
Book Review

Reviewed by Craig Webster

Email: cwebster3@bsu.edu

Strategic Event Creation

by: Liz Sharples, Philip Crowther, Daryl May and Chiara Orefice

Published 2014

by Goodfellow Publishers, Ltd. Hardback

26 Home Close, Wolvercote, Oxford OX2 8PS, 290pp

ISBN: 978-1-910158-06-7 HBK

ISBN: 978-1-910158-07-4 PBK

This book is a text that is worthy of reviewing, as it looks at the event in a way different from many of the other texts that I have looked at. In addition, it is also an effective book for teaching students about events. While many other texts are differently organised, such as along the life cycle of events from the planning to the evaluation of the event, this book looks at the event as a happening that is to have a strategic impact. Thus, this work is built upon a slightly different conceptual foundation, noting that events are part of a strategic plan by organisations and thus they have to be designed with the intention of meeting the strategic needs of those who are sponsoring or planning the event.

The book is composed of five parts. Part I is the 'New normal for events', composed of two chapters, explaining the concept of strategic event creation and the importance of keeping the stakeholders of events as the focal point of events. Part II is 'Outcome obsessed', composed of four chapters that deal with the needs of hosts, attendees, sponsors, and communities in the event. Part III is 'Purposeful design', composed of five chapters that introduce such concepts as eventscapes, the role of food, and the legacy of events. Part IV ('Reflective approach') is composed of two chapters that deal with what happens after the event and focuses on the evaluation of events. Part V is 'Strategic persona', a section composed of two chapters that give industry insights and concludes the book.

There are some features in the book which are standard and some of which are unique. The book has the requisite table of contents and index. In addition, there are 22 figures and nine tables in the book, in addition to a number of different text boxes in each chapter. Chapters end with two to three study questions, a plus to those using the book as a study tool. The cover appears out of place given the content of the book. I am not sure what the pictures on the front cover have to do with events, although to be fair, it is hard to depict the concept of the event in a few pictures. I wish the cover were a bit more attractive, as it is a bit dark. This is a very minor element that has nothing to do with the contents, but I do prefer happier and lighter colours around me, rather than a dark cover with pictures of people I will likely never meet.

There are some strengths to the book. One thing that is noteworthy is that the book is an edited book, but it does not read like an edited book. Typically, edited books consist of

chapters that fit into a general theme of a book and then are put into segments of the book that seem appropriate. The chapters are typically written in obviously very different in writing styles. However, this book is written by 19 different authors, most of which are Sheffield Business School faculty, and yet, it works as a coherent textbook. This is a great success, in that while it is an edited book, it is not a choppy hodgepodge of articles loosely fitted around a theme and written in radically different styles.

The other major strength of the work is the conceptual basis upon which it is based. Each book on event management must have some sort of conceptual basis but this one is a bit novel, it is based upon the intention of events and the creation of events that are attentive to the impact of events. The interesting element is that the book is not too focused upon events as an outcome, per se, but is much more interested in the strategic impact of events. For me, this is rather novel, placing the strategic impact of the event in the centre, taking stakeholder needs into account. The approach is different and refreshing, moving away from discussions of the moving parts of events and focusing upon the major conceptual issues of event professionals, the need to focus upon the impacts desired for events and the interests of the stakeholders of events.

The chapter that stands out as being the most interesting is chapter 9, a chapter dealing with the role of food at events. I believe this chapter is one of the most useful and interesting because it makes it a bit different from many other books on events, as it mentions the role of food in the event, not as an afterthought but as a part of the strategy for the impact of the event. Having a chapter that deals clearly with food and drink and the importance of food and drink in an event is quite helpful and should be important for students and practitioners, adding another dimension to the discussion of events, away from questions of project management, marketing, and evaluation of events and toward something often not thought about in such a strategic way.

Another chapter that stands out is chapter 14, a chapter that consists mostly of about two pages from various professionals in the industry. Students especially would appreciate this, as it gives them insights into event strategy from the professionals. What I find, often, is that students do not necessarily believe what I tell them about events. The best way to overcome this is to bring in guest speakers. This would be, probably, the second-best thing, to have experts write briefly on the role of events in their strategies. I could envision using this chapter for either classroom discussion or an assignment that would have the students concentrate on recurring themes that students can identify in how professionals look at the role of events in organisations' strategies.

There are some weaknesses in the book. One weakness that I noticed is the lack of online/supporting teaching materials. While ideally it is nice for us to have time and energy to make up PowerPoint presentations, quizzes, and exams for ourselves, as teachers, it is helpful to have batteries of test questions with answers pre-prepared by the authors of the book. It seems like a major weakness of the book, as it is easy for me to go to a competitor for a textbook for my classes if they have PowerPoints and batteries of test questions, making my life a bit easier.

The writing style is a bit detrimental, in a way, as a textbook, as it is written in paragraphs, rather than in a business style. While it is understandable that people working in an academic environment would write in an academic style, I find that business style of writing is more effective, especially for the new generation of students. There would be many things that could have been expressed using bullet points, making it a bit easier for students to skim through and understand the major points, without the tedium of reading paragraphs.

All-in-all, I would recommend this book for those teaching classes in events, especially for those teaching for third or fourth year students in the university or at the post-graduate level. It would be best suited for advanced undergraduate students, as it is still somewhat introductory in nature while at the same time assuming a sophisticated mindset, understanding the abstractions of such things such as stakeholders and eventscapes. I feel that it is not appropriate for an introductory text, as it does not introduce basic concepts that people will need in the field (such as DMO, DMC, drayage, riders...) but instead deals with major strategic and conceptual issues linked with getting the desired impact out of an event. As such, the book is appropriate for students who are already familiar with the language of events and have some understanding of events but need to move on to begin to think like managers. In addition, the book may be of some use to practitioners, as it deals with the strategic concerns for events. Event planners, especially those working in on corporate events would likely get a great deal out of the book, as it puts the impact of the event into the spotlight while making the reader think about two major points of interest, satisfying stakeholders and fitting the event into the strategy of the organisers.