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Determining Innovative Tourism Event Professional Competency for Conventions and Exhibitions Industry: A Preliminary Study

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Abstract

This study is conducted to understand the concept of competency and to determine the innovative competencies of event professional for conventions and exhibitions industry. The study has adopted a six-step competency model development in order to determine what the conventions and exhibitions experts perceive would be the innovative event professional competencies that can provide them with the competitive advantage needed to intelligently capture the opportunities. A focus group interview was conducted where a set of questionnaires was further developed and a pilot test was conducted to test the reliability and validity of the instrument. Four main competencies emerged from the analysis namely entrepreneurial competencies, operational competencies, personal characteristics competencies and communication competencies.

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1. Introduction

Event management constitutes one of the most exciting and fastest growing forms of leisure, business and tourism-related phenomena where the recognition of tourism event as an important contributor to the country's economy is unquestionable.

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Over the last six years, the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE) market in Asia has grown by 133 percent against a global market rate of 19.9 percent. Asia is now the hub for hosting all kinds of events and that such enormous shift would indeed spell intense competition for all. Singapore and Hong Kong are the two hottest destinations for MICE with Taiwan, India and Malaysia going for the run too. A total of 16.32 million square meters of space was sold by organizers in 2012, representing an increase of 2.7 percent from 2011. Malaysia and Singapore on the other hand were the fastest growing markets in South East Asia for 2012, up by 8.2 percent and 7.6 percent respectively followed by Indonesia (6.6 percent), Vietnam (4.9 percent) and the Philippines (3.9 percent) (PRWeb, 2013). It looks as though the whole market is for the taking. ASEAN is taking up yet another leap in order to take advantage of the phenomena; the establishing of an integrated ASEAN Tourism Investment Zone (ATIZ) as the building block for its regional tourism investment thrust and to promote ASEAN as a single tourism investment destination and an ASEAN community (Yousuf, 2013).

Global outlook too shows positive turnover with an average of 10 percent profit increase for the exhibitors in 2013 and expected to follow through in 2014 (UFI, 2014a). In the Malaysian context, business tourism contributed RM10.7 billion and an economic impact of RM17 billion in 2011 with each business tourism visitor spending an estimated RM7481.00; three times the spending of an average visitor. By 2020, the business tourism is expected to contribute RM3.9 billion in incremental Gross National Income and 16,700 additional jobs (Myceb, 2012b). Such vibrancy and appeal mandate an equally competent workforce for it to translate well and be sustainable. Without greater insight into the complex relationships between application of learned knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) in managing this, the scenario of event professional's competencies problem will continue to be an obstacle to tourism industry and organizations seeking sustainable and superior performance. Recognizing its significance, the development of workforce and dependency reduction on foreign labour has been clearly delineated in the Malaysian New Economic Model and highlighted under its National Key Result Areas.

Tourism is indeed extremely labour intensive and represents among the world's top creators for jobs requiring varying degrees of skills (ILO, 2010). While a number of developed countries have upgraded their national skills standards system, in Malaysia, there appears to be increasing pressure to develop greater mobility of skilled workers in meeting the demand for event management industry to be competitive and to improve its productivity (Laing & Frost, 2010). On top of that, and despite its considerable impact on economic and social development, a review on selected competencies among event professionals or planners in the Asia Pacific region, Europe, Latin America and Australia appears to be lacking and scant. These regions claim that managing events has enormous potential for growth in terms of attracting the international meetings market (ILO, 2010). There is also limited empirical studies conducted in measuring tools to gauge the quality and effectiveness of event professionals/planners in recognizing event professionally and ethically (Collins, Jone, & Munday, 2009; Laing & Frost, 2010).

There is an apparent dearth need for new knowledge but lack of rigor in much business events research and a tendency towards descriptive statistics and analysis (Mair, 2010). The current research seeks to bridge this gap by providing an insight into various dimensions in the event professional competency and also identify the innovative competencies among event professionals which underpin the speed, flexibility and focus needed in addressing the new exigencies of the industry. These are new, novel, unique underlying characteristics of a person that contribute to successful job or organizational performance in the business events industry specifically the Conventions and Exhibitions Industry.

2. Literature Review

Event management constitutes one of the most exciting and fastest growing forms of leisure, business and tourism-related phenomena. Their special appeal stems from the limited duration and innate uniqueness of each event, which distinguishes them from permanent institutions and built attractions. Events have the ability to attract a large number of visitors for a specific time period to a specific destination and serve a number of functions in contemporary societies. These include developing the social cohesion within, and between communities; improving public infrastructure; bringing 'new' money into host economies; and showcasing host destinations. They happen by conscious human design, created by organizations with many stakeholders and with special goals in mind. To be selected to host a major international event is prestigious and may even be seen as a way of gaining credibility and acceptance on the international political stage (Rogers, 2013).

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