

Self and Team Development in Practice (STP) Walk Rally

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An evaluation study was conducted to assess strengths and weaknesses of an outdoor-based experiential training (OBET) program used in Thailand. Self and Team Development in Practice (STP) Walk Rally is used as the case. Most of the principles in adult theory, experiential learning theory, and Holton's HRD Evaluation Research and Measurement Model are met by the STP Walk Rally, but it cannot promise transfer of learning. In the Thai culture, "Sanuk," or having fun, is the best element of the training design. However, face-to-face feedback is not appropriate for Thais. Recommendations for practice and research are made.

Self and Team Development in Practice (STP) is a variant of Outdoor-Based Experiential Training (OBET) that uses experiential learning as a technique for delivering training content such as team building, leadership, and communication. STP Walk Rally was developed for Thai employees in 1990 by Teerasak Kambannarak, Suwadee Homchanchur, and staff members from Thai Yamasaki. Since 1990, STP Walk Rally has provided services for more than 200 companies in Thailand.

Problem Statement

STP Walk Rally and other Thai OBETs have gained popularity over the last decade, especially for team building. OBET is often misused because (a) documentation in the area is based on personal accounts rather than systematic studies; (b) there is a paucity of research in Thailand in this field; and (c) there is an absence of evaluation of outdoor development programs in Thailand. The effectiveness of STP Walk Rally and other Thai OBETs has been questioned by those who believe it is just for fun since the activities look like childish games. Even though many studies have been done in the U.S. and Europe regarding these issues, they have not shown clear results. In many cases, the research designs were weak and threatened the validity of the research.

Without research on STP Walk Rally, it is hard to credit it with success. Thus, STP Walk Rally will be investigated to determine its strengths and weaknesses. There are many theories and models that could be used, but only adult learning theory, experiential learning theory, and Holton's (1996) HRD Evaluation Research and Measurement Model were selected to evaluate this particular training program.

Research Question

What are the STP Walk Rally's strengths and weaknesses in the Thai context based on adult learning theory, experiential learning theory, and Holton's (1996) HRD Evaluation Research and Measurement Model?

Outdoor-Based Experiential Training

OBET is a training process that uses experiential learning methods to deliver training content. There are three types of general OBET programs: challenge courses, group initiatives, and wilderness travel

activities. The differences between general OBET and the STP Walk Rally as used in Thailand will be described in this section.

Kolb (1993) described challenge courses or high ropes courses as consisting of a series of activities conducted in trees or on poles. The objectives of these courses are to develop self-confidence, to help individuals confront fears and to increase their propensity for risk taking. Group initiatives, or low ropes courses (Baldwin, Wagner, & Roland, 1991), consist of a series of group problem-solving activities. Baldwin et al. (1991) indicated that low ropes courses create changes in group climate but do not change self-concept. The third type, wilderness-based activities, is presented as a multi-day expedition. The objectives of wilderness programs are team building, communication, trust, and group cohesion.

Most of the activities in Thai OBET are a combination of low ropes and wilderness-based activities, not high ropes activities. The expected results from OBET are team building, communication, problem solving, and group cohesion, rather than self-development. STP Walk Rally was originally used for team building only. Later, the program was applied to new employee orientation, improving job satisfaction, and improving participants' skills in areas such as leadership, management, and decision making. These objectives are different from most U.S. OBETs' objectives. In the U.S., OBET is often used for individual development and to increase self-esteem (Wagner, Baldwin, & Roland, 1991).

OBET has many other names. In this article, OBET will be used to represent any outdoor-based experiential training. "Walk Rally" is the most popular word for OBET in Thailand. In this article, STP Walk Rally will be used to refer to the specific STP program, while OBET will be used to refer to the general training approach.

OBET programs vary substantially from trainer to trainer. Ibbetson (1993) stated that the essence of OBET is to use simulated outdoor initiative activities as direct metaphors for many everyday occurrences. In this paper, OBET means a process that uses hands-on challenges or

adventures, usually in the outdoors, combined with review and feedback, to improve workplace performance.

STP Walk Rally

STP Walk Rally is an experiential training program intended to enable trainees to have insights through learning by doing. Kijyanyong (1997) defined “Walk Rally” as an activity that provides trainees with self-experience and self-learning under competitive situations. STP Walk Rally is adapted from European Orienteering, Group Dynamics, and Japanese Walk Rally.

Orienteering

“Orienteering is land navigation by the use of a topographical map and compass” (NAGWS, 1976, p. 162). In STP Walk Rally, maps are used to direct the walk. To win the rally, participants have to work in teams. They are expected to help each other by reading the map and controlling the time. Teams have to get to checkpoints at a specific time.

Group Dynamics

Group Dynamics is the study of the interrelationships between participants of a group, how the group is formed, and how it reacts to other groups. Mathes (1968) stated that group dynamics describes what is happening in all groups at all times whether or not the participants recognize it. In STP Walk Rally, participants’ behaviors are videotaped and are observed by facilitators. The tapes are played back to the participants. The participants are then encouraged to give feedback on their feelings and the changes that they have seen during the course.

Japanese Walk Rally

Shigeru Kobayashi developed a teaching technique called Walk Rally in the 1960s. Japanese Walk Rally is an OBET program that enhances collaboration and team building. The participants are divided into teams of about 8 to 10 people. The participants on each team are paired and each pair works together to obtain a score. The pairs' scores are added to get the team's total score. The team that has the highest score wins. This same system is used in the Thai STP Walk Rally.

STP Walk Rally's Characteristics

The main objectives of STP Walk Rally are to have participants learn through experiential learning activities how to develop themselves, as well as how to understand other people in order to work together. These objectives are similar to the T-Group objectives that focus on learning about self and others (Rothwell, Sullivan, & McLean, 1995).

Each STP Walk Rally session consists of 40 to 50 participants. The participants should represent a variety of ages, genders, functions, and positions within a company. The program takes three days, including one day of traveling because the program is held at a remote site. However, STP Walk Rally can be tailored to meet the needs of different organizations or groups. STP Walk Rally can be divided into two phases: classroom training that prepares the participants to work in teams and experiential activities with participant involvement.

Phase I. In the half-day classroom-training phase, an instructor presents information about team building. Participants work in teams to set goals and objectives for their teams. Trainers use ice-breakers, games, psychological tests, and indoor experiential learning activities as alternative facilitation methods.

Phase II. The experiential phase lasts one-and-a-half days. In this session, STP Walk Rally serves as a vehicle for practicing skills learned during Phase I. There are two rounds of walks. Before the first round, each team receives a map, time sheet, and set of rules. On the map are

hints written in poems to lead the team from one checkpoint to the next. The team members decide which direction they should go. At each checkpoint, all team members have to report to a Walk Rally facilitator. They are presented with a challenge. Each team has to complete the challenge before they proceed to the next point. The participants' behaviors are videotaped. At the end of the walk, participants are given an hour to reflect on what they have learned. This is followed by a debrief session with STP facilitators. The winning team is announced and presented with a trophy.

The second round of the Walk Rally starts on the last day. Participants remain in the same teams. The second round is similar to the first round, but it has different activities and checkpoints. The challenges are more complicated. At the end of this session, debriefing is again provided. Participants are given time for self-reflection. They exchange feedback in person with their team members, thanking them and telling them what they would like them to improve in the future. From personal experience, most of the feedback is positive. There are two trophies for the second round, one for the winning team and one for the most-improved team.

STP Walk Rally Evaluation

Since no research has been done on STP Walk Rally, it is difficult to assess whether or not the program can bring about change in participants and their organizations. Adult learning theory, experiential learning theory, and Holton's (1996) HRD Evaluation Model are used to evaluate STP Walk Rally.

Adult Learning

Cross (1982) stated that people working in adult learning situations should apply four fundamental principles.

1. Present new information only if it is meaningful and practical.

2. Present only one idea or concept at a time--to help adults integrate it with their existing knowledge.

3. Present information in a manner that permits mastery. Adults maintain the ability to learn throughout their lifetime.

4. Use feedback and frequent summarization to facilitate and foster retention and recall.

Applying Cross's first principle, throughout the course, information is presented at an appropriate time. Participants might not understand what is going on while experiencing the activities. Trainers help participants search for answers by themselves. However, the activities in STP Walk Rally are contrived and artificial. As none of the activities in STP Walk Rally occur in real life, the feedback received may not be very meaningful.

As to the second principle, in the debriefing sessions, the participants are asked to integrate what they have learned and how they can use their learning in the workplace. Contrary to the principle, many ideas are presented at a time in the debriefings. Participants might be confused by trainers' references.

For the third principle, experiential training encourages participants to learn at their own pace. Participants of different ages are able to take this course at the same time. However, competition in the STP Walk Rally is contrary to this principle as mastery allows everyone to succeed. Becker (1998) stated that the downside of using games in training is that games tend to spotlight inequalities among participants' verbal skills, physical coordination, or intellectual prowess. "They create winners and losers, and the losers remember it" (p. 79).

For the last principle, videotaping can be a great tool for giving feedback. It has recorded the actual reactions of the participants that might differ from their recollections of the activities. However, the feedback is not provided frequently. There are only two debriefings during the three-day training.

Experiential Learning

Kolb and Fry (1975) presented an experiential learning cycle. The cycle includes (a) concrete experience, (b) observation and reflections, (c) formalization of abstract concepts and generalizations, and (d) testing implications of concepts in new situations. This cycle is continuous because the last step, involving the application of learned concepts, leads to new concrete experiences and the beginning of another cycle.

STP Walk Rally uses the experiential learning cycle for designing the activities in Phase II. This cycle includes (a) having the experiences on the first-round walk; (b) observing and reflecting on the experiences through the videotape and comments by staff and participants; (c) debriefing or analyzing the experience by discussing thoughts and feelings about the relationship of the experience to real life; and (d) applying the results of the analyses to the second-round walk. The two-round walks, videotape reflection, and debriefing make the STP Walk Rally a complete variant of the experiential learning cycle. However, some companies ask for one-round of the walk only, which is contrary to the continuous cycle concept.

It is clear that experiential learning is a participatory approach to training in which learners do things rather than sit and listen to a lecture. Bruner (1996) stated that some things are learned best by actually doing them. Much research has been done comparing the effectiveness of experiential training with that of traditional classroom training. Lumlert (1994) conducted research on the efficiency of Walk Rally training in the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand. According to her research, Walk Rally training improved trainees' decision making, self-control, and planning skills, while traditional classroom training improved only decision making. However, this research did not conduct pre-test assessment.

Hayward suggested that using a combination of outdoor courses with some classroom training works best (in Fryberger, 1995). Lee and Caffarella (1994) claimed that in-class activities can facilitate the synthesis between background knowledge and new knowledge to the

extent that the activities encourage active reflection or problem solving, especially if they are highly interactive. STP Walk Rally has a combination of classroom training and outdoor activities.

Dewey (1929) argued that “it is wrong to see experience as the easy way to learn” (p. 6). However, in experiential learning learners experience real feelings and emotions (Clements, Wagner, & Roland, 1995). STP Walk Rally activities require trainees to commit themselves to team success. With no role-playing, there is no place to hide from one’s feelings (Fryberger, 1995). Yet none of these activities occurs in the workplace.

Holton’s HRD Measurement Model

Holton’s (1996) measurement model is a contemporary evaluation model that has only three outcome measures: learning, individual performance, and organizational results. The first outcome, *learning*, is influenced by trainee reaction, motivation to learn, and ability.

1. *Trainee reaction* plays a critical role in STP Walk Rally. Adams (1997) cited much research about adult play from anthropology, psychology, and education that indicates that play is an important mediator for learning and socialization throughout life. “One way to actively engage learners is to use play in training and development programs” (p. 881). Many groups of participants prefer playing games to sitting for lectures.

Thai people want “sanuk” (play) through games and experiential activities instead of boring traditional classroom training. Komin’s (1990) study in Thailand found that fun-pleasure values function as the imperative mechanism as a means to support and maintain more important interpersonal interaction values. Fun is a part of the STP Walk Rally program. However, fun cannot guarantee that participants will learn more. In addition, it is not easy to involve every trainee in playing every activity.

2. *Motivation to learn*, according to Holton (1996), has a direct relationship with learning. The four variables that influence the degree of motivation are readiness for the intervention, job attitudes, personal characteristics, and motivation to transfer learning. Motivation to transfer will be discussed in the performance outcomes section. One way to improve the intervention readiness for STP Walk Rally is to present the list of things that participants should prepare before attending the course. For example, the trainees should bring comfortable clothes and shoes and have a medical examination.

Job attitude and personal characteristics are independent variables that can affect training success. If the trainees have positive job attitudes, it is likely that they will be more motivated to learn and will have better training outcomes. Personal characteristics, such as self-efficacy, locus of control, and need achievement, have been shown to influence motivation to learn. On the other hand, there is much research on OBET that has attempted to measure without much success these three characteristics as training outcomes (Kolb, 1993; Parker, 1992; Robitscheck, 1993; Taragos, 1993). Without a pre-test, no one can assume that these three characteristics are training outcomes.

3. *Ability* has a direct impact on learning. Holton (1996) noted that heterogeneity in groups' cognitive abilities tends to influence positively training outcomes. Recognition of this is built into the structure of the STP Walk Rally groups as well. The participants normally come from different departments in a company.

The second outcome, *individual performance*, is influenced by motivation to transfer, transfer climate, and transfer design. *Transfer motivation* falls into four categories: intervention fulfillment, learning outcomes, job attitudes, and expected utility. Expected utility will be discussed in the organizational results section.

Intervention fulfillment and job attitudes are independent factors that are beyond the control of training management, but they are considered to be influences on performance outcome. *Transfer climate* and *transfer design* are met by debriefing in STP Walk Rally which helps participants to apply what they have learned in the workplace.

However, in the Thai culture, debriefing, which includes criticizing participants in front of each other, is difficult for Thais. “Face-saving” and “kreng jai” or “ego preserving” are key criteria in relationships. As a result, straightforward negative performance feedback, strong criticism, and face-to-face confrontation techniques must be avoided (Komin, 1990). Becker (1998) presented two incidents in which people who lose face experience significant consequences, leading to decreased learning and withdrawal, antagonism, and sabotage.

The third outcome, influences on *organizational results*, is linked to organizational goals, expected utility or payoff, and external factors. STP Walk Rally has both strengths and weaknesses in this area.

1. Linkage to *organizational goals* can be done from the beginning. Front-end analysis must begin with organizational analysis to identify the highest priority opportunities for performance improvement (Swanson, 1994). STP Walk Rally provides both interviews and questionnaires for the client as a form of training needs assessment. However, the organizational analysis is not required for every company. Further, a comprehensive analysis might well lead to interventions other than STP Walk Rally.

2. *Expected utility or payoff measure* is recommended to determine whether or not the OBET program is a warranted investment of resources. Swanson and Gradous (1988) suggested that financial benefits should be forecasted before the intervention begins. The result of the STP Walk Rally could be measured in terms of financial benefits, but this has not been done. Reduction in absenteeism and employee turnover and improvement in productivity can be calculated as financial benefits. Also, the psychological benefit or quality of work life during and after training should be considered as a return of investment (ROI). Ewert (1989) agreed that the goal of OBET is not only to improve an individual’s physical performance but also to enhance the person’s cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral skills to achieve lifelong physical and emotional well-being. Currently, organizations in Thailand consider encouraging employees to become “khon-kheng khon-dee,” intellectual

and moral persons (Kampu-Na-Ayuthaya, Na-Chiangmai, & Thongwiwat, 1993).

3. As *external factors* outside the realm of training can affect the organizational results, they need to be identified and controlled for in the design.

Recommendations for Practice

Designing experiential training is not an easy task. The following are some recommendations for future development of STP Walk Rally in Thailand.

- Because of *kreng-jai* (ego-preserving) and face-saving, participants may be more comfortable in giving feedback by writing a diary to reflect on their thoughts and feelings and by providing written feedback.
- STP Walk Rally seems to lack mechanisms for shaping the participants' future. Using scenarios is recommended. A scenario is "a tool for ordering one's perceptions about the future environments in which decisions might be played out" (Schwartz, 1996). Participants should have opportunities to think about how they can transfer what they learn to the workplace.
- The course should not be the same every time because each client company has different needs and culture. The program should be tailored for the individual client. Also, the activities should be altered to meet specific objectives. Organizational analysis is a must.
- The trainer should play a key role in developing both individuals and the organization. Rothwell et al. (1995) recommended that the trainer's role be broadened to include consulting with participant organizations to ensure organizational support for improved performance after training. Otherwise, the performance cannot be maintained for very long.
- Evaluation is needed for improvement of the program. To determine the impact of the participants' characteristics on experiential learning, pre- and post-test evaluation should be provided to measure the real

training effect. To protect against post-test euphoria, the post-test should not be conducted right after the training. STP Walk Rally to date has used only post-test evaluation.

- At least two rounds of the STP Walk Rally should be run each time. Trainers should refuse to run one-day sessions.

Recommendations for Research

There is a paucity of research in Thailand in this field. Both qualitative and quantitative research studies are recommended. Miner (1993) found different results from qualitative and quantitative methods on team building through experience-based training. Nonparticipant observation and other qualitative methods suggested that training had a strong impact on participants and on the company. However, quantitative research found that the training did not result in significant differences. In contrast, Reina (1995) found that both quantitative and qualitative results partially supported the hypothesis that physical touch in the context of adventure training within work teams significantly and positively impacted trust. Thus, both research paradigms are necessary and useful.

An experimental research design is highly recommended to include both pre- and post-tests. Most research on OBET uses only a pre-test. Moreover, follow-up tests should be provided to confirm learning outcomes and to protect against post-test euphoria. Ibbetson (1995) provided evidence that a team development intervention had an immediate, short-term, positive effect on the group as a whole but had no long-term effect. Wagner and Roland (1992) noted that programs with long duration would allow a better comparison.

Conclusion

STP Walk Rally seems to have both strengths and weaknesses based on adult learning theory, experiential learning theory, and Holton's HRD evaluation and measurement model.

The STP Walk Rally's strengths are (a) activity design that encourages participants to learn at their own pace; (b) learning cycle that (usually) completes the experiential learning cycle; (c) a learning setting that combines an outdoor course with classroom training; and (d) fun during the training that creates a better learning environment. However, fun cannot guarantee that participants learn.

Weaknesses in the STP Walk Rally are (a) STP activities that do not occur in real life; (b) competition that creates winners and losers; (c) time consuming; and (d) debriefing that criticizes in front of others. In Thai culture, face-saving and "kreng jai" are common attributes that cannot be ignored during the debriefing.

Without needed research on STP Walk Rally, it is difficult to credit it with success. Before such an analysis takes place, the basic design of STP Walk Rally needs to be modified based upon this analysis so that it more closely matches what is already known through theory.¹

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