

## THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE COURSE: DEVELOPING “LEARNING THAT LASTS”

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### ABSTRACT

Leadership is a growing part of the mainstream business curriculum and a primary objective for graduates. The increased use of leadership challenge courses (AKA “ropes courses”) as part of the curriculum is evident by the number of courses and programs that use these courses to facilitate the exploration of experiential occurrences, teamwork and trust building, and the development of leadership skills by participants (Eatough, Chang, & Hall, 2015; Stewart, Carreau, & Bruner, 2016). However, many organizations often do not capitalize on the pedagogical implications and value of such courses and focus on fun outdoor experiences over long-term learning and leadership development. Challenge courses can be effective for leadership development and team building for adults, but findings are equivocal on the effects on university students (Gillis & Speelman, 2008). This paper examines how leadership challenge courses can be improved by using Bloom’s taxonomy of learning objectives (1956).

As participants progress through Bloom’s six levels of learning, higher degrees of critical thinking are required at subsequent levels (Anderson & Sosniak, 1994). In our research we explore the use of challenge courses by students and executives from a pedagogical standpoint. As participants move away from the lower levels of memorization and comprehension to the higher levels of assessment and evaluation, the implications of the challenge course change and these higher levels of learning can be emphasized in the course activities. The focus shifts from a purely fun experience to a more tangible outcome that facilitates “learning that lasts” (Mentkowski et al., 2000). The experiences gained from the course can be extended to both the classroom and the boardroom. We discuss challenge courses and their various features, examine the pedagogy behind the learning, and conclude with a case study that provides suggestions for best practices in using these types of courses.

**Keywords:** leadership, challenge course, ropes course, experiential education, learning pedagogy, learning that lasts, Bloom’s taxonomy.

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