Goals and Objectives of Event Management Associations

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ABSTRACT

As the event management industry grows and consolidates worldwide, associations play an increasingly significant role in professional support to the industry by ensuring the continued growth and success of event management professionals. Although there are many events, which are successfully crewed by volunteers, the increasing competition to secure major events is giving some impetus to the trend to create fully professionalised events (Getz, 1997). Volunteers continue to play a significant role in the management and organization of events, nevertheless, the industry is increasingly relying on well educated, experienced and professional event managers. This paper reviews the literature on professional associations and specifically explores the goals and objectives of event management associations.

The literature on professional associations is scant, scattered among a variety of disciplines and consequently has little breadth (Rodenhauser, 1999). As yet, there is limited academic research, which focuses on event management associations in general (Arcodia & Reid, 2002) and none which investigate their goals and objectives. Ayal (1986) suggests that there is a lack of formal strategic planning with professional associations and this is due to a wide number of factors such as the mission of nonprofit organisations being diffuse, having numerous goals and objectives that are difficult to define, as well as having many constituencies with conflicting objectives. In addition, he proposes that resolution and decision making within associations is often political in nature, leadership may be voluntary and subject to frequent changes resulting in the lack of time and resources that are available for strategic planning.

This study identified 147 professional associations worldwide involved with event management. While this list is not exhaustive, it provides a very strong sample of event management associations. They were located using a variety of sources such as the internet, industry and personal contacts. Rather than use or adapt an existing framework for analysis, this study applies a grounded approach to the analysis of the content of the goals and objectives. That is, the categories of meaning were developed from an analysis of the data provided rather than imposed by an existing typology from the literature. These associations were categorized by location, including international, regional and special interest associations with numerous sub-categories. Regional associations were divided into continents so that there were six sub-categories, the North American, European, Asian/Pacific, United Kingdom, South American and South African. The special interest associations were included as there were a number in the sample that did not fit within the first two categories, yet they were deemed significant to the study because they dealt with event management issues within the context of a specific industry.
The study concludes that event management associations have a strong record in developing goals and objectives as part of their operational framework. The key variables that emerged are: information exchange, education and training, identity and recognition, ethics and standards, networks and collegiality, business management, membership, premier representative association, product development and being a change agent.

Keywords: Event Management, Professional Associations, Goals and Objectives

INTRODUCTION

Event management has emerged over the past decade as a dynamic sector of the tourism and leisure industries. The number, diversity and popularity of events has also grown throughout this period. As the number of events increase, there is a growing realization about the continuing need to develop event management professionals who are able to create, organise and manage events. Although many events are successfully crewed by volunteers, increasing competition to secure major events is giving greater impetus for the need to create more fully professionalised events (Getz, 1997). Volunteers continue to play a significant role in the management and organisation of events; nevertheless, the industry is increasingly relying on well educated, experienced and professional event managers. Consequently, professional associations that focus on the advancement of the diverse facets of event management may have an increasingly significant role to play. Following Getz’s (1997:25) proposition that events must be managed as one would a successful business, many event management associations worldwide are implementing strategic planning processes to determine long term goals and objectives.

The literature that has been published on professional associations is scant, scattered among a variety of disciplines and consequently has little breadth (Rodenhauser, 1999:417). Promoting the industry, organising training, offering specialist advice and information, researching and publishing, and providing networking opportunities for members are primary activities of many associations (Crosetto & Salah, 1997; Kloss, 1999). Kloss (1999:71) for example, notes that:

the professional association exists to advance the standing of the members of the occupation or profession by setting educational and other standards governing the profession, advocating for public and private policies, aiding members in their professional development, and advancing professional practice through research and information dissemination

Specific issues that have been investigated in relation to professional associations have dealt with long term strategic planning (Ayel, 1986; Kloss, 1999), association lifecycles and administrative dynamics (Rodenhauser, 1999), the role of politicization and advocacy (Imber & Horowitz, 1999), the need for profiling and promotion (Crosetto & Salah, 1997; Montgomery & Rutherford, 1994), and relationship marketing and membership behaviour (Frank, 1999; Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). These have been in relation to professional associations in a number of diverse industries such as real estate (Ayel, 1986), psychotherapy (Rodenhauser, 1999), sociology (Imber & Horowitz, 1999), environmental health (Frank, 1999) and life underwriters (Gruen, Summers & Acito, 2000). As yet, there has been very little academic research that focuses on the role and responsibilities of event management associations. While there are a number of studies which review the goals and objectives of organisations in other industries, there are no studies
previously conducted that specifically investigate the goals and objectives of event management associations.

METHODOLOGY

For the purposes of this study an event management association was defined as one that responds to one or more of the sectors of the event industry such as festivals, tradeshows, exhibitions, incentives and meetings. Figure 1 provides a breakdown of the categories of event management associations, however, it is acknowledged that these associations will overlap in some of the categories and were analysed according to the title of the association. This study identified 147 professional associations worldwide involved with event management. While this list may not be exhaustive, it provides a very strong sample of event management associations. The associations were identified by conducting searches via the Internet, in the academic literature, and from trade journals and personal contacts. Specific associations were contacted by letter or email to inform them of the study and to seek their involvement.

Figure 1  Breakdown of Event Management Association by Category

Content analysis was used in this study because it is a multi-purpose method that is useful for investigating a wide range of issues in which the content of communication serves as a basis of inference (Weber, 1985). It is an appropriate methodology to achieve authenticity and validity in the type of qualitative data this study gathered. It did not use nor adapt an existing framework for analysis of the content of the goals and objectives. That is, the categories of meaning emerged by identifying recurring themes in the data rather than being imposed by an existing typology from the literature or a preconceived framework developed specifically for the research.

Eighty percent of the associations (117) responded to requests for information. Of these associations, 49% (72) had goals and objectives already posted on their websites and a further 5% (7) sent publications outlining their goals and objectives. Although approximately 20% (30) of associations were not able to be contacted for various reasons, the goals and objectives procured provided a very strong representative sample.

The associations were classified according to location (see figure 2). The categories included international, regional and special interest associations but there were numerous sub-categories. Many of the international associations for example, have chapters worldwide, however only the mother association was included to minimise repetition. Regional associations
were divided according to continents which resulted in the following six sub-categories: North American, European, United Kingdom, Asian Pacific, South American and African. Special interest associations were included as there was a number in the sample that could not be easily accommodated within the first two categories, yet they were deemed significant to the study because they dealt with event management issues within the context of a specific industry.

Figure 2  Regional Distribution of Event Management Associations by category

The data do not allow for a productive conclusion about differences that may exist between associations that draw from organisational members in contrast to those that draw from individual membership.

Methodological Limitations

A worldwide study presents some specific challenges and reference needs to be made to at least two caveats. Firstly, there is no worldwide registry of event management associations; consequently, the exact number of associations involved with the event management industry worldwide is unknown. Nevertheless, after conducting an extensive search, the 147 that were included in the study is more than likely a very strong sample population. Secondly, in addition to verifying the number of event management associations operating worldwide, there is an issue of language and cultural orientation. Associations around the world are in existence due to the need within their regions for support in the event management industry, so their primary language may be one other than English. While the working language of all associations is clearly not English, the internationalisation of English in recent years, together with the fact that many associations draw membership from more than one country, has served to minimise this problem. Nevertheless, 32% of the associations are based in North America and this provides for some cultural bias that cannot be avoided in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the data found that there were ten variables of goals and objectives that event management associations displayed. These variables and their factors are depicted in Graph 3 and include: Information Exchange, Identity and Recognition, Education and Training, Ethics and Standards, Networks and Collegiality, Business Management, Premier Representativeness, Membership, Product Development and Change Agency.
Information Exchange

The exchange of information has become a key factor within associations as a means for members to understand and discuss what other members are dealing with in their work. This variable is comprised of the following factors: meetings to discuss ideas, communication, knowledge source, up to date information, exchange of ideas and research. The findings indicated that information exchange was the most commonly occurring variable for those associations with stated goals and objectives with 51% (40) of the associations including this variable within their goals and objectives. This was reflected in the International Exhibition Logistics Association (2001) which state:

The objectives of IELA are: To establish a general database which eventually will provide the membership with a schedule of international exhibitions categorized by both country and industry, the temporary and permanent import regulations, temporary and permanent customs regulations by country, as well as
floor plans of the major exhibition venues around the world. To establish an
environment which fosters general discussion and the exchange of experiences.
To provide information on the industry for those who may have just entered it or
may be considering entering it. To facilitate the transfer of both voice and data
communications by keeping abreast with the latest advances in the
telecommunication industry.

By providing members with a forum for the exchange of information and ideas the
associations provide a valuable service. Timely information and research is integral for the
development of event management organisations and the industry as a whole. By providing up to
date and information and market research on issues of concern to their members, associations
ensure that members are receiving value for their membership dues. The Spanish Federation of
Professional Congress Organizers (SFPCO, 2001) noted this by stating that their goal was to:

Expose to all members the results of research work and know-how which might
improve the organization of congresses and meetings, as well as the experience
and resolutions reached.

Additionally, the increased sharing of experiences, ideas, knowledge and research assists
in providing a more professional industry. The American Society of Association Executives
(2001) reflected this further in their goals which stated:

Knowledge Source – ASAE will be a worldwide leader and preferred partner in
creating, expanding, refining, and transferring the body of knowledge of
association management… GOAL 4

Considerable variation exists however, when analysed further into international, special
interest and regional categories. Special interest associations considered this variable to be very
important and it ranked as the most frequently occurring one. The North American, European,
South American and African categories also rated this variable as important as it occurred as the
second most common variable among the stated goals and objectives. In contrast, the Asian
Pacific associations rated the information exchange as the least important variable. As a
relatively new entrant to the industry the associations in this region may be protective of the
information and research that it has at its disposal due to the fear of letting others gain
competitive advantage over them.

Education and Training

This category was represented by 48% (38) of the event management associations who
had stated goals and objectives and considered this an important issue to target. This related to
the professional development and competency of associations members that was achieved
through educational and training programs that associations offer. The Canadian Association of
Exposition Management (2001) acknowledged this within their objectives stating:

To achieve this mission, CAEM has established four objectives:-…provide
opportunities for the professional development and education of members.

The Canadian Association of Exposition Management that was established in the mid
1970s and has a current membership of over 330, is responsive to those serving Canada’s trade
and consumer show industry. The association is providing a valuable service by developing
objectives that assist members in enhancing career opportunities and professional competencies.
This has been acknowledged through its large membership base. The Chicago Society of Association Executives (Association Forum, 2001) further noted that education and training was an important focus of their goals and objectives by stating that the:

Association Forum shall serve the nation’s second largest association and non-profit business community and its suppliers by capitalizing on high customer intimacy and accessibility to: - deliver superior professional education for all levels of expertise and special interests, - enhance the careers of its members and identify qualified talent for association employers…

The emphasis on education and training improves members’ professionalism and the ways in which they do business. This in turn contributes to an increased level of satisfaction, further promoting their skills to others and thus enhancing a more professional view of the industry.

When analysed further into special interest, international and regional associations, there were marked differences in the importance of education as a variable within the stated goals and objectives of event management associations. The North American, Special Interest and European associations all had education as a key variable within their goals and objectives with it rating as first, second and third respectively. However, the International, Asian Pacific, South American, African and United Kingdom categories only rated this variable in fifth or sixth position. This may be attributable to cultural differences about ethical business practices or the lack of recognised training or educational staff within these regions.

Identity and recognition

Identity and recognition was found to be as equally significant as education and training. This variable was comprised of the following factors: image, reputation, visibility, international status and promotion. The identity and recognition of the associations was directly linked with the potential to provide members with new business opportunities. This was reflected in the Canadian Society of Association Executives (2001) goals and objectives which stated the need to:

Increase the effectiveness, image and impact of associations to better serve their members and society.

By developing the positive images of not only the association, but also the destinations in which they operate, increases the opportunity to bid for larger international conferences and exhibitions being held in their area. This consequently leads to economic benefits accruing to the area. The Hong Kong Exhibition and Convention Organisers’ and Suppliers’ Association (2001) has actively sought these benefits and this was reflected in their goals and objectives which stated:

To establish Hong Kong as the major international exhibition and convention capital in Asia and to promote and to develop facilities available in Hong Kong required to effect this aim.

Increased competitiveness within the global exhibition and convention industry leads to the production of new infrastructure for cities that can be utilized by tourism, governments and other industries. Promotional opportunities also assist these destinations with tourism potential that can support the local economy. The Pacific Asia Travel Association (2001) included these objectives within their goals which stated:
...augmenting and assisting local promotional and developmental efforts of the members and encouraging sources of capital for tourist accommodation and recreational projects, - carrying out advertising, promotional and publicity measures calculated to focus the attention of the travel industry and travelling public upon Pacific Asia as one of the world’s outstanding destination areas...

The identity and recognition category when analysed further indicated that the international, special interest and regional associations considered this an important variable with most including it within the top four. However, the only discrepancy was on the part of the associations in the United Kingdom that considered it of lowest importance. This may be due to long established identity and promotional efforts on the part of associations within this region.

Ethical standards

Ethical standards was the fourth most commonly occurring variable as 44% (35) of the associations stated ethical standards in their goals and objectives. This variable included factors of excellence, transparency, quality, world peace, breakdown of barriers and care for environment, as well as ethics and high standards. These factors are based on the potential contributions the associations can make to the economic, political, environmental, cultural and social environments. By developing strong standards based on ethical business practices the associations will develop professionalism within the event management industry. This was reflected by the Insurance Conference Planners Association (2001) which states:

The objectives of the Association are as follows:- Promote a high standard of ethical and professional conduct...

Many associations have created Codes of Conducts or Professional Standards to achieve this goal. This ensures that members acknowledge when they join the association to adhere to a code of behaviour that guides their conduct within the industry and with the general public in a just and ethically sound manner.

By including the cultural environment to be considered within the ethical standards category it ensures that destinations retain their uniqueness which encourages tourist and conference organisers to visit. The International Sport and Cultural Association (2001) was created with the goals of:

Promoting an understanding between people across borders through sports and cultural activities – underlining the view of sport as a bearer of local, regional or national cultural identity, thereby placing it at the centre of international exchange of ideas, opinions and cultural expressions...

The Conseil International des Organisations de Festivals de Folklore et d’Arts Traditionnels (2001) furthered this goal by stating that:

CIOFF has the following objectives:- promote the intangible heritage through such forms of expressions as dance, music, games, rituals, customs and other arts, - serve the objectives of UNESCO, - support the activities of its members and those of non-governmental organizations and all other institutions working in the field of cultural heritage, - serve the cause of peace, through the above objectives.
The inclusion of peace and cultural heritage demonstrates that certain associations strive to be good corporate citizens. The Union of International Associations (2001) within their goals also states that they aim “to contribute to a universal order based on principles of human dignity, solidarity of peoples and freedom of communication”.

When analysed further into international, special interest and regional associations there was varying ratings for this variable. International, South American and African categories all rated this variable as the most common variable in their stated goals and objectives with the Asian Pacific rating it as the third most common variable. The special interest and European associations considered ethical standards as the sixth most important variable. The North American and United Kingdom associations also considered this variable as less important rating it seventh and eighth respectively. This may be attributable to these associations already having in place strategies and standards that deal with these issues. Additionally, associations in the International category may have considered this most important as they oversee the whole industry.

**Networks and Collegiality**

Fourty-four percent (34) of the associations with stated goals and objectives considered networks and collegiality within their aims. This was consistent among all regions, internationally and special interest associations as well with the variable rating in the top five for all. This variable includes working relationships, creating networks and friendship. The event management industry is a very relationship oriented industry with networks, business acquaintances and professional friends being important in solving issues and establishing contacts. The International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus (2001) within their goals stated that:

IACVB will develop and strengthen strategic alliances and business partnerships both within and outside of the industry to solidify its global position and influence.

This is further reinforced in the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners’ (2001) objectives which state:

Through programs and special workshop sessions, conducted at the meetings, the organization strives:- To develop a network in the hospitality industry for the African American meeting planner and supplier. The network is set up to facilitate job referrals, exchange list of consultants and vendors, and share other resources…

These networks are influential in referring meetings, conventions and exhibitions, job positions and knowledge. They can also support others within the network by solving business problems, seeking business opportunities and responding to management issues.

**Business Management**

The business management category was significant to 29% (23) of the event management associations with stated goals and objectives. This variable included factors such as business consultations, developing sound professional practices, profitability and growth. The effective
business management and practices of association members leads to a more professional industry. This is reflected by the Meetings Industry Association’s (2001:3) aim that stated:

> It seeks to strengthen the position of members’ businesses in an increasingly competitive environment and to raise the profile of the Country as an international conference destination.

Without successful event management businesses, the associations would find difficulty in securing membership, consequently, associations are interested in members’ business skills and in promoting a reputable and successful industry. This is supported by the Alliance Meeting Management Consultants’ (2001) goals stating that they aim “to serve the business management needs of meeting management consultants…”

When analysed further the results indicated that there was significant variation among the categories of event management associations. The United Kingdom rated the business management variable as the second most commonly occurring variable for stated goals and objectives in that region. However, the Special Interest, International, Asian Pacific, North American and European categories rated this variable considerably lower at fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth respectively. The South American and African regional associations did not state this variable explicitly within their goals and objectives.

**Membership**

Twenty-eight percent (22) of the associations with goals and objectives considered membership to be an important component. This included factors such as safeguarding, promoting and supporting members, increasing benefits to members and inclusive membership. Strong membership is pivotal to the survival and success of associations. Additionally, the membership dues are the revenue that support a majority of the activities with which the association is involved. The American Society of Association Executives (2001) acknowledged this within their goals by stating:

> Inclusive Membership – ASAE will be an inclusive and accessible organization involving members, their organizations, and related communities.

The Professional Conference Management Association (2001) further refined this by stating that the “PCMA will establish criteria to attract and retain a diverse membership…”. Increased membership also strengthens the position of the association. One way for associations to encourage increased membership is through developing benefits and services for their members. The British Association of Conference Destinations (2000:1) acknowledge this and state that:

> The aims of the Association are too:- constantly develop and enhance the benefits it provides to BACD members, who offer venues and services to prospective clients…

Although a significant finding overall, the United Kingdom and Asian Pacific associations rated this as the fourth most commonly occurring variable. In comparison, the International, European and North American categories rated this variable as seventh, seventh and ninth respectively. Meanwhile, the Special Interest, South American and African categories did not mention this category within their stated goals and objectives. The significance of this variable in the Asian Pacific region may be due to the relatively new industry that operates in this
Therefore, they are focused on increasing the participation of members and uniting them through membership. The continual focus on increasing membership numbers throughout the other regions may be an implicit strategic direction and consequently this variable is seen as less important. An extension of this variable is the striving to be the premier representative association, therefore increasing membership numbers and recognition.

Premier Representative Association

To become the premier representative association was important to 27% (21) of the associations with stated goals and objectives. This variable was comprised of leadership, coordination, advocacy, advice and to be one voice. By establishing and promoting an association as the leading organization in event management it sets a benchmark for others to try to achieve. Additionally, it creates a status within the industry that ensures that participants by being members will enjoy the status of being recognised in conjunction with the association. This is reflected in the National Tour Association (2001) which stated that the “…NTA will be viewed as the preferred association for packaged travel professionals.” The Alliance Meeting Management Consultants (2001) further reinforced this belief stating they aim “to become the premier organization for meeting management consultants…”

The role that associations can play in advising and advocating on behalf of their members for the benefit of the industry has been an issue that was supported in the stated goals and objectives of the event management associations. By lobbying on behalf of members and the industry to legislative and government organizations ensures that the events industry is well represented and the results will be indicative of this. The Hong Kong Exhibition and Convention Organisers’ and Suppliers’ Association consider this in their goals and objectives which state:

… To act as an advisory body to its members … To promote, support or to oppose any legislation for other measures affecting the interests of the industry. … To represent members and appear before any legislative, government, municipal, public or official body, committee or before any court for any tribunal on any matter concerning the convention and exhibition industry as considered appropriate by the Executive committee…

The associations are a valuable tool for members to collectively pressure government to deal with matters that affect the industry. The services and products that they offer their members is a result of this and feature as the ninth most commonly represented variable of event management associations stated goals and objectives.

Product Development

Twenty-five percent (20) of the event management associations with stated goals and objectives considered product development as important to the strategic direction of the association. This included the delivery of leading edge products, efficiently and effectively and customer service. The delivery of products that exceed members expectations ensures that an organization fulfills its obligations and offers value for money to its members. The International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus (2001) acknowledged this in their goals and objectives by stating that the “IACVB will deliver products and services that meet or exceed current and future stakeholders’ expectations…”. The Professional Conference Management Association (2001) further reinforced this by stating:
PCMA will exceed the expectations of its customers through quality products and services… PCMA will have a diversified funding base to enable an exceptional range of products and services for all constituencies…

By diversifying the products and services offered to members it guarantees that an association is differentiated from other associations that service the industry. Another key factor of this variable was the delivery of these products and services in an efficient and effective manner. XM Europe (2001) state this within their goals by “offering services and information which will help the exhibition organizer to be more efficient and cost-effective…” The Association of Corporate Travel Executives (2001) again commented on this within their goals:

Deliver leading edge products that enhance member value and encourage participation of senior level business…Maximize global organizational efficiency and effectiveness in developing and delivering our core products…

Product development contributes significant benefits to members by increasing services and products offered to them to improve their businesses. Additionally, this is a marketing tool that can be utilized by the associations to differentiate their services from every other association and therefore place them in a position to potentially gain more members.

Change Agency

A further variable identified in the stated goals and objectives of the event management associations was to act as a change agent. This variable included factors such as challenging preconceptions of the industry and business diversification. Considerably fewer associations identified this goal, as only 4% (3) of associations mentioned it, but its significance was perhaps best summed up by the goals of the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives (2001) who stated:

We are committed to continuing this process by pursuing the following objectives and strategies: Act as a change agent within the association profession…GWSAE will promote diversity, encourage risk-taking, challenge conventions, explore new opportunities and strongly advocate for new ideas, visions and possibilities, stimulate discussion and debate…GWSAE will help association professionals and business partners ask the right questions and expose them to new ideas and new ways of thinking that will challenge preconceptions and stimulate growth.

CONCLUSION

As the event management industry consolidates worldwide, event management associations play an increasingly significant role in professional support to the industry and its managers by assisting their continued growth and success. This paper reviewed the literature on professional associations and explored the strategic direction of event management associations by analyzing their stated goals and objectives.

The identified variables all contribute to the strategic direction that the associations are committed to following, however, as evidenced from the ten key variables that were discussed, there was significant variation between the most commonly occurring goals and objectives and the least common. The data points to a higher level of organizational sophistication and a broader range of services offered among those organisations that are larger and have been established for
a longer period. The event management associations with a focus in North America, Europe and International regions depict this trend most clearly.

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