

Trading places

Do you know what your colleagues do?

Colleagues can happily work side-by-side on the same project without really getting to grips with what the other does on a daily basis. Internal processes could benefit from a better understanding between colleagues and departments, therefore supplying a better service to clients.

Temporary job swapping gives people an insight into the daily challenges that face both colleagues and customers. It improves internal communication and teamwork, promotes lateral thinking and problem solving and encourages the learning of new skills.

The implementation of a job swap scheme is not difficult, although thought must be put into what outcomes are required. Consider whether whole departments need to have an understanding of how each other works to create a better and more efficient working relationship, or whether perhaps individuals alone would gain a more valuable insight into each department which could then be imparted to the team and acted upon.

Encourage a relaxed situation where questions are welcomed and all colleagues taking part know what their objective is and are curious to find out what their counterparts do. Think about issues such as busy workloads and confidentiality which may jeopardise the success of the scheme. Organise swaps over a period of days or weeks, with an agreed timetable taking into account workload and upcoming events or projects which may be relevant for the new member of the team to experience.

For the individuals involved it will be helpful to keep notes of reactions, thoughts and feelings to allow a constructive review after the event. A reciprocal debrief at the end of the day is invaluable. This could include an appraisal of the best bit, the worst bit, what will change as a result of the experience and, crucially, suggestions on how each job could be done better.

A worthwhile and enjoyable experience that highlighted processes and challenges which were not obvious before

The Campaign for Learning is a national charity working to create an appetite for learning in individuals that will sustain them throughout their lives. The Campaign promotes job swapping as an excellent way to learn at work, and holds a National Learning at Work Day which involves job swapping and shadowing. The Campaign's chief executive, Bill Lucas, has already carried out a job swap with his office manager, Gloria Phyll. Their verdict? A worthwhile and enjoyable experience that highlighted processes and challenges which were not obvious to the other participant before taking part in the swap. The day was made stress-free by a careful discussion of the ground rules before the event.



Scottish & Newcastle Retail runs more than 1,400 pubs and pub restaurants throughout the UK. In the last year, job swaps have been incorporated into staff training. Kevan Hodges, an operations director overseeing 64 pubs and bars, swapped with Sandy Redman, the bar manager of Bar 38 in Covent Garden, London. Kevan was 'usefully reminded of how much pressure our bar staff are under all the time. With that understanding, I now hope to make decisions that will enable them to focus on the customer more'.

Ideas that sprung from their swap included a one-stop phone number that bar managers can ring when a piece of equipment needs to be repaired. Kevan's comments after the swap were: 'A bar manager shouldn't have to spend 20 minutes back of house on three phone calls when she could be mingling with the customers'.

The general consensus from those who've participated in a job swap is that they are a good thing but you have to be committed to getting under the skin of the job you're doing and to think about the experience. It takes a certain amount of work to create a scheme where the swappers are well matched and feel comfortable with the situation, but it will be worth it. It's good to know what other people in your company do and who they are. It's easier to interact with them. And it's a good learning experience.

next steps

► www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk has up-to-date information on the next National Learning at Work Day and more case studies.

business

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bulletin

business news for Kall Kwik clients

● A little more byte

Is Bluetooth technology going to affect the way we work and live?

● Knowledge is power

Understanding your competitors.

● Trading places

Introducing the benefits of a job swap.

All together now!

Revitalise the team's spirit with a breath of fresh air

How well do you work together as a team? Probably not as well as you think. Is everyone pulling their weight? Are untapped skills bubbling under the surface while others struggle out of their depth? Who's happy and who's not? How do you know? Could it work any better?

A day or two out of the office in a neutral yet challenging environment can do wonders for working relationships. It removes individuals from the strong influence of organisational culture, status or functional specialisms. People can focus instead on the development of the underlying and fundamental skills that help teams and leaders operate more effectively.

What to do?

For starters, a simple trip out of the office for a boat ride, a picnic, or a game of softball can be easily organised and can by itself be very beneficial. An outing can be positioned partly as reward for effort, as well as providing an opportunity to 'get it off your chest', build team spirit and share plans.

Alternatively, there are a growing number of organisations offering team building days and longer courses that range from archery to mental agility competitions, and the more physically challenging outdoor pursuits.



Where to go?

One of the organisations offering team building courses is The UK Survival School. Their courses are run on the basis that a physically demanding and sometimes harsh environment is perfect for bringing out the best in people and teaching the 'thinking on your feet' skills that go with today's fast-changing working world. Other organisations believe in a more agreeable environment, where entertainment rather than physical challenges are the order of the day.

Mark Maclure, Managing Director of Business Pursuits Event Management, believes that 'a physically gruelling, military-style exercise' is outdated. Instead he says 'team building is increasingly interpreted as a method of improving communication and collaboration, maximising the combined skills of a diverse group of individuals to achieve results'. Mark believes that 'team building is more likely to achieve positive effects in a comfortable, aspirational environment rather than the punishing conditions of an army assault course'.

Getting physical

Some of the more arduous team building events, for example rock climbing, may require travelling further afield to participate in them. Clipper Ventures in Southampton use the challenging environment of a yacht to 'mirror business situations', tailor-made for

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continued >

A little more byte

Just another 'latest technological gimmick' or is Bluetooth going to radically affect the way we work and live?

Bluetooth technology can connect your office without the use of cables, take over your weekly shopping and even guide you through an airport... are you ready to change your life?

How do you connect your printer, handheld computer, mobile phone and digital camera? Confronted with a web of confusing cables? This may soon be a distant memory. A new technology is promising, and starting to deliver, great things.

The technology is named after King Harald Blåtand (Bluetooth) who ruled Denmark in the 10th Century. This peacekeeping King, who much preferred talking to fighting, acquired his name because of the disastrous effect on his teeth caused by his love of blueberries.

Bluetooth connects equipment and saves you from the habitual cable battle. It is built on the simple concept behind everyday devices such as garage door remote controls, baby monitors and microwave ovens. Cables or infrared are replaced with short-range radio transmitters. Each piece of equipment is fitted with a transceiver, which will interact with any other transceiver within a range of 10 metres. Gone is the need for the correct cable, adapter and software.

Bluetooth has been in development for six years, and expectations have been high from the start as there are numerous applications that are crying out for this technology. The Chairman of the Bluetooth Special Interest Group, Jim Kardack, highlights three major developments which will be enabled by Bluetooth technology. The first, a 'universal data point' that can be sited in public places such as airports, can impart general or personalised information to travellers or customers. The second, the replacement of cables so that hardware can be connected quickly and simply. The third, 'personal ad hoc networks' for the exchange of information between mobile phones, handheld and notebook computers, personal stereos and digital cameras.

Bluetooth is slowly becoming more widely recognised as technology that is worth investing in. Joyce Putscher from Cahners In-Stat Research Group, which carries out digital communication research, predicted back in 1999 that, 'if acceptance goes well, the manufacture of Bluetooth-enabled equipment could exceed 400 million units by 2004'. Judging by the media interest and increasing hunger to try it out, her prediction may be pretty accurate.

The range of applications that Bluetooth can ultimately provide is diverse.



An interesting example is in the railway industry. Midland Mainline is the first company to provide up-to-the-minute details (through mobiles or laptops) on how trains are running. They have launched a trial in which selected customers have installed Bluetooth onto their laptops and mobiles. Customers can then access the Internet in the station or aboard the train and can check train times and delay information on a site specially constructed by the train company. There are also European trials taking place in which travellers' mobile phones store the details from the booking made over the Internet. The train seat will confirm, by checking with the passenger's mobile, that the holder of the correct ticket is seated!

So, the Bluetooth boat has definitely launched and is picking up speed. It looks like this is one journey you won't want to miss.



► Visit: www.bluetooth.com for up-to-the-minute information on Bluetooth's latest news and availability.

All together now!

← continued from front cover

customers. Their courses are structured to be a combination of both mental and physical tasks. One of UK Survival School's courses is 'Exercise Crash Landing', a testing simulation exercise in the Brecon Beacons.

Monnow Events, based in Herefordshire, have a mobile unit that transports all they need for an event, and they are willing to travel to a suitable location of your choice. Their focus is to test delegates' 'adaptability to change and the ability to apply mental agility in the achievement of practical challenges'. However, they are keen to point out that their courses are not about 'physical fitness or expertise in outdoor sports. As such, the skills developed equate with the qualities needed to direct and control real business situations in the workplace.'

For something completely different, London-based company Circus Space offer a range of days out with the chance to try circus activities such as the exhilarating high-flying trapeze and the more creative, feet on the ground, clowning skills. Rob Colbert of Circus Space says 'circus skills foster the development of skills like teamwork, risk-taking, communication, trust and leadership that can be taken back to the office, as well as being simple good fun'.

Unless you get away from the office, both mentally and physically, the time can never be found for these important 'breaks' and the work place is simply not appropriate for trying to create a neutral environment for all to feel comfortable in.



► Visit Business Pursuits at www.businesspursuits.co.uk or phone 01442 286800
► Visit Monnow Events at www.monnowevents.co.uk or phone 01981 580206
► Visit Circus Space at www.thecircusspace.co.uk or phone 020 7613 4141
► Visit UK Survival School www.ukurvivalschool.co.uk or phone 01432 376751
► Visit Clipper Ventures at www.clipper-ventures.com or phone 02380 333080

Knowledge is power

Understanding your competitors

'If you are ignorant of both your enemy and yourself, then you are a fool and certain to be defeated in every battle.'

If you know yourself, but not your enemy, for every battle won, you will suffer a loss.

If you know your enemy and yourself, you will win every battle.'

Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, c. 500BC

Do you know who else is after your customers? Do you know why they are successful or not successful? Every business has its competitors but most don't spend enough time learning from their 'enemies'. The better you can get to know and understand them, the more successful you can be in anticipating their activities.

Who are your competitors?

Some are obvious, those in the marketplace offering what you are offering to the same audience. But you also need to keep an eye on those offering similar products and services or those that are in a strong position to offer similar products and services, and potentially the most dangerous, those that offer completely different products and services that might make yours redundant.

Collecting the information

There is probably quite a lot of information readily available to you. Task your own people to keep their ear to the ground in the first instance. Monitor relevant trade press and other media. You can buy press monitoring services, but they can be expensive. Then there is information that can be bought from organisations such as Dun & Bradstreet who specialise in gathering information about the health of companies. Derwent Information is good for details of patents and patents pending. And an obvious point – check out your competitors' web sites regularly. Companies House have an easy-to-use web site (www.companieshouse.gov.uk)



that can give you company registration details and directors' reports from as little as £2.50, or a company's full accounts for £5.

Converting the information

You've got a continual flow of information about your competitors coming in.

Someone needs to make sense of it all, and turn it into useful analysis. This may be straightforward, but if you need assistance there are specialist organisations that

can help (see information on AVARE in next steps).

Communicating the information

Sharing information within your business is important at every level, and information about competitor activity and plans for acting upon it can be really useful, but only if all the crew are on board. Trust and loyalty are built up within an open and clear working environment, so make sure everyone is involved.

Countering competitor activity

Don't be tempted to break the law. If you find out, for example, that one of your competitors is planning a new product launch which could affect your business, an acceptable approach would be to consider a promotional campaign at the same time, but corporate sabotage is not on.

Too busy for all this?

It's all very well, but everyone is extremely busy, and all the best laid plans...

BOOK OFFER

Business Bulletin has ten copies of *Competitor Analysis: Turning Intelligence into Success* to give away. Send a postcard with your name, address and telephone number and the location of your Kall Kwik Centre to BB37/Competitor, FREEPOST SW8258

London WC2H 9BR by 30 December 2001. Senders of the first ten cards selected at random from all those received by the closing date will win a free copy.

Competitor Analysis: Turning Intelligence into Success by David Hussey & Per Jenster, ISBN: 0-471-49991-9, published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd, RRP £12.99.

AVARE is a consultancy specialising in competitor intelligence, gathering and analysing information to help clients build their business. Although it is true that there will be a lot of useful information that simply requires eyes and ears to be open (and not worth paying consultancy fees for), there is quite likely to be a lot more 'marketing intelligence' that expert advice could help you find and interpret.

And, finally, remember that your competitors want to find out about you. Help safeguard sensitive information by limiting exposure of confidential documents and encouraging discretion amongst your staff.



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