Theoretizing A New Sustainable Business Event: Extension of Mair and Jago Model

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Abstract

The growth of the event sector is underpinned by the demand of organizing a business event. Thus, it leads to an increase in economic and social impact. However, the problems from the growth of this sector potentially results from the use of several event materials, transportation and infrastructure development. Organizing a green event is seen as one of the strategies to reduce the environmental impact. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the issues involved throughout the process of greening an event by applying Mair and Jago Model. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with event managers from six Malaysia business event companies that encourage green practices during their event. Findings suggest that impact, initiative, support and performance motivates event organizers in organizing a green event. It has also been found that knowledge, resources and behaviour are the barriers faced by event organizers throughout the process of organizing a green event. Based on the findings it appears that two important factors have emerged from the data collection and analysis that showed a deviation from the Mair and Jago Model, namely "impact" for the motivation element and "support" for the barrier element. The main limitation of this study was the scope of the study; as it only focuses on business events. However, as the main purpose of this study is to explore the issues of organizing a green event, it has been found that there are other issues need to be explored in other contexts and geographical area. Apart from this, as this is a case study, it can only replicate according to the circumstances of this case study. However, this study can be generalized in terms of the theory that has emerged from it. It is suggested that further research should explore more issues in other contexts and geographical areas.

*Keywords***:** Business Events; Green; Qualitative Research; Environmental Impact and Barriers;

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1.   Introduction

The business event sector is one that has contributed immensely to the economy and is responsible for increasing the revenue in the tourism industry. Generally, from the Australian perspective, this sector contributes an impact to the Australian economy as some 28.4 million delegates had attended business events in Australia in 2003, which represents $17.4 billion of the total amount spent by business event delegates (Mair & Jago, 2010). In Malaysia, business events potentially yield more than a hundred times the return per Ringgit from government investments in events that have been organized in Malaysia (PEMANDU, 2010; p. 337). However, from a broader perspective, there are several problems arising from the growth of this industry, for instance the use of event materials such as paper, vertical posters or *buntings* and banners that may produce negative environmental impact if these materials are not properly managed. Mohindra (2008) has highlighted this and according to them, there are several environmental issues engendered in organizing a business event. Organizing a business event involves innumerable materials and facilities utilized at the location, for example, the convention centre (Whitfield & Dioko, 2011). Therefore, organizing a green event is seen as one of the strategies in reducing the environmental impact. For this reason, the aim of this paper is to explore issues in organizing a green event by applying Drivers and Barriers Model by Mair and Jago (2010). This paper begins with several discussions on greening issues by applying to Drivers and Barriers Model. Secondly, this paper discusses the method used in this study and the findings. Lastly, this paper includes the conclusion, which discusses the overall flow throughout the study.

2.   Greening an Event

There is espouse for discussion on the issue of greening an event as it seems that there are several potential environmental impacts that result from the use of event materials. For instance, organizing an event involves the use of energy, water and waste (Jones, 2010; Sherwood, 2007). The demand for organizing an event and the waste produced during an event shows that there is a need to practise sustainable green practices.

The meaning of 'sustainable' comes from the word 'sustain' or maintain, and it is based on the term 'sustainability', which relates to greening an environment (Baker, 2006). The term 'greening' was used by several researchers when discussing the green practices in industries such as tourism, manufacturing as well as oil and gas (Bansal & Roth, 2000). Greening an event is one of the strategies in achieving the aim of environmental sustainability. One reason is because, the term 'green' is used in line with the term 'event' by several researchers, namely Laing and Frost, (2010) as well as Mair and Jago, (2010). This is also observed in (Mair & Jago, 2010, pg. 78 paragraph 2):

> *In the context of the business event sector, this is not currently the case; however, one important dimension of sustainability development that has been espoused in business event sectors is environmental sustainability. A number of stakeholders have taken steps to reduce their environmental footprint.*

The paragraph above mentioned that one of the dimensions of sustainability development is environmental sustainability and these authors relate this dimension with the environmental footprint. An environmental footprint is seen as a strategy for greening the environment. For this reason, the term 'greening' is said to highlight the green practices implemented during business activities. This is supported by Mair and Jago (2010) who mentioned that greening an event is an 'investment in environmentally friendly facilities and practices'. The process of an event describes the work before the event actually begins and ends with the shutdown of an event (O'Toole et al., 2005). Thus, this

emphasises that greening an event involves the entire process of an event. For this reason, greening an event can also be described as event activities that apply green practices throughout the process of an event. The process of greening involves several issues that demand discussions among researchers in the field.

One of the studies that discusses green practices in the event industry is by Mair & Jago (2010). These researchers discussed this issue by using the Drivers and Barriers model. These researchers stated that the lack of finance and support from stakeholders were seen as barriers that need to be overcome. For example, one interviewee said, "people are worried about the costs and about the fact that if they do it once [e.g. run a green conference] they will continue", p. 88. The issue of lack of finance was also highlighted by Mair and Laing (2012), as "I can't make a business case for the really big things that would make a difference", p. 694. Both transcriptions describe the term "cost" and "big things", emphasising on the issue of financial capability. This is also illustrated by the Drivers and Barriers Model by Mair and Jago (2010) as one of the barriers. This is stated as "environmental initiatives are seen to have an additional cost penalty, then this will become a greater challenge than it was 12 months ago, given the current economic situation", p. 88.

The Drivers and Barriers Model was applied by Mair and Laing (2012) in understanding the barriers of greening music festivals. Their study found that lack of time and control over venues or split incentives were barriers in the process of greening an event. This is stated in Mair and Laing (2012) as, "we do the best we can in the time frame we have available", p. 694. This shows that lack of time is a barrier in their study and "we have 62 different venues, with 62 different attitudes towards sustainability!" This transcript highlights that the factors of time and venue control are two barriers in the process of greening. Several researchers debate the discussion on barriers in organizing a green event or green practices during an event. Paterson and Ward (2011) said that event organizers are not aware of the legislation related to the environment and one of the reasons is that they are resistant to learn about sustainability legislation. Laing and Frost (2010) found that lack of environmental knowledge becomes an obstacle in implementing sustainable practices in an event. The problem of gaining knowledge on the environmental is not a problem only in the event industry but this problem also appears in other industries. For instance, the lack of knowledge on environmental impact became the obstacle in gaining environmental commitment in the manufacturing industry (Chan & Yam, 1995). This is supported by Roy and Therin (2008) who found that the absence of environmental knowledge became an obstacle for environmental practice in a firm. Hence, environmental knowledge is important especially for front line staff who communicate directly with customers (Paterson & Ward, 2011). It should be a transfer of knowledge among employees on the sustainable practice in an industry. This indicates that there should be dissemination of environmental knowledge among employees in the company. However, Park and Boo (2010) stated that environmental knowledge is not the main reason for event organizers to apply sustainability efforts during a business event. It appears from the study Boo & Park (2012) that formal education experience leads to the intention among event organizers to organize a sustainable event.

3.   Methodology

The inductive method is chosen as it provides a better view on the phenomenon. Yin (2009) has illustrated this by saying that the inductive method provides an in-depth discussion on issues. Rittichainuwat and Mair (2012) suggested this method for future research related to their study because according to them the qualitative method will provide better insight on an issue. For this reason, the inductive or qualitative method was chosen for this study. This is an optimum number because, as mentioned by (Creswell, 2012), 4 to 5 interviewees are enough for data to achieve its saturation point. This study only achieved its saturation point after analysing all the 6 interviewees as all the information

obtained from the interviewees was triangulated. Triangulation is also one of the strategies used to ensure that the data is valid. Yin (2009) has discussed this and found that the triangulation method confirms the validity of the data. Semi-structured interviews were used as it gives a chance for an interviewer to obtain in-depth information about an issue as the researcher is not knowledgeable enough about a phenomenon to ask relevant questions and it is usually used at an early stage of a study (Merriam, 2009). This study applied the one-to-one interview style, which is a data collection process that enables the researcher to ask questions and record the answers from one participant at a time. This type of interview is suitable for participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably (Creswell, 2012, p. 218). The semi-structured interview outline was included in the interview protocol. An interview protocol implies a set of procedures and queries that apply during an interview (Yin, 2009). The interview protocol includes a range of questions to gauge the interviewee's opinions on the process of organizing a sustainable event. Merriam (2009) describes the list of questions to be asked during an interview as an interview guideline.

> "The interview guideline will probably contain several specific questions that you want to ask everyone, some more open-ended questions that could be followed up with some probing and perhaps a list of some areas, topics and issues that you want to know more about but do not have enough information at the outset of your study to form specific questions", p. 103.

Initially, interviewees have open-question about the idea of organizing a green event among the employees. The open-question is designed to enable interviewees to give their own views and opinions before any specific question is given to them (Mair & Jago, 2010). Further to that, interviewees have asked questions that are pertinent to their experience in organizing a sustainable event at their firm, with the intention of gauging any issues during the process of organizing a green event. The semi-structured questions are guided by literature. Semi-structured questions are between structured and less structured interview questions and all questions are flexible in order to gauge the individual's experience. It involves structured questions that are prepared before the interview and less structured questions, which are actually open-questions that provide fresh insights and new information (Merriam, 2009). Apart from semi-structured interview, data collection was also based on observations carried out by using field-notes, which would ensure the reliability of the data. During the data analysis, we analysed the data by categorizing the code based on taped interviews and field-notes. We triangulated the data that was produced during the interview with all the information produced from event managers, company directors and associations.

3.   Data Analysis and Results

Our goal was to explore the experience of event organizers in organizing a green event. It was important to gauge their views on the reasons for organizing a green event in order to get an idea on the aim of conducting green practices during their event. It was found that impact was the main reason for the green practices. This is seen in A1 line 9, that states:

> "Nowadays we can see the earth is really sick, I mean in term of pollution and so on".

"Pollution" and "the environment" were two codes found from interviewees who mentioned the environmental impact as the sub-theme. We also found that "increase quality of life" as a code that defined the social impact as a sub-theme. Therefore, we concluded that environmental and social impacts are two sub-themes that motivate green practices. Apart from the environmental and social impact sub-themes, we found that initiative, support and performance are also sub-themes found during the data analysis. We concluded that three important codes for "initiative" were, namely "company effort",

"individual" and "client's role" and the codes were significant in motivating the organization to promote a green event. This is seen from A2 line 161, A3 line 145 and A4 line 53. In order to reconfirm that the client's role played a part in the process of organizing a green event, we interviewed the association that was involved in the A4 event. This is quoted in line 17 as:

> " We advice the event organizers to organize an event that applies green practices during the event as we also applied green practices before during our previous event".

The sub-theme support is based on support from clients and top management, which is referred in A1 line 206 and A2 line 177. Line 32 at A5 justifies that there is support from top management regarding green practices during an event. This shows the company's initiative in practicing green as illustrated below:

 "I advise the staff to reduce the use of paper during business activities and not only during an event".

The observation done during actual fieldwork revealed that the use of paper during events organized by A5 company was at a minimum. A1 also mentioned that the waste produced during an event was sent to the recycling company. For this reason, we interviewed the recycling company to reconfirm the findings. This is mentioned in A6 line 45:
 " We collected all banners and transformed them into conference bags."

We also found that the event activities were supported by the use of technology. This is written in the field-note during the A5 event in line 32:

"...the use of computer systems also seemed to assist the event organizers in organizing this event".

The theme performance was based on the company's image while sub-theme and branding as codes in A2 line 207. The discussion revealed that "motivation" was the main theme with "impact", "initiative", "support" and "performance" as sub-themes and several codes were also revealed such as "pollution", "environment", "social", "company's effort", "individual", "client's role" and "branding".

During the data analysis, the obstacle to the main theme was found to be "knowledge". We also found that "lack of knowledge" was a minor theme, "green information" as the sub-theme and "do not understand" as the code. This is seen in A1 line 211 and A8 line 226, however, in A1 line 243, we found that "awareness" as the sub-theme and "not aware" as the code. We also found that "information dissemination" was a sub-theme and "difficult to get message" as the code as seen in A9 line 163. "Support" is seen as an "obstacle" in organizing a green event, as it was also found that "lack of government enforcement" as a sub-theme and "no government enforcement" as code at A10 line 83. "Support" as the minor theme is seen in A1 line 310 as "government support" being the sub-theme with "lack of government support" as the code. "Behaviour" in A1 line 262 was found to be the minor theme for motivation, whereby "attitude" was the sub-theme and "insists on using paper" as code. Based on the discussion we found that the main themes were "obstacle", "knowledge", "support" and "behaviour", while there were four minor themes for "obstacles". Based on these minor themes, we found that "green information", "awareness", "attitude" and "information dissemination" were the sub-themes. We also found that "do not understand", "difficult to get message" and "no government enforcement" as codes.

5.   Conclusion

There are similarities and differences in the findings of Mair and Jago (2010). We found that the similarities of both the studies were the "CSR policy" and "customer CSR policies", which were the two important themes in their study, while in this study "support" and "initiative" were the two important themes. If we refer to these themes, namely the "CSR policy", customer CSR policies, support and initiative, it provides a similar understanding of the main motivation that drives the implementation of green practices. Therefore, we concluded that the new variable found in our study, which is "impact", could contribute to the emergence of variables from the Drivers and Barriers Model as most of the variables found in this study were similar to the Drivers and Barriers Model. We also found that the impediments mentioned in the Drivers and Barriers Model were "lack of time", "resources, knowledge, awareness, skills and operations" time-frame. We found that some of the variables for barriers found in this study were "knowledge", behaviour and support, which were the three important variables for barriers. Therefore, we found that the new barrier variable that emerged from this study was "support". However, if we refer to the Drivers and Barriers Model, "support" is seen as the driver or motivation for greening an event. Based on the discussion, we concluded that the new variable that emerged for "motivation" was "impact" and for impediments, it was "support".

6.   Limitation

The limitation of this study was that the scope of the study only focused on business events. However, the main purpose of this study was to explore the experience of organizing a green event. It was found that there are other issues that need to be explored in other contexts and geographical areas. In addition, as this is a case study, it can only be replicated under similar circumstances of this case study. However, this study can be generalized in terms of the theory that emerges from this study.

7.   Future Research

It would be interesting to replicate this study in other geographical areas and to focus on other contexts and issues that can be explored.

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