



How HR can help boost the ROI of team building offsites

by Ben Dattner, Ph.D.

HR professionals are often called upon to assist with team building and to facilitate team offsites. This facilitation role can provide excellent opportunities for HR to add substantial value by helping teams and team leaders to evaluate and improve team dynamics. However, team building can also provide challenges for HR professionals if offsite meetings do not result in concrete action steps and clear team accountabilities. In this article, I will argue that, whenever possible, HR should help teams establish quantitative benchmarks in advance of team offsites, and that follow up offsite meetings should be scheduled even before the first offsite occurs.

When it comes to individual performance and organizational effectiveness, organizations are increasingly putting a “what gets measured gets done” philosophy into practice. With the guidance and support of HR, individuals receive quantitative feedback about their strengths and development needs, and organizations receive quantitative feedback about stakeholder satisfaction. Individuals and organizations often receive periodic feedback, usually every year, although in some cases every six months. Despite the fact that teams are increasingly common and important in the workplace, metrics for team performance have not kept pace with individual 360’s and organizational surveys. The absence of quantitative metrics of team effectiveness makes it difficult for teams to assess themselves or to measure their progress over a given period of time. For example, members of a team may get together for an offsite meeting to discuss what is or is not going well on the team, and there may be valuable feedback shared and helpful suggestions made about new approaches that the team might try implementing. However, unless there is some way for the team to measure its progress at a follow up offsite or meeting, it is not likely that the team will be able to hold itself accountable for making progress in the areas that it has identified.

There are two basic ways that HR can help teams assess themselves in advance of an offsite meeting: via individual interviews and/or via online surveys. Interviews and surveys can include just the members of the team evaluating themselves, or can be 360 degree and include ratings from other stakeholders inside the organization, and possibly even external stakeholders such as clients or customers. Anonymity should be assured in either case so that respondents feel comfortable fully sharing their feedback and any concerns they may have about the team or the team’s leader. The main advantages of conducting interviews are that they provide opportunities for in-depth discussions about the team’s strengths and weaknesses and give HR an opportunity to get to know the members of the team better. The main advantages of surveys are that they are less time consuming and can provide an additional level of comfort to respondents who may not want to share their perspectives candidly, even with HR. When possible, a combination of interviews and a team assessment can be most helpful in providing a large quantity of high quality data collected prior to an offsite. In addition to providing a basis for a report out and discussion, the data gathered can also inform the timing, agenda and activities of the offsites. In other words, HR can help the

team work together as a team to reach a consensus about the timing, structure, and content of its offsites even before the meetings occur.

In conclusion, HR can help teams assess both their effectiveness and their progress over time, thereby accelerating team learning and enhancing team effectiveness. The collaborative process of designing a qualitative interview protocol or choosing and customizing a quantitative assessment tool for the team can itself be a valuable catalyst for discussions that HR can facilitate about what is most important and relevant to the members of the team. When HR has an opportunity to gather perspectives and help the team establish a baseline in advance, the team will be able to accomplish much more at its first offsite. Agreeing up front that there will be a second offsite for which follow-up interviews will be conducted and/or follow-up team surveys will be administered enables HR to help the team measure its performance over time. When HR has the opportunity to help benchmark team performance before offsites and to help measure team progress after offsites, HR can provide a much greater return on the substantial time, money, and effort that organizations invest in team building.

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For more information about teams and team building:

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