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Motivational Changes for Students on a Travel Study Program

Objective: This research was done on a travel study trip that takes university students from the United States to New Zealand and Australia. They participate in about fifty different outdoor activities, which include whitewater rafting and kayaking, rappelling, rock climbing, and SCUBA diving. All the activities are challenge-by-choice and if the student does not want to participate there is no negative impact on them. Some activities are included in the trip cost and others are not.

The goals of this trip is that while traveling throughout these countries the students can take up to eighteen university level credits. Their professors meet with them about twice a week depending on where the students are located. The students learn through a combination of experiential learning and course work. While on the program

the students learn real world applications for the coursework and put it into practice. For example in the coursework they will discuss risk management and then go to the local operators to learn about their risk management plans. The classes offered are in business marketing, tourism, outdoor pursuits and legal issues in recreation. By learning through this experiential process it is believed they may retain more knowledge because of the real-world experience they gain in tourism and risk management.

The purpose for the activities is to supplement the coursework. An example would be in the outdoor pursuits class the students learn the theory behind rock climbing and whitewater rafting and kayaking. They learn the hard skills like knot tying and belaying as well as reading the water for kayaking. They then have the opportunity to participate in these activities. However certain factors can make a student not want to participate, such as fear of heights or the water.

There has not been much research on why someone would change their decision while participating in adventure sports. The purpose of this research is to give tour guides and facilitators some knowledge behind why groups of travelers may be more likely to participate in adventure activities that they may initially feel are risky. It can also give tour operators more knowledge so they know how to promote their adventures to potential clients. With the knowledge of this they can see additional potential customers in a group, even if a few people initially choose not to do certain activities.

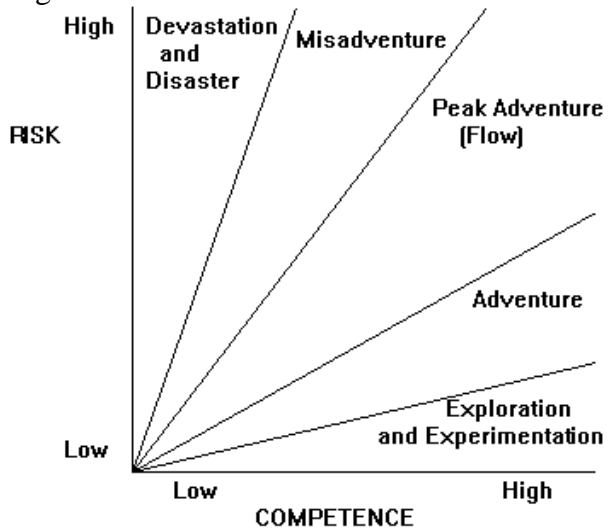
Review of Literature: People are always changing their decisions. This research will attempt to show why on an adventure based travel study program some will start out by saying they will never do certain extreme activities, but end up doing it. What are the factors and motivations for them to change their decisions?

Priest and Baillie describe an adventure as “An experience that must have an element of uncertainty about it” (Priest & Baillie, 1987). They go on to say that an adventure must either be an unfamiliar setting or the outcome can change. However to the person they must feel like they are able to manipulate these issues to provide a positive outcome. People want adventure because their lives are structure and full of boundaries and they need an escape from this monotony.

The “Adventure Experience Paradigm” is based closely on Csikszentmihalyi’s Flow Model and it needs to be explained to help understand the relationship between risk and competence. “Risk is defined as the potential to lose something of value. Competence is the ability of individuals to deal effectively with the demands placed on them by the surrounding environment” (Priest & Baillie, 1987).

There are five levels of the Adventure Experience Paradigm as described by Martin and Priest (1986). Exploration and Experimentation happens when there is low risk and the person is very competent. In this level the person may be trying new skills or techniques. Adventure is the next level where the participants are testing out their new skills. Peak Adventure “is the middle ground where risk and competence are perfectly balance (Martin & Priest1986).” Misadventure is when the risk is a little greater than the competence needed to complete the task. The participant is able to learn from their mistakes, and example would be falling while rock climbing or rolling a kayak where minor injuries could be sustained. Disaster and devastation is where there is a lack of competence and something may go terribly wrong like a major injury or death. Figure 1 shows this chart.

Figure 1



(Martin and Priest 1986)

To have a good adventure travel experience, it should fall in the levels of adventure and peak adventure. In adventure the person may not feel they are challenged enough. In peak adventure the person's skills and abilities are tested. In misadventure they have tried to exceed their skills but they skill may have learned valuable lessons on what they need to work on. One motivation as to why people attempt risky, adventure sports is to challenge themselves and break free of normal, everyday rules.

People are worried about participation in some extreme activities due to the risk they feel is involved. According to Cater in comparing risk in the adventure experience paradigm "it is suggested that controlled risk, when perceived as a challenge, adds to the overall enjoyment of the experience, and, hence is an integral part of the activity" (Carter 2006, P 318). He goes on to discuss fear and how it is what a participant is trying to overcome when participating in these adventure activities. This "commoditized fear" is what adventure tourism is based off of to allow participants a safer environment to face these fears. In these environments, with proper risk management plans from the tour operator, the perceived risk can be higher, while keeping the actual risk lower.

Design/Method: This research used a mixed methods approach utilizing surveys, interviews and observations of the participants. The survey was Dr. Zuckerman's sensation seeking scale and a likert scale to measure if the student was planning on participating in the activity. The interviews will be short interviews done at critical points throughout the trip. Observations were done on the day of the program to see how each participate is acting towards the upcoming activity. The interviewer gave the Sensation Seeking Scale to the group as a whole in Waitomo, which is the first stop in New Zealand. Once this was completed the participants were interviewed individually to answer the interview questions. The interviews were is short five to ten minute interview.

This initial interview was to see how likely they were to participate in the chosen activities. The observations done on the day of the activity was to see how the group as a whole was acting towards those who choose not to participate, and see if they were offering any support. The final interview after the activity was to see if they changed their minds and why.

Results: Out of the whole group of fifteen only six people did not change their mind. All six of them started out the trip planning on doing all the activities that was in the research and completed them. One person changed their mind three times, five people changed it twice and three people only changed their minds once. The participants fell into the Thrill and adventure seeking and Experience seeking sensation seekers. There was no correlation between the type of sensation seeker they were and their probability to change their decisions.

For the students who changed their decisions from not participating, to participating there were three main reasons found for the change. Participants' felt like they had a supportive group and it was with the encouragement of the group that they decided to overcome their fears. The second reason was that after seeing the safety procedures they felt safer and participated. The third was that it was a "bucket list" item and they felt like this was the best opportunity to try the activity.

Conclusion:

There were many reasons that the participants decided to change their decisions but one main reason most of them said was that they saw the reactions of others in the group and felt like they would be missing out on a great experience that they may not have the chance to have again. Here we see a group or mob mentality that helped to get those who were fearful of an activity to overcome it and decide to participate in it. After all the events the students would get together and look at everyone's photos or videos of the activity.

This study focused on the reasons why someone may change their mind about adventure sports from not participating to participating in them. As we start to understand these reasons we can use this knowledge to better market to groups of travelers as well as gain a better understanding of the fear that inhibit some people from participating in these activities. It can also be helpful to trip leaders who can understand that proper group facilitation can help participants achieve a higher level of satisfaction on the trip. One way to do this is by working with the group in a supportive way to help participants overcome fears; they may not normally be able to overcome.

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