Event Planning students' skills development: Adding communications coursework to the mix

Ann D. Summerall-Jabro

Robert Morris University

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**ABSTRACT**

. The Meeting, Expositions, Events, and Conferences (MEEC) industry is far reaching and subsumes numerous sectors of the complex hospitality industry. It is a system of interrelated parts impact by internal and external local, regional, national and global factors. One subsystem of MEEC is event planning, which has been studied in a multitude of areas such as public relations, tourism and hospitality, communication, and business. Myriad factors influence what content is covered in an academic and/or professional development setting. Further, career choice influences the amount and type of exposure to event planning content a student enjoys: some students acknowledge the event planning function as a component of their job description and attempt to prepare while others wish to pursue a full-time career in event planning.

Event planning as a full-time career option appears to be worthwhile choice. According to *Occupational Outlook*, "Employment of meeting, convention, and event planners is projected to grow 18 percent from 2020 to 2030, much faster than the average for all occupations" (www.occupationaloutlook.gov/eventplanning). Event planning coursework focus varies according to the instructor, program focus, text selected, and theoretical or applied nature of the academic and/or professional program in which the course is offered.  Thus, some students may have one course that presents the big picture components of event planning while those enrolled in minors or majors engage in learning diverse content through a series of courses that focus on different aspects of event planning. Another consideration in the event planning preparation and exposure to the field is quantity and quality of internship experiences, table top or scaled-up event planning assignments and supporting skills to empower the event planner to be well-rounded and effective.

Systems theory, developed by Von Bertalanffy (1968) posits organizations aren't predictable in machine-like ways due to a human workforce. Moreover, the ability to interact with environments in which an organization operates is paramount. Systems theory offers an understanding as to how a system functions through its categorizations of systems components, processes and properties. Fenich & Malek (2021) suggest COVID-19 shifted event protocols and design. They suggest event planners must be strategic, incorporate participation in omni-channel environments, and facilitate community planning. Fenich & Malek are demonstrating feedback

to shifts in the external environment prompting change in the internal environment and knowledge and skills necessary to prepare tomorrow's event planners. Based on a voluminous array of external and internal shifts in event planning, Fenich & Malek (2021) describe the skills and knowledge necessary to be successful event planners today:

> (1) understand the foundational ways in-person digital and hybrid (combining in-person and digital elements) events support organizational strategy, drive business outcomes, support human capital; (2) understand the direct and indirect economic impact that events have on the communities they serve and how to measure and communicate these impacts (p.2).

An example of a systems process is when the researchers acknowledge the importance of communication in the event planners' skills development. In short, these researchers promote a systems perspective to event planning: internal and external systems interacting to create a gestalt. While students studying Event planning are exposed to multiple topics to enhance performance, there does not appear to be coursework focused on the diverse communication skills necessary to execute the activities an event planner performs.

This study attempts to identify all the published skills correlated with an event planner. The skills were analyzed to differentiate what communication skills are necessary to execute the identified skills as shown in Table 1. The outcome is suggested communication content/coursework that may empower event planners to learn strategy development, effective and efficient in dealing with their teammates and their clients.

Occupational Outlook identifies the event planning activities performed by event planners in Table 1 and serves as the starting point for this analysis. The literature will be reviewed and more skills identified before the conference.  Table 1 provides *Occupational Outlooks* consolidated list of event planning activities with my associated communication skills an event planner must develop to effectively complete the stated activities. As more skills are developed through the review of the literature, a thematic analysis will assist with categorization of the skills for grouping.

**Table 1: Event Planning Activities**

| *Occupational Outlook* Activities | Jabro's Recommended Communications Skills | |
|---|---|---|
| Meet with clients to understand the purpose of the event | Relationship Development  Relationship Management  Interaction Management  Cognitive complexity | Public Speaking  Listening  Critical thinking |
| Plan the scope of the event, including its time, location, and cost | Behavioral Flexibility  Critical thinking | Mutuality  Problem-solving |
| | Audience-centered solicitation  Persuasion | Writing  Decision-making |
| Inspect venues to ensure that they meet the client's requirements | Audience centered needs' assessment  Empathy  Mutuality | |
| Coordinate event services such as rooms, transportation, and food | Facilitation  Negotiation | Conflict Resolution |
| Monitor event activities to ensure that the client and the attendees are satisfied | Self-Awareness  Conflict Resolution | Semiotics |
| Review event bills and approve payments | Critical thinking  Digital literacy | |

The presentation will flesh out definitions and provide situational context for usage for each communication skill. The findings will provide opportunities for professional development for professional already practicing event planning or potential course work components for those learning event planning.

### *REFERENCES*

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