

1 What is leadership?

Chapter aims

- Introduce the historical development of leadership studies
- Understand the various definitions of leadership
- Critically discuss the difference between leadership and management
- Explore why leadership differs in events and event tourism to other areas of management
- Learn why leadership matters in professional practice
- Focus on leadership in action: how to get a job leading events – industry insight from Lils Collingwood, Albany Appointments.

Introduction

Nearly 100 years of leadership studies have resulted in a large body of literature that suggests that leadership matters in all aspects of life. Studies have also shown that soft skills, such as leadership, are key to continued success in complex, fast changing organisations, and in a variety of managerial contexts. The nature of leadership within organisations and the styles of leadership required for specific business management roles have frequently been studied and there is a broad consensus that leadership matters in a range of managerial positions including event project management, tourism and hospitality management, human resources and a variety of other senior organisational roles. Leadership practices are essential for the development of successful event managers and leadership in planned events and event tourism therefore cannot be ignored.

Once you understand the basics as described in this book, you should be able to identify and classify a variety of event leadership practices. You should also be able to identify how leadership is enacted in event and event tourism organisations. This chapter starts with basic definitions, then goes on to fully explore why leadership matters in events and event tourism.

To get the reader thinking about leadership in planned events and event tourism, consider these scenarios:

- 1** The event manager for a large, international festival has complete control of the project plan, delegates all the work to her large team herself and is the key point of contact for all the major stakeholders. She is taken seriously and suddenly ill two weeks before the event is due to take place. What happens to the festival if the person with all that essential knowledge is suddenly not available to run it?
- 2** An experiential event agency is working with a large corporation on its experiential marketing, but the client is very fussy and the lead contact is a very difficult person to deal with, disagreeing with everything the agency suggests. How does the agency lead a project in this environment?
- 3** A human resource department has been asked to produce some leadership training for the recent event management graduate recruits. What kind of training would they need to develop? What skills might be useful for these new event leaders?
- 4** An event organisation is owned and run by the entrepreneurial founder of the business. The business has done very well in the past, but the owner is very controlling, and insists each decision is run past him before it can be made. This slows down the team's ability to respond to clients' queries and makes quick decision making and problem solving impossible. In addition, this man holds all the power and he has a very bad temper, so everyone in the organisation is scared of him, and can't challenge the status quo. What impact will this have on the team's ability to deliver events?
- 5** A destination marketing organisation (DMO) is developing an event portfolio for a small city. The city has suffered from a very poor reputation in recent years, with high levels of crime and poverty. How can the DMO use the event portfolio to lead changes to the perception of the city?

In the first example, the risk is obvious – when only one person fully understands the operational processes of an event, then both the responsibility and the knowledge sits firmly with them. If that person becomes suddenly unavailable, then the whole event is at risk. Good leadership would solve this because good leadership involves the delegation of responsibility and the development of trust in your team to manage the necessary tasks. Good leaders spread leadership throughout their organisations, and throughout their teams – both to lessen the risk of jeopardising the event, and to motivate and empower their staff members. An empowered, motivated team means a happy team – and therefore a team that will deliver the best experience they can. Types of leadership that might support this empowerment are discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, and issues around knowledge are explored in Chapter 7.

The second example is more complex and leads us to ask questions about who leads and when. Is the client or the agency a leader in this scenario? The answer is that they should both lead at appropriate times, and both parties should be willing to accept leadership from the other. The client has specialist knowledge of their brand, product and customer. The agency has specialist knowledge of events and event experiences – if they both listen to each other and accept leadership from those with expertise, then the project will go well. However, in circumstances such as the one described here, how likely is it that the client contact will listen and accept that he might be making poor decisions? A different type of leadership is required, one in which the client feels in control and the agency is there to ‘serve’ – this is explored in Chapter 4.

The third scenario is perhaps the most complex of them all – how do you train people in leadership, when leadership must change all the time, depending on who and what you are leading. Currently, most training still boils down to leadership styles and leadership competencies. These are explored in Chapter 6 – but the reader is encouraged to remember that leadership should be adaptable and how it is enacted should change depending on the situation in which it is taking place. In addition, remember that events are all about relationships. Understanding how to lead those relationships is not only a key skill needed for event managers, but will facilitate better event experiences. This is explored throughout this book.