Lessons from Mount Everest: Motivation, Teams and Leadership

Covers Chapters 11, 13, 14 Due by Thursday, November 21

The **1996 Mount Everest disaster** occurred on 10–11 May 1996, when eight people caught in a [blizzard](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blizzard) died on [Mount Everest](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Everest) during attempts to descend from the summit. Over the entire season, 12 people died trying to reach the summit, making it the deadliest season on Mount Everest up to that time. The 1996 disaster gained wide publicity and raised questions about the commercialization of Everest.Multiple books have been written and movies produced about the disaster which raised many questions about the circumstances that resulted in the deaths of so many people

In the years since 1996, there have been other fatalities on the mountain. In 2014, an avalanche took the lives of 16 sherpas. Avalanches resulting from a 2015 earthquake in Nepal took another 22 lives. Avalanches are a known risk for mountain climbers who face a variety of hazards. When climbing mountains, there are two types of hazards, *objective* and *subjective*. Objective hazards relate to the environment, and may include inclement weather conditions, dangerous terrain, and poor equipment. Objective hazards also include falling rocks, falling ice, the climber falling, falls from ice slopes, falls down snow slopes, falls into crevasses, and the dangers from altitude and weather. Frostbite, hypothermia and snow blindness can also occur.

Subjective hazards relate to a climber's poor judgement, poor planning, poor skills, or inadequate conditioning. Hazards can also be groupthink, lack of leadership, poor team coordination and inadequate management. These are the hazards that led to the 1996 disaster. In addition to the extremely severe weather and atmospheric conditions that exist at 29,035 feet, there is the very real problem of human error. This combined with the effects of sub-freezing temperatures and low oxygen produced that series of catastrophic events.

For this assignment, we are going to look at the events of May 1996 from a management perspective and try to learn what went wrong and what can be done to prevent it from happening again. We will pay special attention to the role of the team, the team leader, the established procedures and the decision making process.

Here are the learning objectives for the assignment:

\* To learn about building, participating in and leading effective teams

\* To examine how teams can make decisions more effectively in difficult situations when team members have different motivations and opposing interests.

\* To explore how leadership approaches and in particular the process choices that leaders make can affect team performance.

1. Identify the motivation for each of the team members: Expedition company owners, guides, sherpas, clients, journalists, medical personnel.
2. Explain how the different motivations for each of these team members is in sync with the others and how each may contradict the others.
3. Identify the critical decisions made during the climb. Which of these decisions were based on subjective hazards? Which ones were based on objective hazards? Which ones were correct and which ones contributed to the disaster? **Explain why.**
4. Why did the team leaders fail to follow the established procedures for the climb?
5. What assumptions did the expedition leaders make based on previous successful summits to Mt. Everest?