

Corporate Bonding at the Races

Summary of an SIRC research report by Kate Fox

What is ‘corporate bonding’?

‘Corporate bonding’ is a term used to describe the establishment, development and maintenance of good social relationships between business contacts or colleagues. (The term ‘corporate bonding’ was coined by the author of this report, anthropologist Kate Fox, as there was no existing shorthand term for this particular form of social bonding.)

Why was this research undertaken?

This project is a sequel to a more wide-ranging study entitled The Racing Tribe (TRT), conducted in 1996/97. The TRT research provided a broad overview of the culture, customs and social dynamics of the racecourse. The Corporate Bonding study focuses in more detail on one of the key categories of racegoer identified in TRT, namely the ‘Suits’ or ‘corporate racegoers’.

- The principal aim of the Corporate Bonding study was to identify the means and mechanisms by which the culture and social dynamics of the racecourse facilitate social bonding in the corporate hospitality context.
- The study was funded by the British Horseracing Board and racecourse caterers Letheby & Christopher (with additional practical support from the Racecourse Association) and was designed to provide these organisations with a new insights into the psychology, behaviour and needs of their corporate customers.
- The findings will also be of interest to users of corporate hospitality at the races, particularly to hosts who want a more in-depth understanding of the role of racing in building business relationships.
- The study is also part of a wider Social Issues Research Centre programme of research focusing on positive aspects of human interaction and the causes of good behaviour.

What did the research involve?

- The Corporate Bonding at the Races research was conducted by Kate Fox, Director of the Social Issues Research Centre, using the ‘participant-observation’ methods normally employed by anthropologists studying tribal societies. The original TRT study proved that these methods provide insights into the psychology and behaviour of racegoers which cannot be obtained through conventional market research.
- The study involved 11 months of observation work, participant-observation and interviews with hosts and guests at a representative sample of corporate events