Past, present, future major sport event management practice: The practitioner perspective

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ABSTRACT

The last decade has seen unprecedented demand to host major sport events, since they can potentially fulfil multi-levelled economic, social, and political agendas. However, despite their universal appeal and long history of implementation, the emergent industry is too often associated with examples of mismanagement. In the light of these continuing major sport event management incidents, the purpose of this study is to provide a review of current management practice and to place this in some sense of temporal context by reflecting on the historical as well future development of the evolving industry.

Adopting a practitioner focus at the local organising committee level, a self-administered postal questionnaire was sent to 178 major sport event organisers from 11 countries. Based upon a stratified sample of the 20 priority sports of England, the most senior manager of these sport governing bodies and local authority hosts was invited to participate in the study. Providing a questionnaire response rate of 26% a second phase of data collection was undertaken. This entailed 10 in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interviews selected on the basis of a geographical convenience sample (50 mile radius of author) of returned questionnaire respondents.

The findings reveal that current success is based upon effective and efficient management of the tripartite relationship of sport, media, and the event funders, as well as limiting chance occurrences. Reflecting on the historical and future drivers of the event industry, it was further concluded that a better understanding of economics, technology and culture are fundamental to ensuing a safer and new era of global professionalism.

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1. Introduction

Despite the foundations of event management existing for several thousand years it is only in the last decade that the notion of an event industry and profession has gained currency (Harris, 2004). While the celebrations of the new millennium acted as a catalyst to unprecedented demand and growth (Abbott & Geddie, 2001; Breakey, McKinnon, & Scott, 2006), the international practice of event management is still regarded as a relatively new and immature discipline of study (Getz, 2000). With many authors questioning its professional status (Getz, 2000; Goldblatt, 2000; Harris, 2004; Silvers, 2003a), the event industry has at best been described as an "emerging profession" (Silvers, 2003a) since no proof of professional competence is required for event management practice.

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Table 1
Recent sport event management incidents.

Incident	Examples	Country	Sport
Ticketing problems	• 2006 FIFA World Cup (e.g. process, security, and sponsor issues)	Germany	• Football
	• 2006/7 Ashes series (e.g. website crashes, 2 h phone waits, and scalping issues)	Australia	• Cricket
	• 2008 Beijing Olympics (e.g. false website, official website crashes, and lack of overseas allocations despite many empty seats)	China	• Multi-sport
	• 2009 World Cup Qualifier (e.g. ticketless fans stampeded stadium that left 22 dead and 130 injured; 3rd incident in last 9 months in Africa)	Ivory Coast	• Football
Crowd problems	• 2007 Firecracker explodes and removes three fingers of a steward	Israel	• Basketball
	• 2007, 2008 and 2009 Australian Tennis Open ethnic brawls	Australia	• Tennis
	• 2007 Police death at national football league match	Italy	• Football
	• 2008 Racism/pitch invasion/Mexican wave incidents and complaints at international and domestic cricket matches	Australia	• Cricket
	• 2008 Olympic torch relay political protests	France/UK/USA	• Multi-sport
	• 2008 Melbourne Cup drunken violence and public transport problems (e.g. very long queues)	Australia	• Horse racing
	• 2009 European Cup game postponed as team flees for own safety	Turkey	• Basketball
Legal problems	• 2003 Prosecution of an event organiser for criminal negligence due to a participant death	New Zealand	• Cycling
	• 2007 Drag racing driver prosecuted over 6 spectator deaths	USA	• Motor sport
	• 2008 rescheduling of ATP Hamburg tennis tournament	Germany	• Tennis
	• 2008 Dispute over the nature of Digicel sponsor rights of $20 million Stanford Twenty20 cricket event (BBC, 2008)	West Indies	• Cricket
	• 2009 Legal dispute causes America's Cup to be postponed	Spain	• Sailing
Financial problems	• 2005 Professional cycling tour debts	Malaysia	• Cycling
	• 2008 UK grossly underestimated London 2012 Olympic costs (Hammond, 2007)	UK	• Multi-sport
	• 2008 Australian F1 $40 million loss (Ferguson, 2008)	Australia	• Motor racing
	• 2009 Tour of Germany cancelled due to a lack of interested sponsors	Germany	• Cycling
Weather related problems	• 2006 Sydney–Hobart yacht race crew rescued by soldiers	Australia	• Sailing
	• 2007 Australian Tennis Open heat related incidents	Australia	• Tennis
	• 2008 Cancellation of English Royal International Air Tattoo and NatWest Twenty20 cricket match due to heavy rainfall	UK	• Aerosport and cricket
Other	• 2005 FINA Aquatics World Championship cancellation of the organising committee contract due to five interacting factors (Parent & Séguin, 2007)	Canada	• Swimming
	• 2006 Commonwealth Games defection of 14 Sierra Leone asylum seeking athletes	Australia	• Multi-sport
	• 2008 ICC World Cup officiating problems, empty seats and the death of a team coach	West Indies	• Cricket
	• 2009 Cancellation of test match due to poor pitch conditions	Antigua	• Cricket
	• 2009 Team and official shootings on the way to a national cricket match	Pakistan	• Cricket

Indeed Silvers (2004) elaborates that the event industry is perhaps more renowned for its unenviable record of incidents than of any form of professional management practice. This is no more apparent than in the specialist area of sport event management, where randomly selected recent incidents are highlighted in Table 1.

However, it is not just the frequency and breadth of these problems that cause concern, it is the fact that so many have existed for more than a decade and appear to be transcending national barriers as well as sports. While crowd problems were historically related to the confines of professional football and England, they now occur globally, even in relatively untouched sports such as tennis and cricket (see Table 1 final column). In focussing on the universal sport of football, Emery (2007) cynically raises the question of whether spectating at football matches should be considered a dangerous pastime particularly with the knowledge that more than 1000 spectator deaths and 1000 injuries have occurred since 1964—an average of 28 deaths per year over a 40 plus year time period!

Event outputs are not the only issue of industry concern. Goldblatt (2005) for example highlights the important input of staffing, suggesting that event management careers are being characterised by their very long work hours and subsequent high degrees of burnout. Phillips (2005) for example makes reference to the 2006 Commonwealth Games Chief Executive who, having worked 15 h a day for several consecutive months was ordered to take a holiday for his own personal health.

Clearly, there is an urgent need to systematically review major sport event management practice. Adopting an operational perspective, the key purpose of this study is to provide a review of current practice (manager profile, management practice, skills required, and critical success factors) and to place this in some sense of temporal context by reflecting on the historical as well future development of the evolving industry. It is hoped that by identifying where practitioners have been and where they are now, a more informed knowledge base can emerge that can lead to a more comprehensive and professional future.

2. Literature review

According to Goldblatt (2000, p. 2) the meteoric growth of the event industry in the last decade has "produced a climate that is confusing, lacking in credibility . . . and perhaps detrimental to its future long term health." This is clearly evident in

defining the conceptual parameters of this study. A conceptual review of the literature for example reveals that there are probably "as many definitions of events as there are event texts" (Brown & James, 2004, p. 54). While numerous event typologies exist, such as by location, appeal, theme, scale or economic impact (Getz, 1991, 2007; Gratton, Dobson, & Shibli, 2001; Hall, 1992; Jago & Shaw, 1998; Richards, 1994; Walsh-Heron & Stevens, 1990), the agreement of sub-divisions within these categories is often unclear (Parent & Séguin, 2007). Without conceptual clarity, comparative and developmental research becomes virtually impossible. For example, in using the typology of scale, one of the key logistical features that make event management so complex to undertake (Doyle, 2004), clarification is required to determine what actually constitutes a "major" event as distinct from a "hallmark", "mega", "large" or even "minor" event. In the literature every permutation appears to exist with "major" being considered synonymous with hallmark events (Ritchie, 1984); being larger (Breakey et al., 2006) and smaller than them (Bowdin, McDonnell, Allen, & O'Toole, 2006); being the over riding term for hallmark and mega events (Masterman, 2004); and in the case of sport, being the umbrella term to include mega, calendar, one-off and showcase events (UK, Sport, 2007). It is this latter broad base definition that has been selected for this study since it is the only known national and sport specific standard available and furthermore it encompasses the essence of scale as defined in the generic event management literature (Masterman, 2004).

Effectively managing scale complexities are further compounded by the very specialist nature and often unique setting of sport events. Emery (2003) for example offers the acronym of STUDIES (Scale and scope of logistics; Temporary organisation and staffing; Unique benefits and risks; Demand to host, participate and spectate; breadth of International involvement; Event history and emotional culture; and multi-layered Stakeholder diversity) as a means of differentiating major sport event management practice from other types of events. Frequently incorporating all forms of Maylor's (1996) project complexity, local organisers of major sport events are often being placed in the role of a low level, time bound franchise contractor, who under extreme media and fan pressure are expected to work with numerous new stakeholders to produce a one-off high quality experience.

In reviewing the operational practice of managing major sport events, current research appears to be concentrated on a few specialist areas of study. For example, the area of personnel management is comprehensively investigated (Cuskelly, Auld, Harrington, & Coleman, 2004; Farrell, Johnston, & Twyman, 1998; Hanlon & Cuskelly, 2002; Hanlon & Jago, 2004; Hanlon & Stewart, 2006; Solberg, 2003) possibly due to the differentiating pulsating and temporary volunteer workforce encountered at a major sport event (Hanlon & Jago, 2000, 2004). Similarly, with the increasing costs and accountabilities accompanying major sport events (Getz, 2007), event impact methodologies, values and outcomes are also extensively researched. Initially focusing upon socio-economic impacts and urban regeneration studies (Barget & Gouguet, 2007; Crompton, 2001; Gratton et al., 2001; Lim & Patterson, 2008; Preuss, 2005; Solberg & Preuss, 2007; Turco, Swart, Bob, & Moodley, 2003) developmental research now includes environmental consequences (Collins & Flynn, 2008; Essakow & Bound, 2006) as well as ethical considerations (Arcodia & Reid, 2008; Santomier, 2004).

Further specialist areas of major sport event management review, include event visitor profiling (Preuss, Séguin, & O'Reilly, 2007), event bidding (Emery, 2001; Getz, 2003), terrorism impact effects (Taylor & Toohey, 2006; Toohey, Taylor, & Lee, 2003), crowd management (Doukas, 2005); sponsorship protection strategies (McKelvey & Grady, 2008), and factors contributing to a failed world championship (Parent & Séguin, 2007).

However, despite the breadth of empirical study undertaken, most of this major sport event management research might be considered narrow in focus, particularly in terms of area of management coverage, case study orientation and cross-sectional approach. While this has provided useful and excellent contextual information at a moment in time, the holistic understanding of general operational event management is perhaps lacking. For example, the functions of management, planning, organising, leading and controlling (Lussier & Kimball, 2004) are rarely considered or investigated, neither are Torkildsen's (2005) key features of successful event organisation or Hawkins and Goldblatt's (1995) event management skills authenticated to the major sport event management context.

To better comprehend the complexities, critical success factors and issues of the major sport event management environment, the objective of this study was to collect empirical data from local organising committee practitioners so as to provide a benchmark of current industry practice. Furthermore, by using a temporal framework involving past reflection and future prediction, the evolution of the industry could be better understood. The long-term goal was to add to the emerging body of major sport event management knowledge, so that the unenviable record of management incidents, as identified in Table 1, could be reduced and ideally confined to history.

3. Methodology

Acknowledging the multi-faceted nature of major sport events and in the absence of any recognised international database, a stratified sampling frame of the twenty priority sports of Sport England (2006) was selected (the author's country of origin). The most recent major event for each of these sports was identified and based upon the assumption that major sport events are typically owned by sport governing bodies and hosted by public sector organisations, the most senior manager of each of these organisations was invited to participate in this study. Senior managers were chosen, as distinct from middle, first line managers or team leaders (UK Management Standards Centre, 2009) since they were deemed to possess broad knowledgeable on contemporary event management practice and were most likely to be able to draw upon considerable experience at the local organising committee level.

Attendance at two international sport management conferences provided additional snowball sampling opportunities to gain international senior manager contact details, but still being confined to the Sport England priority sports. In summary, the total sample frame constituted 178 senior managers of which 86 were major sport event practitioners from England and 92 from overseas (11 countries).

Given this widely dispersed population frame, the first phase of data collection entailed a mailed self-administered questionnaire being sent to the Chief Executive or equivalent of the identified organisations. This questionnaire, designed in consultation with two major sports event organisers from England, contained both closed response and open ended questions relating to the manager's background (academic qualifications, training and experience), current practice (management tools, skills required, critical success factors), and historical through to future perceptions of the sport event industry. Loosely based on the work of Torkildsen (2005—key features of successful event organisation) as well as Hawkins and Goldblatt (1995—event management skills) the structured questionnaire progressed from basic descriptive data (e.g. manager background) to more qualitative data (e.g. critical success factors and opinions regarding future practice).

More in-depth qualitative data was obtained from a second phase of data collection involving ten face-to-face semi-structured interviews with senior managers. These were selected from the returned questionnaire sample and constituted a convenience sample from all respondents located within a 50-mile radius of the researcher. Interviews were structured around three areas, namely current practice and critical success factors (e.g. what are the determinants of current success?); past practice and the development of the event industry (e.g. what phases, characteristics and triggers have shaped the global industry?); and future practice (e.g. what trends are likely to continue and issues to be faced in the future?). Administered at a time and location convenient to the interviewee, the interviews were able to both draw upon the personal data provided in the questionnaire and provide a more contextual understanding of the event industry.

While the quantitative data was analysed using SPSS, all qualitative data was hierarchically themed and coded using NVivo. The interviews were recorded in situ and transcribed into major groupings, common themes, tones and images (Crossley, 2007) through NVivo. Adopting Gee's (1986) units-of-discourse model the data was then structured around stanzas to encapsulate key phases and incidents of the event industry.

4. Findings and analysis

4.1. Respondent profile

Forty-six organisations from eleven different countries (24 from England; 22 from overseas) constituted the usable questionnaire respondent frame, reflecting a response rate of 26%. Given the high profile positions being targeted, a low response rate was not unexpected, particularly as some of the temporary organising committees had already disbanded and being inundated with research demands some local authorities endorsed a non-response policy.

To establish the particular characteristics of the questionnaire sample, Table 2 is provided to summarise the respondent manager profile as well as identify the perceived levels of current practice in terms of management functions and valued skills.

Derived entirely from the questionnaires, the manager profile highlighted a predominant male sample (78%), a mean age of 46 (age range 35–65), and 80% held the position of CEO or equivalent. Analysis of their educational background revealed that the majority (63%) possessed post secondary education qualifications which were largely from the generic disciplines of either management or sport, but not event or sport management. Given their respective average age this was probably reflective of what was available in the 1980s where event management or sport management qualifications were a rarity.

Current knowledge and competence had largely been developed through practical experience with 64% of respondents reporting classifications of 6 or 7 (high/very high personal experience levels) [average experience level, 5.4/7]. Such claims were often substantiated by comments such as "300 national/various events since 1990!" (Questionnaire respondent 2) and "involvement with 100 events/year – 25 years" (Questionnaire respondent 15). Similarly, one respondent's experience included two World Wrestling Championships, a World Student Games, two Commonwealth Games as well as a long list of other events (Questionnaire respondent 7).

Reflecting and endorsing an experiential apprentice type pathway, the profile of practitioners sampled seemed to suggest that Rubingh's (1993) "subjective working concept" of management exists with practice dominating learning and career development. Experiential learning, developed through the workplace, was attributed to be the preferred form of professional training and not the "150 colleges and universities throughout the world offer[ing] curriculum, certificates, and/or degrees in the Event Management-related studies field" (Goldblatt, 2005, p. 369). With only 30% attendance of "any" external training courses undertaken in the last five years, current education and training offerings were generally perceived as providing a peripheral yet supportive role to a major sport event management career.

4.2. Current management practice

Against this practitioner background, what represents current practice and what belies successful management? This section will first appraise the generic functions of management to determine levels of common practice, before focussing upon the valued skill set of an event manager and the critical success factors of managing major sport events.

As highlighted in Table 2 and as suggested by Watt (1994), planning was considered to be the primary function of event management success (mean of 5.8/7; as compared with other management functions such as control 5.5 and evaluation 5.2).

Table 2
Summary of current profile, management practice, and skills valued.

Characteristics	Measure	% or average rating (1–7)
Profile	• CEO = 80%; male 78%; aged 40+ (59%)	
	• Academic background	
	Graduate degree	28%
	Postgraduate degree	24%
	Secondary education	24%
	Graduate certificate	11%
	Missing	13%
	• Experience level (1 = low; 7 = very high)	5.4/7
Management practice	• Planning level (1 = low; 7 = very high)	5.8/7
	• Plans used (above 60% usage level)	
	Financial	90%
	Marketing	80%
	Technical	75%
	Crowd control	72%
	Master	69%
	Time	68%
	Human resources	65%
	Crisis management	63%
	• Control (1 = low; 7 = very high)	5.5/7
	• Evaluation (1 = low; 7 = very high)	5.2/7
Skills valued	• Skills (1 = non-essential; 7 = essential)	
	Coordination	6.6/7
	Leadership	6.5/7
	Interpersonal	6.4/7
	Administration	6.3/7
	Marketing	6.2/7
	Information technology	4.9/7

Further analysis revealed that 64% of the sample used aims/objectives/outcomes, but of those submitted, most were considered vague in terms of direction and detail. For example, one very general aim was common and only 5% could be considered remotely specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time oriented as minimally suggested by Watt (2003). Despite the practitioner claims of being detailed planners (16% suggested that their last event was over-planned), examples of under-planning and possible complacency were additionally evident via some of the interview comments—"We are talking here of an organisation that has evolved for 80 years" (Interviewee 2); "This makes the event look terribly disorganised – unplanned and ad hoc. The truth is all the systems, formal and informal have developed over the last 16 years, and with one exception, the management team is the same." (Interviewee 4).

From Table 2 it is further apparent that the most widely used plans pertaining to the last major sports event organised were the financial plan (90% usage level), the marketing plan (80%) and the technical plan (75%). Bidding plans (43%) and feasibility plans (40%) were the most under utilised plans reported. Statistically significant findings were that:

- Events held for the first time, were more likely to use a technical plan than other events (Kruskal–Wallis/Jonckheere trend: 1.829; $p < 0.04$).
- The greater the level of innovation, the greater the level of overall planning (t-test: 3.269; $p < 0.01$).
- Events with histories of more than 50 years, scored their overall planning levels higher than younger events (Kruskal–Wallis/Jonckheere trend: 11.097; $p < 0.05$).
- Public sector organisations were less likely to use a bidding plan than other organisations (Kruskal–Wallis/Jonckheere trend: 8.478; $p < 0.04$).

In attempting to explain some of these findings, it is perhaps a little surprising that bidding and feasibility plans were infrequently used and that public sector organisations use the former significantly less than sport governing bodies. Major events usually entail substantial investments and it would appear that an early understanding of the level of risk, complexity and uncertainty, would aid in the determination of the project scope and ultimate success (Westerbeek, Smith, Turner, Emery, Green, & van Leeuwen, 2006). As to the reasoning that public sector organisations are less likely to use bidding plans than others, why this is the case is unclear. Given that the public sector is dependent upon tax payer money, it might be expected that bidding plans are more frequently used by this sector where greater levels of transparency and accountability are often the norm. Perhaps these findings reinforce those of Emery (2001) who found that public sector bidding to host major sport events was often based more on personal and political whims rather than of meeting formalised referenced criteria.

On a positive note nearly all events consider as a priority the financial plan, perhaps suggesting that the financial bottom line drives current major event management practice. Similarly, the statistically significant findings that inaugural events were more likely to use a technical plan than other events (greater complexities in the first instance), that innovative events report greater levels of planning (more uncertainty, hence risk), and that older events are likely to demonstrate greater depth of planning (developed over time)—all appear sound rational practice and common sense.

In summary, current management practice clearly recognises the importance of planning. However, the primary focus of planning activity appears to be towards achievement of the financial bottom line rather than the quality of pre-determined and specified outcomes. While plans develop in detail over time and particular attention is concentrated on high levels of uncertainty and risk, there does appear to be a practitioner vagueness and complacency towards outcome specificity. Without greater articulation, understanding and shared commitment to a breadth of detailed outcomes, high levels of stakeholder satisfactions are unlikely to be realised.

4.2.1. Valued skills

The findings reveal that practitioners appear to concur with Goldblatt's (2005, p. 368) statement that "Event Leaders must continually develop their skill sets." In essence, all of Hawkins and Goldblatt's (1995) event management skills were considered to be important and regardless of management position were recommended to be continually refined over time. Coordination and leadership skills were the highest valued (means of 6.6 and 6.5/7, respectively), but all were considered essential with the exception of information technology (IT) skills (4.9/7). Despite this comparative low mean, three respondents added that IT skills would probably become increasingly important in the future, particularly given the ongoing reliance on technology for daily personal and professional tasks. Additional valued skills/knowledge to Hawkins and Goldblatt's (1995) list were identified as creativity/innovation, politics/negotiating, protocols, planning, flexibility, decision making, communication, team-work and knowledge of foreign cultures. Clearly, these findings possess important implications to event management curriculum designers and educators. For example, specific knowledge and skill developmental opportunities need to be created within study programmes to reflect authentic work-based practice and thereby provide the industry with work ready graduates.

4.2.2. Critical success factors

From the questionnaires, respondents were asked to identify the three most important critical success factors in managing their last major event. The most frequently mentioned factors, in no particular order, were knowledgeable staff, in-depth planning, sufficient and appropriate management of finance and media, and an astute awareness as well as consideration of the largely uncontrollable factors that could impact an event. These were probed in some detail via the subsequent interview process, themed and coded using NVivo, and in summary were reported to be dependent upon effective management of four areas, namely the sport, the funders, the media and where possible the external factors of chance. As diagrammatically represented in Fig. 1, a major sports event usually entails an interdependent symbiotic relationship between the sport (the global product), the event funders (sponsor resources to underwrite the escalating costs) and the media (the image enhancer and distribution medium).

These are the key players of a multi-stakeholder project group who collectively manage themselves and other contributing stakeholders (e.g. emergency services, ticketing agents, security personnel). While managing the relationship
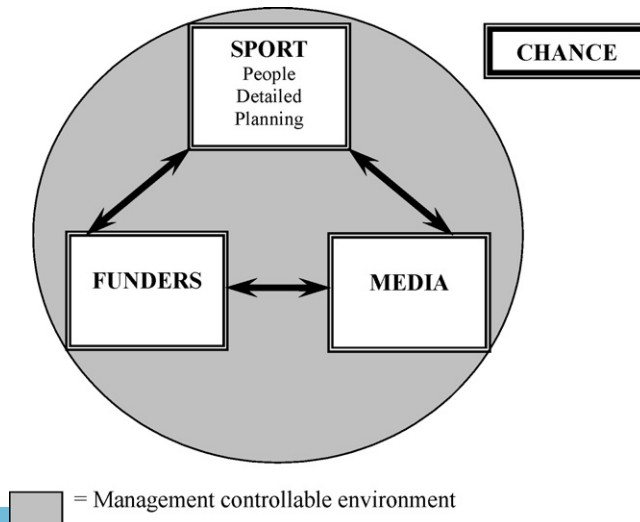

= Management controllable environment

Fig. 1. Determinants of current success.

between these stakeholders was considered to be complex yet manageable, there was always the possibility that something external, the factor of chance, could directly impinge upon the nature of the outcome.

Having provided an overview of these factors in Fig. 1, let us now review each in turn to more fully comprehend the complexities of the major sport event environment. Effective management of the sport component mirrors generic management theory in recognising the importance of staff (Goldblatt, 2005). Respondent comments for example included— "Quality of the 5000 temporary staff" (Questionnaire respondent 16); "We are as safe as the most stupid/ignorant person with responsibility" (Questionnaire respondent 23); "Importance of having the best skilled/experienced people" (Questionnaire respondent 26); "Nurturing volunteer commitment" (Questionnaire respondent 31). In an environment where task outcomes and financial rewards are often considered to be the main driving forces behind work involvement, the additional focus towards understanding and meeting diverse volunteer needs was recognised as an important management necessity for safe quality experiences to be realised (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006).

Similarly, theory and practice concur that effective strategic and operational planning are fundamental to successful event management, particularly in light of the complex framework of legal rights and litigation surrounding contemporary sport (Ammon, 2004). Planning expectations have changed considerably over time. As one manager explained "Specifications increased as did the risks; new methods of management and approval are now minimally required" (Interviewee 2). Another commented "we have now reached the stage that there is greater morality, law and ethics in event management" (Interviewee 4). As Goldblatt (2005) asserts, attention to detail is critical in event management no matter how mundane, but the ensuing increased accountability appears to have come at some cost. Practitioners for example, emphasised the increasingly important economic concerns as well as the very long work hours required to produce a quality event.

To underwrite the escalating security risks and costs, particularly post September 11 (Hammond, 2007), sponsor relationships as well as multi-national partnerships have become more significant, necessary and innovative. The event funders, the second key player of the major sport event environment have now become essential partners in effective event implementation. This has meant greater management competence in understanding and applying financial techniques to event management practice. For example, the use of economic impact analysis and ensuing public scrutiny has now become a common occurrence (e.g. Melbourne F1 Grand Prix—Gordon, 2007). But managers are still requesting more sophisticated techniques to 'dramatically improve the accuracy of estimating budgetary components' (Questionnaire respondent 8), as well as to provide "more timely control and coordination of financial data" (Interviewee 4).

The third very important player in the current landscape of major sport event production and distribution is the media with its accompanying global technological developments. Through greater deregulation and advancement in digital technology the perishable and personal nature of sport consumerism has been more strongly emphasised. Consumer demands of live coverage, action replays, and more informed analysis have meant that the media now possess increasing power and control over sports events. This is highlighted by the following respondent comments—"Media are essential, but they are now interfering with the sports product" (Questionnaire respondent 2); "We're now facing increasing control/ demands of TV" (Questionnaire respondent 6); "Entertainment motives are dictating the sporting competition" (Questionnaire respondent 30).

While a symbiotic relationship has long existed between sport, financiers and the media (Turner, 2007), it has always been sport that has dominated this tripartite relationship. However, sport event organisers are now realising that media and financial organisations are implementing fully integrated vertical growth strategies (Stotlar, 2000), either alone or in partnership. These are decreasing the historical power base of sport. Examples of such strategies can be seen with reference to Murdoch's increasing control of rugby league (Harrison, 2006) and Sir Allen Stanford's $20 million "winner takes all" Twenty20 cricket series in the West Indies (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2008).

Outside of this important tripartite relationship, practitioners also alluded to elements of "chance" that could impact upon success. For example, respondents mentioned the largely uncontrollable elements of weather extremes and failure of the local team/individuals which "had the potential to make or break large events" (Interviewee 10). However, as the sport event industry evolves, even these elements are now started to be considered within the planning mix of this complex environment. With the advent of artificial surface developments (e.g. indoor rock climbing walls), weather creation/ protection mechanisms (e.g. snow machines/retractable roofs), or even the cutting edge weather manipulation strategies/ computer generation images of the Beijing Olympic Games Opening Ceremony (China Daily, 2008; Chase, 2008), the element of chance is clearly receiving greater management attention than ever before.

4.3. Past practice

Current management practice needs to be historically contextualised and it appears that the major sport event industry is unrecognisable when compared with its past. Derived largely from the interviews, but also supplemented by questionnaire findings, respondents were asked to provide their opinions on the phases, characteristics and triggers that have shaped the global industry over the last thirty years. Table 3 provides a simplified chronological summary of these findings.

In practice, it is recognised that each event, sport, and city/town possesses its own morphogenetic cycle. Hence the exact timing of the start and finish of event management phases in Table 3 must clearly be considered imprecise. However, this evolutionary framework provides a useful starting point on which to better explain and understand the management practices of this emerging industry.

Table 3
Evolution of the major sports event management industry.

Management phase	Organisation	Market	Focus	Management characteristics	Examples of global triggers	Examples of national (England) triggers
1970s: Trial and error management	Amateur	Domestic	Seller perspective	Limited planning—reactionary management; voluntary positions	• 1976: Montreal Olympic Games debt	
1980s: Commercial and media influenced management	Committed amateurs	National	Customer focus	Entertainment and business management; largely political; increasingly diverse stakeholders	• 1984: Los Angeles Olympic Games profit	1985: Bradford fire disaster
					• 1985: Heysel football stadium deaths	1988: Local Government Act (CCT)
						1989: Hillsborough football deaths
1990s: Accountable and partnership developed management	Experienced	International	Quality of experience	Event industry development; paid careers; more sophisticated functional management; hosting driven by political whims	• 1991: World wide web introduced	1990: The Taylor Report (stadia management improvement legislation)
					• 1996: Atlanta bomb explosion	1991: Sheffield World Student Games financial loss
					• 1998: Salt Lake City Olympic bribery scandal	1996: Successful European football championship hosting
						1998: Digital satellite television launched
2000s: Professional management and training	Professional	Global	Cultural and personal experiences	More effective and sustainable management; more refined and sophisticated knowledge and skills; ethical, and technological driven practice	• 2000: Millennium celebrations	2005: IOC awards London the 2012 Olympic games
					• 2001: September 11 terrorism incident	2006: http://www.aeme.org/index.php?topic=AEMENews, The Association for Events Management Education (AEME) UK established
					• 2004: Athens Olympic games facility overruns	2008: Event Management UK portal (in-depth resource for event management solutions)
					• 2006: International EMBOK discussion commenced	
					• 2008: Beijing Olympic torch protests	

At one end of the continuum respondents typically commented that in the early 1970s "there was no event industry, never alone sport event industry" (Interviewee 1). Furthermore, people who managed major sport events in this era were considered to be "largely amateurs who relied on reactive trial and error methods and systems" (Interviewee 6). As elaborated by one practitioner:

> From the customer perspective, there really was never any particular expectation to fulfil. It was easy – no real pressure and no scrutiny . . .. Basically there was no training and certainly no career pathway; the only requirement was a passion for sport. Management what was that? (Interviewee 8)

Relative to contemporary management practice in the millennium, one respondent explained that "we are now beginning an era of global professionalism where the consequences of getting it wrong are immense" (Interviewee 3). Elaborating further, he suggested:

> The stakes have moved up considerably, customers expect events to be international, to be bigger and better than previously and everything is geared towards achieving the [financial] bottom line. (Interviewee 3)

Like most growth industries of the last decade, the major sport event industry is seen to have been heavily influenced by reactive incidents and drivers at both macro and micro levels. For example, managers made reference to potential triggers of change at the global level (e.g. September 11 terrorist attack; Montreal Olympics debt leading to Los Angeles profit), national level (e.g. football fatalities of Bradford and Hillsborough led to the ensuing 1990 Taylor Report legislation) and local level (e.g. "last year's event made an unexpected loss which we simply had to turn around" [Questionnaire respondent 27]).

The sequencing of the phases follows the historical development of the sport industry as identified by Westerbeek and Smith (2003) as well as drawing upon the professionalisation and commercialisation cycles of Beech and Chadwick (2004). For example, respondents reported that the last three decades appear to have been driven largely by macro economic (commercialisation) and technological (commedialisation—media) drivers. Westerbeek and Smith (2003) argue that the primary driver has been the economic one, the technological one merely offering the means to extend the geographical boundaries of the business. Silk and Amis (2006, p. 151) similarly identify this event practitioner approach by referring to a substantial "shift from a welfare oriented, inwardly focused city, to one directed to the securing of outside individual and corporate investment." This led to the "sport and business" era of the 1980s, where nations and cities suddenly realised that they could achieve economic development and urban regeneration objectives, through hosting major sport events (Crompton, 2001; Loftman & Spirou, 1996). As one respondent commented "Where as historically major sports events were often financed through a redistribution of current resources, access to external money and overseas tourist attendance provided the introduction to [the concept of] economic impact" (Interviewee 7).

With the onset of a more business orientation approach it was only a matter of time before greater accountability ensued, particularly as most major sports venues were publically owned. While this accountability in the 1990s was initially focussed upon financial measures, even in the public sector (e.g. introduction of national legislation in England regarding compulsory competitive tendering and more recently best value), the millennium saw broader performance parameters and indicators being considered. These included "the more responsible triple bottom line evaluation techniques of today" (Interviewee 4) as well as "a greater expectation towards equity and public transparency" (Interviewee 9), as witnessed with the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games ticketing policy.

Clearly over time, "management practice demanded more professional and sophisticated use of techniques" (Interviewee 9). This can be seen with reference to the third aspect of the tripartite relationship, the accompanying technological/media drivers of the last two decades. Radical developments in digitalisation, deregulation, and networked technologies (Turner, 2007) have permitted considerable change in terms of event management income streams (broadcasting rights superseding ticket sales) as well as market orientation focus and practice. From the traditional transactional local marketing processes of the 1970s, the industry has progressed through the theoretical areas of service quality and relationship marketing in the 1980s, to the more personal and interactive global experiences of today. Manager comments, for example, made specific reference to "more distribution options and multimedia packages to buy into" (Interviewee 3) and "social networking sites as well as mobile phone usage which can better align organisers with targeting youth markets" (Interviewee 8). To further enhance financial income streams, seamless technological applications now used include anything from online ticketing/travel arrangements, pay per view communications, virtual e-games, fanzine and betting websites, through to live co-created technological experiences at the event itself (e.g. video seats, large display screens, third umpire decisions).

4.4. Future practice

In looking to the future, interviewees unanimously reported that the major sport event industry is now entering an unprecedented phase of complexity, with one elaborating "there are more temporary stakeholders, more specifications, increased litigation, and unprecedented complex relationships" (Interviewee 10). Speculating about the future and using NVivo to identify analytical themes, four main areas emerged, namely:

- The power of mega sports events and the demise of less popular events.
- The influence of technology as a driver of future practice.

- The emerging needs to better understand cultural sensitivities.
- The development of career opportunities and greater professionalisation within the industry.

Elaborating upon each in turn, practitioners suggested that current "marquee-property" or "top tier" mega events such as the Olympics and FIFA World Cup (The Economist, 2008) were perceived to hold enormous bargaining power both now and in the future. Possessing a unique sought after presence in the marketplace it was reported that their global prominence will "unquestionably remain with association becoming even scarcer and more exclusive" (Interviewee 2). However, with the "increased overcrowded global and national sports calendars" (Interviewee 3) practitioners demonstrated concern over the future of other less popular events and sports. For example, the sports of swimming and fencing were questioned on the basis of limited telegenic appeal (Interviewees 5 and 8), and it was mentioned that technology providers and financiers were now offering their own competing entertainment packages. Examples of the latter included the very popular television initiated events of the World Wrestling Entertainment and Gladiator series, as well as new sponsor initiated global events, such as the twenty-five world city Nike 10 km road races held in 2008.

Such findings seem to support Westerbeek and Smith's (2003; p. 224) "vicious sport globalisation" model of future development, where "The largest sports will become larger, the largest companies will take stronger and stronger strangleholds over the sport product and all of its peripherals." Dominated by those presently in control of the sport–economic–technology nexus, it is argued that the current elite will survive and prosper. In other words it is envisaged that the most powerful, wealthy and largely monopolistic sport bodies (e.g. International Olympic Committee), media conglomerates (e.g. News Corporation) and global businesses (e.g. Nike) will further develop major sports events to fulfil dream society needs for those who can afford them. However, elements of Westerbeek and Smith's (2003) "virtuous sport globalisation" category also exist as illustrated by recent developments in the emerging markets of China and India. As predicted by Westerbeek and Smith (2003, p. 222):

> Economic progress will drive sporting infrastructure development and hallmark events will be attracted to new parts of the world. …. The sport sector will expand radically to meet the demands of huge entertainment-starved populations.

No more is this apparent than in India where entertainment, sport, financial and media motives have innovatively been combined to establish the India Premier League whose "sudden arrival and apparent success … has shaken cricket from top to bottom." (The Economist, 2008, p. 13).

The second theme identified by respondents, related to the potential and continuing impact of technology. Practitioner comments for example included "artificial surfaces and temporary convertible stadia are common place, but the full range of senses have not yet been touched" (Interviewee 2); "10 years from now technology will have changed every facet of sport beyond our current level of understanding" (Interviewee 10). Referring specifically to football in the year 2020, The Orange Future of Football Report (2008) provides some futuristic ideas as to how different technology applications can enrich football stakeholder experiences. From holographic viewing, interactive stadia, robotic officials, stem cell banking, and artificial intelligence applications, technology will clearly impact all aspects of sport event production as well as distribution. Indeed as the virtual world seamlessly intrudes into reality, electronic games and e-world championships across generations may become commonplace, resulting in consumers preferring an interactive home-based existence of "play station" rather than "play sport". Applied to the major sports event manager scenario, such technologies regardless of location could create an event management role that merely focuses on "coordinating people to overseeing computer/technology decisions." (Interviewee 10).

The third theme related to future management practice emerged from the globalisation of events trend and the paradoxical nature of sport that can both unite as well as ignite cultural tensions. As one manager commented "there is likely to be more world and national leagues developing … and these are likely to require greater levels of understanding cultural sensitivities" (Interviewee 3). "Sport is about identity, pride and increasingly loyalty towards your national heritage" (Interviewee 4). Particularly post September 11, 2001, ethnic conflicts at sports events are now common, with the result that cultural liberalisation and social integration strategies have become prominent features of both government and event organiser agendas. In this sense, Westerbeek and Smith (2003) introduce culture as the third driver of the evolving sport nexus. The implication being that in future organisations that produce and distribute their products globally need to more strongly focus on the local habits, methods and communication expectations of very specific and diverse cultures.

To address these global and local cultural and legal complexities, practitioners unanimously agreed that the future will both create new career opportunities in event management as well as require unprecedented standards of professional education and training. Regards career opportunities, respondent comments included "there will be greater specialist positions within the industry as well as new event opportunities created in international companies such as Nike" (Interviewee 4) and "within five years more developed career pathways will certainly exist" (Interviewee 7). While new education and training provision was considered to be essential to meet these new demands, this sample group believed that current offerings were often "inadequate and uninspiring" (Interviewee 1). Specific criticisms cited related to their delivery (usually by non-practitioners), a lack of sport complexity understanding (generic event focus), and respondents commonly mentioned a mismatch between high student expectations and low management capability on completion of an event management degree.

Despite such criticisms practitioners were pleased to see the beginnings of a more coordinated era of professionalism, particularly in the broader field of event management. For example, a coherent international event management body of knowledge is emerging (EMBOK cited at http://www.embok.org), new national event management education associations (e.g. AEME, 2006) and sport specialist training bodies (e.g. Sport Knowledge Australia) are being developed, and more "formalised training and recognised career paths for professional event managers" are appearing (Allen, Harris, Jago, & Veal, 2000, p. i). However, relative to the established professions of law, accountancy, and medicine, event management is considered to be an underdeveloped profession and still at an infancy stage (AEME, 2006). Furthermore, given the frequency of sport related event incidents as identified in Table 1, it is a misnomer to assume that the search for professionalism in the very complex area of major sports event management is even remotely close. As national governments wrestle with the competing policy objectives of sport (Green, 2007), the fundamental components of an event or sport event management profession, namely an accepted body of knowledge, standardisation of roles, competencies, shared values and purpose (Silvers, 2003b), are yet to emerge (Harris, 2004).

To this end the findings of this study have provided a practitioner understanding of past, present and future major sport event management practice. By identifying the current planning behaviours, valued skill set, critical success factors and macro drivers of the industry, the complexities of this emerging specialist area of industry and study have begun. The implications and recommendations of these findings, as discussed in the final sections of this paper, can hopefully further enhance the growing knowledge base of event management training, education and research, so that a more meaningful, informed and unified profession can develop.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to systematically review current practice at the local organising committee management level. Using a practitioner focussed thirty year temporal framework of analysis (Table 3), this exploratory research has provided important insights into current management practice relative to where the industry has been and the direction it is now headed.

In summary, the findings reveal that major sport event management practice appears to be following a similar path to sport in general. Originating from enthusiastic amateur principles, management practice has progressed from a trial and error management phase, through a commercial and media influenced phase, a more accountable and partnership phase, and currently resides in a professional management and training phase. From the largely inward looking and ad hoc domestic oriented management behaviours of the 1970s, the current landscape is characterised as involving interrelated plans and entailing an outward looking global focus of more sustainable management practice.

Entailing unprecedented complexity through a diverse network of temporary partnerships, planning was deemed the prime management function for success, accompanied by a required skill set of coordination, leadership, interpersonal, administrative and marketing attributes respectively to survive. Furthermore, experiential learning developed through the workplace was argued to be the preferred form of career learning and progression since some current education and training offering were often perceived to be inadequate and uninspiring.

Industry practice appears to have been largely triggered by reactive macro and micro incidents, particularly those arising from past Olympic Games. However, past and present behaviour was believed to be highly dependent upon successfully managing the tripartite relationship between sport, media, and the event funders, as well as limiting chance occurrences. While sport is and historically has been at the centre of this symbiotic relationship, practitioner concerns were expressed as how much power and control global media entities and sponsors can and will have in the future.

Future practice was similarly underpinned by the nexus of economic and technological macro drivers with culture being introduced as an additional influence to the management mix. In essence, Westerbeek and Smith's (2003) vicious sport globalisation model of development was envisaged with some elements of ethical and virtuous globalisation prevailing. With a more volatile international market that minimally requires an understanding of diverse cultural needs new standards of professionalism were unanimously being demanded with a combined input of practitioners and academics.

6. Further recommendations

Further research is clearly required to validate the representative nature and reliability of these findings. However, the practical implications from this study seem to suggest the need to develop:

- a proactive and inclusive global medium to create a more informed event management knowledge base, from which benchmark standards and professionally accredited licence(s)/qualifications/curricula can be universally established and best practice shared.
- a more professional, practitioner relevant, industry based major sport event management series of education/training activities mapped against different roles, positions, management functions and career pathways of the emerging industry.
- an understanding of the unique and collective features of managing major sport event complexities as well as an in-depth comparative incident review across different events and phases of the life cycle.

- conceptual and context specific research that better integrates practitioner and academic needs, particularly regarding the evolving interrelationship between economic, technological, and cultural drivers as applied to different stakeholders, levels and types of sport events.

It is only when all major sport event stakeholders become proactively involved in developing a coordinated and highly valued operational framework that the emerging profession will begin to be recognised and the frequency of global incidents will be a thing of the past.

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