Event management: Bringing people
As the Middle East experiences rapid social and business development, events are increasingly taking place. With countries, cities and companies spending a considerable part of their budgets on events, the need for effective Event Management has become significant.
Events are an excellent platform for governments and businesses to market and promote an idea, product, company or nation. In a region where economies are largely driven by oil revenues and accelerated population growth, events are increasingly used as a catalyst to encourage economic diversification and social development. This is particularly the case in high-profile events, where at an international level Qatar has invested an estimated USD 65 billion to bring the FIFA 2022 football World Cup event to the Middle East.\(^1\) With many Middle East businesses found to invest an annual average of USD 1.89 million in their events,\(^2\) Event Management as a key activity has become more important than ever before. As Event Management is a new and unfamiliar field to many organizations, we examine its background, significance and outline a model solution to key challenges many organizations face with their events today.

**Background: development of a key discipline**

Congregations, conventions and festivals have for long been a practice of social interaction, knowledge interchange and sharing, as well as a key element in enhancing relationship building between different communities to foster an environment of social collaboration and cohesiveness. Throughout history, the advents of organized events and festivals are well documented, even before the fall of the Western Roman Empire in A.D. 476.\(^3\)

Recently, the practice of managing events has been growing and evolving as a formal discipline and body of knowledge. Since the late 1990s, attempts to streamline and aggregate fragmented theories and practices started out within academia by a number of scholars but quickly attracted freelance consultants and practitioners. This core group of professionals initially explored the application of project management concepts to the organization of events. Just as accountants have developed accounting as a practice and profession with global standards, event management professionals have also created and continue to build an “Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK)”, dedicated to the development and professionalization of Event Management practices.

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**Source:** International EMBOK Executive, Emerit
The Event Management industry: value, significance and potential

Estimates about industry size vary considerably, as Event Management covers a wide variety of categories from the very small-scale cultural, to the very large-scale multi-national, including mega events such as the Olympic Games. Indicative of the value of the Event Management industry is an annual survey conducted by the International Association of Professional Congress Organizers (IAPCO), an internationally recognized body of professional event organizers and a leading authority on the meetings events industry, which values the managed budgets of meetings organized by their members at over USD 2 billion.

With an average economic impact of two to three times managed budgets and healthy double digit growth, global IAPCO events clearly indicate the rising demand for events and event management services at an international level, driven by the economic impact they bring to companies, governments and countries. When considering larger scale events such as conventions, exhibitions, festivals, shows, concerts and sports events, we would expect the size and potential of the global industry to be far greater than USD 3 billion by 2015.

Managed budgets* and economic impact* of Global IAPCO meetings events‡ between 2008-2015 (USD billion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Managed Budgets</th>
<th>Economic Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>2.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5.52</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Based on Average Delegate Fee of USD 748 & Average Exhibition Rental Fee of USD 680
* Based on Average Delegate Spend of USD 2,204
‡ Based on Corporate, Associations & Governmental Meetings organized by global IAPCO members

Driven by huge economic and population growth in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, demand for events in the MENA region appears to be increasing at a far greater pace than the rest of the world.

Significantly, an indication that demand is now also picking up in the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region is the growth in their number of conventions. Driven by huge economic and population growth in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, demand for events in the MENA region appears to be increasing at a far greater pace than the rest of the world. With rapid economic, infrastructure and social development, the Middle East could be fast emerging as the destination of choice for all kinds of events. The evidently increasing demand and resulting spend on events by companies and governments therefore makes effective event management essential, especially if they are to maximize the economic impact of their events.

Growth in MENA conventions events from 2005 to 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>2005 % Growth</th>
<th>2008 % Growth</th>
<th>2010 % Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qatar</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAE</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the strategic level, the formulation of an events strategy enables organizations to rationalize, streamline and focus their portfolio of events.

**Events as assets: three fundamental levels**

Event Management is most widely defined as the application of project management principles to plan and deliver events as projects. When asking individuals in organizations what ‘Event Management’ means to them, most people believe it is simply a form of supervision during an event, to ensure the event proceeds according to plan. But what is the event’s plan and where does it come from? How do we really measure the event’s success? Few organizations recognize their events as assets, preventing them from understanding how Events Management (asset management of a portfolio of events) and Event Management (project and risk management of a single event) can be applied to most effectively rationalize, plan and maximize the benefits that their events can bring.

Just as an organization’s intangible intellectual property, brand and goodwill, are now widely recognized as highly valuable assets, events can similarly be recognized with their success measured as a Return on Investment (ROI). Like any organization, Strategic Business Unit (SBU) or project that requires investment and is assigned with measurable ROI targets, events are also an investment that should be developed and managed at three fundamental levels over time: strategic, management and organization (operation).

**Events strategy**

At the strategic level, the formulation of an events strategy enables organizations to rationalize, streamline and focus their portfolio of events. This is especially needed for organizations whose events tend to be unevenly distributed through different divisions, when it is often unclear why most events are held. Based on an organization’s overall strategy, the events strategy is a long-term development vision, a plan outlining the overall objectives of an organization’s events, the benefits they are expected to bring and how they will be achieved. This guides the development of the events portfolio, a collection of events that have been assessed and identified as strategically important.

Regardless of the type of event, it is the desired outcome of the event – its strategic value – that should drive an organization’s decision to invest money and resources to host or participate therein. Each important
event’s objectives, desired outcomes and measures of success are therefore linked with the overall objectives and strategy of an organization’s business to maximize their ROI. In this way more and more companies, government departments and organizations can use events strategies to maximize the benefits of their events portfolio.

**Strategic framework for events**

With reputations, brands and images at stake, such mistakes could be highly damaging to the event and to the hosting organization as a whole. For this reason, reputational risk is the most important to manage.

**Event Management**

At the management level, each event is individually designed, planned, managed, delivered and evaluated as a project. The two largest aspects of this are project management and risk management. However with events, unlike other projects, the date cannot be shifted. For example, the date of New Year’s Eve, birthdays, or events on national holidays cannot be changed. All tasks are therefore planned and managed around the event date as the fixed deadline.

**Project Management**

As with many other project-orientated businesses such as construction, consulting and IT, project management is a specialized skill and a key competency which needs to be built and continuously developed over time.

However, in Event Management, many organizations overlook this, focusing on delivering the next event in the calendar and not on developing their Events Management competency. Staff managing an organization’s events are often employed with little or no training in Event Management. Without any Events Management templates, common documents or system of knowledge management, little or no knowledge retention or transfer can take place. Consequently, event managers and coordinators are left to develop their own Event Management competencies, methods, practices and make their own mistakes in the process. With reputations, brands and images at stake, such mistakes could be highly damaging to the event and to the hosting organization as a whole. For this reason, reputational risk is the most important to manage.
Risk Management
Accordingly, Risk management is essential, as Event Managers are constantly confronted, fraught and stressed with unexpected problems that arise throughout the Event Management process. Although Event Managers apply risk management to solve problems as they arise, their occurrence and solutions are rarely documented. This can also stifle the development of an organization’s events and its competency in managing its events, as risks or problems cannot be foreseen, tracked, resolved and learning from previous mistakes can never be shared. Problems come as a surprise and there is no way to refer to past events or past solutions. As a result, last minute changes and major problems can barely be contained and can reappear across an organization’s other events.

The use of a simple risk register resolves many of these common issues. Risks can be more adequately foreseen before they evolve into problems and experience can be shared to enable colleagues and superiors to understand the complexities involved in managing various events. In this way, embedding risk management and its documentation as a core process can continuously help develop event professionals, a practice that is widely acknowledged as an international standard in Event Management.

Event organization
At the organization (operational) level, an event’s plan and design are elaborated, prepared, executed and closed. Often, event organization is thought to represent the key activities that take place before an event. Whilst this is mostly true with the bulk of the workload in advance preparation and setup, we must not forget the key organizational and operational activities that also take place during, after and even throughout an event’s lifecycle.
Before the event
In this phase of event organization, detailed planning and preparation is undertaken. In planning, key activities involve identifying the full scope of work required to deliver the event and detailing the event’s design, the set of key activities and elements that will take place during the event (e.g. theme, topics, speakers, food and beverage requirements, attendee plan, agenda, site design, event documentation). As with most project plans, the event’s scope of work is broken down into detailed tasks, scheduled and allocated to event organizing staff (Human Resources) with responsibilities to meet set deadlines. Ultimately, the event plans translate into checklists, a best practice used to drive the rest of the event preparation and setup activities.

In preparation, key activities include procurement of goods and services (e.g. speakers, food and beverage services, equipment), site preparation (e.g. venue decoration, seating), invitations to participants and logistics (e.g. travel and accommodation arrangements, security plans, transport and storage of equipment). These various activities are all coordinated and performed together to work towards the event’s date, the target deadline.

During the event
On the day, the participants arrive and the event is staged. During the event, the Event Manager should be physically present, only checking to ensure that all execution activities flow according to plan. This includes registration and attendance of participants, execution of event design elements required to run the event as smoothly as possible (e.g. protocol services for VIPs, food and beverage services, planned performances) and site closure once the event has concluded.

After the event
In the final phase, the event is closed. All outstanding accounts with suppliers and participants are settled and all documentation produced in relation to the event is archived. Most importantly, the event should be measured and evaluated against its strategic objectives. Successes, shortcomings and improvement opportunities should be formally documented and archived for future reference and development.
Throughout the event life cycle
As with all projects, events very rarely flow smoothly as they are constrained by a budget, set timeframe and key stakeholders. At various points throughout the event’s life cycle, there are always risks that are realized and encountered as problems. Plans need to be adjusted, changed and constantly updated. The event’s budget always needs to be controlled through allocations and approvals. Key stakeholders (e.g. the event organizing team, management, participants, media, press and marketing agencies, government) also need to be informed through an adequate communication plan. Risk management, communication and budget allocation are therefore key activities actively applied throughout, where Event Managers coordinate efforts, resolve problems, update plans and control budget allocations to ensure the event is ready, successfully executed and properly closed.

Mapping the life cycle of events: a complete process model
Like any project that involves people, each event is unique. New problems emerge and plans need to be constantly updated. The dynamic, flexible and scalable nature of the activities involved in event organization and management are therefore extremely challenging to map in the form of a process. Accordingly, many organizations struggle with mapping, streamlining and improving their Event Management activities.

The process model for Events and Event Management as shown on the following page, across all three fundamental levels, integrates all events strategy, management and organization activities throughout the full life cycle of an event. By understanding and applying this process model, organizations can take a significant step towards maximizing the full potential of their events.

Building capability: A path to potential
It is clear that events have become more prevalent and important in the region than ever before. With the considerable investment involved, organizations should recognize their strategically valuable events as assets, developing them as well as their Event Management capabilities over time. The Event Management practices and process model outlined enable organizations to take a first step towards achieving this. However, the journey is far from complete.

Developing a dedicated events team, having the right organization structure in place, installing appropriate technology, training and fostering a knowledge management system are all additional ways in which organizations can build their Event Management capabilities. With these capabilities, governments and businesses can maximize the potential return on the events that they invest in bringing to life.

Most importantly, the event should be measured and evaluated against its strategic objectives. Successes, shortcomings and improvement opportunities should be formally documented and archived for future reference and development.
Events and event management process model


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Endnotes
1 “Qatar 2022 – Business Opportunities” by Qatar First Investment Bank, 2012
2 “The 5th Middle East Meetings Industry Research Report” by Reed Travel Exhibitions & Meetme, 2011
3 “Events Management: An Integrated and Practical Approach” by Razaq Raj, Paul Walters & Tahir Rashid, 2009