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HOW EVENT MANAGERS LEAD: APPLYING COMPETENCY SCHOOL THEORY TO EVENT MANAGEMENT

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A lack of research into human resource development, managerial skillsets, and leadership practices of event managers has resulted in widespread assumptions about the nature of leadership within events, which is unsupported by primary research. This qualitative research based on semistructured interviews focused on event managers working within the business events industry. Data analysis using thematic analysis and a ranking list establishes six key leadership practices—engaging communication, strategic perspectives, critical analysis and judgement, resource management, emotional resilience, and interpersonal sensitivity. This research argues that these leadership practices are essential for the development of successful event managers. Additionally, this study shows there is tension at the heart of leadership within events—event projects are intangible and temporary in nature, providing only one opportunity to get it right and this results in event managers attempting to control all aspects of the event delivery. However, in order to be successful leaders, they also need to work in teams, motivate and empower others, and develop team members. This then is the challenge for human resource development in event management: How do event managers resolve this tension in order to become successful leaders?

Key words: Leadership; Competency school; Competencies; Event management; Business events

Introduction

Nearly 100 years of leadership studies have resulted in a large body of literature suggesting that leadership matters in all aspects of life (Marcketti, Arendt, & Shelly, 2011). As Muzio, Fisher, Thomas, and Peters (2007) suggested, multiple studies have also shown that soft skills such as leadership are

key to continued success in complex, fast changing organizations, and in a variety of managerial contexts. The nature of leadership within organizations and the styles of leadership or leadership competencies required for specific business management roles have therefore frequently been studied, and there is a broad consensus that leadership matters in a range of managerial positions including project

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management, tourism and hospitality management, human resources, and a variety of other senior management roles (see, e.g., Bharwani & Jauhri, 2013; Dalziel, 2010; Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008; Li, Gray, Lockwood, & Buhalis, 2013).

However, despite extensive literature maintaining that effective leadership development is essential for related industries such as tourism and hospitality, it has so far been neglected in the studies of the event management industry. Instead, literature on the subject of events often concentrates solely on the technical aspects of the delivery of business events—common topics include what planning processes are needed, what makes a successful event, what motivates event attendees, the nature of event tourism, and how to create a return on investment (see, e.g., O'Toole & Mikolatis, 2002; Silvers, 2012).

This study maintains that it is vital to understand the human resource management (HRM) functions of event managers and, in particular, their leadership practices. The study argues that the role of event manager is a key management function—event managers sit within executive teams and are solely responsible for the delivery of strategically and financially important events. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to deepen the understanding of the nature of leadership within business events management and to explore business event managers' use of the leadership competencies, thereby adding to the conceptual debate around leadership skills in event management.

Industry Background

The events industry is an important one to study because it has seen rapid growth over the last 10 years and is an important contributor to the British economy, with the sector currently worth between £22 billion and £36 billion per annum to the national economy (Business Visits and Events Partnership, 2010; People 1st, 2010). Employment estimates for the industry stand at around 530,000 in the UK, with 15,500 working in business events such as conferences, events, and exhibitions (People 1st, 2010). In addition, there has been a recent increase in academic interest and a rapid growth of graduates entering employment with event management degrees.

Event management is a field of industrial practice, which involves the organization and coordination of the activities required to achieve event objectives. Broadly, the events sector can be seen to consist of the following categories: business or corporate events, represented by the acronym MINCE (meetings, incentives, networking, conferences, and exhibitions) (Bladen, Kennell, Abson, & Wilde 2012); leisure events (including sporting events, festivals, music, outdoor events); cultural events; and hospitality events. This study focuses on those events that fall into the business events typology. The term event manager is defined as encompassing any occupations wherein their main focus is on the development, planning, and implementation of an event project.

Literature Review

Conceptual Discussions of Events and Leadership

Leadership is recognized as a core competency for event managers by the leading textbooks in the field (Bladen et al., 2012; Goldblatt, 2008, Van der Wagen, 2007) and, although these texts are not based on primary research, the assumptions that they make are important in establishing the context within which this article is written.

Van der Wagen (2007) explained why leadership matters in events by outlining the need to understand and develop human capital effectively. She discussed how event managers are leading projects that are “creative, complex, problematic, dynamic, or stakeholder reliant” (p. 216), and that in order to do this successfully they must possess vision and leadership. Van der Wagen suggested that, as events are temporary in nature, there are few opportunities to redress mistakes—instead, mistakes can have major repercussions and often cannot be remedied. As such, Van der Wagen concluded that event managers need to possess strong leadership skills and that these skills should be based around the ability to transform situations, to hold a creative vision, and to have strong decision-making skills.

Similarly, Bladen et al. (2012) suggested leadership is an essential element of event management. This text goes further than just acknowledging the need for event managers to lead and instead links types of leadership, the culture of the team, and the

style of the event delivery. They proposed that goal-orientated leadership is not applicable to the industry because events often take place in an unstable environment, as by their very nature they are temporary and intangible. Instead, events are described as transitory—core project variables such as plans and resources are often in a state of flux and the projects lack fluidity or indeed are too fluid. Therefore, Bladen et al. (2012) suggested that event managers need to be involving and engaging leaders.

In another demonstration of the assumption within events management literature that leadership matters, academics have been working towards a conceptual framework of creating an event management body of knowledge (EMBOK). This was created as a model that hopes to “facilitate the ability to map, define and align current event management standards consistent with the needs of a global event management environment” (Silvers, Bowdin, O’Toole, & Nelson, 2006, p. 185). The EMBOK model takes into account the skill set of the sector but is very narrow in scope and largely concerned with the identification of knowledge domains and the event planning process. The discussion of the required skills for event managers is relatively cursory. However, the authors do acknowledge that leadership is a key skill for event management professionals (Silvers et al., 2006).

Goldblatt (2008) offered one of the most extensive conceptual discussions of leadership in events. For him, the profession of event management has evolved from developing resources and securing logistics to the need to have a body of knowledge that incorporates strategic planning but also includes leadership skills that “are needed for long-term career success” (Goldblatt, 2008, p. xiv). Goldblatt described the six leadership characteristics: integrity, confidence and persistence, collaboration, problem solving, communication skills, and vision.

These key texts—although not based on primary research—allow us to understand that, on a conceptual level, there is an agreement that leadership does matter in event management. However, there is limited discussion as to why it matters or how it is applied in the unique setting of events management and there is little research into this area. There is, of course, considerable literature on leadership and the closely related industries of tourism and hospitality.

However, this article argues that the events industry is a unique setting, which requires a different set of skills and competencies to related areas and which should establish its own body of research into the specific demands of managing events in a changing and challenging environment.

Event Management Research Into Competencies, Knowledge, and Skills

At the time of writing, no studies were identified that focus specifically on leadership in events and only a few notable studies that focus on the competencies required for the role of event managers. As these all touch on leadership they are useful to consider here. Perry, Foley, and Rumpf (1996) surveyed 53 Australian event managers in order to establish industry support for further events education at postgraduate level and to develop course content informed by industry. Respondents provided a list of the essential attributes for an event manager and content analysis on the responses was carried out. Seven attributes were frequently mentioned; of these, vision was the most important, closely followed by leadership. Adaptability, good communication skills, and people management skills were also noted (Perry et al., 1996). Perry et al. (1996) were the first to show that vision and leadership skills are an essential part of an event manager’s competency profile, but stopped short of examining these characteristics within the context of leadership theories.

Arcodia and Barker (2003) reviewed the educational needs, learned skills, and the personality attributes of Australian event managers with an ongoing analysis of web-based job advertisements. One element of the study was a focus on skills and attributes the job advertisements listed as required. The study concluded that, perhaps unsurprisingly, the most sought after skills (learned abilities) were organizational and planning ones. Communication was the second most sought feature, with leadership and decision making coming third (38% of job advertisements specifying the need for these “skills”). The most desired personal attribute (personality characteristic) was motivation, closely followed by “positiveness” (the need for high levels of enthusiasm). Other identified

attributes include (in descending order) dynamism and energy; commitment; creative; initiative; flexibility; accuracy; respect/maturity; friendly; trustworthiness/responsibility; sensitiveness.

Although there has been little work into the leadership dimension of event managers specifically, there has been some work on managerial competencies. The Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council (CTHRC), in conjunction with Meeting Professionals International (MPI), produced a set of standards that represent a comprehensive breakdown of all the competencies required to be an event manager. These standards, entitled the meetings and business events standards (CTHRC, 2011), are an adaptation of the event management-international competency standards developed by CTHRC and EMBOK partners in 2009. The standards are divided into 12 major categories or functional areas including administration, financial management, human resources, and marketing. It is under the category of professionalism that leadership is listed as a key skill. In order to be able to use this skill, event managers must have knowledge of their own role and responsibilities, their own level of authority, their personal strengths and limitations, the strengths and limitations of potential staff, and different leadership styles.

This section has covered the scant research specifically related to events and leadership and demonstrates the focus on establishing the need for leadership and outlining the competencies required to lead in events. The following section contextualizes this discussion of leadership in events into the broader framework of leadership theory, with a particular focus on the competency school.

The Competency School of Leadership

Nearly 100 years of leadership research has resulted in six primary approaches to leadership, identified by Dulewicz and Higgs (2003a) as the trait school, the behavioral school, the contingency school, the visionary school, the emotional intelligence school, and the competency school.

Initial research focused on the predetermined traits of leaders (Stodgill, 1948), but soon discovered that leadership could not be understood by whom leaders are; the focus of researchers therefore changed to consider what the leader does. However, while

exhibiting leadership behaviors appeared to make a difference in successful leadership, it did not provide a full answer to the question of what makes a leader. Debate centered around the classification of leadership as a trait or behavior and leadership as a process—the difference here is between leadership that is inherent and leadership that can be learned. However, in the last 20 years charismatic and transformational leadership have become the most researched theories (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009), with research concentrating on the situational context in which leaders operated. The visionary school developed this understanding of behavior and situational context and began to consider leaders behaviors in light of followers behaviors (Sashkin & Sashkin, 2003). During the same period, there has also been a growing body of work that investigates emotional intelligence and leadership (see, e.g., Emmerling & Goleman, 2003; Goleman 1998). This consideration of the emotional aspects of leadership created a shift towards considering the competencies of leaders and the development of the competency school of leadership.

Within the competency school of leadership, competencies can be technical, intellectual, or emotional in nature. Some of the leading work within this school has been carried out by Dulewicz and Higgs (2005), who began their own research with the premise that “leadership matters.” In order to support this premise, Dulewicz and Higgs conducted a review of the literature, which enabled them to identify that many elements of emotional intelligence appeared in many other theories of leadership. They also established, through research on business leaders (CEOs and general managers), that cognitive (IQ) and managerial (MQ) competencies were vital to business leadership. Dulewicz and Higgs (2003b) developed a questionnaire—the leadership dimensions questionnaire (LDQ)—and set out to demonstrate the content validity of the LDQ by mapping the key leadership models and their relationship with the key elements of emotional intelligence, cognitive (IQ), and managerial competencies. This analysis allowed Dulewicz and Higgs to conclude there were significant conceptual overlaps between aspects of leadership identified in literature and their 15 leadership dimensions. This was supported by significant statistical evidence demonstrating that the 15 developed dimensions

incorporating emotional intelligence, intelligence (or cognitive), and managerial competencies were all important factors in business leaders. The instrument was piloted on 222 managers and the data were rigorously analyzed using multiple regression analysis. All 15 LDQ dimensions reached an acceptable level of reliability.

The discussions within the events literature, though limited, do indicate that the competency school of leadership fits closely with the leadership roles within the industry. This perception perhaps reflects the demand from the events industry for a list of competencies that define and drive performance (Wilson, Lenssen, & Hind, 2006) but fails to take into account the debates around the validity of a reduction of knowledge into a list of skills (Wheelahan, 2007). However, as the purpose of this study is to explore the premise that leadership practices are essential in overcoming the unique challenges of event management, the use and applicability of skills and competencies in event management can be considered a key starting point.

Methods

Research Approach and Design

The epistemological orientation for this study sits within the field of interpretivism (Gray, 2014). It is proposed that, although the formal processes of the role of event manager may share many basic similar structures, it is the study of the detail that is of interest to this body of work. In particular, the research is concerned with the perception, actions, and meanings event managers attach to the processes involved in leadership practices. A constructivism perspective—relying on an exploratory, inductive, cross-sectional study—was employed in order to understand the reality in which event managers have constructed aspects of their role in order to be able to fully appreciate the meanings they place on leadership practices.

The research design combined qualitative, descriptive findings with interpretation from the researcher (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013) via in-depth, face-to-face, hour-long semistructured interviews with 16 business event managers. This qualitative approach has often been missed from leadership research. Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) suggests that much of

the literature on leadership has “consistently ignored cognitive elements for the past few decades . . . due in part to the dominance of quantitative studies and the associated tendency not to measure cognitive elements in such studies” (p. 107).

Sampling

This research was undertaken using a nonprobability sampling technique, which although widely recognized in qualitative research, can be seen to create limitations in terms of intended generalizations. In order to limit criticisms of this technique, sampling decisions were made based on clear selection criteria. The selection criteria for the participants was based on Patton’s (2002) suggestion of critical cases, where sample selection is based on those whose experiences to be studied are especially clear. This is straightforward in this instance—the role and industry of the participant was the central selection criteria. All participants worked in organizations that ran events for the business sector and their roles were specifically to manage these corporate events. This focus ensured the selection involved only event managers who were undertaking similar roles in the same industry and who were running events with similar responsibilities, aims, and outcomes. In order to establish continuity between samples, participants were sent a preliminary questionnaire to check for eligibility to be involved.

All participants had overall responsibility for delivering the events that they worked on (i.e., they must be the event manager, even if their job title is different) and they had an events assistant (or similar) working within the same team. Each of the participants reported to the equivalent of director level, though they were all the primary decision makers for their own events and had autonomy in strategic and budgetary decisions. They had all been working within the events sector for 4 years or more and they all ran between 10 and 50 events a year, within similar corporate-based environments; the majority of respondents ran events for staff members and their clients. Events were mainly small (less than 150 guests) and localized to their place of work, though some participants also ran one or two larger scale national events per year. The selection criteria ensured that the interviewees worked at a similar level, with similar responsibilities and running

similar events. Table 1 shows the descriptive details of the research participants. There were 13 female event managers and 3 male managers.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

This study took a pragmatic approach to data collection, allowing the researcher to use a theoretical framework to guide their research design and, where appropriate, to interpret the data (Merriam, 2009). The framework for this study was the 15 leadership dimensions proposed by Dulewicz and Higgs (2005). The extensive literature review and strong mapping exercises of Dulewicz and Higgs' LDQ, coupled with the statistically testing for reliability of the questionnaire, made it a valid conceptual framework to align with the events industry. The LDQ model is based on the proposition that leadership requires emotional intelligence, managerial competence, and IQ, and consists of 15 leadership dimensions that can be used to explain the performance of managers in an organizational context (Geoghegan & Dulewicz, 2008). The LDQ is a highly evolved survey; for the purposes of this qualitative study, the descriptions of each LDQ, as provided by Dulewicz and Higgs (2005), were used as the basis of the interviews in order to explore how leadership practices are used in daily activities of business event managers.

As Bryman (2008) pointed out, it is almost impossible to establish how many interviews might be needed in qualitative research, though there is increasingly a move towards a minimum level of acceptability. This minimum level appears to be somewhere between 12 and 20 (Bryman, 2008), with the suggestion that these numbers will enable researchers to reach a theoretical saturation point in which there is "thematic exhaustion." As the participants of this study are fairly homogenous and as the study has a clear and specific focus, it is argued that fewer comparisons are needed. Theoretical saturation was reached after the 12th interview; at this stage, no new data were emerging and participants were simply corroborating previously gathered data. Four more interviews were conducted after saturation point to ensure that no further themes arose.

The interviews took place in a one-to-one environment at the interviewee's place of work, allowing for the development of rapport and for the

interviewer and interviewee to fully understand the purpose of the research. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the sole researcher. As the interview process was exploratory in nature, these interviews were based around an interview protocol consisting of a list of general themes emanating from the literature; the semistructured process allowed the interviewer to guide the flow of the conversation and allowed for the incorporation of additional questions to explore the research questions in more detail (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009). This method helped to solicit insights into aspects of leadership in an event management context. During the interviews, the event managers were asked to describe their day-to-day responsibilities and to discuss the nature of leadership within their role. Once the managers had discussed their own leadership practices and described the importance and prevalence of certain leadership skills, the researcher described each of the LDQ dimensions and asked participants to reflect on these in the context of their role. The following question was then asked: "Focusing on the dimension of . . ., could you give me an example of how you use this competency within your role?" The combination of the interview protocol and the use of the LDQ dimensions allowed for an in-depth dialogue around leadership practices in the role of business event managers.

Additionally, interviewees were asked "Please rank the LDQ dimensions in order of priority—which dimensions do you think are most important to your role, with 1 being most and 10 being least." These rankings were then averaged to provide the list of key practices as described by the managers shown in Table 2.

The data analysis used a priori and a posteriori codes. The a priori codes related to key themes from the literature, which enabled the start of the coding process; these codes were largely drawn from the LDQ dimensions (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003b). The a posteriori codes were based on the themes generated from the data gathered and included variations on the LDQ dimensions, which were later linked to the dimensions they covered and also emerging themes of the motivation of others, leadership of networks of teams, control, and attitude. These themes, when considered alongside the LDQ dimension rankings, were used to divide the LDQ

Table 1
Descriptive Details of the Research Participants

Manager	Job Title	Organization/Event Type	Location	Gender	Age Range	Time in Industry (Years)	Average Number of Events per Year	Audience	Average Audience Size	Autonomy of Decision Making/Control of Budget
A	Senior event manager	Banking/business to business events	London and UK	Female	30–40	8	30	External clients/senior members of banking staff	50	Yes
B	Program manager	Sports industry/corporate hospitality	UK	Female	40–50	10+	25	External clients and senior staff members	75	Yes
C	Business owner	Finance/conferences	London/South East	Male	50+	20+	30	Key staff/other interested parties	150	Yes
D	Event manager	Accounting/internal events	UK	Female	20–30	5	50	Staff members	50	Yes
E	Private bank event manager	Banking/business to business events and corporate hospitality	UK	Female	20–30	2.5	40	Staff members, sponsors, and key clients	50	Yes
F	Head of events	SME/entrepreneur specialists	UK	Female	30–40	8+	150	Staff and other interested parties	60	Yes
G	Freelance event manager	Pharmaceutical/business focused exhibitions/workshops	UK	Female	40–50	20+	20	Staff and interested parties	200	Yes
H	Manager	Banking/business event agency	London	Female	20–30	4	30	Staff members of client	50	Yes
I	Event manager	Finance/business to business events	London	Female	30–40	14	15	Staff and key clients	200	Yes
J	Senior event manager	Music and youth events	UK	Female	30–40	12	25	Clients and key staff members	150	Yes
K	Event manager	Technology	London	Female	30–40	8+	20	Clients, sponsors, key staff	250	Yes
L	Senior event manager	IT/internal networking events and client events	London	Male	30–40	5	35	Staff/clients	100	Yes
M	Senior event manager	Accounting/business to business events	UK	Female	30–40	8+	15	Staff and clients	75	Yes
N	Event manager	Venture capital/business events	London	Female	30–40	6	30	Staff and clients	40	Yes
O	Event manager	Music/client events	London	Male	30–40	7	20	Staff and clients	100	Yes
P	Event manager	Property/sponsorship events	London	Female	20–30	4	20	Staff and sponsors	20	Yes

Table 2
Rankings of LDQ Dimensions Within Text and A Posteriori Codes

A Priori Codes: Leadership Dimensions Identified by the LDQ	Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) Brief Descriptors of LDQ Dimensions	Additional Examples From Within the Data	Ranking: Based on Averages From Rankings Provided During Interview
Engaging communication	Engages others and wins their support through communication tailored for each audience. Is approachable and accessible. This is a managerial dimension.	<p>“You need to be able to talk to anyone; one day you might be with a VIP guest speaker, the next you are running an event for the cleaning staff. It doesn’t matter who they are, you have to pick the right track, get the message across in a way that they will respond to.” (Manager L)</p> <p>“You need to be a people person; you need to talk to people on their level. You can’t go through your career expecting people to work at the standard you work at and then judging them in such a way.” (Manager J)</p>	1
Strategic perspective	Sees the wider issues and broader implications. Balances short- and long-term considerations and identifies opportunities and threats. This is an intellectual dimension.	<p>“You have to work with your senior colleagues to say what your main agenda is and what your priorities are. We work to a plan that we produce every year that details our key targets and that links into the key strategies and that we have known those are our overriding priorities.” (Manager I)</p>	2
Critical analysis and judgement	Gathering relevant information from a wide range of sources, probing the facts, and identifying advantages and disadvantages. Sound judgements and decisions making, awareness of the impact of any assumptions made. This is an intellectual dimension.	<p>“A decision you make about something as simple as where a sign is going to go. Well you have to think about, well actually signage is about visitor experience and making it better, but on that signage is all the sponsors’ logos and they want their logos to be as prominent as possible. So, you have got two people who you are trying to satisfy, now overriding this is that you have got to make sure that visitors get from A to B, but at the back of your head is what will happen if a sponsor sees that so I am going to have to get another sign to put over there to put the sponsor happy. So, you think through all the different outcomes.” (Manager G)</p>	3
Resource management	Organizes resources and coordinates them efficiently and effectively. Establishes clear objectives. Converts long-term goals into action plans. This is a managerial dimension.	<p>“If we were to get very literal in terms of skills then you need to be very good in terms of budgets, doing event sheets and I have to do evaluation reports and being able to write, very very clearly kind of summaries of events that other people are going to read. That’s really important.” (Manager D)</p>	4
Emotional resilience	Capability for consistent performance in a range of situations. Retain focus on a course of action or need for results in the face of personal challenge or criticism. This is an emotional intelligence dimension.	<p>“You have to be able to bounce back, you have to know how to adapt. Much as I say that I like to be polite and helpful, and I do try, if you are at an event and sometimes you have to make a complaint to the venue or about the catering and I’ve had to do that. . . . And it’s knowing when do to that and when to be tough; when the priority of the event take over from your own feelings of embarrassment or fear.” (Manager D)</p> <p>“People openly criticize you to your face in this industry—I don’t like the food, this speaker is boring, this venue is awful—you have to take it on the chin, nod and maintain a smile.” (Manager N)</p>	5

Interpersonal sensitivity	Be aware of, and take account of, the needs and perceptions of others in arriving at decisions and proposing solutions to problems and challenges. This is an emotional intelligence dimension.	“It’s your job to realize when they [staff members] are flagging—usually around 3 or 4 days of the event when the intensity, stress and long days get to them, and you have to regroup, bring up their enthusiasm again and manage them and maybe rearrange their schedules or rotas to give them half a day or a day off so that they can reenergize and come back.” (Manager B)	6
Developing	Encourages others to take on ever more demanding tasks, roles, and accountabilities. Develops others’ competencies and invests time and effort in coaching them. This is a managerial dimension	“I would always have a conversation with them [staff] about what they enjoyed doing and what their skills were. I would have a list of jobs that need doing and I would delegate. I think if they had a choice and were doing something they wanted to be doing they would perform better so I’d always try and match people up to their skills. If you have the opportunity to do that, then that is what I’ve done in the past.” (Manager E)	7
Influence	Capability to persuade others to change a viewpoint based on the understanding of their position and the recognition of the need to listen to this perspective and provide a rationale for change. This is an emotional intelligence dimension.	“I always say to people, it’s like imagine you are them—what would make you react in a positive way? What would you like someone to say to you to get the reaction you need? Otherwise you can’t just be one person to everyone.” (Manager F)	8
Vision and imagination	Imaginative and innovative. Having a clear vision of the future and foresee the impact of changes on implementation issues and business realities. This is an intellectual dimension.	“Being reactive isn’t conducive to a positive decision, you’ve got to take a step back and think about it, think about what all the possible outcomes could be. You’ve got to think about the future—have a vision of your event, know what will work and what won’t work.” (Manager K)	9
Self-awareness	Aware of one’s own feelings and able to recognize and control them. This is an emotional intelligence dimension	“Sometimes, I think because events are so high pressured, people are shouting at you, your team hate you, your client is annoyed—but you have to separate your personal feelings about it, and not retaliate. You have to smile, or look sympathetic and diffuse the situation. You have to control your own emotions I guess.” (Manager M)	10
Intuitiveness	Arrive at clear decisions and drive their implementation in the face of incomplete or ambiguous information by using both rational and “emotional” perceptions. This is an emotional intelligence dimension.	“You rely on instinct and intuition I guess—more so in this job than any other, because every event is different and you do get a lot of last minute requests. It’s typical to get asked to do an event at the last minute with very little direction. But they really encourage you to be original and to have flair, so you have to come up with something special without a proper brief.” (Manager K)	11
Motivation	Drive and energy to achieve clear results and make an impact. This is an emotional intelligence dimension.	“I’m thinking about the qualities that a good event manager has—and one of those is not being lazy. Clearly event managers aren’t driven by money, they are driven by someone turning around and saying ‘you did a great job, well done.’ And they get this kind of glow and sometimes that’s the motivation, not just from me but from the business.” (Manager F)	12

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

A Priori Codes: Leadership Dimensions Identified by the LDQ	Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) Brief Descriptors of LDQ Dimensions	Additional Examples From Within the Data	Ranking: Based on Averages From Rankings Provided During Interview
Conscientiousness	Capability to display clear commitment to a course of action in the face of challenge and to match “words and deeds” in encouraging others to support the chosen direction. This is an emotional intelligence dimension.	“Sometimes the directors make decisions about the event direction, and you and the team just don’t agree with it. But your job, as the boss, is to bring people on board, to get them to see why this direction is important to the directors and to encourage them to deliver. It’s not always easy but it is possible.” (Manager O)	13
Achieving	Shows an unwavering determination to achieve objectives and implement decisions. This is a managerial dimension.	“It’s up to the event manager to see things through, to achieve the goals the event set out to achieve. You’ve got to just keep pushing, even when things get difficult. That’s your job, to deliver the event. Nothing else matters.” (Manager O)	14
Empowering	Gives direct reports autonomy and encourages them to take on challenges, to solve problems and develop their own accountability. This is a managerial dimension.	“I try to leave team members to make their own decisions, to make their own mistakes. I don’t want to hover over them, checking—though I normally do. I want them to feel responsible for their area of delivery, to feel part of the team.” Manager M	15
Postori Codes: Emerging From Data	Description of Theme	Examples of Evidence	
Leadership and teams	This theme describes how the managers believe business events are delivered by a network or teams—including the organizing staff, the organizations’ directors, sponsors, clients, the venue, and other key suppliers and the audience themselves, and that they need to lead all of these people in order to run a successful event.	“The event manager has to be able to appear to know everything as you get everyone coming to you—it’s having that calmness and confidence to, because what I always say to the team, you are in a position that, no matter how little you know, you know more than them. You have all the information and they don’t. You just need the confidence that you know more than they do . . . they are coming to you for guidance and leadership.” (Manager B)	
Control	The ability to pay attention to detail, and yet to oversee a large amount of activities at the same time. The desire to ensure everything is completed to a certain standard and the inability to trust others to ensure this happens	“And you are controlling the time, and you are controlling the speakers, you are controlling everything—every last detail.” (Manager C)	
Motivation of others	The ability to motivate a team; to look beyond yourself and recognize that others are contributing to the success of your event	“We all need to get where we need to be. I think the best way to motivate people is to make them feel part of the team because the problem is that when you’ve got lots of people running in different directions. . . . You’ve got to make them feel that they are part of it. So, getting everyone together is really important.” (Manager G)	

dimensions into three categories: high, medium, and low. The split between high, medium, and low categories was drawn from the thematic analysis, based on the emphasis placed on each dimension by the participants and the number of mentions. Through this analytical process, relationships within categories and between categories were identified and explored and a clearer picture of leadership in business events emerged.

Results and Discussion

The results of the discussions with the event managers are now presented through the discussion of key themes and using quotes to illustrate or amplify the managers' views. This study shows that each of the 15 dimensions identified by Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) in their LDQ were expressed by the managers when they were describing their role and responsibilities, but that there were six key leadership practices of business event manager. These six key leadership practices emerged from the data and were ranked by the managers as most important and identified as frequently occurring or emphasized as important during the thematic exploration of the data.

Table 2 contains a full list of the LDQ dimensions and rankings, and includes other emerging leadership practices.

High-Ranking Leadership Practices

Engaging Communication (Ranked #1). The findings show that the managerial practice of engaging communication was the most prominent of the 15 LDQ dimensions, which supports the claims of communication as a key leadership personality characteristic (Bladen et al., 2012; Goldblatt, 2008). All the managers frequently returned to the theme of communication during their interviews; for them communication skills were seen as vital to the role. It was noted that successful event managers must communicate effectively and sensitively to staff, stakeholders, clients, suppliers, and guests. The ability to choose the right communication strategy for the recipient and the ability to look at things from other perspectives was a key function. Specifically, managers A, D, E, F, and K referred to ensuring communication strategies are

adjusted depending on who is being communicated with—understanding their audience was key. Additionally, understanding what stakeholders needed or wanted and how to communicate solutions that resulted in support from those involved was seen as key; as is demonstrated by this statement from Manager J:

The role is all about communicating, it's what you do all day long . . . you have to talk to everyone on a level they will understand. . . . You need everyone's support during the delivery especially—you speak to people in a way that is clear and easy to understand, so that they'll do what you need them to do. And of course, with clients and guests, you have to talk to them in the right way. So, if you can't communicate, you can't really do the job.

Strategic Perspectives (Ranked #2). Collectively, the managers identified the need to consider the wider issues, to look at opportunities and threats, and to balance short- and long-term goals as an essential part of the role. Thirteen of the managers discussed the need for strategic thinking during the planning stages of an event, and ranked this as the second most important leadership practice identified in the LDQ dimensions. The research shows that the ability to foresee implications of key decisions like the venue, entertainment, food, and beverage are based on understanding of not just the event concept and the audience's expectations but also on the organizing party's culture and vision. The managers considered it necessary to be commercially minded, making decisions based on commercial—and strategic—perspectives, as shown by Manager G:

I would say that I am very commercially minded, so I make decisions based on commercial decisions—I can look across the entire structure of what is happening and if I have to make a decision, preshow and on site, then I can see it from the sales point of view.

The managers in this study think strategically and commercially and believe that this is key to their successful leadership of business event; additionally, eight of the event managers in the study were able to visualize how their events related to their companies' strategic objectives. This practice was closely related to the third most important dimension, that of

critical analysis and judgement and echoes the finding of Dulewicz and Higgs (2003b), in which they found that IQ competencies were the second most commonly identified factor in leadership within general managers, who were at the same level within organizations as the event managers in this study.

Critical Analysis and Judgement (Ranked #3). The participants used their critical analysis and judgment frequently as part of their decision-making process. This reflects the observational writings by Goldblatt (2008) that the skill of problem solving in a fast-changing environment was key to successful leadership and that event managers need to be able to produce a workable solution for all the stakeholders. Participants in this study felt that their role required the need to analyze a situation quickly and efficiently, and to consider all stakeholders concerned before making a decision based on their own experience and judgement.

For the majority of the managers, critical analysis and judgement was deemed as most important when working onsite at events. Additionally, decision making—the need to make quick decisions in unexpected and highly pressurized circumstances—was reported as an essential skill by all the participants. Findings showed that all participants were solution driven; decision making started with the understanding of what needed to be achieved and then was worked “backwards” until a solution became clear. Key to this process was the judgement call—the need to consider strategic outcomes for all stakeholders, including the consideration of short- and long-term impacts of any decisions. One participant summarized the need to have a critical faculty and make sound judgements and decisions based on reasonable assumptions and awareness of the impacts of these assumptions as follows:

Because if I am too wishy washy and not going to make decisions, then people are not going to trust my judgement. You need to make decisions quickly; and obviously, I have to look at the wider implications. Those decisions are based on experience and also on having an overview of the project. (Manager I)

This echoes the suggestion by Silvers (2012) that managers analyze information, make decisions, and assign tasks whereas leaders influence and inspire

others to achieve a goal; leaders motivate, they evaluate decisions and envisage the potential consequence and they create contingencies, just as the participants in this study do.

Resource Management (Ranked #4). The leadership practice of managing resources features highly on the list of leadership priorities provided by the managers. This point of view is consistent with the work of Arcodia and Baker (2003), who identified managing resources as the most sought after skill in their review of event management job descriptions. In this study, the managers described the management of resources as an integral part of the role—planning what needs to be done, when it needs to be done by, and who will do it are part of the everyday leadership practices of these managers. There was a particular emphasis by 11 of the managers on management of operational planning (these managers rely on planning processes such as critical paths, event sheets for the event delivery, and team briefings); though they also recognized the importance of managing the human resource and of assigning team members roles that ensured successful event delivery but also provided job variety in order to aid development. As Manager A said:

Obviously, each event is different so we try to rotate tasks so that not everyone is doing the same thing at every event so no one gets bored and everybody gets a variety and gets to use different skills.

Emotional Resilience (Ranked #5) and Interpersonal Sensitivity (Ranked #6). The participants highlighted the need to recognize other people’s feelings and emotions and to react to them accordingly in order to get the best outcome for the situation; they need empathy to be effective leaders. There was extensive reference to the intensity of event delivery and the pressure experienced from both timing and a managerial perspective. The need to remain calm under pressure, consider all viewpoints, and balance needs of stakeholders with intended event outcomes was highlighted, particularly as the event manager often becomes the focus of anger or frustration of others.

So this is the awful balance. You’re the genius—you have to be the easy going, relaxed personality

being nice to everyone but at the same time a level of firmness that you don't lose sight of objectives. (Manager C)

Additionally, the findings show that seven of the event managers feel they have one opportunity to get their event delivery right; that they must be consistent in their performance and focused on that goal, despite the difficulties of the pressurized situations event managers often face. Without this key skill, these managers did not feel they would be able lead their events effectively.

These skills relate closely to the LDQ dimension of emotional resilience and interpersonal sensitivity, which many of the managers discussed simultaneously. These EQ dimensions can all be linked to the notion of empathy that featured strongly in the data—participants felt that in order to be successful at the role, they needed to ensure they were empathetic to others. Here, the findings relate directly to Goleman's (1998) theory of emotional intelligence, in which he suggested that the capacity to empathize with other people, to be able to understand the emotional make up of others, and to treat people according to the way they will react is a key contributing factor to successful leadership.

Midranking Leadership Practices

The next set of leadership practices were well represented within the thematic exploration of the data, but were ranked as less important by the event managers. Therefore, it can be suggested that, although these dimensions are an important part of the leadership process, they are not considered as essential as the first six dimensions from the LDQ.

Developing (Ranked #7). Findings show that although the event managers did not spend a lot of time empowering direct reports, they did prioritize the need to support them in the work place. The event managers felt that it was important to ensure staff were given roles onsite that complemented their skill base.

Well I base [the decisions on who does what] on the skills that are apparent to me, so if they are a really good communicator, if they have a really good relationship with the client then that is what

they are going to do. If they are more technically minded then they do that. (Manager K)

Encouragement and training for other staff members were seen as part of their role as leader of the event team. The managers focused on recognizing achievements, and trying to offer challenges to team members through changes of roles. The managers also emphasized that they saw part of their role as the facilitation of training and progression in the team—they allow team members to become accountable for particular elements of the event delivery and they gave junior team members opportunities to train on the job. However, this was recognized as a difficult leadership skill—finding the time and opportunities to develop staff and encourage others to perform beyond expectations was viewed as important, but not always possible—largely due to lack of resources and the pressures of the pulsating organization that expands in the run up to the event and contracts after its completion.

Influence (Ranked #8). The event managers described situations in which they needed to focus on motivating people to work with together and to manage expectations of stakeholders; in this way business event managers try to use their influence. As has already been shown, event managers are often looking for a solution to satisfy all stakeholders; however, findings show that business event managers find it is important to be firm but fair—while they strive to understand others positions, they recognize the need to be firm in many circumstances. Examples included exhibitors and sponsors trying to push for better positions or more free tickets and the event managers needing to diffuse situations but not concede on issues that are deemed to be outside of the expected norms.

Although this need to influence others and to consider other viewpoints emerged strongly as a theme from the data, the managers ranked this less highly than might perhaps be expected. However, what did emerge from the interviews were two related themes that are not part of Dulewicz and Higgs LDQ dimensions—that of leading a network of teams and the importance of team work. Although these themes are not explicit within the LDQ dimensions, they are discussed in the work of Posner and Kouzes (1998), who developed the five practices of

exemplary leadership: modeling the way, inspiring others, challenging the process, enabling others, and encouraging the heart.

Leadership of Networks of Teams. The emerging data showed that events managers lead teams in the “traditional” understanding of leadership—they transform behavior and motivate teams. However, they also lead a wide range of people from a variety of places during the event (suppliers/contractors/stakeholders/clients/customers) at the event itself.

Leadership isn’t just about the people working for you, it’s about your CEO and the people at the event—it’s about your sponsors and the speakers and the delegates as well. When someone comes and asks you a question, no one ever wants to hear “oh I don’t know.” You really do need to know everything inside out. And that to me is leadership. (Manager J)

Motivation of Others/Team Work. A recurring theme emerging from the data was the need to motivate others to help deliver the event. This included motivating direct reports and other colleagues to work with dedication and enthusiasm during the onsite delivery of events. This motivation is important as event work equates to long hours and the need for a consistently high standard of service. Motivation was provided via rewards—regular breaks, food and beverages, and the opportunity to perform different roles within the delivery of the event. Therefore, motivation of others can be seen as a key leadership function for these managers.

Vision and Imagination (Ranked #9). Returning to the LDQ rankings, the findings show that business event managers have a clear vision of the future of their event—they visualize the end of the project and seek innovative ways to deliver events and create new experiences. Participants in the study highlighted the need to communicate the events organizations’ vision to various stakeholders—this goes beyond the notion of communicating the event concept, vision, and mission statement; business event managers also recognize the need to ensure the event concept and delivery is in line with the organizations’ culture and vision.

Self-Awareness (Ranked #10). The managers appeared confident in their ability to list strengths and weaknesses and were comfortable discussing their particular personality traits. The ability to stay calm under pressure and not react to others emotional responses was particularly evident—the event managers referred frequently to conflict situations with dissatisfied clients, guests, sponsors, and so on.

Well you have to stay absolutely calm and collected at all points even in the most stressful moments of the day. But no matter how stressed you are, or how much you disagree with that person you do have to stop and look at it from their point of view to try and get some understanding of why they might be behaving like that. (Manager J)

Low-Ranking Leadership Practices

The managers ranked the following leadership practices as less important than those previously discussed: intuitiveness (ranked #11); motivation (of oneself) (ranked #12); conscientiousness (ranked #13); achieving (ranked #14); and empowering (ranked #15). These practices were also less frequently mentioned during the interview process. This is not to say that the managers did not feel these practices are part of the role—they very much thought they were—rather, it is that the other practices already discussed were more vital to successful leadership. LDQ dimensions that were less prevalent are briefly described next.

Although each of these five Dulewicz and Higgs LDQ dimensions were less evident in the data (see Table 2), the dimension around empowering others was particularly difficult to pinpoint in the discussions. This dimension relates directly to delegating responsibilities and encouraging staff to solve problems and develop skills. Although the participants did discuss the need to delegate work to others, they also agreed that they often preferred to do the work themselves in order to ensure that it was completed correctly. This notion of the work not being completed correctly by others suggests that the participants felt that they were the only ones capable of doing even the smallest of jobs properly—they admitted to needing to feel in control, which they suggested was down to the possible ramifications of things being done badly or incorrectly in an

event situation in which there is little time to reflect or to fix any problems that occur. This can be linked directly to the discussions of the nature of events put forward by Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris, and McDonnell (2011), Bladen et al. (2012), and Van der Wagen (2007)—as events are temporary, unique occurrences and there is little opportunity to redress mistakes, it follows that event managers have only one opportunity to get it right, and they are unwilling to compromise on even the smallest detail in order to ensure that the delivery is exceptional. Discussions around this topic lead to one of the key themes emerging from the study.

Control

The findings suggest that business event managers need to be in control of all aspects of the event. They need to have planned, arranged, or overseen all aspects of the event themselves. The issue of ownership recurs throughout the data—the event managers feel they are solely responsible for the event delivery and as such, they feel it is important to have control of all areas. It appears that, as events are temporary and unique and there is only one opportunity to get it right, event managers have issues with relinquishing control and are not able to delegate. Instead, they micromanage the event delivery; this then suggests that controlling the event is part of these business event managers overall leadership framework.

This need to be in control, and to carry out or at least oversee almost all aspects of the event delivery, seems to be in conflict with the conceptual discussions by leading events academics that focus on the delivery of the event as a team activity. Focus is given by Bowdin et al. (2011), Goldblatt (2008), and Van der Wagen (2007) on the need to work as part of a team in order to deliver a successful product and this study shows that the managers recognize the importance of teamwork in their events. However, as the findings in this study also suggest, event managers often do not trust others to carry out tasks on their behalf, we can see the tension in event management leadership—the need for control due to the unique nature of the event product versus the need to work in teams in order to deliver successful events. This then is the challenge for the

HRD of event managers—how successful can event managers be as leaders, if they are unwilling to relinquish control of elements of the event delivery?

This study concludes that managers utilize a mixture of managerial competencies, their intellectual facilities, and emotional intelligence to lead events; therefore, the point of view in this study is consistent with Dulewicz and Higgs' (2005) descriptions of leadership and highlights the need for HRD to focus on these skills. Leadership clearly matters in event management—examples of the business event manager's daily activities not only demonstrates that leadership is a key aspect of running business events, but that it infiltrates most aspects of the role.

Limitations

The key limitation of this study was the gender imbalance in the participants, with only three males participating. This, along with the relatively small number of participants, limits the ability to relate these findings to the wider events management industry. A further study, with a wider selection process and more participants, would strengthen the contribution this study makes.

In addition, the data gathered in this study were based solely on the competency school theory, leading arguably to a narrow focus that neglects some of the key criticisms of this leadership movement. In addition, the focus on the LDQ dimensions excluded the use of key leadership inventories such as the LPI developed by Posner and Kouzes (1998), which proved to be relevant to the emerging data. In addition, the study neglects the paradigm shift in leadership, in which the focus is now often on areas such as leadership behavior, servant leadership (Northouse, 2013), and authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2009). However, in the last 20 years charismatic and transformational leadership have become the most researched theories (Avolio et al., 2009). A study that provides a fuller picture of what leadership looks like in events management would help to answer the questions around the relevance of the competency school to this industry. In a similar way, the data collected relied on self-reporting by the participants; further research exploring the wider event team's perceptions of leadership

practices would allow the researcher to gain a fuller picture of leadership in the events industry.

No prior research was found that explored leadership and event management using empirical data. As such, it was necessary to employ an exploratory approach to the research. This research used the descriptors of the LDQ dimensions as presented in the work of Dulewicz and Higgs (2003a, 2003b, 2005) and not the full LDQ instrument. This then meant that the researcher was reliant on her interpretation of these dimensions. Despite these limitations, this study has provided a clear picture of the most used leadership practices undertaken by business event managers.

Conclusions and Implications of the Study

A review of the event management literature showed little primary research into human resource development, leadership, and event management, but uncovered observational and anecdotal writings on the need for HRD and leadership within the role. Although leading academics stated that the development of event leaders is a key to successful for events, there was no research that explored how leadership manifested itself within the role.

Indeed, the currently published work on leadership in the event management literature is reliant on assumptions made by those first pieces of descriptive writing when the discipline first emerged. Not only do these texts assume that leadership matters without explanation as to why it does, but also these assumptions may no longer hold given the fast-paced nature of the industry and the way that it has evolved over recent years. These assumptions have the potential to be very outdated and they are also heavily descriptive—they fall short of any form of exploration of how leadership manifests itself in the role.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore leadership practices within the unique context of event management. This was explored through the focus on the application of leadership competencies in an event management context and allowed for the production of a list of key leadership practices that should be highlighted in the development of successful event managers.

The theoretical contribution made by this study is that HRD should focus on the six key leadership

practices of engaging communication, strategic perspectives, critical analysis and judgement, resource management, emotional resilience, and interpersonal sensitivity in order to successfully deliver their events and lead their event teams. Additionally, this study indicates that event managers believe that it is not the technical skills (such as financial planning, event design) that ensure successful event delivery but rather that it is the soft skills and the human resource that drive successful events. The study concludes then that, in terms of HRD, business event managers need to combine the acquisition of the technical skills needed to undertake the role and to incorporate these 6 key leadership practices into their every day in order to be successful events leaders.

The study has also highlighted the tension at the heart of leadership within events—event projects are intangible and temporary in nature, with only one opportunity to get it right and this results in attempts by event managers to control all aspects of the event delivery. However, in order to be successful leaders, they also need to work in teams, motivate and empower others, and develop team members. How event managers resolve this tension, and whether this makes them successful leaders, should be a focus for future events-related HRD research.

This study has shown that those working within the industry have already acknowledged that the “person” or personality is central to the role of event management. This notion has yet to be fully explored by academic research; future research should therefore attempt to focus on the management and development of the human resource who are seen as key by the industry, and yet largely ignored by those of us studying the industry.

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