



Adventure-Based Experiential Learning Instructors' Perceptions and Expectations of an Industry Governing Body

Abstract

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This descriptive-interpretive qualitative study aimed to determine the expectations of instructors working in the Adventure-based Experiential Learning industry of a potential industry governing body. 23 Participants from across South Africa completed an online descriptive survey that revealed four central sub-themes: (1) Function; (2) Determine; (3) Guidance and (4) Centralised access. Participants highlighted the necessity and specific requirements of a South African professional body to provide a distinct career path for instructors. Considering the responsibilities of an industry body, participants expressed a strong concern for payment and employment conditions, whereas standards received strong agreement from the participants. It would require careful evaluation of the variety of fields instructors operate in, the specific requirements for each one of the fields and the expectations of the relevant industry role-players. This study was the first to provide insights into industry body requirements from a South African instructor's point of view, and these insights can assist in creating a reputable and well-recognised industry.

Keywords Adventure-based experiential learning, career path, instructor, governing body

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Introduction

South African (SA) instructors working in the adventure-based experiential learning (AEL) industry encounter a multitude of personal and professional obstacles that can hinder work satisfaction and growth (Swanepoel, 2010). These challenges mirror the international landscape where instructors face challenges such as insufficient income, retirement constraints, type of employment, working hours and time spent away from home (Priest & Gass, 2017). The inability to find and maintain a work-life balance can lead to burnout or instructors leaving the industry for better employment opportunities (Ley, 2015; Priest & Gass, 2017; Swanepoel, 2010). Additionally, instructors also face industry challenges. Various terms are used interchangeably to describe an instructor such as outdoor educator, facilitator, outdoor guide, or outdoor leader (Povilaitis et al., 2019; Priest & Gass, 2017; Thomas, 2010). The lack of standard and distinguishable naming conventions not only causes uncertainty for those performing the role but also when hiring new employees and instructing existing employees, leading to a disjointed industry (Povilaitis et al., 2019). Despite SA instructors having access to numerous training and development opportunities, the lack of a structured and recognised industry governing body can result in the absence of a formally defined professional path (Priest & Gass, 2017; Snyman, 2020; Zygmunt, 2014). In the absence of career path criteria or regulations, AEL instructors have to endure continuous training when appointed by new service providers (Priest & Gass, 2017), restricting the instructor's ability to switch employment as each service provider requires a different skill set (Gory, 2006). Creating an industry governing body that prescribes a professional career path will not only assist AEL instructors but also service providers, employers, and educational institutions with a thorough grasp of instructor roles and requirements and can assist in recruitment, development, and training practices for the AEL industry (Collins & Collins, 2012; Wagstaff, 2016). The purpose of this article was to determine the considerations that deserve attention when compiling a potential mandate for the governing body to ensure that the body accurately represents the instructor.

Literature review

Originating from adventure programming, AEL is a broad term to describe the use of adventure to accomplish specific goals in experiential learning programmes (Weilbach, 2007) and is important to the greater SA adventure industry (Snyman, 2020). AEL programmes are developed based on physical activities that provide experiences where participants are stretched beyond their natural limits to reach a state of disequilibrium and through the process of reflection, or debriefing, encourage change that can be educational, developmental, and intrinsically motivating (Snyman, 2020). To ensure meaningful experiences for participants, careful consideration is placed when combining the physical and social environment, experiential learning, participant/s, instructor influence and reflection into a programme (Beringer & Martin, 2003). The instructor serves as the crucial link between the AEL experience and the participant, taking moral and ethical responsibility for group procedures and safety, as well as ensuring that the group outcomes are achieved (Priest & Gass, 2017; Thomas, 2010). For this article, the term instructor would be used to represent the role of a properly trained and experienced individual who is responsible to lead and facilitate safe adventure learning experiences to achieve participant and/or group needs.

Several researchers highlighted the significant impact instructors have on the participant's experiences in wilderness or adventure programmes (Povilaitis et al., 2019; Priest & Gass, 2017; Thomas, 2010). As the requirements of these programmes differ, instructors require specific training tailored to each programme's demands (Bobilya et al., 2014; Zygmunt, 2014). This emphasizes the importance of instructors trained on relevant learning theories and models to enhance the learning experience for both participants and instructors themselves (Schumann et al., 2009). Moreover, instructors should consider participant readiness and their own involvement when planning activities (Bobilya et al., 2014). Opposed to normal adventure



experiences, AEL involves reflection and facilitation. It is therefore crucial for instructors to use effective facilitation techniques to promote meaningful experiences and provoke change in thoughts and behaviours (Martin et al., 2017; Priest & Gass, 2017). Inadequate facilitation may not only harm the reputation of the service provider but also that of the industry (Priest & Gass, 2017). To protect an industry, different industry bodies, with different intended purposes, can be formulated. Governing bodies advocate for the interest of the public, while professional bodies advocate for the profession (Wardle et al., 2013) and formulate and enforce the fundamental standards for professional conduct and education practice, allowing them to manage public complaints and discipline non-compliant members accordingly. Professional bodies also lobby for professions by implementing credentialing that would serve as an accountability and promotional benchmark for individuals and organisations. Supplementary, they host yearly conferences and educational and training opportunities and represent the industry by building connections with local, national, and international regulatory bodies to establish industry standards (Speelman et al., 2021; Wardle et al., 2013). For this study, the term governing body will be used as an umbrella term to represent a professional industry body that represents the interest of the instructor.

In the United States of America (USA), the Association of Experiential Education (AEE) was created to focus on experiential adventure programming and formulated to offer a universally accepted benchmark for appraising the professionalism of experiential and adventure programmes (Association of Experiential Education [AEE], 2023). In the UK, adventure instructors have access to a career path through The Institute for Outdoor Learning (Institute for Outdoor Learning [IOL], 2023) that offers professional development (individual accreditation, continuing professional development, training courses and employment portal); community (access to a network of events and industry experts); voice (promoting and fostering collaboration and dialogues amongst the industry and government level) and guidance (presenting through code of conduct and industry journal the current data and best practices) (IOL, 2023). Similarly, The Outdoor Council of Australia (OCA) strives to signify the views and requirements of outdoor educators, leaders, and guides to the community, industries, and all levels of government, as well as organisations that support leadership or are otherwise involved in the training of outdoor educators, leaders, and guides through their respective bodies (Outdoor Council of Australia [OCA], 2023). In Germany, the government do not acknowledge experiential and outdoor learning as a profession, but an instructor can obtain activity certification (K Rothmeier, personal communication August 17, 2023; M Sands, personal communication May 30, 2023). Efforts to create a standardised and governed industry in Germany, similar to the outcomes mentioned by the organisations in the United Kingdom (UK) and Australia have been implemented by the Federal Association of Individual and Experiential Education (Federal Association of Individual and Experiential Education, 2023). Despite the absence of AEL-specific governing bodies in the UK and Australia, the presence of adventure professional bodies looking out for instructors operating in the adventure programming field is pertinent. Considering the problems instructors face, SA should consider a governing body that caters for all adventure instructors. As instructors are key stakeholders in the AEL industry, this article aims to provide insights into AEL instructors' perspectives and expectations of a governing body. A governing body could potentially assist SA in streamlining and consolidating rules, pertinent legislation, training and education, professional industry practices and ultimately the professionalisation of the industry.

Methods

The study followed a descriptive-interpretive qualitative research design. Purposive criteria-based sampling was used to recruit participants. The prearranged set of criteria stipulated that the participant must apply AEL concepts during programmes that he/she presents; be working in the AEL industry for the past two years and should currently be working within the borders of SA. Due to the absence of a formal database or list of instructors in SA (Venter, 2011), snowball sampling was also used to recruit participants. Participants had to complete an online descriptive survey. The survey consisted of 11 questions divided into two sections: Section 1 concentrated on the background information of the participant regarding demographical variables, employment history, current affiliations, insurance, and training and development. Section 2 focused on the role, value, responsibilities and recommendations of a potential governing body. All questions in this section used open-ended questions, except the question pertaining to the responsibilities of a potential governing body, which used a combination of a 4-point Likert scale (1–strongly disagree to 4–strongly agree) and open-ended questions to acquire a deeper understanding of specific expected responsibilities of a governing body (standards, grading, code of conduct, database, training and development, disciplinary action, insurance, payment, and employment conditions). The survey took no longer than 30 minutes to complete and was available for three months. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) IBM software calculated the descriptive statistics (frequency and percentages) for the closed-ended questions relating to the background information question and the Likert scale sub-questions. The frequencies of the Likert scale sub-questions were not used to determine the themes, and sub-themes for this study but rather to indicate the agreement with the indicated question that related to the specific responsibilities and expectations of a governing body. ATLAS.ti as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software was used to guide the inductive content analysis process. The conformability of the study was obtained by using an external co-coder.

Results and discussion

The findings of this study are based on 23 participants (male=65.2%; female=34.8%) aged between 21-65 years old. Four participants had a minimum of two years of experience as an instructor and four participants had more than 20 years of experience in the industry. During the time of data collection, only 13 participants were employed: nine participants permanently and four per project. Participants represented seven of the nine provinces in SA, namely 7 (30.4%) from Gauteng;



5 (21.7%) from Limpopo; 5 (21.7%) from Western Cape; 2 (8.7%) respectively from Kwa-Zulu Natal and North West; and the Free State and Eastern Cape with only 1 (4.3%) participant each. Data analysis yielded four themes, as displayed in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of themes and subthemes with frequency scores (N=23)

Theme	Qualitative Sub-theme	Frequency (%)*			
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
FUNCTION	Role and value	-	-	-	-
	Interaction	-	-	-	-
DETERMINE	Industry Standards	0%	0 (0%)	8 (34.8%)	15 (65.2%)
	Training and development	0%	3 (13.0%)	12 (52.2%)	8 (34.8%)
	Code of conduct	0%	1 (4.3%)	11 (47.8%)	11 (47.8%)
	Grading	0%	0 (0%)	10 (43.5%)	13 (56.5%)
GUIDANCE	Payment and employment conditions	1 (4.3%)	4 (17.4%)	7 (30.4%)	11 (47.8%)
	Disciplinary action	0%	3 (13.0%)	13 (56.5%)	7 (30.4%)
	Insurance assistance	0%	4 (17.4%)	10 (43.5%)	9 (39.1%)
CENTRALISED ACCESS	Database	0%	1 (4.3%)	11 (47.8%)	11 (47.8%)

* Frequencies were not used to determine the themes, but rather to indicate the agreement of the participants (INS) to the specific responsibilities

Theme 1: Function

Before specific requirements and expectations are explored it is important to establish the overall function the governing body would fulfil. The function is provided by the following sub-themes: *Role and value*, and *Interaction*.

Sub-theme 1: Role and value

Participants were asked from a personal perspective what the role and value of a governing body would be. INS16 encapsulated the role: “To regulate and ensure that all activities, experience, training and personnel are qualified and act appropriately with regards to safety of all involved as well as set a baseline for ethical and moral standards”. A strong sense for industry uniformity was reflected as: “... to work with other, related bodies, both government and non-government ...” (INS22); “...They would create some credibility in the industry and help develop AEL instructors that understand this can be a career...” (INS05) and “... it will motivate people to take this industry more serious, with all the risks that are involved as well as the benefits this industry has to offer...” (INS14). The value of establishing an industry governing body, according to Gory (2006), is that it can create a single entity to whom participants may turn to verify the reliability of instructors and service providers; promote consistency in training, certification, and accreditation; and encourage career development and growth. Not only will this assist in solving societal problems but it will create an industry that, despite its diverse nature, is organised and ensures high standards of professional conduct (Zygmunt, 2014). To establish a governing body, INS08 indicated the importance of industry background and experience: “Get people with experience and not someone sitting in an office, not knowing what’s the true meaning of AEL”. Considering the King IV Code of Corporate Governance that was compiled by the King committee to guide SA governing bodies and organisations regarding good corporate governance, this links to principle seven of the King IV code: “The governing body should comprise the appropriate balance of knowledge, skills, experience, diversity and independence for it to discharge its governance role and responsibilities objectively and effectively” (Institute of Directors in South Africa, 2021).

Sub-theme 2: Interaction

In 1997, Jens Rasmussen introduced a risk management model that emphasized the relationship between role-players (such as government, regulators/ professional bodies, organisations, their management and employees, and the task) and guiding indicators (legislation, standards, regulations, policies and procedures). This model highlights the importance of a governing body to advise the government regarding accidents and relevant safety standards. This advice influences governmental legislation and requires the governing body to guide the organisations on necessary changes (Rasmussen, 1997). Playing the advisory role necessitates knowledge and experience as pointed out by INS01: “They should have a background of the industry” to influence the direction and focus of legislation and standards. In addition, INS22 indicated that a governing body should: “...1. liaison with rest of the adventure sector, 2. liaison with government, 3. provide support, information and communication for members on a wide variety of relevant subjects ...”. To ensure effective communication: “A very good communication system should be set in place, to ensure that the employees and employers know exactly what is happening and expected of them” (INS14). This continuous interaction can lead to a well-informed, up-to-date and relevant governing body that can enhance the professionalisation of the industry.

Theme 2: Determine

This theme relates to determining the relevant *Industry standards*, *Training and development*, *Code of conduct* and *Grading* requirements that would ensure compliance with the relevant industry legislation.

Sub-theme 1: Industry standards



Industry standards, created by industry governing bodies, are the minimum best practices to follow, as opposed to government legislation that is formulated and enforceable by the government (Cruikshank & Garland, 2023; Harmon & Johnson, 2012). All participants agreed to the question of whether a governing body should be responsible for industry standards. From an instructor perspective, INS02 highlighted specific requirements as "...proper standards of training, safety and the qualifications are expected elsewhere...". These standards should be realistic and achievable, as INS13 indicated: "Standards should be high but still obtainable to those that are willing to work in following them". Designing user-friendly standards can lead to efficiency and effectiveness (Carden et al, 2021). A governing body should formulate industry standards for compliance by instructors and service providers, as indicated by INS09: "...especially when it comes to ensuring that the qualified guides are certified, and organisations are accredited..." Wilson and Knutson (2012) cautioned that since industry standards are used as the yardstick for litigation, should an accident transpire, the onus is on both the instructor and the service provider to prove that they adhered to the industry standards (Harmon & Johnson, 2012). The concern however remains the enforcement of these standards: "Offer some form of enforcement of these standards. Doesn't help there are standards, but transgressions are not reported or dealt with." (INS05). The potential for disciplinary action is discussed in further detail under disciplinary action.

Sub-theme 2: Training and development

Answers to the question of whether the governing body should be responsible for relevant training and development opportunities at regular intervals varied: "I don't think that the Governing Body should be responsible for training and development, but it should be responsible for laying down the requirements needed for instructors" (INS12) and "To continually help instructors update their skills and personal development" (INS02). Nationally recognised programmes should assist in the development of a skilled instructor and simplify the process of switching employment without adjusting their skill set (Gory, 2006). Improving the employability and suitability of an instructor runs parallel with offering sound education and training (Meltzer et al, 2020; Oliver, 2010; Paisley et al., 2008; Schumann et al., 2009; Sibthorp et al., 2011). Formal education through obtaining a relevant degree, in-house training programmes or practical training can be used to develop the skills of an instructor (Ley, 2015). Only 17.4% of the participants did not have any form of formal training as opposed to the participants that indicated they are formally trained, including one or more of the following options: degree (34.8%); diploma (21.7%); short courses (52.2%); and in-house training (43.5%). Additional training requirements included: "Training and development must be affordable, relevant and planned with AEL-specific outcomes in mind" (INS23); and "To identify one or two institutions that can offer a certain qualification.... That will make it easy for facilitators to be recognized by different companies that require their services" (INS04). Training should not just be limited to formal education opportunities, as highlighted by INS14: "If change occurs, they need to train their members on new policies, ethical procedures, practical techniques and standards". Supplementary it should encourage continuous development, especially as it is beneficial for the instructor, the provider and the broader community (Glasser, 2015). This is reflected by INS16: "...for an AEL instructor or owner to ensure that they still belong to the governing body they must attend continuous development seminars, this will ensure the growth of the experiences, activities, and all individuals involved." An instructor's behaviour is significantly influenced by their traits and can be taught by senior employees and administrators (Povilaitis et al., 2019). Mentorship can be employed as a form of individualised training that is offered by an industry expert specifically for the environment in which the instructor is anticipated to work (O'Connell et al., 2015; Priest & Gass, 2005; Wagstaff, 2016).

Sub-theme 3: Code of conduct

A code of conduct, also known as a code of ethics, represents written rules that members of a governing body should adhere to (Martin et al., 2006). The absence of a code of conduct was accentuated by INS16: "Without a code of conduct everyone involved will do as they please and that will not help anyone, and a code of conduct will protect every AEL involved individual". Participants were asked to consider if the governing body should construct a code of conduct that instructors need to adhere to and will be evaluated against as part of a grading system. INS21 agreed and stated: "There should be a proper code of conduct to ensure that instructors know what to do and what not to do, rules and regulations are important". In addition, the formulation of the code of conduct should also be considered, as INS12 stated: "This must be carefully formulated and must be relevant and acceptable to all operating companies". The code of conduct should hold relevance to the industry role-players, and this can only be done if the code of conduct is formulated by expert industry role-players as they possess practical knowledge of the requirements. Failure to do so could prompt governments to create alternative regulations, tailored to their administrative convenience, with limited comprehension of operational procedures (Stonehouse, 2001). Regardless if an instructor is permanently or temporarily employed, they should act in the best interest of the participant in a manner that represents a sensible professional (Martin et al., 2006). The necessity of a code of conduct to enhance professionalism in the industry was highlighted by INS23: "A code of conduct will help in establishing an operational protocol on safety and professionalism". The establishment of conduct guidelines, according to Priest & Gass (2017), is regarded as a milestone in upholding industry professionalism. Despite the benefit of a code of conduct to assist in developing and maintaining professionalism, it can hold several challenges such as the perception of over-regulation, ineffective monitoring practices and the exploitation for marketing benefits (Issaverdis, 2001).

Sub-theme 4: Grading

All participants agreed with the provided statement relating to grading in the questionnaire: Ensure instructors are graded according to a set scale that is based on skills, training and experience, which can ultimately aid employability and



remuneration. The grading process should be transparent and uncomplicated as mentioned by INS09: “The grading should be fair and not too difficult or take too long to happen. Because the instructor/trainee might lose interest and not want to complete training for grading”. The fundamentals for grading varied: “Grade facilitators/operators/guides on knowledge, skills, and experience” (INS13); “I would see multiple levels of grading that provide continuity” (INS14). These requirements are similar to the four instructor levels (novice, emergent, proficient and exemplary instructors) categorised by Priest and Gass (2017) that are based on experience together with problem-solving, decision-making and sound judgement as a benchmark. Therefore, performing the duties of an instructor while working with a variety of groups throughout time and gaining the necessary experience is the best way for an instructor to develop insightful knowledge and exposure in the industry (Martin et al., 2006; Mitten & Clement, 2007). With more experience, instructors can increase their own knowledge, skills, and abilities allowing them to exercise the necessary judgement and decision-making where required (Galloway, 2007; Hobbs, 2009).

Compiling a grading system would not be an easy process, as highlighted by IN07: “Not everybody is doing the same thing or has the same clients needs”. In a study conducted by Mueller and Sands (2017), it was concluded that is extremely difficult to design a competency model as the required competencies and roles of an instructor vary (Marchand et al., 2019; Mueller & Sands, 2017). According to Guthrie (2001), despite variations in the mission, philosophy, programmatic emphasis, and technical skills among the three major influential entities in the adventure education profession (Outward Bound, National Outdoor Leadership School and The Wilderness Education Association), there exists a convergence in certain competencies, standards, and practices. An instructor who possesses the necessary expertise in these fundamental competencies, standards, and practices, has the potential to secure a position at any of these influential entities. In such a scenario, the instructor would solely need to acquire training on cultural norms and practices specific to the organisation (Guthrie, 2001).

Theme 3: Guidance

The sub-themes: Payment and employment conditions, Disciplinary action and Insurance assistance are clustered to form the Guidance theme, suggesting that a governing body could rather guide industry role-players on the sub-themes instead of determining the sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Payment and Employment Conditions

Participants were asked to consider if the grading scale can be used to provide minimum payment rates and ensure that employment conditions as set out in employment legislation are adhered to. Opposing this statement, INS22 said:

“Pay rates are governed by law already and although recommended minimum pay guidelines can be set, the governing body cannot enforce these. Adherence to basic conditions of employment should form part of the code of conduct that applies to operators and that can used in terms of a disciplinary procedure. The actual investigation into any alleged transgressions of the legal conditions of employment would need to be pursued through the relevant government channels though (not through the governing body as this is not its area of expertise)”.

This is true in SA, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (BCEA) serves as the governing legislation that establishes the fundamental working conditions of employees and a general minimum wage for all workers is stipulated by the National Minimum Wage Act (Harrison et al., 2023). A sector or industry can govern its own conditions through a bargaining council agreement, which subsequently supersedes the BCEA with some minor expectations (Harrison et al., 2023). Despite INS05 suggesting that a governing body can: “... set examples of working hours, contracts...”, the participant also highlighted the potential problem for the industry to provide a standardised classification for payment and working conditions:

“...with the field being varied it is tricky. A rural venue will pay less per day, but you will receive meals and accommodation, a metropolitan area might pay more per day but there is no option of accommodation and meals, so this is not a clear-cut situation, and it is also not a clear-cut kind of job”.

INS21 provided a one-sided view of the current state of payment and working conditions: “At the moment in our industry instructors are being paid minimum wages and employment conditions are not even close to standards and it would help if there was help from a governing body to change the circumstances in which instructors work under”. Even if this is a generalised view of all instructors in the industry, Swanepoel reported in 2010 that SA instructors experience personal limitations in passion; employment location, promotion, income, work benefits, being over- or under-qualified; and time constraints (Swanepoel, 2010). In addition to personal challenges, SA instructors experience numerous service provider and industry challenges that can lead to work dissatisfaction. Varying standard application, inconsistent decision-making or agreements, ignorance of instructor viewpoints or concerns; organisational structures that are either lacking or excessively rigid; increased workload as a result of insufficient planning or vague communication; organisational recognition and appreciation; and freedom to speak openly with management or co-workers about personal and professional difficulties (Swanepoel, 2010). The inability to find a work-life balance can lead to burnout or instructors leaving the industry to find a more suitable position (Ley, 2015; Priest & Gass, 2017; Swanepoel, 2010). Despite the mentioned problems, opposition and challenges, a standardised payment scale would be welcomed. The payment scale should be: “...according to an instructor's knowledge levels and qualification...” (INS18) and:

“A standard payment scale for employers (permanent, per project or temporary), as this will ensure that no instructor gets paid less for the work they are doing. This will assist companies and businesses to know exactly what to pay an instructor when employing or using them. It will also help instructors to know they get paid according to their experience and training.” (INS14).



Financial support according to Priest & Gass (2017) entails an employee receiving compensation according to the role they fulfil and the expected level of performance. Unfortunately, without role clarity for an instructor (Povilaitis et al., 2019; Priest & Gass, 2017; Thomas, 2010), and the difficulties in creating a grading scale that is based on knowledge, skills and experience as highlighted under the Grading sub-theme, a standardised payment scale will not be a reality. Being an instructor was not always the anticipated profession for many, yet Huynh & Torquati (2019), reported that the participants (instructors) in his study spoke passionately and energetically about their work. To ensure that SA has instructors who are passionate and energetic about their position in and perspective of an industry that offers so many opportunities, careful consideration should be placed when forming a governing body and industry-specific legislation to guide employment conditions and payment scales.

Sub-theme 2: Disciplinary Action

The question regarding disciplinary action referred to whether a governing body should be responsible for disciplinary action. Typically, a governing body prescribes the professional norms that members need to abide by in the code of conduct, and transgression of the rules should hold some consequence (Wardle et al., 2013). Some participants did not agree that a governing body should implement disciplinary action: “Just like any other companies, disciplinary action should be taken care of by service providers or employers” (INS07). SA employers should deal with employee disciplinary matters equitably and respectfully as stipulated in the Labour Relations Act (Harrison et al., 2023). Even if the responsibility lies with the service provider for normal employee transgressions, INS10 recommended: “Discipline action is related to employer and client, but actions and results of such things should be recorded on the database”. In contrast, some participants felt that a governing body could play a role in disciplinary action as INS16 indicated: “If an instructor or owner breaks the code of conduct, standards or any other rules action after an investigation must be taken, to ensure the quality and standards of AEL”. INS14 felt that a governing body should rather assist members in the event of incidents and only act in the event of serious transgressions: “If something might happen in the field, with members involved or responsible for the action, the governing body should assist their member in this process. ... They should take action and advocate for clients in illegal and dangerous situations”. The motivation or purpose of disciplinary action should be carefully judged as stated by INS23: “Disciplinary action must be approached as an aid to improve rather than to discredit instructors”. In addition, INS23 recommended that disciplinary action should not just be directed at the instructor but should also be implemented for service providers: “The governing body should also pick up and address businesses and companies using uncertified and untrained employees.” In the occurrence of an accident or incident, it is found that the provider knowingly employed an instructor that is not trained or qualified posing a threat to the participants, it could be classified as negligent hiring or retention (Wilson & Knutson, 2012). Unlike the healthcare sector, where transgression can lead to the revocation of a practitioner license, the adventure industry is not officially recognised as a profession and therefore there are no formal repercussions for instructors deviating from the established standards (Martin et al., 2006). Reviewing the available information to instructors who want to form part of a governing body, there was clear information on the benefits and guidelines of the governing body, but none referred to the consequences in failure to comply (AEE, 2023; IOL, 2023). To foster the growth of an emerging profession, Martin et al. (2006) suggested the need to ascertain professional expertise and the consequences of deviating from it.

Sub-theme 3: Insurance Assistance

Credentialing cannot guarantee the occurrence of accidents, however, it can reduce the risk of negligence, which can assist instructors and service providers to benefit from potential lower insurance premiums (Gory, 2006). By being a member of the AEE, the member has access to lower liability insurance as the insurance companies recognise that the AEE and its members are committed to the standards of practice and reducing the risks of accidents, and therefore reducing the insurance cost (Martin et al., 2006). When asked if the governing body should ensure that instructors must have insurance that is underwritten by an approved insurance company/-ies, INS23 agrees: “The governing body can negotiate for a more affordable insurance premium if the governing body approach the insurance companies”. In addition, INS05 commented regarding the role in assisting with insurance: “...can assist with details, discounted rates if possible...”. However, INS10 did not agree and mentioned: “The variety of activities, employment options and fields in adventure education is too wide to standardise an insurance system”. Despite this diversity, service providers in some states in the USA are required by law to possess insurance policies with a minimum liability limit (Wilson & Knutson, 2012). Of the 13 permanently employed participants of this study, only one participant (7.7%) had personal liability cover, and four participants (30.7%) were covered under their employer’s insurance cover. The potential role of a governing body with regard to insurance coverage was highlighted by INS05: “It can be a dangerous and risky industry, thus it should be something the governing body sets in place, as part of being certified and being a member”. In the case of a serious accident, the expenses for legal action and compensation can outweigh the financial capability of the instructor and provider (Wilson & Knutson, 2012). Considering that insurance can cover these costs, this leaves the question for the remaining 61.5% of permanently employed participants what would happen in the unfortunate event of an accident, and how they will cover the potential costs involved. Insurance, together with safety, and liability concerns, according to Ewert & Sibthorp (2014), are some of the factors that can decrease participation numbers. This prompts consideration of whether a governing body can secure lower insurance premiums by enforcing industry standards, benefiting industry growth and instructor recruitment.



Theme 4: Centralised access

Through the use of the internet, wireless technology and cell phones, the industry role-players can access and share information quicker and easily (O'Connell, 2015). Using the technological advancement to their benefit, The National Recreation and Parks Association in the USA, created a national online database, PRORAGIS, that allows the provider to capture essential information regarding their facility, employees, programmes and services (Adams & Schilling, 2015). Posing that a governing body must create and maintain a database of instructors that contains contact details, skill set and qualifications, INS14 highlighted the importance of this:

“This is definitely one of the best responsibilities a governing body could have. This will assist businesses and companies wanting to hire someone permanently, per project or temporary to see the available instructors with their experiences and qualifications etc...include the availability of job offers/ vacancies in this field”

Specific requirements were highlighted as:

“... it will be easy to access for people wanting to have their names on the database as well as the providers looking for instructors on the database...” (INS13); “to keep members up to date and to keep the database up to date with current members/ affiliates” (INS05) and “It should be accessible for all, even schools who want to hire a person for leadership development... so that schools and individuals can also search for camps that cater for their needs.” (INS17).

The need for an extensive national database in SA to assist the relevant industry role-players with registration, employment, training and development as well as industry-related research, was already highlighted by Venter (2011). A database should reflect accident record-keeping to support governing bodies and government decision-making (Salmon et al., 2017). The data can provide benchmarking insights on trends and frequencies regarding activities, programmes and industries over a specific timeframe to improve best practices in the industry (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014). Supplementary, an incident database provides empirical data for participants, parents and insurance companies to accurately assess both the likelihood and seriousness of injuries that could be anticipated during a programme (Ewert & Sibthorp, 2014).

Conclusion

Even though participants were not in agreement on the specific responsibilities of a governing body that was provided in the survey, recommendations were provided to adjust the responsibilities, especially for training and development, code of conduct, pay and employment conditions, disciplinary action, insurance assistance, and database requirements, in order to accurately represent instructors. It was clear that standards received the least opposition, whereas the aspect of payment and employment conditions was referred to frequently indicating an area of concern. The focus of questions in the questionnaire was on the needs of an instructor from a governing body and considering the overlap of certain functions of a governing body and a professional industry association, careful consideration should be placed on the type of industry body that should be formulated. Based on this research and the descriptions of professional industry associations (e.g., Speelman et al., 2021; Wardle et al., 2013), instructors would benefit from a professional body for instructors. Not only should an industry professional body manage the image of the industry whilst protecting its members, but it should ensure training and development opportunities with ample opportunities to practise application (AEE, 2013). These development opportunities should be sustainable, and professional bodies should motivate instructors to develop and maintain knowledge and skills (Guthrie et al, 2012). To ensure the attraction of new instructors and the retention of current instructors, the industry and service providers must afford instructors security in their position and growth opportunities, success in maintaining and adhering to quality; financial support rewarding instructors for function and the level of quality they perform at; and balance through access to time, resources, and support to maintain a professional standard (Priest & Gass, 2017). If the AEL industry can ensure these requirements, not only will instructors have a clear career path, but it will also assist in creating a reputable and well-recognised industry.

The number of participants can be a potential limitation. As 23 participants might not accurately represent all AEL instructors. Some instructors are both AEL instructors and adventure guides to protect their livelihoods. Data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic was detrimental to the industry that relies on in-person contact. Financial and employment constraints might have impacted participation. Data was collected through an online survey, but the survey structure did not provide the anticipated in-depth information due to limited opportunities for further explanation or clarification. Based on the results, a recommendation is to construct a standardised annual survey with reported reliability for industry analysis and decision-making. This will also assist in research purposes and international comparability. Additionally, the clarification of adventure industry terminology for instructors, especially considering the nature of employment. Clarifying roles can benefit the instructors, service providers and the industry overall. Supplementary, it would require the clarification of the different adventure industry fields due to instructors working in multiple fields. Finally, the responsibilities of the professional body should be clearly defined in collaboration with all industry role-players to ensure unity and representation of all interests.

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