

Miles, J.C. & Priest, S.

Adventure Programming. Venture Pub.

Pennsylvania
1999.

Chapter 21

The Adventure Experience Paradigm

Simon Priest

eXperientia

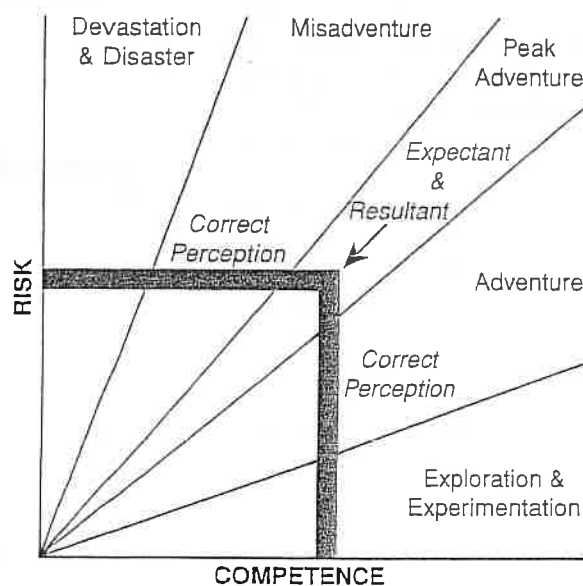
gms are merely conceptual models and theories de-
l to view and explain phenomena in life. One such
ective, the adventure experience paradigm (Martin
riest, 1986), was designed to interpret adventure ex-
ces. Based on the works of Ellis (1973), Csikszent-
yi (1975) and Mortlock (1984), the paradigm is dia-
ined in Figure 21.1. Before reading on, a review of
finitions given in the chapter on semantics is now

model has two axes: those of risk (the poten-
lose something of value) and competence (a syn-
f skill, knowledge, attitude, behavior, confidence,
perience). Recall from the last section on philoso-
at challenge is the interplay of risk and competence.
model, five such conditions of interplay are shown.
ndition which is expected or results depends upon
ance of risk and competence.

hen risks are low, and competence is high, a condi-
rmed *exploration and experimentation* exists. Us-
common activity of canoeing, this is likened to
ing paddle strokes on a calm lake. As risks increase,
ompetence decreases, the conditions of *adventure*,
adventure, and *misadventure* occur. Returning to ca-
these would be respectively analogous to paddling
le moving water, successfully running a fierce rapid,
mping overboard in whitewater. These four condi-
e acceptable learning opportunities for any adven-
basic skills, applying them to a challeng-
one's limits on the razor's edge, and having

to deal with the consequences of error are the mainstay of
education from and through adventure.

Figure 21.1 The Adventure Experience Paradigm



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However, the fifth condition of *devastation and disaster* is a place where few adventurers choose to tread. Occurring when risks are high and competence is low, this frightening condition should have no role in educational experiences. People may learn from misadventures, from which they may recover, but deaths result in negative adventure experiences and seek only to reverse the educational merit of adventure.

The key to an experience being adventurous, then, is uncertainty of outcome (Priest and Baillie, 1987). In fact, adventure is simply leisure with uncertainty (Carpenter and Priest, 1989). The uncertainty comes from the risks inherent in the activity and becomes challenging when a person applies his or her competence against the risks in an attempt to resolve that uncertainty. Furthermore, people tend to select risks which balance their competence in order that they may achieve optimal arousal (Ellis, 1973), a state of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975), and/or peak adventure experiences (Priest, 1987).

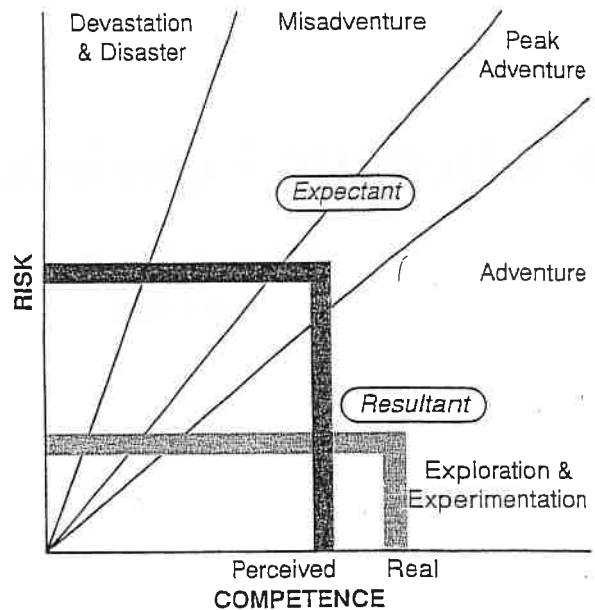
For these reasons adventures are personally specific (based on personal competence) and situationally specific (based on situational risks). In other words, an adventure for one person, in a particular place, at a given time, may not be adventure for another, or for the same person in a different place or time. Like leisure, adventure is purely "a state of mind" (Mitchell, 1983)!

The state of mind concept dictates human behavior and, in turn, is driven by human perceptions of reality. Hence, both risk and competence (the two axes of the model) may be thought of as having two possible values: real and perceived. Unfortunately for most people engaged in adventures these are often not the same value. Novices tend to misperceive the risks and competence of an adventure experience. Two types of such novices are common.

First, the timid and fearful people overperceive the risk (this is going to be dangerous) and underperceive their competence (I can't do this). If we consider that the perceptions of these people to dictate their expectations, then they are likely expecting a condition of misadventure (Figure 21.2). Also, if the real values of risk and competence dictate the actual outcome, then a condition like exploration and experimentation may result. This adventure experience is undesirable; because, when left to their own accord, the timid and fearful will miss their opportunity to experience a self-actualizing adventure and this is a shame.

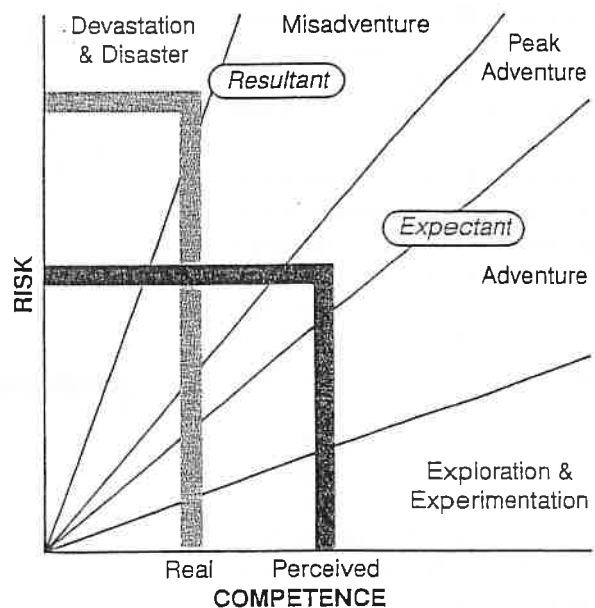
Second, the arrogant and fearless people underperceive the risk (this is going to be a breeze) and overperceive their competence (I can do this the best). Again, if we consider that the perceptions of these people to dictate their expectations, then they are likely expecting a condition of adventure (Figure 21.3). Also, if the real values of risk and competence dictate the actual outcome, then a condition like devastation and disaster may result. This adventure experience is equally if not more undesirable than the previously mentioned one; since the arrogant and fearless

Figure 21.2 Profile of the Timid and Fearful Individual



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Figure 21.3 Profile of the Arrogant and Fearless Individual



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will injure themselves and may likely take some other adventurers with them and this is unacceptable.

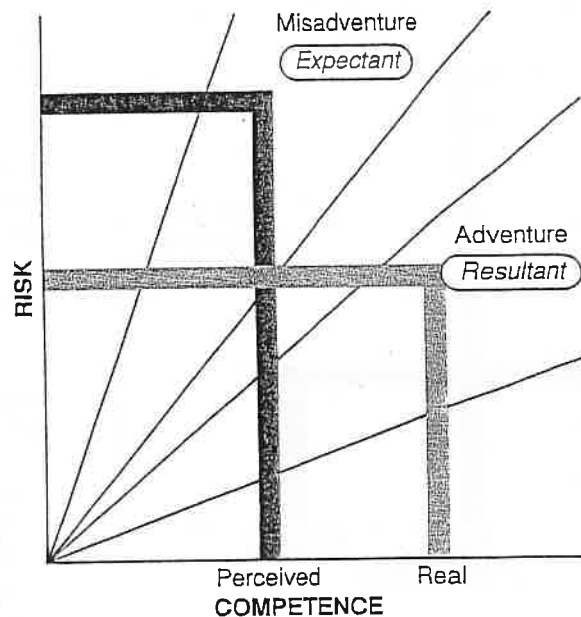
These kinds of shortcomings are often avoided by experienced adventurers. Through repeated exposure to the risks and by repeated application of their competence, these people have become astute: accurate in their perceptions. Hence, one goal of adventure education should be to create astute individuals: people who correctly perceive the situational risks and their personal competence, plus seek adventure experiences where the two variables are matched for a peak adventure.

The solution to the problems elucidated here are known as the facilitated adventure experience. Through structured and controlled experiences under the supervision of a facilitator or leader, people can make advances toward astuteness. These experiences are said to be structured, since the facilitator sets up the level of challenge as a custom fit for the individual; and are said to be controlled, because the risks which are manipulated are strictly the perceived values (the real values are maintained at acceptable and/or low levels). The key to the operation is the facilitator, who must be sufficiently experienced and astute enough to perceive the risks and the people's competence more accurately than they can. Two examples are shown in Figures 21.4 through 21.7 (page 162).

By way of illustration, consider a timid and fearful man on a high ropes traverse. The facilitator has structured an experience where this person is asked to walk across a tightrope 50 feet above the ground with only a rope strung from the far tree for balance and support. Based on perceived values, he is expecting a misadventure or, even worse, devastation and disaster! In actuality, the real values are quite different, since he is belayed (protected by a safety line). After considerable coaxing and assistance from the facilitator, he completes the traverse with the accompanying feeling of elation. The facilitator assists him in reflecting on his adventure and after some thought and discussion he now realizes that the task was not so dangerous and that he really was capable enough to complete it. This learning may later transfer to daily living concerns, where perhaps the man expresses timid and fearful behaviors when meeting new people.

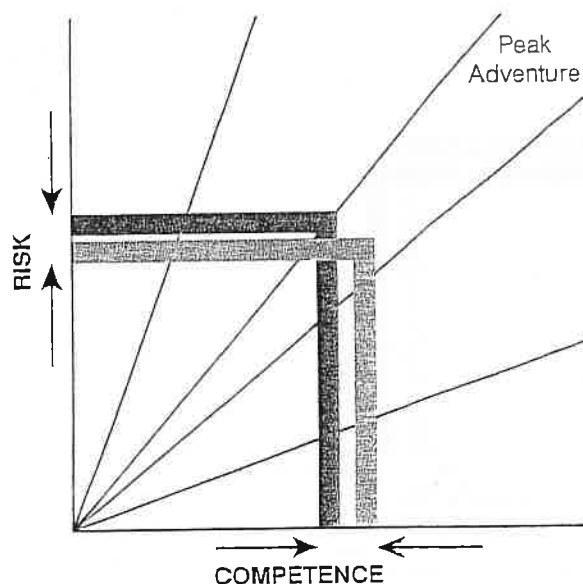
As a second case, take an arrogant and fearless woman on a rock climb. The facilitator has structured an experience where she is asked to climb a particularly difficult route which has previously been the topic of some bragging on her part. Based on perceived values, she is expecting exploration and experimentation or, at best, mere adventure! In actuality, the real values are quite different, since she is belayed (protected by a safety line), but the facilitator has chosen a very difficult route and expects her to fail. After considerable effort, she has fallen off the crux of the climb repeatedly and is exhausted. The facilitator now assists her in reflecting back on her misadventure and after some thought and discussion she realizes

Figure 21.4 Before the Facilitated Adventure Experience for the Timid and Fearful Participant



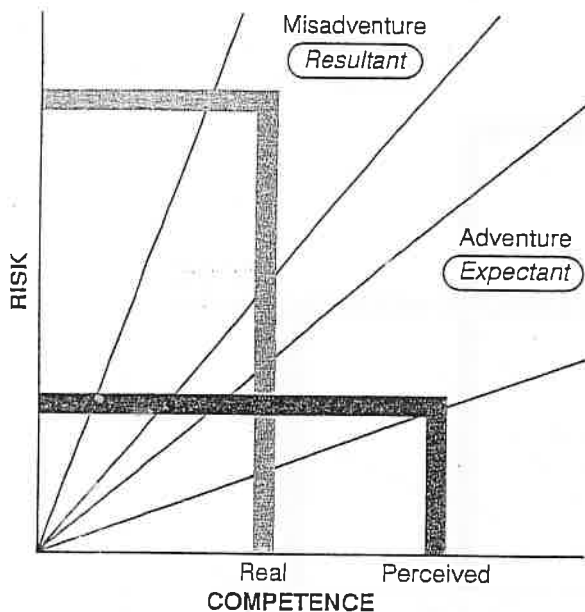
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Figure 21.5 After the Facilitated Adventure Experience for the Timid and Fearful Participant



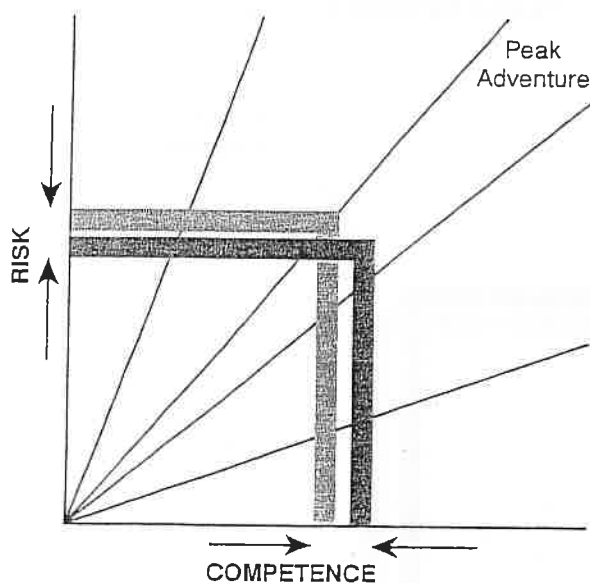
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Figure 21.6 Before the Facilitated Adventure Experience for the Arrogant and Fearless Participant



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Figure 21.7 After the Facilitated Adventure Experience for the Arrogant and Fearless Participant



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that the task was indeed more difficult than she expected and that she really was not as good as she was saying. This learning may later transfer to daily living concerns, where perhaps the woman expresses arrogant and fearless behaviors when working on projects as part of a small group.

These types of facilitated adventure experiences are repeated in different contexts, but with similar structuring and control. The upshot is that people slowly shift their perceptions toward becoming "in-tune" with reality: they slowly become astute! With astuteness often comes improvements in self-concept and in socialization. The interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships benefit from such adventure experiences. The paradigm described in this chapter helps visualize how this takes place.

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