

Expert External Review of MSC's Bushcraft and Risk Management Course Delivery and Resources

Summary Report

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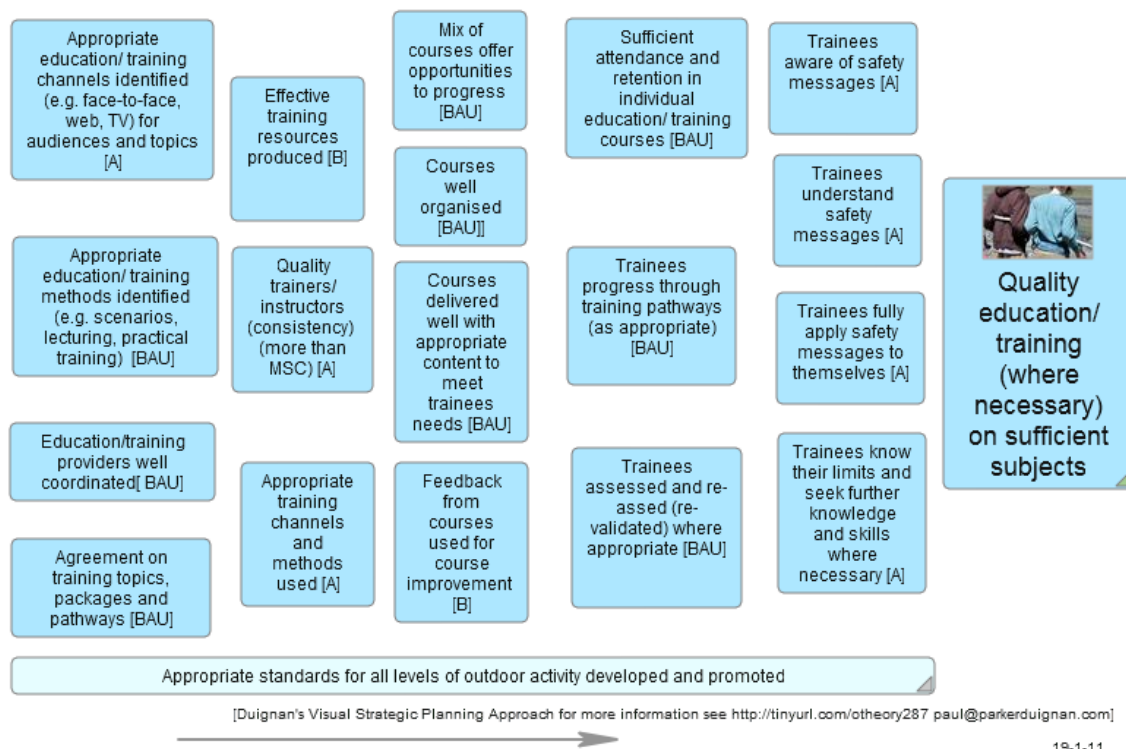
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Introduction

In 2010 the New Zealand Mountain Safety Council (MSC) began the process of developing an outcomes model. This model describes what outcomes the organisation wants to achieve, the steps needed to take to get there and how it would evaluate the progress towards these outcomes.

Having clearly outlined the outcomes the organisation wants to achieve, MSC have now set about the process of implementing a number of evaluation projects and collecting data which will provide indicators that we are working towards the stated outcomes. A more detailed examination of the MSC outcomes model is available in the report titled “The Navigator – An Outcomes Map for MSC”

The first of these evaluation projects was to have an external expert review of two of MSC educational programmes. The two programmes reviewed were the Bushcraft course and the Risk Management programme. The expert reviewer, Dr Robyn Zink, utilised the outcomes model as the basis for her review and her particular focus was the outcome “quality education/training on sufficient subjects”. The insert below visually displays the steps required to achieve that outcome and it was these steps that the reviewer focused upon.



The executive summary of the external expert reviewer report included below provides valuable insight and recommendations for MSC.

In addition to this external review MSC is undertaking some follow up evaluation with course participants who attended the Bushcraft and Risk Management courses to gauge their learning from the courses 4 months after the event.

The information provided from this follow up evaluation will be added to our growing understanding of how MSC is working towards achieving its outcomes. This will also inform strategic and business planning as well as the prioritisation of activity.

The task of considering and implementing these recommendations will be the responsibility of the MSC education manager and the work of prioritising these recommendations has already begun.

Executive Summary

This project examines the delivery and educational outcomes of two Basic Bushcraft courses and two Risk Management courses. The specific questions addressed in this project are:

1. Is MSC education / training high-quality training?
2. Are MSC messages being delivered well?
3. Is the component of MSC's Outcomes Model which relates to 'Quality education/training' credible as a model for how MSC's educational/training process should be operating?

In addition, comment is made on the appropriateness and value of the volunteer delivery model.

Data was gathered through observation/participation on two Basic Bushcraft and two Risk Management courses. This included extensive conversations with instructors and participants. Interviews were also conducted with relevant programme managers and the CEO of MSC. This data provides a snapshot view of MSC courses and the teaching and learning that occurs on these courses. It is not possible to generalise the experiences of these instructors and participants across all MSC bushcraft or risk management courses.

Summary of Findings

1. Is MSC education/training high-quality training?

The instructors on the courses observed all had a high level of outdoor skills and experience. The programmes they delivered were organised and well structured, introducing concepts and skills in a sequential manner. They provided opportunities for participants to discuss ideas and practice skills as they were introduced. The instructors used a range of pedagogical approaches to deliver the material. They all related well to the participants and the breadth of their experience enabled them to understand the contexts in which the participants would utilise the skills they were learning. The instructors expressed a desire to further develop their teaching skills along with a stronger shared understanding of content knowledge to be taught. Gaps in the current teaching practices are around assessment processes and reflection activities.

2. Are MSC messages being delivered well?

The instructors were able to clearly articulate the learning outcomes they were hoping to achieve on each course. Feedback from the participants suggested that key skills and knowledge they developed over the course were in line with individual instructor's learning objectives. The instructors expressed a lack of confidence in the consistency of MSC courses across the country. It was felt that National Office needed to do more work to clarify both the content to be taught and benchmarks to which skills should be taught.

While all the instructors did deliver their messages well, and the messages were about being safe in the outdoors, the focus of the messages varied.

There is scope for National Office to more clearly articulate learning outcomes for each course and do this in a consistent manner across the disciplines.

3. Is the component of MSC's Outcomes Model which relates to 'Quality education/training' credible as a model for how MSC's educational/training process should be operating?

The Outcomes Model related to Quality education /training is a credible model for MSC's educational / training processes. The model provides a consistent frame work to plan, deliver and evaluate educational and training programmes, which should enable MSC to continue to develop programmes in a coherent manner. It allows MSC to articulate its educational/training processes and identify outcomes in line with the policy and political climate in which MSC operates. This will let MSC clearly communicate the outcomes of programmes to funders and to policy makers. The Outcomes model needs to be communicated and explained to the wider MSC community.

4. The volunteer model

The volunteer model used by MSC both presents challenges and opportunities. While this model has worked well for the organisation to date, the climate in which MSC operates is very different from that at its inception in 1965. A key question MSC needs to address in relation to this evaluation is what the pedagogical value and advantages of the volunteer model are? Being able to clearly articulate these advantages would provide an avenue to capitalise on the strengths of a volunteer model and address some of the challenges of this model identified in this report.

Recommendations for Action and Areas for Further Investigation

This section summarises the findings and the conclusion from this evaluation project. These are divided into recommendations of action and areas that require further investigation. Both the recommendations and the areas for further investigation are organised around the terms of reference for this project. The order in which the recommendations are presented should not be read as a priority of action list.

Recommendations for Action

1. Is MSC education / training high-quality training?

- Strengthen the teaching / instructional skill development in instructor training programmes, including in the Outdoor Leader programme.
- Introduce assessment components into the Bushcraft and Risk Management courses.
- Develop reflection activity resources for Bushcraft and Risk Management courses.
- Develop a consistent format for a teaching plan for to instructors to document intended teaching / learning processes.
- Teaching plan and a risk management plan written for all courses by instructors, working in conjunction with course directors.
- Clarify who has the capacity to assess if an Outdoor Leader or a person with Bush 1 has the skills / ability to take on certain roles.

2. Are MSC messages being delivered well?

- Clearly articulate learning outcomes for each course.
- Develop a set of learning principles to support teaching across all disciplines.
- Develop course planning principles to support teaching across all disciplines.
- All teaching and course administration resources produced in a consistent format across all disciplines.
- Set course time requirements of Risk Management courses (as per the Bushcraft courses).
- Ensure Basic Bushcraft courses meet the course time requirements as set in the Standard Operating Procedures.
- Up-date Risk Management resources, including the manual and the CD.
- Inclusion of more interactive activities in Risk Management teaching resources.
- Write Standard Operating Procedures for the Risk Management courses (similar to those that exist for the Bush and Outdoor Leader Standard Operating Procedures).
- Re-design evaluation form to capture information on learning outcomes and participation motivation, along with course satisfaction data.
- Match this re-design with developing efficient and effective data-gathering processes to ensure data is readily available and in a usable format.
- Develop clear process outlining how evaluations are used to improve courses and how those improvements are incorporated and embedded into courses.

3. Is the component of MSC's Outcomes Model which relates to 'Quality education/training' credible as a model for how MSC's educational/training process should be operating?

- Integrate course moderation into the appropriate part of the Outcomes Model
- Develop consistent course moderation processes, including clear benchmarks.

Other recommendations

The following recommendations do not align neatly with the Terms of Reference for this project, but support the delivery of high quality education programmes by MSC.

- Articulate clearly the unique aspects of MSC courses over other providers.
- Increase promotion of MSC courses to those participating on a course.
- Clarify communication processes in case of a serious incident in the field and communicate this clearly to all Branches.
- Identify on-going support National Office will provide to instructors, Branch members and course participants, if a major incident were to occur in the field and communicate this to Branches.
- National Office to prepare media releases, after major incidents or reports have been released, for Branches to disseminate to their local media and use for the promotion of MSC courses.

Areas for Further Investigation

The following points highlight a number of areas of further investigation that would contribute to MSC gaining a more in-depth understanding of issues that impact on the delivery of high quality education programmes. The order in which areas for further investigation are presented should not be read as a priority action list.

1. Is MSC education / training high-quality training?

- The development and use of self-directed learning resources to support the face-to-face teaching, using on-line and other media.
- Develop knowledge and expertise in the organisation on teaching and learning processes relevant to the MSC context.
- Strengthen understanding of motivations of course participants.
- Develop greater understanding of the motivations and needs of MSC volunteers along with the benefits of volunteering for MSC.

2. Are MSC messages being delivered well?

- Investigate the longer term impact of MSC training and the transfer of learning from courses to participants' own practice.
- Investigate how Branch solutions to specific issues are identified and recognised as good practice and how these solutions can be effectively communicated to other Branches.
- Understand and develop mechanisms for communicating changes in practice to Branches and to relevant instructors. Include a checking procedure to ensure appropriate people have received and understood these communications.

3. Is the component of MSC's Outcomes Model which relates to 'Quality education/training' credible as a model for how MSC's educational/training process should be operating?

- On-going review of the model to ensure it continues to remain relevant to MSC and the context in which MSC operates.

4. Other areas for further investigation.

The following areas for further investigation do not align neatly with the Terms of Reference for this project, but support the delivery of high quality education programmes by MSC.

- Investigate methods of recruitment and retention of volunteers in MSC.
- Investigate ways to strengthen mentoring processes at Branch level to support new volunteers and instructors.
- Develop seamless pathways for volunteer instructors to train and work between outdoor recreation organisations.
- Understand the networks MSC volunteers have with other outdoor organisations and how these networks facilitate and support the work of MSC in the broader community.
- Investigate ways to raise the profile of MSC in the general population and of Branches in local communities.
- Develop a mechanism to capture demographic data to map trends in courses to identify populations or groups currently not attending MSC courses.
- Explore the development of niche market courses.
- Explore the utility of a web-based discussion group or similar forum for Branches to discuss issues and share information nationally.
- Investigate organisational structures (e.g. Branch model versus a more centralised model) to allow for effective delivery of high quality education / training programmes.



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