

Chapter Nine

Campus Diversity and Intercultural Engagement for Good Mental Health in Cultural Events

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Purpose The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance and best practises to event organisers to ensure the successful planning and execution of the event. We have focused on cultural events as we are living in an increasingly globalised world, and cultural diversity is to be recognised. These practices include addressing several aspects of event management, such as task delegation, risk management, team management, etc. Furthermore, event organisers and managers should not only ensure that the event is successful but should also promote their own mental health and well-being and that of everyone else in the process. This includes addressing all the emotions felt throughout the planning and execution of an event; the latter is discussed through ‘The Gestalt Perspective: The Contact Cycle.’

Study design/methodology/approach The study design used is descriptive research, which involves the collection of data from several resources. This paper describes the characteristics, behaviours, and mental health of event managers.

Findings Event managers can better understand the complexities of managing a cultural event if they focus on the slightest details. They can plan and implement an event that is enjoyable and beneficial. By prioritising mental health in event management, organisers can create a safer and more productive environment for themselves and their team.

Originality/value The value of the current chapter lies in its originality in tackling the mental side of event management.

Introduction

In an increasingly globalised world, it is important to recognise and value cultural diversity and promote cultural exchange and understanding. The latter helps to break down cultural barriers, foster mu-

tual respect, and build strong and inclusive communities. Whether through events, the arts, or education, culture can connect us all, and we have many opportunities to promote cultural awareness and appreciation. As we grow older and build our experiences, we meet a wider range of people from diverse cultures, sometimes from our own country and environment. With that being said, when we are assigned to manage a cultural event, it is important for us to be familiar with the culture(s) that we are dealing with to avoid any misunderstanding or inconvenience (Unifrog, n.d.). Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance and best practices to event organisers to ensure the successful planning and execution of the event.

Cultural Intelligence: Why Understanding and Respecting Differences is Key to Successful Event Management

We focus on cultural events as we are living in an increasingly globalised world, and cultural diversity is to be recognised. These practices include addressing several aspects of event management, such as task delegation, risk management, team management, etc. Furthermore, event organisers and managers should not only ensure that the event is successful but should also promote their own mental health and well-being and that of everyone else in the process. This includes addressing all the emotions felt throughout the planning and execution of an event.

Firstly, to gain a deeper understanding of other cultures, it is crucial to reflect on your own (Unifrog, n.d.). Often, we take our cultural practices and beliefs for granted and don't realise that they may seem peculiar to others. By recognising that our own culture is not the norm, but one variation among many, we can approach our cultural differences with more respect.

Secondly, there are different ways to learn about different cultures (Unifrog, n.d.). You can start off by making friends with people from diverse backgrounds; you can also engage in polite conversation and ask about their lives. You can also read books written by and about people from diverse cultures, as well as watch movies that tackle other cultures than your own. Lastly, enjoy the culture you wish to learn more about, travel, and explore the cultural pockets in your country and outside of it.

Thirdly, it is crucial to avoid stereotyping when you are dealing with a culture and getting to know it (Unifrog, n.d.). To achieve this, you

should be aware that learning about a culture does not mean you know everything about a person from that culture. In addition, avoid making assumptions based on limited information or generalisations. It is also important to remember that every individual is unique and may have different perspectives and experiences, even within the same culture.

Lastly, always appreciate and embrace the differences that make life interesting (Unifrog, n.d.). Learn to balance curiosity with appreciation, ask questions only if your friends are willing to answer. Recognise that what may be a fascinating difference to you is just a normal part of someone else's life, and show respect to people from different cultures by appreciating their unique perspectives and experiences. Now that we have briefly explored culture and how to respect it, we can start to manage, plan, and organise a cultural event.

Mastering the Art of Event Management: Strategies for Success

For an event to be successful, proper event management is essential. Simply put, failure to get the fundamental factors, such as budgeting and logistics right could expose you to possibly unexpected challenges, regardless of how fantastic your location, speakers, or entertainment are. Consider it this way: the more time you devote to event management, the more polished your event will be.

Firstly, a running checklist should be with you while you arrange the event. To make it easier for you to keep track of the preparations, it should include a list of caterers, decorative objects, speeches, dancing and music performances, etc. The list can be expanded with new items, and completed activities can be crossed off. You'll remain organised the entire time. You can choose between a digital copy and a manual version, depending on which is more convenient for carrying. Include alternate plans as surprises may happen and barriers may arise. If such obstacles happen, there isn't a need to stress or be negative; switch to the alternative!

As soon as your checklist is ready, it is time to start building your event to successfully bring it to life. For that, building a team that shares ideas is key (Sheth, 2017). You will need someone on your team who can come up with more original ideas for the event. This addition to the team is a requirement to manage the jobs effectively; thus, you will need a staff that can handle all of the event's important tasks. One team member should also coordinate the different aspects of the event management process (location, speakers, needed material, etc.) in order to

have accurate updates. With that being said, we can conclude that assembling your perfect team begins with identifying the team members you require for each task.

Make sure to answer the 5 W's of a successful company event: who, what, where, when, and why (Smith, 2020). Start off by determining who your target audience is; this information will help you shape the event and ensure that its outcome fits the attendees. Then define the theme and activities that you wish to execute during the event. It is now time to choose an appropriate venue that aligns with the purpose of the event; don't forget to keep an alternative plan for this point. For the time of the event, schedule it at a time that suits most of the target audience. And lastly, in your communication plan, clearly state the values and benefits of the event to encourage your target audience to attend.

It is now time to have a clear image of your cultural event and to set goals and objectives (Sheth, 2017). It is necessary for you to have a clear vision of what you wish to accomplish in relation to the event. Once your goal is clear and your objectives are set, you start working towards achieving them. You should keep in mind that every event you organise has a purpose. In order to reach your goal and accomplish your objectives, task delegation is of extreme importance. Delegating tasks would help you, as an event manager, streamline your entire event and management process. By doing so, you would have a quicker phase of execution and a lower possibility of mental and physical burnout. Even if you are the event manager, this does not mean that you should do and achieve all the tasks on your own. To facilitate task delegation, make sure to write a task list, then identify the strengths and weaknesses of your team members, and based on that, design the task list.

Furthermore, as an event manager, you would be in charge of leading your entire team and supporting the execution of their tasks (Sheth, 2017). As mentioned above, you should delegate tasks, but this does not mean that you are not equally responsible for the success of each one of these tasks. Hence, follow-ups are a must with each team member to ensure a smooth flow. You can also send reminders to your team members based on the task to ensure that they are respecting the time frame set. Let's imagine that one of the team members did not finish the execution of the task in question. How would you handle the situation? If you thought of yelling at the member and making a big deal out of it, then you are not thinking as an event manager or as a leader.

When such a situation happens, you should sit down with the member in question and try to get to the bottom of the situation, find together the reason behind this delay, and sort things out to be able to continue with the execution as previously set. In addition, your team needs motivation. Any task can be achieved, but it can be better achieved if the team is motivated; hence, show support to your team. Whether through words or through incentives, motivation and support are important factors in pulling off an event successfully.

This leads us to an important point in event management, which is communication. Whether communication is with your teams or with external parties, you have to ensure that you can't complete a task if you do not clearly state what this task is and what needs to be done (Sheth, 2017). Keep in mind that one of the reasons you may have a slip-up in completing a task is miscommunication. Things may be unclear, yet it is your role as a manager to ensure that everyone is on the same page. The latter is important to be able to proceed with your tasks quicker and more efficiently.

Now that everything is set, promote your cultural event. Make sure to indirectly answer any question that the viewer may have regarding the cultural event through your marketing strategy. Congratulations! You have successfully managed the cultural event; yet, your work does not end here. Don't forget to take feedback from the attendees so you will be aware of what was appreciated from the event and what was not appreciated. A feedback survey is important to further enhance your future event by keeping track of the audience's requirements.

In conclusion, managing a cultural event is a big challenge, and you may face different slip-ups. Never rush to accomplish your tasks quicker; ask for help when needed; give yourself time to plan; keep alternate plans; expect the unexpected; but most importantly, enjoy what you are doing and keep a positive mindset. End your plan and organisation feeling satisfied; the more you are invested in cultural activity management, the more professional your event will be.

Taking Care of You: Nurturing Mental Health While Navigating the Demands of Event Management

As we have discussed in the first part of this paper about effective event management, you have probably realised that this type of job is stressful. Indeed, event management is considered to be one of the fifth most stressful jobs in the world (Nyakoojo, 2021); hence, mental

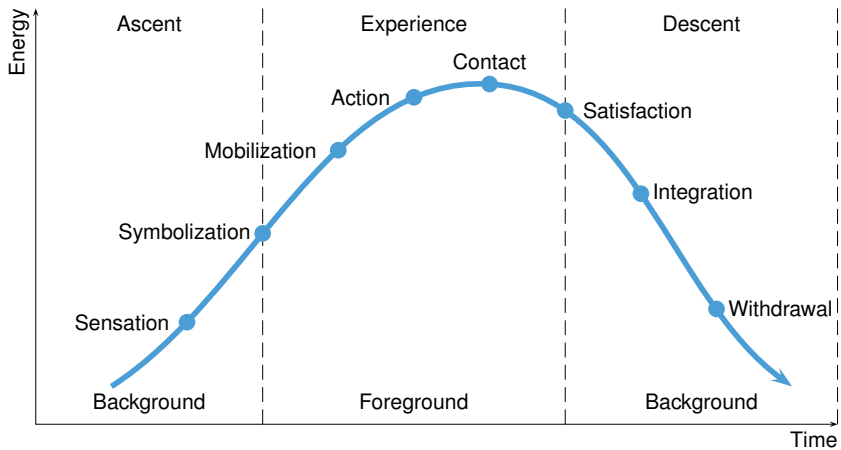


FIGURE 9.1 The Gestalt Perspective: The Contact Cycle (adapted from Acher, 2022)

health should be a priority for event managers, as it is certain that if your mental health and well-being are not maintained, you will not be able to effectively manage a successful event.

Emotional Rollercoaster

Throughout the process of managing an event until its execution, you will experience different feelings at different stages. The latter does not mean that you have an emotional imbalance; it is actually quite the opposite; experiencing different feelings is extremely normal and healthy! This emotional rollercoaster has the name ‘The Gestalt Perspective: The Contact Cycle.’ This cycle clearly depicts the emotions felt by any event manager when effectively managing an event (Figure 9.1).

The very first level of emotion felt is ‘Sensation’; this phase is during a level of consciousness and can be very low (Acher, 2022). You would feel this feeling when you accomplished a previous cycle from a previous event, and then you would suddenly get an awareness feeling that you should now start thinking and setting all the points to begin to effectively manage a new event; you are now aware that you need to start a new project. You would then move to the second stage, ‘symbolization.’ The mind has the nature of not being able to perceive anything without a shape; therefore, you would start symbolising and shaping the event that you have to work on next by linking it to previous experiences.

The next step is the response that you would expect when unlocking a door: your emotions and thoughts will unleash (Acher, 2022). This

stage is known as mobilisation, where a sudden increase in energy occurs. This energy, mixed with the previously felt emotions, causes both the mind and body to become energised with the rush felt.

It is now time to call for action. We are now triggered, and what was once a disturbance has turned into an urge to act (Acher, 2022). As event managers, we now begin to evaluate the tasks, select the options, and eliminate what is not needed. In mere moments, we look for behaviours that have been effective in previous situations and events. We may choose from these previously established behaviours, or we may trust our intuition and put on our creative hat to create something new; this is where innovation occurs.

After successfully mobilising and taking action, we experience a dynamic interaction as part of the contact stage. We are currently both observers and participants, and we are fully engaged with the event that is being built by us (Acher, 2022). This is a moment of risk and unpredictability; our interpretations might be correct, or we might have set the wrong assignments related to the success of this event. The key is currently in our hands, and this is the moment in the event management phase to either change some of the set actions or keep them as they are. At this stage, you would either feel frustration or an unexpected energy boost.

When engaged in interaction, anything is possible. No preparation is fool proof, and life is full of uncertainties. However, a life of constant engagement also means losing perspective and becoming limited in our viewpoint. Unrelated and undiscovered things will gradually disappear, preventing any new and surprising outcomes from emerging. That's why it's equally important to let go as it is to fully engage in interaction. The capacity to find fulfilment and stay attuned to our ever-evolving inner needs is a rare ability among people (Acher, 2022). You have now achieved satisfaction.

Once we attain fulfilment, we conclude the interaction and move on to integration. We step back and retreat into ourselves (Acher, 2022). Although interaction involves our entire selves, it occurs within ourselves. We then return to our own centre and start to process the experience we faced when managing the event and executing it. We consider how it relates to past experiences, whether it confirms or challenges our beliefs, whether it added to our life or was repetitive, and what impact it has left within us.

In the final phase of the Contact cycle, known as 'withdrawal,' we

cease any direct or conscious involvement in the interaction (Acher, 2022). Although remnants of the dialogue may still linger in our subconscious, we consciously withdraw from the situation. This phase is often overlooked, but it is a crucial part of every complete interaction: a return to a state of balance and non-interaction. It is a state of inner freedom and detachment. We are present, and all possibilities are quietly waiting in the background.

Practical Tips for Prioritising Mental Health during Event Management

Throughout this emotional experience and cycle, it is extremely important to look out for your well-being, enhance it, and work on maintaining your mental health. To do so, remember that you are not a one-man show in your event management process and execution (Waida, 2019). For that, make sure to include a personal backup to cover for you when you need to rest. You need to have your regular meal and sit down during the event. All this running around and making changes in your diet is not healthy and would affect your mental health; hence, assign one of your team members to the task and take your 30-minute break and rest to be able to proceed. It is also important to have self-awareness practices included in your daily routine (Waida, 2019). Such an addition will ease your stress as an event manager and will help you maintain your mental health by reminding yourself of all the positive actions that you are handling. Tap yourself on the back! Write positive affirmations to yourself, as 'I' statements have a charm. For example, you can say to yourself 'I deserve respect for what I have done,' 'I was able to pull off this challenging situation,' 'I beat my own expectations!,' 'my event planning skills are developing,' etc. Make sure to acknowledge yourself and that you may deal with stressors; in this case, take the opportunity to turn your stressors into positive actions, and most importantly, develop the ability to embrace what you are unable to control and make adjustments accordingly (Flaherty, 2021).

Furthermore, it is important to compare and contrast the situations that made you experience a negative feeling to be able to generate a new response that will make you feel at ease with this situation when it happens again (Flaherty, 2021). For example, you might notice that whenever a speaker or a team member takes long to answer your email back, you feel frustrated; therefore, you should remind yourself that such action is irrelevant to the overall objective that you are aiming

to achieve. Then why bother yourself and create an unnecessary emotional imbalance? Reflect on the action and then decide whether it will harm you or not. Whenever you find yourself in a frustrating situation, take a step back, close your eyes, and do some breathing exercises. You can follow the '4 seconds technique' (Stinson, 2023): breathe slowly through your nose while counting to four, hold your breath while counting to four as well, and then exhale slowly for four seconds. This technique should be repeated at least three times to feel that you are in a calmer state than the one you started with.

In addition, identify your emotions by giving them labels, since emotions serve as a means for the mind to convey messages to the physical body (Waida, 2019). Hence, when managing an event or experiencing a feeling, take a moment to recognise it and evaluate if it is beneficial to you in the present moment or not in order to process it accordingly.

Additionally, getting enough sleep is extremely important for your mental health (Waida, 2019). When managing an event, you should try to use every minute of the day to try and achieve your tasks, but this does not mean that you should pull an all-nighter! Ensure that you have a restful and consistent sleep, even if it is not for the full 8 hours.

Moreover, don't be ashamed to share what you are feeling through the event management process; talk to your friends, your partner, or even a therapist every once in a while (Waida, 2019). Don't keep your emotions to yourself, and certainly don't let them build up in you, as you may experience burnout.

Lastly, designate specific days to focus on your mental health and well-being (Waida, 2019). Taking time off for mental health is a legitimate reason to take a day off or two. If you run your own business, taking a mental health day sets a positive example of self-care for those you work with or manage.

Remember, be your own motivation when managing an event, as mental health matters; push yourself and be proud of yourself and your end product.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current chapter tried to shed light on the different aspects of cultural events' management, with special attention paid to the importance of maintaining good mental health for the effectiveness and ease of planning and executing such events. It is therefore worth noting that being interculturally competent and having a multicultural

global mind-set should be recognised as necessary conditions for the mental preparation to manage cultural events within higher education institutions or more generally in organisations. Thus, further research is urgently needed to explore this intricate relationship between intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and the efficiency of cultural event management.

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