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Adventure racing and organizational behavior: Using eco challenge video clips to stimulate learning

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In this article, the Eco Challenge race video is presented as a teaching tool for facilitating theory-based discussion and application in organizational behavior (OB) courses. Before discussing the intricacies of the video series itself, the authors present a pedagogically based rationale for using reality TV–based video segments in a classroom setting. They then describe the Eco Challenge race series, with an overview of how it is used to facilitate application of course concepts, encourage attention and interest in the course, and provide a frame of reference for other experiential activities and assessment in the course. Readers are encouraged to use this video as a semester-long teaching tool. To assist in this regard, readers are provided with a template for using the Eco Challenge video with a variety of OB topic areas, a list of the potential limitations of this teaching method, and sample discussion and assessment questions.

**Keywords:** organizational behavior; reality television; teaching tool; video

As early as the 1940s, university faculty became interested in the nuances of student learning; books were written and questions were posed that moved faculty beyond the traditional questions of “what” students should be learning, toward those of “how” students were learning. John Dewey’s (1948) classic *Experience and Education* was one of the seminal books in this area. In his book, Dewey described the importance of tapping into students’ experiences as a basis for learning, using the two principles of continuity and interaction. Although we subscribe to Dewey’s principles,
we also acknowledge that creating continuity and interaction in the classroom can be difficult. One tool that we have repeatedly and successfully leveraged to create such experiences is video—and our most successful video is that of a reality TV adventure race program called the Eco Challenge. The Eco Challenge race is a 300-mile, continuous, 24-hr a day expedition where teams of four trek across uninhabitable and often-dangerous terrain competing against one another for prize money. Although there are numerous versions of this race, showcasing treks across a number of different countries, we have found the Eco Challenge Morocco series to provide the best illustrations and applications of organizational behavior (OB) theories and concepts.

Using this reality-based adventure race video has assisted us to draw connections between theory and experience for ourselves and our students, arousing that which James March called the “pleasures of the process.” March described such pleasures, written in terms of education and leadership, as “the glories of position, the joys of commitment, the excitement of influence, the exhilaration of conflict and danger” (Augier, 2004, p. 172). We find each of those things in our dialogues with students when we challenge them to connect theory and personal experience to observations and insights about the dynamics of the race.

In this article, we begin with a review of the literature on using video in the classroom and then transition into an overview of the literature on reality television (TV). We then describe the Eco Challenge video series followed by an overview of why we tend to use short clips of the video, rather than a one-time complete showing, throughout the semester as a tool for stimulating learning. We then present three in-depth examples of topic areas we apply to video segments throughout the semester (group dynamics, leadership, and motivation). Finally, we put forth examples of assessment items tied to the students’ video experiences, representative student responses to this teaching tool, the potential limitations associated with this video, and a conclusion summarizing our overall experiences with the Eco Challenge in our OB classes.

Review of the Literature: Using Video as a Tool for Learning Enhancement

There is a large and diverse literature on the use of film as a teaching resource (see review in Champoux, 1999), where the term film is used to represent “contemporary films, classic films, foreign films, documentaries, and some television series” (Champoux, 2005, p. 50). Films are often viewed as videos and, as such, the literature includes references to film and video use in the classroom. In a study comparing the effectiveness of video as a teaching tool to that of traditional paper-based information delivery, Neef, Trachtenberg, Loeb, and Sterner (1991) found that the use of video to
convey concepts in a training program improved performance over that of a paper-based training series. Not only did performance improve, but also assessments of the program revealed the uniform appeal of the video format for participants.

Over the past 30 years, film has become increasingly popular in academic settings, with literature on the use of film as a teaching tool spanning disciplines from statistics (Moore, 1993; Vellemen & Moore, 1996) to physics (Chandler, 2006). Its popularity is a direct extension of its effectiveness. Champoux (1999) described film as an “uncommonly powerful teaching tool” (p. 207), citing literature on brain and media cognition to support the use of multimedia in learning environments. In a similar vein, Sweeney (2006) argued that using popular film in university courses assists in the development and acculturation of new students:

writing about and discussing movies could be especially helpful with underprepared students who have greater knowledge of popular culture than they do of the academic subject matter for which they are considered unready, either because of inadequate preparation (native speakers), lack of facility with English (second language), or myriad other reasons (learning disabilities, etc.). (p. 29)

As a result of its popularity, descriptions of specific applications of film to a diverse array of educational topics are common in the literature. In fact, film has been used to illustrate concepts ranging from communication and rhetorical criticism to leadership and ethics. Examples include Zorn’s (1991) application of Death of a Salesman to the concept of identity management; Johnson and Iacobucci’s (1995) discussion of student communication patterns as exemplified in The Dream Team; Winegarden, Fuss-Reineck, and Charron’s (1993) use of Star Trek: The Next Generation to elicit student reflection about persuasion, family communication, and communication ethics; Griffin’s (1995) examination of Thelma and Louise as a way to teach rhetorical criticism; Comer’s (2001) application of The Lion King to a discussion of fundamental concepts and complex themes in leadership; and Champoux’s (2005) comparison of animated versus live-action films to examine the following management course topics: diversity using The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Beauty and the Beast, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs; ethics with Robin Hood; and problem solving with Alice in Wonderland. These examples showcase how films with different presentation styles (e.g., animated vs. live action) and varying classifications (e.g., fiction, science fiction, portrayals of real-world events) can be effectively used in educational settings. Unlike the examples above, as well as most of the extant literature on the use of film and video in the classroom, this article describes the use of a relatively underutilized form of video—a live-action reality TV program.
Reality TV and Its Use in the Classroom

Reality TV is not a new phenomenon. With popular origins in the TV show *Candid Camera*, reality TV’s history can be traced back to 1948, the year Allen Funt directed and aired the first *Candid Camera* episode (Funt & Reed, 1994). As a testament to the more than half-a-century of reality TV programming, in a recent historical review of the genre, Clissold (2004) described reality TV as “enduring” (p. 33). He attributed its popularity to the creation of moments of simulation anxiety, where the differential line between actual reality and manufactured TV programming is blurred. It is this blurring that has sparked some of the controversy around the term *reality TV* itself. For example, Couldry (2004) argued that these shows are not reality and has labelled the term *reality TV* an oxymoron. He describes reality TV shows as nothing more than “social process(es) that take real individuals and submit them to surveillance, analysis, and selective display as means to entertainment and enhanced audience participation” (p. 72). If we acknowledge that there is a false reality via participants’ surveillance awareness and producers’ selective display of video footage, then what is it that underlies the increasingly popularity of this format?

In an attempt to better understand what stimulates viewers’ attraction to reality TV, Reiss and Wiltz (2004) performed an empirical analysis of individuals’ underlying motives for watching reality TV shows. Outcomes of their study revealed that individuals’ preferences for reality TV programs are correlated with their basic desires and intrinsic values. They found that two most significant predictors of an individual’s predilection to watch reality TV were the motive of status (i.e., the desire for prestige) and the motive of vengeance (i.e., the desire to get even with others). Related to status, reality TV creates an environment where viewers have the opportunity to feel “more important” than the ordinary people portrayed on the programs. Related to vengeance, reality TV feeds people’s desires to win (a component of vengeance) via the notion that they would perform or behave better than the people in the program. A third motive they identified in their study was that of social contact (i.e., the desire for peer companionship); this motive may be fulfilled by a viewer’s interactions with others who watch reality TV, as in conversations with other viewers at the water cooler at work or in other social settings. This motive is one that we believe assists us in effectively using reality TV in the classroom—students tend to find the content of the clips interesting and accessible and, as a result, tend to be readily prepared to engage with one another as they reflect on and integrate film clips into OB course theories, experiences, and concepts.

Turning back to Reiss and Wiltz’s (2004) work, in their conclusion that focuses on reality TV’s popularity, they acknowledge the position put forth by social commentators and some scholars that these programs exploit
participants and glorify low levels of morals. They caution researchers against blanket categorizations of reality TV programs, stating that “many different shows are classified as ‘reality television’” (p. 374), and encourage future research into not only the different forms of reality TV but also the relationship between these forms and viewers’ values and desires. Related to the frequent criticisms against reality TV in the popular press and academic contexts, Hight (2001) challenged the quality of the extant scholarship in this domain by stating that “much of the reaction to reality hybrids with the academy has tended to reinforce the narrow and negative perspective which dominates public discourse” (p. 390). He called for future theoretical and practical examinations to “treat these (reality TV) forms as a complex media construction . . . possibly implicated within a variety of social, economic and political changes which suggest a transformation of fundamental aspects of modern society” (pp. 390-391).

In support of this perspective, Clissold (2004) described reality TV’s continued presence and increasing popularity as a function of its ideological sociopolitical context. Reality TV is a successful socially based communication medium because it makes people feel like they are a part of an intimate community of viewers (Kavka & West, 2004). It makes people feel like they are engaged in the action—playing on the effect of the audience relating to and imagining themselves as participants in the reality portrayed on the TV. It was, in fact, the attraction and engagement components of reality TV that led us to consider applying it to the classroom. We knew that clips from popular TV shows such as Home Improvement could be effectively used in the classroom (e.g., Hunt, 2001). However, we were unaware of any discussion about the use of this specific genre, reality TV, as a teaching tool. We thought that if reality TV was a medium that stimulated engagement as well as something that our students would most likely be attracted to as far as content and application, then we wanted to see if it could be leveraged into a tool for increasing students’ classroom-based interaction and learning. After some debate about the type of reality TV show that we thought would provide the most appropriate contextual fit for an undergraduate OB course, the show we selected was Mark Burnett’s Eco Challenge.

What is the Eco Challenge?: A Description of the Video Series

In 1992, Mark Burnett (Survivor, The Apprentice) created an expedition race called the Eco Challenge. In this race, mixed sex teams of four race 24-hr a day over a rugged 300-mile course. Competitors participate in activities ranging from white-water canoeing, sea kayaking, and scuba diving to trekking, mountaineering, horseback riding, and mountain biking. If one person quits or is injured, the entire team is disqualified from the race. To
succeed is to compete and finish as a team. The essence of the race lies in team dynamics and the ability to solve problems under constant stress, while sleep deprived, and with limited food. Eco Challenge races have been held in the United States, Canada, Australia, Morocco, Argentina, Borneo, and Fiji. Potential application of the Eco Challenge video to OB topics is as varied as the countries in which it has been run. The video series we have found most useful to use is the 1999 Eco Challenge contested in Morocco.

The Eco Challenge Morocco race consists of 3½ hr of video on two separate tapes. We encourage faculty to use both tapes, culling clips from each and showing them in chronological order. As there are 3½ hr of video, the actual amount of video each faculty member is able to show students will depend on the length of the semester, the length of each class, and the amount of time during each class that is available for this exercise. At our University, we have a 14-week semester, with 12 weeks of class content (2 weeks of review and examinations) where we meet two times per week for just fewer than 2 hr. In that format, students are able to watch and discuss almost the entire series. To provide an overview of the race video for readers, the two tape/DVD sections are briefly described below. Both tapes are legal copies purchased by the university library. However, instructors are encouraged to review the applicable copyright laws of their country concerning use of films in the classroom.

TAPE ONE: CAMELS, KAYAKS, AND CARAVANS.

1999, 1 hr 52 min (including introduction to series)
Publisher: Discovery Communications Inc./Unapix Entertainment Inc.

The first tape sets the scene for the way the race will progress. First, the nature of the race is explained, and the arena for the event (Morocco) described. Viewers are gradually introduced to the members of several teams whose progress and team dynamics are followed closely during the race; the teams introduced at this point in the series include the members of rookie team Urban Edge (U.S.), Team Navigator (U.S. Navy Seals), Team Aussie (Australia), Team Rubicon (U.S.), Team Mexico (Mexico), and Team Cepos (Spain). As we follow the progress of the teams in this first video, (the 9-mile camel race, the coastal steering, the ocean kayak paddle through huge surf, and the start of the trek into the High Atlas Mountains) we gain a unique perspective on how each team is approaching the race and how they anticipate they will deal with the myriad of problems that racers face on a daily basis.

TAPE TWO: MILES FROM NOWHERE.

1999, 1 hr 31 min (including series information at the end)
Publisher: Discovery Communications Inc./Unapix Entertainment Inc.

The second video follows largely the same teams, with the introduction of a few others, as they trek (and get lost) in the maze of canyons that is the
High Atlas Mountains, scale a 10,000-ft mountain peak, ride horses through lush valleys, and then ride mountain bikes for the final 180-km leg into Marrakesh. The eventual winner is never clearly identified. In this section of the race, good-performing teams suddenly turn bad, bad ones improve, and dark horses emerge from the pack behind the front runners. In the midst of such rivalry, some teams such as Malaysian Team 20/20 bring up the rear of the pack, seeking simply to enjoy the experience and finish as a team (these team members openly state that their team goal for each section of the race is to make it to the checkpoint before disqualification time).

Although we find that using most or all of the video series is ideal for an undergraduate class, we have also had success using isolated 10- to 12-min clips in masters of business administration (MBA) and executive masters of business administration (EMBA) OB classes. For graduate and executive students, a single clip can often be enough to illustrate a theory or topic area and stimulate discussion using a nontraditional pedagogical tool for the graduate business curriculum—a reality-based adventure racing video.

**Using Short Video “Clips” of the Eco Challenge to Stimulate Learning**

Across all applications, undergraduate through postgraduate, we have found that the use of short video clips, as opposed to showing students the entire video at once, assists in student learning. When we show the Eco Challenge video to our students, we use it at the beginning of most class sessions as a short, communal form of experiential learning. The descriptor *short* is an important asset of how we use video segment delivery in the classroom. Although the video itself is 3½ hr long, the clips we tend to show to our students average approximately 10 to 12 min in length. This is a direct result of students’ tendencies to have relatively short attention spans. In fact, Friedman (2002) argued that when trying to convey concepts or issues to students at any level (postgraduate, undergraduate, or executive), it is helpful to use short (5 – 10 min) cases or scenarios that are based on real-world conflicts and struggles.

At a pedagogical level, our use of short video clips at the beginning of each class provides an introduction to classroom discussion that is “others based,” by that we mean students watching the video together share a common experience as observers. In this case, students are observing other people who are engaged in a team-based competition where most of what they do in the race is respond to unexpected hardships while trying to work together in a safe and productive collective. Providing such an intensely challenging and “others-based” foundation allows students to more comfortably talk about issues they may be experiencing that are too difficult or controversial to raise in a public setting (i.e., the classroom); Baker (2004) called this type of issue “undiscussable.” In her article, Baker posed a call to management educators to create environments of
learning through classroom interactions based on open sharing and effective listening that, when taken together, allow for psychologically safe dialogues about complex issues. This type of classroom, where open discussions are encouraged, clearly reflects a “learner-centered” model for management education—teaching environments where there are no wrong answers and no incorrect interpretations (see Freed, 2005, and Ramsey, 2002, for discussion of this model). In this type of environment, the faculty member becomes a partner in learning, not simply a provider of information to be learned.

For many faculty members, transitioning from information provider to information cocreator is often a difficult shift to make; such a shift can be challenging to implement in teaching environments where there is a required set of theories and concepts for students to learn. In our experience, we have found that the use of short video clips at the outset of every class is a safe entry point for faculty interested in making such a transition. The videos provide a real-world–based set of behaviors and consequences that faculty members are able to watch before the class begins. Previewing the videos allows each faculty member to identify topics that relate to each video clip and to prepare a set of evaluation-based learning questions to pose to the students. Preparation is key to effectively using this tool in the classroom. Weak or nonexistent connections to theory will rapidly diminish the effectiveness of video as a teaching tool (Hobbs, 2006).

To effectively use the video clips, faculty should create questions designed to challenge the students to analyze the participants’ behaviors, to synthesize the patterns of action and reaction into categories, and to evaluate the contributions of participants on numerous levels (e.g., physical, mental, ethical). This type of questioning is based on an application of the higher levels of Bloom’s (1956) educational objectives, as modified and described by Athanassiou, McNett, and Harvey (2003) in their article about critical thinking in the management classroom. To effectively use these types of questions, faculty members must resist the temptation to give in to the traditional, information provider tendency to want to prepare a set of “correct” responses and applications of theory. In our opinion, one of the major benefits of the Eco Challenge video series is that there are so many possible applications and interpretations of each 10- to 12-min segment. Faculty members and students alike will quickly become confident in their ability to generate theory-based and learning-centered dialogues in the classroom.

**Connecting the Eco Challenge Video to Three OB Topic Areas: Examples of Applications to Focus and Stimulate Class Discussion**

As stated above, at the beginning of most of our classes throughout the semester, we show a video segment from the race that is approximately 10
to 12 min long. Using the video at the start of class encourages students to be on time, as most students become thoroughly absorbed in the race experience and do not want to miss the next installment. In addition, the opening video clip provides continuity between classes and focuses students in larger classes, ensuring that they are tuned in and ready to participate immediately after the video segment concludes.

Using a brief segment of the video at the beginning of each session allows the instructor to refer to race events and the behavior of race participants as a review of topic areas that have recently been discussed as well as a transition into the topic to be covered in that day’s class. Each video clip depicts a unique segment of the race, creating a new and different feel for each class session; it is a useful way of avoiding teaching monotony, or what Robinson (1998) called the “Groundhog Day” effect in the classroom (i.e., feeling like you are teaching the same thing again and again). We have found the video serves as a good discussion starter for a number of OB topics, including but not restricted to communication, conflict, decision making, group dynamics, leadership, motivation, personality, and values. It also serves as a tool for student self-reflection through the use of questions about their reactions to the participants (e.g., Why they like some of the participants and dislike others? How can they explain intraclass differences across perceptions of participant likeability?), and their thoughts about how participant situations and behaviors are similar to their own (e.g., How is carrying someone else’s backpack [as well as your own] similar to behaviors they have exhibited? How is lagging behind the group and holding up progress similar to something they have done?).

Although a definitive prescription of how to use this video is neither what we intend nor what we would advocate given the individuality of every faculty member’s classroom experience, we recognize the need to provide some descriptive examples of film segments we frequently use to illustrate specific OB topic areas. As a resource for interested faculty, we created a list of potential applications for each of the 10- to 12-min clips in the video series (see Appendix A). As a complement to the Appendix, a more detailed description of how we have used specific video clips to illustrate three OB topic areas (group dynamics, leadership, and motivation) is presented next.

GROUP DYNAMICS

The arduous nature of the race and the requirement that teams must finish intact (i.e., with the entire team of members still participating in the race) provides for fascinating dynamics between team members. Some teams operate as a cohesive unit whereas others tend to self-destruct along the way. Teams make decisions about approaches to challenges, rest stops, and how to cope with adversity and injury. Competition as well as collaboration between teams occurs.
Early on in Tape 1 (Start 00.08.30 – Stop 00.20.00), Team Urban Edge is introduced. This is a team comprising men and women, Black and White, gay and straight, from a variety of professions. Team members are asked about their goals, roles, and proposed norms for team operation. This clip is followed almost immediately (Start 00.21.15 – Stop 00.25.30) by a similar exposé of Team Navigator (a team of three U.S. Navy Seals and one female sales representative). In our course we cover the topic of group dynamics in the first 2 weeks of the semester, so the comparison of the two teams provides an excellent introduction to the discussion of the advantages/disadvantages of heterogeneous group membership and the importance of team goals, roles, and norms. It also provides the basis for an animated discussion on the topic of which of the two teams is best equipped to outperform the other during the race.

Throughout the video, a number of other teams and their members are introduced, including Team Rubicon (a team of three women and one man), Team Aussie (four Australians), Team Mexico (three Mexican males and an American female), Team Cepos (Spanish team) and Team 20/20 (Malaysian team). The video is excellent for analyzing ongoing team dynamics such as the manner in which teams deal with group conflict arising from navigational errors and sick team members. For example, in Tape 1 (Start 01.31.30 – Stop 01.39.30) the males in Team Navigator carry the load of their sick female team member who is struggling to continue. In Tape 2 (Start 00.44.30 – Stop 00.49.17), Team Cepos compromises their race lead to care for a team member suffering from altitude sickness, while Team Rubicon is ultimately disqualified from the race after pushing one of their teammates well beyond the member’s physical and emotional limits. Toward the end of the race (Tape 2: Start 01.15.27 – Stop 01.17.13), Team Epinephrine (a team whose members were chosen by lottery just prior to the start of the race), despite their fatigue, work as a team on the bike leg to tow one of their team members who has torn both quadriceps muscles. Such segments provide a basis for discussion and identification of positive and negative methods for dealing with team problems and underline the importance of members’ respect and support for each other.

**LEADERSHIP**

Leadership is manifested differently and continuously throughout the race. Some teams have a chosen/elected leader, some rotate leadership, and some distribute leadership based on the type of task involved. Leader style does (or should) vary depending on the particular challenge to be overcome. In some cases, leader style is customized to the particular subordinate’s needs at that point in time. A variety of examples of effective and ineffective leader behavior are presented. Teams such as Team Navigator
(the team that consists of three U.S. Navy Seal personnel) appear to favor a more hierarchical or leader-centered approach to team leadership with one person tending to dominate the role of leader. Other teams such as Team Cepos and Team Aussie are excellent examples of shared leadership, with the leader’s role rotating among team members depending on the race leg, the health of the members, and the relative skills and strengths of the participants in specific race disciplines. Team Mexico exhibits a very directive and nonparticipative form of leadership throughout most of the race, excluding their female team mate from participating in most of the decision making. Examples of this can be seen in Tape 1 (Start 01.44.20 – Stop 01.47.17) and Tape 2 (Start 00.13.00 – Stop 00.14.15). The effect of such inflexible leadership becomes evident in the female team member’s demeanor, motivation, and the overall poor performance of the team. It is only when a female member of the Argentinean team berates the males in Team Mexico for their poor leadership and explains the need to support their female team member (Tape 2: Start 00.42.58 – Stop 00.44.20) that Team Mexico begins to function cohesively. The differences in leadership between the teams, the variety of leadership styles evidenced throughout the race, and the numerous examples of effective and ineffective leadership provide a rich context for class discussion of leadership behavior, leadership styles, the importance of the situation, the need for flexible leadership, and the roles that learning and experience play in the process of leadership.

MOTIVATION

The race video provides a variety of opportunities to discuss each of the main motivational theories that are typically covered in an OB course. Individuals and teams enter and compete in the Eco Challenge race for a variety of reasons. Some are motivated by prize money and prestige, some are looking for personal development and challenge, others engage in extreme sports as a lifestyle. Teams such as Team Aussie are professional adventure racers who race not only for the challenge but also the prize money. Team Aussie members are all well trained and equipped, approaching the race as an event to be won and making team decisions with this outcome in mind. Others such as rookie Team 20/20 simply aim to “finish the race as friends.” They view the race as a personal challenge and plan their strategy with no thoughts of prize money; rather, they remain focused on the simple goals of enduring and maintaining their camaraderie. This provides a context for discussing the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and hypothesizing as to what specific needs might be driving individual teams and participants.

Team Mexico and its members’ ongoing poor treatment of their female team member provides an opportunity to examine equity theory and the causes and effects of demotivation. Team Aussie’s climb up a 10,000-foot
peak illustrates the value of goal setting as Team Aussie member, Jane Hall, repeatedly sets a goal of six steps, followed by another six steps, to reach the summit (Tape 2: Start 00.33.55 – Stop 00.36.10). Throughout the race, individual and team goals change as participants encounter adversity and achievement. The differing motivation of the team members, often represented by the goals they verbalize, ultimately determines each team’s attitude, strategy, and decisions made throughout the race.

Although we have only provided an in-depth description of the video’s application to three OB topics (group dynamics, leadership, and motivation), we firmly believe that the Eco Challenge race applies to many OB topics, and that most of the video segments can be viewed through multiple OB lenses. For example, one of the segments listed above under group dynamics (Tape 2: Start 00.44.30- Stop 00.49.17) involves Team Cepos altering their plans to aid a team member suffering from altitude sickness and Team Rubicon trying to resolve an ongoing team conflict. This segment could be used equally well to illustrate and stimulate discussion on not only group dynamics but also conflict resolution, decision making, personality, leadership, perception and attribution, and motivation. We have found that one of the benefits of using the Eco Challenge race video is its utility and overall applicability to a variety of OB topics. When used, as we do, as a semester-long teaching tool, adaptability is critical given the potential for shifts in the chronological ordering and/or selection of OB topic areas. Regardless of the number or ordering of topic areas, viewing the complete film over the duration of a semester allows students to follow the temporal changes of each team’s internal dynamics and overall progress as the race unfolds. Repeatedly showing the same segment at different points throughout the semester is another way to use the video, illustrating the variety of OB theories and interpretations applicable to a specific set of participant behaviors and outcomes.

Examples of Assessment Items: Translating the Eco Challenge Experience Into Assessment

The Eco Challenge video can be used as a tool for formative and summative assessment in the classroom. Regarding formative assessment (i.e., assessment that is used to further students’ learning and may or may not be graded), following every video clip that we show in the classroom, we either run a large group/entire class-based discussion or break the students out into smaller groups to reflect on connections between the video and topics we have covered in the class to date. On occasion, we ask small groups to present the rest of the class some of the ideas and connections they derived from this process, in an attempt to stimulate further discussion as well as work to improve students’ presentation skills. We regularly provide
feedback to students about the quality of the connections they are making between the video and theory, typically in the form of joining in as members of their discussion groups and giving them verbal or written feedback about their minipresentations. We find that as long as we restrict the overall viewing and discussion experience to no more than 35 min, students tend to stay engrossed in the process and work as active participants. After 30 to 35 min, we use the video-based discussion, always referencing comments and points made by the students, as we transition into the next topic area.

Related to summative assessment, we often use the Eco Challenge as a starting point for examination questions based on concepts demonstrated in the video and discussed in class. Four examples of such questions appear below, followed in brackets by each respective question’s topic area:

1. A team intending to compete in the next Eco Challenge race in 2 weeks time has approached you for advice. Although three members of the team have been training together for approximately 12 months, the fourth member has just joined the team (because of an injury to one of the original members). The team has asked for your opinion on what potential problems this might cause in terms of team culture and how this change might be best handled both before and during the race. [culture and change]

2. Successful completion of the Eco Challenge race requires high and sustained motivation. What ideas can you get from the video that you might use in motivating either yourself or your subordinates? Relate each point from the video to one or more theories of motivation discussed in class. [motivation]

3. To be a good leader you need “the right stuff.” (i.e., the “right” personal qualities and character traits). Do you agree? Why/Why not? In answering this question, make sure that you clearly refer to:
   a) at least three different theories of leadership
   b) at least two examples from the Eco Challenge Race video
   c) At least three of your own OB group experiences [leadership]

4. The article “High Performance Teams: Lessons from the Pygmies” by Kets de Vries (1999) lists seven lessons for groups. Discuss the extent to which at least four of these lessons are adhered to by various teams throughout the Eco Challenge race video. [group and team dynamics]

To date, we have not had any complaints about our use of the video as the basis for formative and summative assessment. Rather, students are often vocal about their appreciation of an application of something as novel as a reality TV show to theoretical concepts discussed in class. We attribute students’ positive reactions to the fact that we tell them how we will use the video up front (e.g., as basis for one or more of their examination questions), that we give them the opportunity to discuss the video/theory connections in class together and with us, and that it is an application medium that for most of them is either genuinely appealing or interesting and new.
Overall Student Response to the Eco Challenge Video

As we have stated throughout this article, most students respond positively to use of the Eco Challenge video (to be fair, as in most classrooms, there is always a small subset of students that do not respond at all). We attribute students’ interest and attention not only to the popular TV-based content but also to the connections we draw for them to OB topic areas. Comments on teaching evaluations indicate that students find great value in use of the video throughout the course. Our teaching evaluation form includes a specific question asking students “What did you particularly like about this course?” A review of this question on past student evaluations shows that our students frequently cite the benefits of the video and accompanying discussions. Examples, drawn directly from the evaluations, include: “the video was a great way to bring course concepts to life,” “the video added depth to the theoretical concepts,” “it helped me understand the dynamics of real life teams,” and “the video helped me learn from the experience of others.”

Our undergraduate OB course requires students to complete two personal learning journals as part of their assessment. When writing these personal learning journals (which are based on other experiential activities performed as part of the class), students often draw parallels between their experiences and a specific Eco Challenge team or competitor in terms of the opportunities and challenges that they have faced. Several examples from student personal learning journals include:

1. “During this time I kept noticing the similarities between our group and Team Mexico. Just like their team, constant conflict was stopping us from performing well.”
2. “In summation, the group project was similar to the Eco Challenge race, where we, like many of the race teams, became more dependent, cohesive, and reliant on each other throughout the semester.”
3. “I can relate our experience to those of Team Cepos in Eco Challenge and Ernest Shackleton in his failed journey to the Pole, simply because we had to overcome so many setbacks to reach our goals.”

As a testament to this, one of our former students was recently passing through our office building and stopped in to say hello. When we asked her what she particularly liked about the course (we also asked her for candid areas of improvement), her first response was the Eco Challenge video. She said that it helped her to create connections and bring theory to life in a way that she would not have been able to do otherwise. She also mentioned that she loved the anticipation of what would happen next in the video, and the continuous opportunity to feel genuinely engaged in class discussion in an efficacious way. She noted that she was embarrassed to say that as a
historically “mediocre” student, the only times she really felt confident in raising a discussion point or question throughout the semester were during the video reflection sessions. Her last comment was that she was proud that she could still remember, 2 years later, some of the theoretical applications to video clip situations . . . and that she had been able to extend the theory on motivation from the video to her own job search and first job experiences. We consider that type of learning and connectivity, particularly from a student who openly shared her low self-efficacy in the areas of knowledge application and synthesis, a genuine success.

Potential Limitations of Using the Eco Challenge Video

Nothing is perfect. As with any teaching tool, there are limitations and issues raised with the use of the Eco Challenge reality TV clips in OB courses. Although we have not personally experienced any openly negative student reactions to the Eco Challenge video (e.g., students regularly showing up late to class, students’ body language or verbal comments that are disruptive to the exercise, disparaging student comments on teaching and course evaluations) we acknowledge that there are limitations related to its use. The first limitation has to do with country or culture-specific student associations with race participants. We note that students who are from the countries represented by the race teams often have nationalistic initial reactions to the race itself. This has the potential to segregate those students who are not from countries represented by the race teams into an “out-group” or, at the very least, to elicit taciturn reactions from them. One of the tools we use to reduce the potential for this occurring is to discuss our own connections with teams that are from countries other than our countries of origin (we were born and raised in two of the countries with teams in the race yet have traits and values represented by members of a number of teams). We also note that every team in the race exhibits functional and dysfunctional behaviors, and we challenge the students to look beyond initial stereotypes and “country-of-origin” categorizations as they view the race and apply it to course concepts and personal experiences.

A second potential limitation is our regimented use of showing the video at the beginning of every class. As stated above, our intention with this narrow time slot is to encourage students to be on time for class. We think that one of the reasons this works for us, and that we have very few students who turn up late, is that we state early in the course that the video will be included in their examinations, and we encourage students to use the video as a basis for part of their other assignments (i.e., personal learning journals). We find that rather than being disappointed and distraught about having to be at class on time, students are appreciative of this process as they
view it as providing not only a “free pass” to information on the examinations but also easily accessible information for use in their journals.

A third limitation is the potential for students to view the video as repetitive or mundane as the semester progresses. This limitation was something that we took very seriously and used as one of the key criteria for video selection. Unlike some of the other reality TV shows (e.g., Big Brother, Survivor), we found that the Eco Challenge series in general, and the Morocco race in particular, provided a constantly changing environment and set of stimuli for the viewer to consider. To ensure variety in application, we carefully select how we frame each clip that we show to the students, in terms of the recent theories we have discussed as well as students’ other activities in our course (e.g., each student team runs his or her own business throughout the semester). We also vary the way in which we use the clips in terms of logistics, with some large-group discussion and some small-group discussion and presentation, and prescription, with occasional sessions during which we provide minimal direction and facilitation—simply challenging the students to come up with theoretical connections and applications on their own (either individually or in small groups). Through careful video clip selection, contextualization, and processing we work to reduce the potential monotony and tedium associated with this learning tool.

A final potential limitation of the Eco Challenge race video stems from its classification as a form of reality TV. As we point out in our discussion of this domain above, with numerous criticisms of reality TV in the academic and popular press (e.g., Peyser, 2001), there is the issue of our not only condoning but also promoting reality TV through its application in our classes. One way we try to combat this limitation is to acknowledge up front that though the Eco Challenge is reality TV, the label reality TV covers a variety of programs ranging from documentaries (e.g., Jamie’s Kitchen, which won a 2003 Indie reality TV award in the documentary category) to talent shows (e.g., Pop Idol was awarded a 2003 Indie reality TV award in the category of independent production) (Hill, 2005). We talk about the process we used to select the Eco Challenge and state that we have selected it intentionally as a “best practice” example of a reality TV show that is neither offensive nor threatening, and that we are using it as a tool to provide readily accessible and “others-based” illustrations and applications of individual and team-based interactions to OB concepts. We believe that in acknowledging others’ criticisms of the format up front, followed by the positives that continue to lead us to utilize this video in our classes, we are able to effectively convey to our students that their learning is our primary goal (Cialdini, 1993).
Conclusion: Adventure Racing’s Place in Organizational Behavior

All in all, in our overall experience to date, we have found the Eco Challenge race series video to be a stimulating and thought-provoking teaching tool for use in our OB courses. As a testament to how captivating the video is, when we presented this tool at the 2005 Organizational Behavior Teaching Conference (OBTC) conference, most of the workshop participants stayed for 30 to 40 min after the session had ended to watch more of the race. We recognize that some faculty may view our use of the race video as a teaching activity that is void of theory and a waste of valuable classroom time; however, our perceptions and experiences lead us to believe the opposite. We have found that the Eco Challenge allows us to engage students in an active dialogue about the application of theoretical concepts to what we (as participants in the classroom experience) observe in the race. For us, in our roles as teaching practitioners, we relish the fluidity and variability that comes from students relating the race competitors’ thoughts, actions, and outcomes to their own experiences as individuals and as members of class-based teams.

To once again reflect on James March’s “pleasures of the process,” we find that our pleasures are firmly grounded in our ability to create learner-centered discussions with students based on shared experience. Using the Eco Challenge video helps us to stimulate these discussions with a larger percentage of students than we have ever been able to engage using a traditional lecture-style teaching method. The video series is not only attractive and addictive to most of the students who watch it but also, and much more important, is readily applicable to a variety of OB theories and practical topic areas creating opportunities for cognitively complex and “no one right answer” creative student discussion and reflection.
### Appendix A

#### Potential Applications of Eco Challenge Video Clips

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Segment Description</th>
<th>Content Themes</th>
<th>Discussion Suggestions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tape 1: 00.00 - 11.15</td>
<td>The 315-mile Eco Challenge race concept is introduced. The members of Team Navigator (U.S. Navy Seals) and Team Urban Edge (United States) are introduced. The race commences with a 9-mile camel trek along the beach.</td>
<td>Teamwork, diversity, personality, leadership, and motivation</td>
<td>Have students consider the race as a metaphor for a 14-week Organizational Behavior course. Also a good way to introduce the course by having students think of the many course topics covered in Organizational Behavior and how they might apply in the context of an expedition team race.</td>
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<td>11.15 - 24.21</td>
<td>The video follows the difficulties of Team Urban Edge members during the camel trek and provides more background on the team and its members. Team Navigator charge into the coasteering leg while Team Urban Edge begins to lag behind. Other teams begin the dangerous coasteering leg.</td>
<td>Creativity, team decision-making and performance norms, leadership traits, team goal setting</td>
<td>This section contrasts Team Navigator and Team Urban Edge in terms of each individual member's background and the manner in which the teams operate. Have students assess the teams, their members, and each team's potential to be successful in the race.</td>
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<tr>
<td>24.21 - 35.00</td>
<td>Team Navigator begins the 50-mile kayak paddle along the rugged coast. Team Aussie (Australian) is introduced. Team Urban Edge' tentative approach costs them dearly in the coasteering section. Team Aussie takes the lead in the kayak leg.</td>
<td>Group culture, attitudes and values, dealing with group setbacks, decision making, team skills and cohesiveness</td>
<td>This section allows students to consider how teams (good and bad) make decisions and their implications for performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>35.00 - 46.00</td>
<td>Team Wa (Japan) faces difficulties in the huge surf. Many teams have to be rescued from the difficult conditions. Teams are creative in utilizing kites, parachutes, sails, etc., to assist their kayaks. Team Venezuela is missing.</td>
<td>Decision making under pressure, resilience and perseverance, creativity, and leveraging team strengths</td>
<td>This section shows how different teams respond to setbacks and pressure situations. Have students discuss key factors in how effective teams deal with difficulties and setbacks.</td>
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</table>
Team Venezuela reaches the passport control checkpoint after the "dark zone" cutoff with one member suffering from hypothermia. Team Urban Edge suffers from poor preparation. They commence the kayak leg in last place.

Team Urban Edge continues to struggle with their excess baggage. Surf conditions worsen for the race. Team Urban Edge capsizes, requires medical assistance, and is disqualified from the race.

Team Aussie completes the kayak leg in 1st place. The medical team manages a variety of competitors in distress. Team Rubicon (United States) and Team Mexico are introduced. The lead teams commence the hiking leg.

Team Aussie commences the hike - 63 miles - and a 10,000-ft climb through the Atlas Mountains. Team Aussie, Team Navigator, and Team Rubicon all have problems.

Communication, preparation and planning, understanding task context, and attitudes and values

Values and attitudes and coping with failure

Planning, teamwork, crisis management, leadership styles, team diversity, personality, team cohesiveness and capability, conflict, values and attitudes, and stages of group development

Team strategy, values and attitudes, team support, and team leadership

This section highlights the problems that teams face when they fail to understand task context and the factors that may limit their performance. Have students consider how these problems can be avoided in teams.

This is an emotional section for the race participants. We suggest simply letting the students watch this section without directed questions. The section is action packed and engaging for most viewers, giving students free reign in terms of application allows them a break from the prescriptive analyses of each preceding section.

This section highlights the dynamics of effective teamwork and distributed leadership. Have students discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different leadership styles and models manifested by the teams.

This section highlights how successful teams deal with crisis and low morale. What are the key lessons for teams of students working together on assignments?
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<td>1.37.30 - 1.50.00</td>
<td>Team Cepos (Spain) is introduced as they take the lead and commence the abseiling section of the course. More conflict is apparent in Team Mexico. Team Rubicon climbs the wrong mountain.</td>
<td>Personality, motivation, effort and performance, teamwork, self-awareness, conflict, negotiation, individual needs, and motivation</td>
<td>This final section of Tape 1 is a great stopping point for student reflection. Have students discuss the performance of each of the teams: their similarities &amp; differences, their cohesion and norms, their leadership and decision-making. Who do they think will win and why?</td>
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<td><strong>Tape 2: 00.00 - 11.22</strong></td>
<td>There is a review of what happened in Tape 1 and preview of what happens in Tape 2. Members of Team Rubicon suffer because of the altitude. Team Vail (United States) is introduced. Team Aussie reaches the abseiling section of the course in 6th place. A member of Team Evolution (United States) has to be rescued because of illness.</td>
<td>Team diversity and culture, group development, motivation, leadership traits, and resilience and dealing with hardship</td>
<td>This section highlights the skills and abilities of members of the different teams. Have students consider how they might put a team together and what skills, abilities, traits might be most desirable in this context.</td>
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<td>11.22 - 23.14</td>
<td>The toughness of the course begins to take its toll on competitors. Team Mexico is still experiencing conflict. Rookie Team 20/20 (Malaysia) is introduced. Team Aussie reaches the horse riding section of the course. Team Epinephrine (United States) is introduced. Team Mexico experiences even more conflict.</td>
<td>Conflict and negotiation, group development, cohesiveness, motivation, team culture, self awareness, and the role of chance or luck in performance</td>
<td>This section highlights the continuing team dynamic problems facing Team Mexico and contrasts them with some of the better performing teams. Have students consider what the cause of the conflict is for Team Mexico and how it could be resolved.</td>
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23.14 - 36.38
Team Cepos arrives at Camp 2, still in 1st place, and prepares to summit a 10,000-ft mountain.
Team Aussie is now in 4th place.
Team Rubicon must repel through a gorge in darkness.
All teams are suffering at this stage of the race and members must work together.
Team Aussie summits the mountain.
Team Cepos begins the final bike leg of the race.

36.38 - 52.52
Team Vail has surprisingly moved into 2nd place.
Team Rubicon erupts in conflict, and their cohesiveness dissolves.
The conflict in team Mexico is resolved in an unexpected manner.
A member of Team Cepos becomes gravely ill.

52.52 - 01.08.15
Team Cepos begins the final bike leg of the race.
Team 20/20 shows remarkable cohesiveness to endure.
Team Vail begins to chase down Team Cepos in the final bike leg.
Team Cepos becomes lost and is overtaken by Team Vail.

01.08.15 - 1.29.30
Team Rubicon is disqualified after one of their members is evacuated with a medical condition.
Team 20/20 grapples with tough decisions related to race leg cutoff times.
Team Mexico is finally working as a team.
The winners cross the finish line.
References


