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Event volunteering as an educational resource in business tourism

Abstract

The growth of the business tourism industry globally has catalysed the need for responsive academic programmes to cultivate skilled graduates for the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector. The vocational nature of the industry requires academic programmes to provide students with the opportunity to fortify the hard and soft skills required to manage business tourism events by means of industry exposure initiatives. The purpose of this paper is to explore students' perspectives on volunteering at business events to assist educators effectively in utilising volunteer participation as a means to meet students' educational needs in partnership with industry. This qualitative study generated data from 15 interviews with event management student volunteers at the 17th World Conference for Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) in Cape Town, South Africa. Following Creswell's steps for qualitative data analysis, thematically categorised results reveal that students' motivation to volunteer is closely linked to self-improvement goals, and suggest that students have a strong desire to learn from the event organiser (EO) as opposed to just being a helping hand. The research concludes that purposeful collaboration between educators and industry practitioners is required to utilise event volunteering opportunities effectively as a way of enhancing business tourism education.

Key words: business tourism; event management education; qualitative methodology; volunteering; South Africa

Introduction

Business tourism, widely recognised as tourism generated from the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector, has developed into a significant economic sector worldwide (Kumar & Hussain, 2014). Congruently, there has been considerable growth in academic delivery geared towards meeting the needs of MICE-related industries through event management qualifications. Internationally, higher education institutions (HEIs) have established specialised courses aimed at developing future event management professionals (Getz & Page, 2016), while numerous tourism-related qualifications offer modules specifically linked to event management (Rogers & Davidson, 2016). Specialised business tourism education, such as that resulting in event management qualifications, aims to meet the specific, professional needs of the MICE sector, where graduates are expected to hit the ground running in the world of work.

Due to the vocational nature of the MICE sector, industry exposure initiatives are crucial in bridging the gap between theory and practice for students pursuing careers in business tourism organisations. Lee, Lee and Kim (2009) argue that event management education programmes repeatedly neglect to take into account industry needs, whilst Silvers (2010) maintains that event management education should provide students with both the hard and the soft skills required to successfully run business tourism operations. It is therefore imperative that students engage with the real world of business tourism through as many industry exposure opportunities as possible, including volunteering. Adopting an essentially student-centred approach to business tourism education, this article seeks to explore event

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management students' perspectives of the value of event volunteering as a means to reinforce their knowledge and skills development.

The paper thus seeks to contribute to literature on volunteering at business tourism-related events in the MICE sector. In addition, it aims to expand the dialogue on the role event volunteering can play as an educational measure to strengthen students' grasp of theoretical concepts by means of industry exposure. A review of the extant research reveals that event-volunteering studies have been dominated by mega-events and sport events, covering themes associated with event volunteer and stakeholder expectations, motivations and profiles (Lockstone & Baum, 2009; Khoo & Engelhorn, 2011; Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Smith, Baum & Storer, 2015; Tomazos & Luke, 2015; Koutrou & Pappous, 2016; Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Shipway & Smith, 2016). Similarly, while growing interest in event management education is evidenced by the increase in research geared towards this sector (Ryan, 2016), there is a lack of research relating to volunteering at business events and the role it can play in event management education. Laing (2018) maintains that there is a need for research specific to events that extends the theoretic fundamentals of management to event tourism in particular. This paper begins with a review of literature pertaining to business tourism, event management education and event volunteering. Then the qualitative methodology used in the research is described, after which an account of the results is given and discussed. The paper concludes with recommendations stemming from the key findings of the research, in respect of harnessing event volunteering as a supportive means of strengthening business tourism education.

Literature review

Business tourism and event management education

Although 'business tourism' is widely used to describe the sector in tourism that encompasses meetings, conferences, incentive travel and trade exhibitions, the terminology is not clearly defined and the terms 'MICE industry' and 'business events' are often used interchangeably (Rogers, 2013; Ismail, Yusoff & Rahman, 2014). MICE events are typically planned in advance and generate business tourism from large groups of delegates who are brought together for the main purpose of business engagements (Zulu, 2016). Business tourism and leisure tourism are entwined due to the fact that they rely on similar support services and infrastructure (Rogers, 2013). However, for the reason that MICE delegates typically spend more money than leisure travelers (Stewart, Warburton & Smith, 2017), business tourism has become a major role player in the tourism industry for both private and public sectors in host destinations. In South Africa, for example, business tourism is thriving (Marais, Du Plessis & Saayman, 2017) and tourism generated from MICE events is a significant driving force in the tourism industry's 9.5% contribution to the gross domestic product of the country (Hanekom, 2015). As the knowledge hub for the international association meetings industry, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) represents a global community of more than 850 members in 80 countries. According to ICCA, Cape Town ranks as the leading meetings destination in Africa and is in the top 40 destinations for business tourism in the world (ICCA, 2017; Business Events Africa, 2018). Thus HEIs offering business tourism-related programmes in Cape Town are ideally positioned to diversify industry exposure opportunities for students, promoting their practical skills development through initiatives such as volunteering.

There is an increased demand for skilful event management practitioners because of growth in the business tourism sector. McCabe (2008) notes that the pursuit of careers within the business tourism sector has become increasingly popular due to the apparent job-related growth potential of the industry. In

South Africa, for instance, the tourism industry is spearheading the creation of jobs through prospective careers within the event management sector (George, 2014). According to Junek, Lockstone and Osti (2007), students believe that a qualification in event management will give them the knowledge and skills to find a suitable occupation in this dynamic field. This underlines the need for the continuous development of HEI programmes relevant to business tourism (Nelson & Silvers, 2009).

Silvers (2010) argues that event management education should deliver to students both the technical competencies and soft skills that are needed to run business event operations. It is therefore imperative that students engage with the real world of events through opportunities such as volunteering at events. Laker and Powell (2011) are of the view that it is costly and time-consuming when new employees do not have the required soft skills to do their jobs, as effort and time are required to bring them up to standard. Schwagerman (2016) maintains that the skills needed to be successful in the business tourism sector are typical of the service industry, and should include technical proficiencies as well as interpersonal skills. Emphasis must therefore be placed on university-industry partnerships to enable the skills required by the industry to be better matched with the skills generated in the education system (Beddie, Ceaser, Hargreaves & Ong, 2014). As Junek (2014) notes, the role of universities has evolved in recent times, to the extent that students are not only consumers of educational products but also active co-producers of their own education. Event volunteering can provide a useful platform for a collaborative approach to business tourism education.

Event volunteering

In spite of the fact that there are several definitions of volunteering in existence, it is a slippery concept because there are many and various forms of it (Tuan, 2005). Wilson (2000) notes that volunteering essentially occurs when individuals give their time freely to benefit a cause, group or person. However, volunteers often sign up for events to gain something in return. In the case of event volunteering, this may be to gain industry exposure, free access to an event, the opportunity to learn from experts, or networking with stakeholders. Event volunteers essentially sacrifice their time to work at events with no guarantee that they will receive any of these benefits. The choice to volunteer is multifaceted and influenced by a variety of circumstances and events (Tomazos & Luke, 2015).

Whatever the reason for volunteering, the reality is that although event volunteers work in a stimulating setting, they rarely have the chance to enjoy the event due to their operational duties behind the scenes (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). It is therefore important that the event organiser (EO) considers ways to make volunteering attractive by understanding the needs of volunteers. Volunteers play an integral role in the operational components of events and they contribute significantly to the success of many events (Holmes & Smith, 2009), underlining the importance of gaining volunteer perspectives. Han (2007) notes that it is costly to train and retain volunteers, hence it is essential to understand their motives. Furthermore, by understanding the motivations, abilities and experiences of volunteers, EOs may improve the level of volunteers' emotional engagement, leading to better teamwork and an increased desire to volunteer again (Fallon, 2015).

Ryan and Deci (2002) suggest that intrinsic motivation to volunteer is based on inherent fulfilment, either through personal gain that makes volunteering worthwhile, or through the sheer enjoyment of volunteering. However, it appears that volunteers are increasingly seeking personal growth and self-satisfaction as they shift to more non-committal and self-orientated types of volunteering (Macduff, 2011). According to Hustinx, Handy and Cnaan (2010), the new generation of volunteers are non-committal by nature and esteem their individualistic orientations. As part of this generational cohort,

current event management students may display similar perspectives. This self-centred approach to volunteering (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003) may require that educators and industry practitioners regard student volunteers as individuals on a journey in which self-actualisation is the goal and where meeting their own needs is a priority in their decision to volunteer. Extrinsic motives outside of the volunteers' immediate control may motivate individuals to volunteer while suggesting some degree of self-interest (Antoni, 2009), such as the need for recognition from others, the enticement of rewards, or other self-beneficial outcomes. Event volunteers seem to be driven more by self-interest than altruism, with a view of "what is in it for me?" where the need for recognition from others or the enticement of rewards, for example, may play a role. Furthermore, personal skills and external expectations may strategically link volunteers to an event (Khoo & Engelhorn, 2011), as is the case with event management students volunteering at a business event. Educators are often faced with a lack of knowledge about volunteering amongst students doing business tourism-related courses, and skills development has been put forward as both a key motivation and major benefit for event volunteering (Junek, 2014).

For the reason that they are the vital link between the event and the community, volunteers generate some form of social capital through the formation of social networks and teamwork towards a common goal (Nichols & Ralston, 2012). International MICE events benefit from working with volunteers who are from the host city, as it adds to the delegate experience by creating a medium for them to engage with locals, adding to the authenticity of the tourism experience.

Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach. According to Travers (2001) there are no advantages to large data sets in qualitative research as they will incorrectly encourage a positivist approach to analysis. The experiences and viewpoints of participants are more significant to qualitative research than the number of participants (Cresswell, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research does not aim to draw statistical inference or produce a numerically representative sample, but rather seeks to explore deeper insights gleaned from participants. In support of this view, Ryan (2016) claims that what is vital to qualitative research is to obtain a sufficient sample of a population relevantly connected to the core activity being investigated.

In order to gain relevant insight aligned to the objectives of this research, it was important to identify an event management student cohort familiar with volunteering at events. The MICE sector offers a number of volunteering opportunities in Cape Town, South Africa, which is Africa's leading convention destination, ranking in the top 40 destinations for business tourism in the world (ICCA, 2017). The population for the study therefore consisted of Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) event management students who participated as volunteers at the 17th World Conference for Tobacco or Health (WCTOH). Purposive sampling was employed to select participants from the population, and data was generated from interview questions answered by 15 event volunteers. The 17th WCTOH was hosted on African soil for the first time in Cape Town from 5 to 9 March 2018, at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC). This annual MICE event is a global forum attracting international tobacco control experts, civil society, policy makers and medical experts. The EO approached the CPUT students by way of the Cape Town and Western Cape Convention Bureau as all three of these entities are members of the South African Association for the Conferencing Industry (SAACI). SAACI is the reputable and recognised umbrella body that promotes learning, professionalism and growth within the South African MICE sector.

Following Cresswell's six steps for the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative content of data, the data collected according to a structured interview guide was analysed as follows (Cresswell, 2014):

Step 1: The first step involved organising and preparing data for analysis by copying the data exactly from the interview questions and answers.

Step 2: A sense of the meaning of the data was gained by reading through the data numerous times and reflecting on the emerging issues relating to participants' viewpoints on volunteering at events.

Step 3: The data was manually coded into categories in respect of practicality, suitability and relevance to the research objectives. A re-coding process using ATLAS.ti v.5 statistical qualitative data analysis (QDA) software allowed for a comparison with the initial codes to gain an overall perspective on reliability.

Step 4: Themes aligned to subthemes were created to display diverse quotes from the coded categories. Four key themes emerged and are presented as the headings in the findings section of this paper.

Step 5: A narrative passage to express the findings of the analysis was selected and descriptive information about the themes as identified by the participants was considered. The preceding coding process assisted in identifying the main views, presented as quotes in the findings.

Step 6: A theoretical lens was utilised to formulate and facilitate theory-based understanding and interpretation from the results.

Data saturation for this research occurred when no new information was forthcoming from the coding of interviews. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) saturation can be achieved after only six interviews and is reached when further coding is no longer feasible and yields no additional information. Reliability in this research was achieved by means of the data coding and re-coding process (Marais et al., 2017) that sought to ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of the qualitative methodology (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002).

Results

The results are presented with verbatim quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings, while a discussion is incorporated under each theme. Participants are numbered 'Participant 1' (P1) to 'Participant 15' (P15) in order to facilitate the narrative approach and safeguard their anonymity. The word 'event' is used in the context of business tourism and relates to MICE events in particular; it accurately reflects the conversational tone of participants' responses.

Theme 1: Personal motivations for event volunteering

This theme provides participants' opinions on what would motivate them to volunteer at events. Participants frequently mentioned aspects relating to personal growth, in line with the view that self-interest (Antoni, 2009) or personal gain (Ryan & Deci, 2002) are motivating factors for volunteers. Participant 1 explained it in this way: "if I know the event is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity... then it motivates me to volunteer. I want to be able to say 'I was there' when people talk about it". Hustinx et al. (2010) note the non-committal nature of the new generation of volunteers, who essentially prioritise their personal preferences and goals when volunteering. Interestingly, although driven mainly by the goal of self-actualisation, the participants in this study had strong individual views regarding the potential of volunteering for goodwill and social upliftment (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). This is reflected in the following response: "I find it satisfying to say that I changed something in the life

of others, or made things much easier for someone that needed something... It teaches me something new about people, cooperation, compassion and about myself. In helping others, I am reminded that we should support each other in life" (P6). Participant 4 added that "events that have to do with giving back and having an impact" would motivate volunteering, while Participant 8 would volunteer only "if the event is about, or will bring about, change" and contribute to society in a positive way. Industry practitioners should be aware of and understand this new generation of volunteers' desire to be part of events that leave a positive legacy in some way. Participant 15 encapsulated the sentiments of most of the participants in summing up the key reasons to volunteer as to get "satisfaction from helping others, get work experience and make new friends". While this sentiment corroborates the argument that volunteers are looking for individual growth and self-satisfaction (Macduff, 2011), what is remarkable is that the personal goals are not self-centred as such, but rather evoke a sense of personal growth aligned with self-fulfilment by giving back to society.

Participant 8, however, added that "some kind of incentive linked to the event" would be an additional motivation for volunteering. EOs have to be mindful that volunteers may view access to the event experience as an exciting incentive to volunteer, but may never get the opportunity to actually experience the event due to overwhelming responsibilities (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). The incentives to motivate volunteering suggested by participants include monetary stipends (P2, P7, P10, P11) and the opportunity for networking through industry exposure (P2, P3, P6, P9, P10, P12) such as "engagement opportunities with business event associates" (P14). Finally, the study found that there is a connection between the personal skills of volunteers and a particular kind of event, as proposed by Khoo and Engelhorn (2011). The participants all agreed that the opportunity to improve their personal skills through practical experience in a live event setting would be a key incentive to volunteer. This is a reminder that for event management students it may be important to provide future employers with a track record of their practical experience at events, given the vocational nature of the sector. Volunteering can certainly boost such a track record and therefore entice volunteer participation. As participant 13 explained, "the prospect of gaining practical experience" would be an important reason to volunteer at events, because it would assist with securing a sought-after job and a future in the sector.

Theme 2: Event volunteering constraints

It is instructive to gain insight from participants into factors that might discourage them from event volunteering. Such insight can help to identify aspects that negatively influence the attitude of students, impacting on their willingness and commitment to volunteer. The availability of time was a key concern shared by participants in this study, who pointed out that their busy academic schedules and other obligations at university would most likely impede participation (P6, 8, 9, 12, 15). Students trust that business tourism-related qualifications, such as event management, will provide them with the requisite skills to secure appropriate jobs (Junek et al., 2007), and given the vocational nature of the sector, educators are responsible to create supportive educational environments where industry exposure is encouraged. Educators therefore need to find ways to make arrangements with student volunteers that will assist them with time management and create opportunities for industry exposure so as to strengthen their practical knowledge and skills.

Another hindrance to event volunteering worthy of note is the limited access to reliable public transportation for student volunteers in Cape Town, who often live in locations far from the business tourism hub of the city. Participant 13 stated that "some companies don't pay you for your transport, or provide you with it, and that can be a problem", while "transportation issues" (P4) and the distance between the event and where students live were cited by most participants (P1, P2, P3, P7, P10, P14). This

may be a significant aspect to consider for international stakeholders and EOs of international events, who may not be aware of the fact that the provision of transportation could serve to increase access for volunteers.

It cannot be emphasised enough how crucial it is for volunteers to have sound expectations of the tasks and duties that they have to perform at the event (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). All the participants in this study concurred that a lack of clear communication from the EO in terms of arrangements, expectations and deliverables would severely hamper their desire to volunteer, and EOs should ensure that "the volunteers know what they are expected to do" (P13). It is especially important that EOs "make sure volunteers get enough information about the event" (P10) prior to volunteering, to allow them to feel confident and enthusiastic about participating. Participants want to be assured that they will be well informed about the event and "EOs need to ensure that the volunteers know exactly what to do, how to handle situations and who to call when things get complex" (P1). EOs need to provide volunteers with clear guidelines and procedures (Van de Wagen & White, 2018). Therefore, educators and EOs need to collaborate to ensure the dissemination of useful information to volunteers to address any uncertainty around the volunteering opportunity. Noteworthy from participant responses in terms of communication was not necessarily the 'what' that needed to be communicated, but rather the 'how' it needed to be communicated. Participants across the board consistently mentioned the need for "respectful" (P10, P13) communication between EOs and volunteers at all times (P6, P8, P9, P11, P14). Participants across the board indicated that they would be reluctant to volunteer if there was a lack of respect from EOs, as Participant 2 explained: "As a volunteer I expect respect from the EO and they need to be friendly so that you are not afraid to ask a question if you don't understand anything". When EOs recruit volunteers, the way they communicate should set the tone for open, friendly and respectful communication, as participants in this study were adamant that they be treated with respect, otherwise they would not be interested in volunteering. This view is also expressed by Participant 2, who stated that: "You also expect the same and equal amount of respect from the organiser that staff, who get paid for the job, get". This statement reiterates that volunteers want to feel valued for their contribution to the event. The following theme focuses on the perceived value of volunteering at events.

Theme 3: The value of event volunteering

Participants were probed to share their views on how volunteers can add value to an event, and in turn, how volunteering can add value to volunteers. Because the attitude of students and their university context influence event volunteering, understanding the feelings of participants in this regard can assist with identifying the benefits of volunteering (Junek, 2014). These perceived benefits can be used as leverage by educators and industry practitioners to encourage student commitment in future volunteering initiatives. Most of the responses provided by the participants reveal that they regard event volunteering as mutually beneficial, seeing that "volunteers are there to get the job done and gain experience from it" (P1). Participant 9 contributed to this theme by suggesting that volunteers "can bring a different energy...they are usually young and vibrant...wanting to gain personal experience", whilst providing a "cost-effective" staffing solution for EOs. Similarly, Participant 6 explained: "involving volunteers at an event can help to provide...skills development and employment opportunities", while EOs can save money because they do not need to hire expensive staff.

In line with the spirit of goodwill identified in theme 1, Participant 5 noted that the value of volunteering lies in being a helping hand and being able to contribute to the success of the event by "lifting the weight off the EO's shoulders" in order to allow the EO to focus on "much bigger things" (P5). Furthermore, volunteers can "really have an impact, because they won't be busy with the logistics

and the bigger problems of the event" (P2); instead, volunteers can play an important role in delegate interaction and attendee management on behalf of the EO. As noted by Nichols and Ralston (2012), volunteers serve as an important linkage between the event and the local community, as volunteering "provides opportunities for social inclusion" (P6) and is used as a platform to meet new people and contribute to the delegate event experience (P11, P15). Most of the participants viewed this interface with delegates as beneficial: Participant 14 explained that it allows volunteers "to engage with well-known business people to gain more skills and tips on how to work with different characters". It is important to possess 'people skills' in the business tourism sector (Schwagerman, 2016), and volunteers gain confidence by being on-site and experiencing the real world when meeting and interacting with new people, allowing them to practise and reinforce their soft skillset.

Furthermore, participants were in agreement that networking with EOs and the opportunity to build industry relationships would be major benefits associated with volunteering. Holdsworth and Quinn (2012) state that volunteers use the platform to build industry relationships and expand their social network in an effort to acquire superior jobs in future. Participants 4 and 9 indicated that volunteering could boost their résumés for seeking employment while broadening their understanding of event management jobs. From the analysis of this theme, it is evident that participants value highly the benefits of volunteering associated with industry exposure. As emphasised by Participant 5, "Students get to see and be involved in events at an early stage in the studying period of their lives...not to say that the theory is inadequate, but there is a big difference in just learning work from a book and actually being in the game with real life challenges that may come. Life is not always by the book, some things can but only be taught through experiences".

Theme 4: Knowledge and skills development

In accordance with the findings presented in the preceding themes, Junek (2014) notes that skills development is regarded as a significant benefit and major motivation for event volunteers (Junek, 2014). Theme 4, therefore, seeks to further interrogate participants' perspectives relating to the development of knowledge and skills as a result of volunteering. As a service sector, the MICE industry requires practitioners to possess a comprehensive set of skills, including technical competencies, emotional intelligence, problem-solving proficiencies and information management expertise (Auld, Cuskelly & Harrington, 2009). Participants revealed that the transfer of knowledge and skills from EOs to volunteers is an important aspect in event volunteering. In fact, the findings suggest that volunteers view the EO as a co-educator or mentor. Participant 12 explained that EOs should guide volunteers and "teach them new things that they don't know" about practical event management. Participant 8 insisted that EOs should teach volunteers "all the things you, as an EO, wish someone taught you when you were a student". It was evident from the analysis of responses that participants want EOs to demonstrate their skills, share their knowledge and offer training specifically aimed at enhancing the volunteers' practical event management abilities (P5, P8, P10, P11, P12, P14). For EOs volunteer coordination is but one aspect of the mammoth event project, and student volunteers may have unreasonable expectations of EOs in respect of mentoring and guidance. HEI educators can assist here, harnessing their academic expertise to facilitate knowledge sharing and skills transfer during volunteering. EOs should nevertheless understand that student volunteers are in apprenticeship while volunteering, and seek meaningful industry exposure experiences. For example, participants in this study indicated a strong desire for EOs to be inclusive towards volunteers by exposing them to the "behind the scenes" know-how of the event. Participant 9 suggested that volunteers could learn "by attending meetings" while Participant 11 noted that volunteers can contribute ideas if they are afforded the opportunity

to be included in more aspects of the event. Participant 2 expressed concern that often "students are too scared to ask for help at events because they are afraid they might be bothering the EO". To make volunteering a meaningful experience, EOs need to understand the significant impact they have as role models for student volunteers.

Focusing on the hard skills sought from volunteering, participants concurred and evidently wanted "skills that will help me plan and produce an event" (P13) and to "understand what goes into planning an event" (P2). Volunteering was viewed as an opportunity to improve technical and organisational skills relating to project management (P3, P9). Participant 6 was more specific, stating that volunteers would like to know how the event was conceptualised and planned, how to solicit relevant sponsorships, and how to select the right venue. From a soft skill point of view, Fenyés and Pusztai (2012) state that volunteers are likely to grow in terms of self-confidence and acquire skills in leadership, critical thinking and conflict resolution. Supporting this view, Participant 1 declared that, "People skills are vital as well as communication skills...and knowing how to handle conflict" (P1). In addition to these skills, data saturation occurred when participants also recurrently noted leadership skills, customer service skills and the ability to apply business etiquette in an event setting. The findings in this theme correlate with the recommendation put forward by Beddie *et al.* (2014), namely, that educators and industry practitioners should collaborate to ensure that the skills generated by business tourism education qualifications are matched with industry requirements. It is therefore essential for EOs and educators to work in partnership and find ways to expertly utilise volunteering to develop and strengthen the industry knowledge and skills required by students.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to shed light on the perspectives of students regarding volunteering at business events as a way of enhancing business tourism education. The following section provides an overview of the study's findings, draws conclusions, and recommends implementable strategies resulting from the latter.

From the data collected through interviews, it was evident that event management students value the opportunity to improve their résumés with the practical experience gained from volunteering. It is recommended that EOs and educators collaborate to identify the knowledge and skills required for success in the dynamic MICE sector as technology and international event practices continue to evolve. Consultation between EOs and educators prior to student volunteering should take place to ensure feasible ways in which the requisite knowledge and skills can be linked to the event areas where volunteers will be needed. It is furthermore recommended that educators themselves get involved with event volunteering alongside students, not only to support the EO in the achievement of event objectives but also to experience first-hand how this form of industry exposure can facilitate education for specific student cohorts.

The findings also indicate that student volunteers are motivated by more than personal career-driven goals, and in fact would be inspired to volunteer if the event promised to make a difference and generate positive benefits for society. EOs should be aware of this new generation of volunteers' desire to participate in events that leave a positive legacy in some way. It is recommended that business event stakeholders and EOs strive to host 'green' events with positive legacy and sustainability components as part of the event objectives. These green initiatives should be founded on strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals that seek to have a positive impact on local socio-economic conditions and

the environment. Volunteering programmes in themselves could meet the CSR objectives for business events if, for example, event management knowledge and skills are transferred and developed amongst volunteering students from the host community.

Networking with business event practitioners was also highlighted as a key enticement to volunteer. In the future, EOs and educators should collaborate to enhance networking platforms; for example, EO guest lectures could be hosted before or after the actual event takes place to allow for student engagement with industry. Educators should also actively engage with local convention bureaus and industry associations to create a database of student volunteers for future event participation, and in so doing, facilitate networking between students and the industry for upcoming business event volunteering opportunities.

This study furthermore confirms that students value the interface with delegates as a way to practise and develop their business etiquette and communication skills while volunteering. It is therefore recommended that educators and EOs point out the essentials of business communication etiquette and protocols before student volunteers engage with delegates. It is important to include role playing and general delegate management etiquette in the preliminary groundwork prior to the actual event. This will allow volunteers to feel confident and engage professionally with delegates, adding to the event experience whilst strengthening their soft skills.

The findings also highlight that there are perceived benefits for students in that the practical exposure enhances the theoretical underpinnings covered in class. It is therefore important for EOs to understand and accept their role as co-educators when they sign up students to engage in volunteering, and to find ways to impart practical knowledge to them. This could include holding briefing and debriefing meetings with students, providing them with clear volunteer manuals, assigning supervisors to oversee their volunteer activities and providing training workshops before the event. It is furthermore reiterated that educators should utilise their academic expertise in teaching and learning to support EOs in their mentorship role and act as intermediary between the EO and the student in meaningful knowledge and skills transfer.

From the participants' responses, limitations of time, access to transportation and poor communication were identified as obstacles that hinder volunteer participation. It is therefore recommended that educators set a supportive, realistic volunteering schedule and consider building practical assessments into volunteering in order to effectively manage time and add gravity and student commitment to volunteer participation. Transport plans should be negotiated between EOs and university transport operators to enable equal access for all. EOs should be hosted in the classroom prior to volunteering initiatives and clearly communicate the background of the event, volunteer expectations and protocols, volunteering areas, general arrangements and the benefits of volunteering at the particular event.

It is accepted that this research of student volunteer perspectives is limited due to the nature of the qualitative methodology, and therefore conclusions are typically not generalisable to a larger population. However, the findings can assist educators and industry to better understand the expectations of student volunteers and develop closer relationships, in order to help close the gaps that exist in business tourism education between theory and practice. In closing, further research is recommended to explore how industry and educators can collaborate to create more practical educational platforms for students in business tourism education.

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