

The Benefits Of Offsite Team Building

The term, 'Team Building', encompasses a huge range of activities which exist on a spectrum, with fun recreational activities at one end, and strategic team development at the other. Fun, team building activities may involve trivia challenges, lawn bowling, cooking or African drumming. At the other end of the spectrum, are customised, experiential business games that simulate the group dynamics that may occur in a typical work project. These sessions involve a debrief to assist with highlighting how the behaviours that occurred in the experiential exercise may improve performance back at work.

At an intellectual level, it would be easy to think that teams that need to improve their performance would do the most team building. However, in my experience, the opposite is true. It seems that high-performing and successful teams put a high value on team building, and they are prepared to commit their time, people and resources to ensure that they can maintain a positive team culture.

Team building programs need to be designed, based on many factors, including the industry, group size, gender, time frame and previous team building experience. Tuckman's model of group development (forming, storming, norming and performing) suggests that teams progress through a predictable sequence of stages.

In the workplace, it may take years for people to move through some of the stages, as interaction may be infrequent or minimal. However, these stages can be accelerated, by means of team development activities, as teams are required to innovate, problem solve and complete a task within a relatively short time period. Business-simulation activities can provide an opportunity for teams to practise teamwork without the expensive consequences if mistakes occur.

Some companies struggle to fit a structured, team building activity into a tightly-packed, daytime conference agenda. So, running an evening event during dinner can be a perfect opportunity for team members to relax, unwind and have a memorable group experience.

Recreational team building activities, such as Trivia Challenges, during dinner, may appear frivolous or unnecessary. However, they serve a valuable purpose. A well-designed session allows for structured, positive interaction between team members. These events should be entertaining and require a variety of skill sets, talents and knowledge. Sessions may be competitive to increase the level of fun, although the prize at the end should be symbolic of victory without it having a high cash value.

The Kolb experiential learning cycle (abstract theory, concrete experience, reflective observation and active experimentation) forms the basis for effective team development. A typical team development program might begin with a short theory session about group dynamics or a model for effective teamwork. The session might then have a team-based problem-solving activity which allows team members to have a concrete experience. This experience is followed by a debrief session which guides participants to reflect on their experience and how it relates to the abstract theory.

The session should then provide another opportunity for active experimentation so that the insights discussed in the debrief can be practised again. To avoid team building fatigue, sessions should have a high degree of variety so that people can interact with new people in a variety of different challenges and tasks. Team development programs that include these four distinct stages provide the best opportunity for improvements in team performance.

Some of the more frequent team building objectives include improving communication between teams, stimulating creativity, or practising teamwork. Business simulations provide an opportunity to practise and reinforce beneficial team behaviours. Team building can provide an opportunity to reward staff for good performance or for achieving performance targets. Some team building events provide a memorable group experience which becomes part of the company culture and history. Each year, people look forward to the next team building event. As the



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culture develops and strengthens, positive team behaviours are reinforced and less desirable behaviours are extinguished.

A primary purpose of team building is to foster a positive team culture and this can serve as reward and recognition for achieving company targets. Team development programs help individuals to understand group dynamics and practise teamwork. The social interactions that occur during team building programs can strengthen informal working relationships which can translate to enhanced communication back at work.

I am not sure anyone can put a monetary figure on the value of team building or calculate a percentage improvement in productivity as a consequence of a team building program. However, there is considerable research that suggests the cost of replacing an employee can be between 100 per cent and 150 per cent of their annual salary, based on recruitment costs, training and inducting a replacement. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that staff, who are achieving good results and enjoy working with their colleagues, would be less likely to leave the organisation, resulting in huge savings.

So, perhaps the benefit of team building is having a happy and committed workforce that is recognised and rewarded for its efforts. This benefit is increased by team members who understand the principles of teamwork and enjoy working with their colleagues as they perform in a productive and collaborative company culture.

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