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CONCEPTUALIZING SELF-LEARNING TO DELIVER SUCCESSFUL EVENTS IN BUILT HERITAGE SETTINGS

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In the UK, museums (29%), gardens (38%), and historic buildings (27%) are the most visited attractions, yet admissions revenue is often insufficient for operational costs and long-term repair and investment costs. With the UK events sector worth £42.3 billion annually historic buildings are in a unique position to use events to generate income and raise awareness. However, the management of events within the heritage setting is complex, contextually informed, and contested by stakeholders while operators manage the competing issues of conservation, access, and revenue generation. Through 10 detailed semistructured interviews this study explores the way in which knowledge is gathered and embedded to professionalize event management practices within the heritage tourism sector. Building on the work of Garvin and Brine and Feather, a model is evolved to explain how knowledge is gained, embedded, and shared across the heritage sector.

Key words: Heritage management; Learning organizations; Self-learning; Event tourism; Heritage tourism; Event management

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing body of research where historic houses have become a critical lens for mediating research in tourism (Markwell et al., 1997), conservation (Watt & Colston, 2003), and education (Henson et al., 2004). However, research is still infrequent in relation to events management, with little relevant information surrounding the management procedures and policies necessary for managing events in historic houses (Turner & Kennell, 2018), despite the growth of the events industry within heritage settings (Connell et al., 2015; Harvie, 2015; Tkaczynski & Rundle-Thiele, 2011; Turner & Kennell, 2018; Whitfield, 2009).

In the UK museums (29%), gardens (38%) and historic buildings (27%) are the most visited attractions, yet admissions income often generates insufficient funding to cover operational costs and

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the long-term investment required to sustain and manage such assets (Bryan & Hall, 2017; Garrod & Fyall, 2000). For owners and managers seeking to make historic houses economically sustainable, events have become an increasingly important source of revenue (English Heritage, 2004).

With the events sector worth £42.3 billion to the UK economy in terms of direct spend by event attendees and organizers (Eventbrite, 2018) and with over 10,000 venues, 85 million event attendees and with 1.3 million business events held in the UK annually historic buildings are in a unique position, not only to generate income but to also increase the value and importance of their venues by using them for a range of events and functions (Bryan & Hall, 2017). Public events have become a key motivator for many consumers visiting a historic building, Mintel (2010), while many provide dedicated facilities for corporate events, private parties, art exhibitions, concerts, festivals, and educational visits (Getz & Page, 2016a).

This nontraditional approach (Kaufman, 2018) to attracting visitors and funding has been criticized for the tensions created between preservation, curatorship, and heritage protection (Evans, 2010; Lloyd et al., 2002; Skads Hannah, 2001). Event managers working within these historic venues face challenges that include dealing with clients, selling space, managing logistics, organizing catering, and meeting revenue targets while working with key staff who have very different priorities around conservation and protection of the sensitive historic environment (Turner & Kennell, 2018).

It has been acknowledged there is a scarcity of academic and professional research regarding the sustainable management of historic venues (Turner & Kennell, 2018). Getz and Page (2016a) suggested that despite the growing body of research in event tourism and event management, there is comparatively less research around the context of specific industries that utilize events, including the heritage sector (Evans, 2010). Events and event management within the context of historic buildings has been mainly overlooked, in both theory and professional practice (Fox & Johnston, 2009; Getz & Page, 2016b; Turner & Kennell, 2018). Several studies (e.g., Leask & Hood, 2001; Skads Hannah, 2001; Turner & Kennell, 2018) have indicated that little research has thus far investigated the relationship between commercial events, conservation, and heritage management. In response, this study aims to explore the processes of learning, adaptation, and development within heritage settings.

Historic Houses, Heritage Tourism, and Events

The concept of "heritage" is broad and dynamic. It is typically used as an umbrella term to describe the practice of cultural continuity (Fouseki & Cassar, 2015), and it denotes that the cultural resources of the past are still valued today for the purposes of tourism, education, and community development (Ashworth, 2003; Timothy, 2011). Heritage tourism is typically divided into three categories: natural, cultural, and built (Nicholls et al., 2004). This study focusses on historic houses—the most prominent feature of the UKs heritage landscape (Brine, 2008; Historic Houses Association [HHA], 2019a; Timothy, 2011) and one form of built heritage, which also includes religious buildings, scheduled monuments, domestic properties, and industrial buildings (Casey et al., 1996; National Heritage Training Group, 2020).

Charitable organizations such as The National Trust and English Heritage are responsible for maintaining an estimated 15,000 listed historic buildings (Kenny, 2018). The National Heritage List for England has seen an increase of 800 listed buildings since 2017–2018. The rising number of historic buildings and the number of historic houses that have been opened to the public indicate a growing appreciation of the value of heritage properties to the UK tourism market. Visiting historic houses and castles were among the top seven activities when visiting the UK for international visitors in 2019 (Visit Britain, 2019).

The UK's heritage sector has an impact that extends beyond its visitor numbers, with historic houses generating a gross value of £987 million in 2016 (Kenny, 2018), suggesting that historic houses play an important role within the UK tourism industry. It is recognized that many of these historic properties are now active businesses, hosting weddings, private or corporate events, staging festivals, concerts, conferences, and community events (HHA, 2019b). Evidently, historic houses are businesses, and need to be managed as both a visitor attraction and as a historic building (Brine & Feather, 2010).

Although many heritage sites are in the care of conservation bodies such as English Heritage, The National Trust, and various local authorities, many more are in private ownership or managed by independent charities (Parry, 2008). For those in the public sector it is worth noting that over the last quarter century there has, and continues to be, a severe decline in public expenditure (Darlow et al., 2012). Recognizing the influence and emphasis of ownership helps understand the nuances in their individual motivations for hosting events and the approaches taken to deliver effective event management (Bladen et al., 2012; Bowdin et al., 2006).

Heritage assets are expensive to maintain and require considerable financial support (British Property Federation, RICS & Historic England, 2017; Yale, 2004). Baker (1999) proposed a set of staged activities as a process for managing the relationship between preservation and presentation of a historic building. However, this model, as a one-size-fits-all solution, does not consider the nuances of individual properties, the difficulties faced by owners, and the challenges of balancing competing priorities for the property—in particular ensuring there is adequate income for maintenance and repairs (Hughes & Carlsen, 2010).

The management of historic buildings has become increasingly complex and controversial (Croft & Harwood, 1999; Garrod & Fyall, 2000). Heritage management has conflicting notions of ownerships attached and, therefore, conflicting sets of interests and values when it comes to managing an historic building (Keitsch, 2019). Researchers, conservationists, and heritage managers face significant internal and external pressures when deciding on the most suitable methods of conservation and management (Rahman, 2012). In recent years, it is generally accepted that the conservation of historic houses requires an interdisciplinary approach with the involvement of various players across the public, private, and third sector (Macdonald, 2011; Macdonald & Cheong, 2014). Southall and Robinson (2011) noted that heritage resources often overlap in terms of boundaries and, in some cases ownership, strongly suggesting that effective cooperation is required in order to maintain and sustain an effective balance between conservation, the attention of owners, the local community, and the benefits of tourism. Furthermore, it is recognized that "conservation actions need to be embedded within social, environmental, and economic development strategies that include financial mechanisms" in order to encourage and enable public and private funding (Macdonald, 2011, p. 893).

As securing funding has become more competitive, property managers are encouraged to build on emerging opportunities to secure the necessary funding and resources (Beaulieu, 2017; Woodward, 2012). Only a fraction of heritage places are public monuments that can be preserved for purely interpretive purposes (Macdonald, 2011). There is a general consensus that events are one of the most successful marketing tools for a business and an important mechanism to enhance tourism development locally (Dwyer & Jago, 2012; Ensor et al., 2008; Raj et al., 2017). As a result, many historic houses have taken the opportunity to develop events in order to generate additional income (Janiskee, 1996; Soteriades & Dimou, 2011; Weidenfeld & Leask, 2013; Whitfield, 2009).

Hosting events fulfils a wide range of objectives for owners of historic houses: generating publicity, growing visitor numbers, improving understanding, preserving culture and celebrating diversity, and, of course, generating much needed revenue (Janiskee, 1996). Income from events provides revenue for conservation works and delivers an up-market identity for many properties (Rahman, 2012), shaping a contemporary identity that ensures people remain interested in their survival (Turner & Kennell, 2018). Getz and Page (2016b) suggested that events are a key animator of attractiveness and a motivator for tourists. Historic venues have become popular as a result of their original features, interesting stories, and the symbolic power they still possess (Nolan, 2018). The appeal of these properties as venues is symbiotic with their function as attractions and the need to gain competitive advantage to retain and grow visitor numbers (Di Pietro et al., 2018).

Events in Heritage Settings

When historic houses are open to the public and are available for venue hire, owners and event managers must understand the conservation challenges and potential additional impacts. The approach taken to the conservation of any historic building, site, or structure will be a specific response to the situation and use of the property (Orbasli & Woodward, 2009). In spite of this, the underlying challenges will be the same (Orbasli, 2008). As visits to historic houses have grown in popularity many are now opened regularly to the public and used for commercial events (Lloyd & Staniforth, 2000; Timothy, 2018), thus exposing historic interiors to more light, dust, humidity, trampling, and handling (Leask et al., 2002: Lloyd & Staniforth, 2000). The impact when historic spaces are used to capacity considerably increases the vulnerability of the interiors and the collections of a property (English Heritage, 2004) in spaces that were never intended to accommodate regular large gatherings (Leask et al., 2002).

Because many historic properties are open to the public during the day, and transformed into private venues for the evening, event managers are often faced with the challenge of a tight turn around (Whitfield, 2009). Some venues require event managers to transform the space within 2 hr (Shallcross, 1998, cited in Whitfield, 2009). The logistics of moving equipment during the set up and derig of an event can cause damage to floors as staging, lighting stands, cameras, and other equipment are installed and removed (Frame, 2010). Other challenges arise from catering facilities that can result in spillages from food and drink (Frame, 2010). It has been suggested that historic buildings that handle these events themselves perform and manage better than those who leave it in the hands of a third-party event organizer or caterer. Third parties are often more interested in their own reputation and profit than the collections and contents of the historic building (Kanawati, 2006).

Professionalization and Self-Learning

The proliferation of events in recent decades has resulted in the expanding field of event management (Arcodia & Reid, 2003; Getz & Page, 2016a). There are challenges that exist within the event industry because of the "breadth, speed of delivery, and diversity of events in comparison to other industries" (Robertson et al., 2014, p. 1). With purpose-built facilities being seen as drab and dreary (Nolan, 2018), there has been a sustained increase in demand for more interesting, unusual, and unique venues—often because they allow more creativity within the space (Colston, 2014).

In response, an increasing number of historic buildings have developed space and operational strategies in order to specifically target event buyers (Nolan, 2018). Now, many historic venues host a range of planned events from cultural celebrations; political and state; arts and entertainment; business and trade; educational and scientific; sport competition and private events (Getz, 2016b). With the introduction of the Marriage (Approved Premises) Regulations in 1995, which allowed civil ceremonies to be held in venues other than churches, many historic houses have secured a license and now conduct marriages (Nolan, 2018). Historic houses have become popular wedding venues for civil ceremonies and are now considered a high-income commercial mainstay for many properties (AXA, n.d.). A report by Mintel (2016) found that 54% of couples now want their wedding to be remembered by guests as a party and a celebration that reflects a couple's unique personality.

It has been suggested that the rush to cater for events has, for many properties, compromised the core business of opening an attraction to the public for the purpose of cultural engagement and education, to generate revenue to preserve the place and to protect the fabric of the house (themes that align, when relevant, to the charitable objects of those charitable organizations operating historic properties) (Maust, 2018). As such, the professionalization of event management is imperative within historic buildings to ensure that those overarching values remain at the heart of any commercial activity (Turner & Kennell, 2018). Therefore, as the events industry grows, associations and education play an increasingly significant role in professional support (Arcodia & Reid, 2003).

Although many venues manage and evaluate events and their impacts, Page and Connell (2014) suggested a focus on the preevent, event, and postevent phases to facilitate continued improvement through three distinct stages. Again, such an approach, although broadly applicable to all properties, does not reflect the great diversity of ownership that determines the way in which they manage an event, which is often about the event itself, and then the building, its contents, and gardens (Brine, 2008). Brine and Feather (2010) subsequently developed a model that attempts to illustrate the information needs of those working in these complex environments and seeks to then explain how critical information is sourced, selected, and used to address problems, challenges, and projects. This model was used to frame the data analysis for this study, providing opportunities for further development and application of the model to event operations.

Turner and Kennell (2018) have investigated the professionalization of events in historic buildings and suggested that there is a lack of training, expertise, and knowledge within mainstream event management. Historic houses are classified as unusual venues that may indicate the need for specialist knowledge that does not fall in the standard overview of event management (van der Wagen & White, 2010). Allied to the paucity of literature regarding the management of events in historic buildings it is highly likely that in many cases these historic venues have become self-learning organizations (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012), and rely heavily on tacit knowledge (Brine & Feather, 2010; Gulavani & Kanthe, 2020). Thus, the organization learns through adapting to the changes in the environment, from past experience and through transferring knowledge in order to manage events (Basten & Haamann, 2018). The role of internal organizational learning within the business can facilitate a better understanding of the external operating environment and subsequently contributes to improved decision-making processes (Yang, 2007).

Although a number of articles suggest that organizational learning is hard to embed because of its highly conceptual nature (Garvin et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2010), this research seeks to assess the extent to which it happens organically and not as part of a formal or cultural approach to the development of tacit knowledge. It has been suggested by a number of authors (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012) that learning organizations are able to gain sustainable competitive advantage in unpredictable business environments. Crucially, organizational learning helps firms to avoid repeating past mistakes and helps embed critical knowledge that could otherwise be lost (Tohidi et al., 2012), while also encouraging creativity, which subsequently leads to increased innovation and resilience.

There are two principal models used to explore and explain organizational learning, single and double loop learning, and Garvin's five building blocks (1993), which discusses systematic problem solving, experimentation, learning from past experience, learning from others, and transferring knowledge. It is Garvin's model that is of most interest in developing this study as it reflects themes already identified within the literature and provides a framework for thematic analysis. It is Garvin's model and the work by Brine and Feather (2010) that are considered most applicable and which provide the basis for the methodology and analysis in this article.

Methodology

This study adopted an interpretivist paradigm, given the study was to understand the viewpoints of employees regarding the effective management of commercial events in heritage settings. This approach was especially important for this study as it can build a comprehensive assessment of experts' perspectives by gaining insight into their views and experiences (Gentles et al., 2015). Furthermore, it enabled the interpretation of the research to evolve as more semistructured interviews were completed as this has enabled opportunities to gather deeper insights by synthesizing and comparing the accounts of other respondents as the study developed (Snape & Spencer, 2003). This approach allowed the research to be flexible, to explore important facets of human and organizational behavior (Qu & Dumay, 2011), and to facilitate deeper investigation during each interview. Researchers involved in this project have direct experience of managing events in the heritage sector—the type of direct experience that Adams (2015) suggested is essential.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. All participants were working in one of 10 historic properties in directly relevant roles—as a senior event manager, property manager, or undertaking a similar role. It was important each participant had a relatively clear overview of the organization and the management of the property. Several historic houses were e-mailed and were offered the opportunity to voluntarily participate towards the study. A total of 10 historic houses agreed to the interview. These were (noting the R denotes the respondent) Burghley House (R1), Elvaston Castle (R2), Chiswick House and Gardens (R3), Trinity House (R4), Castle Howard (R5), Doddington Hall (R6), Pitzhangar Manor (R7), Foundling Museum (R8), Hardwick Hall (R9), and Tower of London (R10).

In addition to the semistructured interviews, a question guide was created containing questions and probes, which ensured that detailed narrative was collected. The questions and probes were structured around the key themes that emerged in the literature.

Where possible, interviews were carried out onsite, providing an opportunity to observe the atmosphere and other nontranscribable features of the interview interaction (Brinkmann, 2014). In some cases, the only option available were telephone interviews. Although the site visits were useful in terms of context, there was no discernible difference in the quality and depth of the data that were collected.

The interviews conducted were audio recorded with signed consent and permission from the participants. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and after completion the data analysis could commence (Lichtman, 2014). Throughout the transcribing process comments and interpretations have been made throughout that were deemed important to note. Then a summary table containing 3–4 short bullet points were produced to outline key points of each organization. A thematic approach to the analysis was used, with the utilization of discourse analysis to also consider the written and spoken language used in the discussions (Gee, 2014; Luo, 2019; Salkind, 2010). Discourse analysis was most appropriate in order to closely examine various elements of the conversations and to then relate them to the attributes, themes, and patterns that were relevant to the research question (Dick, 2004).

Results

This research sought to evaluate the importance of hosting events and the learning that occurs in response to event planning and delivery. The diversity of ownership in the sector was a critical contextual issue with some properties being supported by a larger network of expertise and policy frameworks (such as those managed by The National Trust), while independent properties have much less support. As such, it is ownership that initially determines the management philosophy of each historic building. All research participants emphasized that involvement, expertise, and legal policy determines to some extent the role of the public, private, and third sector determines the way in which they approach conservation and management, which reflects work by Macdonald (2011) and Macdonald and Cheong (2014). For independently-owned properties this might be a "memorandum of understanding" with Historic England as a result of previous funding grants and/or planning constraints (R3) or as a result of knowledge gained from conferences, events, and sector networking meetings.

Participant responses also suggest that stakeholders have a strong influence on the management culture of a historic building. For one property (R7) aspirations for growing the events business was constrained by stakeholders, "what we are here first and foremost is for the stakeholders for example, the council and HLF putting money in." Many operators noted a clear tension between event manager aspirations within historic buildings who are aiming to provide an excellent event experience, and the constraints placed upon them by internal and external stakeholders prioritizing both the physical environment and the philosophical approach to operating the property. For charitable organizations, Boards of Trustees add a further layer of complexity when it comes to making and implementing decisions (R2) with competing motivations and interests. A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense among participants that the involvement of stakeholders can differ the way in which the property is managed. R5 found this especially frustrating:

> Local authorities and the licensing side of life . . . they are so paired to the bone. I mean there's real contrast when running Blenheim and running Castle Howard. At Blenheim we worked with West Oxfordshire District Council, they had a Safety Advisory Group . . . which was very proactive . . . and if we had a big event, they would be all over us like a rash. But over here, it's like the walking dead.

At Elvaston Castle, a property at the beginning of the restoration, redevelopment, and revenue generation journey the Trustees are still working through the establishment of an accepted and agreed approach to space utilization, working out the balance between conservation and commercial activity and developing the philosophical approach that will guide critical decisions: "there's not yet a management culture for how the site is managed" (R2). Overall, these results reflect those of Rahman (2012), who found that due to the conflicting notion of ownership, there will be conflicting sets of interest and values when it comes to managing the property. Moreover, these results confirm Rahman's (2012) notion that it has become difficult for researchers, conservationists, and heritage managers to decide on the most appropriate method of conservation and management, especially with the involvement of many players across the sector.

Despite these constraints, the benefits of events were clear. The findings of the research confirmed the earlier literature by Soteriades and Dimou (2011), Weidenfeld and Leask (2013), and Turner and Kennell (2018) that events are an essential way to generate additional income in order to fund day-to-day operations and also that they play an important role in raising awareness, attracting further tourist visits, and retaining repeat visitors (Getz, 2008; Getz & Page, 2014):

> There's no point in sustaining to keep maintaining a building of this age of this value if no one is able to see it . . . by having events they bring us money and also show people, almost indirectly, what they're paying for. (R4)

> The aim is to provide diversity to people that can immerse themselves coming to here and reasons to keeping coming back because they come back for another reason or they become a member because of our events calendar. (R5)

In this study all 10 participants saw hosting events as secondary to their core purpose of conservation. Respondents also noted that there may be other opportunities to change their business models in the future with emerging opportunities for the heritage sector:

> Filming income is becoming increasingly important to houses. This was followed by, the film industry is bursting at the moment because you've got Netflix, Amazon, Apple, all growing hubs of production sites and they all want venues and these places are the places they want to come. (R5)

Ultimately, however, the historic setting comes ahead of any commercial income that can be achieved:

> We actually reduced the [events] offer, so we are doing very little in the house these days because of the impact on conservation of the house. . . . National Trust members have the expectations of entering our properties quite freely, so for us to close any period of time is not viewed favorably so even closing a room or part of the property for a wedding causes a problem. (R9)

This is consistent with Fox and Johnston (2009), who found that many National Trust properties operate dual decision-making processes for their properties: a top down approach where events relate to a national campaign (such as annual Easter Egg hunts) and events that are developed by each individual property to reflect the spirit of place. Orbasli (2008) argued that the approach taken to conservation will be a specific response to the nature of the property, but the underlying challenges will be the same—especially when it comes to mitigating the overall impacts of increased visitor numbers:

> These houses aren't necessarily built to accommodate hundreds and thousands of people . . . they continued, you wouldn't necessarily keep shoveling more people through the front door because the wear and tear on the fabric can actually be counterproductive. (R5)

> You think how many on a peak day we can get around 15,000 people coming through with their rucksacks and their footfall. There's always a lot of work that needs to be done . . . we're really trying as many events as we can to bring in revenue. (R10)

Another finding demonstrated that the management of visitors were an integral part of operating events. In fact, some participants commented on the benefit of having surrounding grounds and gardens in order to minimize damage to the interiors with R5 stating:

> When looking into the summer months, you've got the ability to put up a marquee, you can spread your business broadly, you can add more people

> . . . the good thing about grounds is perhaps what owners don't get is that it will always recover.

Nonetheless, respondents all agreed that without hosting events it would be difficult to sustain and maintain these properties. Most properties are operated by charities and charitable trusts so the revenue generated through events goes straight back into the future ventures of the property (Turner & Kennell, 2018).

The most prominent factor found by the research were the management challenges faced by event managers—more specifically the day-to-day practical challenges. Almost all the participants rely on small staff teams, which restricts the number of events that they can host:

> We regularly work 50–60 hr weeks. If we were doubling up roughly what we're selling. We don't have the physical capacity to do double the work, so we'd have to double the team.

Such pressures impact not just on the capacity of a property to host an event, but also on the capacity of staff to find time for formal learning and continued professional development. All respondents agreed that the idea of professionalization of events within the heritage sector needs more discussion and consideration—especially around the lack of consistency and the varied approaches taken to managing events. Despite many of the properties represented in this study having existing policies and guidelines in place for suppliers and events that operate on site these are developed in an informal and ad-hoc way with little external or internal expertise to determine the appropriateness of each:

> You can sort of feel that there is no care and no awareness and understanding. The discussion could be continued and developed more. The events sector is always going to feel like a dirty word and shame but it's something which needs to be focused and looked.

This issue reflects earlier studies by Leask and Hood (2001), Skads Hannah (2001), and Turner and Kennell (2018), who also noted a lack of information around the management of events in historic buildings.

However, of particular relevance to this study is the emergence of networks of knowledge and learning. Despite the shortcomings noted above, many off the participants expressed a sense that there is increasing professionalization and note particularly the importance of networking meetings, conference, events, and regional meetings between venues that have assisted heritage venues in building knowledge, which can become embedded in organizational working practices:

> There's all sorts of forums now, I think it's become far more professional than it was before, 10, 15 years ago. I think we've had to be for a number of reasons, health and safety is probably the main reason for it now and we've had to be very conscious . . . documentation has become more vital than it was. We might be a stately home, but we have to have the same kind of guidelines . . . we have to protect these incredible houses. (R1)

The growth of these networks in the last three decades has provided event managers with new opportunities to develop knowledge and enhance practice, reinforcing Brine and Feather's (2010) and Gulavani and Kanthe's (2020) idea that tacit knowledge is seen as an important component in running these organizations. All participants confirmed that networking is one of the most important processes for developing new knowledge. This has facilitated informal sharing of best practice with most managers in this study suggesting that they would call people they had met at events to seek guidance or second opinions:

> A lot of my role is focused on our wedding business. I'm not aware of that many support networks for historic venues and how weddings venues thrive and succeed . . . that's only through my own professional network. (R3)

Many historic properties have recognized the benefits of tourism and developed an attraction offer and a subsequent event offer to support income generation. With limited staffing budgets many of these properties have relied on owners and estate managers to support the evolution of these two sources of revenue. R6 represented an organization where the owner's knowledge and expertise has been integral to the growth of the event business:

> Wendy's grown up here, so she knows all the tricks of the trade because she learnt it from her mother. (R6)

Where responsibility for events has fallen on nonspecialist managers the research suggests that they have relied on existing networks of contacts and freelancers to provide the necessary expertise. Most respondents suggest that their businesses rely on "a self-teaching philosophy" (R5) and "learning on the job" (R6). There was little evidence among the respondents of any of the formal approaches or methodologies (e.g., suggested by Page and Connell, 2014) being applied to working practices, but strong evidence instead that these heritage venues are relying on self-learning (Basten & Haamann, 2018; Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012).

When it comes to working with outside event organizers the lack of professionalization was highlighted further:

> The professionalization of the industry can only be a good thing because there are lots and lots of cowboys out there. (R2)

The findings are also consistent with Robertson et al. (2014), who found that the themes linked to event professionalization are as follows: the

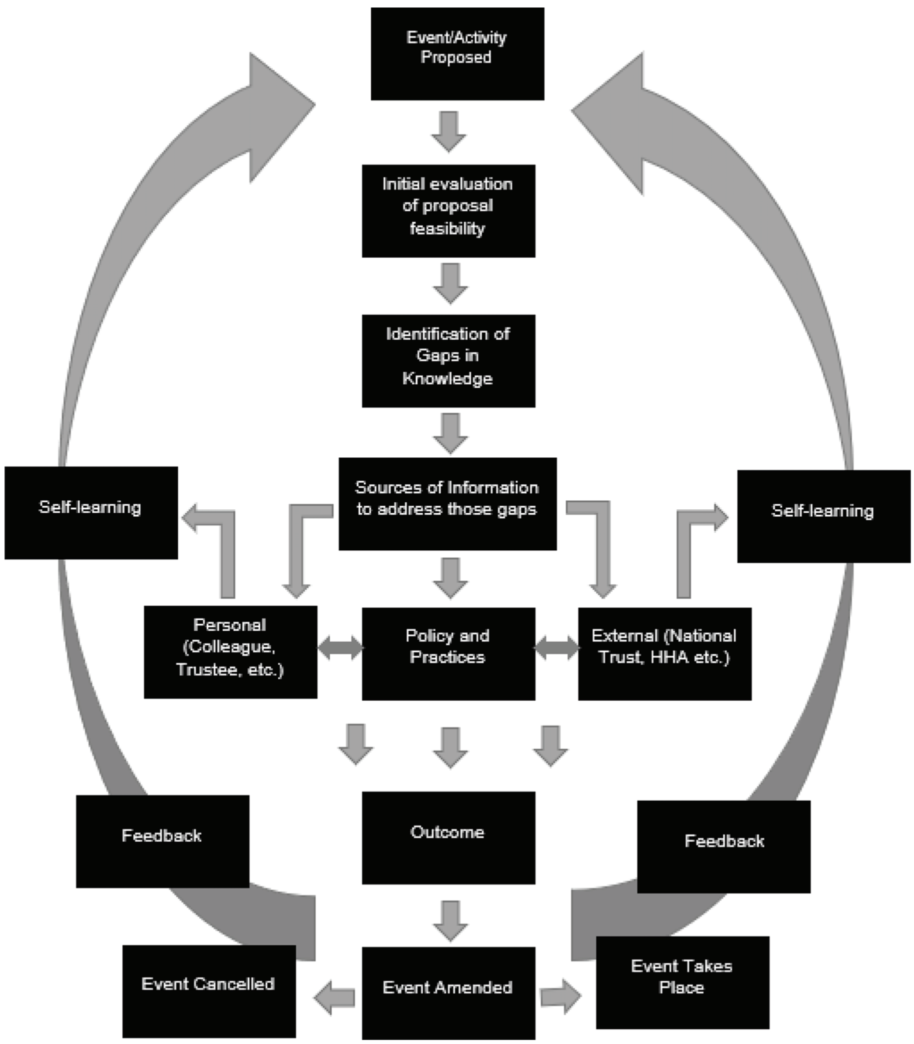

Figure 1. A conceptual model for self-learning to deliver successful events in built heritage settings.

perspective of the industry, training, education, knowledge, and the experiential side of events:

> While I do believe that experience is more valuable than education in the industry. The education is still extremely valuable and very useful . . . I believe they should both work closer together. (R4)

This confirms research by Arcodia and Reid (2003), who noted that as the event industry grows, associations and education play an increasingly significant role in professional support. It is clear from the participants' responses, and the paucity of education and research regarding event management in historic buildings, that further research could be beneficial.

Developing a Model of Self-Learning in the Heritage Sector

Using the principles set out by Brine and Feather (2010) and Garvin (1993) the following model has been developed to bring together the processes that address gaps in knowledge (Brine & Feather) and the process of organizational learning (Garvin) to create a model that illustrates the importance of self-learning for facilitating event management activities in the heritage environment.

A number of examples of events were discussed with respondents and the information flow illustrated in the system was applicable in all of those examples. Respondents identified how, when presented with a problem they would identify sources of new knowledge, use that knowledge to make decisions, and then embed this new learning within both the operations team and the policies and frameworks used to determine future decision making (Fig. 1). It is this knowledge that then becomes tacit and embedded.

Conclusion

A detailed review of academic literature from the 1990's (Casey et al., 1996; Janiskee, 1996; Markwell et al., 1997) to recent years (Nolan, 2018; Raj et al., 2017; Turner & Kennell, 2018) established that there is a clear lack of professional and theoretical information surrounding the management of events in historic houses. Using semistructured interviews informed by this secondary research, detailed discussions with senior decision makers at 10 historic houses were undertaken to evaluate the importance of events to heritage operators, the challenges involved in balancing the competing challenges of access, conservation, and revenue generation, and the role of self-learning to deliver effective and appropriate events.

The research bears out work by Soteriades and Dimou (2011), Weidenfeld and Leask (2013), and Whitfield (2009), who all observed that events play an important role in sustaining historic buildings. However, participants also noted that the growth of event operations has led to management and conservation difficulties for key decision makers.

The findings showed that it is the tacit knowledge of event managers that is the most prominent factor in managing events in historic buildings. The model we have developed suggests that event management decision makers follow the model without recognizing a formal approach to embedding learning within the organization. This doesn't matter as the model seeks to prove the process occurs, not to provide a framework for managers to adopt. This important contribution to knowledge is not the development of a model per se, but the existence of the model to support the importance of organizational learning that occurs in the management of events. This means that networking and interorganizational networks are critically important to building self-learning approaches for event management, supporting and extending research by Basten and Haamann (2018), Brine and Feather (2010), and Tohidi and Jabbari (2012).

Clearly, in carrying out this study the sample of 10 event managers can only be considered exploratory though the themes that emerged from the study were consistent across the sample. The study has tested and further developed existing research in the field and highlights some gaps to be addressed in the development and delivery of event management education and practice. In terms of training and education it might be impossible to better prepare event staff for every eventuality in complex heritage settings, which further emphasize the importance of gathering, retaining, and sharing new information. This knowledge could be collated and developed into more formal learning materials for future event managers.

Further research could also be carried out with others working in the heritage sector and there may be gaps and opportunities to consider the role of employment strategies and mentoring when recruiting event managers. There are also other forms of heritage where the same research might reveal similar or different results. It should also be considered that this study looked at properties that primarily operate as visitor attractions. Several heritage venues focus primarily on events or have actively moved away from tourism to become more exclusive venues. There are also opportunities to consider the role of external stakeholders including Historic England, local authority planning and conservation teams, and others who influence and control permissible activities in heritage settings. Finally, having developed a model (that has been theoretically applied and tested) there is scope to test this through further studies and to assess its generalizability to the field of events management.

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