

Creating a Triple Win - Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Programmes in Development Training

The use of CSR projects within development programmes has seen a huge increase over the last few years, these programmes have the potential to provide a motivational introduction to a new organisation and leave a lasting legacy. While there are many examples of excellence, some have left participants to question the intent and value of the initiative, and in the worse cases, question the motives of the organisation they have just joined. So, what makes a great CSR project which creates a win for participants, community partner and corporate host? And, where do some projects fall short of their promise?

One of the great strengths of CSR projects is an inherent strong call to action; we've known for a long time that challenging tasks stimulate performance and serve to build a sense of team spirit. Katzenbach and Smith (The Wisdom of Teams) for example identify a clear sense of challenge as a critical unifying factor to developing high performance teams, and Colins, (Built to Last) refers to Audacious Goals as a positive motivational force, clearly linking challenge to performance.

Strong CSR projects have a stretching, clearly defined and achievable goal. Combine this with an emotional call to action, and you have a very, very powerful driver. With the right project, you will find groups going the extra mile, working through lunch and into the night to deliver and a sense of pride in achieving something of value.

Your single most important input will be your introduction and contextualising. This undoubtedly works best when delivered in conjunction with your community partner, ideally on location so participants can see, feel and understand the value their work will add and the role the community partner plays within the society it sits. An essential aspect is a **clearly defined goal** which motivates and provides opportunities for a sense of celebration at the end; projects that work less well, contribute to a greater good without a sense of definition drifting to a close.

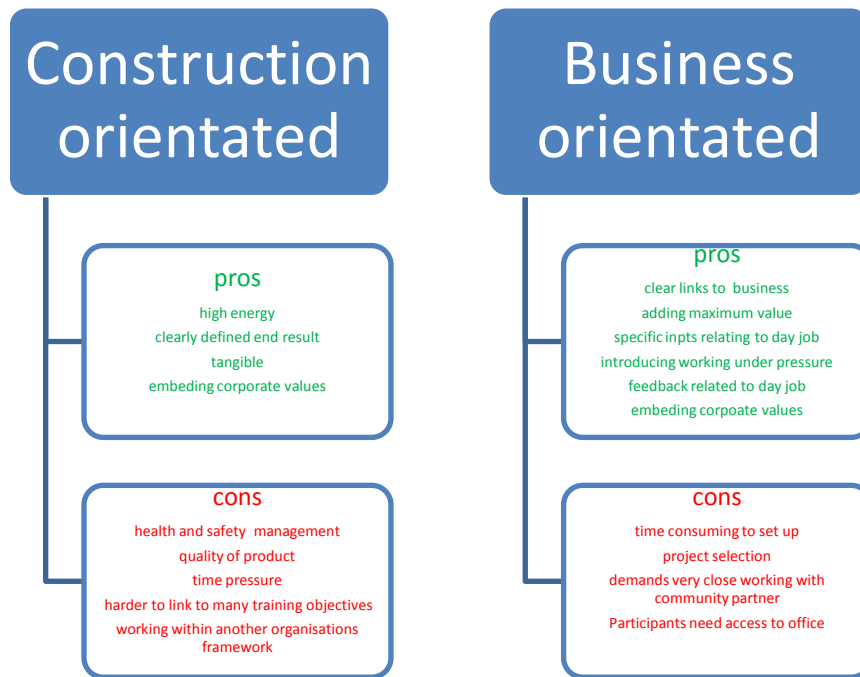
The flip side of this strong call to action and time pressure is that opportunities for training inputs or review are limited. If inputs are **overdone** they are seen by participants to hinder project. A common mistake is to force training interventions, or to have unrealistic training objectives forcing the trainers hand into making these interventions. CSR programmes work due to the energy they create, do not make the mistake of weakening its greatest asset.

Initiatives can take many shapes and sizes most of which fall into one of two clear genres, each with their respective pros and cons to be explored in more detail. Both genres due to their experiential nature lend themselves well to breathing life into corporate values providing of course there is the vital context and review. Both also carry the challenge of balancing the ratio of task to review/input maximising learning and productivity. And in both cases consider your ratio of trainers to participants, most experienced experiential providers will recommend a maximum ratio of 1 trainer to 10 participants. This is a specialised field and trainer's needs to be comfortable working experientially in the moment, using their experience to know when an intervention adds value. Insist on seeing your trainer's credentials and ask to talk to past clients.

Two Key Genres

1. Business orientated – providing consultancy or skills in areas of corporate excellence: marketing, business analysis, financial planning, business modelling.

2. Construction orientated – the provision of non-skilled labour: painting and face lifts, building and refurbishment, gardening and land regeneration.



Business Orientated

These are often presented in the style of the TV programme 'Apprentice Challenge' with a real business objective to be delivered within tight time scales. They offer community partners and opportunity for real expertise in an area they may not excel in or are usually able to afford and bright fresh minds to examine their organisation from a new perspective. This form of project seeks to directly replicate the workplace, and as such, provides a powerful tool for feedback relating to role, it is also compatible with formal skills/knowledge inputs, which can be immediately put into action to reinforce learning. Common examples of this might be:

- Consultancy skills
- Financial awareness
- Marketing
- Presentation skills/business pitches

Many organisations create competition between groups to drive performance; judged via a final presentations to senior staff and representatives gathered internally and externally. Presentations work well to create a finale, and also very effectively model challenging via questioning; something many organisations ask of their new intake but fail to demonstrate. This leaves graduates either badly burned by overdoing challenging or being less effective than they could be in their new positions.

Finding the right project and producing a brief to bring it to life can be a challenge. Often a more open brief works better and allows for greater creativity. In your brief be absolutely crystal clear regarding objectives, resources and timings. Business orientated projects demand a high level of communication between your participants and community partner, who should be considered as a client. The reality is that this can be very demanding and community partners need to be fully informed that they can expect intense questioning by some very keen graduates!

Programme participants are going to need unrestricted access to computers, internet, email and phone, which at the very least this needs to be on a 1:2 basis. Do not attempt to run this style of project with anything less!

Generic objectives which can be effectively covered in this style of project might include:

- Understanding the need to question and how to do this effectively
- Presentation skills/business pitches
- Setting expectations regarding performance
- Consultancy skills/models
- Understanding the role of CSR within a business
- Building relationships/networks
- Understanding and bringing to life corporate values



Construction Orientated

More labour intensive projects have been used for a long time as a way of connecting with community organisations and giving something back to society. They are highly visible and leave a physical lasting legacy as well as serving to generate a sense of pride in a job well done and building strong relationships and teams.

With a strong introduction, context and conclusion they provide a good platform to bring to life corporate values. Don't be afraid to create stretching targets; participants are often amazed by what can be achieved by a committed group under tight time constraints. However it does mean that it becomes harder to integrate many corporate development objectives due to a real need for action. As a rule of thumb, facilitators will have 3 opportunities for interventions every day, first thing, lunchtime and after work; expect a mid day review to be largely task focused. A caveat to

this is if things just aren't going right they need to be addressed, just as they do in the workplace. A timely review and corresponding shift in performance can be a very powerful learning tool.

Generic objectives which can be effectively covered in this style of project might include:

- Setting expectations regarding performance
- Understanding the role of CSR within a business
- Building relationships/networks
- Understanding and bringing to life corporate values
- Creating a lasting legacy
- Creating a energising introduction to organisation

Construction style projects have the advantage of often being easier to set up within your local area; generally community partners understand what you are looking for and trying to achieve. They are sometimes criticised for the lack of quality resulting in a need for remedial work or when you look at the time and labour utilised, simply not making economic sense.

With construction projects, think quality, impact and ease of construction. Tasks such as clearing areas, adding benches and planters have a huge Impact and open up areas previously out of bounds. We recommend employing a suitably qualified craftsperson, able to advise on the safe use of tools, PPE and to assist with technical aspects, you're craftsperson will also need very good interpersonal skills interacting with participants and clients. Also consider the impact of poor weather, painting in particular can be a nightmare!

These projects run on site, require sensitivity to working within another culture, perhaps alongside children or people with special needs. Participants need to be fully informed of their situation so everyone can feel safe while undertaking the project. Also of consideration is health and safety, risk assessment and food hygiene.



The right partner

Partnership is central to effective community projects and demands time and energy from both sides. You will need to invest in understanding your partner's situation and culture which is likely to vary, very different from a corporate environment.

Go and seek to meet up with many organisations; some of the most worthwhile to work with are hidden away as their focus is getting down and doing great work, rather than seeking to network. They so need your help but you are off their radar. Conversely, sometimes it is those who are most proactive who are actually very well resourced and expert at drawing attention to their cause and raising funds. Crucial to the success is a **sense of real need**. Powerful CSR projects leave the participants with a deep rooting feeling that the work they undertook made real difference and helped within society, they create a connection at an **emotional level**. Your community partner is usually the best person to position what they do and highlight the impact and the difference the project will make.

Be prepared for major cultural differences, the unexpected to always happen and.... with the right project and partner, huge rewards. One of the best ways to create cross cultural understanding is to undertake a project in full partnership, working together with the project beneficiaries from consultation to the delivery phase, this might involve working directly with children, youth, those with disability or who are vulnerable.

Hopefully this article creates some thought around using CSR projects within your organisation and stimulates debate within respective forums and sector groups. CSR projects have the potential to provide very powerful experiences adding real value to society and all stakeholders. But, when committed to as tokenism, because its expected, or without thought, like many other aspects of the graduate proposition, will leave participants to question the intent and values of the initiative and in the worse cases the values of the organisation they have just joined - let's make sure we get it right.

Howard Crook

Howard Crook is the Director of Re-Think development. He has specialised in Graduate Development for 15 years running programmes for over 20 corporate clients, twice presenting at the AGR conference and has run a variety of workshops nationally exploring best practice within Graduate Development.

www.rethinktraining.co.uk

Where some CSR based development programmes fallen short in the past:

- No call to action

Solution – a strong introduction, delivered on location. A clear need within society and easily identified benefits. A challenging task with definable outcomes.

- Lack of commitment from community partner

Solution – A robust conversation at the planning stage outlining the need for a 2-way commitment, be prepared to walk away and find another partner if it doesn't feel right.

- Resources not arriving on site in time

Solution – Ensure site deliveries arrive before the event or bring them with you.

- Health and safety issues

Solution – ensure rigorous risk assessments are completed by experts in the field concerned who also have experience of managing this type of programme. Provide full PPE and ensure it is used. Train staff in the safe use of tools, and inform of health and safety issues.

- Child protection/vulnerability issues

Solution – Ensure participants are never working alone with children. Ensure you have a conversation around the protection of children and vulnerable adults with your community partner, they will be fully informed and will be able to draw up some guidelines. It helps if organisers have recent CRB checks at the enhanced level.

- Food hygiene issues

Solution – order in food from a reputable outside caterer with food hygiene training

- Poor briefing

Solution - ensure your briefing includes context, why. Involve the community partner, ask them to outline the situation and the benefits. Brief on location so participants can really sense the benefits. Have beneficiaries on site.

- Untimely interventions

Solution – Don't overdo the number of reviews. Use trainers experienced in experiential delivery and working in the moment.

- Lack of interventions/project structure

Solution – particularly on business orientated projects, ensure you have a solid 'red thread running through the project, trainers must work to develop the group into a high performance team.

- Weakly constructed project briefs

Solution – ensure the project concept is thoroughly critically reviewed by all parties before commissioning to a group

- No sense of completion

Solution – clear objectives with a finished end product

- No genuine need from community partner

Solution – strong open dialog with community partner, if not 100% sure regarding need or intent walk away

- Inappropriate objectives

Solution – start with the end in mind, know your objectives and design a programme to meet them. CSR programmes may not work for you in all cases. Above all else ensure your objectives are achievable.

- Cultural insensitivity

Solution – Seek to fully understand your community partner and be clear on both sides regards expectations.