2 Knowledge Management Challenges in Event Organisations

Learning objectives

- ☐ Understand different knowledge management challenges for event organisations.
- ☐ Be able to identify knowledge management challenges for project-based and 'pulsating' types of organisations.
- ☐ Understand how the large number of seasonal employees and volunteers in event organisations impacts upon knowledge management.
- ☐ Explore the different event specific types of knowledge (creative, operational, strategic).
- ☐ Learn the difference between knowledge hiding and knowledge hoarding.
- ☐ Be able to explain how the different knowledge management challenges impact upon reinventing the wheel.

Introduction

This chapter sets the scene for knowledge management in an events context. The events industry is a highly competitive industry, where many new events emerge, and unsuccessful ones disappear. Events management thus needs to be effective in order for the organisation to be successful, both in economic as well as in creative terms. The notion

of success is thereby "(...) as much an inward-looking concept as an outward one" (Getz & Frisby, 1988: 23). Effective knowledge management can help event organisations stay innovative and competitive in the long term. This, however, comes with a few challenges.

Allen et al. (2011) and Bowdin et al. (2012) provide an extensive overview of the managerial process of organising special events. An operational focus includes strategic considerations, marketing, financing, human resource management, logistics, legal issues, and risk management. Allen et al. (2011: 495) also identified the issue of knowledge management as part of the post-event evaluation, where,

> *"[t]he staging of major events and conferences has now become so complex that event managers and organising bodies cannot afford to start from scratch in the planning of events. They must start from what has been learnt from the previous staging and history of the event and build on this (...). [T]his process of the transfer of knowledge takes place partly through the documentation of the event and partly through the skills and experience of key event personnel, who become highly sought after because of their successful track record in organising events."*

Many event organisations, however, fail to document and share the acquired knowledge and end up reinventing the wheel each event season. In the wider management literature, an organisation's basic characteristics, such as its size (i.e. number of employees), whether it is a private organisation or a public sector organisation, whether it is geographically dispersed (e.g. multinational corporations), and whether it is run very formally or more informally (such as many small- and medium-sized enterprises), all play an important role in determining the best and most effective way of managing knowledge processes and practices (Hislop et al., 2018). There are, however, several additional knowledge management challenges specifically relevant to the field of events, which will be discussed in this chapter. These are: the 'pulsating' nature of events; lack of time and resources to create, share and document knowledge; large numbers of volunteers; knowledge leakage, knowledge hiding and knowledge hoarding; as well as the team moving on once the event is over, and knowledge therefore being lost. Knowledge management in project-based organisations will also briefly be discussed in this chapter, as there are a number of similarities between these types of organisations and events.

The 'pulsating' nature of events

With one-off events, of course, there is no previously accrued organisational knowledge available for staff members to draw on. They need to quickly and efficiently engage in the process of creating new knowledge, which can be a massive challenge. But even with recurring events, such as annual events, staff turnover is high: when the event is approaching, the organisation expands rapidly, new seasonal staff members and volunteers join and need to quickly gain an understanding of key processes, practices and procedures within the organisation. They need to acquire knowledge, share existing knowledge with others, and together create new knowledge. As soon as the event is over, however, the organisation then contracts again, and staff members move on to other jobs (Carlsson-Wall et al., 2017; Clayton, 2020).

Toffler (1990) originally defined these types of organisations as 'pulsating' organisations. Figure 2.1 below depicts the number of people involved over time in a typical 'pulsating' event organisation running, for example, one event per year.
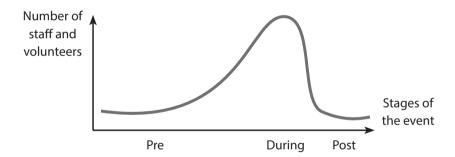

Figure 2.1: 'Pulsating' event organisations

Hanlon and Cuskelly (2002) later applied the same idea to mega sports events and argued that event organisations share similar characteristics to these 'pulsating' organisations. They specifically looked at the induction process for new staff members in these types of organisations, where there is no stable workforce in place and therefore no established relationships between staff members. Induction tends to be run at a group, rather than individual, level in 'pulsating' event organisations because of the massive influx of people over a short period of time. Hanlon and Cuskelly (2002) highlight the importance of induction