1 An introduction to risk, adventure and risk management

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> Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.
>
> Helen Keller, author, activist and lecturer, 1957

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. How are the terms 'risk' and 'risk management' used in organisations that conduct activities, programs or events in the outdoors?
2. What is the role of risk in their activities?
3. Why do people participate in activities in the outdoors?
4. What is the role of adventure in today's society?
5. What facilitates or limits people's pursuit of adventure?

CASE STUDY

Over time, what we seek in adventure and what we find acceptable changes. For example it has been suggested that when Sir Ernest Shackleton was preparing for his 1914 expedition to the South Pole that he placed the following advertisement: 'Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success'.

> In contrast, a travel company in 2010 who were marketing an Antarctic trip to retrace Shackleton's journey, said 'A small band of adventurous souls will attempt to repeat Sir Ernest Shackleton crossing with favourable weather. "If you love nature, this trip will awake the senses like no other. Teeming with wildlife from elephant seals, humpback whales, and albatross, to literally millions of penguins, South Georgia and the Falklands are among the most precious wildlife oases on the planet."'

Introduction

At the time when this book was planned the world was facing one of the worst economic crises since the Great Depression of the early 20th century. After an unprecedented period of economic growth, increase in share values, growth in personal wealth and property ownership, this economic 'tsunami' hit all countries and all sectors of their economies. The epicentre of this event was in the finance sector, where risk management has been central to their operations for decades; in fact, risk management emerged in the insurance industry. Yet, in an industry that is highly regulated, supervised and closely monitored, these well-defined and developed systems have been ineffective in the changing environment.

What does this worldwide event have to offer those who conduct activities in the outdoors, where risk management has only been part of our discourse for a little over fifteen years? If a highly controlled financial sector can experience worldwide damage, what could occur in the outdoors, where the very fact that nature is not controllable can be part of the attraction? Reflecting upon these events as they have unfolded, some lessons that may be gleaned from current events include:

- people who have not experienced new and challenging events may not have the knowledge or skills to manage within a changing and unfamiliar environment
- models, and thus decisions, based upon past experience have limited value if they are not changed to model and incorporate changing circumstances
- all decisions about future strategies need to consider how organisations and people may have the capacity to respond to the unknowns of the future
- transferring the risks to others may merely spread the 'disease' not limit the downside of the problem.

The problem with risk is that if we voluntarily take risks in life, we may die, if we do not take risks, we may also die. It has only been through the taking of

risks that we have learned new things, explored new arenas, found love and discovered ourselves. If we had not been willing to live this adventurous life, then we may never have lived the lives we have, or will do.

This book is not about avoiding risks, but it is focused on managing the desirable benefits of taking risks while minimising the potential damages if things go wrong. This will involve understanding why you are operating, what you hope to achieve, who you are working with, where you are working, the types of technologies that can support your endeavours, and assessing whether you have achieved what you hoped to achieve. Risk management is not a 'one size fits all' process, it has to be adapted, refined and varied according to the differences in people, places, programs, communities, societies and environments. Risk management is an iterative process within which all stakeholders, internal and external, should be able to play a part.

Risk, adventure and the outdoors

There are many articles that define risk as the potential to lose something (e.g. Beedie 1994; Dickson & Tugwell 2000; Priest & Gass 1997), but if we reflect on any area of our lives, the main reason we take a risk is that we might gain. Rarely will someone take a risk with the expectation that it will fail (Bernstein 1996). In fact, if we did take a risk in the expectation that it would fail, many may question our very sanity! Some examples of where risks are taken in the hope of gaining is in finance, investments, relationships or gambling.

This book builds on over seventeen years of Australian industry interest in the management of risks in outdoor activities which has been documented in earlier editions of the risk management document published by the Outdoor Recreation Industry Council of New South Wales (Dickson & Tugwell 2000; Jack 1994). As with this book, the earlier publications drew upon a wide array of insights and experiences from industry experts.

Here we adopt a whole-of-organisation approach to risk management, drawing upon the definitions of risk and risk management that are used in the international standard AS/NZS ISO 31000: 2009 Risk Management – Principles and Guidelines (ISO 31000) (SASNZ, 2009) which supersedes earlier risk management standards (Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand 1999, 2004). This latest standard defines risk as 'the effect of uncertainty on objectives' (SASNZ 2009, p. 4).

As noted in ISO 31000, every aspect of an organisation may have objectives, such as economic objectives, social objectives and environmental objectives, and these may occur across all levels of an organisation, from the strategic to services, projects and processes. In each of the areas and across all levels there is 'uncertainty, whether, when and the extent to which they will achieve or exceed their objectives' (SASNZ 2009, p. iv).

While there is uncertainty, it is not a reason for risk to be avoided, rather, the term risk is applied in this book in the sense that activities are taken in order that a person, a group, or an organisation may achieve their objectives, so that they may gain, grow, learn or benefit. In doing so, there will always be some degree of uncertainty about those activities: that is normal, that is the risk. Given this understanding of risk, risk management is about maximising the potential positive effects upon the objectives, while minimising the potential negative effects. Risk management is therefore defined within ISO 31000 as 'coordinated activities to direct and control an organization with regard to risk' (SASNZ 2009, p. 2).

Why adventure and the outdoors?

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. (Thoreau, 1854/1986, p. 135)

Adventure

Increasingly adventure is being 'commodified', packaged as a saleable product for any consumer with the available funds to buy (Cater 2006; Dickson 2004; Varley 2006). Even the summit of Mt Everest appears to be accessible if you have sufficient funds (Krakauer 1997). Yet this process of selling 'adventure' is at the risk of losing the essential nature and role of adventure in life and society.

Colin Mortlock, British adventurer, author and academic suggests that adventure and the outdoors are an essential part of a person's growth:

> To adventure in the natural environment is consciously to take up a challenge that will demand the best of our capabilities – physically, mentally and emotionally. It is a state of mind that will initially accept unpleasant feelings of fear, uncertainty and discomfort, and the need for luck, because we instinctively know that if we are successful, these will be counterbalanced by opposite feelings of exhilaration and joy. (Mortlock 1984, p. 19)

Further, Mortlock wrote of the feelings and pleasure one may have in facing challenges in the outdoors, whether achieving one's goal or not:

> In all cases you, the person in the situation, are being challenged to the best of your abilities. If you have given of your genuine best, and either overcome the challenge or retreated with dignity through skill and experience rather than luck alone, then you have had one of the greatest experiences of your life. You have had a 'peak experience' with feelings almost indescribable and beyond those common to normal or routine living. Ultimately life is about feelings, those that are concerned with the joy of living, rather than the anxieties of modern existence. (Mortlock 1984, p. 19)

Kurt Hahn, the founder of Outward Bound quoted his friend when he suggested that there is an important role for the future of societies in the having of adventures: 'Without the instinct of adventure in young men (sic), any civilization, however enlightened, any State, however well ordered, must wilt and wither' (Trevelyan quoted in Hahn 1947, p. 2).

Varley (2006) in a review of available literature on adventure, suggested that there are some core qualities of adventure, including risk, uncertainty, participant responsibility, participants' use of skills, emotional engagement and authenticity. These may be reduced to three key conditions: responsibility (self determination), risk-uncertainty, and transcendence as a result of an ecstatic or marginal experience. If uncertainty is an essential component of adventure, then to offer to sell an activity, an event or a program that has a guaranteed outcome may be in contradiction to what an adventure really is (Dickson 2004). While *real* adventures with their attendant uncertainty and potential for danger may be desirable for individuals and societies, they may not actually be a commercially saleable product, but they may be important for an individual's lifelong education and development.

The outdoors

At a time when we are more disconnected from nature and nature's rhythms than at any other time, adventure and reconnection with the outdoors in a way that encourages freedom, relaxation and engagement is an ever-increasing challenge. Nature and the outdoors have been drawcards for personal development, growth and reflection for millennia. Across cultures, religions, eras and countries, outdoor environments, including deserts and wilderness areas, have been central to our beings as humans.

Louv (2006) coined the term 'nature deficit disorder' which is used to describe the costs associated with our alienation from nature. This 'disorder' is the result of a lack of contact with the natural world, with dirt and trees and insects and animals and birds and may be manifested in 'diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses' (Louv 2006, p. 34). For Louv, connection with nature is essential for healthy development of children and adults, a view reflected in a wide range of recent research highlighting the health and community benefits of physical activity in the outdoors (e.g. Aldous 2006; Biddle, Gorely, Marshall & Cameron 2005; Dickson, Gray & Mann 2008; Mallar, Townsend, Brown & St Leger 2002; Pretty, Peacock, Hine, Sellens, South & Griffin 2007; Surridge 2004).

The outdoors may be used in a variety of ways depending upon the person's use of their time, the location with respect to where they reside, the activity focus or purpose, and the level of activity of the participant (Figure 1.1). Yet even these distinctions are not so simple, for example climbing at an indoor gym will have some similar concerns relating to personal protective

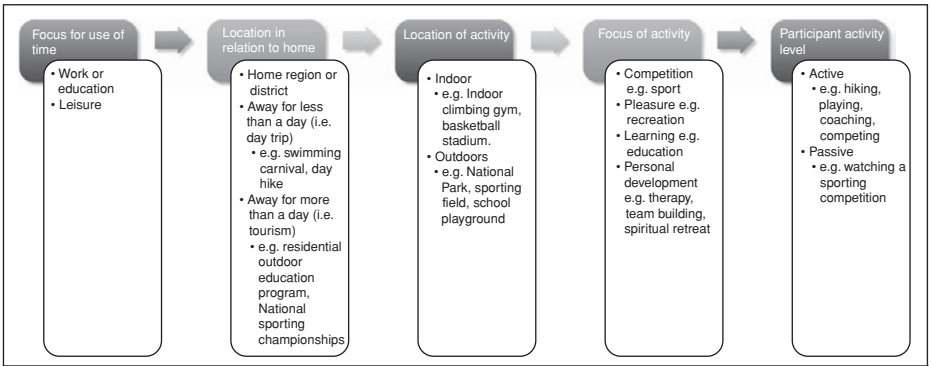

Figure 1.1 Examples of the different uses of outdoor activities

equipment as in climbing outdoors in a natural environment, while a local canoe club will have similar issues related to weather and personal safety as would competitors in a national canoe championships. Thus, from a risk management perspective, many of the issues discussed in this book will have application across sport, recreation and education where they use activities that are conducted primarily in the outdoors.

Perceived and real risk and safety

Another discussion that exists in the literature is the use of the terms perceived and real risk. Haddock defined real risk as 'the amount of risk which actually exists at a given moment in time (absolute risk adjusted by safety controls)' and perceived risk as 'an individual's subjective assessment of the real risk present at any time' (1993, p. 20). Regardless of whether the risk is 'real' or 'perceived', the reality is that the participant will respond to how serious they perceive the risk to be and how they evaluate the benefits or costs associated with taking the risks. Regardless of any objective measure by 'experts', people will perceive things differently and will feel and behave accordingly.

What may be deemed unsafe by one person, may be more to do with their lack of familiarity with the activity, while what is deemed too safe, may be due to too much familiarity. For example, for a new participant, abseiling may be considered as a 'high risk' activity, yet statistically may have less injuries than other activities in the outdoors (Dickson, Chapman & Hurrell 2000). In contrast, for an instructor, coach or guide, being too familiar with an activity may render them complacent and make them susceptible to not being conscious of relevant safety issues (Lange 2007).

Commensurate with these definitions of risk and risk management is the reiteration that an adventure is where the outcomes are uncertain. Risk is desirable. As noted by Walle, 'the absence of risk may decrease the satisfaction

the participant receives from a would-be adventure' (1997, p. 266). If we can predict the outcome is it really an adventure (Dickson 2004)? In the context of classroom-based education, personal exploration and adventure are also important, as Eleanor Duckworth, Harvard Professor of Education, suggests:

> The virtues involved in not knowing are the ones that really count in the long run. What you do about what you don't know is, in the final analysis, what determines what you will ultimately know (Duckworth 2006, p. 68).

For Duckworth these virtues reflect the process of the adventure of learning that includes 'sitting alone, noticing something new, wondering about it, framing questions for oneself to answer, and sensing some contradiction in one's own ideas' (Duckworth 2006, p. 67).

What has not been addressed so far in this discusson about risk and risk management is the topic of safety. Risk and risk management is *not* about safety, though safety may be one aspect of risk management. We cannot guarantee safety, but we can manage the risks to maximise the potential outcomes, such as learning and growth, while limiting adverse effects, such as environmental damage or threats to physical wellbeing. As Willi Unsoeld (cited in Hunt 1991, p. 123) is quoted as saying,

> We used to tell them in Outward Bound, when a parent would come and ask us 'Can you *guarantee* the safety of our son, Johnny?' And we finally decided to meet it head on. We would say, 'No. We certainly can't Ma'am. We guarantee you the genuine chance of his death. And if we could guarantee his safety, the program would not be worth running. We do make one guarantee, as one parent to another. If you succeed in protecting your boy, as you are doing now, and as it's your motherly duty to do, you know, we applaud your watchdog tenacity. You should be protecting him. But if you succeed, we guarantee you the death of his soul'.

A whole-of-organisation approach to risk management

In the context of this book the term 'whole-of-organisation' is used to highlight the fact that risk management is the responsibility of everyone in an organisation, including clients and participants, not just the 'risk manager' or the risk and safety committee. To this end, risk management needs to be imbedded in all areas such as corporate governance, the human resource function, organisational culture, occupational health and safety, finance and in the familiar domain of standard operating procedures. Risk management is a proactive process and not a reactive process, in that the planning needs to happen before and throughout an event, so that plans are in place to deal

Figure 1.2 The three-legged risk management stool

with the situation before, during and after. (For further discussion of this in relation to severe weather, please refer to Chapter 10.)

First aid training is one example of reactive risk management in that the skills are in place to deal with a first aid situation should it occur. To make this a proactive approach, the first aid training may be supported by sessions exploring what first aid scenarios have arisen in the past or could happen in the future, what the contributing factors may be, and to plan what may be done to prevent these occurring. As an example, slips, trips and falls are frequent causes of injuries. The chance that a slip, trip or fall may occur will be exacerbated by fatigue, and fatigue can be exacerbated by poor hydration (Casa, Clarkson & Roberts 2005). Thus, a proactive risk management strategy would involve designing programs, activities or work processes to ensure that there is sufficient time for all to be adequately hydrated. This may also mean looking at the equipment used, in that hydration may be facilitated by the use of hydration packs which may be used 'on the go' instead of stopping and having to pull out drink bottles from packs or bags (Waddington, Dickson, Trathen & Adams 2010). Thus the 'solution' to managing the risk of slips, trips and falls may be a combination of hydration, program design and equipment choice that is supported by first aid training.

This book seeks to integrate previous views of risk management into one model or metaphor. A metaphor likens one thing to another. In this case, we are using the metaphor of a three-legged stool. Anyone who has ever used a tripod on uneven ground will know that it is very stable. The three legs of our structure are philosophy, policy and practice (Figure 1.2). These 'legs' are connected by the people, equipment and environment, while the stool itself is

situated within a particular social, political, legal and historical context that may change over time or place. These will be discussed later in the chapter.

Philosophy

For any organisation, it is possible that a program or event that has operated for some time may not have a clear philosophy, but it is important to go back and clearly understand what this philosophy is in order that you may be sure that what you are doing and how you are doing it is consistent with what you say that you do. Other terms that may be used to refer to a philosophy include raison d'être, mission or vision. Essentially, though, your philosophy is articulating why you exist. This may include a social or community focus, an educational focus and an environmental focus. The philosophy underpins your organisation and must then be reflected in the policies of the organisation and ultimately the practice. The philosophy will inform 'how you do things around here' and thus the culture. Value statements may also support philosophies, visions and missions. A common value statement for many organisations that provides services to people are that their people are important part of the organisation, yet at a time of economic crisis, these value statements are put to the test with many organisations downsizing, rightsizing or more simply put, firing people.

People, equipment and environment

For risk management in the outdoors, Haddock (2004) introduces the importance of the interaction of the three key areas of people, equipment and environment as contributing factors in risk management. These areas fit within a broader framework known as human factors engineering that focuses upon the design of tools, machines, task, jobs and environments for the safe, comfortable and effective human use. Thus human factors is about the interactions and relationships between the people, i.e. the users, the tools or equipment they use and the environments in which they live and operate.

Social and political context

The context in which we operate will influence what is deemed to be acceptable or desirable risks. Changes in society have seen increased expectations that 'safety' will be assured with discussions of the 'nanny state', while generational changes impact the sills and experiences that participants bring to activities and programs. Each country with its various levels of government,

will have their own legal frameworks and case histories that will also influence what may be deemed acceptable or appropriate at that time (this is explored in Chapter 3).

Child protection and the nanny state

If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun. (Katharine Hepburn)

In the latter part of the 20th century and into the 21st century terms such as the 'nanny state' and 'helicopter parents' emerged as ways of expressing the increasing supervision and control over an individual's actions, potentially restricting the chance to venture, explore and discover. As society changes, the real adventures that children have, let alone the adventures adults have, have diminished to what can be offered by a commercial operator, seen on a screen or in the imaginations of the game designer. While there is little empirical evidence to support the views that the paranoia of parents is rising (Jenkins 2006), there are other reports highlighting the lack of engagement with the natural world that emerge as a result of increasing limits on a child's adventuring, exploring and playing in the outdoors (Charles, Louv, Bodner & Guns 2008; Louv 2006; Mallar et al 2002). Playing in the cubby house down the backyard, watching the tadpoles grow in the local creek and the riding of bikes until the sun goes down, have been replaced by supervised play dates, personal video game players, DVD players in cars and structured and supervised games and lessons. The time and place for children to play, dream, explore and learn from their trial and error have been managed out and replaced by programs, controls and the loss of adventure and the exploration of the unknown.

In place of having real personal adventures we have commodified adventure into packages bought over the internet. If we have lost the ability to have adventures, what are the implications for the future for us as individuals, organisations and nations? In May 2010, 16 year-old Australian Jessica Watson returned from a 210 day unassisted solo sailing trip. A spectator, who was a parent of a 16 year-old girl herself, while watching Jessica's return, reflected that if you bring children up to have dreams, you have to also give them wings to fly. To this may be added: and then let them fly.

An internet search using the term 'adventure tourism' reveals offerings of bungy jumping, tandem skydiving, white water rafting and jet boating. Each of these are provided and supervised by commercial organisations and resemble 'thrill seeking' activities which are more closely related to theme parks, than to 'real' personal adventures. As these 'packaged' adventures replace real adventures in the outdoors, the children may be physically safer,