

Fact-File 4: Teambuilding – the art of working better together...



Extract from our *Working Better Together* Guides for Team-Building

The Need for Team-building



"We just don't seem to work very well together! Everyone does their own thing. We're not on the same page. We don't pull together or help each other out with problems. What we need is team-building!" Sound familiar?

Teams are everywhere these days and the ability to get teams working better together is a major mission for most leaders. We all want happy, productive workplaces where we get along well with each other and there's a real sense of team.

Team-building's become an article of faith – a miracle cure for many managers. We know we need it, but often we aren't quite sure what it really is.

- While most workplaces say they work in teams - fewer know how to really make teams work.
- Teamworking skills come into play any time a group of people work together to achieve a common goal.
- We naturally form teams to achieve things together we couldn't do alone, yet working well together doesn't come so naturally. We have to learn how to do this.
- We need to know how to form teams that function well – then we need to learn how to work in them collaboratively.
- We need to build commitment to common goals, shared visions and collective actions, as well as manage team relationships and performance.
- We need to maintain and improve them – to help them constantly rethink how to work better together.

Like everything else though, teams break down, under-perform, disintegrate or stop functioning as well as they should. They need remodeling, revitalizing or re-forming. Put simply, they need maintaining.

That's where teambuilding comes in. It has a proven track record as a tool to enhance team performance, but the term itself sometimes seems a bit nebulous. People know they need it, but often aren't sure what it is.

What is Team-Building?

For starters, team-building is not a single thing – there are many different definitions, methods and approaches. No one approach is right every time and it can incorporate so many different things.

In a very broad sense, all team-building is about finding ways to work better together. Aims and outcomes vary from team to team, but it typically covers team improvement ideas like:

- Shaping shared visions and values* – where most teambuilding needs to start!
- Forming and designing teams* – getting the team architecture right.
- Talking better together in teams* – attending to our conversations and communication.
- Learning together* – tapping into opportunities for sharing learning and good ideas
- Increasing team cohesiveness* – finding ways to stick together and then stay together
- Enhancing team relationships* – respect, trust, openness, collaborative team behaviour
- Social and emotional intelligence* – attending to the emotional climate of the team
- Clearing up leadership* – self-responsibility, empowerment and better co-ordination
- Clarifying roles* – understanding expectations and contributions we each make in the team
- Operational issues* – making changes and improvements to how the team does its work

Each of these things can contribute to building a positive, team-working culture and supportive emotional climate where people can find ways to discuss team and task issues constructively, work through conflict without resorting to argument and identify ways to work better together in future.



What does Team-Building do?

As well as looking at design, structure and composition, a lot of what team-building does depends on dipping deeply into the dynamics and interpersonal aspects of how a team functions.

Fact-File 4: Teambuilding – the art of working better together...



Extract from our *Working Better Together* Guides for Team-Building

It deals with underlying issues, concerns and processes present in all teams – patterns of behaviour, interaction, communication, roles and relationships that affect how well they work together.



While every team has its own unique needs and challenges, most find they need to work on conversational, behavioural and relationship-building aspects. The clearer you are on what you want from team-building, the more effective it is. Here's a string of ideas about what team-building does:

- ❑ **Teamwork:** Builds understanding of what it takes to be part of a well-functioning team
- ❑ **Direction:** Helps people agree visions and goals and how to collectively achieve them
- ❑ **Group Interaction:** gets people to reflect on behaviours that help or hinder teamwork
- ❑ **Creates cohesion:** makes people more mindful of working in well with each other
- ❑ **Connection:** Who do I connect or relate to in this team? Who don't I? Why is that?
- ❑ **Rapport:** Do we give each other enough positive self-regard, respect and support?
- ❑ **Belongingness:** the degree to which people identify with feel like they belong in a team
- ❑ **Leadership:** Do I like my leader or agree with how leadership is handled in this team?
- ❑ **Decisions:** How we make decisions and how can we share and improve on this?
- ❑ **Team Spirit:** Building team spirit, trust, identity and making people feel recognised/valued
- ❑ **Team Improvement:** Identifying ways we can do the work better or work better together
- ❑ **Co-operation:** Increasing co-operation and work more collectively as a team
- ❑ **Differences:** How to deal better with conflict and resolve differences more amicably?
- ❑ **Responsibility:** taking joint responsibility and holding each other to account
- ❑ **Climate:** Do we have a positive work culture and a safe and supportive emotional climate?

- ❑ **Communication:** Do we have constructive, open conversations so people share ideas?
- ❑ **Obstacles:** Identifying and fixing barriers that get in the way of working better together

The Benefits of Team Working

Whatever negative press they get, there's a bucket-full of hard evidence harking way back to the early 20th century Hawthorne Experiments, that shows teams magnify performance. When they work well together, they achieve more than any single individual can.

We all know the reasons for working in teams – things like:

- ❑ Teams tap collective thinking and doing power greater than any single individual
- ❑ Teams boost work performance, staff satisfaction, commitment and involvement
- ❑ Teams enable better co-ordination and blend more skills together
- ❑ Projects are too big, too complex, too involved for a single person to do it all
- ❑ Discourages skills hoarding and encourages shared perspectives on problems
- ❑ Teams get people to think together about new ways of getting things done
- ❑ Teams are the prime vehicle for continuous improvement, innovation and learning
- ❑ Teams are the key to more productive work cultures and improved service quality



While there are loads of rational reasons to work in teams, there are good social and emotional reasons too. Here are some important ones:

- ◆ *Feeling 'included'* or 'belongingness' – it's a frequently-mentioned job satisfaction factor
- ◆ *Feeling 'supported'* – knowing we can call on people to support, back us up and encourage
- ◆ *Feeling 'involved'* – sensing we can have a say, our opinions count, we're 'in the loop'
- ◆ *Feeling 'energised'* – good team performance increases individual confidence and energy

Fact-File 4: Teambuilding – the art of working better together...



Extract from our *Working Better Together* Guides for Team-Building

- ◇ *Feeling 'heard'* – knowing our ideas will be noticed, nurtured and not 'knocked'
- ◇ *Facilitates open dialogue*, freer information access and mutual understanding
- ◇ *Fosters participation and ownership* – in creating, capturing and sharing learning
- ◇ *Synergy* – the dynamic of learning alongside others improves team spirit and performance
- ◇ *It creates a supportive environment* for experimentation, enquiry, mentoring, coaching and skills expansion

Working well in teams leads to staff satisfaction, commitment, involvement, more innovation and improved customer service quality.

Planning for Team-Building

All teams need to take time-out now and again to work on their team-talk, renew relationships, find ways to discuss difficult issues that get in the way and clarify how they can work better and more constructively together.



Like anything, the planning and preparation you put into a teambuilding session is vital to success.

It's sad but true: many detest team-building - they see it as a waste of time, full of fluffy-stuff with little relevance to real needs. It's not enough to simply get your team together off-site and run a bunch of icebreaker games.

If you want team-building to work, you need to identify what to work on. A good team-building session firstly has a clear focus. You also have to demonstrate to the team that it relates directly to real work results they care about and on top of that, that it benefits them personally. Here's a few tips when planning team-building sessions...:

- ✓ *Make it real and relevant*: Choose one or two real-work issues as your base. The best team-building often happens as people work on things that matter to them – planning a change, developing new strategic goals, rethinking a key work process or service.
- ✓ *Clear aims and outcomes*: Identify clear work-related aims and outcomes. Plan from the beginning to ensure by the end people

have achieved – that they've made headway defining a direction, solving a problem or coming up with a new way of doing things.

- ✓ *Consult for commitment*: Consult beforehand about what issues people feel the need to tackle or talk over – and what outcomes they'd like to see.
- ✓ *Balance talk with action – and work with fun*: All fun and it's too frivolous – all work and it's boring drudgery. Balance your session with a combination of solid work sessions threaded through with fun team-building activities.
- ✓ *Build team skills*: Team-building can be big on activities and light on learning. Build in some conversational, planning or problem-solving tools people can apply back at work
- ✓ *Right-time your team-building*: Don't team-build in times of terror, transition, absence or high work-load or when people are reeling from bad news or big set-backs.
- ✓ *Plan in time for people to network* and 'free-range' on issues that arise spontaneously for them – especially if they don't get much opportunity for this at work. Building strong teams starts with relationship-building.
- ✓ *End with an action plan*: Whatever else you do put together a follow-up plan to continue the work back at work. Great ideas emerge at team-building sessions only to submerge back at work through lack of a follow-up plan to implement them.

There's no one right strategy or method to best bring out the potential in your team. Talk to your team. Get very clear on what you want what you want (and don't want) from teambuilding and what approaches would best suit your outcomes, your culture and the personalities that make up your team before deciding the design and focus of your session. ■

The Change Forum regularly delivers tailored team-building clinics under the generic banner: *Working Better Together*. For information on our *Working Better Together* approach or to find out what a WBT clinic can do for your team, contact us for a program outline or download a detailed *WBT Prospectus* at www.thechangeforum.com.
☎: 07-4068 7591 or ✉: WBT@thechangeforum.com



This Fact-file is derived from materials from our *Working Better Together* participant Guidebooks that accompany our team-building series of the same name. © Copyright Bill Cropper, The Change Forum 2004-9.