

## ...DELIVER CHANGE (22)

The mechanism of change for experiential outdoor programs often involves combinations of reflection, challenge, and nature.

### REFLECTION

Reflection is the initial key to achieving change from outdoor adventure or nature experiences. From each experience, or the various parts of it, clients engage in a four-step repeating cycle.

1. **distressful dissonance** (in a novel situation the client's mind has difficulty holding two opposing views due to challenge/nature),
2. **attempted resolution** (client acts to reduce or eliminate the gap between two views),
3. **new found competence** (clients discover their hidden skills or novel behaviors), and
4. **facilitated reflection** (helps clients solidify: lessons learned, applications to daily living, and commitment to change in the future).

This cycle may or may not be facilitated by a leader following the principles of **competence effectance**. However, highly talented leaders may mix and match these four steps, so that each can occur at any point and in any order.

### CHALLENGE

**Challenge** (difficult undertaking) comes mainly from individual risk taking and/or group conflict resolution. Leaders deliberately seek out these risks and/or conflicts as they arise naturally in the outdoors. Leaders do not manufacture risks and/or conflicts within the adventure.

**Risk** (potential for clients to lose something of value) often relates to dark underground, great heights, deep water or remote isolation. These unfamiliar exposures present an appearance of high perceived risk (while real danger is actually kept low by competent leaders. Clients have a fear response that creates dissonance: "I'm safe and I'm going to die!" This dissonance leads into the reflection cycle with attention to confidence, resilience, self-esteem, and so on.

**Conflict** (social friction among group members) frequently occurs under stress during outdoor living as inevitable disagreements, arguments, misperceptions or resentments. Again, the dissonance can be distressful: "I have to be a team player but I'm so ready to get aggressive!" This leads into the reflection cycle with a focus on cooperation and other pro-social skills.

### NATURE

Life stressors can cause a flood of negative or antagonistic emotions (anger, guilt, sadness, grief, loneliness, disgust, failure, apprehension, jealousy, and helplessness) that are known to diminish physical and mental health, if left unaddressed. Closely associated with these disorders are common physiological impacts of elevated muscle tension, blood pressure, and heart rate, with suppressed cognition and immune response. Following the tested principles of **biophilia**, **stress reduction** theory, and **attention restoration** theory, **sensory immersion** in a natural environment may tap the powerful **restorative properties of nature**.

Nature immersion brings a **positive emotional outlook** (joy, happiness, serenity, tranquility, peacefulness, new hope, amazement, awe, admiration, and inspiration) that can lead to healing, well-being, and enhanced health. Once more, exposure to nature creates dissonance: "I am depressed and anxious, yet feel happy and calm in this very moment!" This leads into the reflection cycle that highlights coping strategies.

Some adventure programs take place **indoors** or within artificial environs. **Without nature**, the outcomes are strictly intrapersonal (due to risk taking) and/or interpersonal (due to conflict resolution). Nature immersion outcomes are unlikely to be fully realized. Lastly, the finer mechanism of change can be carefully adjusted by varying the combined mixture of reflection, challenges (risk and/or conflict), and nature as best co-created by client and leader together.

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