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Adding Fuel to the 'Fyre'

Leaving it late at Vestiville

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Introduction

The necessity and virtues of meticulous event planning cannot be extolled highly enough in ensuring successful outcomes for key stakeholders, the event organization itself, and the wider event community. For stakeholders, the benefits include: excellent consumer satisfaction, positive word-of-mouth recommendations, and media attention. The event organization benefits from enhanced reputation, attainment of event objectives, profit and longevity. Previous media coverage and existing events management literature highlight numerous cases of successful events and festivals (e.g. London 2012 Olympic Games). There are also many high profile examples of unsuccessful events verging on the edge of disaster (e.g. Fyre Festival and Hope & Glory Festival), which achieved notoriety because organisers failed to anticipate and address challenges encountered within the event planning and implementation process.

In retrospect, event failure raises numerous questions from teaching, learning and practitioner perspectives, not least regarding the reasons for failure (Kinnunen & Haathi, 2015; Getz, 2002) contributory factors (Nordvall & Heldt, 2017) and, whether or not these were within the organization's control. In today's challenging times, where resources are both limited and stretched, organisers can ill afford to take chances or short cuts in relation to attendee health and safety, as the resulting consequences can be dire, if not fatal, in worst case scenarios. Yet, despite advances in the sector's professionalisation and the availability of event planning software, event failure and mismanagement recur. The Vestiville Festival is an example of such a failure and is the main case study examined in this chapter. Scheduled to take place in Lommel, Belgium, in June 2019, this music festival was shut down by local authorities over safety concerns on its opening day (NME, 2019).

This chapter uses the Vestiville example to explore issues of event planning, project management and stakeholder communications. It is important to critically evaluate the reasons for the event's failure and last-minute cancellation, to learn valuable lessons, thereby assisting event organisers to host better, safer events in future, that ensure the safety and satisfaction of event stakeholders (Pielichaty *et al.*, 2017).

This chapter contributes to existing knowledge and is a practical resource for academics, students and practitioners, with reference to a range of useful videos, reports and journal articles. It explores some of the more controversial aspects of whether or not event organisers are appropriately held to account following poor planning and execution of major international events. It begins with an examination of the professionalisation of the events industry, before going on to explore the phenomenon of event and festival failure, as well as the importance of learning from failure. Relevant event management models and processes are assessed, before considering a critical analysis of the Vestiville case study itself, which includes an application of the EMBOK model framework to the festival.

The professionalisation of the events industry

Pre-pandemic, the Events Industry Council (2018) reported that business events supported a total global economic impact of \$1.5 trillion of GDP (gross domestic product). If the global business events sector was a country, it would equate to the 13th largest economy globally (larger than economies such as Australia, Spain, Mexico, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia). In the UK, the events industry was estimated to contribute over £70 billion in direct spend, accounting for over 50% of the UK visitor economy (BVEP, 2020). Over the last 20 years, the industry has developed from spanning a range of other disciplines such as project management, marketing, finance and human resources, to being a professional industry in its own right. It is recognised that today's events manager requires a highly developed skillset, particular to the demands of the industry and area of employment, such as leisure, personal, cultural, and organizational events (Shone & Parry, 2019). This is largely confirmed by the growth of Events Management undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses and an increase in the number of higher education institutions providing them in the UK (Pielichaty *et al.*, 2017; Ryan, 2016), and the success of the Higher Education sector in supporting the development of dynamic, versatile graduates who are seen as valuable 'all-rounders' by employers from all sectors. The industry as a whole receives important support and guidance from a range of events-related professional bodies, and although they tend to represent their own specialist areas (Bladen *et al.*, 2018), their existence has undoubtedly aided the professionalisation of the industry. One such example is the Business Visits and Events Partnership (BVEP, 2019) who recognise the importance of forging close links with Government, in order to influence policy-makers.