

GUIDE

The Definitive Guide to Virtual Team Building



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WHAT IS VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING?



[Image Source](#)

Virtual team building refers to the process of bringing together and encouraging team spirit and collaboration among virtual coworkers through various activities and exercises. The end goal of virtual team building is similar to that of the real-life team building which is to improve the ability of a group of employees to work together as a team and nurture better relationships.

Despite this fundamental similarity, there is a very significant difference between the two. While team building in real life requires all the colleagues to be physically together in one place, virtual team building, as the name suggests, can be done remotely. Even when co-workers are geographically dispersed, they can still come together virtually and participate in fun and engaging activities and exercises thanks to technology.

WHY IS VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING (VTB) NEEDED?

There is a strong case for virtual team building programs that bring the team together and help in driving collaboration, teamwork and, ultimately, an increase in employee engagement.

Here are a few reasons why:

- Today, more people are working from home than ever. And this situation resulting from the pandemic does not look like abating any time soon. While working from home does have its perks such as more flexibility, it has its challenges too. For instance, employees report **low engagement levels, which then affect their productivity, efficiency, and creativity.**

- Working from home can also affect teamwork, ease of collaboration and increase the **risk of miscommunication and conflicts**. This is because remote workers miss out on a number of opportunities that in-office workers receive, including the opportunity to mingle and connect daily with their co-workers.
- According to the [Gallup People Engagement Survey](#), which is run every year, it was shown that even before the pandemic, as much as **80 to 85 percent of employees are disengaged**. Ultimately, organizations are the ones who will have to face the consequences of failure to engage their employees.
- As humans, we have **a need for connection and belongingness**. Even in the professional realm, working together as a team is a social activity. Employees of an organization need to have a sense of belongingness to the company in order to be able to fully realize their potential and contribute to the success of the organization, and virtual team building activities make this possible.

WHAT ARE THE REQUISITES FOR A VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING PROGRAM?

Let us go through in detail what you would need to get it going:

1) **A Laptop with internet connection**

For any engagement to be done virtually, you need a laptop with a reliable internet connection. These are things that most of us have readily available in our homes. Usually, team building activities are conducted through popular video conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, etc.

There is no other special software that you need to download and install. Whatever virtual platform employees in your organization are comfortable with, can be leveraged for such a program.

2) **A portfolio of Team building activities / exercises**

The vendor you engage should be able to provide a [wide variety of team building](#) activities and exercises that you can choose from. These are fun and engaging activities that have been carefully designed, especially for improving team dynamics and building better relationships in a virtual context.

Thanks to technology and human imagination, the variety of options that are available today will surprise you! A few such options are: [music based activities](#), [cooking](#) (yes you heard that right!), [treasure hunts](#) that can be setup

in any city across the world, the high energy [Maori Haka](#) performance, [crime scene investigations](#), movie making, anthem creation, horse based treasure hunts, well you are truly limited only by your own imagination!

3) An experienced Facilitator

The best virtual team building activities have one or more Facilitators who can guide the team members throughout the entire process. Usually, the vendor will provide the facilitator who can explain the rules and guidelines of the activity to all participants in a clear and concise manner, answer any doubts they have and guide them through the whole experience, including the scoring and declaring of the final winner or winning team! Like in face to face workshops, the more experienced the Facilitator, the better the experience.

4) Additional objects you may need for the activities

Several virtual team building activities may require you to make use of additional objects, but this depends entirely on the kind of activity you have chosen. These are everyday objects that are readily available in our homes.

For example, if you choose a cooking-based activity for team building, then participants will need ingredients, utensils, and other cooking equipment – things they already have in their homes. But rest assured that the vendor you are interacting with should educate you about the same before hand.

5) An enthusiastic team

Last but not least, you will need a team of remote workers with an open mind. Many people are sceptical about virtual team building because they are tired of amateurish experiences put together by hassled in-house teams – that are more tiresome than they are energizing.

Team building to be done well is the domain of professionals who spend years honing their skills on it. Telling participants that there is an external team who will be running the session, is sometimes a good way to build credibility for the whole engagement.

Learning gets anchored when participants have an engaging shared experience, that they can then talk and discuss about, to glean out the learning with their coworkers.

MYTHS ABOUT VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING (VTB)

Myth #1: There are a limited number of things we can do virtually

We are often limited by our own thinking. Talking about our own experience, we started off by asking, “What can be done virtually?” Three months down the line, the question has now transformed into, “What can’t we do virtually?” Here is a small video that gives you a glimpse of this.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cvT8QpuZeQw>

Myth #2: This can be done in-house

There is a reason why Team building is a separate industry by itself. It needs professionals. It needs people who understand the nuances of team dynamics, who are comfortable with the related technologies, who know how to get the engagement going with participants (real or virtual), who have the experience of handling various sized groups, who know how to spark conversations and most importantly people who know what to do when things go wrong in a team engagement session.

Yes, everybody can play cricket. Yet, there are only 11 people who play for the country. Professionals matter.

Myth #3: Virtual team building cannot really be effective

The apprehensions are natural, considering that this is a relatively new thing for most people. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Here are a few stories of customers who already have this experience. Do read what they say:

- [How an IT Consulting company had a high energy virtual engagement](#)
- [How an Oil major ran a cook-off challenge virtually](#)
- [How a Consumer Healthcare major created a team anthem virtually](#)
- [How a FMCG company experienced a virtual treasure hunt in Dubai](#)

Myth #4: Virtual team building is only for junior folks

Well, this is one myth we are tired of answering. Is people engagement determined by hierarchy? Are feelings like the need to be connected and have a sense of belongingness only for the junior cadre?

However, when someone says this, the way we read it is: “Are the activities mature enough to be involving senior leaders in it?” That is a valid concern. Do engage with your vendors to explore the whole range of their offerings before deciding on which ones you think would work best for your senior team members.

Myth #5: People need to be physically fit

It never harms to be physically fit. However, that is not a criteria for team building of any kind – real or virtual. In fact since the domain of a virtual team building program is all within the confines of one's home, you can be sure there are no trust falls or walking on fire or any such cliched activities that give team building a bad name.

Myth #6: It doesn't really make a lasting difference

It is true that one swallow doesn't a summer make. Similarly, keeping an expectation that one intervention of any kind (physical or virtual) will transform a team is, well – a wrong expectation to have in the first place. Professionals in the field of team building understand that there is a process of forming, storming, norming before a team comes to the stage of performing. Also there is a big difference between a team engagement or [team entertainment program versus a team building program.](#)

Having said that, when done right, even a single team engagement program can leave a warm glow of connectedness and belongingness between team members. The important thing though is that it needs to be done consistently for the team to move up the ladder of being a good team and for the interventions to have a lasting impact.

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHILE PLANNING A VTB SESSION

Here are a few factors that you need to consider while planning such a session:

1) What is the objective?

As simple as it sounds – are you doing this as an engagement activity for your team or are there underlying team issues that you want to be addressed by doing such a session? These are two different roads – and a good team building vendor would be able to explain the critical difference between the two.

2) How many people do you want to engage in one go?

This has implications for the virtual platform that will need to be chosen, the kind of activity that has to be selected and whether you should run this as multiple batches or one large batch.

3) How much time do you have in hand?

An ideal time to budget is around 2 hours. Beyond that leads to fatigue for participants who have to be continuously in front of a screen. If the time

available is very limited, it has implications on the kind of activities that a vendor could offer to you.

4) Does the vendor have sufficient experience and range of offerings?

While the first part is self explanatory, a larger range of offerings generally gives you greater choice in terms of what may work for different members in your team. “If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” – be wary of being forced to go with the limited options that a vendor tries to “push” onto you.

5) Which virtual platform should you go with?

Thanks to the tremendous competition between different platform vendors like Google, Microsoft and Zoom – today most features between the different platforms are common. Hence you can be platform agnostic. However, it is a good practice to insist on a platform check prior to the event, so that there are no surprises on the given day.

6) Which day of the week is ideal to schedule a virtual team building program?

While there is no science to it, Fridays happen to be popular days for scheduling such events. However, there is a strong case for Wednesdays too considering the midpoint of the week is when people need the most motivation sometimes!

7) To debrief or not to debrief?

In most team building programs, when done well - the experience itself can be very engaging. Do you want the Facilitators to debrief the experience basis the different behavioral nuances that they noticed? Or do you want your team to just have a flawless experience, without necessarily a debrief? The answer depends squarely on your objective for the engagement. There is no “right” answer to this.

BENEFITS OF VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING



[Image Source](#)

Any group of employees that has to work together as a team within an organization and collaborate on various projects can benefit greatly from virtual team building. However, here are a few specific benefits you can hope to reap, in these times:

1) Increased employee productivity

With most employees working from home and the news that it is unlikely for things to return to normalcy soon, morale can be very low. It is often very hard for employees to find the energy to remain motivated at such times. Actively engaging employees to heighten team spirit and morale can be a good investment for improving employee spirit and productivity too.

2) Employee health and well-being

The need to connect and feel like being a part of a larger group is very critical for people. The mental health implications – stress, fear and uncertainty – for employees, in the enforced environment of isolation can be very crippling.

Activities that are carefully chosen to overcome these challenges can go a big way in boosting employee health and well-being.

3) Increased connection and belongingness

All of us want to feel that we are a part of a tribe. Connection with colleagues can provide an important buffer to feelings of social isolation and disconnection. When employees together engage in a virtual team building program like say [dancing together](#) or [creating a movie](#) together – the unsaid narrative is that, “we are in this together.” That itself can be a big balm for many people.

4) Social learning of essential soft skills

Social learning, which means learning together as a group, comes with a number of benefits. One of the most significant of these benefits is that the shared experience makes it easier for you to really grasp, understand, anchor, and then implement what you have learnt.

The virtual team building exercises focus greatly on essential soft skills that are required in any corporate environment such as communication skills, strategic thinking, agility, working together as a team, etc. When these important skills are imparted to the participants through social learning, they become lessons that stick.

A FEW TIPS FOR AN IMPACTFUL VTB SESSION

The great thing about virtual team building is that there are endless ways to get creative. So, how can you nurture stronger and better team relationships in a fun and effective way and ensure that everyone is actively participating? Here are a few tips that should be kept in mind.



[Image Source](#)

1) Designate time for the team to come together and discuss their experiences

It's always good to spare time for the team to discuss their experiences with the team building activities. By sharing insights and reflecting on the lessons they take away from the exercises, learning is anchored. Their shared experiences allow for the lessons to be rooted deeply in them, making it easier for them to apply the new lessons and skills they have learnt in real life.

If you choose to have a debriefing session after the virtual team building activity, the facilitator can guide the entire discussion, giving each participant an opportunity to share their thoughts and also summarize the lessons learnt.

2) Remember to appreciate team members for their active participation

Virtual team building activities require the active participation of each team member to be a success. Remember to thank your team members for their enthusiasm and iterate the fact that their eagerness and positive attitude towards the experience is what made it a success and an exercise that everyone could benefit from.

part in group activities, but if they have forced themselves to go out of their comfort zones, make sure that you and other team members notice and appreciate the effort they have put in. This appreciation will also encourage them to participate in future sessions.

2) Choose new and exciting activities that everyone can enjoy

There is a fine balance to engaging people through virtual team building activities. Make it very difficult and people will disengage. Make it very easy and people will disengage. The magic is in choosing activities that are at an optimum level of difficulty for participants. Neither too hard, nor too easy.

The best virtual team building vendors have a wide range of exciting and creative activities that have been carefully designed by experts to inspire motivation and bring out the competitive and collaborative spirit in the participants. When you choose activities and exercises that everyone can enjoy and appreciate, you can be guaranteed that you will receive better results.

STORIES OF TEAMS WHO HAVE ADOPTED VIRTUAL TEAM BUILDING

CASE STUDY 1: An IT Consulting firm uses virtual team building to rejuvenate its team

Objective :

Due to the high demand of Digitalization, the team had been working very hard during the 6 weeks of confinement. It was indeed tough to maintain a balance between the highly demanding work, and the family for most employees. Despite that, the team had been able to deliver good results and had been very committed.

Hence the head of the department has been very keen to offer them a small break out of the daily routine work.

Solution :

Know how they used a virtual team building program not just to rejuvenate the team but also to have conversations around Ownership, Resilience and Situational Leadership.

Click to read [the detailed case study](#).

CASE STUDY 2: liPM runs a Cook-Off Challenge virtually to engage team members

Objective :

“In the current scenario of the lockdown, how can we engage with employees in a manner that brings them together and also ensures they have fun together?” that was the question posed to us by the ED of liPM, Mr.C.K.Tiwari.

Solution :

Know how a Cook-Off Challenge was planned and executed virtually so that team members were not just engaged but were also able to mull over and talk about issues around Team bonding, Coping with ambiguity, Helping each other and the importance of Fun in team relationships.

Click to read [the detailed case study.](#)

CASE STUDY 3: Perfetti Van Melle adopts virtual team building to energize new joiners

Objective :

To plan a virtual team building session for the new joiners at PVMl as part of their induction program with the objective of they getting to know each other better at an informal level.

Solution :

Know how the whole engagement was planned and executed using a novel offering – Knowing Me, Knowing You - so that team members not only got to know each other better in a virtual environment but also had a whole lot of fun!

Click to read [the detailed case study.](#)

CASE STUDY 4: Beiersdorf Nivea Dubai uses a Virtual Treasure Hunt to engage its team members

Objective :

To plan a virtual team building session for the Marketing team of Beiersdorf Nivea (Dubai) with the objective of team bonding and having a fun time together

Solution :

Know how a virtual treasure hunt was set up in the city of London, how it was planned and executed so that team members were not just engaged but were

also able to have an engaging conversation post the activity on points like Team bonding, Attention to detail, Missing the obvious, Helping each other and the importance of Fun in team relationships.

Click to read [the detailed case study](#).

CASE STUDY 5: A consumer healthcare major celebrates a fresh new start

Objective :

To celebrate a fresh new start as a recharged and reinvigorated organization, through a kick-off that was to be done virtually

Solution :

Know how the team of 250 came together virtually to create a choreographed team anthem which included conceptualising the wordings, the tunes, dancing to it and of course putting it all together in one compelling video format!

Click to read [the detailed case study](#).

RESOURCES

Useful links:

- [57 Virtual Team Building Activities For Remote Teams In 2020:](#) **Snacknation**
- [27 Great Ice Breaker Questions for Remote Teams:](#) **Miro**
- [35 Best Virtual Team Building Activities in 2020 \(Ranked\):](#) **Museumhack**
- [16 Virtual Team Building Activities Your Remote Team Will Love:](#) **Timedoctor**
- [Best Team Building Activities & Games for Remote Teams:](#) **Miro**
- [This Is How Leaders Build Trust With Remote Teams:](#) **Forbes**
- [How to Build Trust in a Virtual Workplace:](#) **HBR**
- [Making Virtual Teams Work: Ten Basic Principles:](#) **HBR**
- [How to Collaborate Effectively If Your Team Is Remote:](#) **HBR**
- [Virtual team building: How to build trust in a remote team:](#) **Know Your Team**

CONCLUSION



[Image Source](#)

Virtual team building is a great way to connect remote workers and improve engagement, motivation and creativity among employees. Remote workers miss out on many in-office opportunities including the ability to chat and form relationships with their colleagues. This makes it very easy for them to feel like passive members of an organization rather than valued employees who are actively contributing to a shared success.

This very evident obstacle of remote working can be tackled effectively with virtual team building exercises and activities. It not only improves intra-team relationships, but also leaves participants with important and valuable lessons that they are likely to carry with them their whole lives. These lessons include effective communication skills, strategic thinking, how to work productively within a team and collaborate smoothly with others, agility, empathy, resilience, good sportsmanship, etc.

It is imperative that organizations invest in high-quality team building exercises which will bring about tangible results. Especially in a time like this, when the pandemic is forcing countries to go into lockdown and our whole life as we know it is turned upside down, this is the need of the hour in corporates.

Do you still have unanswered questions? Do get in touch with us!

LET'S TALK

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