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“I’m an employee, get me out of here!” – workers put off by forced team-building

- **New study suggests majority of British workers think doing more team-building events would be a waste of time**
- **Eye-popping examples of activities mentioned include 'bush tucker trials', bikini-clad bed-baths and lingerie parties**
- **Better communication, a supportive atmosphere and tools for flexible working are preferred ways to improve teamwork**

We may be a nation of good sports, but most British workers think that doing more company team-building events would not help improve how they work with colleagues. A survey by Vodafone UK and YouGov suggests employees feel that some organised team-building activities can be a waste of time, and at worst, are toe-curlingly awkward.

British workers would much prefer being able to communicate with each other better at work rather than being forced to build rapport with their co-workers by sharing adrenaline experiences or performing 'trust' exercises.

The research among more than 1,000 British employees with colleagues uncovered some eye-popping examples of awkward and silly team-building activities, including enduring bikini-clad 'bed baths' and massages from colleagues, holding lingerie parties, and eating crickets as part of a 'bush tucker trial' style event.

While the majority of workers surveyed (66 per cent) have been made to do some form of team-building activity, more than half (54 per cent) don't feel that doing more would help them work better with their colleagues.

“British companies are spending a huge amount of time and effort in building more effective teams,” says Peter Kelly, Enterprise Director at Vodafone UK. “This research confirms that people place more value on open, collaborative and flexible ways of working every day than one-off team-building exercises.”

According to the survey, adrenaline experiences like speed-boating and bungee jumping are considered the least effective team-building activities, followed by trust exercises such as being blindfolded and led

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by colleagues. Those deemed most effective are social events like going out for a drink or a meal, followed by volunteering and charity work.

Rather than potentially waste money on frivolous team-building exercises, respondents with a negative view of team-building suggest that companies should instead focus on providing a more supportive atmosphere at work, enabling better team communication and offering tools for flexible working as their top three priorities.

"Many genuine team-building activities can be valuable, but ultimately, to achieve better teamwork businesses need to get the basics right first. Employers need to focus on how their employees work day-to-day, and give staff the tools they need to be able to do their job best. Employees also want to be able to work smarter – and that means easy access to customers, colleagues and information wherever they are," continues Peter Kelly.

Respondents are also clear about the negative impacts of not working effectively as a team. The most serious of these were delayed decision-making (named by 31 per cent), unhappy customers through poor response (29 per cent), missing targets because of lack of timely input from colleagues (28 per cent), and making the wrong decisions because of lack of access to the right people and information (28 per cent).

Overall, only 26 per cent of respondents feel that more team-building would help them work more effectively with their colleagues. Whether it's down to cynicism or wisdom, age seems to engender a more jaded view of team-building exercises: only 10 per cent of people aged 55 and over say they help improve team working, compared with 42 per cent of 18–24 year-olds. People in Scotland seem to be more positive than those south of the border, with 33 per cent of respondents saying that more team-building events would encourage better team working.

Key findings

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov plc. The total sample size was 2,014 adults, of which 1,059 were workers with colleagues. Fieldwork was undertaken between 20th and 23rd January 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

The key findings are as follows:

- Most workers with colleagues (66 per cent) have ever participated in some form of organised team-building event at work.

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- The most common team-building events people have participated in are social activities such as team drinks and dinners (56 per cent) and away days or weekends (24 per cent).
- More than half of all respondents (54 per cent) say that doing more team-building events would not help them work more effectively with colleagues. For this group, the preferred ways of encouraging effective teamwork are a more supportive atmosphere at work (39 per cent), better team communication (37 per cent) and tools for working flexibly (23 per cent).
- Only 26 per cent of respondents feel that doing more team-building events would help them work more effectively with their colleagues. For this group, better team communication was an even more important factor in improving teamwork (cited by 49 per cent of respondents).
- The team-building activities people considered least effective are adrenaline experiences such as speed-boating and bungee jumping (18 per cent) and trust exercises such as being blindfolded and led by colleagues (17 per cent).
- Those deemed most effective are social events (cited by 23 per cent), followed by volunteering and charity work (11 per cent).
- Among people aged 55 and over, only 10 per cent say doing more team-building events would help them work more effectively with colleagues, and 75 per cent saying they would not. By contrast, 42 per cent of 18–24 year-olds say more team-building events would help them work more effectively with colleagues, and 40 per cent say they would not.
- Wales is the region with the most negative view of how effective team-building events are, with 71 per cent of workers saying they would not contribute to better teamwork.

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