – retest method was used to examine the external reliability of the instruments used. This test was carried out in two week time interval between two administrations. As shown in the table 1, the results of the test – retest method of this pilot test were reasonable enough to accept high external reliability of the instrument. Section B of post outbound training program questionnaire also consisted of the same questions asked in pre outbound training questionnaire. Since the test retest results show high reliability in the instruments used in pre outbound training

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questionnaire, researcher suggested that, the instruments in section B of post outbound training questionnaire also have high external reliability.

The internal item consistency and reliability was tested by using Cornbach's Alpha test. As shown in Table 1, the results of Cornbach's Alpha test ensure the internal reliability of the instruments. The instrument in section B of post outbound training questionnaire was assumed to be internally reliable.

Table 1: Reliability and Validity Test

	Instrument	Test – retest coefficient	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Effectiveness of OBT program	0.992	0.826
2	Skills	0.94	0.802
3	Attitude	0.872	0.734
4	knowledge	0.886	0.886

Techniques of Data Analysis

Data collected from primary (questionnaire) sources were analyzed using the computer based statistical data analysis package, SPSS (Version 16.0) for validity, reliability, and relationship testing. The data analysis included univariate and bivariate analyses.

Results

To investigate the responses for independent and dependent variables of this research study, univariate analysis was used. The results of the univariate analysis before the outbound training questionnaire are given in Table 2 and Table 3 shows the results of univariate analysis after the outbound training questionnaire. Furthermore, table 4 illustrates the results of paired sample t-test analysis which were used to find employees' behavior difference before and after the outbound training program.

Table 2: Results of Univariate Analysis before the Outbound Training Program

	Mean	Stand. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Employees' behavior	3.51	1.005	-0.763	-0.503
Skills of employees	2.71	1.191	0.685	-0.793
Knowledge of employees	2.23	0.988	1.025	.0709
Attitudes of employees	3.33	1.069	-.0265	-1.083

Mean value of employees' behavior before the outbound training was 3.51. The main three dimensions of employees' behavior were skills of employees, knowledge of employees and attitudes of employees. Mean values of these three dimensions were 2.71, 2.23 and 3.33 respectively. The results obtained from this analysis indicate that employees' behavior was not at a satisfactory level before the outbound training program.

Table 3: Results of Univariate Analysis after the Outbound Training Program

	Mean	Stand. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Effectiveness of Outbound training program	1.69	0.743	1.226	1.947
Employees' behavior	1.66	0.667	0.817	0.832
Skills of employees	1.67	0.664	0.629	0.52
Knowledge of employees	2.20	0.986	1.025	0.709
Attitudes of employees	1.61	0.709	1.104	1.237

Mean value of employees' behavior before the outbound training was 1.66. The main three dimensions of employees' behavior were skills of employees, knowledge of employees and attitudes of employees. Mean values of these three dimensions were 1.67, 2.20 and 1.61 respectively. The results obtained from this analysis indicate that employees' behavior was at a satisfactory level after the outbound training program even though employees' knowledge has not changed after the outbound training program.

Mean value of the effectiveness of outbound training program is 1.69 and it indicates that, respondents view outbound training program as an effective one.

As mentioned previously, researcher used paired sample t-test analysis to compare employees' behavior before and after the outbound training program in order to identify whether this outbound training program has an impact on employees' behavior in respect to their skills, knowledge and attitudes. Results of this test are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Paired Sample t-test Analysis

Pair 1	Paired Differences	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Employees' Behavior (Before the OBT program) - Employees' Behavior (After the OBT Program)		1.848	1.232	.105	1.641	2.055	17.625	137	.000

According to above table there is a significant difference between the pair (employees' behavior before the outbound training program and employees' behavior after the program). There is a 1.848 difference between the means of employees' behavior before and after the outbound training program. Also, the significant value is less than 0.05 (Sig = 0.00) which shows there is a statistically significant difference between employees behavior before and after the outbound training program. Accordingly, it can be said that employees' behavior has improved after they participated in the outbound training program.

The correlation between the effectiveness and employees' behavior after the outbound training is given in Table 5.

Table 5: Results of Pearson’s Correlation Analysis

	Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
The effectiveness of OBТ program and employees’ behavior after the OBТ program	0.977	0.000
The effectiveness of OBТ program and employees’ skills after the OBТ program	0.918	0.000
The effectiveness of OBТ program and employees’ knowledge after the OBТ program	0.163	0.056
The effectiveness of OBТ program and employees’ attitude after the OBТ program	0.834	0.000

Correlation coefficient between the effectiveness of outbound training program and employees’ behavior after the outbound training program is 0.977 (sig: 0.000). It implies that there is a strong positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and employees’ behavior after the outbound training program. Relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and employees’ knowledge after the outbound training program of the sample is 0.163 and it is not statistically significant (sig: 0.056). Therefore, it can be said that there is no relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and employees’ knowledge after the outbound training program. However, other dimensions of employees’ behavior are positively correlated with the effectiveness of outbound training program and all are statistically significant.

The simple regression analysis of the independent variable with dependent variable and its dimensions are given in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of Simple Regression Analysis

	Eff. of OBТ with employees’ behavior (After OBТ)	Eff. of OBТ with employees’ Skills (After OBТ)	Eff. of OBТ with employees’ knowledge (After OBТ)	Eff. of OBТ with employees’ attitudes (After OBТ)
R Square	0.977	0.842	0.27	0.695
Adjusted R Square	0.955	0.841	0.19	0.693
F	2.877	756.150	3.723	310.544
Significance	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
B- constant	0.178	0.290	1.829	0.265
b- Value	0.878	0.820	0.217	0.795
Beta	0.975	0.918	0.163	0.834

In reference to Table 6, 95% of the variance of employees’ behavior is significantly explained by the effectiveness of outbound training program. And also, 84% of the variance of employees’ skills (after the program) is significantly explained by the effectiveness of outbound training program. Furthermore, only 19% of the variance of employees’ knowledge (after the program) is significantly explained by the effectiveness of outbound training program. Also, 69% of the variance of employees’ attitudes (after the program) is significantly explained by the effectiveness of outbound training program.

Table 7: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

No	Hypothesis	Value	Remarks
H ₁	There is a positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training programs and employees' behavior	b = 0.878, sig= .000	Accepted
H ₂	There is a positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training programs and employees' skills	b = 0.820, sig= .000	Accepted
H ₃	There is a positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training programs and employees' knowledge	b = 0.217, sig= .000	Rejected
H ₄	There is a positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training programs and employees' attitudes	b = 0.795, sig= .000	Accepted

Discussion and Conclusion

This study mainly focused to find out the relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and employees' behavior after the program in Parliament of Sri Lanka.

It was found that there is a positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and employees' behavior after the program. The correlation between these two variables was 0.977 which is significant at 0.000 level. This correlation can be identified as strong as it is more than the lower bound of strong correlation (0.5). According to the results of regression analysis, the effectiveness of outbound training program was found to have a positive impact on employees' behavior since the strength of b value is 0.878. Therefore, the effectiveness of outbound training program was found to be a predictor of employees' behavior after the outbound training program. Findings of correlation and regression analysis empirically confirm the arguments of Rohrs (1970), Holmes et al. (1979) Wagner and Campbell (1994), Dwyer (2006), and Freeman (2011). They stated that, outbound training programs have high impact on changing employees' behavior positively. Also Cason and Gillis (1994), Hahn (1957) and Hattie et al. (1997) conducted meta-analysis on outdoor education. They stated that, outbound training programs change employees' behavior since it provides experiential learning to participants in outdoors and, the findings of this research study confirms this argument as well.

Furthermore, it was found that there is a positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and skills of employees after the program. The correlation between these two variables was 0.918 which is significant at 0.000 level. This correlation can be identified as strong as it is more than the lower bound of strong correlation (0.5). According to the results of regression analysis, the effectiveness of outbound training program was found to have a positive impact on skills of employees since the strength of b value is 0.820. Therefore, the effectiveness of outbound training program was found to be a predictor of employees' skills after the outbound training program. The findings of correlation and regression analysis empirically confirm the arguments of Holmes (1979), Wagner and Campbell (1994), Dwyer (2006) and Boopathy and Radhakirishnan (2013). They stated that outbound training programs highly affect participants' interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, environmental skills and many other skills.

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Also, it was found that there is no relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and knowledge of employees after the program. The correlation between these two variables was 0.163 which is not significant at 0.000 level ($\text{sig} = 0.056$). According to the results of regression analysis, the effectiveness of outbound training program does not have any impact on knowledge of employees since the strength of b value is 0.217. Therefore, the effectiveness of outbound training program cannot be identified as a predictor of employees' knowledge after the outbound training program. Gass (1987) and Hattie et al. (1997) stated that outbound training programs are not effective in producing gains in the cognitive domain. Results of this research study support this argument since there was no relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and knowledge of employees in Sri Lanka Parliament.

It was found that there is a positive relationship between the effectiveness of outbound training program and attitudes of employees after the program. The correlation between these two variables was 0.834 which is significant at 0.000 level. This correlation can be identified as strong as it is more than the lower bound of strong correlation (0.5). According to the results of regression analysis, the effectiveness of outbound training program was found to have a positive impact on attitudes of employees since the strength of b value is 0.795. Therefore, the effectiveness of outbound training program was found to be a predictor of employees' attitudes after the outbound training program. The findings of this research study supports to empirical findings of Rhodes and Martine (2014). They carried out a research to examine the extent and type of changes in workplace attitudes, as self-reported by soldiers who had participated in 6 to 10 day outbound training program offered by the New Zealand Army Leadership Centre. This study shows that the majority of the participants (71%) perceived some degree of attitude change after the course. Furthermore, the findings of this research study are matched with the empirical evidence provided by Hattie et al. (1997), Wagner and Campbell (1994), Dwyer (2006) and Freeman (2011).

The findings of this study shall be important on the theoretical as well as practical scenario. Also, these results are a positive endorsement of outbound training programs as a legitimate and effective training method. As this research model proves to be an explanatory model of effective outbound training program, the findings of the study are important to improve the effectiveness of outbound training programs offered to the employees in different organizations in Sri Lanka.

One of the limitations of this current study is that the results were based only on immediate program effects. There is a concern that participants typically experience good feelings at the end of a course, and such feelings may affect the effect sizes especially when the measures are via self-report (Marsh, Richards & Barnes 1986). To have a more comprehensive picture, future studies should administer follow-up effects of the outbound training programs. Also, further research studies are suggested to carry out to find psychological and social processes which lead to the outcomes of outbound training programs.

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