

Event gypsies – who, what and how?

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At most big international events there is a group of international staff and volunteers who have participated in many previous events. The different events depend on them and the expertise and experience they bring to the event/Organizing Committee (OC) through knowledge transfer. This nomadic lifestyle has resulted in the term event gypsies, describing workers who move around and work for Olympic or major international event organizers (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2012). We suggest that in addition to the staff who might work for an OC for a year or two, the term event gypsies can also be applied to a group of volunteers doing the same. Hence, we propose that the term should include both the staff and the volunteers moving from one event to another as many of these events do not reoccur at the same destination. In addition to an international group, which we immediately think of, there is also a national group that travels to events in the same way. We have little knowledge about the event gypsies (Parent, MacDonald & Goulet, 2014).

Research question

To expand our knowledge about the event gypsies – who they are, why they do it and if their previous experience contribute positively to the local OC.

Theoretical background and literature review

A focus on knowledge transfer has been a priority since the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. Actually, it did not start as a knowledge management program but as an information management project with the goal of leaving a legacy (Halbwirth & Toohey, 2001). This project helped the Organizing Committee to share knowledge through the organization. It turned out to be a commercial product that the Sydney Organizing Committee sold to the IOC. Before that, there had been no formal transfer of any knowledge from one game to another. Vancouver was the first city where knowledge transfer was a requirement in the bid document (Parent, MacDonald & Goulet, 2014).

Knowledge management originated primarily in the field of strategy (Thompson, Jensen & Tienne, 2009). Knowledge transfer is defined as "the effective sharing of individual and collective experience" (Thompson, Jensen & DeTienne, 2009, p. 326).

Methodology

The data we used are from three multisport youth events: the 2015 European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF) in Vorarlberg/Schruns, Austria and Liechtenstein, the 2016 International Children's Games in Innsbruck, Austria and the 2016 Youth Olympic Games Lillehammer, Norway. The information was gathered from observations at the three events, interviews in person and by Skype after the event of both staff and volunteers (N=15), and document studies. The transcribed interviews were coded.

Results, discussion and implications

The event gypsies, who were staff, were mainly young well-educated persons. Most of them had a sports background themselves and they were devoted to the age group targeted by the event. The volunteer gypsies were also well educated and covered wider age categories (26 - 49 years). The gypsies indicated the importance of the tacit knowledge and the value to their organization. The gypsies were often socially connected, and they would go where their friends were in charge of an event. They established a network, and due to globalization they move easily from one event to another. A person is knowledgeable if she/he has the knowledge to take action effectively where the knowledge is relevant. The knowledge can be used over and over again. The gypsies have learned to do the right things at work, and they feel comfortable in their role. It is important that veteran workers are open and supportive and help the newcomers. The knowledge is often a byproduct of socializing with a lot of talking, listening, telling stories and developing a feel for the role. The receiver of this information has to engage with it in order to make it knowledge for her/him. Any piece of information a sender sends, will be a mix of the sender's tacit and explicit knowledge. The receiver converts the information she receives to her own and translates it to knowledge for herself. The gypsies used their knowledge from other events they had taken part in; for example the EYOF in 2015 used lots of knowledge from YOG in Innsbruck and the YOG in Lillehammer used experience from YOG in Innsbruck. As the gypsies received more and more information, they developed expertise and identified with their role in the organization. Many of the repeating volunteers wanted to have a future career as staff member in an event. Organizers should be adept in using all the volunteers in the field where they already have some competence.

References

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