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# 5 Events Employment: Crises' Impacts and Resolutions

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## Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to consider employment in relation to the broader events industry and crisis. In doing so this contribution homes in on two substantial research gaps in the literature. The first, related to the intrinsic interdependency between the events industry and the tourism and hospitality industries (Getz & Page, 2016), is that there is a well-documented academic and policy-maker ambivalence towards workforce issues in the broader tourism, hospitality, and event industries relative to other topics in these domains (Baum et al., 2016; Liu, 2018; Muskat & Mair, 2020). The second gap is that although there is a rich literature related to tourism and events recovery from, and resilience to, crisis and disasters, their impacts on workforce, and the role they play in recovery is ill-understood (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

There is, however, also an interdependency between many of the entertainment, cultural and sporting industries and events (Getz, 1997). Almost without exception the global tourism (hospitality and events) and entertainment (cultural and arts) have been the hardest hit economically by the COVID-19 pandemic (Sigala, 2020). A focal point of this chapter, therefore, will be the consideration of not only direct event employment effects vis-a-vis crises but also the ripple effects on other workforces dependent on the 'soft infrastructure' that the event industry generates. In particular this chapter will:

- ◆ Demonstrate that workforce is a neglected area in events research relative to its importance;
- ◆ Outline what we know about event workforces and job creation (including multiplier effects);
- ◆ Reveal the impacts of crises on event workforces;
- ◆ Detail how organizational recovery strategies impact workforces when dealing with crises;
- ◆ Consider events employment-related recovery and resilience strategies.

Crises refer to institutional (organizational) responses or failures vis-à-vis disasters (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Disasters can be natural (e.g., flood, earthquake bushfire), human-induced (e.g., economic, terrorism or conflict) and epidemic events. Disasters can also be unfolding scenarios, for instance climate change, escalating nuclear armament tensions or rising inequality. In practice many of these are not discrete but interconnected – for example epidemic and economic disasters. As a case in point, the context for this chapter will be the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on events, with a focus on Australasia, although in the first case study a crisis in late 2019 compounded the proceeding COVID-19 impacts. Nascent research suggests the impacts on tourism, hospitality and events workforces has been crippling – more than this, Baum, Mooney, Robinson and Solnet (2020) suggest COVID-19 (and by implication other crises) amplify existing workforce vulnerabilities and precarities (cf. Robinson et al., 2019). As such there are several imperatives for the consideration of the workforce impacts of crises on events, extending from the economic, social, political, and humanistic. These imperatives will unfold in this chapter thus. First the literature and background will be critically treated to generate a platform for the presentation of two Australasian case studies that bring the various surfaced perspectives to life. The chapter will conclude with the consideration of employment-related recovery and resilience strategies in both practical but also more abstracted dimensions.

## Importance of event workforces

Events are operated on a temporary and project-based structure and are characterized by a high fluctuation of paid employees and volunteers (Muskat & Mair, 2020; Michopoulou, Azara, & Russell, 2020). Event workforces have their unique profiles (Abson, 2017; Kim & Cuskelly, 2017) which reflects in a highly heterogeneous workforce from a diverse nature of contract forms (e.g., long-term permanent employees, casual employees, volunteers, and external contractors) (Mair, 2009). The temporary and project-based structure also indicates a high speed/clear goal performance of event organizations, which rely on constant fluctuations of employees during an event's operations period. This creates a series of workforce management problems to ensure business continuity (Clark et al., 2017; Van der Wagen & White, 2015), especially for small- to medium-size event organizations (SME) with a large number of part-time temporary workers (Michopoulou et al., 2020). For example, the difficulty around ongoing recruitment, employee retention (Muskat & Mair, 2020), storage of knowledge (Stadler, Fullagar, & Reid, 2014) and logistics of employee planning (Van der Wagen, 2007).

In the current uncertain global environment affected by natural disasters and health crises (e.g., COVID-19), event organizations are facing more challenging issues to adapt their strategic planning to achieve resilience. Crises

and disasters can disrupt workforce availability and mobility and can create negative psychological effects to vulnerable populations (Santos et al., 2020). Therefore, workforce training is emphasized as one of the key dimensions in determining the ability of organizations to absorb or mitigate negative impacts (Nyaupane et al., 2020) or to reduce business interruption losses by maintaining functionality and productivity (Santos et al., 2014). However, despite the clear recognition of the heterogenous nature of event teams, existing literature largely focuses on volunteer understanding (e.g., Blackman, Benson, & Dickson, 2017; Kim, Fredline, & Cuskelly, 2018) with a neglect of paid part-time workers (Muskat & Mair, 2020). Event workforce strategies are under-researched in the context of events, specifically on increasing employee retention, improving upskilling, creating long-term positions (Baum et al., 2009; Michopoulou & Melpignano, 2019), and mitigating disruptions to achieve crisis/disaster-related resilience (Nyaupane et al., 2020).

Furthermore, event employment or workforce issues reside in what Muskat and Mair (2021) ascribe as 'inward' perspectives on events research, which include the machinations of organizational, managerial, and human resource matters. Among these 'inward' attributes, industry leaders need more creative strategies to attract and sustain quality workforces. However, the ability of event organizations to recognize the needs of its labor shortage and provide sufficient career development and training opportunities is relatively limited (McCabe, 2012). No specific research is available in discussing quality workforce in the event context. Although Getz and Robinson (2014; Robinson & Getz, 2016; Robinson, Getz, & Dolnicar, 2018) have argued that in some niche event areas there is preponderance of demand-side research in comparison to supply-side, employment issues in the event industry remain neglected.

## **Event workforce effects and management**

Events provide substantial opportunities to create employment, develop new skills, accelerate short-term economic needs, and alleviate long term poverty (Maguire & Hanrahan, 2017). Many countries have leveraged events as an opportunity to build skill legacy and to enhance long-term employment for local people (Jago et al., 2010), and develop event education programs to provide a pipeline of skilled workers (cf. Robinson, Barron, & Solnet, 2008). Moreover, events can generate a large need for labor during events planning and preparation phases, such as construction of event-related infrastructure, maintenance of grounds and facilities, and security planning (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013). Furthermore, events can bring short-term employment effects in other sectors such as retail trade, accommodation and food services, arts, and entertainment (Feddersen & Maennig, 2013). The investment of public projects (e.g., transportation system upgrade, travel infrastructure renewal) can create other economic development opportunities and generate more new