



MODULE 5

Part 2: Event operations and logistics



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**Disclaimer:**

These notes are adapted from the University of Cape Town and GetSmarter's course notes for Module 2 of the Events Management elective offered as part of the blended version of the UCT Postgraduate Diploma in Management and Marketing.

Learning Outcomes:

LO3: Use elements of site planning and management.

LO4: Practice management techniques to work with suppliers, service providers, participants and attendees.

1. Introduction

This set of notes covers assessing the suitability of, and considerations around, event sites and venues. It also deals with how to manage suppliers, contractors, and infrastructure. Keep in mind the aspects of event operations, logistics management, and operational plans which function as a springboard to the responsibilities of an event manager discussed in these notes.

2. Site selection, suitability, and planning

2.1 Selecting the date and time of the event

Before deciding on the date of the event, event managers will be required to conduct thorough research, as there are several key factors that they need to take into consideration before setting a date and time.

2.1.1 Weather considerations

Firstly, the date of the event needs to be considered in relation to the weather at that time of the year. For example, during the winter months, Cape Town experiences heavy rains and winds and these two factors can be crippling to an event, especially an outdoor one. From an operational perspective, bad weather means longer build times, which means increased costs and time pressure. Logistically, bad weather makes building more difficult and dangerous too. It is essential to always have an indoor back-up venue if an outdoor event is being planned, as the weather across South Africa can be unpredictable at any time of the year.

Outdoor events always come with a chance of rain. No matter what the size of your event or the time of year for your event a wet weather contingency plan is always essential. Have the wet weather conversation early in your planning phase of the event. Budgeting for it is as well is crucial. Remember, leaving things to chance is never a good idea.



If the weather does turn bad at your event or just before it, you have a few options: continue, postpone, relocate, or cancel. Making sure you have discussed these options during the planning stage of the event ensures less confusion and more informed decisions on the day.

Rescheduling is often not an option, especially for larger public events as the date was set far in advance and due to the number of role players and all the logistics involved with attendees potentially travelling to the event it is not viable. The cancellation of the Cape Town Cycle Tour in 2017 is a case in point where severe winds meant the race had to be cancelled and there was no option to reschedule.

Work out in advance the costs and losses associated with cancelling, relocating, or postponing your event against going ahead with potentially smaller attendance. This can influence borderline cancellation decisions. If your event cannot be rescheduled and the losses will be significant if you cancel, look into whether taking out contingency insurance for your event is an option for you.

When will you make the call to cancel or postpone? Consider that timeframes can be impacted by contracts with suppliers and stall holders. Notifying all the parties involved with the event as well as the attendees is a mammoth task and must be handled timeously and professionally.

Include a wet weather policy in your stall holder agreements. For example, “Unless threatened by extreme weather our event will go ahead.” List any cancellation fees (if appropriate) or refund details. Advise the time that final decision will be made and who to contact if clarification is needed. It is important that you have the contact details of all your suppliers and stall holders so that you can send out a group notification. Planning for weather prior to the event is the wise. So, using marquees and other temporary infrastructure regardless of the weather is always a safe option as they provide both shelter and shade.

Once you have your plan in place all you can do from there is monitor weather forecasts as far in advance as possible. Websites offer forecasts up to ten days ahead but it’s probably best to monitor a few different sites to check for any corroboration between them. The closer you get to your event, the more accurate the forecast will be. There are even some sites where you can get the minute-by-minute forecast for your exact location when thunderstorms and lightning are a threat.

A word about the weather:

Unforeseen changes in the weather can wreak havoc on an otherwise well-planned event, and it is essential that a weather plan is incorporated into the operations plan in order to minimise any negative effects of ill weather.

Another point to remember is that, in certain cities, people tend to venture out to events less in winter than in summer. This needs to be considered during the planning stages. The event may need a unique offering to entice people out in cold, rainy weather.



2.1.2 Infrastructure

Temporary infrastructure is only weather rated to a certain point before it is deemed unsafe for use, especially marquee structures. A structural engineer will have to sign off structures and set the wind speed rating for that particular structure. The structural engineer, along with the event manager, will then have to decide whether or not to pull down a structure and cancel an event due to bad weather conditions. It is always better to make this call ahead of time if possible, rather than evacuate people from a structure. However, the popularity of temporary structures has grown because of their advantages.

Smart tip:

When you have a date in mind, research the weather patterns over the past few years for that particular date to establish an idea of what weather you may have to plan for. Always have a back-up venue.

2.1.3 Local and regional event calendar

Another factor to consider when setting a date is the existing events calendar for the area. There may be other big events planned that will clash with the proposed event. This scenario will not always impact on the planned event, because the other event may cater for a different demographic. However, two of the same type of event to be held on the same weekend in the same area would not be advisable. For instance, two cycling races in Cape Town on the same weekend would compete with one another in a potentially regrettable way.

2.1.4 Timing

The time of the month can also play a part in guest attendance. Towards the end of the month, people tend to spend less money on non-essentials such as events. On the other hand, the beginning of a month follows payday, a time when people generally feel more inclined to spend money on leisure items and activities.

The time of day when the event will be held is also important. Preferably, the event should not start too early or too late. However, the type of event will often dictate the time that it begins and ends. For example, certain sporting events have to start very early. The event manager should place themselves in the guests' and participants' shoes in order to plan in the most logical way.

2.1.5 Media considerations

Finally, the availability of broadcasting time on various media can influence both sponsorship interest and viewership support. International events need to consider international time variations and select optimum time slots to maximise exposure.

As a final note, it is important for event managers to recognise that lack of thorough research regarding a date can lead to low attendance and financial loss. This may even affect the

reputation of the event, which could lead to even lower attendance numbers for the next event of its kind.



Figure 1: Conditions at the AST marquee for the Two Oceans Marathon two days before the event. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)



Figure 2: The same marquee on the day of the event. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)



Figure 3: A logistical nightmare at the 2004 Two Oceans Marathon at the UCT sports ground. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

2.2 The venue

Appraisal of the proposed venue or site needs to be carried out so that there is a clear understanding and interpretation of the venue. The venue is assessed according to its characteristics to determine the venue qualities that may benefit the event and those that may be detrimental to its success.



The following information should be gathered:

- The size of the venue in relation to the proposed event.
- The layout and topography (surface features and elevation) of the land.
- The entrance and exit points.
- The availability of parking.
- Arrangements for special needs guests.
- The availability of infrastructure and transport, as well as any existing services such as toilets, cleaners and waste areas.

Any venue or site should have sufficient land and flexibility to accommodate the event and all the services related to it.

2.2.1 Zoning and land suitability

Another factor to consider is whether the venue is zoned for events or not. The event manager may need to get special event permits to use the venue, and these should be applied for as far in advance as possible, because they may take some time to be issued and approved. It is also important to consider suitable slopes and the overall orientation of the site to take advantage of views, protect from prevailing winds, and avoid poor weather conditions. Some areas of a site may be more protected than others or may offer more level surfaces for the building of structures.

2.2.2 Infrastructure

Site selection needs to consider affordable, adequate and efficient access to bulk infrastructure including sewerage, water, electricity, telecommunications and roads with ease of access to airports and potential accommodation facilities. It is not essential that all venues have these services. A venue with no services at all can also be used, it would simply mean that all services would need to be brought in, which can be very costly.

The above-mentioned types of considerations apply mostly to medium- and large-scale public events. However, understanding and interpreting any event venue, regardless of the size or scope of the event it is housing, is important. A wedding venue, for example, also needs to be carefully considered from all of the above angles, but also from the point of view of the guests. This should include travelling time, for example, if it is an out-of-town wedding.

The surface is important for a wedding as most of the female guests and the bride will be wearing high heels. In the case of a 21st birthday, the issue of noise will be a consideration for the venue. These types of events tend to run late into the night and many venues close at a certain time due to noise restrictions. House parties can also be a problem for neighbours and these issues need to be dealt with prior to the time in a diplomatic way.



2.2.3 Cost implications

A crucial factor in venue selection and operations management is cost implications. Often, large-scale events require a long build-up time and this can be expensive as the venue charges for days used. This may also have an impact on a smaller event such as a wedding or a gala dinner where the infrastructure and décor need to be brought in the day before. This needs to be factored into the overall budget.

There may be other financial implications to a venue, such as the acquisition of special permits and licences. Temporary venues all require temporary liquor licences if alcohol is going to be served on the property. Public spaces require you to get a permit to hold an event. For example, it is not easy to get permission to hold an event on a beach, as there is considerable risk involved. Special permission is granted in exceptional cases, and it is best to enlist an experienced event company to handle this. Protected areas such as nature reserves and mountain areas are also difficult to gain access to for an event. Careful consideration and sustainable planning methods are implemented when working in these types of venues.

2.2.4 Accessibility

Access to the venue or site is also of vital importance. Often build-up and breakdown times are restrictive and easy load in and load out is necessary. Most events require some kind of load in, whether of furniture or perhaps only décor. Larger events require heavy, large infrastructure such as staging and marquees. Existing venues need to be assessed on their access points; do they have restrictions on load size or times? For example, can large trucks enter and turn in the venue? Are the access points wide enough to accommodate oversized vehicles? Is the ground hard and level enough to allow for heavy vehicle access?

Truck access for larger events is very important. A site visit is always necessary and the ground needs to be assessed. For example, in winter, fields may become waterlogged and muddy, meaning large vehicles are not able to access them, as they would get stuck. This is highly problematic from a load-in perspective and needs to be planned for. Access on the event days must also be carefully thought out. A well-planned accreditation plan needs to be developed and communicated to the people handling access control, which is usually a security company.

An event with invited guests only is much easier to manage from an access point of view than a public event. At an event where tickets are sold, there are more operational issues around access. Security needs to be fully briefed on procedures of access. The best way to inform security and guests is by having detailed and clearly-defined accreditation boards; these show the different types of passes and the access they allow. The accreditation plan is often designed within the layout plan.

2.2.5 Venue temperature

When hosting an event, whether an outdoor or indoor event, the temperature of the venue needs to be considered, as it affects the guest experience. No one is going to enjoy an event if they are either freezing cold or boiling hot. If the event is taking place in an existing indoor venue, make sure there is air-conditioning that can cool and heat. If the event is taking place



in marquees or temporary structures, air-conditioning units may have to be brought in. However, keep in mind that they require a large power supply.

If the event is on a tight budget, think of cost effective ways of offering temperature control, such as branded event blankets in winter and fans or mist sprays in summer. In summer, outdoor events should always offer enough shady areas, especially if the events are scheduled to be all-day affairs. Heatstroke is a common medical issue at events.

2.2.6 Queue management

Another major organisational element with regard to access is queue management. Management of entry points is crucial to the success of an event. Managing the entry points not only helps with the collection of revenue through ticket sales, but also improves public safety. Guests are checked for illegal firearms, drugs, and alcohol at entry points, minimising the risk to other guests. Queue management is also important from the point of view of managing the guest experience. The entry points of an event are the guests' first experience of the event and can leave a lasting impression.

Below are key factors to consider when managing queues:

- There must be sufficient points of entry to avoid long queues.
- Guests should be informed of any delays or waiting time estimates during their time in the queue.
- There should be entertainment if the queues require a waiting period.
- Physically handicapped guests need to be accommodated.

From a public relations perspective, it is always important to have a representative from the event management company at the entry points to manage any potential problems.

2.2.7 Facilities

Apart from assessing the physical venue layout and space, it is also important to consider how accommodating it will be to certain facilities, and how these facilities will be set up (Bromley et al., 2010:296). Event managers need to ensure that a site map, which includes all the facilities, is drawn up, paying special attention to indicating the following:

- Toilets
- Information centres
- Entrances and exits
- Media centres, TV broadcast areas and commentator areas
- Parking



- Loading or delivery areas
- Performing areas and seating
- Assembly areas
- Dining areas
- Public catering
- Equipment storage
- Refuse areas
- Medical areas
- Security points

Information centres

Information centres can take various forms. If you are at a venue, the venue should either have an information centre or a room or cubicle available to create one. They are important as they are where guests can come if they are lost or need information about the event. They should be manned by experienced staff and be located near the entrances of the event. They should also be well marked and easily accessible. At an outdoor event, the information centre may be a marquee. It should always be covered in the likelihood of bad weather. It should have all relevant information about the event as well as site maps if the event requires them. Information centres can also double up as a place for lost property or children; it often acts as a central meeting point.

Entrance and exit points

The amount and location of exit and entrance points is crucial. They need to be shown on the event layout. They are not only important for the way guests are brought into and leave the event venue, but they are vital in the case of an emergency evacuation. Existing venues will have existing exit and entry points and they should be in accordance with safety regulations. If you are building or creating your own venue then you are responsible for making sure that there are the correct amount of entry and exit points. These points should be accessible at all times and not blocked by temporary structures or parking. They should be clearly signposted. They should also not lead into dangerous areas, such as a majorly busy road.

The following needs to be considered with regard to layouts of entrances and visitor perception:

- Signage is vital at the entrances to avoid confusion.
- Long queues need to be avoided at all costs.
- Toilets should be close to the entrance.



- The most experienced staff should be at the entrance.
- Entrance points generally need power, phone lines, cover, or furniture.
- Entrances need to have a high level of security, especially if money is being handled or if cash carry companies need to take money off site on a regular basis.
- Guests need to be checked for guns, fire arms, drugs and alcohol.
- Guests to be handed any information they might need, for example, site maps or agendas.
- VIP entrances should be separate to general public entrances.

Media centres or broadcast areas

Not all events require media centres or broadcast areas. They generally apply to large-scale events where there will be considerable media attending and broadcasting. For example, big sporting events such as golf tournaments tend to attract a large amount of media, and there are dedicated equipped media centres set up for these types of tournaments. These media centres need desks, chairs, TVs, telephones, wireless connection, and tea and coffee areas. There may also need to be broadcast areas. These can be very large on events such as the FIFA World Cup, where there may be media or broadcast villages. These broadcast areas house large broadcast vans and sometimes portacabins are brought in for the media to work from.

Parking

There should be a parking plan for the event. This would fit into the greater transport plan for the event. Parking can be difficult, especially on large events held in temporary venues. Existing venues tend to already have the necessary parking and it is generally accessible to the event venue. However, this information should always be checked before booking.

On custom designed sites, parking can be a problem. The venue may be perfect, but it may not be able to accommodate the amount of cars that will need parking space. There may be a way of overcoming this, such as making use of park and ride facility or shuttles buses. The parking facilities need to be well lit and secured. They should be easy to find and well signposted. Special needs parking must be available as close to the venue as possible and supplier and event staff and sponsors parking should also be accommodated. Supplier parking should be kept to a minimum with only emergency vehicles parking on the actual event site.

Load-in areas

Suppliers will need to load in before the event and sometimes during the event; therefore, dedicated load-in areas, which are accessible throughout the event and do not interfere with the smooth running of the event, need to be made available at all times. Sometimes large load-in areas are needed, especially if large items such as AV equipment and infrastructure need to be loaded in. Event managers should always check on the details of their load-in areas and any special procedures that need to be adhered to.



Performing areas and seating

Performing areas take various forms; they could be large stages, or marquees, or even roving entertainers. The type of performers at an event will vary according to the type and size of event being planned. Some performances will require seating, for example, if there is to be a show. Some performances will be roving and seating is therefore not always necessary. Artists will generally need an area to prepare in such as a back-of-house dressing room and toilets. At larger events, there could be whole marquees dedicated to entertainers.

Seating at an event varies. Some seating arrangements are formal such as with meetings and conferences, while others are informal such as with festivals and live events. There are various seating arrangements and styles to choose from, and the chosen seating arrangement must be appropriate to the event.

Dining areas and public catering

Dining areas also differ from event to event. A wedding, for example, may have a formalised dining area, whether it be in a ballroom at a hotel or in a reception marquee on the lawns of a wine estate. On public events, there may be dining areas, either inside existing structures or in temporary structures. These dining areas should have enough seating for people to sit and eat and they should be kept clean always. They should be enticing to the guest and be designed in such a way as to make ordering and waiting for food easy and painless. This even refers to a small buffet style wedding. People should not have to wait for long periods of time to get their food or service.

Storage

Storage is often overlooked at an event. Some events may need more storage than others. For example, exhibitions tend to need more storage as exhibitors may need space to keep merchandise. Caterers may also need storage, as may the event brand partners (to house the event branding). The storage area could be a locked room in a venue or it could be a marquee or a Portakabin (portable building). The storage areas should be manned by a security guard and be access controlled.

Refuse areas

At large events there are usually back-of-house areas where waste is taken and sorted during the event. These areas should always be behind the scenes and never seen by the guest. There needs to be unobstructed access to them for waste trucks. This is where the large waste skips are placed. The skips are the dumping point for the refuse wheelie bins at the event.

Medical facilities

The type and scale of medical facilities differs across the range of events. A wedding, for example, may only require a medic or a medical kit whereas a large racing event will need an entire medical tent at the finish village and various medical points throughout the course or track.

Having the right facilities is essential to the planning process and may be a factor in deciding on the venue, as some venues have more existing facilities than others, such as toilets,



storage rooms, loading areas, or seating. Existing facilities can save the event organiser a considerable amount of money.

3. Managing suppliers and contractors

It is very important to select the right suppliers and contractors to work on an event, because they are in large part responsible for bringing the client and event manager's ideas to life.

Bromley et al. (2010:300-302) outline four key considerations that event managers need to take into account when selecting suppliers:

1. **Competence:** Suppliers must be competent to perform their assigned and agreed-upon tasks. This includes having the necessary qualifications and experience, accreditation and safety policies, and insurance. Event managers should also check that suppliers have skills in the relevant field that they will be working in for the event. For example, a caterer who is experienced in catering for large school and youth events may not have the right knowledge to cater for more intimate, professional events. Volunteers must always be well trained to perform the tasks that are expected of them. When using volunteers, always make sure they are trained in the task they are required to do.
2. **Control:** Event managers have to have control over all aspects of the event in order to ensure that the event will be delivered on time within predefined cost constraints. In order to assist the event manager in reaching these goals, suppliers have to know what their responsibilities and delivery time are on an event, and meet their obligations according to the prearranged agreement between the supplier and the event manager. A service delivery agreement can also be drafted to outline all supplier responsibilities, deliverables, and timeframes.
3. **Cooperation:** As events are often subject to rigid timelines and budget constraints, suppliers have to be aware of these constraints at all times and cooperate with the event manager to achieve the agreed upon outcome.
4. **Communication:** Suppliers must be able to communicate effectively with the event management team (and vice versa) in order to ensure that all parties are kept up to date with any changes to the plan. It is a good idea for event managers to hold regular meetings with the suppliers prior to, and during, the event in order to ensure that the event runs as smoothly as possible. It is also advisable to document all important communication in order to have a record of what was agreed upon in case problems or disagreements arise. On larger events, suppliers can use radio communication to interact with the event manager.



4. Conclusion

Without proper planning, the delivery of the event would fail. Event managers are tasked with finding the correct logistics and operations managers for their events, and they must also ensure that a thorough operations plan is established before the event set-up commences to streamline processes and ensure an efficient and smooth build-up, presentation, and breakdown of the event.

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