



# Research, Policy & Practice Supplement Measuring Challenge Course Outcomes

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*A summary of Schary, D. P. & Waldron, A. L. (2017). The challenge course experience questionnaire: A facilitator's assessment tool. Journal of Experiential Education, 40(3), 295-307. doi: 10.1177/1053825917708400.*

What outcomes are your challenge course programs achieving? In the United States alone, there are 42 certified vendors in the Association for Challenge Course Technology and more than 3000 members worldwide (ACCT<sup>1</sup>). Do all these programs strive for and produce similar outcomes? What evidence are individual programs producing that supports the perceived benefits of challenge course programming on such a scale?

Despite the potential benefits of outcome-based assessments, their implementation is rare in experiential learning programs like adventure education (Qualters, 2010). Logistical constraints and a lack of specific assessment tools are some of the obstacles to measuring challenge course outcomes. In fact, time is a precious commodity when conducting a challenge course program. Facilitators are typically pressured to maximize programming time, which can come at the expense of program evaluation and research. They may not have time to give participants lengthy instruments to complete and therefore it is difficult to efficiently capture the variety of psychological and social factors involved in challenge course programs.

Besides, if facilitators choose to undertake more sophisticated evaluations, they are faced with multiple questionnaire options, making it even more difficult for facilitators to choose relevant ones. This then challenges researchers since they cannot accurately compare results between different studies, groups, and courses.

Currently no empirically tested evaluation tools exist that are specifically designed to meet the unique logistical demands of challenge course programs. That is why Schary and Waldron (2017) piloted and tested The Challenge Course Experience Questionnaire (CCEQ), designed for facilitators to measure participant outcomes in challenge course programs. The CCEQ is a step toward helping various types of challenge course operators and facilitators to express program outcomes through statistical data.

## ABOUT THE CHALLENGE COURSE EXPERIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE (CCEQ)

The Challenge Course Experience Questionnaire (CCEQ) is a general participant scale that is quick and easy to implement while still providing accurate outcome measures for challenge course operators and facilitators. It gives facilitators a snapshot of their programs' outcomes with enough information so they can recognize positive and/or negative trends while attempting to control for some confounding variables. The CCEQ consists of challenge course participants' (a) individual experience and (b) feelings of group support.

### Components of the CCEQ

- Nine primary questions answered on a 6-point Likert scale
- Basic demographic questions, including a unique categorical question to gauge the perception of the participant
  - Example: Thinking about how you feel about participating today, which best describes you?
    - a) Prisoner
    - b) Vacationer
    - c) Learner
- One question about perceived anxiety (only a few challenge course assessments ask participants about their perceived anxiety or fear)

## How was it developed?

The original questionnaire was inspired by the Washington State University's Challenge Course Assessment (WSCCA). The WSCCA was selected because it was one of the few assessment tools designed specifically for challenge course programs. The CCEQ was examined through three separate but interconnected studies using different US university student populations and challenge course settings. The results from all three studies provide initial evidence that the CCEQ may be a psychometrically sound measure of desired challenge course outcomes.

## IMPLICATIONS

### Implications For Facilitators and Practitioners

Schary and Waldron's initial research on the CCEQ establishes a foundation for building an evaluation tool for challenge course facilitators.

- 1 Aside from a technical certification exam, there is a dearth of facilitator assessment tools for challenge course managers and/or facilitators. Although the CCEQ is not a direct facilitator assessment tool, it could be used as a simple proxy to get an estimate of facilitator effectiveness. It may be helpful to add an item assessing the facilitators' role in the challenge course experience, if direct feedback on facilitation quality is desired.
- 2 Gives challenge course facilitators a snapshot of their programs' outcomes with enough information so facilitators can recognize positive and/or negative trends.
- 3 The CCEQ is a baseline step toward helping various types of challenge course operators and facilitators improve programming through statistical evaluation.

### Implications For Research

Future research could examine:

- 1 The dynamic relationship between the participant's individual experience and perceived group support. While the outcomes of challenge course programs typically focus on improving both individual and group dynamics, the vast majority of research focuses on either individual or group outcomes, but individuals and groups influence each other within the context of their environment, and examining this relationship further is needed.

- 2 Longitudinal trends across time. By having items focused on both the individual and group, the CCEQ may be useful for identifying these interactions and long-term trends.
- 3 Construct validity by testing the relationship of the CCEQ to other established measures.
- 4 Other assessment designs (e.g., participant interviews, Delphi panel) that may increase validity and/or reliability since the CCEQ was designed using an existing assessment tool (i.e., WSCCA) with a small, convenient sample of challenge course professionals.

## LIMITATIONS

- 1 The CCEQ is a subjective measure with self-reported data, thus the study's accuracy hinges on the participant's honest representation of their feelings toward the challenge course program (i.e., Individual Experience) and other people (i.e., Group Support).
- 2 The CCEQ was designed using challenge course programs for adults (18 years and older); as a result, it may not be appropriate in its current state for younger ages and/or speakers of English as a second language.
- 3 The CCEQ has only a few items to measure the construct of interest. While these early studies indicate acceptable reliability and content validity, future research could validate the specific items with more established measures (e.g., self-efficacy).
- 4 Potential moderators were not considered in this study, but they may be important to consider in future research (e.g. previous challenge course experience).
- 5 The CCEQ does not capture all variables that may be of interest to a practitioner and/or researcher (e.g., diversity and experience of facilitators, group progression and goals, self-esteem, personality).
- 6 The current study used samples of university students, so it is unknown if the CCEQ is able to accurately measure the challenge course experience of participants in other areas, doing different types of programs.

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Want to find out more? Read the entire article! You can find it in JEE issue 40(3), page 295.

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