



## MODULE 1

# Part 3: Events in context



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**Disclaimer:**

These notes are adapted from the University of Cape Town and GetSmarter's course notes for Module 1 of the Events Management elective offered as part of the blended version of the UCT Postgraduate Diploma in Management and Marketing.

**Learning Outcomes:**

**LO3:** Recognise the skills and competencies that are needed to become an event manager.

**LO4:** Describe the relationship between events and the tourism industry.

**LO5:** Review the external factors that influence an event in order to plan around such factors.

## 1. Introduction

It is important for event managers to equip themselves with the necessary skills and knowledge to function optimally in the high-pressured industry. Building your knowledge and skills will enable you to better navigate the contexts you may work in and handle the various challenges that may arise in managing an event.

## 2. The event manager

### 2.1 Role and responsibilities

Depending on the types of services they offer, event managers may call themselves any of the following:

- Project manager
- Event coordinator
- Event planner
- Professional conference organiser (PCO)
- Meeting consultant

The terms “event manager”, “PCO” and “event planner” are common within the events industry.



**Video 1:** Paul Sainsbury from Venturescapes provides some practical advice about starting a career in event management and working on different types of events. (Download link: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/UCT\\_PG\\_Programmes/PG+Dip+2015/EM/EM+Short+Course+re-edits/EM+Short+Course+M1+re-edit+-+Paul+Sainsbury-SD.mp4](https://s3.amazonaws.com/UCT_PG_Programmes/PG+Dip+2015/EM/EM+Short+Course+re-edits/EM+Short+Course+M1+re-edit+-+Paul+Sainsbury-SD.mp4))

The conference industry, specifically, has grown and continues to grow dramatically in South Africa, so much so that the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) launched a construction project in 2014 to extend their flexible convention space by 10,000 square metres by 2017 (Future Cape Town, 2014). The expansion will play a pivotal role in raising the global profile of Cape Town as a premier destination for meetings and events. Upon completion, the city will be able to attract and host an even larger number of international conferences, which is the major driver of economic growth and job creation in the province. Since opening its doors in 2003, the CTICC has attracted over 5 million delegates and visitors to Cape Town and has contributed to the creation of over 60,000 jobs.

The event management industry as mentioned before is diverse and made up of many different sectors and types of events, with new ones being introduced all the time. When starting in the industry, it is important to understand that gaining as much experience as you can on whatever event you can is vital. Experience is what sets event managers apart; it is on the job training you cannot learn at school. No textbook or set of notes can fully prepare you for the decisions and challenges you will have to face on an event site. And while some may find this distressing, others relish the excitement and challenge of the job. An event manager's job or role on an event is not always clear cut. The type of event, client, and venue will always determine the level of involvement and scope of work.

### **What is the difference between an event manager and a PCO?**

The role of a professional conference organiser (PCO) is to plan, coordinate and manage conferences of all natures and sizes. Conferences are specialist types of events and require a unique set of event management skills. A PCO should have strong organisational abilities and be very efficient when it comes to paperwork and scheduling. Furthermore, a PCO tends to work in established venues like convention centres and is therefore not as involved as an event manager in the actual building of events.

Conferences also generally do not require as much creativity from a design and décor perspective as other types of events such as weddings or themed parties. Instead, PCOs are often the people responsible for gathering data from intermediaries and bodies such as destination management companies (DMCs) and convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs).

They will then present this information to the clients. A PCO also works closely with travel agents and is often responsible for booking transport and accommodation for the attending delegates. Their role is therefore focused on planning and coordination.

Simply put, the role of an event manager is exactly what the title denotes; it involves the management of an event. An event manager plans, directs, monitors and controls resources and people in order to achieve a goal. An event manager is typically responsible for finance, information, sales and marketing, research and development, organisational structure and the delegation and supervision of personnel and strategic operations. In this respect, event management is the same as project management in any other venture. The difference is the context. Each event is unique, and the event manager's role is to assemble the event in all its tangible parts (the concrete elements) and create the intangible product (the excitement or ambience) of the event experience.

### **2.1.1 People and relationship management**

While administration, planning, and paperwork are key aspects of an event manager's job, they should never neglect to factor the human dimension of their job into the equation, as events rely heavily on people to produce them. Managing an event is a complex task that involves logic, imagination and experience. The event manager is the key person for an event as they manage the process from start to finish and make sure all deliverables are completed on time and up to standard. They liaise with the client and all the suppliers as well as any other intermediaries or parties involved. It is therefore very important for an event manager to have the necessary interpersonal, people management, and relationship building skills to interact with multiple stakeholders throughout the course of planning and executing the event.

## 2.1.2 Flexibility and time management

### Smart tip:

It is vital that you consider your life and lifestyle as you plan a career in event management. If you are raising young children, for example, be sure that you have a system in place for reliable childcare. Nothing will sink your business faster than if you are forced to miss events because your babysitter didn't show up as planned or cancelled on you.

Few event planners have 9-to-5 jobs. By its very nature, event planning tends to be concentrated on weekends, holidays and sometimes in specific seasons. The amount of time available to plan an event and the working hours involved will depend heavily on the chosen specialisation within the industry. As a general rule, social events involve more weekend and holiday work than corporate events. Some areas of the country and some types of events have peak and off-peak seasons, which depend largely on climate and tourism. However, no matter what specialisation is chosen (with perhaps the exception of parties for young children), event managers can count on working at least some evenings as they coordinate and supervise events. The planning of the events, however, will be done mostly during office hours.



**Video 2:** Melanie Woodward, an event planner from Event Planning Blueprint, gives viewers three tips on how to maintain work-life balance while working in the events industry. (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SE5BX8DQwaQ>)

Some event planners work from home, while others rent office space for their businesses. Some work for large corporate or event companies, others for destination management companies (DMCs). The industry is large and diverse in nature, and people working in the event industry come from wide-ranging backgrounds and enter the industry in different ways. There is not one clear path to becoming an event manager.

**Smart tip:**

Passion and a love for what you do are key character traits required in the event industry. It is an industry that is highly competitive, pressurised and oftentimes challenging. The role of an event manager isn't always the most glamorous either. Event managers work irregular hours and often find themselves in challenging situations. For instance, a golfing event might require the event manager to wake up at 4am in order to be at the golf course before the golfers tee off. Without the requisite drive and passion, tasks like this might become intolerable or burdensome.

## 2.2 Characteristics of an event manager

Although not all event managers are likely to come from the same professional background or industry, in order to be effective in their positions, there are some common key characteristics that make for successful event managers. These characteristics are also useful for managers and personnel in a corporate or small business setting when getting involved in managing business-related events, or taking on the task of overseeing an event management team within an organisation:

- **Organisational ability:** Event managers need to be able to make and keep track of various lists and plans. There is a considerable amount of paperwork to compile and keep track of during an event.
- **Attention to detail:** Planners must think of, and keep track of, an astounding number of details. They need to be able to think about the end result that they want, and then work backwards to see how they can achieve that result step by step. The success of events lies in the detail.
- **Strong character:** Event managers cannot be faint hearted; they are in charge of the entire event and, because events are “live”, in the moment occurrences, there are no second chances.
- **Nerves of steel:** Positivity and an upbeat attitude are essential during the event, despite any problems that may arise. In this industry, a nervous disposition will not stand an event manager in good stead.
- **Decision-making ability:** Event managers will be called upon to make many (sometimes split second) decisions during the course of their career.
- **Good communication skills:** It is important for event managers to convey their ideas and plans to clients, staff and suppliers effectively. They need this ability not only as a sender, but also as a receiver of communication. (Keep in mind that communication can be visual as well as verbal. Recognising a blank look can enable an event manager to clarify directions before some aspect of the event goes wrong.)



- **Interpersonal skills:** Event managers interact with all kinds of people, from the toilet janitor to the MD of a major company. They must be able to communicate with people on all levels.
- **Creativity:** Whether or not the job calls for handling design elements of an event, creative talents are a definite plus. Event managers also need to be creative in their approach to solving potential problems.
- **Flexibility:** There's always something that will not go according to plan and event managers need to be ready for it; they have to be able to think on their feet.
- **Tact:** Sometimes unfortunate news has to be broken to clients. For example, their budgets may not be big enough to accomplish what they want, or they may want décor elements that will either not work well, or be inappropriate. While these problems are less common when dealing with corporate clients, tact is still a necessary ingredient in building successful business relationships.
- **Leadership quality:** To accomplish the goal of creating a successful event, when an event manager speaks, people need to listen and take them seriously. Assertiveness is essential; they should always strive to be pleasant and nice to everyone they work with, while simultaneously maintaining a sense of distance in order to be a good leader.
- **Good time management:** This skill is essential, as event managers will be forced to commit to and adhere to schedules for every event.



**Smart tip:**

Maintaining open lines of communication and listening to your client is essential. Don't push your ideas onto them; you want them to be comfortable with the final decision. Ask them what they want and deliver on your promises (unless of course their demands are highly impractical; it is best to inform them of this tactfully).

## 2.3 Practical advice on starting out in the event industry

People working in the event industry all start out in very different, oftentimes unconventional, ways. There is the “traditional” route, which involves studying event management and then finding a job within the field. Quite a number of people currently in the industry found themselves working in subsidiary sectors of the event industry, for example, catering, hiring, audio visual or technical jobs, and décor, before deciding to embark on a career in event management. In corporate jobs, employees can also often be given the opportunity to manage a team or company-wide event, especially if they are employed in management or marketing positions, or work within a small business where they are expected to possess a diverse skill set and fulfil multiple roles. These subsidiary careers were often the first step that took them along a path leading to event management.

Many people enjoy very successful careers linked to the event industry and are very involved in event planning, but not as event managers. There are companies that specialise in infrastructure management, for example, where people are exposed to the event industry on various levels and are responsible for the design and build of the event, including the décor, but not the actual administrative side of the event (the invitations, marketing, payments, scheduling and so on).

### 2.3.1 Where to work

There are a number of paths open to individuals desiring to pursue a career in the event industry:

- Working for a company as an event manager.
- Starting an event management company.
- Acting as a sole proprietor and consulting on events, or offering services on a freelance basis.

The ideal way to start out would be to get a job in a junior position at an event management company, and gain as much experience and build up as many contacts as possible. From there, two options for the aspiring event manager are to either work their way up in the company (if there is the potential for growth within the company), or seek out more lucrative job offers once they have established the right foundation and core skills, and their skills are highly valued in the market place.

**Smart tip:**

Once you feel you have reached a ceiling working for someone, and you are the entrepreneurial type, then starting your own business within the field can be a lucrative option; it is, however, not without risk.

### 3. Events and tourism

Although relatively young and dynamic, the events sector is starting to grow and mature globally at a rapid rate. No longer an industry reserved exclusively for developed nations in North America and Europe, the event industry now features as a global sector of the international tourism industry, and many developing countries are acknowledging the benefits of events and event tourism for their economies (Tassiopoulos, 2010:4). This has resulted in events being recognised as an essential part of marketing a country, or a destination within a country, to tourists.

**Definition of event tourism:**

“The systematic development, planning, marketing and holding of events as tourist attractions.” (Tassiopoulos, 2010:5)

Event tourism is used to do the following:

- Help create a positive image for a destination in the mind of the traveller.
- Extend the conventional tourist season of a given location.
- Spread tourist demand more evenly through an area to avoid overcrowding at popular tourist destinations during busy tourist seasons.
- Attract both foreign and domestic visitors to a region.

(Tassiopoulos, 2010:5)

Events within South Africa have become a very popular way for a visitor to sample the local culture and food, and they allow the visitor to participate in local entertainment. Local and regional events have the added advantage of encouraging regional tourism. Good examples are the Cape Argus Cycle Tour and the Two Oceans Marathon. These events bring thousands of people to Cape Town from other parts of South Africa. They also attract foreign visitors who may be in the country at the time or who come to the destination with the event already in mind. An international example would be Oktoberfest in Germany, which sees thousands of local and international tourists visiting the country over this period.

Another classic example of an iconic event, which has a very positive impact on the tourism of the region, is the Tour de France. The media coverage of the event and the route have been designed in such a way as to enhance and showcase the beauty of the region, which leads to an increase in participation and visitor numbers.



**Video 3:** This 2015 Tour de France teaser paints a picture of the enormous scope of the cycling event and the diversity of destinations across France that tourists will be able to visit as they follow the race. (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m3MSw6lcdfo>)

South African Tourism (SAT) is working very closely with event management companies to align the event and tourism industries and create mutually-beneficial partnerships. Events can boost tourism numbers and benefit the local economy. Tourism can also help to create markets for events. In other words, the two industries have a mutually-beneficial relationship.

Convention and visitor bureaus (CVBs) and destination management companies (DMCs) are local bodies that can offer support to the event manager when organising an event in a destination by providing the event manager with vital information, such as weather, venues, local culture, suppliers and restrictions. Often event managers will need to compile documents for clients detailing proposed destinations or venues and, in these cases, bodies such as these can be particularly helpful. CVBs and DMCs often organise their own events or require the services of event management companies to stage their events; therefore, these bodies can also be clients.

Business events, specifically in the conference and exhibition sectors, attract a large percentage of foreign visitors. For example, countries that host global events such as the annual World Economic Forum and Conference of Parties (COP) meetings will see an influx of business tourists during the event. Political events also attract foreign visitors, mostly heads of state or other dignitaries. Sporting events and cultural events attract a smaller market. The wedding industry is starting to attract international clients who want to get married either in the bushveld (in the Gauteng area) or in Cape Town. Wedding Concepts



is an example of a niche market wedding planning company that specialises in luxury South African weddings for South African and foreign clients.

Often events are developed with tourism in mind, but even in cases where they have not been planned with tourism objectives, the destination managers promote and package the events as part of the attraction mix of a destination. Websites like [sa-venues.com](http://sa-venues.com) list events according to province. These act as easily-accessible guides to tourists, who are then able to plan their trips around certain events, if they wish to do so.

Events can also assist in putting destinations “on the map”. A case in point is the Pick ‘n Pay Knysna Oyster Festival. It attracts thousands of people to a small town during the off-season and has created a thriving town and economy. The event showcases what Knysna has to offer and has grown over the years to become a “must attend” event in SA.

**Note:**

Popular, well-attended events can have very favourable socio-economic impacts on the host region, particularly when the event is hosted over a period of a few days or weeks. In 2007 for instance, the Knysna Oyster festival generated a direct spend of between R27 million and R33 million (taking into account event and non-event related spend and accommodation) in the region over the festival period. You can read more about the socio-economic impact of the 2007 Knysna Oyster festival in the article that is in this module’s additional reading materials.

Events provide a unique perspective of ordinary life with the opportunity to participate in a collective experience where novelty is assured, because events occur infrequently and at different times. For a tourist visiting a destination, participating in an event can give them a favourable perception of the destination, its people, food and culture.

## 4. External factors influencing the event industry

### 4.1 Economic forces

In developed countries, a large percentage of the population enjoy the benefit of having disposable income to spend on more luxurious leisure activities such as events and tourism. This surplus disposable income can result in favourable gains for developing countries that choose to provide tourism events and products to attract foreign visitors. The international event sector’s large-scale growth and diversification over the past few decades can be attributed to the global economic expansion following the Second World War, peaking in the 1970s and 1980s (Tassiopoulos, 2010:20).

Major events can be used as catalysts for regeneration or other economic imperatives. Examples of this include the Barcelona Olympics in 1992 and most recently the FIFA World Cup in 2010.

In South Africa, a developing nation, many events are priced beyond the reach of a vast majority of the population. Only a small percentage of South Africa’s population have the



disposable income to partake in events. Government and provinces are attempting to create heritage events, which are accessible to the population as a whole, regardless of their economic status. The 2010 FIFA World Cup is a wonderful example of an event that was experienced by, and touched, a country as a whole. Not every citizen could afford to attend a game, but everyone living in the country felt the atmosphere of the event and undoubtedly saw or heard a game, whether it was on a big screen at a fan park or through commentary on a local radio station.

Cutbacks of government subsidies for events have increasingly required event organisations to compete with each other for corporate sponsorship, resulting in a more aggressive, efficient form of event management.

The economic implications of events can be looked at in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. An event itself may not, for example, generate a vast amount of direct income, but the indirect effects on local businesses, services and local infrastructure could be quite significant. These types of analyses have been carried out on a number of festivals, and research conducted on the economic impact of the 2010 Edinburgh Festival found that the festival generated approximately £82 million of new income for Scotland, and £59 million for Edinburgh alone (BOP Consulting, 2011). The indirect effects of incoming spend of this kind may include visitor activities such as purchasing magazines, eating at restaurants, using public transport, or staying in hotels. It is important to remember, however, that events are not a permanent solution to reviving a failing local economy, as they are risky ventures and their long-term success is subject to many uncontrollable variables.

## 4.2 Social forces

Certain communities are more inclined to certain types of activity and this influences the types of events that take place in the area. For example, it would not have been viable for London to host the 2012 Olympics if England did not have a nationwide interest in sport.

Events can help to enhance community pride and image and increase the standard of living. Mass participation events lead to a feeling of inclusion and sense of community. Antisocial behaviour such as drunkenness and rowdiness at events can, however, have the opposite effect, and such incidences quickly find their way into the media, which can tarnish the perception and image of the event.

Large-scale events can also lead to displacement of communities in the process of creating the desired showcase venue. Community alienation often takes place when the community feels poorly treated or their involvement in the event is neglected. This can lead to opposition and discontent.

The 2004 Athens Olympic Games and the Rio 2016 Olympic Games are prime examples of the negative effects of displacement on communities, with the Roma community being displaced and forced to live in unsanitary conditions for an interim period in preparation for the Athens Olympics, and riots breaking out in Rio as residents resist eviction ordered by authorities to clear space to complete construction of the Olympic Park.



**Video 4:** A short film by Luciana Frietas about the challenges that Rio residents dealing with forced eviction in preparation for the 2016 Rio Olympics face. (Source: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/viewfinder/2013/01/2013181253860560.html>)

#### 4.2.1 Discretionary time

Industrialisation and technological advancements, which led to improved productivity, has resulted in an overall increase in the amount of discretionary time people have at their disposal. However, unstable economic conditions and the rapid pace of advancement has also led to longer working hours in many cases, and time is therefore considered a highly-valuable currency (Tassiopoulos, 2010:20). People expect more from their free time, are more discerning about how they spend their free time (including which events they attend). This means there is greater competition in the event marketplace. Events that have a unique selling proposition (USP) and catch the attention of the guests are the ones that will prosper. As in any evolving industry, it is important to keep abreast of trends and adapt your event to the changing needs and wants of the marketplace.

#### 4.2.2 Population and demographic interests

Socio-demographic factors, including aspects such as income and wealth, tastes and preferences, life cycle stages, and physical health significantly impact event tourism and explaining demand and preference for certain types of events. Keeping this in mind, it is reasonable to conclude that a country's population demographics influence the types and amount of events a country holds. For example, a country like Italy, which has a large Catholic population, will likely host many religious based festivals, while a country that has a large population under the age of 30 will likely host more youth-related events, such as music festivals and sporting events.





### 4.2.3 Cultural diversity

The event marketplace is not uniform, and it is important to take cultural differences into account when considering why people are motivated to make certain leisure choices (Tassiopoulos, 2010:23). For example, the European market is very different to the South African market; the different cultural backgrounds and what the citizens are accustomed to makes it necessary to cater for the two countries in different ways. Event managers cannot use a blanket approach to event management; understanding the demographics of the guests is vitally important.

Hofstede's cultural dimensions is a useful framework for understanding and comparing national cultures based on six categories:

1. Power distance
2. Individualism vs collectivism
3. Masculinity vs femininity
4. Uncertainty avoidance
5. Long-term orientation vs short-term orientation
6. Indulgence versus restraint

(Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010)

This framework illustrates how national culture can vary on multiple dimensions, and event managers and organisers should take the cultural values and orientations of different nations and cultural groups within a nation into account when designing, marketing, and assessing the benefits and impacts of the planned event. For example, the indulgence vs restraint dimension refers to the degree to which a nation embraces free gratification of natural human drives related to pleasure and fun (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Nations that score low in this dimension will suppress gratification of these needs through strict social norms, and it is therefore less likely that such a culture will embrace frivolous events that are hosted "just for fun".

### 4.2.4 Urban conditions

Urban living is the norm for the majority of people in developed nations and, as a result, they will naturally have greater opportunities for exposure to leisure activities, art and culture, and formal entertainment options. Most local neighbourhood events centre on celebrating the community as a whole and reinforcing pride and a sense of belonging, but some celebrations are specific to ethnic groups or special interests (Tassiopoulos, 2010:21). Because these events give attendees an insight into the lifestyle and customs of the community hosting the event, they can be seen as tourist attractions in their own right. In South Africa, it is common for larger-scale events to be hosted in smaller, less-developed areas of the country as a way of aiding urbanisation and community development. The level of urbanisation will therefore affect the amount and type of



events hosted in an area. The greater the urbanisation, the greater the amount and scope of events, as events are a by-product of urbanisation and globalisation.

### 4.3 Political forces

Events are often leveraged to keep the population content, to promote certain political agendas, or to raise the profile of political parties or politicians. Mega-events can be particularly political. For example, politicians have been known to make strategic visits in order to secure the success of particular bids. Winning the bid for a world-class event shows power and determination of government, and this in turn helps to ensure voter confidence. Not all bids are won with consideration for successful delivery. The International Olympic Committee expressed concerns about Athens's ability to host the Olympics, and in the end the result was severe financial losses for Athens.

Governments also set policy for events and legislature plays a crucial role in controlling impacts of events, as the event manager has to comply with certain legalities. The legal considerations surrounding events will be discussed in more detail in later modules.

Government departments usually support the development and growth of events and policy tools. In developing countries such as China, South Africa and India, the governments have yet to show their full support. An example is Cape Town's failed 2004 Olympic bid, in which the government did not seem to support the destination and where political agendas were perhaps at play. Sometimes events can be manipulated for political purposes; a government might support an event to provide economic stimulation for a depressed area with the aim of re-election. With this in mind, it must be emphasised that, most of the time, the political objectives around staging events are positive and useful.

### 4.4 Technological forces

Technology influences every aspect of the event industry today. There is an increased consumer expectation to purchase tickets online through booking services such as Computicket, and planning and managing events is becoming increasingly computerised. The benefits of using technology include more accurate decision-making, improved marketing strategies, greater control, and more detailed and accurate accounting of sales to ensure improved return on investment (Tassiopoulos, 2010:22-23).





**Video 5:** An advertisement for WeTrack, a technologically-advanced event project management software system that allows event managers to manage all the aspects of their event on one programme, thereby gaining greater efficiencies and lowering costs.

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvNly7AYz0U>)

Additionally, in an attempt to attract visitors, technology is also being used more frequently to create special effects, including laser lighting shows, video conferencing, and advanced sound systems (Tassiopoulos, 2010:23).

There have also been developments in ticketing, marketing, communicating, lighting, sound and other ancillary services. Twenty years ago, it was virtually impossible to provide a major power source in a remote event location (such as the top of a mountain); now it is done with relative ease. It is important for event managers to recognise that technology will continue to change the face of the industry and the way it operates, delivers its services and communicates in years to come.

## 4.5 Values and sustainability

During the last decade, many companies have started recognising the importance of partaking in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives (Tassiopoulos, 2010:23). Events provide an ideal platform for this. For example, a company may host an event and give a portion of their profits to charity, or the event may aid in skills development.

From an event management perspective, the increased emphasis on sustainability and making a difference places an expectation on event managers to start producing greener events and take a more proactive approach to staging sustainable events. Events need to take a “tread lightly” approach, and environmental concerns have therefore become a major issue. Impact studies are conducted prior to and during the event and ways to minimise the event’s footprint are implemented as often as possible.



## 5. Conclusion

Event management is a demanding career path but one that many professionals find rewarding and fulfilling. When approaching a new career, just like when one approaches a new event or client, it is imperative to be prepared, to know what is expected of you, and whether or not you can deliver on expectations.

The event industry, as you have learnt, does not operate in isolation but has a very close relationship with tourism. Understanding how the two work together is crucial.

Event Managers are detail-orientated, big-picture professionals. Therefore, remember to keep this bigger picture in mind while working through the rest of this course and as you learn about the “how” of event management in more detail.

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