

Case Study of 'Blue Watch' on STS Leeuwin¹

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Introduction

The Sail Training Ship (STS) Leeuwin, built in 1986 in Coogee (Western Australia) for Youth Adventure Training, is a 55 metre three masted barquentine as illustrated in Figure 1.

The masts, towering over 30 metres, are square rigged on the foremast and fore-and-aft rigged on the main and mizzen. In addition to the professional crew of five and eight volunteer crew there is accommodation for up to 40 trainees in six cabins with six or eight pipe-cot bunks in tiers of two or three. On each trip, which range from half-day sails to 10-day voyages, trainees are divided into four groups known as watches and each is appointed a watch-leader who is an ex-trainee and usually a peer.

Listed in all quarterly issues of the "Leeuwin Lines", the official publication of the Sail Training Association of WA Inc. (STAWA), the stated objective of Leeuwin Sail Training is personal development and "to help young people mature under adventurous challenge". Specifically, young males and females 16 to 25 years of age are targetted, however, a limited number of older trainees are also on board each voyage. Sources of trainees, therefore, can include education institutions (secondary schools, tertiary institutions and technical/trade schools), business organisations or corporations, individuals or groups from the Department of Community Services, Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), Youth Care agencies, other Government Departments and Authorities, and the general public.

Following preliminary discussions in February 1993 among Leeuwin Board members, professional staff, and several researchers, the Leeuwin Sail Training Foundation Ltd. agreed to the development of a Research Board. This board subsequently became responsible for, among other things, the planning and coordination of research on Leeuwin operations which would hopefully benefit the host organisation and, at the same time, minimise disruption to the ship and trainees. The present study was one of the Research Board's first approved projects, and its purpose was to determine the effects of a specific 10-day STS Leeuwin voyage (#11, Carnarvon - Dampier, 18-28th May, 1993) using a case study approach.

Methods and Procedures

Once trainees were randomly assigned to watches by Leeuwin office staff, all members of 'Blue Watch' were contacted and interviewed by researcher One four weeks prior to the voyage. At this meeting she informed all trainees of the case study project which would involve pre and post-voyage interviews. Trainees were also informed that they were not obliged to participate in the study and could withdraw or opt out of the project at anytime.

Question areas used in the pre-voyage semi-structured interview conducted at the residence of each trainee, are listed in Table 1.

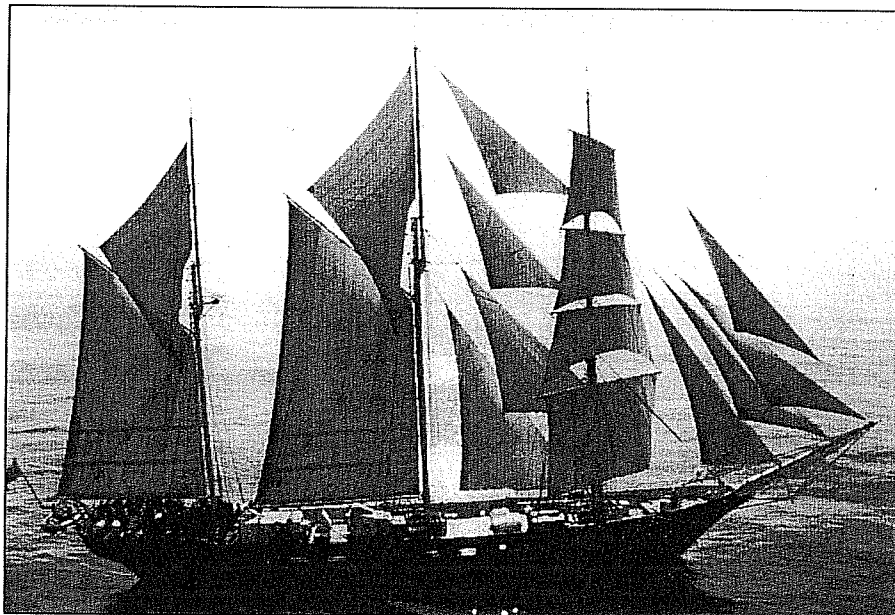


Figure 1 (photograph of Leeuwin)

Table 1: Pre-voyage questions areas

General

Name, age, contact address and telephone number; occupation and/or occupation status Voyage funded by? e.g. DEET, work, school, parents, self

Awareness of STS Leeuwin

How did the trainee become aware of the STS Leeuwin? e.g. advertising, friends, family other contacts

Sighted the Leeuwin previously?

Know of Leeuwin programs, what happens on board?

Previous experiences

Sailed before?

Done any other similar adventure activities before? e.g. wilderness experiences, bushwalking, climbing, absailing etc.

Expectations

Motives for participation? e.g. obliged to do it, holiday/present, challenge, learn to sail, personal development etc.

How do you think it will be like to:

live with a big group of people?

be at sea for a long time?

climb aloft?

other concerns?

Do you:

enjoy mental and physical challenges?

enjoy risk taking activities?

like to set goals in your life?

How do you feel about yourself?

happy?

like to change things about yourself?

confident about this trip and your ability to get along with everyone and enjoy it?

do you like things to be organised and routine in your life or do you like variety?

do you enjoy being part of a team or prefer to work or be on your own?

STS Leeuwin aims

What do you think about Leeuwin's aims in relation to yourself and to this voyage?

The main purpose of the pre-voyage interview was to collect data on both each trainee's personal situation (demographics), and their expectations of the adventure they were about to participate in. These data were recorded, with permission, on tape, transcribed and subsequently passed on to a second researcher (researcher Two) who covertly joined 'Blue Watch' as a trainee. She subsequently observed each of the 'Blue Watch' trainees carefully during the voyage and on two long bus trips (pre-voyage to meet the vessel and post-voyage on the return to Perth). On board she also 'interviewed' each trainee several times to discuss their perceptions and experiences and daily noted these data on tape or as field notes.

'Blue Watch' met at the completion of the voyage and was formally de-briefed and de-briefed by the principal researcher in the presence of researchers One and Two. At this meeting trainees were informed in greater detail about the purposes of the study they had just participated in and were assured that their data would be both kept and reported in strictest confidence. They were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study at anytime. Four months post-voyage, follow-up interview data were collected once more by researcher One, and again at two years post-voyage (April, 1995). The purpose on each occasion was to check the status of each trainee and to ascertain if any changes, attributable to the Leeuwin experience, had stabilised or otherwise.

Results

While complete data on each subject ran for several pages of type-written text, both researchers One and Two agreed that the following 'data summaries' best represented the status of each trainee both pre- and post-voyage. To protect identities, the real names of the 'Blue Watch' trainees have been substituted. The ages listed are those at May, 1993.

Sarah : 19 years, Caucasian female, secretary

Despite her private school education and high socio-economic background, she appeared to lack motivation, direction and interest in her life previous to the Leeuwin voyage. Post-voyage, however, she was "filled with a great deal of motivation and energy" and involved herself in many different physical activities, including sailing. The voyage provided her with the opportunity to live and work with motivated people and she noted this was the most positive aspect of the whole adventure. Immediately post-voyage, therefore, her life was very busy and she made definite plans for overseas travel. However, four months post-voyage she fell into a "hole", felt lost and needed direction to get motivated again. She felt she could not seem to find this from "within herself" and was "searching for inspiration" again. Eventually, however, she did fulfill her dream to travel overseas for a year (backpacking) and found some secretarial work in

London for five months. Two years post-voyage she was considering work in tourism "up North" (WA) but was not interested in making firm plans either for her future or for further trips aboard Leeuwin. She was non-committal on the effects of the Leeuwin voyage on her subsequent life experiences.

Claire: 22 years, Caucasian female, clerk

Her expectations for the voyage were not met at all. She had expected to learn how to sail and, therefore, found the personal development program of no interest to her. She had also expected to be with a group of motivated people for the 10 days and did not enjoy "working with others of a different work ethic". She had previously been on a weekend Leeuwin voyage which placed much less emphasis on the personal development program and had expected a 10-day trip to be similar. While she had enjoyed the voyage, at both four months and two years post-voyage, she reported she "would not be sailing with Leeuwin again".

Jim: 28 years, Caucasian male, carpenter

The voyage surpassed all his expectations which were to meet new people, have a holiday, and to gain a new interest. He did not feel the voyage changed him much personally but had not expected that it would. He did note, however, that he had learned to appreciate "youth at risk". He also developed a "desire to help in the community" and particularly help "these young people in need" - a motive and emotion he had not experienced previously. Immediately post-voyage Jim was asked back as a watch-leader. Two years post-voyage he had attended a watch-leader course "to improve skills and maintain interest". He had also attended college for 12 months to attain his builder's qualification and was back working for himself again. At the time of interview (April, 1995) Jim was keen to get 'Blue Watch' back together again for a Leeuwin sports day and was busy trying to contact everyone.

Bob: 34 years, Caucasian male, clerk

His expectations were met - "good holiday, new experiences, meeting new people". He didn't feel the voyage changed him and noted he was "not on the voyage to be changed". Bob had very little to say for or about himself and, subsequently, his interviews were very short. Two years post-voyage Bob was still in the same job but had "saved up a lot of long service leave" and was planning a six-month trip to the Middle East and Europe next year (1996). He had returned to Leeuwin for some 2-day sails and may do another 10-day sail as purser.

Bill: 18 years, Aboriginal male, long term unemployed, history of petty crime.

Pre-voyage this teenager was apprehensive about the trip but, at the same time, excited. He was retiring, shy, and hard to communicate with but showed, through his reactions to the interview, some potential and desire to achieve. During the voyage he opened up considerably, responded well to all program activities, and achieved a lot. Upon leaving the vessel he was, unfortunately, lost back to "the system" in which he felt "trapped". He was involved in stealing a car which resulted in a 1-week stay in a remand centre (no charges laid), a warning, and community service. A week later he "landed" a labouring job but was soon laid off and back on "the dole" (unemployment benefits). Three months post-voyage an opportunity for work arose on a boat (pearling lugger) restoration project in Fremantle which was offered on the strength of his performance on the Leeuwin. The restoration project supervisor reports were also very favourable - "very dedicated, very keen". Upon completion of that project he was informed of a ship building apprenticeship but due to administration problems the opportunity was lost. Two years post-voyage Bill remains unemployed but still hopeful for work or some sort of a trade apprenticeship. He has crewed on another 10-day Leeuwin voyage as bosun's mate but battles constantly against negative peer pressure. However, he believed he was "keeping above it all and on the road to somewhere".

Jenny: 18 years, Caucasian female, unemployed

Pre-voyage she was unemployed, lacking motivation, "hanging-out with a bad mob". Post-voyage she arrived home with a lot more motivation and self-confidence and found her "old lifestyle" boring and unsatisfactory, and her friends "lazy and going nowhere". Four months post-voyage she was mixing with a group of friends who were more interesting, had jobs, or were studying. She had found a good job, got a new hair cut, improved her appearance, was well presented and happy with her improved self-concept. She reported she had found more confidence to deal with and tolerate other people and their habits, and was transferring this into her work life. She had plans to go back to school and get an education. Two years post-voyage Jenny reported she had been laid off from her initial job and had spent time doing various odd jobs. However, she was recently offered full-time work beginning in May (1995) as a medical receptionist and was very happy about this. She was also thinking of going back to night-school to finish her TEE (Tertiary Entrance Examination) and perhaps go into nursing. She was living at home and getting on much better with her parents. She was not sure how Leeuwin had affected her life experiences but she was keen to do another trip for which her father "would happily pay". She reported greater appreciation of her family and appeared and sounded a lot more confident and mature as a person.

Bruce: 22 years, Aboriginal male, unemployed

Pre-voyage this Aboriginal young man was very apprehensive about the trip and would have benefitted enormously from a pre-voyage briefing. He had not much to say even with a family member present, but opened up considerably during the voyage, was relaxed and appeared to have fun. Unfortunately, he was not able to be contacted personally for either the four month or two year post-voyage interviews, but his father was able to offer the following observations by telephone. In the period immediately following the Leeuwin voyage Bruce had become a lot more confident and assertive and had taken an active interest in his Aboriginal people and culture. More recently he had also initiated travel opportunities up North and down South (WA) and had become more self-responsible regarding employment. Although he was presently unemployed he was working on establishing an apprenticeship in the motor industry.

Perceived Benefit to Trainees

Self-confidence

Post-voyage, Sarah found enough confidence to ask for a pay rise at work and got it despite her personal concerns (pre-voyage) about "hassling the boss". She also finally got herself organised to travel overseas which she had been wanting to do for a long time. Jenny found confidence to get a new job and to drop her friends whom, she realised, were "losers and no-hopers". She now "hangs out" with other friends. Both Bill and Bruce experienced much more confidence in the company and presence of strangers, including those in authority.

Self-esteem

Bill's improved belief in both himself and his abilities led to a much better attitude towards his future and his goal to get on and achieve things. Jenny took greater pride in her appearance and in looking after herself. She also noticed a greater need to "achieve things" and, like Bill, began to set short and long term personal goals.

Motivation

Sarah finally found the motivation to get out and travel which is what she had always wanted to do. Jenny sought out work and became more motivated generally about getting ahead in life. Bill and Bruce also found the motivation to seek out work. Jim found the motivation to go back to finish his "builder's ticket" which he had put off for years.

Tolerance

Sarah learned more tolerance for “DEET kids” (unemployed youth), their backgrounds, and associated social problems. She also became more tolerant of Aboriginals although she admitted she had never actually spent time with them before. Jim also became more tolerant of “DEET kids” and developed a desire to help them - pre-voyage he had regarded them all as “bums”. Jenny became more tolerant of stress in her workplace, and Bill became more tolerant of people from higher socio-economic groups whom he had referred to as “those buggers with lots o’ money”.

Opportunity to Display Talents

Bill was sufficiently skilled on board Leeuwin that he was offered the bosun’s mate position, then the opportunity of work on the pearling lugger restoration project.

Feedback for the STS Leeuwin Foundation Ltd.

From post-voyage interviews, three constructive criticisms seemed to emerge. First, the need to formalise a pre-voyage briefing. Bill, Bruce and Jenny (DEET trainees), in particular, appeared comforted by the chance to ask questions in the pre-voyage interviews with an ex-trainee and experienced Leeuwin watch-leader (researcher One) - “not the Leeuwin marketing man in a suit”. Briefings would also ensure clients like Claire, who was more into learning to sail (vs. personal development), would not “sign on for the wrong reasons”, and could include providing pictures of the Leeuwin (which only Claire had seen previously) during a one-on-one chat about what to expect with an ex-trainee (culturally matched if possible) in an informal setting.

Second, Sarah in particular, was frustrated she didn’t get to know trainees from other watches. The suggestion might be, therefore, to allow for more opportunities to meet and interact with other trainees, although this might be inconsistent with the group/watch process so heavily encouraged in the program.

Third, a more obvious concern was the lack of follow-up. Sarah appeared to lose the impetus she gained from the voyage and may have benefitted from some follow-up, and Bill initially went home, got bored, lost a job, stole a car and went to remand. Perhaps the absence of a follow-up comes down to lack of money, human resources and time but perhaps Leeuwin could arrange mutually suitable follow-ups financed by client groups themselves? For example, if DEET spend money regularly on these programs perhaps they would see some benefit in a follow-up. But perhaps STAWA should be ultimately responsible for assisting trainees cope with post-voyage highs and lows and, while debriefing the experiences immediately post-voyage would assist in this transition period, further meetings ought to be considered and perhaps facilitated by ex-trainees or watch-leaders.

Besides the aforementioned perceived benefits to trainees, three other aspects of the program seemed to be received well. Specifically, the games played on board which appeared to be great fun and effective in “breaking the ice”, getting strangers to laugh with and at each other, and allow trainees to be children again. Second, the permanent professional crew were always regarded favourably. Not a lot was said about them but when they were mentioned several positive impressions were recorded. Perhaps it is a good thing the permanent crew remain somewhat invisible? Finally, the “overall program” was highly regarded by everyone (excepting Claire), and especially parents/family and DEET.

An appraisal of the effectiveness of this Leeuwin experience must first be weighed with the composition of the ‘Blue Watch’ trainees and their individual motives for participation. While 10-day Leeuwin voyages can be client-specific (e.g. all trainees drawn from DEET or a particular high school) and, therefore, some similarity in individual motives and expectations can be anticipated, this voyage was ‘open’. As a consequence, ‘Blue Watch’ was comprised of three young unemployed (DEET) trainees, two significantly older males seeking a holiday, one female clerk hoping to learn to sail, and one bored teenage secretary. Given such a diversity of backgrounds, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect any similarity in either participation motives or expectations or outcomes. Nevertheless, all trainees seemed to both thoroughly enjoy the voyage and (excepting Claire) experience considerable affective benefits in terms of boosts in self-confidence, self-esteem, motivation, and tolerance for others. We believe such outcomes are both meaningful and trustworthy principally because of the methodology we used in this project.

The qualitative methods used in this case study and the use of covert interviews may be questioned by those interested in replication. However, while the latter procedures and the role of researcher Two could be regarded as “dubious” on ethical grounds, it is worth noting that no one on ‘Blue Watch’ either objected when her identity and purpose was revealed, or withdrew from the study. Furthermore, we believe her data, drawn directly from the natural setting and in combination with data from researcher One, represent highly credible, transferable, dependable and conceivable qualities required in naturalistic research data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Credible, in the sense the data emerged from prolonged engagement with subjects and persistent observation, as well as negative case analysis (Claire); transferable, because the data provided thick and rich descriptions for readers to judge for themselves “transferability” (ie. are similar results likely on other 10-day Leeuwin voyages?); dependable, since two researchers combined notes to summarise accounts; and conceivable, since a third researcher read through reports to ensure objectivity was sustained in reporting style. In summary, from a methodological standpoint, we are satisfied our findings are worth paying attention to and taking account of, which leads, finally, to the implications for STAWA and all adventure and wilderness therapy or adventure programs interested in both evaluating and improving their effectiveness.

According to Kimball and Bacon (cited in Gass, 1994) adventure and wilderness therapy programs are characterised by some important common themes. These include a small-group format, the opportunity to master demanding challenges, immersion in an unfamiliar environment, a focus on understanding the meaning of program activities, and an emphasis on creating an environment which implicitly supports prosocial values. From the evidence obtained in this case study we believe STAWA programs, which aim to promote “personal development..... under adventurous challenge”, and specifically the 10-day Leeuwin voyages, fulfil all of these characteristics. However, we believe that some pre and post-voyage efforts (pre-voyage briefing and post-voyage debriefing respectively) could even enhance the effectiveness of the experiences. Particularly post-voyage STAWA should consider the establishment of formal periodic debriefings that could be designed to both assist trainees in coping with “post-Leeuwin blues” and to cement metaphoric transfer from on-board experiences and games, to “real life” (e.g. social life and career).

The authors respectfully invite correspondence (to the first author) regarding this study, which hopefully has made some contribution to the dialogue on “methodology of adventure programming evaluation”.

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