

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF VOLUNTEERS IN EVENTS

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Abstract

When organising an event, strategic planning is an important aspect. Without a planned and structured implementation strategy, the event will not run successfully. However, strategic planning must be supported by adequate manpower who carry out their duties to create and implement the event. Human resources (HR) are one of the keys to the successful implementation of events. HR in the events industry can be permanent workers, temporary workers or volunteers who are willing to spend their time supporting the event for no financial reward. The recruitment of volunteers is not always the same as the recruitment of permanent employees due to their motivation and personal characteristics. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the reasons why volunteers work at events and to relate these benefits to seven events that were held in Jakarta, Indonesia. The primary research for this paper was conducted using semi-structured personal interviews with volunteers who worked at the seven events. The findings from the research indicate that the main motivations for volunteering varied according to the type of event. However, some common motivations were discovered that related to all of the events: wanting to make the event successful; gaining networking opportunities; developing work related experience; non-material benefits; and for mega-events national pride and patriotism.

Keywords: *HR planning (Human Resources), role of volunteers, benefits of volunteering*

Introduction

The event industry is divided into two fields, namely special events (leisure events) and MICE events (business events), Hind et al (2019). Today the event industry is one of the growing business sectors in the global economy. Both types of event (leisure and business) require volunteers to be recruited

to enable the event to be staged successfully, Hind et al (2019).

The event industry is felt to be different from other industrial fields because events tend to be temporary activities rather than permanent. This makes a difference in human resource planning as the event workers employed to organize and stage the event will include permanent workers, freelancers such

as part timers and volunteers (Wagen, 2007). Thus, in the event industry, there are different segments in the workforce, one of which is volunteer workers.

Volunteers tend to be unpaid workers who are motivated to work at the event for a variety of reasons which can include patriotism or a commitment to the cause behind the event such as fundraising. Event volunteers could also be classified as being part of a growing sector of tourism which is called volunteer tourism. This is because the volunteer might be attracted to volunteer at an event because it is being staged in a particular tourist destination which the volunteer wishes to visit.

Volunteers at an event can undertake a variety of different roles depending on their expertise, Hind et al (2019). Some events could recruit volunteers to contribute to the overall management of the event if the volunteer has particular experience in event planning and organisation. Alternatively, university, polytechnic and college students are recruited by event organisers to undertake administrative tasks or customer-facing functions, Hind et al (2019). For example in the 2018 Asian Games held in Jakarta and Palembang, Indonesia, 14,000 volunteers were recruited to work on the main sports events, in roles supporting the opening and closing ceremonies and in event production, multi-media technology, catering and other customer facing functions.

All events require volunteers to make them successful, Hind et al (2019). Volunteers play an important role in the implementation of the event, not only because of the skills they can bring to the event organising process but also because they help to reduce the costs incurred in staging the event. Whilst the volunteers will not receive a salary they will probably be offered some form of non-monetary reward for their work which could include free accommodation, transport and food and beverage, Hind et al (2019). The event

organiser (no matter what type of event is being organised) has to pay careful attention to the selection and recruitment of the volunteers as they play a significant part in creating customer satisfaction with the event. This can be a challenge for the event organiser – how to select and recruit appropriately qualified volunteers for the event who will be motivated to work hard and to deliver excellent customer satisfaction whilst not receiving a financial reward. Indeed, some event organisers might be reluctant to use volunteers because of the challenges and difficulties in recruiting volunteers with the appropriate motivation and skills set.

This paper will discuss the role of volunteers in events and the benefits that volunteers have gained from working at seven events that were staged in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Human Resource Planning

Event organizing is not only about designing the concept and implementing it but it also involves strategic and functional management. Within the functional management of an event human resource planning and management is a key function.

Human resource management is much more than the recruitment and selection of event staff or volunteers, it involves a long-term strategic development of the event organization so that the event organizing company can operate efficiently using a variety of different types of worker. Wagen (2007) suggests that the strategic approach to human resources planning involves:

1. Formulating the HR strategy, including an environmental assessment on the labour market, industrial relation framework and the level of expertise required;
2. Developing a flexible and responsive approach to dealing with HR issues especially when staging the event;

3. Facilitating worker integration across a wide range of projects that are needed to stage the event successfully; and
4. Focusing on customer service both internal and external that relate to both the audience and event workers.

According to Webb (2001), a HR strategy should analyse the local labour market to determine what types of worker are available to the event organizer and the potential for recruiting volunteers to support the staging of the event. As mentioned previously (Hind et al, 2019), the recruitment of volunteers by an event organizer offers considerable benefits as volunteers normally offer their labour without expecting to receive a financial reward. This helps to reduce the HR costs of staging the event.

When deploying volunteers at an event the event organizer, though, has to pay careful attention to their training and supervision (Hind, et al 2019) as the volunteers will have an important contribution to make in establishing customer satisfaction as well as supporting the health and safety of the event customers.

The role of the HR function in the planning of an event is to determine the different types of worker who are needed to stage the event and then to devise a HR strategy for their recruitment, selection, training, supervision and motivation. Analyzing the training needs of all event workers and then devising and implementing the training is one of the critical functions of the HR planning for an event (Hind et al, 2019). It is essential for the success of the event that all event workers understand clearly what their individual role is in creating customer satisfaction (Byrne et al, 2002).

It is clear from the literature review so far that a strategic approach needs to be adopted for HR planning at the event – this is particularly important for large-scale events that will recruit hundreds or thousands of event workers to make them a success.

At the Toronto Winter Olympic Games held in 2006 some 25,000 volunteers were recruited. The 2018 Asian Games held in Jakarta and Palembang, Indonesia utilised 14,000 volunteers. Volunteers are an important part of an event's workforce and frequently their personal motivation and enthusiasm for volunteering at an event creates a community spirit that results in a high social impact for the event (Wagen, 2007).

Volunteer: Definitions, Category, Impact

Most leisure and business events recruit volunteers. For the purpose of this paper two main types of volunteer will be identified. The first category of volunteering is known as volunteer tourism which is generally recognized as a form of alternative tourism (e.g. Wearing, 2001; Brown, 2005; Callanan and Thomas, 2005; McIntosh and Zahra, 2008; Matthews, 2008). Wearing (2001) describes a volunteer tourist as a person whose motivation is more altruistic than the wish to earn money. Volunteer tourists travel to a destination to perform voluntary work without remuneration and can be motivated to volunteer by a variety of different reasons, for example to support a particular cause such as poverty reduction or environmental conservation, or they might volunteer for social reasons or to gain work experience that will be helpful to their future careers.

The second type of volunteer can be found in the events industry – the general volunteer. According to Wagen, (2007), a general volunteer could be motivated by patriotism or commitment to the cause behind the event such as fundraising. The Jakarta Coffee Week event hired 100 volunteers divided between catering, ticketing, the cashier division and the competition division. The Java Jazz Festival hired 300 volunteers.

Event volunteers work at many different stages of the event planning and implementation phases and depending on the volunteer's level of experience they could be

members of the organising committee – particularly for smaller scale, community based events. For some events that take place on a regular basis (for example every year) the volunteers might work on a continuous basis throughout the year preparing and planning the event. Depending on the experience of the volunteers some might take on management roles, whilst those with less experience might work in customer facing roles or in support roles such as catering or stage management.

According to Page (2016) the main motivation of general volunteering is because of social interest, looking for social and career benefit (networking), seeking experience and new challenges. Event volunteers come from a variety of different backgrounds, Hind et al, (2019). Some volunteers will be retired people who volunteer perhaps as a hobby in their spare time. People who have a permanent job in another industry might be an event volunteer because they want to work `behind-the-scenes` at an event that they have a personal interest in, for example a major music or sporting event. Many university, polytechnic and college students see event volunteering as an opportunity to gain work experience in the industry in which they want to develop their career upon graduation.

Strigas and Jackson (2003) summarise the reasons why people volunteer into three categories:

1. A material factor, this includes the incentive or the payment that is received for volunteering;
2. The purposive factor, the motivation to become a volunteer based on recognition from the society;
3. A leisure factor, volunteering in order to have another experience and opportunity to develop a new interest.

The author of this paper also supports the view that people volunteer for patriotic or nationalistic purposes, as is the case with the thousands of volunteers who work at mega

sports events such as the Olympic Games and the Asia Games.

When the event organiser utilises volunteers there are certain considerations that have to be taken into account. Firstly, the job function and task given to the volunteer must match the capabilities of the volunteer – the volunteer should not be given a job that is outside their capability. Clear briefings have to be given to the volunteers, through training, to explain to them what their job is and how to undertake it safely. Once the volunteers are working at the event they have to be monitored and supervised to ensure that they are performing their duties to the standards expected. Using volunteers at an event puts additional responsibilities on the event organizer and these responsibilities have been well documented by Hind et al (2019) and Cuskelly and Auld (2000).

Methodology

The research approach used in this study is a qualitative method consisting of a number of steps Arbnor (1997). The first step is to describe the phenomenon that occurs. At this stage the data sources are taken from various documents and literature (secondary research). The second step is to analyze the causes of the phenomenon. At this stage, various possible causes of the phenomenon will be seen. The next step is to try to look ahead, what will happen and what must be done by the object of study to be able to answer the challenges of the future. As a means to analyze the phenomenon this paper used methodological triangulation (Decrop, 2004; Denzin, 2006).

The primary data for this study were collected through participant observation and semi structured personal interviews to understand the role and motivations of the volunteers. Interviews were conducted with a small sample of volunteers and professional exhibition, conference and event organizers located in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Interviews were conducted with the project manager of each event. Subjects of observation are volunteers who are part of the event. The data were, in The Asian Games event consisted of 30 participants from a total of 100 volunteers, BFI ran 4 participants out of a total of 50 volunteers, JCW 20 participants from 100 peoples, BBW 15 people from 300, Inacraft 20 people from 100 peoples, Jakarta Sneakerday 5 people from 30 peoples, and IFW 10 people from 100 peoples.

Result and Analysis

As discussed earlier in this paper, in the implementation of events in Jakarta, Indonesia many professional conference, exhibition and event organisers recruit volunteers. In some of the major events held in Jakarta such as the 2018 Asian Games, Para Games 2018, BFI Run 2018, Indonesia Fashion Week (IFW) 2018, Big Bad Wolf (BBW) 2018, Jakarta Coffee Week (JCW) 2018, Jakarta Sneakerday 2019, Inacraft 2019, many volunteers are deployed within their event teams. The role of each volunteer varies depending on the event and the experience of the individual event volunteer. Based on the primary research conducted for this paper one finding was that the role of volunteers is generally in customer facing roles such as registration / ticketing, liaison officer (LO), runners, marshals, cashiers, tenant and in catering (see Table 1).

Table 1
Roles for Volunteer

Event / Position	Asian Games	BFI Run	IFW	BBW	JCW	JSneakerday	Inacraft
Registrasi	X	X					
Ticketing	X		X	X	X	X	X
Cashier				X	X		
LO	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Runner							
Marshal	X	X					
Tenant			X	X	X	X	X

Catering X X X
Source: interview

Based on data from the 2018 Asian Games sports event, volunteers played a role in all areas of organising this mega sports event. This illustrates that the need for volunteers is high and that there is great respect for volunteer workers by event organisers. In addition, volunteers also play a role in important teams such as stage management, production, cast movement in celebrating the opening and closing ceremonies.

Jakarta Coffee Week hired 100 volunteers who were divided into food & beverage, ticketing, cashier division and the competition division. In BFI Run, which is one of the marathon sporting events in Indonesia, around 50 volunteers were required to assist in the marshalling of the event, as liaison officers and consumption areas for runners' needs.

Big Bad Wolf needs a lot of voluntary workforce assistance because the event runs over a 24 hours period with a shift schedule in place. The event organiser needs to recruit volunteers who have the capacity for working over a long period of time. Jakarta Sneakerday is a fashion event that runs over a number of days. It is popular among younger generations who attend to observe the fashions and to buy the products. The role of volunteers at Jakarta Sneakerday is to assist in the registration process as a large number of buyers attend this event. The same thing happens at the Inacraft exhibition.

Based on the data generated by the research for this paper, volunteer roles were found to be determined by the type of event itself. The main role of the volunteers is to take up customer service support activities with most of the volunteers being students in higher education. One of the reasons for this came from an interview with one of the event organizers who stated that they are looking for volunteers who have spare time to volunteer at the event and who require little

training to undertake their volunteering role – it was felt that customer service roles did not require the volunteer to possess any special skills. The recruitment of student volunteers provides the event organizer with a flexible workforce (in terms of time availability), at a lower cost than hiring paid employees, but who can also deliver customer satisfaction.

Based on interviews with several volunteers from each event, five main motivational reasons were identified for volunteering at an event. As can be seen from Table 2, ‘wanting to help make the event a success’ was the most important reason, followed by motivations relating to ‘networking’, ‘gaining experience’ and receiving some form of reward for being a volunteer. The fifth motivational reason in Table 2 is specific to national events that might be organised such as the 2018 Asian Games.

Table 2
Motivation of Volunteer

Rank	Motivation
1	Wanting to help make the event success
2	Networking
3	Wanting to fill spare time and gain some experience
4	Extra credit/ money/ material factor
5	Nationalism (in a national event)

Source: interview

However, the general findings in Table 2 can be broken down further into the main reasons why volunteers offer their services at specific events. Most of the volunteers who were interviewed about their motivation for volunteering at the 2018 Asian Games, a mega event, indicated that they volunteered because of the social impact of the games. A reason for volunteering was for a sense of patriotism and nationalism – a motivation also identified by Strigas and Jackson, (2003). For other events such as festivals, music concerts and exhibitions, the motivation of the volunteers is probably based on material factors and career benefits

that the volunteer will gain, such as in Big Bad Wolf 2018, Inacraft 2018, and Jakarta Coffee Week, 2018. On the other hand, at sports events such as the BFI run, motivation was more to fill spare time and increase experience. These research findings are similar to those identified by Page (2016).

Based on the semi structured interviews with the respondents for this research it can be seen that the volunteers benefitted from their volunteering experience. In addition to the personal benefits of gaining valuable work experience and networking the volunteers also appreciated the opportunity to receive some form of material reward in exchange for their labour such as a meals allowance and occasionally a small financial payment.

Event organizers also benefit by including volunteers as part of their event workforce, most significantly by being able to reduce their wage bill. However, recruiting and incorporating volunteers into the event workforce has to be undertaken strategically.

The type of volunteer that is recruited has to align with the vision and objectives of the event – otherwise there is a strong risk that the event will be unsuccessful. Once selected, the volunteers have to be trained, monitored and supervised (Hind et al, 2019) – just as if they were permanent employees of the event organizer. Careful attention has to be paid by the event organizer to the strategic management of volunteers for the event – if this is achieved then both the volunteers and the event organizer will benefit considerably.

Conclusion

Based on the contents of this paper the following conclusions can be drawn. The literature review (Hind et al, 2019) identified that all events require to recruit volunteer employees to make them a success – in addition to paid employees. However, when recruiting volunteer workers a strategic approach has to be followed by the event

organizer to ensure that the volunteers who are recruited have the relevant skill set for the tasks that they have to undertake at the event. The strategic approach involves undertaking an analysis of the local labour market to determine if suitable volunteers might be available through to the human resource management strategies that the event organizer implements.

Volunteers play an important role in the implementation of events and help in the success of events. In some events, especially `business to customer` exhibitions customer satisfaction is a key objective for the event and volunteers play an important role in providing customer satisfaction through their social and communication skills. Recruiting volunteers to help stage an event also provides financial benefits for the event organizer as the cost of utilising volunteers will be lower than employing paid employees who will require a wage for working at the event.

The primary research undertaken for this paper was based on a small sample of events taking place in Jakarta, Indonesia. The author considers the research findings of interest because they do support the findings of other authors who have also researched the role of volunteers in events – see Jackson (2003), Page (2016), Hind et al (2019). However, the recruitment, selection, motivation, monitoring and management of event volunteers is a relatively under-researched area and further studies are needed to identify best-practice in the strategic management of volunteers at events.

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