Top 10 Tips

Team Building Activities

Getting people to work together effectively is one of a manager’s ongoing challenges. The University is made up of many different teams, all of whom have specific goals to achieve. Whether a team’s purpose is to achieve a high quality student experience, world class research project or deliver highly effective services, it is a manager’s job to help them work together in the best way. Managers can use focused team building activities to encourage team development, this document outlines several approaches which may be used.

What activities can a manager use to build the team?

1. **Plan team building activities rather than hoping it will happen naturally.**

You may be lucky and your team members all get on with one another and naturally work well as a team. However, it is common for teams to require some work for them to work most effectively. It is useful to spend time working on the team and helping them develop the relationships they will need to work together most effectively. If you would like a useful summary of what is needed in a team building event see [50 activities for Team Building by Mike Woodcock 1989](#).

2. **Use ‘Ice Breakers’ to help your team get to know one another better.**

These can be used at the start of meetings or during specific team building events you organise. Speak to SDDU for any advice on what team building activity suits your requirements best.

   - **One interesting fact** – Ask team members to give one interesting fact about themselves, it can be from their careers, their research or other areas of their lives. This allows the group to hear members talking about themselves.

   - **My greatest achievement** – Ask team members to share what they feel is their greatest achievement. This allows people to start the process of describing the knowledge, skills and behaviours they are bringing to the project/team.

   - **Human Bingo** – This activity involves team members giving one or two facts about themselves to a co-ordinator. The co-ordinator then compiles these facts on a sheet of paper and during the event the team members circulate and try and find out which fact links to which person. This exercise allows group members to get to know one another, and breaks down barriers.

   - **Origins, influences and expectations.** Again, a good exercise for an initial session. This can be done using flipchart paper or just done verbally. **Time:** 10 mins to complete, then 10mins per person to share, **Resources:** notepad/paper or flipchart and pens. Ask participants to outline:

     a) their origins (however they choose to define it)
     b) influences in their life (people of event that have influenced their life)
c) their expectations for this project, of themselves and others.
If using flipcharts participants can answer using words, metaphors, pictures or drawings then share otherwise, this can be done as a go round and share.

3. **Use exercises to reflect on the Team itself**

It is useful for the manager to create a space in which team members can talk about the way the team is working. Here are some ideas which may be used:

**What kind of a team am I working in?** Ask the group to draw the team they are working in, in any way they want and then write words which summarise the team. This can provoke some interesting discussion about the team.

**Team Health Checklist** – how do we fare against the criteria? Using set criteria discuss what the criteria mean then invite discussion about team’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to the criteria. Results in better understanding of the team and an action plan to address weaknesses/avoid possible pitfalls. Your criteria depend on what kind of team you are in charge of but might, for example, include:

*University Values*
Academic Excellence, Community, Integrity, Inclusiveness, Professionalism

*People Management Framework*
This framework has been introduced to ensure best practice in people management and staff engagement with University strategy. The framework replaces the TIFES Standards, which helped to achieve compliance with people management processes University wide. This new focus forms part of the Investors in People Framework, against which the University may decide to be benchmarked in the future.

*Lost in the Desert* team building exercise. This survival helps the group to reflect on decision making and communication processes. For further information on Survival Exercise Scenarios: [http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/SurvivalScenarios.html](http://wilderdom.com/games/descriptions/SurvivalScenarios.html)

*Profiling of the team members* – There are various mechanisms for measuring characteristics of team members. For example, learning styles or the roles people play within a team. It can be useful to measure characteristics of individual members before they come together, to provide a context within which everyone will be working. (For example: Belbin – preferred roles in groups or Honey & Mumford learning styles questionnaire. For more information contact [SDDU](#).)

*Cross-Team/Collaborative working* – Can you design an activity to identify other teams that your team has contact with? How clear are you about their team’s expectations of you? Can you invite a member of their team to come and discuss this at your event? Who leads on your communications with other teams? This can be a useful exercise to help define your relations and expectations of other teams.

4. **Use exercises to focus on the objectives of the Team**

Discussion of the task which faces the team will help team members to share their expectations, hopes, fears and plans. Facilitation of these discussions is a key project manager role and allows everyone to imagine what the future looks like.

- What are our measures of success (Key Performance Indicators)?
- What will help us to achieve these KPI's? – How can we ensure we maintain these?
5. **Undertake analysis of a team’s activities using well-known management models.**

A team can benefit from analysing its own activities by a focussed session using management measurement. For example:

**SWOT analysis** – Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats against the *purpose* of the team. By asking the group to reflect on these aspects of teamwork, this can provide useful insights into how the team can best work together.

**PESTLE Analysis:** Political, Economic, Sociological, Technological, Legal, Environmental; by breaking the team down into groups and asking them to consider the following question;

“What **political, economic, sociological, technological, legal or environmental** factors affect our ability to work as a team?” “How can we use this knowledge to work more effectively together?”

6. **Use social activities to get the team to know one another better.**

It is useful for members of teams to spend time together where they are not actually working. This allows them to see different attributes of their colleagues and learn of different interests etc. Some teams allocate a ‘social secretary’ who is responsible for arranging walks, going out together for lunch one day, quiz evenings etc. It is important that members of the team are **NOT** required to participate in social events but the hope is that people will naturally become involved as the activities become more and more successful.

7. **Set your team a challenge!**

Nothing seems to inspire a team to work together as a unit more than a challenge! It can be useful to divide your team into smaller groups and ask them to solve a stretching challenge. This might be something which you set for them or a pre-written team task (ask **SDDU** if you need ideas.) By reflecting on how the teams went about solving the problem can be highly revealing about people’s styles, work preferences and styles.

8. **Design and deliver an Away Day**

Time away from the office where the team can think about how things are working can be highly rewarding and productive. This process of ‘working on the business’ (as opposed to ‘in’ the business”) is an important part of team reflection. The most effective use of away days can be during periods of high levels of change, or at the end or beginning of phases in the team’s year. The away day needn’t be a whole day. In fact shorter more focused events can sometimes be preferable.

The ‘away day’ concept has received ‘bad press’ in certain quarters because it has been undertaken as a means to an end; however, planning is choice of relevant activities are key. Just spending time together at an away day is not good use of time and will not achieve great team bonding. It is the pre-planning and care and attention to linking activities to what key staff concerns and the most important things they are being required to undertake, linking everything back to departmental strategy and purpose which will determine success. Speak to your SDDU representative for examples of other events and help in designing and delivering your own.
9. **How good is the team as a ‘learning organisation’?**

The concept of a learning organisation can help managers consider how good their team is at evolving and growing. Static teams get left behind, whereas teams which understand the importance of ongoing growth and improvement develop inbuilt resilience and ability to change with the times.

Activities which help staff to understand what a learning organisation is, and to audit their own activities in relation to it, can be highly valuable. The notion of ‘learning organisation’ sets out a blueprint for how things could be in your team. This can be a good starting point.

10. **Make sure team building helps staff to understand the team purpose in a university context**

Staff at the University of Leeds have a variety of frameworks within which they must operate. It is useful NOT to assume that team members understand all these frameworks, but spend time ensuring that they DO. Events which help staff team members ask questions and fully understand their roles in relation to the following frameworks, for example, will be highly useful:

- **The University Partnership** – what are the expectations? Does everyone understand how their roles help achieve the aspects of the partnership?

- **The University Strategy Map** – where on the strategy map does your team make the biggest impact? Do all team members work together to achieve this?