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The Influence of Group Development on Stress Appraisal and Coping Responses of Expedition Trip Leaders

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The Influence of Group Development on Stress Appraisal and Coping Responses of Expedition Trip Leaders

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ABSTRACT

Group development has the potential to contribute to our understanding of stress appraisal and coping among expedition trip leaders. Despite extensive research on the stress-coping process in daily life, there has been little effort to determine how expedition leaders appraise and cope with stress in environments characterized by risk and uncertainty. Group development stages and the stress-coping process have been researched independently, but what remains to be explored is their potential inter-relationship. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between Tuckman's stages of group development, stress appraisal, and coping responses among trip leaders of multi-day wilderness expeditions. More specifically, the study investigated how stress appraisal and coping responses varied among trip leaders at different stages of group development. The nature of this study warranted a qualitative approach, as semi structured in-depth interviews provide an exclusive vantage point for investigating the interplay between group development, stress appraisal, and coping responses among trip leaders. A total of twelve interviews were conducted with employees at an outdoor program dedicated to providing experiential education, life skill development, and adventure experiences to teenagers with mild to severe learning disabilities. The evidence suggests that trip leaders undergo a dynamic stress-coping process that is influenced by group development. Furthermore, there are numerous personal and situational influences that effect not only group development and stress appraisal, but coping efficacy and the outcomes of the trip as a whole. Although stress was most salient in the storming and adjourning stages, it also occurred when groups were norming and performing.

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Introduction

Tuckman (1965) reviewed over fifty articles related to small group development in search of common characteristics and changes that groups go through when working together to achieve common goals. Through further theoretical development he proposed a five-stage group development process that includes forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 2001). Forming is the first stage of group development, which occurs when individuals come into initial contact and begin the team-building process. Storming occurs when the group experiences conflict or disagreement. Personal agendas are revealed as the group determines how to work together. Individual strengths and weaknesses are recognized in the norming stage, leading to defined roles and the establishment of social norms. During the performing stage, the group compensates for individual strengths and weaknesses, and works together to accomplish shared goals. The final stage of group development is adjourning, where group members revert from a team mentality back to personal agendas. While the stages tend to occur in sequential order, it is possible for groups to regress back to earlier stages. Although there is no guarantee that a group will experience each stage, all groups form and adjourn.

Group development stages are thought to influence leadership styles among trip leaders in expedition settings. For example, a democratic leadership style is likely to be effective with groups that are in the storming stage, provided that there are no extenuating circumstance such as environmental hazards (McCleskey, 2014). Group development theory also has the potential to contribute to our understanding of stress appraisal and coping among expedition trip leaders. Despite extensive research on the

stress-coping process in daily life, there has been little effort to determine how expedition leaders appraise and cope with stress in environments characterized by risk and uncertainty. Furthermore, the existing group development studies have tended to focus on the validity of Tuckman's stages, rather than the process by which groups move through the stages or the impact that leadership has on that process (Runkel, 1971; Obert, 1983; Gersick, 1988; Wheelan, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003). Group development stages and the stress-coping process have been researched independently, but what remains to be explored is their potential inter-relationship. Expedition settings provide an ideal environment in which to assess connections between these constructs. A need still exists to explore and describe the effect of the leader on group development and to develop theory to support it.

The literature on group development theory is expansive, from Gersick's Punctuated Equilibrium (1988) to Tuckman and Jensens's revisited stages of group development (2010). The Integrated Model of Group Development outlined by Wheelan is also similar, but more specific than Tuckman's model. Wheelan, Davidson, and Tilin (2003) combined group structure and task orientation into collective stages, but also focused on the relationship between the levels of development attained by work groups and the effectiveness and productivity of those groups.

Other studies have been conducted proposing new theories of group development. This includes Personal Construct Theory and Practice (PCP), which focuses Tuckman's stages on the individual instead of a collective group (Frances, 2008). The PCP stages are as follows: Individual Anticipation - of the group, Individual Experimentation - in the group, Collective Construction - by the group, and Collaborative Action – as a group.

Each of these stages correspond to the first four stages of Tuckman's group development model. Many contemporary group development studies stem in some way from Tuckman's theory, but stages vary based on task, process, and individual characteristics.

One area of research that may contribute to our understanding of group development is stress appraisal and coping. There is considerable research on the topic but little that focuses on group leaders. Most is primarily laboratory based, and compares the stressors and coping responses of various types of people, in different settings. For example Fanshawe and Burnett (1991) discussed a variety of issues with current research methods that test and measure stress and coping responses in adolescents. McCrae (1982) preformed two studies attempting to assess the influence of losses, threats, and challenges on the choice of coping mechanisms. He posed the research question: Is the coping mechanism decided primarily by the person, the situation, or some interaction of both? Results discussed that the type of coping response used by participants was significantly correlated to the type of stressor. This suggests that coping may be influenced by personal and situational factors, as well as group development.

In their study Stress Appraisal and Coping Response to Hassles Experienced in Outdoor Recreation Settings, Schuster, Hammitt, and Moore (2006), referenced the stress appraisal process established by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Cognitive appraisal is divided into two phases: primary and secondary appraisal. Primary stress appraisal deals with the relationship between the source of stress and the amount of influence the stressor has on the individual experiencing stress. The second component of primary appraisal is deciding whether or not the stressor is a current or future threat, or whether it is seen as a challenge to the person feeling stress. Secondary appraisal is the person's reaction to

stress, whether positive or negative. It is the person's attitude toward the situation itself. For example, a person on a backpacking trip has three more days on the trail. It starts to rain heavily, and there is no shelter nearby. It begins to thunder and lightning. Primary appraisal of the situation suggests that the storm is significant because it is negatively affecting the experience. The hiker appraises the storm as a threat because the weather conditions pose an identifiable hazard. Primary and secondary appraisal happen simultaneously. Although the hiker has accepted the storm's presence, negative feelings about the situation persist.

Coping responses can be divided into two primary types: problem focused and emotion focused (Miller & McCool 2003). Problem-focused coping targets the fundamental source of stress. The goal of problem-focused coping is to use an active approach to control the stressor. For example, the hiker in the lightning scenario might seek shelter in a protected location. In contrast, emotion-focused strategies rely on psychological reactions to mitigate the stressor. In the lightning scenario mentioned above, emotion-focused responses might include expressing frustration at the timing of the storm, trying not to think about the possibility of being struck, or seeking reassurance from a more experienced co-leader. Problem-focused coping is typically used when the stressor can be changed, whereas emotion focused coping tends to be used when the stressor is unchangeable. The latter can be an effective strategy, but sometimes leads to depression or anger (Leon, Kafner, Hoffman, & Dupre, 1991). Both problem focused and emotion focused coping responses vary due to personal and situational characteristics, and may be influenced by the way one typically deals with stress in daily life (DeLongis & Holtzman, 2005).

Stress appraisal and coping responses occur in day-to-day situations, as well as outdoor recreation settings. While stress and coping are seen in both participants and trip leaders, the types of stress experienced by leaders and the coping responses that follow are likely to differ from those of participants. The characteristics of trip leaders should influence not only how they appraise stress, but how they cope with it (e.g. whether they use problem focused or emotion focused approaches). Stress and coping may be influenced by personal factors such as experience level, judgment, and decision-making skills. Weather, competency of participants, and level of risk are situational factors that could cause stress for leaders and influence how they cope. How the leader appraises and responds to stress is likely to influence how the group progresses through the stages of group development, and ultimately the outcomes of the expedition as a whole.

Purpose

Most studies that have investigated the stress-coping process in outdoor recreation settings have focused on participants (Miller & McCool, 2003; Schuster, Hammitt, & Moore, 2003; Schuster, Hammitt, & Moore, 2006). There has been minimal research on expedition trip leaders or guides of trips lasting ten days or more. Stressors seen in the leader of the group are likely to be different than those experienced by participants, and little is known about how leaders appraise and cope with stress at different stages of group development, particularly in expedition settings. Existing group development studies have focused on the validity of the different group development stages as opposed to how groups progress through the stages themselves (Runkel, 1971; Obert, 1983; Gersick, 1988; Wheelan, Davidson, & Tilin, 2003)

Group development stages, stress appraisal, and coping have all been identified and researched, but what remains to be explored is their relationship in an expedition setting. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between Tuckman's stages of group development, stress appraisal, and coping responses among trip leaders of multi-day wilderness expeditions. More specifically, the study investigated how stress appraisal and coping responses varied among trip leaders at different stages of group development. An expedition was defined as an adventure-based trip lasting a minimum of 10 days.

<div align="center">**Methods**</div>

The nature of this study warranted a qualitative approach, as semi structured in-depth interviews provide an exclusive vantage point for investigating the interplay between group development, stress appraisal, and coping responses among trip leaders. The interviews took place in North Carolina and involved employees at an outdoor program dedicated to providing experiential education, life skill development, and adventure experiences to teenagers with mild to severe learning disabilities.

Sample

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling strategies were utilized to obtain data for the study. Potential respondents were contacted by the primary investigator after securing permission from the academy director and approval from the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board. The average age of trip leaders was 31. They led approximately seven adventure-based trips per season, most of which included backpacking. Adventure-based trips were defined as novel experiences with uncertain outcomes and real or perceived risks. Half of the respondents chose to discuss

expeditions that were led for other companies. Most were educational or developmental in nature, however three were strictly therapeutic. Trips averaged 18.5 days in duration and approximately half encountered some form of weather influence. Participants ranged from 11-18 years in age and a majority of the groups had some level of interaction before the expedition commenced. Participant to instructor ratios ranged from 4:2 to 15:1. Only one of the leaders operated without a co-leader.

A total of 12 semi-structured interviews were used to determine how expedition leaders appraise and respond to stress at different stages of group development. A passive consent was read to respondents before the interviews were conducted and ID codes were assigned to maintain anonymity. An interview guide with 20 questions was used to inquire about four broad concepts: trip leader background; characteristics of a recent expedition that was led for an adventure-based outdoor program (although not necessarily for their current employer); stress appraisal and coping; and group development (see Appendix A). Probes were used to illicit more in-depth responses, clarify information, and further investigate emerging themes. Interviews lasted 15 to 50 minutes, were recorded with a password protected digital audio recorder, and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

A-prior and emergent coding were used to identify broad themes within the data (Charmaz, 2006; Strasuss, 1987). A-prior codes included forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning, stress appraisal, emotion-focused coping response, and problem-focused coping response. Emergent codes included personal influence, situational influence, situational leadership, positive outcomes, and negative outcomes. Axial coding

was then used to identify emerging relationships between group development stages and different components of the stress-coping process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define axial coding as processes wherein novel connections between emergent themes are analyzed. Coding was conducted by the principal investigator.

Results

Personal and Situational Influences

Personal and situational influences are contextual factors that increase or decrease not only the amount of stress experienced, but also the sources of stress (Taylor, Sheley, E., and Aspinwall, 1996). Personal influences reside within the individual, while situational influences originate within the external environment. Personal influences were reported by half of respondents with frequencies ranging from 1-3 per interview (Table 1). Examples of personal influences included military experience, burnout, wilderness therapy background, fatherhood, and physical fitness.

Respondent 7 explained how military experience can help mitigate the stressors associated with expedition leadership: *"Coming from the military I spent on average 6 or 7 months of the year in the middle nowhere in the woods. Trips are easy because you don't have the distractions of modern life."* In contrast, Respondent 11 commented on how a lack of personal fitness can increase the likelihood of stress when leading in the outdoors: *"I hadn't backpacked in a while, there was a lot of sitting around where I came from. I didn't want to quit on them or make it seem like we could just camp wherever."*

Table 1

Frequency of personal influences per respondent.

Respondent:	Personal Influence Count:
1	-
2	3
3	-
4	-
5	1
6	2
7	2
8	-
9	3
10	-
11	1
12	-

Situational influences were more common than personal influences, and included

weather, experience level of co-leaders, student population, experience level of the group,

intensity of the activity, instructor relationships, and other extenuating circumstances. All

respondents mentioned at least one situational influence with an average of 4.5 per

interview (Table 2).

Respondent 10 explained how variable weather patterns can affect stress appraisal

and coping: *"One day would be really sunny and then the next day it would just dump*

rain on us while we were on the river. We had to get off because of the potential for flash

floods." Respondent 5 discussed the impact that inexperienced co-leaders can have on

fellow leaders, particularly in terms of decision-making: *"The other two staff were very*

new and they were kind of sit back, wait, and not really take initiative type of people. So

that was a lot of pressure on me to take charge of what was happening in making

decisions and then also be the primary disciplinarian." Respondent 1 mentioned how

structure provided by the leadership team can impact group development stages and

potentially decrease the amount of stress experienced by the leaders: *"We do have a roles system here, so the kids are responsible for cooking, cleaning up, filling water bottles, and it changes every day. By that point the group had really bought into that. They knew their responsibilities just out of habit."*

The type of student population was also a strong situational influence. Respondent 5 explained how tension between rival gang members in a therapeutic wilderness program for at-risk youth led to stress in the group as a whole: *"Another thing that was stressful was the dynamic of the group. It was kids from different gangs and some of them were from rival gangs. So there was a lot of tension in the group early on in the course."* In contrast, Respondent 1 commented on the pressure that she felt because the trip was the last time that participants in an extended developmental program would be together: *"Since that was our last expedition, and the last expedition the participants would experience possibly ever, I was kind of stepping it up a little bit to make their experience worthwhile and memorable, and I think that's when it (stress) heightened for sure."*

Table 2

Frequency of situational influences per respondent.

Respondent:	Situational Influence Count:
1	3
2	12
3	3
4	5
5	3
6	1
7	4
8	7
9	2
10	5
11	6
12	3

Group Development

Respondents were asked to describe inter-relationships between members of the group during the most stressful point of the trip. This question and subsequent probes were used to assess the relationship between group development stages and the stress coping process. The two most common group development stages were storming and adjourning. Only three leaders indicated that their groups advanced to the norming and performing stages. Respondent 8 explained how complacency among participants can cause groups to remain in the storming stage for prolonged periods of time, placing higher levels of stress on the leader: *"Because this particular group had a really long period of storming and they felt that they could do whatever they wanted and get away with it. The adults didn't know me, and also when you have other adults that are closer to the children you have their perspective to look out for too. So they kind of took it and ran. There was a lot of turmoil on that trip and it never ended."* Similarly, Respondent 4 reported that participants in the storming stage do not always adapt well to change, which can create stress for leaders: *"I think we stayed in the storming stage most of the time for the summer trips. Yeah, it's hard. A lot of the population of students we work with aren't good at change."* Additional probes led the respondent to explain that participants often have trouble moving beyond the storming stage because they do not recognize group goals that extend beyond themselves: *"Most kids don't even realize there is a big picture. Their whole life it's been about them."*

By nature, all groups should experience adjournment, which is the final stage of group development. It occurs regardless of whether a group progresses through any of the other stages. Respondent 10 explained how participants in the adjournment stage can

become fixated on the end of the expedition, leading to greater risk exposure and more stress for leaders: *"At that moment, the first two kids that flipped were at the adjourning stage. They saw the light at the end of the tunnel, and they knew it was their last expedition and within two weeks they would be going home. They thought 'yeah maybe our eval scores will be lower but hey we're almost out.' So that's why that stage was the most dangerous. They definitely didn't realize how dangerous their actions were and how badly that could have affected the rest of the group."*

Additionally, Respondent 7 explained that the group development stages are cyclical in nature with the adjourning stage being one causing major stress to leaders: *"For me, as I became experienced, I would say when they were adjoining is when I would worry. Because it was generally the stage of complacency and I've never seen in all my years a group over long-distance network where they stay in a performing or an adjourning state. They're always crashing and regressing back to it."*

Stress Appraisal

Personal and situational influences, along with group development stages, appeared to affect expedition leaders' appraisals of stress. Emergent coding revealed three major sources of stress that are consistent with the primary contributing factors to accidents in expedition settings: environment, leaders, and participants. Respondent 11 discussed the impact that impending darkness and difficult terrain can have on stress appraisal: *"Stress-wise our first day backpacking we didn't end up being able to find our trailhead until 4:30 in the afternoon. We ended up ascending 1500 to 2000 feet in 5 miles and a lot of our kids had never done that before. It wasn't until10 that we actually got to camp and busted everything out."*

Respondent 1 explained how inexperienced co-leaders can increase the pressure felt by others in a leadership role: *"My new co didn't have much education in the outdoors. He just worked summer camp. So the learning curve was the most stressful. I felt that things should be going a different way, and it was almost like sometimes having seven kids instead of another co."* Respondent 9 focused on stress attributable to participants: **"***This one kid, he was just huge jerk. Very privileged, extremely wealthy and knew it. He didn't have anything good to add to the group. We had one kid who had a pretty bad learning disability and he would pick on him. I didn't know how to deal with that and I couldn't handle it"*

Coping

Problem and emotion focused coping. Different coping responses were used by leaders from various expeditions. Leaders used both emotion focused and problem focused coping mechanisms, but tended to rely more heavily on one or the other. Respondent 12 discussed how she used a combination of emotional and problem-focused coping responses to encourage the group to continue their difficult hike: *"I just kind of keep pushing. Cause you know, when they're kind of feeling down and if anyone is feeling down that can rub off, so just keeping it positive. I just tried to motivate them in different ways to get to the top. I guess just keep moving."* Respondent 10 used problem-focused coping by responding to a canoe that had flipped. However, he also relied heavily on emotion-focused strategies such as releasing emotion and emotional distancing: *"I yelled to my co and said, 'switch, you take lead,' and I paddled over as fast as I could to push them off the bank. After that I yelled at the entire group about listening to me and my co*

and safety. They could all tell just from my demeanor and because I wasn't really talking

that I was more upset."

      Internal and external stressors. The type of stressor (internal vs. external)

influenced the coping mechanisms used by trip leaders. In most cases, problem-focused

responses emerged when situational factors were appraised as external and controllable.

Respondent 6 explained that she viewed stress as external, and therefore, was able to

easily use problem-focused coping: *"Usually, I think what can we do to fix this? Usually*

when my stress is external like that it is really easy for me to problem solve." Respondent

6 reported that he responds to and appraises external stress differently than he would

respond to other types of stress. *"I think when I get super stressed… well it's different. In*

that particular situation it was an external stressor, so I managed it externally. I think

sometimes when I'm stressed in other areas I get quiet and bottle that up a little bit

longer than I would have in another situation."

      Situational leadership. Situational leadership occurs when individuals adjust

their style of leadership based on competency of participants, group unity, environmental

hazards, and potential consequences of decisions (McCleskey, 2014). An understanding

of situational leadership gives trip leaders an opportunity to assess situations using

experience-based judgment, and choose the style of leadership that is most appropriate.

Situational leadership was an emergent code that surfaced when trip leaders responded to

probes about problem and emotion focused coping. Respondent 1 discussed how two

high functioning participants assisted the designated leaders in solving disputes within

the group. This led Respondent 1 to adjust her leadership style to become more

democratic, and led to a decrease in the amount of stress she experienced: *"We had two*

very high functioning boys in our group, who a lot of the others looked up to like big brothers, so being able to rely on them to bring the team together and work through the issues, instead of me and my co always being that voice of problem solving. That approach seemed to work a little better because they hear our voices all the time. I think having those two strong leaders was really helpful in helping the kids kind of get out that emotional freak out and then they were able to problem solve." Similarly, Respondent 2 explained the importance of understanding situational leadership to create rapport with students: *"For us, as instructors, we personally were more task oriented. But we found that more often than not good emphasis on the relationships that we had built with the students allowed us to get them more task-oriented. Then, over time, you know we could pull back. There was less that we had to do to make it so they could focus a little bit more, again communicating with the parents, and handling the budgeting, planning for the medium-term."*

   Coping dispositions. When asked about how respondents dealt with stress in their personal lives, expedition leaders reported using a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, or showed a stronger tendency towards emotional responses. Respondent 9 explained that she uses emotion-focused coping through emotional release in her personal life: *"I think it's more emotion. I have this list of things to do, and if I don't complete it, I freak out."* Respondent 10 reported that he responds with a primary emotional response of emotional distancing followed by problem-focused strategies: *"At work I am really good at putting things off to the side and talking to someone about the situation later. Whereas when I'm at home if I get stressed out about something I may go and clean or have a small outburst of verbal or energy output. At*

work I don't really bottle things up, but I do try to hold back those emotional outbursts."
A person's coping disposition - how they tend to respond to stress in daily life - did not impact the way they coped in the field. In most cases there was delineation between the types of coping utilized in the field and the types of coping used in respondents' personal lives. Respondent 1 explained how she utilizes a predominantly problem-focused response in the field and an emotion focused coping response in her personal life: *"I guess it's kind of a weird balance. I'm pretty bad about managing stress in my personal life. When it comes to professionally, I think it is easier for me to justify it, because I would be holding other people back. But when it comes to my own life, and things that I find stressful, I tend to get worked up about it emotionally, but then I also try to quash that feeling by being super analytical. So if I'm talking to someone about what I am stressed out about, I can tell them what the problem is, I can tell them what I need to fix it, but it is really hard for me to take that action because of my emotional side."*

Effects of leaders' coping responses on groups. The frequency of emotion-focused coping in the field was attributable to the use of emotional distancing and self-control. Many leaders showed their groups a problem focused response, but also used an emotion-focused response to cope with stress internally. This may be attributed to the therapeutic and developmental nature of the programs used in the interviews. Respondent 1 explained how a trip leader's emotional responses could negatively affect the group, which increases stress on leaders: *"Our kids especially are very in tune to our emotional gauge. If you're getting cranky or upset or down or whatever, they are going to read that and throw it right back at you ten fold, which would add to the stress for sure."*
Respondent 11 discussed the importance of emotional coping through self-control to

maintain an image of strong leadership: *"If your participants key into you feeling stressed or you feeling weak they recognize that. You don't want to show that you can't handle a particular situation. So just stay motivated."*

  Respondents exhibited a heavy reliance on problem-focused coping. Respondent 5, who has extensive amounts of experience in therapeutic based recreation programs, explained the importance of problem-focused coping when working with at-risk and adjudicated youth: *"Problem based. Yeah. I'm not a feeler. So they will tell you my compassion well is a puddle. I don't respond in a very emotional ways because it's one of those things that if you cracked the door than... you know what I mean. But generally I tend to just be action oriented. What needs to happen? Goal focused."* In contrast, coping responses were more varied among respondents who worked in developmental programs or both therapeutic and developmental programs. Respondent 2, a seasoned field instructor with both therapeutic and developmental program experience, explained the importance of acknowledging personal emotions and their influence over emotions of the group, showing the importance of self-regulation, an emotion-focused response, for both participants and the leadership team: *"Our students can be very relationship dependent even when holding a boundary. So the degree to which you manage your effect and your relationship with the students in large measure is going to determine how hard you have to work. Our students… many of our students have not experienced enough success for them to develop a hunger for it. That gives us a real opportunity. That provides us leverage. It is it's my experience that generally that's one of the most powerful ways to approach that sort of thing."*

Outcomes

Outcomes, which can be positive or negative, reflected the efficacy of trip leaders' coping responses and provided insight on the benefits and drawbacks to coping responses utilized in the field. Outcomes also revealed the impacts that group development and the stress-coping process can have on leaders, participants, and overall experience quality.

Respondents were asked if they thought the way they dealt with their most stressful moment on the trip was successful. Respondent 5 discussed the effectiveness of her problem and emotion focused coping responses, and the overall success of the trip: *"It worked. Yeah, I mean I got me through! It was fine in the long run and the group made it through. Successful course? Yeah. I mean the kids got a lot out of the experience. So yeah it was successful in a lot of ways."*

Respondent 4 reported that his group experienced many positive outcomes that were largely due to keeping a positive outlook by effectively coping as a leader: *"Yeah I definitely think there were a lot of positive outcomes, even with backpacking when the kids had never been camping before and hated the backpacking part but enjoyed the backcountry camping. So you see, it's just making sure that they are having fun. You tend to focus on positives so they end up getting a good experience out of it. We do a lot of deflection in the summer just redirect everything."*

Respondent 3 explained how coping strategies used by the leader could affect the group as a whole and create a negative outcome: *"It's nice when things go well, but when they don't – like when we have to hop on the river a couple days early, that's when it starts getting bad. It's funny because they don't know the social cues or emotional cues*

but they can feel it. Because I was stressed out about it too, you know like having to go do

a food buy right then for however many days and all that. So whenever things don't go as

planned is when it's more difficult."

Discussion

This study investigated potential inter-relationships between group development stages and the stress-coping process among trip leaders of multi-day wilderness expeditions. The evidence suggests that trip leaders undergo a dynamic stress-coping process that is influenced by group development. Furthermore, there are numerous personal and situational influences that effect not only group development and stress appraisal, but also coping efficacy and the outcomes of the trip as a whole. Although stress was most salient in the storming and adjourning stages, it also occurred when groups were norming and performing. The primary sources of stress experienced by leaders were consistent with the three factors thought to contribute to accident potential in expedition settings. Leaders tended to employ emotion focused coping strategies, but preferred problem focused approaches in situations appraised as controllable. However, coping dispositions prevalent in daily life did not appear to influence the use of coping strategies in the field. Coping efficacy impacted the overall success of the expeditions by increasing or decreasing stress among both participants and leaders.

This study has a number of important implications for professional practice, as well as future research on group development and the stress-coping process. First, the leader's ability to cope with stress has an impact on participants, other leaders, risk management, and experience quality. Knowledge of inter-relationships between group development and the stress-coping process can be used to train leaders how to more

effectively manage their own emotions in the context of an expedition setting. It can also be used to help leaders understand how to use problem-focused approaches to effectively mitigate stress in situations that are controllable. Second, situational leadership appears to be a particularly effective problem-focused response in such situations. Programs should emphasize the importance of situational leadership as a means of mitigating stress for both participants and leaders. Third, the type of programming provided and the populations served seems to have a strong influence on group development, stress appraisal, and coping. The nature of therapeutic and developmental programs influenced the type of coping used by expedition leaders. Respondents attributed the use of emotion focused coping strategies to the necessity of maintaining a state of emotional stability within their group. However, leaders also recognized the importance of modeling effective problem-focused coping strategies for participants. Fourth, the effectiveness of leaders' coping strategies appears to have a profound impact on expedition outcomes. Successful attempts to cope with the stressors of an expedition can decrease stress felt by participants and lead to higher quality experiences.

To our knowledge, this is the first study that has investigated relationships between group development stages and the stress-coping process. The study identifies personal and situational influences, stressors, and coping responses common among therapeutic and developmental expedition leaders. Future research should seek to employ a broader range of outdoor programs, including those that are purely recreational in nature. With recreation-based expeditions, groups may progress through the group development stages more rapidly, prompting variations in stress appraisal and coping. Furthermore, recreational programs are often more task-oriented, whereas developmental

and therapeutic programs tend to emphasize process. For example, recreational programs spend more time making sure clients enjoy the experience while developmental and therapeutic programs focus on using the adventure experience to develop intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. It follows that personal and situational influences, stress appraisal, and coping will differ. A better understanding of how the constructs included in this study vary based on program type will help prepare leaders to cope with stress more effectively and increase expedition quality. Furthermore, insight on the ways that group development influences stress appraisal and coping is important not only in an expedition context, but related settings where success is dependent upon a leader's ability to perform under pressure. Future research should seek to determine whether the findings reported in this study are consistent in settings such as emergency services, wildland firefighting, and the military.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was the small, non-generalizable sample necessitated by the qualitative method of inquiry. Although this approach was appropriate given the lack of research on the topic, future studies should employ quantitative approaches to further investigate the constructs of interest. Another limitation was the potential for bias resulting from the principle investigator's interpretations of the data. A recommended solution is to incorporate additional investigators and calculate inter-rater reliability. A final limitation was the lack of member checks conducted after transcription of the interviews. In future studies, it would be advisable to conduct member checks to ensure accurate coding.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide:

1. What is your age?
2. How long have you been working with Adrift Adventures?
3. How many trips do you typically lead per season with Adrift Adventures?
4. Have you worked for any other outdoor adventure companies before?
5. What type of activity trip do you typically lead?
6. Do you typically lead day trips or trips lasting longer than one day?

Last expedition you led— adventure trip at least three days in length

1. What type of activities were involved on this trip?
2. How long was the trip?
3. Where did the trip take place?
4. What was the group size?
5. Did you have an assistant or co-leader? What was the participant to instructor ratio?
6. What age group were your clients?
7. Did your group know each other before the commencement of the trip?
8. What was the weather like on the trip?

Stress Related Questions

1. What was one thing that created the most stress for you as a leader of the trip?
2. How would you describe the duration of this stressor? Probe: Was it constant or a one-time occurrence? How long did it last?
3. How did you deal with this stressor? Probe: Would you say you relied more on emotional responses or on actual behaviors?
4. Was the approach effective? Probe: In what way?
5. How do you typically handle stress outside of expedition settings? Probe: Is it similar or different than the way you tend to deal with stress on trips?

Group Development – Think about what was happening with the group when you experience the source of stress we just discussed.
1. Are you familiar with group development stages?
   a. If yes: What stage of group development would you say your group was in when this situation occurred?

      i. What about after you had a chance to address the situation?

   b. If no: Would you say that group members were focused more on accomplishing certain tasks or on building relationships with one another?
      i. Which day of the trip did the situation take place?

          1.   Probe Group Development Stages
     ii.   How did the group act after you had a chance to address the situation?
          1.   Probe Group Development Stages

Probe Questions for each stage of development –

Forming:
1. How comfortable would you say group members were with one another at this point?
2. Did it seem like they were being overly polite or agreeable?
3. Did you feel like the group was very dependent on you as the leader at this point?

Storming:
1. Were there any members of the group who were particularly disengaged?
2. Were there any passive aggressive or confrontational conflicts occurring?

Norming:
1. Do you feel like you were working a lot to get the group to become more united?
2. Did you feel like the 'norms' of the group were established? i.e. things that were 'okay' to do and say were made clear by not only you as the leader, but through accountability from the group?
3. Were members willing to give/offer help?
4. Did you hear more "I, Me, My", or "We, Us, Our"?

Performing:
1. Did you feel the group recognized and accepted each other's strengths and weaknesses?
2. How committed did the group seem to the 'big picture?'
3. How dependent was the group on you as the leader?
4. Was there any evidence that they were becoming complacent regarding risk management?

Adjourning:
1. Did members of your group seem ready to go home or less motivated at this point?
2. Were group members reverting back to their own personal agendas?
3. Were they talking about home or the end of the trip?
4. Did it seem like they were in a hurry to get somewhere?