



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Pros and Cons of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning comes with advantages and disadvantages. Compared to indoor experiential learning, outdoor learning has many merits.

It's Real

Indoor experiential learning often involves role-plays and business simulations that are obvious simulations. Therefore, learning might not be total. The problems encountered by trainees in an outdoor session, on the other hand, are more real. For instance, teams pay a penalty for not building a raft properly. As trainees deal with real people and real issues in real situations, their behavior in the workplace is reflected. Behavioral observations made in these sessions can be used in the workplace while dealing with employees.

It's more memorable

Outdoor activities, especially those high on adventure, have a greater potential for being memorable. The experience, the environment and the weather aid in creating strong and favorable memories in the minds of the trainees. Therefore, when trainees recount the events, they invariably recollect the learning derived from the experience.

There are fewer learning barriers

To most employees, the outdoors is an unusual environment. Nobody has an edge over the others, and therefore, all trainees start on an equal footing. As seniority and expertise are neutralized, the emphasis shifts to behavioral skills and process awareness. Each person gets the opportunity to learn something.

It builds team spirit

Because the outdoor experience is unusual and absorbing, trainees from diverse backgrounds tend to build strong bonds with each other. The bonds are likely to be stronger when the trainees belong to the same organization. The opportunity to bond accounts for the popularity of experiential learning for team building. The activities help people understand each other better and appreciate diversity in teams. This understanding leads to better working relationships between employees, thereby increasing productivity.

The disadvantages, though not insurmountable, are worthy of mention to ensure that they are avoided.

Too much fun

There is the chance that trainees will get too involved in the adventures in experiential learning. As a result, learning can take a backseat. This can be countered by having a good review process. A good facilitation and review process helps to strike a balance between learning and fun.

Negative perception



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Some people overreact to certain exercises in outdoor sessions, which affects their learning adversely, making them behave abnormally. Designing and reviewing the training session carefully can prevent negative perceptions.

Denial

Trainees sometimes view the exercises as an unfair reflection of their behavior in the working environment. If these complaints are true, then the situation should be remedied. For instance, it would serve no purpose to encourage a trainee from a well-structured organization to work creatively.

However, at times trainees complain in order to avoid the truths they are uncomfortable with. A careful review can help in overcoming this problem.

Summary

An effective outdoor program maximizes benefits and minimizes drawbacks. Trainers should ensure that the programs are designed to meet the complete learning cycle and are flexible enough to cater to different learning styles.