

How do employees really feel about team building? An exploratory netnographic investigation

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ABSTRACT: This study explored employees' attitudes towards team-building events. Anonymous qualitative data were obtained using netnography and analysed through an interpretive content analysis approach. The data analysis yielded sixteen codes and five main themes, on the basis of which employees' attitudes were modelled into eight categories, represented on a two-dimensional coordinate system along two axes (attitudinal and behavioural): true believers, go with the flow, rational thinkers, pragmatists, saboteurs, political dropouts, honest opt-outs, and absentees with genuine reasons. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are discussed both in general terms and for hospitality enterprises.

KEYWORDS: behavioural tendency, employee attitude, management, netnography, team-building activities

Introduction

The hospitality industry is labour intensive (Gröschl & Barrows, 2003; Zhang, 2020) and employees play a key role in determining the success of hospitality enterprises (Cheng, 2011). As such, hospitality managers seek to ensure that staff can function in effective and cohesive teams at work. Team-building exercises and interventions are often used by hotels to help achieve better teamwork (Tews et al., 2013; Han et al., 2016). Team-building interventions are high-interaction activities designed to help work teams improve performance, better meet team goals and accomplish work tasks (Klein et al., 2009). Key components of team building include goal setting, role-clarification, problem-solving, and building trust and cohesion among team members (Salas et al., 2008). For the hospitality industry as well as other labour-intensive sectors, the importance of team effectiveness and team building can hardly be exaggerated. Using qualitative (Rushmer, 1997), quantitative (Mazany et al., 1995; Gibson, 2001), and meta-analytical methods (Klein et al., 2009), researchers have shown that proper team-building interventions could result in potential improvements for employees and teams on cognitive, affective, and process outcomes.

When properly designed and implemented, team building can greatly help organisations. However, in practice, not all team-building interventions are methodically designed and properly implemented. Companies conduct a wide array of activities in the name of team building. From simple socialising with drinks in a bar to extreme sports like go-karting in the mud, team building could take on almost any form. As long as something is a team-based activity and somehow the manager believes in or approves of it, it could be performed in the name

of a team-building intervention. There have been multiple incidents documented where misguided team-building attempts resulted in non-productive or even counterproductive outcomes (Alberty, 2008; Lopez, 2010).

So, how do employees really feel about team building? Not what they tell their manager during or right after the team-building event; not what they say in the anonymous but mandatory evaluation survey which does not ask the name of the employee but does ask age, gender, department, nationality, and a whole lot of other identifying information. What do employees genuinely think and feel about team-building events in which they participated?

On the one hand, there are beautiful testimonials given by team-building clients to team-building facilitators which says employees love team building; there are published papers and articles which claim that employees overwhelmingly and resoundingly want team building (Symanowitz, 2013). On the other hand, a quick Google search would reveal that on internet forums and discussion boards employees complain about the team-building events that they are subjected to, calling such events ghastly, useless, and ridiculous (Hotson, 2016; Green, 2018). There is clearly a gap, or at least, a potential gap between what some managers and some team-building facilitators claim about team building on the one hand and how some employees really feel about team building on the other. The objective of this study is to address this question and thereby fill a gap in the understanding of academics and managers.

This question will be addressed using an exploratory netnographic approach. Netnography, a variant form of ethnography, also sometimes referred to as web-scraping, is a data collection process in which researchers collect user-posted

or user-generated content on the internet relating to a specific topic (Kozinets, 2002; Amatulli et al., 2019). A key strength of this method is that, compared to more traditional data collection methods, it diminishes the potential of social desirability bias (Amatulli et al., 2019), which is of key importance considering that the objective of this study is to explore people's genuine feelings and opinions regarding a topic that is potentially sociopolitically sensitive. In this article, relevant literature and previous research findings on team-building interventions are outlined. We then describe in greater detail the usage of netnography as the chosen research method and how it was used in this study, and finally, key findings and their implications are presented.

Literature review

Team building defined

Organisations conduct a variety of activities for the sake of and in the name of team building (Miller, 2007; Klein et al., 2009). Such activities range from simple team-based games played by employees (obstacle courses, orienteering, tower building, puzzles, etc.) to systematic, long-term interventions and processes aimed at improving team effectiveness (Salas et al., 1999). Consequently, the term "team building" has been used to refer to a myriad of activities, games, interventions, and processes. Team building, as defined in the human resource management and organisational behaviour literature, refers to high-interaction activities designed to enable work teams to better achieve results, meet team goals, and accomplish work tasks (Klein et al., 2009; Robbins & Judge, 2017). Key components of team-building interventions are role clarification (i.e. employees analyse their own roles and the roles of other employees in the team in order for discrepancies, ambiguities, and disagreements in perceptions to be identified and solved), goal-setting (i.e. team members identify, clarify, and set goals towards which they direct their effort at work), problem-solving (i.e. employees systematically identify and discuss solutions to task-related or process-related work issues), and interpersonal relations (i.e. interactive, group-based activities aimed at building trust and increasing team cohesion). In terms of time duration, a team-building intervention could be a single, stand-alone session of an hour or so (Miller, 2007) or a process which takes weeks or months (Buller & Bell, 1986).

Types of team-building activities and interventions

There are different typologies when it comes to team-building activities and interventions. The traditional, more academic typology involves four main focuses of team building: role clarification, goal setting, problem-solving, and interpersonal relations (Robbins & Judge, 2017). Research shows that most team-building events typically focus on one or two of these aforementioned components, instead of incorporating all four in the same team-building event or intervention (Klein et al., 2009). In addition to the traditional four, empirical research shows that in practice team building tends to involve indoor fun activities, outdoor fun activities, socialisation, assessments, and work issues (Kriek, 2007; Zhang, 2017). Finally, commercially published how-to books add to this list with another typology: creativity and problem-solving activities, trust cohesiveness and teamwork activities, motivation games, and communication exercises (Mackin, 2007; Miller, 2007).

Team building in hospitality

Research has shown that team-building activities are implemented by hospitality enterprises. Tews et al.'s (2013) study demonstrated that incorporating some team-building activities at work had a favourable impact on hospitality employees' work performance. However, their study also showed that manager support for workplace fun had a negative impact on performance. Han et al.'s (2016) research showed that implementing workplace fun, an element or a type of team building, enhanced trust, group cohesion, interpersonal citizenship behaviour, and team performance among hotel employees. Zhang's (2017) investigation examined what hotel employees desired as team-building activities and found that socialising was the most preferred, whereas outdoor fun was the least preferred type of team-building activity. Hospitality researchers have shown through their studies that team building is very relevant for hotel staff and it will continue to be as hotels and hospitality enterprises seek to facilitate and build effective teams and teamwork. Moreover, research has indicated that employees do have their own preferences and opinions about team building.

Effectiveness of team building

Much research effort has been directed at measuring the effectiveness of team-building interventions. A large number of descriptive, correlational, causal, and meta-analytical studies have been published on this subject (Salas et al., 1999; Klein et al., 2009; Martin et al., 2009). Research took into account the four main types of team building (role clarification, goal setting, problem-solving, and interpersonal relations), four main types of outcomes (cognitive, affective, process, and performance), as well as potential moderating variables (e.g., employee demographics, team size, duration of team-building intervention). Despite all this work, research has not been able to be conclusive regarding team building's effect on objectively measured performance outcomes. However, research does point to the positive effects of team building on affective improvement (i.e. attitudinal and perceptual improvements such as increased satisfaction, commitment, or engagement).

Employee attitudes towards team building

Research effort in measuring employees' attitudes towards team building, compared to that aiming at measuring team building's effectiveness, is relatively limited, which is not necessarily surprising for two main reasons. First, as it is usually an organisation's management that organises team-building events and interventions (either directly or through outsourced team-building facilitators), employees may simply be required to attend. Their attitudes towards team building (i.e. whether they want to participate or not and whether they are enthusiastic about it or not) may not be viewed by the management as their most significant consideration. Second, as team-building events do involve costs, it is of more apparent importance for management and researchers to examine the effectiveness of team building in order to gauge the return on investment. Employees' attitudes towards team building, even when measured, are usually measured after the team-building event as part of the general effort in measuring team building's effects or effectiveness overall (Bragg & Andrews, 1973; Mitchell, 1986; Bushe & Coetzer, 1995; Gibson, 2001; Huang et al., 2002). Research focusing on accurately measuring employees' global

attitudes towards team-building interventions is still lacking and it is this gap that the present research seeks to address.

This is due to several important reasons. Firstly, employees' attitudes towards team-building interventions matter. Not only can such attitudes explain and partially predict employees' behavioural tendencies (Harrison et al., 2006; Robbins & Judge, 2017) in participating in and making contributions to team-building events, they can also provide useful directions for the management to better design the organisation's future team outings and team-building interventions. As such, forming an understanding of how employees view team-building activities would be both theoretically interesting and practically beneficial.

Secondly, research has demonstrated that there tend to be significant gaps in terms of perceptions, attitudes, and desired behaviours between employees and management (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Su, 2010). Gaps exist between what employees perceive to be effective influence behaviours and what managers view as effective influence behaviours that employees can use (Falbe & Yukl, 1992). Research has also shown that while employees may view friendliness as a form of behaviour which is pleasant towards the manager, managers might in fact view such efforts negatively as ingratulatory flattery (Su, 2010). In brief, in the employee-manager relationship, numerous gaps may exist which may cause miscommunication, misunderstanding, and even conflicts. Consequently, the potential gap between employee and management attitudes towards team building is particularly worthy of exploration. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore, through a qualitative research approach, employees' general attitudes towards their companies' team-building interventions.

Method

Data collection and sampling

This study used netnography with a purposive sample in order to obtain the necessary qualitative data to address the research question. For the purpose of this study, netnography, or a variant form of ethnographic research approach applied in cyberspace (Kozinets, 2002; Amatulli et al., 2019), was appropriate as we were particularly interested in anonymous and/or pseudonymous postings on the internet which arguably more honestly reflected people's experiences, overall attitudes, and future behavioural tendencies regarding corporate team-building activities. The use of anonymous and/or pseudonymous internet user-generated content enabled the researchers to avoid social desirability bias, which tends to occur in self-reported data, especially on sensitive topics or topics that involve sociopolitical risks.

Different combinations of search keywords were used including "team building", "team outing", "company team-building activities", "corporate team-building events", "discussion forums", and the auto-generated variants of these keywords by Google to identify internet postings which would fulfil the search criteria. The thousands of postings found were further filtered to fulfil the inclusion criteria – posts must be open to public view without the need for registration or logging in and posts were made anonymously and/or pseudonymously so that posters' identities were not publicly known. Ultimately, a total of 104 postings were included in the data analysis, with short postings including just one or two sentences and long ones containing several paragraphs of text. Only posts in English were considered for inclusion.

Analytical approach

The qualitative textual data was analysed by performing content analysis. Specifically, the general process of reading, interpreting, coding, grouping, structuring, and modelling was applied (Verhoeven, 2008; Brotherton, 2015;). As the main focus was to let employees' attitudes regarding team building surface from the raw data, this interpretive approach was used instead of a more quantitative approach to qualitative analysis (e.g. analysing frequencies and creating word clouds). We performed the analysis independently first in order to fully explore the data without each other's perspectives and findings so as to not interfere in each other's analysis and exploration. This went as far as the structuring step. The modelling step was jointly performed after we had had the opportunity to review and fully discuss each other's analysis. As such, the final model reflected the analysis, consensus and opinions of both of us.

Results

Upon repeated reading of the collected posts, 16 initial codes were created in the process of interpreting the data (Table 1 for the codes and a paraphrased version of the original text on which each code was based).

The 16 codes were further linked to create five main themes:¹

- (1) Employee attitude (codes 3, 10, 13);
- (2) Employee behaviour (codes 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 16);
- (3) Sociopolitical concerns (codes 1, 12);
- (4) Perceived misconceptions by management (codes 2, 7, 15);
and
- (5) Effectiveness (codes 8, 9, 10).

These five themes fully encompass the 16 codes, and they function as the basis for creating a model which illustrates employees' overall attitudes towards team-building events in this study.

We elected to use a two-dimensional coordinate system to model the key findings. The horizontal axis represents employees' attitudinal dimension, while the vertical axis is behavioural, representing employees' participation tendencies. As such, employees with different attitudes and behavioural tendencies regarding team-building activities and events can be positioned into the four quadrants in this two-dimensional coordinate system (Figure 1).

Employees were placed in eight main categories on the basis of their overall attitude towards team building and their behavioural intentions in terms of participation. The figure is visually self-explanatory – that is, there are employees who like team-building events (positive attitude) and those who dislike them (negative attitude); there are employees who choose to participate in team-building events (participate) and those who choose to stay away (avoid). Employees in three of the four quadrants can be further sub-categorised on the basis of their beliefs or perceptions regarding team-building effectiveness. Below, each of the eight categories is linked with the codes and the themes.

Category 1: True believers

Employees in this category have highly positive attitudes about team-building events and they always participate in such events. They also believe that all employees should join such events. They view team building as something effective and useful (codes 7 and 13; themes 1 and 4). They state that employees

TABLE 1: Codes and paraphrased sample texts

Codes	Paraphrased meaning units
(1) Sociopolitical concerns	If I were to not attend, I might as well put "trouble-maker" on my forehead for all to see.
(2) Misconceptions by management (regarding team building)	My manager does not get team building. They force us to play games for one afternoon to compensate for poor management throughout the whole year.
(3) Team-building games versus team-building process	To really promote team effectiveness, the management needs to come up with a process, instead of making us play outdoor games once per year.
(4) Depends on manager	If you really don't like it, talk to your manager, share your concerns. But whether or not you should do so depends on your manager.
(5) Depends on type of work	I sit in the office 40 hours per week. Any opportunity for me to get out of the office is a good day. I don't care what we do. I just want to get out of my office.
(6) Depends on stage of career development	I was so happy to get my first job that I did not mind going on team-building days, as long as I get my pay at the end of month to pay my bills.
(7) Effectiveness of team building	I did enjoy this team-building event we had last year, it was a good laugh, although I don't think it changed anything for anyone at work.
(8) Unproductive	Useless, just useless.
(9) Counter-productive	I can honestly say that the team-building events I had to join were a significant contributing factor for me to quit one of my previous jobs.
(10) Boredom versus anger	It is not the boredom that I worry about. It is that I get angry at the stupidity and meaningless of the situation.
(11) Coping strategies	Since I cannot get out of going, I just show up and use it as a networking opportunity.
(12) Compulsory versus volunteer participation	My manager tells me – yes, it is compulsory. It is under "any other duties as assigned".
(13) Positive attitude	I like team building; I believe it is very beneficial to the team; which is why all successful companies do it.
(14) Rational decision-making	I find team-building days irrelevant. But I will go as long as it does have something to do with my work and as long as it takes place during working hours.
(15) Questionable and misguided team-building content	They took away our phones and then made us reveal very private information so that we were vulnerable in front of each other in order for us to build team cohesiveness.
(16) Manipulation and sabotage	When I attend a team-building event, my only goal is to create cock-ups in order to sabotage it.

who do not join team-building events are wrong and are troublemakers. Overall, these employees are extremely positive about team-building events. They are the true believers.

Category 2: Go with the flow

Employees in this category are generally positive about team-building events and they participate in them to a large extent. However, these employees do not necessarily view team building to be effective in terms of improving employees' work performance and productivity (code 7; theme 4). They tend to argue that team-building activities are fun to join and are enjoyable but do not experience such events as improving things at work. They simply go with the flow.

Category 3: Rational thinkers

Employees in this category have a somewhat negative view of team-building events. This may be because they have had unpleasant experiences with previous team outings and have been subject to poorly designed team-building interventions with questionable content (code 15). These employees approach team building from a more rational point view. They see it as part of work. Employees in this category generally do not believe that team-building events and team outings are effective in improving employees' work performance and productivity. They tend to choose to attend team outings and events if the contents of such events are work-related and they take place during working hours. These employees have sociopolitical concerns if they choose not to attend (code 1; theme 3). These are rational, logical, and professional people.

Category 4: Pragmatists

Employees in this category, like rational thinkers, have a generally negative view of team-building events. They also do not believe that team-building events are effective in terms of improving employees' work performance and productivity. However, they do choose to attend these events. They make practical use of them and take pragmatic advantage of such events for other personal or professional gains (code 11; theme 2). They might go to the team outing to promote their projects or to network with upper management while placing little attention on the team-building activities themselves. These are the political, utilitarian-minded pragmatists.

Category 5: Saboteurs

Employees in this category have a negative attitude towards team-building events and team outings. They do not believe team-building events have any positive effect on any attitudinal, perceptual, cognitive, process, or performance outcomes. They see it as a waste of time. They might, due to previous negative experiences with team building (codes 9, 12, 15; themes 2 and 5), harbour resentment and even anger towards team-building activities. They do choose to attend instead of excusing themselves specifically to spoil and sabotage the events (code 16).

Category 6: Political dropouts

Employees in this category have a negative attitude towards team-building events and team outings. They do not believe team-building events have any significant positive effect on employees' work performance and productivity. These employees may have some sociopolitical concerns (code 1)

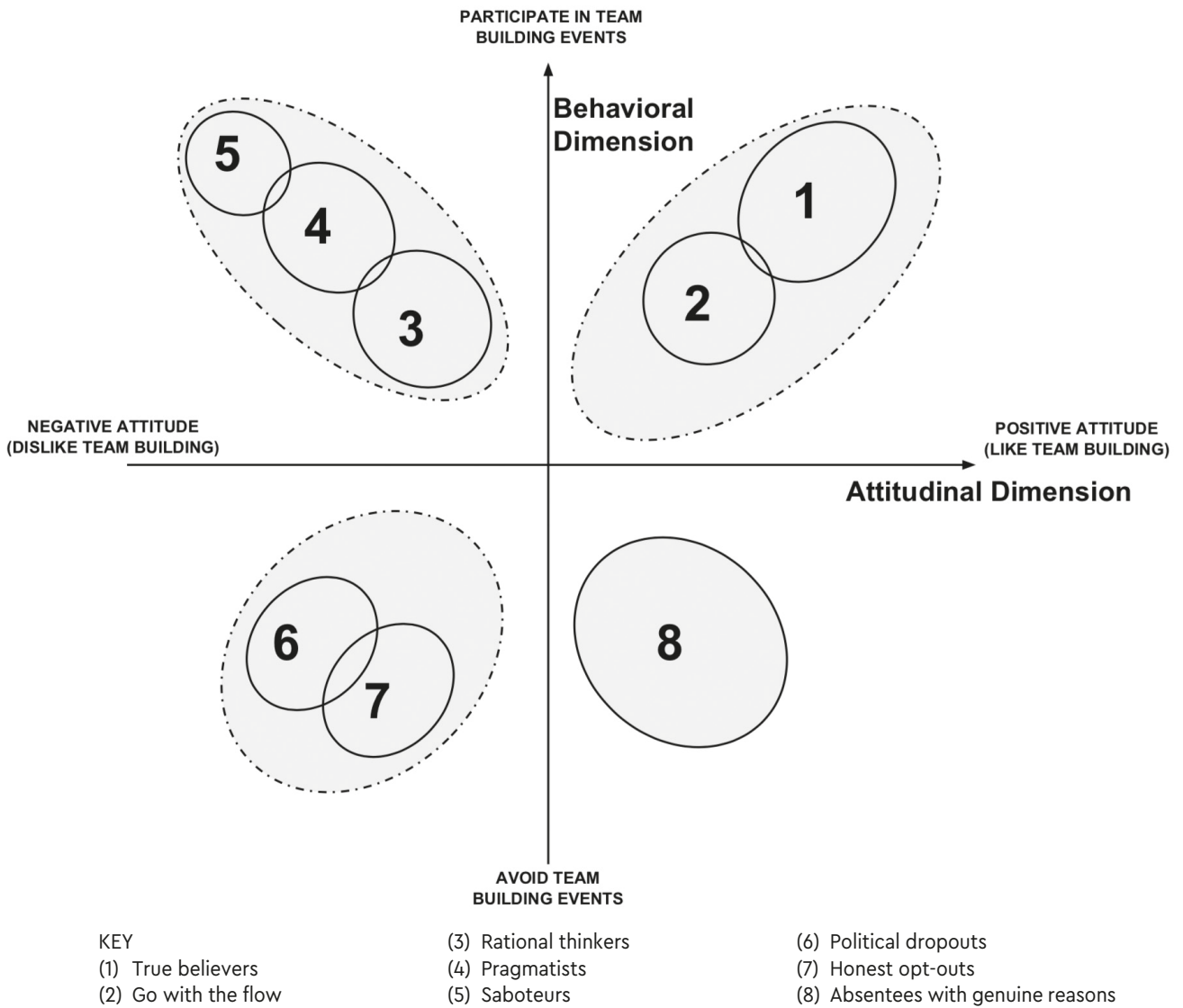


FIGURE 1: Model showing employees with different attitudes towards team building

regarding not attending team-building events so they would try to come up with convincing and legitimate-sounding reasons or excuses so that they can skip team-building events and team outings (code 11).

Category 7: Honest opt-outs

Employees in this category are very similar to political dropouts. The crucial difference is that these employees do not make the effort to come up with excuses. They tend to simply decline to participate outright. These may be older employees close to retirement (code 6). They are no longer interested in career advancements and promotions. So, they are much less constrained by the potential sociopolitical risks (code 1) associated with declining to join team outings.

Category 8: Absentees with genuine reasons

Employees in this category have generally positive attitudes towards team-building activities and team outings (code 7; themes 1, 2, 4). They may or may not believe in the effectiveness

of team building in improving employees' work performance and productivity, but they do find most team-building activities enjoyable. When they do not attend, it is because they have legitimate reasons, not excuses, for their absence. It could be because of a schedule conflict, an upcoming deadline, or other personal or family reasons.

Discussion

The findings make several contributions to theory and research on team-building interventions. First and foremost, the findings show that some employees may hold highly negative views towards team-building events and activities. This finding stands in contrast to the claim that employees resoundingly *want* team-building activities from their firms (Symanowitz, 2013). The netnographic data that underpinned this study clearly indicated that some employees strongly dislike team-building activities. In fact, not only do some employees resist and avoid team-building events, but they also actually develop well thought-out tactics

and strategies to cope with or avoid team-building events (e.g. rational thinkers, pragmatists, and political dropouts). Some go even further and set out to sabotage team-building events (e.g. saboteurs). These findings do seem to challenge the dominant discourse that employees want team building. When improperly done, team building perhaps does more to divide the team than to unite it, and certainly, not all employees want team-building events from their employers.

Second, the intention of and the motive behind organising team-building interventions is to facilitate better work performance and higher productivity (Klein et al., 2009; Robbins & Judge, 2017). Researchers and managers must recognise that having the right intention is not enough and that the effect of team-building events could be not only unproductive, but actually counter-productive to the realisation of the organisation's very intentions. As some research has shown, hotel managers' support for workplace fun had an adverse impact on employees' sales performance (Tews et al., 2013), indicating the possibility that team building may have unexpected counter-productive effects among employees. In terms of the findings of this study, of the eight categories of employees, six can be categorised as believing team-building activities to be ineffective (i.e. go with the flow, rational thinkers, pragmatists, saboteurs, political dropouts, and honest opt-outs). Of course, with this study being an exploratory qualitative one, six out of eight categories do not necessarily mean a numerical majority in employee numbers. However, the existence of these categories of employees points to the importance of further examining whether or not and to what extent the intention behind organising team-building events is fulfilled.

Finally, while much research effort has been directed at measuring the effectiveness of team-building interventions (e.g. Salas et al., 1999; Klein et al., 2009), researchers and management ought to carefully and systematically examine employees' opinions about and their desires or preferences for team-building activities. These findings, showing a wide spectrum of employee attitudes, from eager participation to avoidance and even sabotage, are an indication that there may still be much that is unknown regarding employees' opinions about and their preferences for team-building events. The complexity of employees' attitudes towards team building is compounded by the fact that team-building events can be compulsory and by the sociopolitical risks associated with not attending, even when the team-building event is not mandatory. As such, a more systematic research approach focusing on tapping into employees' honest and unfiltered opinions regarding team building will be valuable for management.

Conclusions and implications

Using netnography, this study explored employees' attitudes towards team-building activities. The findings reveal a wide range of attitudinal beliefs and behavioural tendencies. On the basis of netnographic data, 16 codes and five themes were created. Furthermore, employees were placed into eight categories along two axes (i.e. attitudinal and behavioural): true believers, go with the flow, rational thinkers, pragmatists, saboteurs, political dropouts, honest opt-outs, and absentees with genuine reasons.

The findings of this study have several practical implications for managers, employees, and team-building facilitators. First,

for managers and team-building organisers, it is important to keep in mind that those employees who participate in the team-building activities and events may have a wide range of different attitudes and behavioural tendencies which can manifest themselves in surprising ways during the events. It would be naïve and incorrect to presume that all present are there because they embrace the team building that is to take place. Among the employees who indicate that they tend to participate in team-building events, this study found they have different motives, reasons, and attitudes. The "true believers" are there wholeheartedly; the "pragmatists" are there with ulterior motives to benefit themselves and to advance their own careers; and the "saboteurs" are there to create mayhem and distractions. Managers and team-building facilitators ought to recognise this and be prepared for it.

Second, managers and team-building facilitators should also recognise that those employees who are not present at team-building events have different reasons and motives as well. Recognising that not all absence is equal is challenging. This is because those who are absent are obviously not present. The negative sociopolitical consequences that befall those who do not participate in team-building events may be particularly likely to impact on the "honest opt-outs". This is due to the fact that they may be too forthcoming in speaking the truth, whereas the "political dropouts" may be more diplomatic and considerate in presenting a well-thought-out excuse. It is important that managers and team-building organisers keep in mind that employees who choose not to attend team-building events have different reasons and motives, and that their absence should perhaps be treated differently.

Third, for industries such as the hospitality industry where there is a shared conviction that employees are a key to success, management ought to pay attention to and devise ways to understand how employees really feel about team-building interventions and activities. As discussed in this article, not participating in team building or expressing negative views about team building is associated with potential sociopolitical risks, which could make employees hesitate to inform the management their true opinions regarding team building. Consequently, managers should arrange ways to elicit honest responses from employees. For instance, after a team-building event, the hotel's management might administer an anonymous survey to gather employees' opinions and feedback. However, the issue is that employees might still feel that their responses could be linked to them personally and used against them. For example, even if the survey does not include the employee's name, other demographic and organisational factors that are measured might easily reveal the respondent's identity. Consequently, employees would not necessarily be fully assured of the "anonymous" nature of the survey. A practical suggestion this study could put forth is that if the organisation's intention is to gain employees' true opinions and feedback, anonymity should be fully guaranteed by excluding any potentially identifying items from the survey.

Finally, regarding misconceptions concerning the perceived effectiveness of team-building activities, employees, managers, and possibly team-building facilitators can all benefit from more accurate and empirically based information. A number of the employees included in this sample complain that their managers are misguided about team-building events and team-building effectiveness, while at the same time some of them also exhibit

misconceptions themselves. For instance, "true believers" are of the opinion that team building is good, and it is beneficial and effective for team performance. They also tend to advocate that all employees should participate in team building and those who do not are "anti-team". These views could also be considered rather extreme and unsubstantiated. Research has not been conclusive that all types of team building are effective for all types of outcomes (Klein et al., 2009). On the other hand, "saboteurs" also hold misguided beliefs regarding team building. They are the opposite of the "true believers" and tend to hold an extreme and negative view of team building and behave in accordance with that negative view during team-building events. Research on team building needs to be much more nuanced than employees, managers, and possibly team-building facilitators perhaps realise. Research should take into account different types of team-building interventions, different types of outcomes measured, time duration of team building, team size, lasting effect of outcome, subjective self-report outcomes versus objective outcomes, type of team, etc. Practitioners, employees, and managers, however, tend to oversimplify. Moreover, it would appear that it is those who are on the extreme ends of the attitudinal and behavioural spectrums also tend to oversimplify (e.g. true believers, saboteurs). Those whose views are more moderate do seem to be more nuanced (e.g. rational thinkers, pragmatists, go with the flow). By having a more nuanced view, employees, managers, and team-building practitioners may find more common ground on the topic of team building, and also avoid unnecessary conflicts, which would, hopefully, truly facilitate team effectiveness in the long term.

Potential limitations and future research

As with any research, this study has its limitations, both in terms of the method (netnography) and the actual process followed in this study. Netnography as a method is no longer new and is increasingly being used by established researchers, but as Mkono et al. (2013, p. 69) state "netnography remains outside of the mainstream". The number of postings on sites such as Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter make them a valuable resource for academics (Björk & Kauppinen-Räsänen, 2012; Mkono, 2012). Although the comments used in netnography are posted in a public forum and therefore research ethics assumes the poster is happy for their comments to be read and used, the method does not enable the researcher to explicitly obtain informed consent. However, Langer and Beckman (2005) make a distinction between a genuinely "public" forum which is open to all and a "private" discussion group – they suggest a researcher should identify themselves as a researcher before actively participating in any online discussions.

Also, there is little opportunity to clarify the meaning or the intention of the poster – it remains an interpretive process and is therefore open to error. There is also little opportunity to confirm the authenticity or truthfulness of postings. As Rageh et al. (2013, p. 134) point out, "in online contexts, participants might be more likely to present an identity that is significantly different to their 'real' identities, which could possibly undermine the trustworthiness of the data collected". Belz and Baumbach (2010) therefore suggest that netnography is best used in triangulation with other evidence and approaches. In terms of specific limitations of this particular study, it has only used qualitative approaches, and follow-up quantitative studies would

clearly help strengthen the proposed model. The focus of this study was employees, but it would also be helpful to understand the (unfiltered) motivations and experiences of management with regard to team building. As discussed in the Method section, social desirability bias may force respondents to be unrealistically positive, but the opportunity to post anonymously may also pressurise or at least facilitate respondents to be unnecessarily negative ("trolling" is the term often used online for unnecessarily negative contributions).

We, the researchers in this study, are from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds and as such considered ourselves sensitive to cultural aspects of team building and criticising management efforts, but it is also very likely that there is a cultural aspect to people's attitudes to work-based team-building activities. Without wishing to resort to stereotypes, it may well be that some cultures are much more comfortable sharing personal information and participating in team-building activities than others. In a world where an increasingly global training elite deliver such interventions, it would be well to clarify cultural expectations of team-building events.

While 104 postings were included, the fact that some were as short as a few lines while others were several paragraphs in length could influence the analysis and conclusions. An opportunity to do in-depth interviews with employees in each of the identified categories would be very valuable, as might a large-scale survey using the eight categories. Notwithstanding these very valid limitations, this research still contributes to the understanding of employee attitudes to the increasing use of team-building activities in organisations.

Note

1. Codes 10 and 12 are each linked to two themes. The boredom, frustration, and anger of employees regarding team-building events (code 10) are related to their overall attitudes towards team building (theme 1) as well as theme 5: offering potential explanations as to why team building may not have its intended effects on employees. The voluntary versus compulsory participation in team building (code 12) is linked to and reflective of employees' behavioural patterns (theme 2) and it also represents the sociopolitical risks associated with (not attending) team-building events (theme 3).

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