



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

**CONTEMPORARY CURRICULA FOR PROFESSIONAL MEETING AND EVENT  
MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA: STRATEGIES AND RESPONSES TO  
INDUSTRY REQUIREMENTS**

by

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**Article-format thesis**

**submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**Doctor of Technology: Tourism and Hospitality Management**

**in the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences**

**at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

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**District Six Campus  
November 2022**

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**Signed**

28 October 2022

**Date**

## **ABSTRACT**

The continued growth of the business event tourism industry has catalysed the need for academic qualifications to meet the demand for knowledgeable and skilled professionals in the field. As a sub-sector of the tourism industry, business events have been identified globally as a lucrative sector holding socio-economic benefits for host destinations. Due to the dynamic and fast-paced nature of the industry, business events are not only susceptible to changes in the world-of-work, but also require a competent work force to ensure the long-term sustainability of the sector. Therefore, it is imperative that vocational qualifications are closely aligned to industry needs and adopt innovative educational approaches to embed the necessary knowledge and skills in meeting and event management curricula. Meeting and event management is an emerging academic discipline compared to the more established tourism and hospitality programmes offered at university level. The incremental expansion of more specialised qualifications in meeting and event management is directly related to the progression of the business event tourism industry. In South Africa, business event tourism brings with it powerful opportunities to create jobs and to make meaningful contributions to the economy and society at large. As a destination, the country competes on a global platform to win major meetings and events further galvanising the need for qualified practitioners to reinforce the destination's ability to successfully host business events and contribute to tourism. Furthermore, the movement towards the professionalisation of occupations in the meeting and event industry has made headway in recent times with both international and national professional bodies instituting designations in the field. It is therefore important for university educators to ensure that the meeting and event management qualifications they offer, are relevant and recognised by industry to enhance graduate employment and support professional career advancement. The development of responsive curricula in the field requires ongoing renewal to meet the demands of this ever-evolving industry. Therefore, the primary aim of this study was to explore stakeholder perspectives on professional meeting and event management curricula in South Africa and, in doing so, develop responsive strategies for contemporary curricula in line with industry requirements.

A qualitative approach was adopted and a total of seven inter-related research publications were written to contribute to the primary aim of the study. The qualitative research design across the publications employed interviews and focus groups to collect data among selected key informants during candidature between 2015 to 2021. Utilising purposive sampling, data was collected distinctly for each of the seven publications amongst industry practitioners affiliated with the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) and industry practitioners who served on academic advisory boards for a university of technology; and from graduates and students enrolled in a vocational meeting and event management

qualification. The generated data was also analysed separately for each of the seven publications by means of step-by-step inductive, thematic content analysis. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the ethics committee of the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), SAACI and the participating key informants by means of informed consent.

The study presented valuable insights on important aspects of a meeting and event management curriculum from industry perspectives and the educational experiences of graduates and students. These insights were used as the foundation to inform responsive strategies for contemporary curricula. Firstly, the investigation established that the embedment of corporate social responsibility (CSR) as part of sustainability education can be achieved by adopting a knowledge-skills-attitude framework in partnership with industry. The research also found that it is imperative for curriculum developers to reinforce industry-aligned graduate attributes related to time and stress management, professionalism in the workplace and personal characteristics as part of the holistic development of students during their time of study. It was further revealed that experiential learning in partnership with industry can be enhanced by implementing a co-mentorship framework to close the graduate knowing-doing gap. The study also determined how event volunteering can be used effectively as an educational tool to reinforce theoretical knowledge of the curriculum in a practical setting. Another noteworthy aspect of the findings related to curricula that is responsive to industry trends where technology, delegate experiences, safety, and security as well as sustainability were highlighted as key trends to consider. Additionally, the study outlined how the United Nations Sustainability Goals (UN SDGs) can be integrated as competencies and learning outcomes in a meeting and event management curriculum. Lastly, the investigation presented findings on competencies for business event careers in a changing world-of-work considering the Covid-19 pandemic. Implications on the curriculum in this regard emphasised aspects related to health and safety in risk management, technological advancements, sustainable meeting and event management and new opportunities for experiential learning. The study has aided to reduce the industry-academic gap regarding relevant curricula content for vocational meeting and event management qualifications and contributed South African contextual notions to the body of knowledge in the field.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### I wish to thank:

- Niel and Ruby-Rain Hefer, my cherished family who supported me with so much unconditional love, patience and understanding.
- Annalie and Robert Venske, my parents for their encouragement, in particular my mother, for her unwavering care and spiritual support.
- Professor John Spencer, my supervisor, for bringing the weight of his extensive knowledge and experience to this project with so much care, kindness, humour and understanding.
- Professor Jacobus Steyn, who initially started this journey with me during times of good health, for his gentle approach and gracious advice often reinforced with anecdotes of his life experiences.
- My network of friends and family, for their steadfast companionship, support, and motivation.
- My CPUT colleagues, for their advice and time spent on refining and guiding the various aspects of the manuscript to meet the research requirements of this article-format thesis.
- The participants of this study, particularly to the Southern African Association for the Conferencing Industry (SAACI), for their extended cooperation as an industry body.
- The esteemed peer reviewers and editors of the various publications presented in this thesis, for the rigorous reviews, positive critique and valuable feedback that allowed me to contribute to the academic field of meeting and event management.
- Mr Gareth Cornwall, for his fortitude in terms of the academic language editing, and for imparting his expertise with so much professionalism.

## **PREFACE**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction and research background**

The interrelated concerns of this study coalesce around the notion of a contemporary curriculum for professional business and event management that is responsive to industry requirements in line with the guidelines for an article-format thesis (**Appendix A**). An introductory summary of the background of the research problem is provided, followed by an overview of the research objectives and questions as they relate to each of the seven peer-reviewed publications that constitute the thesis (five journal articles and two conference proceedings contributions). This is followed by an overview of the research methodology employed. The chapter concludes with notice of the limitations and significance of the research. The in-text references in Chapter 1 are included in the overall thesis reference list.

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

The literature review provides additional and updated theoretical underpinning for the interconnected publications that were published during the span of candidature. Each of the seven accredited publications (Chapters 3 to 9) has a literature review aligned with its specific objectives, each of these conforming to the editorial specifications of the journal or proceedings concerned. Although the repetition of key literature sources was unavoidable because of the interrelated themes informing the body of work, the researcher sought to reduce duplication by including a range of sources where equivalent information is presented differently. Chapter 2 therefore provides a review of literature associated with each of the publication themes on meeting and event management, namely: embedding sustainability: corporate social responsibility; graduate attributes that are industry-aligned; experiential learning in partnership with industry; event volunteering as an educational tool: education that is responsive to industry trends; incorporating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals; and competencies for a changing world of work. The in-text references in Chapter 2 are included in the thesis reference list.

### **Chapter 3: (journal article 1) Learning to leave a legacy: corporate social responsibility in South African business event tourism curricula**

This article was published (in June 2016) in a South African peer-reviewed journal, the *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure (AJHTL)*, Volume 5, Issue 3 (see Table P.1). The journal is included in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) list of accredited journals. The chapter appears stylistically formatted to meet the technical requirements of the thesis. All headings, tables, and figures presented in the chapter have thus been renumbered according to the sequences of numbers in the thesis as a whole. However, the wording of the headings remains as prescribed by the journal. The reference style of

Chapter 3 also remains unchanged from the journal specifications. The main objective of this article was to understand how corporate social responsibility (CSR) could be embedded in business event tourism curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa to meet industry requirements. The first page of the actual journal publication can be found in **Appendix B**.

**Chapter 4: (journal article 2) Graduate attributes for contemporary business event tourism management qualifications: employee and graduate reflections at a South African University of Technology (UoT)**

This article was published (in 2017) in a South African DHET-accredited and peer-reviewed journal, namely the *African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences (AJPHEs)*, June 2017, Supplement (see Table P.1). This full paper was one of twelve chosen for publication in the journal from those presented at the Tourism Educators South Africa (TESA) International Tourism Conference in Cape Town, between 21 and 23 September 2016. The article is stylistically formatted to meet the technical requirements of this thesis. All headings, tables, and figures presented in this chapter have been renumbered to form part of the overall thesis sequences. The wording of the headings remains as prescribed by the journal. The reference style of Chapter 4 is also that prescribed by the journal. The main aim of the article was to determine the graduate attributes and personal skills that are fundamental to the South African business event management sector to meet industry requirements. Please refer to **Appendix C** to view the first page of the actual journal publication.

**Chapter 5: (journal article 3) Rising to the occasion: experiential learning experiences of event management students at a South African University of Technology**

This article was published (in February 2018) in a leading international and peer-reviewed journal, namely *Event Management*, Volume 22, Issue 1 (see Table P.1). The article has been stylistically formatted to meet the technical requirements of the thesis, with all headings, tables and figures renumbered according to the sequences with the thesis as a whole. The wording of the headings remains as prescribed by the journal, and the reference style remains that prescribed by the journal. The main aim of the article was to explore how students experienced experiential learning (EL) as part of a formal event management qualification at a South African university of technology (UoT), and how workplace-based internships can enhance industry-academic collaboration to reinforce EL as a tool to meet industry requirements for the workplace. Please find the first page of the actual journal publication under **Appendix D**.

#### **Chapter 6: (journal article 4) Event volunteering as a tool to strengthen education in business tourism**

This article was published (September 2019) in an international and peer-reviewed journal, *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, Volume 67, Issue 3 (see Table P.1). Chapter 6 has been stylistically formatted to meet the technical requirements of the thesis, with all headings, tables, and figures renumbered to form part of the overall thesis sequences. The wording of the headings and the reference style remain as prescribed by the journal. The main aim of the article was to explore students' perspectives on volunteer participation at business events as a tool to meet their educational needs in alignment with the requirements of industry partners. Please refer to **Appendix E** for the first page of the actual journal publication.

#### **Chapter 7: (paper in conference proceedings 1) Industry perspectives on contemporary trends that affect Cape Town's MICE sector: implications for Event Tourism Curriculum**

This conference paper was published (in March 2020) in the *Conference Proceedings Book of the International Tourism Conference Dubrovnik (ITCD) – Tourism in the VUCA World: Towards the Era of (Ir)responsibility* (see Table P.1). The ITCD was hosted in Dubrovnik, Croatia, from 6 to 9 November, 2019. The paper was peer-reviewed and selected as one of 21 international full papers for publication. It is recognised as a DHET research output and is submitted (in addition to the journal articles) as part of the body of published work for the thesis. Chapter 7 presents a version of the paper stylistically formatted to meet the technical requirements of the thesis, with all headings, tables, and figures renumbered in conformity with numeric sequencing in the thesis as a whole. The wording of the headings in Chapter 7 and the reference style remains that of the *Proceedings*. The main aim of the publication was to explore industry perspectives on contemporary trends that affect the MICE sector in South Africa's top events destination (Cape Town), as a reference point to support responsive curriculum development consistent with industry requirements. Please refer to **Appendix F** for the first page of the paper as published in the conference proceedings.

#### **Chapter 8: (journal article 5) Quality education: industry contributions to embed sustainability in a meeting and event management curriculum**

This journal article was published (in August 2021) in a prominent, peer-reviewed international journal, the *International Journal of Event and Festival Management (IJEFM)*, Volume 12, Issue 3 (see Table P.1). Chapter 8 is stylistically formatted to meet the technical requirements of the thesis, with all headings, tables, and figures renumbered in line with the sequences in the thesis as a whole. The wording of the headings and the style of referencing remain as per the journal publication. The main aim of the article was to explore the viewpoints of industry regarding the embedding of sustainability in the development of a Meeting and Event

Management curriculum that is responsive to industry needs and contributes to quality education. The first page of the actual journal article can be found in **Appendix G**.

### **Chapter 9: (paper in conference proceedings 2) The changing world of work: implications for vocational business event management curriculum**

This conference paper was published in (January 2022) in the *Conference Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Events (ICE2021) – Making New Waves in Africa: Exploring Frontiers in Festivals and Events* (see Table P.1). The full paper was peer reviewed for inclusion in the publication. The *Proceedings* is recognised as a DHET research output and forms part of the body of published work constituting this study. Chapter 9 presents a version of the conference paper stylistically formatted to meet the technical requirements of the thesis. All headings, tables and figures presented in the chapter have thus been renumbered according to the numerical sequences of the thesis as a whole. The wording of the headings and the style of referencing remain the same as in the *Proceedings*. The main aim of the publication was to explore the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business event industry, and the implications thereof for curriculum realignment congruent with evolving industry needs. Please refer to **Appendix H** for the first page of the actual conference paper as published.

### **Chapter 10: Conclusions and recommendations**

The final chapter provides a concise summary of the seven publications that make up the body of the study. In line with the thesis format, the conclusions reached within each publication are presented individually (Chapters 3 to 9). Chapter 10 attempts to blend these to arrive at an overall set of conclusions. The researcher endeavoured to avoid needless duplication by highlighting key implications and identifying the shared contribution made by the publications to the existing body of knowledge. The limitations of the study are noted and directions for future research are identified. The in-text references in this chapter form part of the thesis reference list.

### **References**

The thesis reference list is only applicable to Chapters 1, 2 and 10. Each of the journal and conference proceedings publications (Chapters 3 to 9) follows the referencing style of the medium of publication, in line with the article-format thesis guidelines of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) (see **Appendix A**). In-text references are presented without pagination and a list of references is to be found at the end of each of the chapters. Some referenced sources recur in the thesis, indicating the interrelatedness of the publications. Selected seminal papers and theories are integrated into the body of work as a whole, and the

considerable date range of the references reflects the time of publication during the researcher's candidature.

### **Appendices**

The following supporting documents are included as appendices: the CPUT guidelines for an article-format thesis, the first page of each of the seven publications; interview guides; participant consent form; Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) permission letter; and CPUT's ethical clearance certificate.

### **Publications**

An overview of the series of articles and conference papers that constitute this article-format thesis is presented in Table P.1. The five journal articles and two full conference papers published in proceedings are listed in their order of publication during the researcher's candidature. The publications comprise a sustained thesis with a coherent focus on issues relating to contemporary and responsive curricula in the field of meeting and event management.

**Table P.1: Publication overview**

Publication	DHET accreditation & subsidy	ISSN / ISBN number	Indexing and/or abstracting (Presented as specified by the publication)
<p><b>Journal article 1 (Ch. 3):</b> Venske, E. 2016. Learning to leave a legacy: corporate social responsibility in South African business event tourism curricula. <i>African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure</i>. [Online], Special Edition, 5 (3). Available: <a href="http://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_16_vol_5_3_final.pdf">http://www.ajhtl.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_16_vol_5_3_final.pdf</a></p>	<p>DHET Approved SA (African) journals (2016)</p>	<p>ISSN: 2223-814X</p>	<p>Scopus abstract and citation database; Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ); The Comprehensive List of African Research Journals (Journals Consortium); EZB Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek (EZB - electronic journals database); Directory of Open Access scholarly Resources (DOAR); AcademicKeys journal database; EBSCO.</p> <p>AJHTL is ranked internationally by the University and Research System Assessment Agency (ANVUR, Italy).</p>
<p><b>Journal article 2 (Ch. 4):</b> Venske, E. 2017. Graduate attributes for contemporary business event tourism management qualifications: employee and graduate reflections at a South African University of Technology (UoT). <i>African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences (AJPHEs)</i>, June 2017(Supplement): 32-45.</p>	<p>DHET Approved SA (African) journals (2017)</p>	<p>ISSN: 2411-6939</p>	<p>Sabinet Reference; African Journals Online (AJOL)</p>
<p><b>Journal article 3 (Ch. 5):</b> Venske, E. 2018. Rising to the occasion: experiential learning experiences of event management students at a South African University of Technology. <i>Event Management</i>, 22(1): 79-99.</p>	<p>DHET Approved International journals (2018)</p>	<p>ISSN: 1525-9951 (Print) ISSN 1943-4308 (Online)</p>	<p>American Psychological Association/Psycinfo; Cab International (Cabi); C.I.R.E.T.; Ebsco Discovery Services; Google Analytics; I.B.S.S. /Proquest; Ocl; Primo Central; Proquest; Scopus; Southern Cross University; Web of Science Emerging Sources Citation Index; Worldcat Discovery Services</p> <p>Event Management is an "A" category journal with the ABDC (Australian Business Dean's Council): <a href="https://abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-list/">https://abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-list/</a></p>
<p><b>Journal article 4 (Ch.6):</b> Venske, E. 2019. Event volunteering as an educational resource in business tourism. <i>Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal</i>, 67(3): 268-280.</p>	<p>DHET Approved International Journals (2019)</p>	<p>ISSN: 1332-7461 (Print) ISSN: 1849-1545 (Online)</p>	<p>Web of Science Core Collection – ESCI; SCOPUS, Abstract and Indexing Databas; Boletin de Novedades, Instituto de Estudios Turisticos, Centro de Documentacion; CAB Abstracts and Leisure Tourism Database; C.I.R.E.T. (Centre International de Recherches et d'Etudes Touristiques; Cabell's Directory of Publishing Opportunities in Management and Marketing; CSA, Bethesda, USA; EBSCO, Electronic Journal Service; Elsevier Geo Abstracts; EconLit with Full Text, American Economic Association; EMBASE, Elsevier Science, Bibliographic</p>

Publication	DHET accreditation & subsidy	ISSN / ISBN number	Indexing and/or abstracting (Presented as specified by the publication)
			Databases Division; IBR, International Bibliography of Book Reviews of Scholarly Literature, IBR - CD-ROM; IBZ, International Bibliography of Periodical Literature, IBZ - CD-ROM; PsycINFO; Social Planning / Policy & Development Abstracts (SOPODA)  All articles are available (open access) at the portal of Croatian scientific and professional journals, HRCAK: <a href="https://hrcak.srce.hr/Tourism">https://hrcak.srce.hr/Tourism</a>
<b>Conference proceeding 1 (Ch. 7):</b> Venske, E. 2020. Industry perspectives on contemporary trends that affect Cape Town's MICE sector: implications for event tourism curriculum. In Vukadin, I.M. & and Krešić, D. (eds.). <i>Tourism in the VUCA World: Towards the Era of (ir)responsibility. Proceedings of the International Tourism Conference Dubrovnik (ITCD), Croatia, 6-9 November 2019. Zagreb: Institute for Tourism: 26-38.</i>	DHET Research output subsidy (2020)	ISBN: 378-953-6145-45-4	Conference proceedings available on: <a href="https://makingwavesinevents.org/legacies">https://makingwavesinevents.org/legacies</a>
<b>Journal article 5 (Ch. 8):</b> Venske, E. 2021. Quality education: industry contributions to embed sustainability in a meeting and event management curriculum. <i>International Journal of Event and Festival Management (IJEFM)</i> , 12(3): 297-313.	DHET Approved International Journals (2021)	ISSN: 1758-2954	ABI/INFORM Complete, ABI/INFORM Global, British Library, Cabells, Emerging Sources Citation Index (Clarivate Analytics), ProQuest Central.  IJEFM is ranked by AIDEA (Italy), Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC) Journal Quality List, Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS, UK) Academic Journal Guide, The Publication Forum (Finland), Scopus.
<b>Conference proceeding 2 (Ch 9):</b> Venske, E. 2022. The changing world of work: implications for vocational business event management curriculum. In Couto, U. & Knott, B. (eds). <i>Making New Waves in Africa: Exploring Frontiers in Festivals and Events. Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Events (ICE2021), Cape Town, 16-18 November 2021. Cape Town: Cape Peninsula University of Technology: 229-241.</i>	DHET Research output subsidy (2022)	ISBN: 978-0-620-98104-0	Conference proceedings available on: <a href="http://www.itztg.hr/en/news/proceedings-book-from-the-itcd-2019---%E2%80%9Ctourism-in-the-vuca-world-towards,3207.html">http://www.itztg.hr/en/news/proceedings-book-from-the-itcd-2019---%E2%80%9Ctourism-in-the-vuca-world-towards,3207.html</a>

**(Researcher's construct)**

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

### Abbreviation/Acronym

AAXO	Association of African Exhibition Organisers
CEPA	Certified Event Practitioners Africa
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EIC	Events Industry Council
EL	Experiential Learning
EMBOK	Event Management Body of Knowledge
EXSA	Exhibition and Events Association of Southern Africa
ICCA	International Congress and Convention Association
ILEA	International Live Events Association
MBECS	Meetings and Business Events Competency Standards
MPI	Meetings Professional International
SAACI	Southern African Association for the Conference Industry
SACIA	Southern African Communications Industries Association
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UFI	Global Association of the Exhibition Industry
UNSDGs ( <i>also</i> SDGs)	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

## GLOSSARY

### Term/Concept

### Definition/Explanation

#### **Business events**

Also known as “MICE” (Meetings, Incentives, Conferencing and Exhibitions/Events). The term typically refers to “any public or private activity consisting of a minimum of 15 persons with a common interest or vocation, held in a specific venue or venues, and hosted by an organisation (or organisations). This may include (but is not limited to): conferences, conventions, symposia, congresses, incentive group events, marketing events, special celebrations, seminars, courses, public or trade shows, product launches, exhibitions, company general meetings, corporate retreats, study tours or training programs. The demand for a business event is driven mainly by organisations choosing it as a forum to communicate messages, to educate or train, to promote a product, to reward or celebrate, to collaborate on issues and solutions, or to generate resources” (BECA, n.d.).

<b>Business event tourism</b>	Used in place of “business events” to identify a sub-sector of business events as a specific type of tourism. As with many terms used in the business event industry, there is no commonly used definition. The International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) defines it as “the provision of facilities and services to the millions of delegates who annually attend meetings, congresses, exhibitions, business events, incentive travel and corporate hospitality” (ICCA, n.d.). Like leisure tourists, business event participants travel outside their normal places of residence and utilise tourism facilities and amenities in the host destination, such as hotels and restaurants. Such participants display patterns of consumption distinct from those of ordinary tourists as they are travelling mainly for business event engagement purposes (Davidson, 2019:8).
<b>Event Management Body of Knowledge</b>	The EMBOK is an internationally recognised descriptive framework of “the knowledge and skills essential to create, develop, and deliver an event. The term ‘event’ includes conferences, exhibitions, festivals, special events, civic events, sports events and the like” (International EMBOK Executive, n.d.). The framework aims to facilitate the ability to map, define, and align current event management standards and curricula with the needs of a global event management environment, to ensure that all event management domains and topics are covered (Silvers et al., 2006:185).
<b>Meeting and event management</b>	Meeting and event management refers to the management of a whole spectrum of business meetings and special events. There is often some overlap and difficulty differentiating between gatherings typically referred to as business meetings or special events. For example, a product launch or sales conference might be considered a business meeting or a special event – particularly if it takes place in an exotic location (Friedman, 2003:11). Similarly, professional meeting and event management refers to the specialised management of events linked to the meeting and event industry.
<b>Meetings industry</b>	Sometimes referred to as the “MICE sector” or “business events industry”. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) describes the meetings industry as the sector of events supplying products and services relating to “the organisation, promotion, sales and delivery of events for corporate, association and government meetings, corporate incentives, seminars, congresses, conferences, conventions, events, technical visits, exhibitions and fairs” (UNWTO, 2006:4).
<b>Professionalisation (in meeting and event management)</b>	Meeting and event management educators strive to produce qualified professionals for the event industry. Academic curriculum developers should therefore integrate relevant theory

with practice to adequately prepare graduates for this niche sector (Zeng & Yang, 2011:233). Professionalisation in meeting and event management refers to the industry's progress towards becoming legitimised as a profession. As a goal, it will be achieved through the establishment of professional associations and codes of ethics, and by offering industry certification exams towards accreditation guided by an international professional body of knowledge such as the EMBOK (Silvers et al., 2006: 185-186). In this study, professional meeting and event management covers an extensive range of careers in the business event tourism industry and is concerned with the strategic management, organisation, planning and coordination of temporary, structured events. It includes EMBOK aspects such as financial management, site management, project management, event design management and communication management.

### **Vocational qualifications**

Vocational qualifications are formal, work-related qualifications. They are based on the premise that theory and practice are inextricably linked for qualifications orientated towards hands-on professionals (Billet, 2003:7-8). In this study reference to vocational qualifications embraces professionally focused Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas offered at academic institutions in the context of South African Higher Education (HE). The qualifications concerned have a vocational orientation, which includes professional or industry-specific knowledge. This is the case with Diplomas in South Africa (South Africa. HEQSF, 2013: 24). Likewise, the purpose of the Advanced Diploma qualification is to "provide entry-level vocational or professional preparation or specialisation for bachelor's degree graduates or diplomats by offering an intensive, focused and applied specialisation which meets the requirements for a specific niche in the labour market" (South Africa. HEQSF, 2013:26).

## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 Introduction to and rationale for the research problem**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introductory overview of the background and rationale of this article-format thesis, and of the contribution made by each of the seven publications that it comprises.

#### **1.1.1 Tourism and the contribution of the business event industry**

The Economic Impact Report (EIR) of the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) has forecasted that the South African Travel and Tourism industry is poised to grow annually over the next decade at an average rate of 7.6%. This is significantly higher than the country's overall economic growth rate of 1.8%. The latest EIR report also indicates that the industry's contribution to GDP could reach beyond ZAR 554.6 billion (7.4% of the total economy) by 2032, adding nearly ZAR 287 billion to the South African economy (WTTC, 2022). Over the next decade, the South African Travel and Tourism industry is also expected to create more than 800 000 jobs, reaching 1.9 million by 2032 (WTTC, 2022). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the tourism sub-sector of business events contributed one-third of the total generated by travel and tourism in South Africa (Bartis et al., 2021:103-105). It also supported 250 000 direct and indirect jobs whilst hosting approximately one million business event-delegates annually (Meetings Africa, 2018). Referring to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the business event industry, Glenton De Kock, CEO of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), noted that there had been a marked improvement from 2021 in terms of business event recovery, and that the industry was on track to reach the pre-pandemic figures of 2019 by 2023 (Tourism Update, 2021). Also referencing the growth and recovery of the sector, Senthil Gopinath, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the International Conference and Congress Association (ICCA), observed: "Although we have yet to return to pre-pandemic numbers, we have gained significant ground on the road to full recovery. Further, we have transformed the meetings industry in the process" (ICCA, 2021:2).

#### **1.1.2 Meeting and event management as a growing academic discipline**

According to Backman (2018:169), event management is growing stronger as a recognised academic field and plays a key role in tourism development due to the significant benefits that event tourism can generate for a destination (Kim & Kaewnuch, 2018:453). Increased demand for skilled and qualified business event management

professionals has driven the development of higher education curricula in the field of event management exponentially since the beginning of the 21st century (Nelson & Silvers, 2009:31). This pattern has continued in recent times, with a growing number of students demonstrating interest in pursuing careers in the event and meeting industry (Lee et al., 2020:77). The ongoing expansion of an evolving industry as well as advances in technology underline the need for more skilled and educated practitioners in the meetings and event industry (Arcodia et al., 2020:661). Competent personnel in the sector are consistently in high demand (Hahn, 2021).

As the industry has grown, event management education has emerged as a distinct and swiftly-evolving discipline (Allen et al., 2021:16). To remain relevant, event management qualifications, educators, professional associations and event management practitioners ought continuously to seek to create and improve curricula consistent with the needs of a dynamic business event management environment (Silvers et al., 2006:185). In addition, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on business events is undeniable: it has generated short-term disruptions and prompted long-term changes, not only in how the world lives, but also in how it does business. Due to the pandemic, each industry, sector, and function, including education, has had to reinvent itself to attain full growth and sustainability (McKinsey & Company, 2022). Because business event tourism essentially relates to the expansion of knowledge and business, it has become a core component of several sectors driving the economy (Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2021:1204). According to McCabe (2008:22), the meetings, incentives, conference and exhibitions (MICE) industry has been recognised by national tourism agencies and governments across the world as a lucrative sector of the tourism industry associated with economic benefits for host destinations (Raj et al., 2017:19).

This holds true for South Africa, where the National Skills Development Strategy III (NSDS III), regarded as the authoritative document on the scarce skills required to drive the economy (South Africa. DHET, n.d.), indicated a scarcity of mid-level event managers and high-level skills for business event managers and event project managers in the tourism industry. In March 2020, NSDS III made way for the National Skills Development Plan 2030 (also NSDP 2030), which was launched in April 2020. Within the NSDP 2030, tourism has similarly been identified as one of the main economic sectors to be targeted for skills development across a range of high-level services (South Africa, 2019:13). In addition, the Safety at Sports and Recreational Events Act, No. 2 of 2010, also prescribes as a regulatory requirement for major events

in South Africa the use of qualified event practitioners in the staging of corporate, sports and recreational events (South Africa, 2010.).

### **1.1.3 Recognition of meeting and event management as a profession**

The growth of the event management industry has resulted in international developments in the business tourism sector, including the recognition of event management as an emerging profession (Formandi & Raffai, 2009:75). This recognition requires, among other considerations, a formal education process that involves academic institutions offering event management-specific training, certifications, or formal qualification programmes (Silvers et al., 2006:69). Academic institutions have indeed become increasingly committed to offering a professional event-management curriculum as a specialist field in the tourism discipline (Fletcher et al., 2009:52). Nelson and Silvers (2009:31) identify several international programmes which have pioneered curriculum development in the field of event management by offering specialised diplomas and degrees, including the Leeds Metropolitan University's Master of Science in Event Management, the Master of Management in Event Management offered at the University of Sydney, and the vocational National Diploma in Events Management offered at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in South Africa. The credentialing of such specialised training programmes, as noted by Fletcher et al. (2009:52-53), is often driven by international professional associations and has focused primarily on experienced professionals who have been actively involved in professional associations, participated regularly in specialised training, or have been working in the industry for many years and have thereby contributed substantially to the event industry. Fletcher et al. (2009:53) also highlight the fact that entry-level event managers, with new diplomas and degrees, lack the years of intensive event management experience required to meet the high standards of professionalised credentialing offered by professional associations such as the International Live Events Association (ILEA) that offers the Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP) designation (ILEA, n.d.); and the Event Industry Council (EIC) that offers the Certified Meetings Professional (CMP) designation (EIC, n.d.). Developing formal academic qualifications with an appropriate curriculum for future entry-level business event management professionals is therefore essential to support the holistic development of the industry and the professionalisation of the discipline.

The latest National Tourism Sector Strategy for 2016-2026 notes that the country has experienced the benefits of hosting large events in the past and is fast becoming a prominent global competitor as an appealing destination for business, sport, and

lifestyle events (NTSS, 2017:20). In the NTSS 2016-2026, under the rubric of the improvement of service and tourism skills, “Professional Event Managers” are highlighted as representing an occupational field intended for professionalisation with educational institutions and the industry acting as contributing partners to achieve this objective (NTSS, 2017:30). In response, the Southern African Communications Industries Association (SACIA), a SAQA-accredited professional body in the communications and entertainment industry, aims to award three professional designations to industry practitioners working in event management: Certified Event Associate, Certified Event Practitioner and Certified Event Professional. This initiative in 2021 established collaborative links between industry and vocational academic institutions such as the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, the Central University of Technology, and the Tshwane University of Technology (SACIA, n.d.), among others. Support for industry-aligned curricula in relevant academic programmes has therefore become imperative to support graduates in their pursuit of recognised, professional careers. Furthermore, vocational qualifications offered in South Africa, such as Diploma and Advanced Diploma programmes, are designed not only for entry-level event management practitioners but also for postgraduates (South Africa. HEQSF, 2013:24-26). A vocational qualification in professional meeting and event management should deepen knowledge and understanding of the theories and practices specific to the discipline and its specialist fields. The challenge for educators is to design contemporary curricula for a dynamic field, equipping students with a professional skill set for employment that meets industry requirements by enabling them to operate successfully in a global meetings and event environment.

## **1.2 Research problem**

The South African business event sector continues to face challenges resulting from a shortage of suitably skilled and qualified professionals. This is a consequence of several contributing factors (South Africa. DHET, n.d.), including increasing regulatory requirements on the part of international government and industry bodies for qualified event managers in the move towards industry professionalisation, and the fact that recent event management graduates from the higher education spectrum are relatively inexperienced and possess limited contextual knowledge. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, a review of the extant literature on event management curricula revealed that, internationally, research has been conducted on curriculum development, vocational qualifications in general, positioning strategies, industry perceptions and co-creation (McDonald & McDonald, 2000; Jenkins, 2001; Getz, 2002; Arcodia & Barker, 2003; Billet, 2003; Kruger, 2003; Beaven & Wright, 2006; Silvers et al., 2006; Lee et

al., 2008; McCabe, 2008; De Lange, 2009; Fenich et al., 2012; Formandi & Raffai, 2009; Janek et al., 2009; Nelson & Silvers, 2009; Jones, 2010; Ladkin & Weber, 2010; Aggett & Busby, 2011; Phelan & Mills, 2011; Zeng & Young, 2011; Robertson et al., 2012; Smit, 2012; Barron & Ali-Knight, 2017; Bouchon et al., 2017). However, most studies present perspectives rooted in Asia, the United States of America, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Very few, if any, address the unique context of a developing country such as South Africa. The existing studies may also be regarded as outdated as they do not reflect the latest trends in a dynamic industry where external factors, such as sustainability and technological change, will always have implications for curriculum development for future practitioners in business event management.

Congruently, the impact of the recent Covid-19 pandemic has galvanised event educators and the meetings and event industry to reassess education and the curriculum (Werner et al., 2022:867). Insights from such recent experience are, however, limited and to date have excluded the South African context, focusing on countries such as Australia, China and Germany (Werner et al., 2022:867). Furthermore, education relating to MICE in academic institutions seems to be trailing behind developments in the MICE industry brought about by the pandemic (Liu et al., 2022), necessitating relevant and responsive curriculum research. In an industry study (UFI Global Exhibition Barometer) concluded in June 2022, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) asked MICE companies to select the most important issues for their business regarding recovery. The Association of African Exhibition Organisers (AAXO) and the Exhibition and Events Association of Southern Africa (EXSA) were included in the study, which garnered 366 responses from 57 countries (UFI, 2022:4). The most pressing business issue for the immediate future was “internal management”, with 64% of respondents identifying “human resources” as a critical issue in business sustainability (UFI, 2022:12). Due to a lack of government support to stay afloat during the pandemic, many skilled meeting and event practitioners had to look outside the industry for other opportunities after being furloughed or retrenched (Copans, 2021). This exodus of skilled meeting and event professionals further substantiates the need to understand and renew meeting and event management curricula in line with industry requirements, so that graduates are skilled to ‘hit the ground running’ as the sector returns to pre-pandemic operational levels.

Event management education is regarded as a younger field than event management research (Robertson et al., 2018:866), and most aspects of event education and curriculum are under-researched. Although research in event management education

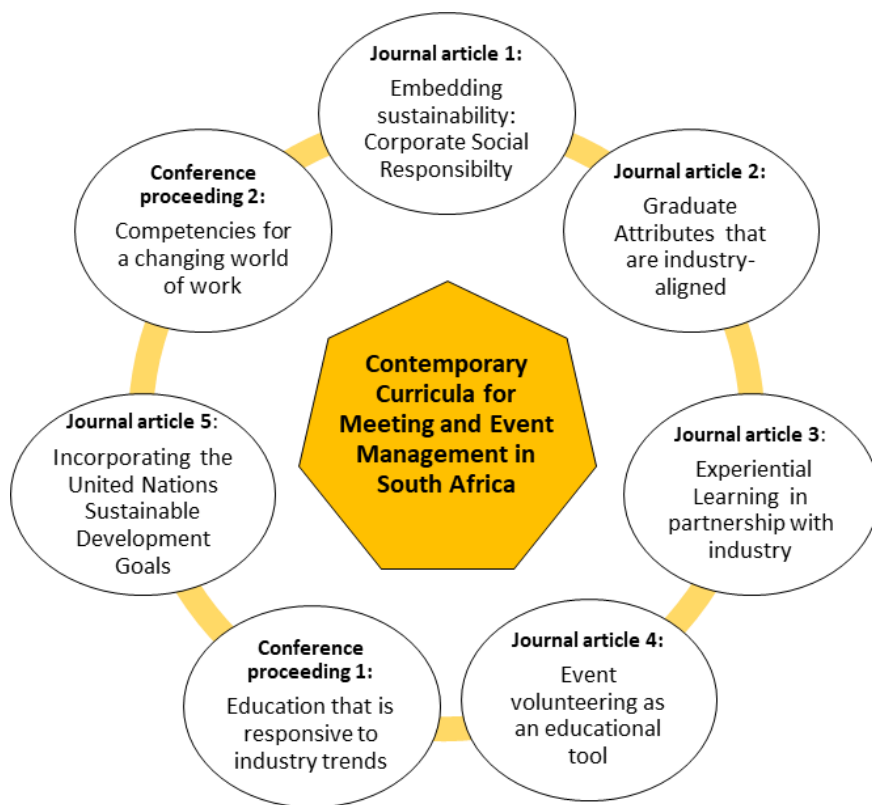
has progressed in recent decades, it is still regarded as an emerging research phenomenon (Aguiar-Quintana, 2015:2). According to Getz & Page (2016:598), there has been minimal research conducted on event-tourism careers, while education at university level is insufficiently developed to support such career pathways. Very little has been written on the topic of MICE education, despite a wide-ranging academic response to research on human resource development and educational practices in the broader fields of hospitality, tourism and business (Tang, 2014:34). Compared to more established curricula and related research in the field of tourism and hospitality management, studies on the business event curriculum development are scarce in South Africa (Fenich et al., 2012:39-40). Regarding business events in particular, research has been undertaken on trends shaping the business event sector (Weber & Ladkin, 2005) and the future of event tourism (Yeoman, 2011; Jones, 2012; Yeoman et al., 2014), yet little attention has been paid to the implications for curricula. A study by Hsieh (2013) explored the curriculum frameworks of a MICE course for continuing education (as opposed to a vocational diploma or baccalaureate programme aimed at training a prospective workforce to be readily available for industry absorption) (Hsieh, 2013:107-108). Sox and Strick (2017) conducted a case study focused specifically on hybrid meeting management education in preparing meeting professionals for the future, whilst Millar and Park (2018) considered the perceptions of industry regarding sustainability in MICE education. However, there is no existing or current research on broader educational concepts or contemporary trends affecting the business event industry in South Africa conducing to the establishment of a responsive curriculum. According to Liu et al. (2022), issues of skills and employability in MICE education should be a continuous focus area for researchers concerned with the advancement of the business event and tourism industry at large (Liu et al., 2022).

Furthermore, none of the extant studies has made use of in-depth interviews with South African business event management practitioners to understand how to design, deliver and position contemporary meeting and event management curricula for a vocational qualification. Consequently, there is a significant gap in business event management-specific and vocational qualification-specific research on a contemporary curriculum for South Africa, with industry input. The Advanced Diploma as a vocational qualification in South Africa appeared on the Higher Education Qualification Framework (HEQF) in 2007 for the first time, but the HEQF was not implemented in its entirety nor reviewed nationally. The newly-revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) was introduced in 2013 and the Advanced Diploma was included as a formal, specialised vocational qualification in

South Africa, along with the Diplomas which replaced the pre-HEQSF National Diplomas (South Africa. HEQSF, 2013). The result is that South Africa has only recently begun to offer these new HEQSF-aligned vocational qualifications in meetings and event management, and the lack of research to support this has resulted in a palpable knowledge gap. In the development and renewal of such qualifications in South Africa, research is required to identify which professional knowledge, skills and abilities are required by the industry, and how these can be aligned with international business event management qualification standards. The knowledge gap relates not only to the disparity between industry requirements and the academic syllabus for vocational qualifications in South Africa, but also to the positioning, design and delivery of a business and event management qualification in an increasingly competitive higher education environment. Advanced Diplomas are aimed not only at students progressing from undergraduate studies but also at working professionals who may want to change careers or further professionalise by sharpening their skill sets in a specific career field (South Africa. HEQSF, 2013). While there is a clear association between event industry needs and education, there has been little exploration of the relationship between event management competencies and academia (Arcodia et al., 2020:661). It is unclear how meeting and event management students interpret competencies required in the field and how event and meeting professionals view these competencies, which will have an impact on students' abilities to meet industry requirements (Lee et al., 2020:77). This further intensifies the need for representatives of the industry to act as co-creators in future curriculum design, to ensure that vocational programmes meet both local and international business event management requirements and ensure graduate employability and global transferability. A relevant professional meeting and event management vocational qualification in South Africa contributes not only to individual career growth but plays an important role in the socio-economic advancement of the country.

### **1.3 Research questions and objectives**

The research sub-questions and objectives should be clearly related to the main research question and central aim of the study (McCombes, 2019). To facilitate the discussion that follows, Figure 1.1 presents a visual model of the integrated themes of the seven publications centred on the topic of the study. Figure 1.1 is followed by a detailed outline of the main research question and sub-questions as well as the main aim and objectives of the research. The purpose is to demonstrate how the research questions and objectives thread through the publications that comprise the body of the thesis.



**Figure 1.1: Integrated themes of the study centred on contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements  
(Researcher's construct)**

### 1.3.1 Research question and sub-questions

In response to the research problem, the over-arching primary research question of this study is as follows:

“What responsive curriculum strategies can be developed for contemporary vocational meeting and event management curricula in South Africa to meet industry requirements?” This main research question is underpinned by the following sub-questions contained in the body of work of the article-format thesis. These are presented below, in chronological order of publication:

- **Journal article 1 (Chapter 3):** How do industry practitioners perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR), in relation to sustainability, in the business event sector; and how can university educators and industry stakeholders form mutually beneficial partnerships to embed CSR in business event curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa?

- **Journal article 2 (Chapter 4):** What are the graduate attributes and personal skills that are fundamental to the South African business event management sector, to guide the development of a responsive curriculum; what are the expectations of employers in terms of workplace skills; and how do graduates perceive their personal competency levels in relation to industry-specific graduate attributes?
- **Journal article 3 (Chapter 5):** How do students experience Experiential Learning (EL) as part of a formal, vocational event management qualification in South Africa; and how can the role of industry and academic supervisors at workplace-based internships be leveraged to mentor students towards more responsive business event tourism curricula?
- **Journal article 4 (Chapter 6):** What are students' perspectives on volunteering at business events; and how can volunteering be utilised in the curriculum as a tool to meet students' educational needs in partnership with industry?
- **Conference Proceedings paper 1 (Chapter 7):** What trends affect the MICE sector; and what are the implications of MICE trends for responsive curriculum development in South Africa?
- **Journal article 5 (Chapter 8):** What are the viewpoints of industry on aspects of sustainability relating to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), as part of developing responsive meeting and event management curricula and contributing to quality education?
- **Conference Proceedings paper 2 (Chapter 9):** What are the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business events industry as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic; and what are the implications thereof for the curriculum?

### 1.3.2 Research aim and objectives

The aim of a research project should map out what the researcher wishes to achieve in or through the research (Klopper, 2008:65) and should be a concise and clear statement of the goal of the research (Burns & Grove, 2005:71). The main aim of the current research is as follows:

“To determine and develop responsive curriculum strategies for contemporary vocational meeting and event management curricula in South Africa in line with industry requirements”. This aim is supported by the following objectives that are particular to each of the seven publications that constitute this thesis:

- **Journal article 1 (Chapter 3):** To understand how industry practitioners in the business events sector perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) in relation to

sustainability, and to establish mutually beneficial partnerships between university educators and industry stakeholders to embed CSR in business event curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa.

- **Journal article 2 (Chapter 4):** To ascertain the graduate attributes and personal skills that are fundamental to success in the South African business event management sector, explore the expectations of employers in terms of workplace skills, and understand how graduates perceive their personal competency levels in relation to industry-specific graduate attributes. The overall purpose is to guide the development of a responsive event-management curriculum.
- **Journal article 3 (Chapter 5):** To understand how students experience Experiential Learning (EL) as part of a formal, vocational event-management qualification in South Africa, and to propose a framework to solidify the mentorship role of industry and academic supervisors at workplace-based internships in the development of a more responsive business-event tourism curriculum.
- **Journal article 4 (Chapter 6):** To adopt a student-centered approach in seeking their perspectives on the educational value of volunteering at business events, and to establish how volunteering can be utilised in curriculum development as a tool to reinforce students' knowledge and skills in partnership with industry.
- **Conference proceedings paper 1 (Chapter 7):** To examine the trends affecting the MICE sector, and to determine the implications of MICE trends for responsive curriculum development in the South African context.
- **Journal article 5 (Chapter 8):** To explore the viewpoints of industry regarding aspects of sustainability derived from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), as part of developing meeting and event management curricula that are responsive to industry needs and contribute to quality education.
- **Conference proceedings paper 2 (Chapter 9):** To understand the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business events industry as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to determine the implications thereof for the development of curricula capable of accommodating the evolving knowledge and skills requirements for emerging occupations.

#### **1.4 Significance of the study and expected contributions**

The knowledge generated by this study may be of significant value to higher education institutions concerned with the development and successful implementation of

vocational qualifications for business event management practitioners in the South African context. The research is especially important to higher education institutions that aim to expand on the current tourism and hospitality management qualifications they offer by embarking on the development of event management qualifications aligned with the vocationally orientated Advanced Diplomas and Diplomas as provided for in the revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. It is hoped that the research will offer academics some useful strategies and considerations for partnerships with industry in curriculum design and delivery for meeting and event management. Furthermore, it seeks to contribute to contemporary curriculum frameworks for professional meeting and event management in South Africa as the industry recovers and evolves in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The article-format thesis enables a specifically South African contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the field of event management through peer-reviewed publications in DHET-accredited journals and reputable conference proceedings.

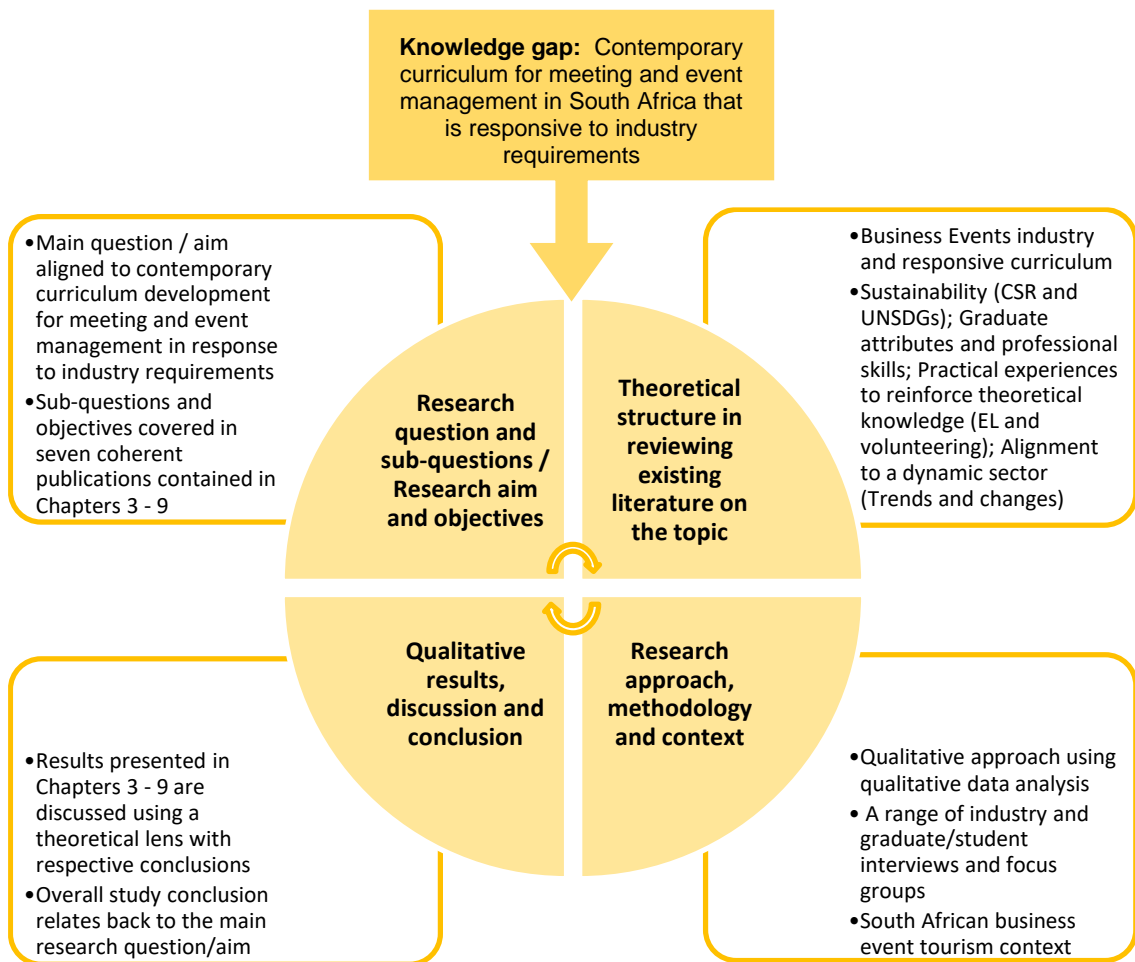
From an industry perspective, the research may be regarded as significant as it seeks to align theoretical with practical knowledge and skills by bringing industry input to bear on the meeting and event management curriculum. This alignment may play a role in the production of employable exit-level graduates who possess the required competencies to operate effectively in the field and hit the ground running when entering the world of work. It is hoped that the research can also contribute to HEQSF-aligned vocational qualification development for professionals in business event management who are looking for formal qualifications to advance their careers and develop their skills. The curriculum strategies and frameworks presented in this study build on the EMBOK as the blueprint for meeting and event management curricula in South Africa, guaranteeing global relevance for the vocational qualifications in alignment with future national and international professionalisation requirements.

## **1.5 Conceptual framework**

There are various ways to interpret and account for the functions served by a conceptual framework (Trafford & Leshem, 2012:44). In this context, a conceptual framework essentially serves as an organising structure for the written thesis (Berman, 2013:1). Bell (2005:102) observes that conceptual frameworks have various labels, but insists that what is important is the establishment of a workable framework that maps out how the research will be conducted. Figure 1.2 is therefore introduced to demonstrate how the study was approached. The research problem of the study arose

from the knowledge gap in academic research about contemporary curriculum development in meeting and event management in the South African context.

Figure 1.2 demonstrates the relationship of the components of the study to a central idea (knowledge gap), depicted as a cyclical progression. The research questions, aim and objectives described in section 1.2, above, stemmed from the identified knowledge gap. The theoretical structure draws together existing literature on curriculum design and business events in general, industry requirements and engagement around curriculum development in the fields addressed by the research outputs. The overall literature review follows the themes of these seven publications, focusing broadly on graduate attributes, sustainability (CSR and UNSDGs), practical experience to reinforce theoretical knowledge (EL and event volunteering), and business event trends and changes in the sector due to Covid-19. The study as a whole adopts a qualitative research approach supported by qualitative data generation via interviews and focus group discussions amongst key informants from both students and representatives of the industry affiliated with SAACI. Qualitative data analysis is utilised for each respective data set and publication. Each publication consists of an introduction followed by sections devoted to methodology, results and discussion, as well as a concluding section that ties into the overall conclusion of the study in addressing the main research question and aim. The study's conclusion seeks to demonstrate the synergy between the various publications in recommending responsive strategies for the development of meeting and event management curricula.



**Figure 1.2: Conceptual framework guiding the research  
(Researcher's construct)**

## 1.6 Literature review

The study's literature review includes academic books, journal articles, conference papers and proceedings, theses and dissertations, government publications, industry publications and research, as well as other business event tourism-related literature. Sources dealing with the MICE industry and event management, curriculum and education are also included. For the most part, information searches were conducted via library catalogues and indexes and on the internet, using inter-library loan facilities when necessary. The databases consulted included, among others, EBSCOhost, Nexus, ScienceDirect, Sage, Emerald, Research Gate, and Sabinet. During the information search various combinations of the following keywords were used:

Business events; business event tourism; MICE education; business event curriculum; industry-academic collaboration in education; sustainability in business events; corporate social responsibility and UNSDGs in meetings and events; graduate attributes for meeting and event management; professionalisation of event occupations; knowledge and skills in event management; business event trends; the impact of Covid-19 on business events; experiential learning in event education, and volunteering in meetings and events.

## **1.7 Research methodology**

This section provides an overview of the research methodology utilised across the seven publications presented in Chapters 3 to 9. The discussion that follows endeavours to avoid unnecessary repetition since the application of the research methodology is explained in the methodology section of each chapter. Cassell et al. (2006:291) posit that qualitative methods are crucial to researchers in the field of business management because they provide important insight into managerial life and individual experience. In the field of responsive curriculum development in meeting and event management, therefore, qualitative methods offer the means of ascertaining the experiences and perspectives and insights of South African business event management professionals, graduates and students.

### **1.7.1 Paradigmatic perspective and research approach**

The study adopted an interpretivist philosophical framework. According to Robertson et al. (2018:870), event studies should include interpretivist research because of the prominence it accords to subjective experience, which often leads to the description and discovery of deeper meanings (Flick, 2014:5). In interpretive research “meaning-making is key to the scientific endeavour” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:10) because its very purpose is to understand how specific individuals interpret and make sense of their worlds in particular settings and times. According to Klopper (2008:68), since qualitative data is valid only in a specific context, qualitative studies are, in fact, always contextual. Because sense-making is also contextual, contextuality rather than generalisability motivates the qualitative research approach (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012:11). The research was also empirical to the extent that it rested upon the collection of qualitative data detailing the “attitudes, beliefs and preferences” of the participants in the study (Brown & Stewart, 2004:129). According to King and Harrocks (2010:7), the aim of qualitative research is essentially to “capture aspects of the social world” without relying on numbers as the unit of analysis. The qualitative research approach employed here followed the logic of induction: qualitative data was collected,

coded, categorised and themed, resulting in interpretation that gave meaning to the relationships emerging from the data (Zubkov & Pondi, 2022:38).

### 1.7.2 Research design

According to Mouton (2001:55), a research design governs how the research is conceived, conducted, and ultimately how the findings are compiled. It expresses the overall strategy selected by the researcher to address the research problem coherently and logically (Gorard, 2013:3). For this specific study, qualitative research with an overarching exploratory design was employed. Essentially, the study explored participants' viewpoints to understand *what* curriculum aspects are considered important and to determine *how* the contemporary curriculum can be developed to be responsive to the meeting and event management industry's needs in South Africa. Qualitative studies that are primarily concerned with exploring and discovering "what is" and "how should" are in essence descriptive by nature (AECT, n.d.). Descriptive qualitative research produces data that explains the 'who, what, and where of events or experiences' from a subjective viewpoint (Kim et al., 2017:23). With the overall aim of developing responsive academic curricula, this study therefore exhibits the exploratory, descriptive, and contextual characteristics of qualitative research in its attempt to gain a richer understanding of the experiences and career-related requirements of professional business event management practitioners and students/graduates in South Africa.

Gorard (2013:3) confirms that a qualitative research design is exploratory to the extent that it seeks understanding and follows an inductive approach, that the research problem is justified in the literature review, that data collection is typically built around text generated from smaller numbers, that the analysis of rich data provides valuable meanings, and that the reporting of findings is subjective in nature. According to Myers (2013:22-23), unlike quantitative research, qualitative research develops as the study progresses. Once qualitative data has been collected from the interviews the researchers proceed to analysis, which requires continuous reflection to describe the themes that emerge and even develop some explanatory theory (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014:5). Qualitative research also follows iterative and interactive processes which may lead to the modification of different parts of the study as it evolves, which means that the research design cannot be fixed and rigid (Zubkov & Pondi, 2022:381). This was indeed the case with the research presented in this thesis. The study evolved as new directions and themes relating to a responsive business event curriculum continually arose from data collection and reflection. This prompted

various additional data collection initiatives in a variety of settings and among various participants. Creswell (2014:185-186) offers a list of characteristics associated with a qualitative research design. Table 1.1 presents these characteristics and shows how they were integrated into or displayed by the study.

**Table 1.1: Qualitative research characteristics as they manifest in the study**

Qualitative research characteristics	Manifestation in the study
Research is often conducted in the field, allowing direct interaction with the people being studied in their context.	Industry participants were interviewed in their natural setting at a venue of their choice, often at their place of work. Students/graduates participated in focus groups hosted at a venue in the CPUT, a natural setting where their experiences with the business event curriculum converged.
The researcher is key to data collection. Researchers collect data themselves by examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants.	The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews and facilitated focus groups in person, supported by semi-structured interview/focus group guides.
Multiple sources of data are preferred over a single source; this requires the researcher to review all data, make sense of it and organise it into categories or themes that cut across all sources.	In the context of the overall study, multiple data sets were collected, analysed and published. Emergent themes are presented in the article-format thesis as a collective body of work.
Researchers often build their patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up. The focus is on learning the meaning participants hold rather than the meaning brought in by the researcher.	Through inductive analysis, the viewpoints of participants were categorised, and a pattern emerged to inform contemporary curriculum strategies responsive to industry needs in the South African meeting and event management context. The researcher endeavoured to focus on the meaning made by participants regarding the research problem.
The research is often emergent as the qualitative researcher interprets what is seen, heard, and understood. This must be seen considering the researcher's background, history, context, and prior understanding.	Reflexivity was applied in that the researcher recognised that she was subjectively invested in the research. Her academic background in the field of meeting and event education and experience with curriculum development influenced prior understanding in the context of vocational higher education in South Africa and played a role in shaping the direction of the study.
The researcher tries to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue by reporting multiple perspectives and identifying multiple factors involved.	Interrelated themes associated with the topic of the study provided a complex picture of meeting and event management curricula by organising the various perspectives in an article-format thesis, the researcher endeavours to provide a holistic account of the multiple factors identified in the research to address the research problem.

[Adapted from Creswell (2014:185-186)]

### 1.7.3 Data collection

Qualitative data collection allows the researcher to continually reflect, analyse, and then adjust the research as the study progresses (Zubkov & Pondi, 2022:381-382). Qualitative data collection for the article-format thesis was generated from key informant interviews, focus groups, and case study abstraction, in alignment with the particular research focus associated with each of the seven publications (Chapters 3 to 9) in the study. This process is summarised in Table 1.2, below.

**Table 1.2: Summary of qualitative data collection for the study**

<b>Research focus of the publication</b> (relating to responsive meeting and event management curriculum development)	<b>Data collection method</b>
<b>Chapter 3 (Journal article 1):</b> Embedding sustainability: corporate social responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 18 key informant interviews with business event practitioners</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 4 (Journal article 2):</b> Graduate attributes that are industry-aligned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ DACUM (Developing a Curriculum Method) Focus group amongst seven (7) expert meeting and event practitioners; and</li> <li>▪ 20 key informant interviews with Event Management Diploma graduates guided by a structured interview guide</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 5 (Journal article 3):</b> Experiential learning in partnership with industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 18 participants in two (2) separate focus groups of 9 Event management diploma students each; and</li> <li>▪ Eight (8) key informant interviews in an open-ended, unstructured format.</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 6 (Journal article 4):</b> Event volunteering as an educational tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 15 key informant interviews amongst event student volunteers guided by a structured interview guide</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 7 (Conference paper 1):</b> Education that is responsive to industry trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nine (9) key informant interviews with MICE practitioners</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 8 (Journal article 5):</b> Incorporating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10 key informant interviews with top-level meeting and event professionals</li> </ul>
<b>Chapter 9 (Conference paper 2):</b> Competencies for a changing world of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 10 key informant interviews with business event companies (2018-2019) prior to Covid-19; and</li> <li>▪ 10 key informant interviews with business event companies (2020-2021) during Covid-19</li> </ul>

**(Researcher's construct)**

Semi-structured and open-ended interviews with key informants were deemed suitable for gathering information from participant stakeholders in meeting and event management curricula (Werner et al., 2022:867). According to Welman et al. (2005:167), using semi-structured interviews enables the researcher to probe participants for clarity in the event of vague responses, or ask them to elaborate on answers given should this seem necessary. The objective of semi-structured interviews is to involve key informants, individuals or interest groups in a conversation covering a range of questions and topics relevant to the research (Jackson & Ingles, 1998:25). A semi-structured interview schedule consisting of both open- and closed-ended questions was utilised for data collection in the key informant interviews. When data was collected through focus group encounters, a focus group guide was employed to ensure a structured approach to the generation of data. All the questions included in the interview schedules and focus group guides (Appendices H to N) were relevant to the objectives of the study. The qualitative interview guides followed the lead of Creswell (2014:194) in typically including the following components:

- A heading aligned to the theme of the research (including the date and participant's name)
- Guideline instructions for the interviewer to consider and/or an introductory statement to bring the participant into the world of the research
- A list of open-ended questions structured in the following way: an ice-breaker question at the beginning, followed by four to five questions linked to the objectives of the research and closing with a question to garner closing remarks from the participant and/or facilitate referrals to others in his/her network who might have insights to share on the topic
- Probes to the four or five main questions to extract more detailed elaboration where required, and
- A thank-you statement to bring the interview to a close.

In this study, the personal interviews were conducted one-on-one, and where in-person interviews were not possible, they occurred telephonically or via online platforms at the convenience of the participant. The interviews took place at an agreed venue, or via a communication platform convenient for the participants, and lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The focus groups occurred in a meeting venue at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, where contributions were displayed on flip chart paper to prompt further discussion among participants. Key informants were contacted between two to three weeks before their interviews or focus group participation. The purpose of the interview or focus group, the objectives of the study, and relevant ethical considerations were communicated in advance to all participants. A consent letter was made available for signature prior to the research (Appendix L). As part of the data collection process, the researcher compiled a record of the participant's name, affiliation, designation and/or company, years of experience and/or role in the meeting and event industry (where applicable). The key informant interviews and focus groups were conducted by the researcher (in focus groups, in some cases with the assistance of a scribe). The interviews were recorded with permission and later transcribed for data analysis.

#### **1.7.4 Sampling and target population**

Each of the seven publications in this study explains the sampling and target population in line with the research methodology requirements of the respective accredited journal or conference proceedings. Here, a broad overview is provided of the foundational basis for the decisions made about the target population and sampling methods chosen.

The criteria for the selection of participants in this study were determined by the research questions as the enquiry evolved. The descriptive profiles of participants are presented in Chapters 3 to 9 as they appear in the publications concerned. In the epistemological perspective associated with the interpretivist research paradigm, the qualitative researcher is inseparable from the study (Antwi & Hamza, 2015:222). Therefore, as an academic interested in the development of an industry-aligned curriculum, the researcher sought participation from outside of the academic milieu, from experienced business-event industry professionals and graduates/students who were willing to share their experience of event- and meeting-management education. Expert industry participants in this study were selected according to their affiliation with the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI), and/or their services as a member of a University of Technology advisory board. SAACI is the official umbrella body for the business event industry in South Africa, with a national cohort of over 1 500 members (SAACI, n.d.). SAACI membership is extended to individuals, private and public entities, as well as to students involved in the MICE sector. Participants regarded as experts in their fields were encouraged to provide input relating to the responsive curricula objectives of the study.

Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were utilised in the selection of participants in this study. Purposive sampling is based on the premise that the research results of a study are a direct result of the sampled participants, so that when the researcher purposefully seeks out the most appropriate participants for the study, the most useful data will be produced. This is of particular significance in qualitative research, “because the better the participants are positioned in relation to the topic, the richer the data will be” (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020:191). Snowball sampling was used to trace and access industry practitioners through referrals in the corporate world of business events. The practitioners concerned were credited with experience and views that the referring participants believed would be valuable and relevant to the research. According to Mweshi and Sakyi (2020:191), snowball sampling is particularly useful for accessing isolated or unknown participants who are unlikely to be found without a referral from a known and trusted individual in their network.

According to Guest et al. (2006:65), the size of a sample is dependent on the differences within the population, the type of analysis, and the depth of the conclusion that is required. The sample size for qualitative research depends on the appropriateness and extensiveness of the data and is guided by the sampling

approach, research goals, and suitability of the research participants (Sarfo et al., 2021:60). In the case of this study, the sample size varied in accordance with the research objectives, participants, and data collection method employed for each of the publications included (see Table 1.1). As suggested by Roller and Lavrakas (2015:73), the study carefully considered the following four factors in determining sample size to achieve the various research objectives of the publications: First, the depth and nature of the research issue were taken into consideration. Secondly, careful thought was given to the homogeneity of the participants. Thirdly, the level of interpretation and analysis required to meet the research objectives was assessed. Lastly, practical boundaries such as financial resources, travel logistics, time constraints and the availability of participants were considered. As an additional factor typically utilised to guide sample size, data saturation was included as a factor when appropriate (Guest et al., 2006:65). To assist with determining saturation, emerging themes were documented and analysed after each participant interview. When the analysis produced no new results or noticeable changes from ongoing data collection, the point of saturation was reached, and interviews were concluded.

#### **1.7.5 Data analysis**

Each of the qualitative data sets generated for the seven publications (Chapters 3 to 9) was analysed separately utilising the qualitative data analysis steps broadly canvassed in this section. Various data sets were generated and analysed to meet the research objectives of the study. The researcher applied the data analysis process of Miles and Huberman (1994:4) as well as Creswell's six steps for data analysis (Creswell, 2014:178-185) across the various data sets, as described below.

In this study, the data collected was transcribed after each interview or focus group discussion and progressively labelled and organised to help make the process of continuous analysis less complicated. Maxwell (2005:96) noted that the core "categorising strategy in qualitative research is coding." In order to analyse the data obtained, coding was used, after which various categories were identified and compared across cases (Stoner & Angell, 2006:179). Listening to audio-recorded interviews, transcribing the interviews, and reading the interview transcripts are necessary aspects of the process of analysis (Maxwell, 2005:96). In this regard, the researcher immersed herself deeply in the process of transcribing audio and texts and making notes to get a sense of the meaning of the data as the study unfolded.

Miles and Huberman (1994:4) propose a qualitative data analysis process comprising three main components: 1) data reduction, 2) data display, and 3) drawing and verifying conclusions. These three components are viewed as concurrent streams of activity that interact throughout the process of analysis and culminate in what has come to be called the Miles and Huberman framework for qualitative data analysis (Punch, 2009:174-175). In this study, some data sets were analysed according to the Miles and Huberman framework in the following way: Data reduction was achieved by editing, segmenting, and summarising the data collected from key informant interviews. This occurred during the coding process when labels were attached to segments of data (Punch, 2009:176). "Memoing" is the second basic operation after coding in qualitative data analysis (Punch, 2009:179). "Memoing" is the writing-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as these emerge during the coding process. It can take the form of a paragraph, a note, a sentence, or even a few pages, but is mainly concerned with the conceptual elaboration of the data as notions and ideas "strike" the analyst (Miles & Huberman, 1994:72). Unlike quantitative research, where the goal of coding is to count items in each category, the goal of coding in qualitative research is to rearrange data into categories to allow for comparison between ideas that fall in the same category (Maxwell, 2005:96).

Data display occurred when the researcher compressed the data and assembled the results in diagrams, networks and charts. Data displays help to organise and summarise the information (Punch, 2009:175). According to Punch (2009:177), although drawing conclusions seems logically to follow the reduction and display of data, it in fact takes place concurrently. The researcher therefore noted possible conclusions early in the analysis and highlighted these, pending further analysis. Drawing and verifying conclusions was possible because the process of analysis served to integrate the data into a meaningful and coherent picture.

Creswell (2014:178-185) suggests a similar structured approach and recommends that the researcher follow six steps in qualitative data analysis. The steps proposed by Creswell (2014:178-185) have helped to guide data analysis in this study and feature conspicuously in the methodology sections of Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7. The six steps (Creswell, 2014:178-185) are mentioned below with a broad explanation of how they came to inform the study:

- *Step 1: Organise and prepare data for analysis.* During this process, the transcription of interviews and focus groups occurred. Typed-up notes were

captured, and data was arranged into sets based on the information sources linked to research objectives.

- *Step 2: Read through all the data to gain a general sense of the information and reflect on the overall meaning.* During this step, patterns started to emerge from participants' responses. The credibility of information was validated for accuracy and reference was made to notes taken during the interviews. Reflective notes were made in the margins of the transcripts.
- *Step 3: Code and/or organise related segments of data into categories.* The data was organised in a table where commonalities were identified and clustered together. Topics were allocated codes with descriptions to facilitate emerging patterns. The inductive approach supported the analysis in that it allowed concepts to emerge from the data.
- *Step 4: Generate a description of the setting or people, identify themes from the coding and search for theme connections.* In this step, the various interconnected themes were identified, described, and built into a storyline to form the headings of the findings of the study.
- *Step 5: Present the data within a research report.* A narrative passage was selected to describe the themes and convey the findings derived from the analysis of the various data sets.
- *Step 6: Interpret the larger meaning of the data.* The findings were compared to information gleaned from existing literature on the topic. The theoretical postulates provided a meaningful foundation to highlight areas in contemporary meeting and event management curricula where informed strategies could be developed to align educational outcomes with industry requirements.

#### **1.7.6 Reliability and validity**

Validity in qualitative research relates to the appropriateness of the research tools, the research processes and the data collected (Leung, 2015:324-325). Validity reflects the accuracy of information gleaned through the process of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014:201). Validity in qualitative research does not hold the same meanings or implications as it does in quantitative research as it is not a companion to reliability (where stability is examined) or to generalisability (Creswell, 2014:201; Leung, 2015:324). Validity in qualitative research "means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of findings" (Cresswell, 2014:201). Validity is often addressed in terms of authenticity, trustworthiness and credibility, and these qualities were enhanced in the study in several ways. First, the researcher was well versed in the topic of curriculum development (as the curriculum officer in CPUT's Tourism and Event Management

Department) and well positioned in the business event tourism industry (as a national board member of SAACI) to extract authentic data from key informants. Care was taken to ensure that the data collection instruments were appropriate and formatted with unambiguously. They were piloted among academics with industry experience at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology familiar with the meeting and event management curriculum (De Vos & Strydom, 2011:210). The researcher was well prepared for the interviews, taking into consideration participants' experience and roles in the sector prior to the interviews. The interview platforms and/or venues were agreed upon with the participants before data collection (Coolican, 2014:72). During data collection, the researcher listened attentively while making meticulous notes to support the audio being recorded. Pertinent issues that were raised during interviews and focus group discussions were noted and clear areas of commonality in participant responses were highlighted as the interviews progressed. As a validation strategy, the researcher had recourse to member-checking (Creswell, 2014:202), in some cases, by means of follow-up interviews, sharing initial findings to reach consensus among participants (a Delphi process), and/or by providing them with opportunities to comment on emergent themes (Beuving & De Vries, 2015:44). According to Creswell (2014:2022), when a researcher spends a prolonged time in the field, greater understanding of the phenomenon being studied is achieved, which leads to more valid and accurate findings. Peer debriefing, in terms of which interpretation goes beyond the researcher, added an additional layer of validity. Academic colleagues reviewed selected themes and asked questions that assisted the researcher to formulate a resonant narrative account of the research. When preliminary themes are examined by a second, impartial person who holds some understanding of the topic or field of study (here, curriculum development in meeting and event management), reliability is further enhanced (Coleman, 2021:2041). Qualitative reliability indicates that the research approach is constant across different components of the project (Creswell, 2014: 201); while Stiles (1993: 602) refers to this as "procedural trustworthiness". The researcher transcribed the recording made after each interview and compared this with the notes taken during the interview. Audio recordings and transcriptions used in this way help to establish procedural trustworthiness and reliability (Coleman, 2021:2044).

## **1.8 Delineation of the research**

The study sought input on curriculum and educational issues of significance to the business event management industry in South Africa. The research was therefore confined to input from participants in the business event management sector of South Africa, and included only experts, companies, educational institutions and academics,

students and graduates affiliated to SAACI and/or participants who were enrolled for a vocational qualification in meeting and event management at a University of Technology in South Africa. Because of the industry-education nexus, industry participants who served on an academic advisory board for meeting and event management qualifications at a South African University of Technology were also included.

## **1.9 Ethical considerations**

Permission was sought to conduct the research from CPUT via the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences Research Ethics Committee. Approval to proceed with the study was granted and Clearance Certificate Number 2015FBREC300 (Appendix J) was issued. A letter of introduction describing the background and scope of the research was sent to the CEO of SAACI to request permission for the research to be conducted among industry practitioners and students or graduates affiliated with the association. The CEO responded with a letter of permission on behalf of SAACI (Appendix K) granting the researcher access to the SAACI membership (including company, individual and student members) and seeking to assist her in identifying expert business professionals to participate in the study from 2015 for the duration of her candidature. According to Klopper (2008:71), qualitative research introduces ethical dilemmas not usually encountered in other research. These are usually associated with the conversational tone of interviews and the nature of the resultant interaction between the participants and the researcher.

Interview appointments with participants were scheduled telephonically or via email. The researcher commenced with an introduction to and description of the research project and the anticipated process of data collection. A date and time for the interview or focus group were allocated at the convenience of the participants, and a venue of their choice was determined. During the interviews or focus group discussions participants were led through the data collection process to ensure that they were comfortable and prepared. Participants were informed of the ethical principles guiding the research and duly completed consent forms. The following rights were communicated to participants (De Vos et al., 2011:115-122):

- The right to refuse participation, as well as thrightts to privacy and protection from harm. Participation in the study was voluntary and participants were informed that they could withdraw their consent and discontinue participation in the project at any time,

without prejudice. Participants were also free to refuse to answer any question asked by the researcher. No questions of a sensitive nature were asked.

- The right to confidentiality and anonymity, in terms of which information gathered during the study remained confidential throughout the project. Although there are identifying names on the interview transcripts for the researcher's convenience, no reference to names or organisations is made in the research report itself. Personal details were neither requested nor included in the research. Where participant profiles were presented as part of the project, anonymity was safeguarded as reference was made to broad occupations, levels of management, years of experience, or types of companies relevant to the participants.
- The right to full disclosure, meaning that participants were informed of the purpose of the inquiry and that the data collected would be used only for academic purposes. The participants accepted that the results of the research would be published in the form of research papers and presented at international academic conferences as part of the research project.

### **1.10 Summary**

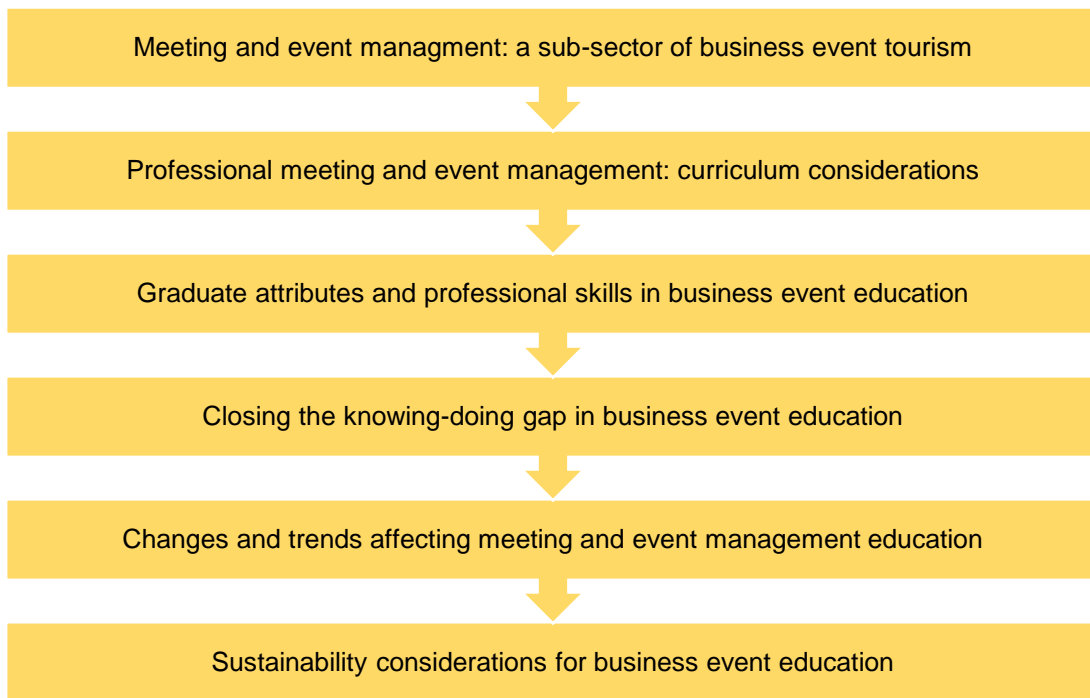
This chapter has provided an overview of the research problem and demonstrated the important contribution that the business event industry makes to tourism in South Africa. As the world recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic, meeting and event management is once again a viable academic discipline, contributing to growing professionalisation within the industry. Despite a recent spike in publications, research on meeting and event management education nevertheless remains scanty. The knowledge or research gap in the field of business events in the South African context has been highlighted, especially with respect to the need for a curriculum that adequately responds to the industry's evolving requirements. The study seeks to address this knowledge gap by making available seven accredited, peer-reviewed publications that are linked by a shared conceptual framework. The study is deemed significant for the contribution it makes to knowledge in the South African context. It should be of value to industry practitioners and academics concerned with responsive and relevant curriculum development in the field. The study followed a qualitative research approach to achieve its declared objectives and was guided throughout by the observation of sound ethical research principles.

Chapter 2 provides an overall review of existing literature on the topics and themes with which the publications featured in this study (Chapters 3 to 9) are concerned.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter seeks to provide additional contextual and theoretical support for the arguments informing the seven publications presented in Chapters 3 to 9 of this study. The overriding focus of this chapter is the need for vocational education and responsive curricula in meeting and event management education. The educational aspects of meeting and event management are under-explored in the literature (Arcodia, 2022:310). To understand the complexities faced by educators in keeping abreast of professional developments in the meeting and events industry, the chapter also considers the Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK) and the Meetings and Business Events Competency Standards (MBECS). Theoretical perspectives on graduate attributes and professional skills are canvassed, followed by a consideration of sustainability education with an emphasis on embedding corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the United Nations sustainable development goals (SDGs) in meeting and event management curricula. This is succeeded by a critical review of the role of education in closing the knowing-doing gap for meeting and event management graduates entering the business event industry. The existing body of knowledge on experiential learning in the context of business events is summarised, along with an overview of event volunteering as a tool for enhancing practical skills through on-the-job experience. This literature review then draws to a close by discussing business event industry trends that could affect curriculum content, considering the implications of the changing world of work for education. The structure of the literature review is summarised in Figure 2.1, which follows below.



**Figure 2.1 Framework of the literature review  
(Researcher's construct)**

## **2.2 Meeting and event management: a sub-sector of business event tourism**

Business event tourism is regarded as one of the dominant, fastest growing and most profitable sub-sectors of tourism (Hussain et al., 2017:97; Pirnar & Altin, 2022:134-135). It is receiving increasing attention as a stable and vibrant sub-sector generating significant socio-cultural and economic benefits for host destinations, helping to raise regional employment rates (Lee et al., 2008:67; Getz & Page, 2016:603-604; Caber et al., 2017:100-101; Jung & Tanford, 2017:118; Carvalho & Costa, 2022:217; Celuch, 2022:55). Because of the substantial economic and cultural benefits that business events can bring, the development and promotion of potential host cities as international event destinations have become prevalent world-wide (Qi & Qi, 2022:239-240). The expansion of international convention centres, meeting and conference facilities and hotels to host meetings and events, offers tangible evidence of the growing formal business tourism industry in Africa (Tichaawa, 2017:182). These business events are also considered high-yield areas in South Africa's tourism industry because they facilitate extensive tourism expenditure, generate foreign exchange and create opportunities for permanent employment (Rogerson, 2019:82). Business events also facilitate the dissemination of new knowledge and technologies, which contributes to the knowledge economy through improved educational offerings, professional practice, and research capacity (Foley et al., 2013:315). Lee and Taylor (2005:595-596) note that when events are hosted at a destination, an opportunity is provided for

the destination to showcase and build on the hosts' skills. In recent years the value of business events has become more clearly understood and governments are motivated to invest in business event facilities, services and education to build their destinations' capacity to compete for a share of the global business tourism industry (Delaney, 2022:226-227). South Africa has invested in its business event product, with major cities boasting international convention centres, infrastructure and capable human resources. Cape Town is regarded as the country's most significant destination for business event travel (Rogerson, 2018:382). The substantial benefits that business events bring to a host destination have also stimulated recognition of meeting and event management as a topic of interest in research and education (Kim & Kaewnuch, 2018:453), since, as Fenich et al. (2012:39) point out, the expansion of the business events industry increases the demand for qualified, well-trained employees.

When reviewing the research on business events specific to the South African context over the last decade, one notes that studies have focused on the economic impact and contribution of business events (Donaldson, 2013; Spencer & Bavuma, 2018) and, more recently, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the sector (Bartis et al., 2021; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2021). Researchers have also considered the challenges associated with the development of business events (Rogerson, 2019); service delivery, delegate expectations and experiences (Donaldson, 2013); and aspects relating to business event destinations and demand (Tifflin & Balkaran, 2014). Research dealing with South African business events generally is scanty: Fenich et al. (2012) do discuss educational offerings within the field of business event management, but there is a dearth of current or recent research on this topic.

It is difficult to find a succinct definition of business events, as evidenced in the following definitional narratives. Rogers (2013:71) describes business events as "a sector of the economy connected with organising and promoting meetings and managing meetings, including congresses, conferences, trade shows, corporate events, and incentive travel". Fenich (2012:323) suggests that business events include "events where the primary activity of the attendees is to attend educational sessions, participate in meetings/discussions, socialise, or attend other organized events", while Davidson (2019:2) posits that business events are distinguished by in-person interaction taking place at a specific location (towns or cities) and time (usually Monday to Friday), with mobility (often rotating between different destinations), and possibly the fusion of different events in hybridised formats. Chandra et al. (2022:263-264) note that business events may vary considerably in size and may be national or

international. Such events are typically created by corporate companies, associations or government entities, with the aim of networking, educating, motivating, or generating sales. They may invite internal (employees) and/or external (media, customers, government officials, industry) attendees. It has been established that the terms “business events”, “MICE” and “meetings industry” are often used interchangeably (Marques & Santos, 2016:2-5), but educationists have endorsed the umbrella term “event industry” for the phenomenon in general (Khan, 2015:299). A similarly inclusive definitional approach is followed for meeting and event management or business event education.

### **2.3 Professional meeting and event management: curriculum considerations**

Meeting and event management has gained recognition as an academic field, evidenced by the growth in higher education programmes, academic textbooks and research (Draper et al., 2018:3). Event management courses at university level have become more popular, with increased enrolment in the 21st century. Due in part to the high standards of quality service associated with the MICE tourism industry (Rojas-Bueno, et al., 2020:177), event management has become a popular choice of specialisation for students who might have enrolled in tourism or hospitality programmes in the past (Silvers et al., 2006:185). It is by now established as a popular career pursuit option that offers good job opportunities with the potential for accelerated promotion (McCabe, 2008:222).

The worldwide meetings and business events profession has expanded into one of the biggest global industries, and yet the role of its professionals has not been formally defined (Cecil et al., 2013:65). Although there is a clear association between tertiary education and the requirements of industry regarding the professionalisation of the meeting and event management sector, there is a need for closer academic-industry alignment (Arcodia et al., 2020:661). The international Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK) highlights the complexities faced by curriculum developers in ensuring consistency and alignment with professional developments in the industry. The EMBOK is a flexible, descriptive framework for the knowledge and processes used in event management (Heuchert, 2021:46). It may be customised to meet the needs of various users such as organisations, governments and educational programmes (EMBOK, n.d.). To facilitate the recognition of meeting and event management as a legitimate profession and to develop curricula that are aligned with the needs of a global event environment, the EMBOK model has been adopted internationally by educators, academic regulators, industry associations and practitioners (Silvers et al.,

2006:185). The EMBOK model was ratified in 2005 by academics from universities offering event management-related qualifications in Australia, South Africa, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as by industry practitioners representing Meeting Professionals International (MPI), the International Festival and Events Association (IFEA) and other key industry associations (Silvers & Nelson, 2013). The EMBOK model (Table 2.1, below) offers an overview of the phases, processes and core values required for event management. The core values represent the practices and principles that guide event managers to infuse quality and credibility, at a fundamental level, across all areas of event management throughout an event project (Silvers, 2013). It distinguishes five areas or “domains” of management: administration, design, marketing, operations, and risk management. Every meeting and event manager must possess the competencies to manage these five domain areas. The domains are subdivided into seven associated topics need to be considered in event management and planning (EMBOK, n.d.).

**Table 2.1: Overview of the international EMBOK model**

<b>PHASES</b>	<b>PROCESSES</b>	<b>CORE VALUES</b>
Initiation	Assessment	Continuous Improvement
Planning	Selection	Creativity
Implementation	Monitoring	Ethics
Event	Documentation	Integration
Closure	Communication	Strategic Thinking

<b>DOMAINS</b>				
<b>Administration Management</b>	<b>Design Management</b>	<b>Marketing Management</b>	<b>Operations Management</b>	<b>Risk Management</b>
Financial	Catering	Marketing Plan	Attendee	Compliance
Human Resources	Content	Materials	Communications	Decision
Information	Entertainment	Merchandise	Infrastructure	Emergency
Procurement	Environment	Promotion	Logistics	Health & Safety
Stakeholder	Production	Public Relations	Participant	Insurance
Systems	Program	Sales	Site	Legal
Time	Theme	Sponsorship	Technical	Security

**(Silvers & Nelson, 2013)**

The EMBOK model supports the professionalisation of the industry by establishing globally adopted standards that have helped event professionals continue their education and training to become certified meeting professionals (Sisson & Kwon, 2021:80-81). The Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) credential is recognised internationally and aims thereby to enhance the credibility of the meeting and event management profession by recognising knowledge, performance and excellence in

the industry. The Event Industry Council (EIC) is the certifying authority for the international CMP, a designation awarded after rigorous assessment based on professional experience and relevant education in the field (EIC, n.d.). Since the inception of the CMP in 1985, more than 11 000 professionals across 55 countries have been awarded the professional credential (EIC, n.d.).

In South Africa, similar advances have been made towards meeting and event management professionalisation. SACIA is the official body promoting the adoption of international professional standards in the event industry at a national level with the founding support of SAACI and CEPA (Certified Event Practitioners Africa) as key industry associations. It is also endorsed by various academic institutions that offer meeting and event management qualifications. SACIA currently has three professional event management designations registered with SAQA: Certified Event Associate (NQF level 5), Certified Event Practitioner (NQF level 6) and Certified Event Professional (NQF level 7). To be rewarded a professional designation, relevant education in the field is required; in addition, candidates should demonstrate their competencies through an online assessment and a portfolio of evidence, along with a certain number of years of experience associated with the relevant NQF level (SACIA, n.d.). The professionalisation of meeting and event management is comparatively novel and, in a sense, a work in progress in South Africa. Refinements to the process and its implementation are currently on the agenda of industry associations, in consultation and collaboration with public vocational universities such as the Central University of Technology (CUT), Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), as well as private tertiary education providers including Varsity College, the Aleit Academy and the Get Smarter Education Institute (SACIA, n.d.).

In event management education, academic legitimacy remains a challenge for a vocational qualification that must include practical and experiential components aligned with the standards required for professional certification. Academic curricula must reflect industry standards and expectations to ensure that students are adequately prepared should they seek to advance their careers with recognised professional designations – a direction that the industry is currently embracing. The professionalisation of the industry will be difficult without a definitive body of knowledge supporting a minimum standard of certification that also recognises the decisive role that formal education and academic qualifications play. Cecil et al. (2011:185) note that academic programmes that are ill-defined and fragmented may result in

“situational curriculum planning, typically based on the experiences of those planning that curriculum”. For this reason, the EMBOK model provides a meaningful framework to guide the development of a vocational meeting and event management curriculum (Silvers & Nelson, 2013) capable of providing formal educational support for the competency areas required for national and international professional meeting and event management certification.

It is well documented that universities and tertiary institutions have established meeting and event management courses in significant numbers (Robson, 2011:45-46) and that the academic expansion of this field is proceeding internationally. In the South African context, continuing growth in the number of meetings and events held has fuelled the development of suitable event management qualifications and training programmes. According to Lee et al. (2008:68), tourism-related programmes are under considerable pressure, not only to deliver relevant qualifications in event education, but to develop a curriculum that will satisfy industry, graduates and educators. Zeng and Yang (2011:233) argue that it is “very important to involve industry professionals in the planning, development and evaluation of curriculum”. A gap can open between the skills that the industry considers important and the skills highlighted at academic institutions. There is a danger that the industry’s requirements can be neglected and not reflected in the curriculum. Clark et al. (2017:424) highlight the need for cooperation between industry and educators to ensure that new event management professionals have the requisite skills and recognise the need to contribute to the events industry throughout their careers. Mutual benefits result from the collaboration of industry and educators: “for the academics, practitioners can provide feedback to enhance teaching practice and support and opportunities for research. For practitioners, academics can improve the practice and professionalism of conference and events management through their teaching of potential new recruits to the sector and through the dissemination of research results” (Moscardo & Norris, 2004:48).

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has obliged the event industry and related academic programmes to reflect on future directions that meetings and events might take. There is a need to reassess and restructure the knowledge and skills taught in academic programmes, given that innovative hybrid and virtual events will be part of the foreseeable future (Werner et al., 2022:867). For academics involved with the design and development of vocational qualifications such as diplomas and degrees in meeting and event management, it has also become important to approach new programme development strategically. There are significant differences among the various

international destinations, and simply reproducing the curriculum developed for one country and applying it to another is not necessarily the best way to proceed (Jones, 2010:155). From an industry perspective, the curriculum in event management should mirror environment-specific trends in the industry and provide a balance of technical and soft skills to equip students with the capacity for daily event management. Stuart (2002:5) notes that for the industry, involvement in the tourism and hospitality discipline often equates only to a seat on an advisory board, the occasional guest lecture, and other once-off events or encounters. In such circumstances, it has become important to reshape current industry collaborations to be more inclusive in their response to the contemporary needs of graduates learning in a South African context.

#### **2.4 Graduate attributes and professional skills in business event education**

This section discusses the prevailing, albeit limited, discourse on meeting and event management attributes and skills (Arcordia et al., 2020:661). According to Robinson et al. (2008:5), university programmes in tourism-related sectors often struggle to reconcile graduate attributes and professional skills with industry needs, as academic curricula tend to have a business management rather than an operational focus.

Winberg et al. (2018:234) point out that there is a “bewildering array of terms” used interchangeably to describe graduate attributes because of varying interpretations on the part of governmental and educational institutions around the world. Examples of the terms generally used include graduate qualities or capabilities; core, key, generic or workplace competencies; and personal, employability or professional skills. Barrie (2006:217) adds that graduate attributes are also referred to as soft skills, transferable skills, or key outcomes. He offers the following definition: “it is the knowledge, skills and abilities of graduates that go beyond disciplinary content, that may be applied to various contexts and that should be acquired as the result of completing a university degree” (2006:217). This is echoed in part by the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE), which recognises that graduate attributes “encompass values, attitudes, critical thinking, ethical and professional behaviour, and the capacity of a graduate to take what has been learnt beyond the site of learning” (CHE, 2013:19). Jones (2001:3) differentiates between different kinds of graduate attributes that may, for example, be linked to disciplinary knowledge, employability and lifelong learning, ethical practices and social responsibilities, and critical understanding. Graduate attributes will no doubt continue to mean various things in various contexts, creating confusion and ongoing debate. But however they are defined, they remain a set of

prominent and non-negotiable outcomes for university education (Barrie, 2012:80; Bester, 2014:84).

As noted by Kew (2014:7), although the concept of graduate attributes has been widely applied in higher education institutions in the South African context, it remains a complex undertaking to fully understand what exactly can be expected from students at the various stages of their education. There is also increasing pressure on higher education from government and the private sector to provide employable students and competent graduates (Brits, 2018:39). Barrie (2012:81) stresses that “graduate attributes sit at a vital intersection of many of the forces shaping higher education”. Many higher education institutions have embraced the notion of graduate attributes as reflecting the culmination of a particular stage in a student’s holistic development and sought to embed such attributes as implicit (or explicit) outcomes for formal and informal courses, learning environments and extracurricular activities. To illustrate this, the graduate attributes identified by two South African UoTs offering meeting and event management-related qualifications are presented below.

CPUT proposes four main graduate attributes: technological capability and foresight, where graduates recognise that society, technology and science are interlinked; resilience and problem-solving capability, where graduates should be able to engage confidently with solving problems in the broader society; relational capability, where graduates value teamwork and diversity; and ethical capability, requiring graduates to consider the well-being and improvement of society through ethical practices (CPUT, 2021:5-7). The Central University of Technology (CUT), on the other hand, recognises 10 graduate attributes: sustainable development, community engagement, entrepreneurship, technological literacy, numerical literacy, communication, technical and conceptual competence, teamwork, and global leadership and citizenship (CUT, 2020).

Notwithstanding the lack of consensus on the definition of graduate attributes and on the questions of which attributes should be inculcated and how, it is clear that they should be contextualised within and tailored to the field of study concerned (Winberg et al., 2018:234). According to Robertson et al. (2012:226), the applied nature of the industry, specific core skills and subject specialisation are influential factors when considering graduate employability. Additionally, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on education and careers in meeting and event management. As a result, when identifying contemporary graduate attributes, Walters (2021:521)

notes the importance of personal qualities in meeting and event management, such as communication, problem solving, collaboration, leadership and confidence. Liu et al. (2022) refer to employability skills in the MICE industry and point to the importance of the ability to use technology in combination with communication, innovation, event organisation and coordination, marketing and promotion, project planning and implementation, operation management and crisis management. To enhance graduate employability, Jackson (2016:1) proposes the fostering of a “pre-professional identity” at university that “relates to an understanding of and connection with the skills, qualities, conduct, culture and ideology of a student’s intended profession”.

It is evident that there is an overlap between graduate attributes and professional skills in the existing definitional frameworks and literature. Higher education seems to view graduate attributes in a more holistic way than industry, which is more focused on the professional knowledge and skills relevant to the sector. Bester (2014:4), for instance, posits that curricula with embedded graduate attributes should support lifelong learning in a holistic and life-wide approach. Bitzer & Withering (2020:26) argue for so-called minimum standards to be considered in higher education to ensure an adequacy of graduate attributes among students; they also maintain that the development of graduate attributes should be a combined effort between educators and stakeholders such as students, industry and society at large, to ensure that meaningful competencies and skills are cultivated (Bitzer & Withering, 2020:26). To promote the development of meeting and event management-related industries, it is imperative that issues relating to employability skills in MICE education remain a key topic of interest among educators and practitioners (Liu et al., 2022).

Internationally, the growth of business event management has led to the development and release in 2011 of a set of globally recognised competencies called the Meeting and Business Event Competency Standards (MBECS). These are the latest available competency standards that may be useful for comparing real-world meeting events with event management courses (Sox, 2021:296-297). The MBECS set of competencies focuses solely on professionals intent on advancing their careers in meeting and event planning and production (Cecil et al., 2013:65; Krugman et al., 2014:101) and utilises the international EMBOK model (discussed under heading 2.2.1, above) as its framework (Silvers & Nelson, 2013). A collaborative effort between Meetings Professionals International (MPI) and the Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council, the MBECS emerged after extensive consultation in 20 countries, including South Africa, as a repository of standards to outline the competencies

required for success in the meeting and event industry (MBECS, 2011:7-8). The MBECS consist of 12 major categories, each containing one or more skills (33 in total), as presented in Table 2.2, below.

**Table 2.2: The MBECS major categories and skills**

Major categories	Skills
A. Strategic planning	1. Manage strategic plan for meeting or event 2. Develop sustainability plan for meeting or event 3. Measure value of meeting or business event
B. Project management	4. Plan meeting or event project 5. Manage meeting or event project
C. Risk management	6. Manage risk management plan
D. Financial management	7. Develop financial resources 8. Manage budget 9. Manage monetary transactions
E. Perform administrative tasks	10. Perform administrative tasks
F. Human resource management	11. Manage human resource plan 12. Acquire staff and volunteers 13. Train staff and volunteers 14. Manage workforce relations
G. Stakeholder management	15. Manage stakeholder relationships
H. Meeting or event design	16. Design program 17. Engage speakers and performers 18. Coordinate food and beverage services 19. Design environment 20. Manage technical production 21. Develop plan for managing movement of attendees
I. Site management	22. Select site 23. Design site layout 24. Manage meeting or event site 25. Manage on-site communications
J. Marketing	26. Manage marketing plan 27. Manage marketing materials 28. Manage meeting or event merchandise 29. Promote meeting or event 30. Contribute to public relations activities 31. Manage sales activities
K. Professionalism	32. Exhibit professional behaviour
L. Communication	33. Conduct business communication

**[Adapted from MBECS (2011:10)]**

Academic programmes should be aligned with the MBECS and teach future meeting and event professionals how to drive business event results and success (Sperstad & Cecil, 2011:313). Acquiring appropriate skills, knowledge and abilities improves students' employability and enables them to contribute positively to organisational objectives when they commence employment (Mason et al., 2009:1). University educators faced with curriculum development should therefore constantly bear in mind the knowledge and skills required by the industry in day-to-day event management

operations (Silvers, 2010:50). According to Muskat and Mair (2021:13), meeting and event managers operate in an ever-changing world of work with high stress levels. Personal resilience and enhanced mindfulness help them to cope with this environment. These and other soft skills enable people to adapt positively and deal effectively with challenges in their professional careers (Haselberger et al., 2012:67). Networking, relationship management and communication are important skills in the meeting and event management sector, where strong and trustful relationships are based on effective communication (Celuch et al., 2018:28). Padron and Stone (2019:927) suggest that leadership skills be included in the event management curriculum, as leadership skills and practices are essential to the development of effective event managers (Abson, 2017:403). Apart from leadership skills, other soft skills of significance for future meeting and event professionals in a post-Covid world include adaptability and agility, the ability to cope with disruptions and uncertainties, personal resilience, flexibility, approachability and openness (Werner et al., 2022:876-877).

Meeting and event planners should have the ability to think creatively to design sociable event spaces that facilitate the networking and interaction of delegates with ample opportunity to stimulate innovation (Foley et al., 2014:53). Business events, in particular, require skilled practitioners who are able to organise meetings with meticulous detail and sophistication (Chandra et al., 2022:270). Professional acumen and risk management skills are required to organise and manage the complexities of business events (Arnott, 2020:1). Resources and techniques must be optimally applied to ensure safe and effective meetings (Chandra et al., 2022:264). In addition to competencies in networking, collaboration, branding and media relations, marketing skills are required to support business event activities such as bidding (Novais, 2022:213-215). Social and other digital media have become the most effective medium for business event marketing, requiring appropriate skills for effectual utilisation (Dixit et al., 2022: 256-257). As a consequence of Covid-19, the academy, the industry and students themselves have a new sense of the importance in the curriculum of technical expertise and IT-related skills relevant to hybrid and virtual events, as well as to risk and crisis management (Werner et al., 2022:876-877).

In sum, vocational education qualifications need to take into account that the demands of work (in business events) are multifarious and highly complex, requiring a comprehensive approach to curriculum design to ensure that both soft skills and technical skills are embedded (Billet, 2003:7; Chandra et al., 2022:264)

## **2.5 Closing the knowing-doing gap in business event education**

Spowart (2011:170) observes that employers are increasingly reliant on academic institutions to produce students with a sound theoretical understanding of tourism and hospitality-related fields, as well as the practical skills to operate independently in this demanding industry. Most academics today face two major challenges: educating increasingly diverse students for progressive workplaces and bridging the knowing-doing gap between university theory and workplace practice (Papamarcos, 2002:31; Kim et al., 2015:332-333). These challenges are amplified in meeting and event management education due to the practical and immersive nature of the field. Lei et al. (2015:345) note that relevant knowledge and extensive hands-on industry experience are required of event management students to facilitate their easy transition into this dynamic sector after graduation. On-the-job training such as experiential learning and volunteering at live meetings and events may assist the academy to overcome the conceptual and contextual challenges of vocationally-orientated meeting and event-management qualifications. As the goal of MICE education is to produce well-educated and qualified professionals for the industry, academic curriculum developers should strive to integrate theory with practice to prepare graduates for the MICE industry (Zeng & Yang, 2011:233).

Experiential learning (EL) is an effective tool for addressing apprehensions about the gap between theory and practice in MICE education (Kim et al., 2015:382-383). McHardy and Allen (2000:501) describe experiential learning as “making sense of learning by doing”, while Kolb & Kolb (2005:195) explain it as learning from “synergetic transactions” between the contextual environment (industry workplace) and the student. Robertson et al. (2012:226-227) reiterate that authentic learning environments with practical exposure are essential to the development of students employable in the meeting and event sector. There is perceived value for students when they can link theory to practice in the real world of events (Walters, 2021:521), and their exposure to the actual operational needs of meeting and event management fosters preparedness for the industry. Experiential learning offers an ideal opportunity for students to cultivate certain skills in practice, including leadership, communication, collaboration, problem-solving and confidence (Padron & Stone, 2019:927; Walters, 2021:521). The key element required for meaningful experiential learning to occur is that knowledge is created by transforming experience. The student should be actively engaged and then be able to reflect on the experience (Odendaal, 2018:30-31). Experiential learning depends on students learning from their experience and

integrating that learning into their own body of knowledge (Benecke & Bezuidenhout, 2011:55). Experiential learning requires the student to engage “directly in the phenomena related to their studies and . . . to reflect on the experience, analysing it and learning from it” (Hedin, 2010:109). Odendaal (2018:29) concludes that experiential learning is the outcome of a collaborative process in which students complete tasks in a practical environment, receive feedback on their performance from industry, and reflect on what they have learned, to determine what knowledge and skills they need to improve upon to ensure success in the industry.

In vocational meeting and event management programmes, formalised experiential learning provides an immersive experience in the industry coupled with reflection on the experience. Experiential learning also leads to stronger networks among the industry, the university and the students, which should facilitate the progress of students into the workplace.

It has been argued that more should be done by academic institutions to collaborate with industry in the provision of work-based courses for students (Zeng & Yang, 2011:237). Modalities to improve practical skills such as internships, experiential learning and other industry exposure prospects have become increasingly important to academics, industry and students (Werner et al., 2022:877). The nature of the business event industry lends itself to unique industry exposure opportunities to close the knowing-doing gap through event management volunteering. Volunteers play an important role and are often referred to as “the life blood” of events, usually outnumbering permanent event staff during the operational phase of a meeting or event (Goldblatt, 2002:210). Event volunteers are typically concerned with gaining experience and understanding the work that goes into an event (Muskat & Mair, 2021:13). Volunteering helps increase self-confidence and self-esteem, improves communication skills, and enhances the ability to work with other people effectively, all of which are essential in preparing for employment after graduating. Many young people also develop a range of practical skills associated with the tasks they are required to perform. The possession of these skills can help volunteers to stand out from the crowd and become more desirable to prospective employers. Volunteering also enhances leadership capacity (Wee et al., 2018:319-320). It is essential that students are exposed to opportunities where they can learn a range of skills that go beyond the discipline-specific competencies of MICE to increase their sense of citizenship and responsibility in giving back to society while learning on the job (Wee, et al., 2018:327).

Greater collaboration and mentorship between academic institutions and MICE practitioners in the industry should provide more volunteering opportunities to university students to develop the required contextual understanding and skills for future employment in the sector. Academic institutions should work with industry to expose their students to volunteerism at MICE events to provide them with the opportunity to build experience, skills and knowledge beyond the university classroom. Students find it easier to fit into the world of work if they can learn real skills outside of their academic setting (Wee et al., 2018:327).

However, when students are working in the industry to further their educational objectives, mentorship is essential to bring about positive conceptual and contextual learning. Owen (2011:10) explains mentorship as “a sophisticated relationship between two people whereby experience and wisdom is used to enable a person to reflect, question and construct actions while being able to tap on doors that would otherwise be closed”. University educators depend on business event practitioners to act as mentors when students are out in the real world. The mentor relationship builds students’ confidence in their ability to assess their current situation and encourages reflection, goal setting, deeper learning and personal growth (Connor & Pokora, 2007:11).

## **2.6 Changes and trends affecting meeting and event management education**

It is vital for educators as business event stakeholders to stay up to date with research trends and innovations, so that they can adapt swiftly to changing environments and operate effectively in the contemporary economy (Le, 2022:20). Fenich et al. (2012:46-47) observe that event industry developments and research should be applied to the development and modification of new and existing events qualifications curricula. As globalisation, technology, and social and financial challenges play a part in transforming business event practice, graduates are required to be adaptable in and to modern business management settings. Their vocational qualifications should equip them with the necessary competencies and skills to operate in the ever-changing world of work (Fook & Sidhu, 2010:154). According to Arcodia et al. (2020:661), rapid technological advances in the tourism industry have led to rising demand for competent meeting and event managers in the sector. Business event management education in tertiary institutions may well be lagging behind the upgrades and developments in the MICE industry (Liu et al., 2022). University educators responsible for curricula

development are tasked not only with the development of curricula in line with industry standards, but with delivering relevant and up-to-date content.

Over time, the landscape in which meetings and events operate has changed. Factors such as technology, globalisation and aspirations to professionalise the business event industry have played an influential role (Kitchen, 2022:32). Most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a dramatic impact on the meeting and event industry worldwide as a notable disruptor and driver of change (Dillette & Ponting, 2021:179-180; Mair & Smith, 2021:1739). Circumstances attendant on Covid-19 in 2020 forced meeting and event organisations to quickly embrace technological innovation, not only for financial sustainability but to reach delegates and clients who were prevented from travelling to attend events (Le & Yung, 2022:188). Although initially introduced as temporary solutions (during the peak of the pandemic), virtual and hybrid events have since become integral and seemingly lasting components of the business event industry (Lekgau & Tichawaa, 2021:1207). This expedited adoption of virtual events incurred substantial investment and significant up-skilling and learning across the sector. The pandemic has also obliged tertiary education providers to reflect on the new event landscape and placed curriculum renewal firmly on the academic agenda (Werner et al., 2022:867). Table 2.3 (that follows) provides an overview of pertinent trends that emerged in 2021 as the business event industry started to recover post-pandemic and the industry-wide adoption of virtual and hybrid event solutions was at its height (Solaris, 2022:4).

**Table 2.3: Post-Covid-19 meeting and event management trends**

<b>Trends</b>	<b>Associated explanations</b>
Micro event experiences	Smaller, more intimate events that facilitate meaningful connections
Health, safety and risk awareness	Creating a feeling of safety and comfort for delegates sensitive to health protocols
Revenue-generating virtual events	Integrating innovation and creativity to generate revenue from virtual event experiences
Hybrid events are here to stay	Establishment of high-tech venues and quality production for hybrid events
Meaningful connection, entertainment and content	Strategically prioritising these elements to meet delegate preferences
Online fatigue	Designing virtual events that include innovative elements such as gamification and audio
Enhanced technology and virtual experience	Event technology is constantly improving in line with evolving market needs
Redefined virtual and in-person engagement	Purposefully crafting two distinct interactive experiences for virtual and in-person delegates at hybrid events
Inclusion	A focus on diversity and inclusion for all stakeholders, participants and speakers in event design
Reimagined networking	Moving away from parties and functions fuelled by alcohol as the main constituent in networking

[Adapted from Solaris (2021:6-29)]

Although negative impacts such as event postponements and cancellations, personnel redundancies and bankruptcies prevailed during Covid-19, the pandemic also generated a renewed longing and enthusiasm for face-to-face meetings and events (Werner et al., 2022:872). This has especially been the case since the novelty appeal of virtual eventing has worn off due to online fatigue. The social interaction and other benefits of in-person meetings and event attendance were missed during the Covid-19-imposed lockdown (Le & Yung, 2022:201-202). However, potential in-person meeting and event clients have become more discerning, and education stakeholders will do well to consider the trends and innovations in the sector that can influence event participation and impact on meeting and event management curricula (Le, 2022:18-21).

While business event tourism is recovering post-pandemic faster than was anticipated, delegates are opting for intentional travel and are looking for purposeful interactions (Doyle, 2022). The experience economy is a key focus, and business events require innovative spaces for memorable event experiences (Zhong & Luo, 2018:111-112). Business event managers are also progressively relying on information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance service and delegate engagement by

creating seamless experiences and adding new dimensions to business event environments (Doyle, 2022; Lei & Couto, 2022:169-170; Sangkaew et al., 2022:178).

There are also challenging macro-economic trends that have affected the global meeting and event industry, namely skilled labour shortages, economic uncertainty and inflation, political unrest, supply chain issues and sustainability (Doyle, 2022). Future trends in meetings and events are increasingly associated with sustainability, including considerations of social value and environmental impact. There are, for instance, concerted efforts to ensure social value through careful consideration of how the event experience, seen holistically, might affect the well-being of all stakeholder groups (McBain, 2022:70-71).

## **2.7 Sustainability considerations for business event education**

According to Mair and Smith (2021:1739), meeting and event management is a maturing field of study with a body of work that has grown beyond managerial and operational analyses towards critical studies that examine events as “phenomena that are important socially, culturally, politically, environmentally and economically”. Mair and Smith argue that meeting and event management scholars should expand their “limited ambitions and narrow focus” on merely making events more sustainable and go on to consider how events can contribute to the broader sustainability agenda (2021:1740). The meeting and event industry is under increasing pressure to implement effective sustainability initiatives as the sector typically brings large numbers of people together, resulting in unavoidable socio-environmental impacts (Mair, 2022:107-108). Arguably, meeting and event managers are ethically obligated to deliver events that are environmentally, socially, culturally and economically responsible (Bladen et al., 2012:374; Jones, 2018:4).

The meeting and event industry is not well known for its sustainable practices because of the negative impacts its operations typically have on the environment (Millar & Park, 2018:124). Global standards and best practice guidelines for sustainable meetings and events have been developed by industry associations and are widely available (Musgrave & Woodward, 2016:366-367). In South Africa, the well-established Event Greening Forum (EGF) spearheads the promotion of green event principles and standards for events, in partnership with meeting and event stakeholders. Policies and practices relating to sustainability include the responsible use of resources, effective waste management, conscientious water consumption, and efforts to reduce the emission of gases (Allen et al., 2010:102). Sustainable practices within business event

management involve such measures as the use of electronic media and green products and services, reusing meeting and event paraphernalia and minimising printing (Bunlueng & Butcher, 2022:99-100). Additional examples of green meeting and event practices include the use of locally grown and supplied food in catering, a waste disposal plan that encourages the use of compostable and recyclable materials, and using conference bags, badges and lanyards manufactured from recycled materials (Rogers, 2013:371; Allen et al., 2010:102). Han et al. (2017:1) note that business event travellers value eco-friendly initiatives and recommend reinforcing environmentally responsible behaviours during event engagements. Meeting and event professionals should embrace the effectiveness of green meeting strategies to ensure long-term credibility and sustainability in the sector (Musgrave & Woodward, 2016:366). Business event managers also have a responsibility to showcase sustainable best practices to catalyse pro-sustainable behaviour change through promoting awareness among delegates of green practices (McBain, 2022:70-71). In light of the urgent necessity for the adoption of green standards, guidelines, and strategies in events, there is a need for sustainability education in meeting and event curricula. Meeting and event professionals should have the knowledge, skills and ethical resolve to build sustainability into events for the benefit of the sector and society at large.

The recognition that sustainable events maximise benefits and generate revenue without harming resources has induced many business organisations to actively engage with corporate social responsibility (CSR), which involves aiming at societally conscious policies and practices while maintaining profitability (Rogers, 2013:371; Jones, 2018:4). It is imperative that meeting and event management students recognise the social value of business events, which can be leveraged to generate a significant social contribution for host communities, especially in isolated regions (Walters, 2022:77-78). Academic institutions are well positioned and have an ethical responsibility thoroughly to embed sustainable thinking and practices in meeting and event management qualifications. CSR involves the voluntary adoption of sustainable practices in business that go beyond statutory requirements while offering benefits such as reputation building and competitive advantage. Yet embedding CSR policies and strategies in business activities and industry practice in a meaningful way is challenging (Bunlueng & Butcher, 2022:97-98). Knowledgeable and skilled graduates entering the world of work can bring with them a socially responsible awareness and desire fully to include CSR within business event organisational settings, but to do so requires advocacy and understanding. It is in this context that the focused and

disciplined incorporation of sustainability education in meeting and event management curricula can play a powerful role in producing critical-thinking and socially responsible graduates. Mair and Smith (2021:1739) argue that event management students and scholars should examine how meetings and events can contribute to sustainable development, rather than simply exploring how events might be made more sustainable.

The globally adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was published in 2015 by the United Nations. It called on all areas of industry and endeavour to contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), presented in Figure 2.2 (Foley et al., 2021:64). However, the link between the SDGs and business events has largely been ignored in academic literature (Foley et al., 2021:65). To ensure a more substantial contribution to social, economic and environmental sustainability on the part of the sector, the SDGs should feature prominently in sustainability education within meeting and event management curricula. That the business event industry is committed to making a useful contribution towards meeting the global SDGs is evidenced by the Joint Meetings Industry Council (JMIC) SDG Project (Foley et al., 2021:65). The report demonstrates the global business event industry's leadership in collectively addressing the SDGs, with input from 16 countries across 43 sustainability case studies (JMIC, 2020:3-4). On behalf of the international meeting and event industry, the JMIC identified three key areas to embed sustainability, namely:

- *Event theme and content:* Promoting sustainability awareness and actions;
- *Event execution and operations:* Planning events in a way that manages the event footprint on resources; and
- *Company operations:* Reaching beyond individual events by implementing sustainability strategies and creating a sustainability-focused culture within the event company. (JMIC, 2020:13)

The identification of these three areas is useful to meeting and event educators because it highlights areas where SDGs may be embedded in curricula in a meaningful way.

### **Sustainable Development Goals**

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

**Figure 2.2 UN Sustainable Development Goals  
(United Nations, 2015:18)**

JMIC (2020:20) identifies 5 of the 17 SGDs as pertinent to the business event industry: in order of importance, responsible consumption and production (SDG12); partnerships for the goals (SDG17); sustainable cities and communities (SDG11); climate action (SDG13); and decent work and economic growth (SDG8). These SDGs

should help to lay the initial foundation for embedding sustainable development in meeting and event management curricula. It is clear that the business event industry wields meaningful influence on how sustainable business practice, knowledge and skills evolve (JMIC, 2020:3). Finding ways to include SDGs in meeting and event management education supports the promotion of social, economic, professional and academic advancement for all graduates.

## **2.8 Summary**

Chapter 2 has provided some additional theoretical underpinning for the literature reviews in each of the research publications in Chapters 3 to 9. The chapter has highlighted that business events comprise a key sub-sector of the tourism industry with the potential to generate multiple positive benefits for host destinations. The meeting and event industry has grown substantially, both globally and in South Africa, along with the demand for skilled practitioners in the sector. Academic programmes in meeting and event management are required to prepare practitioners to meet this demand. Subsequent discussion of the latter centred on the need for higher education programmes to be responsive to industry requirements. Business event education should be designed in such a way as to ensure that students master the necessary skills and understandings specific to the discipline and possess the appropriate graduate attributes to gain employment and achieve professional success in their careers. Practical skills can be inculcated through experiential learning and event volunteering initiatives that seek to minimise the gap between contextual and conceptual forms of knowledge.

The chapter also focused on the sector-wide commitment, at both international and national levels, to industry professionalisation, which underlines the need to include appropriate knowledge, skills and attributes in meeting and event management curricula. It was argued that tertiary curriculum design and renewal should be based on the EMBOK model and MBECS professional standards, to ensure that graduates have the appropriate educational foundation to pursue professional certification should they choose to do so. The chapter revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the traditional event landscape and abruptly expanded its virtual and hybrid eventing products and services. Trends emerging from this development emphasise technology, risk and safety management, enhanced event design and content, and sustainability issues. It is now necessary to embed sustainability in meeting and event management curricula for broad-spectrum social, economic and environmental

progress. The seven chapters that follow consecutively present the research publications that make up the interrelated body of work in this article-format thesis.

**CHAPTER 3  
(JOURNAL ARTICLE 1)  
LEARNING TO LEAVE A LEGACY: CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESS EVENT TOURISM CURRICULA**

Figure 3.1 illustrates how journal article 1 (Chapter 3) forms part of the coherent body of work related to the development of contemporary curricula.



**Figure 3.1: Contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements (Embedding Corporate Social Responsibility)**

**(Researcher's own construct)**

### **3.0 Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to understand how industry practitioners perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business event tourism sector and to explore how university educators and industry stakeholders can form mutually beneficial partnerships in an effort to embed CSR in business event tourism curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa. The study utilised qualitative methodology that gained in-depth information from key informant interviews with 18 business event tourism practitioners involved with CSR engagement at various levels and

representing several business event environments. The sample represented experienced practitioners affiliated with the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) and also qualified practitioners with a university diploma or degree in event management. Industry participants acknowledged that CSR has become an important part of the corporate agenda and revealed that CSR leads to increased staff morale, public image and business benefits for companies. Five strategic themes were identified to enhance CSR benefits of which the analysis of community needs was highlighted as vital. University-industry partnerships and student engagement with real projects, such as fundraising and greening initiatives, were reiterated as to develop and engender CSR knowledge and skills amongst graduates of vocational business event tourism qualifications. The paper provides new insights into how business event tourism practitioners perceive CSR and underpins the need for enhanced university-business collaboration. In addition, the paper presents a practical framework for CSR curricula embedment that will be of interest to both academics and practitioners in the business event tourism sector.

**Key words:** Business event tourism, corporate social responsibility, industry-academia partnership, curricula.

### **3.1 Introduction**

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), according to Supanti, Butcher and Fredline (2015), is of fundamental interest to the academic world and the corporate sector alike and therefore features as an important item on many corporate and academic agendas. CSR takes the fundamental premise that businesses, rather than merely pursuing economic gain, have to be of service to the community in which they operate and have to justify their existence as good corporate citizens (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008). Although companies are publicly committed to CSR in response to societal demands (Moratis, 2013), there has been an increased need for the further exploration of CSR undertakings in an effort to better understand and implement initiatives that will positively impact on society (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2014).

There is a substantiated need for CSR in developing countries that experience the continuous growth of international tourism as it is considered one of the main service industries in the world which impacts on the society in which it operates (Martinez, Perez & Del Bosque, 2013). Events have been well established as a theme within tourism research (Getz & Page, 2016), with progressive interest in terms of the value of business events such as meetings, conventions, and exhibitions to destinations.

The events sector has also received increased attention as a dynamic segment of tourism generating significant socio-cultural and economic benefits to host destinations (Lee, Lee & Kim, 2008). The business event sector is particularly well positioned to be assured of sustained demand due to the need of businesses worldwide to innovate, collaborate and share ideas by means of meetings, conventions and other events (Rogers & Davidson, 2016). However, as the sector progresses the inevitable link between business event tourism companies and the social environment in which they operate, may impact negatively on sustainability in the absence of sound CSR practices (Kasim, 2006). In the South African context, the increase in business events has fueled the development of university qualifications related to business event tourism which have to reflect relevant content to satisfy educators, students and industry alike (Lee *et al.* 2008). Dima, Vasilache, Ghinea and Agoston (2013) highlight the importance of university-business cooperation, or academic-industry partnerships, as a critical aspect towards the advancement of social responsibility at universities. Under these circumstances it has become more important to consider co-creation and greater collaboration with the business event industry to ensure effective CSR skills development when embedding CSR as part of the contemporary curriculum for business event tourism qualifications. This is underpinned when considering that current and future graduates from the so-called millennial generation group, recognised to have been born within the range of 1979 to 2002 (McGloane, Spain & McGloane, 2011), are typically considered a civic-minded generation wanting to work for companies that contribute to society (Cone-AMP, 2006). Although event tourism has become a legitimate research topic, research on university education for event tourism careers is underdeveloped (Getz & Page, 2016). The paper therefore aims to contribute to the business event tourism body of knowledge from an educational perspective. Firstly, it seeks to understand CSR business event tourism as perceived in the South African world of work and, secondly, explores how university-business cooperation can be mutually beneficial for business event students and companies as a mechanism towards CSR curricula embedment.

### **3.2 Literature review**

Companies have become increasingly conscious of how they impact on society (Porter & Kramer, 2006) and today CSR is widely accepted as part of the world of business (Supanti *et al.*, 2015). CSR promotes ethical relationships between companies and their stakeholders and drives business goals to be aligned to the sustainable development of society. It assists in the preservation of cultural diversity and environmental resources and the reduction of social problems (Filho, Wanderly,

Gomez & Farache, 2010). Accordingly, this study views CSR as a corporate response to social, cultural and environmental concerns inclusive of activities and practices that demonstrate socio-cultural, ethical, legal and environmental upliftment for the good of the wider community (Sheldon & Park, 2011; Sampaio, Thomas & Font, 2012). CSR and sustainable development are recognised by the corporate world as a global megatrend in the 21st century, resulting in profound implications for the way businesses interact with social institutions and the environment (Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler [KPMG], 2012). It is widely accepted that CSR has ascended the corporate agenda due to an increased demand from society and that companies should act responsibly, driving the need for established CSR practices within companies (Cornelius, Wallace & Tassabehji, 2007). Likewise, there is continued emphasis on sustainable business practices within the tourism sector (Sheldon & Park, 2011).

Business event tourism is often referred to as MICE tourism (meetings, incentive travel, conventions, and exhibitions or events). The acronym relates tourism activities generated from this collective business events cluster (Schlentrich, 2008). Business events is a diverse and complex sub-sector of tourism that plays a vital role in tourist visitation for major destinations and has led to substantial development investments to provide infrastructure related to such increased demand (Mair & Jago, 2010). Business events are of considerable economic value to destinations as Dwyer (2002) reveals that these international business event delegates typically spend more and travel with companies, yielding greater economic benefit than general travelers. According to Getz and Page (2016), this can be partly ascribed to the development of convention facilities and bureaus in global cities with a mandate to secure large groups of international delegates through event bidding (Booh, Koh & Jones, 2008). According to McCabe (2008), business events will continue to be recognised by national tourism agencies and governments across the world as an economically lucrative sector of the tourism and hospitality industry. In its global business survey, the International Special Events Society (ISES) reported strong growth across all sectors of the events industry, including in Africa, and indicated increased global demand for event products and services across all sectors of the industry (ISES, 2014).

In South Africa, the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) was formed in 2012 and mandated to increase and oversee business event tourism to South Africa (SANCB, 2016), in an effort to tap into the expanding market. South Africa maintains an extensive track record of hosting major international business events, such as the

World Economic Forum 2015 in Cape Town, and consequently business event tourism companies have been required to meet international business practice standards such as CSR. The South African government is committed to the sustainable development of business event tourism as a national priority and regards business events as a major force in the tourism sector's 9.5% contribution to South Africa's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), translating to more than 1.4-million jobs in the country (Hanekom, 2015). In 2011, the government also approved an action plan for 2011-2014, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD1) to address issues of sustainability in South Africa in partnership with academia, the business sector and other key role players (Department of Environmental Affairs, 2016). The NSSD1 (2011-2014) was developed to inform the NSSD2 (2015-2017), highlighting the government's continued commitment to green practices and reinforcing the business sector's drive to prioritise CSR. Therefore, the contribution to the green economy, in terms of initiatives such as CSR, remains a key sustainability and developmental issue for managers in the business event tourism sector. Business event tourism acts as a catalyst capable of creating long-term legacy through socio-economic development initiatives and while bringing socio-economic benefits to destinations, tourism can also have undesirable socio-economic and environmental impacts (Cowper-Smith & Grosbois, 2010).

Consequently, Mair and Jago (2010) note that the business event sector is susceptible to public opinion as related to climate change and green business event tourism practices and CSR can play an important role in managing this opinion. More attention is being paid to how the industry, inclusive of the business events tourism sector, should adjust business practices to improve operational, social and environmental sustainability towards a greener economy. In support of this view, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) offers an international platform as a business event association to honour outstanding sustainable development and CSR practices in the industry (Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2016). In 2016, no less than two South African business events companies were represented out of six global companies as best practice examples, namely Synergy Business Events for Meetings Africa 2015 and the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC) (Global Association of the Exhibition Industry, 2016). This highlights the fact that South African business events tourism companies have not only embraced CSR, but also recognise the value of such practices to remain globally competitive. There can be little doubt that there exists general public expectation for big companies operating in the tourism industry to mention their CSR efforts in their annual reports, indicating their

efforts towards assisting society and the implementation of sustainability practices (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008). Similarly, there is an increased expectation for academic institutions to align their institutional goals to address the social needs and play a leading role in the social upliftment (Vallaey, 2016) which could be of especial significance to developing countries like South Africa.

Universities can play an important role in social responsibility development among graduates and create educational impact through the preparation of students to participate actively and contribute to the development of society. However, of concern according to McGloane, Spain and McGloane (2011) is how universities can meet the educational needs of these millennial students who place an increasingly higher value on CSR. Nicholson and DeMoss (2009) note that non-traditional activities structured outside the classroom may be more effective than traditional lectures on social responsibility while Tucker (2006) concurs that these millennials actually want to be involved with real situations and deal with real issues. University educators and industry stakeholders can therefore play an important role in the advancement of CSR education in business event tourism curriculum through collaboration and non-traditional engagements external to the classroom. Doh and Tashman (2012) argue for the integration of CSR best practices in curricula where paramount insights and knowledge can be shared with students. In the business event tourism sectors, industry partners are ideally positioned to assist with best practice initiatives and mutually beneficial strategies towards improved CSR teaching approaches and student involvement. Furthermore, South Africa's drive towards a green economy is built on the premise that economic progress, social protection and environmental preservation are interdependent in sustainable development. Cornelius *et al.* (2007) note that ethics education is often integrated across undergraduate curricula but remains unsupported by real conviction or action within academic institutions. A further question is posed as to whether a business curriculum really provides graduates with the knowledge and skills "to stimulate socially and ethically grounded corporate activities and programmes" (Cornelius *et al.*, 2007). Nicholson and DeMoss (2009) argue that there is little understanding as to how CSR can be incorporated in order for students to get the most relevant exposure to their future context. CSR issues should be integrated in undergraduate curriculum (Persons, 2012) as CSR will continue to play a definitive role in future business strategy worldwide. CSR initiatives often have to contend with accusations of "greenwashing" (Marquis, Toffel & Zhou, 2015) and questions raised about companies' true motives and ethics when adopting CSR practices. The rise of CSR policy adoptions within international companies also holds

true for the tourism industry (Bhodanowicz & Zientara, 2008) and such CSR initiatives should introduce genuine change. Undergraduate students often find it difficult to make sense of complex business strategies related to CSR and sustainable development and grapple to understand CSR implications across the business sector (Brumagim & Cann, 2012). This also holds true for the business event tourism sector where there are ongoing international developments towards the recognition of event management as an emerging profession (Formandi & Raffai, 2009).

As academic institutions have become increasingly involved in event management curriculum, including business events, as a specialist field in the tourism discipline (Fletcher, Dunn & Prince, 2009), a need has emerged for university-business partnerships. This is highlighted by the fact that vocational business event management programmes are, by their very nature, closely aligned with the world of work. Nelson and Silvers (2009) affirm that collaboration between business event tourism stakeholders is required to ensure the continued advancement of professional qualifications in this field.

The business event tourism industry has received increased attention worldwide as a dynamic and vibrant sector generating significant socio-cultural and economic benefits to host destinations (Lee et al., 2008). From an industry perspective, a business event tourism curriculum ought to mirror global business trends and best practice, such as CSR developments, and provide a balance of technical and soft skills to equip students for daily business event operations and interpersonal workplace skills as noted by Silvers (2010). It has therefore become important to consider co-creation and greater collaboration with business event practitioners through CSR knowledge-sharing and partnerships. As social and financial challenges play a continuous role in the transformation of global business event practices, graduates require the ability to adapt with ethical acumen. As the goal of MICE education is to produce well-educated and qualified professionals for the event industry, academic curriculum developers should strive to integrate theory with practice in order to prepare graduates for the sector adequately (Zeng & Yang, 2011). Lozano, Arenas and Sauquet (2006) suggest that CSR curricula require learning practices that allow for critical evaluation and analysis of companies in relation to society. Gomez and Crowther (2009) similarly recommend minimised subject content in CSR with a more humanistic management education approach allowing for learning outside of the classroom. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are considered to be three vital components for sustainable education (Chalkey, 2006; Rands, 2009). Accordingly, Shephard (2008) states that students

should reflect knowledge about sustainability, have personal attributes that will lead to sustainable behaviour and possess the ability to act sustainably. Stubbs and Schapper (2011) propose a knowledge-skills-attitudes framework as a content design approach in their research related to curriculum development for educating CSR. Stubbs and Schapper (2011) note that CSR curriculum should reinforce negotiation, communication, change management and critical analysis skills as students should be able to act as sustainability change agents in the world of work. Furthermore, students' attitudes should be developed by encouraging them to explore through structured analysis and reflection processes embedded in the curriculum (Stubbs & Schapper, 2011).

### **3.3 Methodology**

According to Bice (2015), many studies in the field of CSR engagement remain quantitative and pose substantial limitations to the understanding of ground-level CSR operations in businesses and the subsequent educational implications thereof. Qualitative studies are required in order to do a more in-depth investigation to determine the reasons for acting in a sustainable way (Font, Garay & Jones, 2014). The purpose of this study was to elicit better understanding of how industry is engaged with CSR and furthermore explore how university-business partnerships can be used to embed real-life CSR management in business event tourism curricula. Considering that this paper is exploratory in character, a qualitative approach is deemed particularly useful to answer the "how" questions and gain insight in terms of practical business events strategies on how to embed CSR in curricula. Information is therefore gathered from key informant interviews with 18 business event tourism practitioners involved with CSR engagement on various levels in various business environments. Interviews were conducted in Cape Town. Cape Town is viewed as a leading international business event and tourism destination and is included in CNN's Top 10 Cities List for 2015. Cape Town ranks 10th in the Top 25 Destinations in the World by Tripadvisor 2015 and has been named as one of the top five eco-friendliest cities in the world in 2015 by Conde Nast Traveler (Cape Town Tourism, 2016).

As qualitative research is an ongoing and emergent process, researchers typically are unable to state in advance one and all that will be included in the study and may opt to rather use inclusion criteria related to the research focus of the study as guidance (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). The criteria for this study firstly considered whether participants are affiliated with the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI). SAACI is the official umbrella body for business events in Southern

Africa and members affiliated with the association are vetted in terms of ethical business practices. Secondly, to gain valuable insights from participants with extensive business events curriculum exposure, event management graduates in possession of official SAQA accredited NQF level 6 (National diploma) or NQF level 7 (Bachelor of Technology) were included.

**Table 3.1: List of interview participants**

Participant number	Occupational title	Type of business event tourism company	Purposive sampling criteria
Participant 1	Client service manager	Event management and marketing company for high-profile brands	Qualified event management graduate (NQF7)
Participant 2	Event executive	International convention centre hosting major national and international events	SAACI member Qualified event management graduate (NQF6)
Participant 3	Project manager	Relationship marketing and brand communications agency	Qualified event management graduate (NQF7)
Participant 4	Event specialist	Event management company for product launches and activations	Qualified event management graduate (NQF6)
Participant 5	Freelance event management training facilitator	Public higher education institution for event management qualifications	SAACI affiliation Qualified event management graduate (NQF7)
Participant 6	Sales, marketing and revenue Manager	International hotel chain	SAACI affiliation
Participant 7	Event manager	Event and exhibitions company for experiential marketing	SAACI affiliation
Participant 8	Marketing manager	Event technology specialist	SAACI affiliation
Participant 9	Event manager	Event management and marketing company for sport events	Qualified event management graduate (NQF7)
Participant 10	Student centre assistant	Private training provider for event management certification	SAACI affiliation
Participant 11	Company director	Event audio-visual service provider	SAACI affiliation
Participant 12	Professional congress organiser	Conference and event management company	SAACI affiliation Qualified event management graduate (NQF7)
Participant 13	Event and sales specialist	Event, function and conference venues management	Qualified event management graduate (NQF6)
Participant 14	Stakeholder and marketing coordinator	Destination marketing organisation and convention bureau	SAACI affiliation
Participant 15	Personal travel coordinator	Meetings and incentive travel operator	Qualified event management graduate (NQF7)
Participant 16	Company director	Event management and décor company	SAACI affiliation
Participant 17	Event manager	Event management and production company	Qualified event management graduate (NQF6)
Participant 18	Senior event coordinator	Full-service eventing, venue and event consulting company	Qualified event management graduate (NQF6)

**(Researcher's construct)**

At first network chain referral, or snowball sampling, was utilised by seeking potential participants based on referrals from industry networks, and as noted by Johnson and

Christensen (2014), discerning who to talk to and what to focus on while collecting data in the field, is often a more effective in gaining in-depth research. In addition, as only representatives working in the business events sector could ideally contribute to the study, purposive sampling, related to the aforementioned inclusion criteria, was used in the further recruitment of participants (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007; Baker, 2002). Furthermore, due to the purely qualitative nature and focus area of the study, it was imperative to ensure participants were knowledgeable in the practice of CSR. For this reason, participants hold multi-level occupational titles as CSR responsibilities are distributed at random to individuals within companies. In addition, the size and nature of the participants' companies were typically reflective of the multi-faceted event tourism business industry. Details of the participants interviewed are shown in Table 3.1 above.

Participants were contacted by telephone in an effort to discern their level of CSR engagement and subsequently arrangements for interviews were made to gather individual responses to the range of open-ended questions and answers could be further probed to acquire more detail. All participants indicated a preference for telephonic interviews due to their respective business schedules and availability. The majority of informants were based in Cape Town where the interviews were conducted. However, as most business event tourism companies operate nationally, telephonic interviews were conducted and recorded for transcription where required by means of a mobile call recorder application. Data saturation was reached after 14 interviews; however, four more interviews provided further diversity in the typology of business event tourism companies and ensured that no new information surfaced. Data was reduced, displayed, and then verified by drawing conclusions (Punch, 2009) and guided by Creswell's steps for qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014) as presented in Table 3.2 below:

**Table 3.2: Steps in the qualitative data analysis of the study**

<b>Cresswell's six qualitative data analysis steps</b>	<b>Application to this study</b>
1. Organise and prepare the data	Each interview was logged and transcribed. The data was sorted and then arranged manually
2. Read or look at all the data	The overall depth and credibility of the data was determined and a sense of the meaning of the information was gained
3. Start coding all of the data	Data was organised in sets of information with accompanying memos and notes. Transcripts were interpreted through identification, categorisation and abstraction

Cresswell's six qualitative data analysis steps	Application to this study
4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as themes for analysis	Detailed information about the participants and the setting was noted and themes were created that displayed diverse quotes and findings. Once themes emerged, outcomes were reviewed and matched against transcripts supported by ATLAS.ti scientific qualitative data analysis (QDA) software
5. Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative	Narrative passage was selected to convey the findings of the analysis
6. Making an interpretation in qualitative research	The lessons learned from the insights gained were captured by using a theoretical lens and passing on research-based personal meanings

[Adapted from Creswell (2014:197-198)]

### 3.4 Results and discussion

A total of 18 interviews were conducted with practitioners in middle to senior management positions across the multi-faceted business event tourism sector as reflected in Table 1. To understand how industry perceives CSR, an exploratory question was asked in terms of how participants were engaged with CSR projects. Overall, four main categories of CSR engagement were identified. The first category, social activities, was most frequently mentioned and included contributions to children's homes, feeding schemes, and fund-raising for non-profit organisations (NPOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Closely related was the second category, namely, skills development activities, which involved specific stakeholders. These stakeholders included youth and women in the local community. For instance:

One of the projects we do is we identify at risk youth and give them work placement experience. One of the conditions though is that they attend weekly support meetings with the counsellor who comes onsite. We currently have a young man we helped. He has been with the company for 11 months. When he joined, he had been an addict since the age of 13. He has been clean for 10 months (Participant 11).

Currently we are part of an ongoing programme to uplift community members in the Helderberg and surrounding areas through assisting with skills development relating to the event industry. The programme focusses on teaching these skills to women in the area that have a passion for the industry but no means of getting training and have no income. They can use these skills to start working in the industry as entry level staff or start their own community-based service and business (Participant 16).

The third category identified were professional service activities whereby the participants sponsored their business event service and expertise free of charge or at a discounted rate for various upliftment projects as expressed by the following participant:

Our CSR is mostly the sponsorships of venues, accommodation or food and beverage for charitable and fund-raising events hosted at our hotel. We also contribute by offering discounted tariffs to NPO's (Participant 6).

The majority of participants also viewed their cause-awareness activities as a major CSR initiative. It was explained that events are often linked to causes and charities to reflect good corporate citizenship. Many participants spoke of their companies' commitment to various causes, charities, NGOs and NPOs such as CANSA (Cancer Association of South Africa), breast cancer awareness and the Red Cross Children's Hospital. One participant provided an example of her company's established management of a five-kilometre walk held in aid of breast awareness:

At the event, women also get the opportunity to get tested for breast cancer, free of charge. All funds raised go to Pink Drive, a breast cancer awareness organisation that provides free breast cancer screening and education around South Africa (Participant 1).

In order to understand why business event tourism companies engage in CSR, participants were asked to disclose the motivation for their involvement with CSR. Four main themes emerged:

- Financial and business benefits;
- Positive public image;
- Staff morale; and
- Philanthropic values.

The first theme related to financial benefits that may be gained directly or indirectly from CSR engagement. The informants of this study held a consistent view that CSR initiatives can be financially beneficial to the company and are generally good for business. Many participants were of the view that CSR can generate prospective clients from CSR platforms. Three of the participants indicated that their CSR activations were eligible for tax refunds. Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), the South African governments' programme to redress the inequalities of Apartheid by giving certain previously disadvantaged groups economic benefits,

can be aligned to CSR according to several participants. These insights are shared as follows:

With the new BEE codes there are ways to use your donations and enterprise development to get points. Also, often potential clients are wanting to see if you do work with CSR projects (Participant 11).

Our main driving force as a business is to gain on our CSR and BEE ranking. Companies want to do business with companies who are ranked well [...] and governments are enforcing and incentivising CSR more than ever before. This is even more important in countries like SA where certain historical factors have created a level of disparity within our communities and society as a whole (Participant 6).

Utilising volunteers and students are cost effective if they are used in the correct areas of the event (Participant 3).

The second theme related to the positive effect CSR has on a company's public image. Most comments indicated that CSR enhances the popularity of the company and underpins corporate credibility. Some participants recognised this as an extension to the preceding financial benefits theme. The examples are expressed as follows:

More clients are likely to invest or purchase from a company that gives to their communities and engages in activities to improve society. You could improve your corporate reputation and generate positive publicity (Participant 2).

Consumers would pay more if they knew their favourite brand is 'doing good' (Participant 17).

One participant further noted the publicity value of CSR as follows:

I think for corporate companies their biggest benefits would be great marketing for the company and its products as well as amazing image enhancing publicity. Especially as most corporate companies are seen as "evil" in many ways and any good they do publicly help their image. I do also think that is most probably why most corporate companies actually do it. So, it's more self-benefiting (Participant 5).

Several industry practitioners expressed a boost in staff morale as a consequence of CSR-related activities. For instance, one participant actively described how staff felt energised to be part of something bigger by giving back to society. Primarily, informants to this study described how CSR improved teamwork when they worked towards a common goal that made a positive contribution to society. A few participants also alluded to the fact that staff prefer to work for socially responsible companies. This perspective was captured in the following quotation:

When staff can see that the organisation they work for is sincerely interested in people and communities outside itself, they have a greater sense of belonging. Millennials especially want to see what organisations do for the communities around them (Participant 11).

The final theme is related to the philanthropic values of the individuals that drive CSR in the company. All participants recognised a need to practise goodwill in their personal life as well as in their place of work. One participant revealed a strong belief that if CSR makes a difference in someone's life, it is worth doing. Another participant expressed the following:

My motivation for getting involved in CSR projects comes from a space of feeling a sense of responsibility, a natural urge to want to help and make a difference (Participant 17).

In addition, many respondents revealed that they are committed to drive CSR as a matter of personal principle. One participant shared how she was a resident at a child and youth care centre and how that motivated her to drive CSR initiatives to benefit the aforementioned centre:

This place means a lot to me [...], they rely merely on community support. I see my involvement as a way of giving back so others like me can have a chance to succeed (Participant 15).

Participants were probed to draw on their CSR experience and suggest approaches for CSR to be most successful and socially beneficial. Five clear themes and corresponding approaches to CSR emerged from the combined responses and are reflected in Table 3.3. Some supportive verbatim quotes are included in the table to highlight participant perspectives.

**Table 3.3: Suggested approaches for CSR to be successful and socially beneficial**

Theme	Approach	Supportive verbatim quote
Local community empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use locals as staff at events and make use of scholars and students to volunteer</li> <li>▪ Make use of local products and services and provide exposure for local businesses</li> <li>▪ Provide professional event management assistance to community-owned events</li> </ul>	Giving the community ownership helps create [CSR] longevity and is more sustainable in the long term” (Participant17)
Skills development and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transfer practical business event management skills to local community to develop skills at events or business</li> <li>▪ Sponsor training or individual bursaries in the field of business events</li> </ul>	Provide a place where out-of-work youth can experience some on the job training” (Participant 11)
Community needs analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the critical social needs within community in order to develop CSR projects relevant to their needs in consultation with credible NPOs and NGOs in the community</li> </ul>	Benefits can be increased by really seeking out what the community needs, what type of CSR project. Doing proper interviews with candidates so that the success rate increases” (Participant 10)
Theme	Approach	Supportive verbatim quote
Partnerships with credible NPOs/NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Align with reputable organisations that have terms of reference and existing projects for CSR engagement</li> <li>▪ Create formal CSR activation agreements with local NGOs/NPOs</li> </ul>	Link your organisation with projects and use it as a tool to directly impact communities around you” (Participant 11)
Fundraising and donation drives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hosting events specific for the benefit of a cause/charity</li> <li>▪ Create a link for cause/charity to benefit directly from specific events or company agreements</li> </ul>	Create a platform; this could be an online platform, on which people are able to raise funds in support of a cause” (Participant 3)

**(Researcher’s construct)**

An in-depth question was asked in order to find out how industry and educators can work together in a partnership to reinforce social awareness among students in business event tourism. Participants across the board regarded students as the future drivers of CSR activities in the industry. Sentiments were shared by many informants of the study that companies should use students on-site at business events more often. By implication, the company would be practising CSR by allowing students on site to gain experience and transferring skills. There is no question that the contextual experience on-site will benefit the students in terms of industry exposure. However, how can such experience benefit the students in terms of CSR exposure? One participant suggested that student volunteers be

solicited to assist with CSR activations and CSR events within the industry. Many participants spoke about the importance of involving students, with fresh perspectives and dynamism, in CSR projects. This was apparent in the following quotation:

Get students involved and tap into their creativity and knowledge of how to get people involved in these projects (Participant 12).

Collectively, participants viewed CSR as an important part of today's event tourism companies and many participants shared the concern that it will become even more critical to display accountability in an industry that, by its very nature, impacts the society in which it operates. Comments relating to the industry-academia partnership in CSR advancement included suggestions for collective brainstorming and preliminary needs assessment. Many participants provided practical ideas for students to get involved in social awareness initiatives such as donation drives and on-campus activations. A widespread view among participants clearly indicated that students should be immersed in industry CSR projects outside the classroom under the guidance of industry mentors and educational facilitators. This perspective was captured in the following quotations:

Students could design custom CSR plans and campaigns which they could pitch to a company aligned with their campaign idea and together with the company plan it from start to finish. The CSR plan could be [...] custom designed for a chosen or interested company. This will allow students exposure to different industries, access to the specific industry information regarding CSR practices as well as resources from the company they will be working with. The company will then, along with the students, implement the initiative as firstly a one-time event and hopefully it will evolve into a long-term initiative (Participant 5).

[Students] must be able to do business plans or models that promote new initiatives and think outside of the models we have in our everyday lives. Motivate thinking outside of the box by insisting on business research and interviews with businesses [...] this closes the gap in knowledge between the work-place and the students' study material (Participant 3).

In the final set of main findings presented in this paper, participants concurred that graduates require specific knowledge and skills in order to advance sustainable CSR initiatives successfully in the South African business event tourism industry.

Primarily, ethical business practices and in- depth understanding of sustainability were mentioned as vital. Further to this, many respondents stated that the ability to distinguish between genuine CSR and hollow CSR for the sake of window- dressing the company's image would be an important consideration. This was apparent in the following statements:

[Students] would need to understand the frameworks and guidelines laid down by government, why it is in place and the impact that CSR can have on your bottom line. They need to understand why CSR exists in the first place [...]. They need to be able to understand the value of CSR and the benefits to people, planet and profit (Participant 8).

CSR has been used as a greenwashing tool by ugly and evil companies to enhance their tarnished public images or reputations. They use certain initiatives and campaigns to do some good, to seem good in the eyes of the public and change the public's perception of the company to that of a socially responsible and conscious company, when in reality they contribute to many negative social, economic and environmental issues (Participant 5).

Participants were in agreement that both soft skills and hard skills would be required to implement successful CSR initiatives when graduates enter the world of work. Participants were asked to identify the essential knowledge and skill capacities required for business event tourism graduates to manage CSR initiatives successfully in South Africa. Their collective responses are illustrated in Figure 3.1 that follows below, in the form of a word cloud that gives greater prominence to the words that appear more frequently in the text that was generated from individual responses.



**Figure 3.2: Essential CSR knowledge and skill capacities for business event tourism graduates**

**(Researcher's construct)**

From Figure 3.2, it is clear that participants viewed soft skills such as compassion, passion and creativity as predominantly important. The need for theoretical and conceptual underpinning of knowledge and skills related to fundraising strategies, greening principles, financial budgeting and effective monitoring and evaluation of CSR initiatives were highlighted by participants. Many participants viewed skills related to marketing, such as branding, sponsorship and relationship management as important.

In discussing the findings, it was the purpose of this paper firstly to understand how industry practitioners perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business event tourism sector. Accordingly, the findings of this paper shed light on the CSR initiatives that practitioners are engaged with and their motives, as well as the CSR approaches that proved to be successful and mutually beneficial to the company and the community. A secondary aim of the paper was to explore how university educators and industry stakeholders can form mutually beneficial partnerships in an effort to embed CSR in business event tourism curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa. Accordingly, the key findings revealed industry insights in terms of business-university partnerships and the graduate knowledge and skills required to create sustainable CSR legacies specifically in the business event tourism sector of South Africa.

In summary, the findings and discussion are incorporated to form a knowledge-skills-attitude framework specific to CSR in business event management curricula with theoretical and practical implications for vocational qualifications (see Table 3.4). This framework has been conceptualised by linking the themes from participant interviews back to literature for business event tourism CSR education and is based on the fundamentals of the Stubbs and Schapper (2011) framework for curriculum development for CSR education: “Knowledge, skills and attitude - corporate sustainability: the business case”.

This framework aims to provide educators of vocational qualifications in the field of business event tourism with an outline of how to approach a CSR module or unit within a subject as part of the curriculum. The paper does not wish to enforce CSR embedment in a rigid manner and does not consider the proposed framework as exhaustible but it should be viewed as a flexible tool to assist with the generation of ideas to incorporate CSR elements in curriculum. In accordance with the view of Stubbs and Schapper (2011), the paper argues that it is possible to make a difference to student learning as reflected in the following quotation:

No matter how inadequate or piecemeal the curriculum, society cannot wait for universities to establish integrated programmes of sustainability – and neither can the planet (Stubbs & Schapper, 2011:265).

**Table 3.4: Knowledge-Skills-Attitude framework for CSR in business event management curricula**

Educational component	Knowledge ↓	Skills ↓	Attitude ↓
Lectures →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discuss sustainability and business event tourism greening concepts, issues and debates</li> <li>▪ South African legislation related to NPOs/NGOs</li> <li>▪ CSR business plan: financial, marketing and fundraising management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Research social, environmental and economic impact of a business event and the implications of these for a business and provide strategic responses</li> <li>▪ Develop a fundraising proposal for an NPO/NGO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discuss and debate different CSR and sustainability perspectives and their underlying values</li> <li>▪ Discuss and debate greenwashing in the business event management sector and the legacy of major business events on communities</li> </ul>

Educational component	Knowledge ↓	Skills ↓	Attitude ↓
Industry guest speaker/role model →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Senior executives from business event tourism sector</li> <li>▪ Business event tourism sector industry association officials</li> <li>▪ NPO/NGO managers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Job shadow at green events and initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inspirational coaching and mentorship: industry role model</li> </ul>
Assessment→	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Written assessments: comprehend key concepts and issues</li> <li>▪ Participation: share knowledge and experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Group company project and class presentation: develop skills outside classroom on-site to develop CSR activation in partnership with business event tourism company</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individual essay: CSR in the business event tourism sector</li> <li>▪ Reflective essay: post CSR involvement via industry project</li> </ul>
Other initiatives →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Audiovisual: Technology, Education, Design (TED) talks on sustainability and issues related to CSR and business event tourism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Practical industry workshop presented by credible association (for example Event Greening Forum)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creative participation in United Nations (UN) awareness days</li> </ul>

**[Researcher’s construct: adapted from Stubbs & Schapper (2011:264)]**

Outlined in the framework presented in Table 3.4 above, is how the knowledge-skills-attitudes framework is applied to lectures, guest speakers, assessment and other aids such as audio-visual to reinforce theoretical concepts in the classroom in partnership with industry experience and input. Firstly, the CSR unit seeks to develop the knowledge component and understanding of CSR in the business event management context by means of lectures, readings, research, audio-visual and discussion forums drawing on specifically South African greening and legislation and the design of an implementable CSR business plan. The knowledge is reinforced and further vocational context is derived from industry guest speakers considered to be leaders in business event greening, and perspectives of sustainability are presented (Stubbs & Cocklin, 2008) to further stimulate the attitude component and shift students’ thinking and interest in CSR beyond business as usual (Rusinko, 2005). Secondly, the unit focuses on skills development in an effort to understand how business event tourism may impact on destinations and how to formulate strategies in response (Stubbs & Lockhart, 2009). Students are expected to work in group format and develop CSR activations with real business event tourism companies of their choice. University-business partnerships are further utilised in event job shadowing and external (industry)

practical workshop facilitation. Finally, inspirational coaching and mentorship from industry role models challenge students to create new ways of thinking and reflect on their own behaviour and attitudes towards CSR. A collaborative assessment approach includes reflective essays, knowledge sharing through presentations, and the real CSR project in partnership with a business event tourism product or service as illustrated in Table 3.4.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was firstly to understand how industry practitioners perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business event tourism sector. Secondly, the paper aimed to explore how university educators and industry stakeholders can form mutually beneficial partnerships in an effort to embed CSR in business event tourism curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa. The research contributes to CSR curriculum and business event tourism educational literature and the practical framework for CSR curricula embedment will be of interest to both academics and practitioners. Firstly, the research contributes by bringing together existent theoretical contributions to demonstrate the need for CSR curriculum in the business event sector specifically whilst highlighting the importance of industry-academia partnership to engender vocational learning. Secondly, there is a contribution to knowledge by providing empirical evidence and industry insight to support the design of a framework in an effort to approach CSR embedment in vocational business event tourism qualifications in South Africa. In this paper, a more industry-inclusive approach was adopted to reflect the business event tourism context in this knowledge-skills-attitudes framework for business events vocational qualifications in South Africa.

In terms of limitations to the study, it is recognised that CSR engagement and decision-making in the business event tourism sector is multi-faceted and includes the involvement of many persons within the company. Accordingly, although attempts were made to interview industry practitioners deeply involved with CSR, the views expressed by a single practitioner may not correspond to the views of the entire company in relation to CSR activities. The study acknowledges that curriculum design is a complex exercise, and a range of curriculum implementation models are worthy of further exploration. Future research to the implementation of the approach examined in this paper in the form of a case study will provide further opportunities for research.

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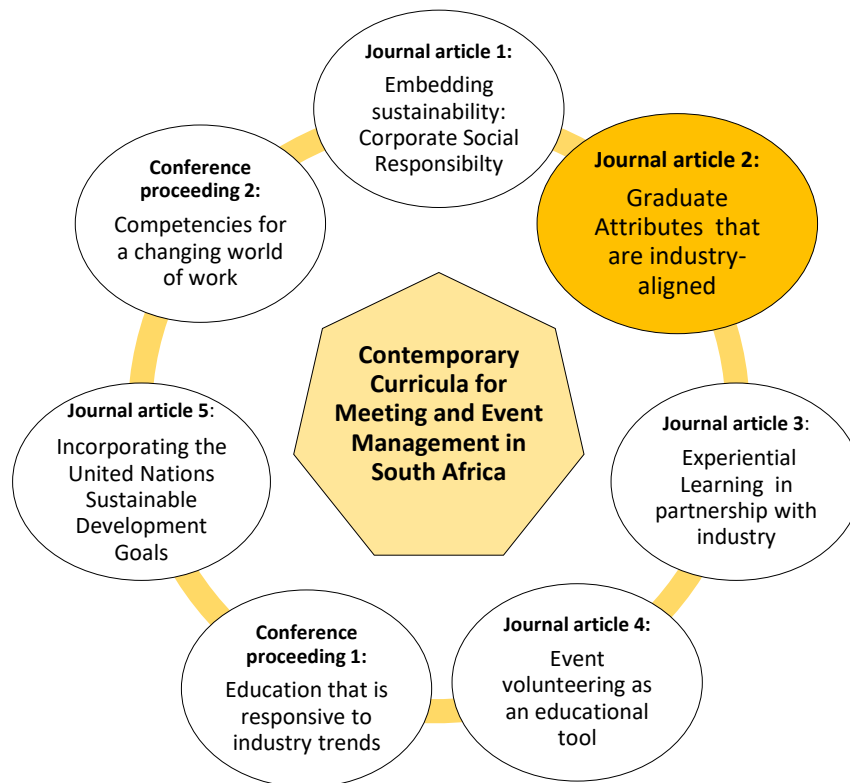
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**CHAPTER 4  
(JOURNAL ARTICLE 2)  
GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES FOR CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS EVENT TOURISM  
MANAGEMENT QUALIFICATIONS: EMPLOYEE AND GRADUATE REFLECTIONS AT A  
SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY (UOT)**

Figure 4.1 illustrates how journal article 2 (Chapter 4) forms part of the coherent body of work related to the development of contemporary curricula.



**Figure 4.1: Contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements (Graduate Attributes that are industry-aligned)**

**(Researcher's construct)**

#### **4.0 Abstract**

The purpose of this article was to determine the graduate attributes and personal skills that are fundamental to the South African business event tourism management sector in order to develop responsive higher education qualifications. The article seeks to understand employers' expectations in terms of workplace skills and to explore how graduates perceive their own personal competency levels related to the industry-specific graduate attributes. This qualitative study considered two data sets at a South African University of Technology (UoT). It was firstly informed by a panel of seven expert practitioners utilising the Developing a Curriculum Method (DACUM).

Complimenting this perspective, the second set of stakeholder insights was gained from semi-structured personal interviews with 20 National Diploma graduates enrolled for further education in the degree Bachelor of Technology: Event Management in Tourism Management, indicative of business event tourism career specialisation. Data was analysed systematically by means of manual qualitative data analysis steps and ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis (QDA). General areas of competence (GACs) related to graduate attributes and personal skills were categorised into several critical workplace competencies. Communication, conflict and stress management were highlighted as critical workplace competencies. Insights further indicated significant limitations in the conflict and stress management competencies of graduates. Focusing on the broader needs of the different stakeholders involved, this article provides new insights into how employers and graduates perceive the workplace competencies significant to the South African business event tourism management sector and suggests the deeper engenderment of graduate attributes in higher education syllabi for business event tourism qualifications.

**Keywords:** Business event tourism management, graduate attributes, qualitative methodology.

#### 4.1 Introduction

Event management has become well-established as a key area of specialisation in the academic discipline of tourism (Getz & Page, 2016). Globally, there has been significant growth in the academic provision of event management education in order to meet the needs of the tourism industry for skilled event professionals (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris & McDonnel, 2012). The need for a more professional approach to event management and skilled, qualified individuals to take up management roles in the event tourism sector have catalysed the worldwide development of higher education in this field (Nelson & Silvers, 2009; Barron & Leask, 2012). Furthermore, the growth of the event management industry introduced international developments to the business tourism sector, including the recognition of event management as an emerging profession (Formandi & Raffai, 2009). Business event tourism includes tourism activities generated from the collective business events cluster of meetings, incentive travel, conferences and exhibitions or events (MICE) and is often referred to as MICE tourism (Schlenrich, 2008). While academic institutions have become increasingly involved in event management curriculum as a specialist field in the tourism discipline (Fletcher, Dunn & Prince, 2009), Nelson and Silvers (2009) contend

that collaboration between stakeholders is required to ensure the continued advancement of professional qualifications in event management.

Business event tourism practitioners require a range of practical skills and attributes to operate successfully within the sector. Schwagerman (2016) notes that business event tourism practitioners require attributes and skills linked to the service industry. There should be a balance between soft and hard skills and face to face communication, responsiveness, technical knowledge, time management and courtesy are but a few of the attributes required from business event tourism graduates (Bowdin et al., 2012; Schwagerman, 2016). According to Bowdin et al. (2012), limited research has been done to identify the critical skills, qualifications and attributes of successful event managers. The challenge in South African higher education is therefore to identify the required skills set for graduates to operate in a globally competitive event tourism environment and to develop contemporary business event tourism management qualifications that will prepare graduates successfully for employment.

A review of extant research revealed that internationally research has been conducted in terms of tourism and event management qualifications and curriculum development considerations (Beaven & Wright, 2006; Silvers, O' Toole & Nelson, 2006; Lee, Lee & Kim, 2008; McCabe, 2008; Formandi & Raffai, 2009; Nelson & Silvers, 2009; Jones, 2010; Ladkin & Weber, 2010; Aggett & Busby, 2011; Phelan & Mills, 2011; Zeng & Yang, 2011; Robertson, Junek & Lockstone-Binney, 2012; Kock & Strydom, 2014). However, most of these existing studies on the topic presented international perspectives for Asia, the United States of America, Australia and the United Kingdom and none of the research addressed the unique considerations for a developing country like South Africa. Most of the research reflecting on industry and student expectations have focused on the tourism and hospitality sector with no recent research on the graduate attributes for business event tourism management specifically. Regarded as one of the main service industries in the world with substantial impacts on the society in which it operates, international tourism continues to grow in developing countries like South Africa (Martinez, Perez & Del Bosque, 2013).

A number of developing countries have recognised the potential economic benefits of global business event tourism (Rogers & Davidson, 2016). However, from a demand-side, there are often constraints in terms of the types of jobs available, and from the

supply-side the youth labour-market's success is hugely influenced by capabilities related to education, social capital and soft skills (Mlatsheni, 2012). Therefore, there is an increased focus on the educational development of professional business event tourism practitioners to ensure global competitiveness in this sector. Furthermore, in South Africa, the Safety at Sports and Recreational Events Act, No 2 of 2010, prescribes the use of qualified events practitioners in the staging of corporate, sports and recreational events as a regulatory requirement (South Africa, 2015), further compelling the syllabus development and delivery of formal event management qualifications. The purpose of this article is to determine the graduate attributes and personal skills that are fundamental to the business event tourism management sector of South Africa in order to develop responsive higher education qualifications at vocationally orientated institutions such as UoTs.

As part of contemporary curriculum development, the determination of suitable graduate attributes should consider the graduates themselves as an integral constituent of the process. Graduate attributes include sets of skills and attributes that a university will declare critical to develop while students are studying towards a qualification and reflects external stakeholders' requirements (Chalmers & Partridge, 2013). According to Chalmers and Partridge (2013), graduate skills and qualities are developed as students advance their studies at university level and include the development of broader attitudinal dispositions which lead to improved graduate employability. Bridgstock (2009) notes that graduates need to display skills not only specific to their discipline but must possess generic attributes that are transferable in the rapidly changing information-intensive economy in which young entrants currently have to operate.

In a South African context, the increase in events has fuelled the development of suitable event management qualifications and training programmes and according to Lee et al. (2008), today's tourism programmes have the utmost pressure, not only to deliver relevant qualifications in event education, but to develop a curriculum that will satisfy industry, graduate and educator requirements. Kruger (2003) and Osoian, Nistor and Zaharie (2010) argue that the biggest challenge with unemployed graduates relates to a lack of experience and an adequate skills set required for certain jobs. In events, versatile skills related to project management, such as timeline management, communication, accuracy in details as well as the ability to work cross-functionally in complex event environments are important skills for graduates (Bladen, Kennell, Abson & Wilde, 2012). Table 4.1 is a reflection of some of the most important event

management graduate attributes and personal skills essential for effective event management leaders based on the findings of research conducted by Beaven and Wright (2006) and Goldblatt (2005) respectively. Stress management, communication skills and problem-solving competencies as well as flexibility are underpinned as important in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Event management graduate attributes and personal skills**

Most important attributes required from graduates seeking employment	Essential personal skills required from event leaders
Self-motivation Ability to communicate Problem-solving skills Passion and enthusiasm Willingness to learn Resilience to cope under pressure Reliability Flexibility Management skills Commitment	Multi-tasking abilities Oral and written communication abilities Conflict resolution skills Interpersonal and team-building skills Ability to improvise Stress management skills Time management skills Adaptability Leadership Attention to detail

**[Source: Adapted from Beaven and Wright (2006) and Goldblatt (2005)]**

Goldblatt (2005) states it is essential that employees are capable of advancing the goals and objectives of event companies, and graduates will require a diverse skills set to do so. Arcodia and Barker (2003) draw attention to the importance of multitasking skills and personal attributes such as self-motivation, creativity, flexibility, and initiative taking to event practitioners seeking employment. The demanding nature of the tourism, hospitality and event industry is characterised by long and irregular hours (Kokt & Strydom, 2014) and requires flexibility and a positive attitude towards work. According to Kruger (2003), South African employers require more than just technical skills but also self-confident graduates with good manners that have effective communication abilities and are able to think on their feet with the ability to work in a team and display a willingness to learn. For event management practitioners, core values such as strategic thinking, creativity, ethics and continuous improvement are essential personal traits for professional business event tourism managers (Silvers, 2011).

Fletcher et al. (2009) also highlight the fact that graduates with new qualifications entering the world of work, often lack the years of intensive event management experience required to meet the high standards of professionalised credentialing as offered by these professional associations, such as the International Special Event Society (ISES) that offers the Certified Special Events Professional (CSEP)

designation. From an industry perspective, it may be argued that event management qualifications must mirror the environmental trends and provide a balance of technical and soft skills in order to equip to manage event operations and workplace relationships (Silvers, 2010). Under these circumstances, it has become important to shape industry collaborations to be more inclusive for professional business event tourism qualifications and consider co-creation and greater collaboration with the event industry through knowledge-sharing and partnerships. It is important that educators work in tandem with industry to ensure increased cohesion between educational outcomes and industry requirements due to the particularly practical nature of the sector (Bladen et al., 2012). As globalisation, technology, social and financial challenges play a continuous role in transforming event management practices, graduates need to be able to adapt to this modern world of business and it has become almost mandatory that professional qualifications equip students with the competencies and skills that are required for employment success (Fook & Sidhu, 2010). As the goal of MICE education is to produce well-educated and qualified professionals for the event industry, academic curriculum developers should strive to integrate theory with practice in order to adequately prepare graduates for this niche sector (Zeng & Yang, 2011).

The article seeks to understand employers' expectations in terms of workplace skills and to explore how graduates perceive their own personal competency levels related to the industry-specific graduate attributes. The knowledge obtained from this study may contribute to literature in the discipline and be of value to higher education institutions concerned with the expansion of qualification offerings in business event tourism. It is significant to other developing countries as a point in reference where there is a mismatch in terms of the existing skills endowments of the majority of the workforce and the nature of the skills demanded by employers in the growing business event tourism sector.

## **4.2 Methodology**

Qualitative research methods are crucial to researchers in the management discipline and can provide important insight related to individual experiences (Cassel, Buehring, Symon & Johnson, 2006; Creswell, 2014). The value of qualitative research typically lies in the experiences and views shared by participants rather than in the number of participants (Creswell, 2014). Data collection procedures for the study considered two data sources at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in Cape Town, South Africa and ethically, the research assured participants of confidentiality and

participatory freedom. Employer insights were gathered from a panel of seven expert practitioners utilising the Developing a Curriculum Method (DACUM) in a structured one-day focus group. DACUM is ideal as a systematic method for developing practical competency-orientated qualifications and is a formal job-analysis technique that has been used globally for more than 30 years (Johnson, 2010). The DACUM process departs from the premise that an occupation may be described in terms of skills, tasks and procedures, and this in turn could translate into developing a curriculum that prepares students adequately for the world of work. Expert workers and supervisors in business event tourism management formed part of the DACUM committee, as they are best able to describe and expound on the specifications for the particular occupation. Participants were identified by means of purposive sampling from the official 2013-2016 industry advisory board list of the Tourism and Event Management Department at the CPUT. Participants were interviewed in a group while the session was recorded. The DACUM allowed for discussion amongst committee members until consensus was reached on each graduate skill and competency. Secondly, graduate insights were gained from 20 National Diploma graduates whereby purposive sampling was utilised to identify and interview individuals who enrolled for a degree in Bachelor of Technology: Event Management in Tourism Management during 2016 at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. This would ensure participants were aligned to business event tourism career specialisation. For this data set, a key informant interview guide was used to record individual insights gained from personal interviews. Data saturation was achieved for both sets of data whereby no new information emerged from the focus group (employer insights) or the personal interviews (graduate insights) before analysis commenced. The research looked at two different data sources to increase the validation of the qualitative data, namely employer and graduate perspectives respectively. Further to validation, the DACUM findings were revisited with participants where similar questions were asked to the same participants after initial transcriptions. Creswell's steps for scientific qualitative data analysis guided the analysis of the study (Creswell, 2014) as presented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Steps in the qualitative data analysis of the study**

<b>Creswell's six qualitative data analysis steps</b>	<b>Application to this study</b>
1) Organise and prepare the data	Interviews were transcribed and the data collected from participants was sorted and arranged into the two participant sets of responses. The DACUM results were prepared from scribed notes in the focus group session. Graduate interviews were captured electronically. The two data sets were prepared separately.
2) Read or look at all the data	The overall depth and credibility of the data was determined and a sense of the meaning of the information was gained.
3) Start coding all of the data	Data was organised in chunks of information with accompanying memos and notes as the data was read. Employer insights from the DACUM were grouped to display graduate attributes and workplace skills for analysis. Graduate responses from interviews were categorised.
4) Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as themes for analysis	Detailed information about the participants and the setting was noted and themes were created that displayed diverse quotes and findings. Once themes emerged, outcomes were reviewed and matched against transcripts supported by ATLAS.ti scientific qualitative data analysis (QDA) software.
5) Advance how the description and themes will be represented in the qualitative narrative	Narrative passage was selected to convey the findings of the analysis.
6) Make an interpretation in qualitative research	The lessons learned from the insights gained were captured by using a theoretical lens and conveying personal researched-based meanings.

[Source: Adapted from Creswell (2014)]

### 4.3 Results and discussion

Employer participants' insights are presented in Table 4.3 and the consensus reached by the DACUM committee on the most important graduate and personal skills required for employability in the event industry are highlighted.

**Table 4.3: Event management graduate attributes and GACs**

<b>Graduate attributes and GACs</b>	<b>Specific workplace skills, competencies, and graduate attributes</b>
A) Time management and stress management	<p><b>Time management</b></p> <p>A1 Practice punctuality</p> <p>A2 Engage in multi-tasking of several activities simultaneously</p> <p>A3 Prioritise duties, actions, tasks</p> <p><b>Stress management</b></p> <p>A4 Practice restraint and control personal emotions during stressful periods of work with colleagues and clients</p> <p>A5 Separate issues from the person during conflict management situations</p> <p>A6 Use colleagues as support and mentors</p>

Graduate attributes and GACs	Specific workplace skills, competencies, and graduate attributes
	A7 Apply stress management techniques to minimize stressful situations A8 Approach problems objectively without emotion
B) Professional profile	B1 Be passionate about all tasks assigned B2 Be eager to please B3 Be available at odd times not necessarily only during office hours B4 Keep abreast of current news and events B5 Display personal poise and deportment as a company representative B6 Display good manners B7 Show creative flair for design tasks
C)Personal characteristics	C1 Take initiative and indicate a willingness to learn the trade C2 Have confidence C3 Engage in intelligent communication C4 Apply correct protocol in terms of respecting colleagues and clients C5 Show respect to all colleagues and clients C6 Display leadership qualities C7 Take responsibility for all actions C8 Know what to speak about, and to whom
C)Personal characteristics (cont.)	C9 Be a lateral thinker C10 Display a positive attitude C11 Be detail orientated C12 Be open to criticism

**(Researcher’s construct from data information)**

The general areas of competence (GACs) describe the major functions and responsibilities of a typical entry-level occupation for graduates. The DACUM committee was in agreement that the following GACs, skills and competencies were salient to the entry-level position of a Business Events Assistant. This generic position is transferable to the various types of business event tourism organisations related to the sector. The DACUM committee noted that graduates at entry-level would not be employed as managers in the industry without the requisite technical knowledge and expertise related to specific occupations gained only through professional experience. While some of the graduate attributes do not qualify as skills or workplace competencies, the DACUM committee was of the strong opinion that graduates required these characteristics for industry employment. As supported by Arcodia and Barker (2003), the ability to multi-task with attention to detail as well as stress management was highlighted as critical to business event management success by DACUM participants.

Graduates need to possess generic attributes that are transferable in the rapidly changing information-intensive economy in which young entrants to the world of work currently have to operate (Bridgstock, 2009). Osoian et al. (2010) contend that the biggest challenge of graduates seeking employment is a lack of experience as high

skills levels are required. Personal interviews with graduates (referred to as Participant 1 to Participant 20) provided valuable insight into individual competency levels and the subsequent attainment of graduate attributes. Six key themes related to the GACs (Table 4.3) emerged and were used as the headings presenting the key findings below.

#### **4.3.1 Ability to engage in multi-tasking of several activities simultaneously**

*Related to GAC A: (A2-A3)*

With regards to multi-tasking competencies, Participant 6 explained that, “...*although I have a good ability to manage multiple tasks, sometimes I don’t commit myself to it,*” ...which leads to undesirable outcomes in the workplace. Participant 4 noted personal multi-tasking abilities as “*good, but at some point, I just cannot do it*” feeling overwhelmed with multiple tasks at times. Participant 2 and Participant 11 reflected negatively on their abilities, with the latter participant noting that, “...*I prefer to concentrate on one thing*” when dealing with operational tasks. Participation responses reached saturation early in the analysis of this attribute as most insights repeatedly alluded to the possession of good multi-tasking abilities.

#### **4.3.2 Ability to manage stress by practicing restraint and controlling personal emotions during stressful periods of work with colleagues and clients**

*Related to GAC A: (A4-A8) and GAC C: (C4-C8)*

Skills related to people management are deemed indispensable for an industry that is fundamentally concerned with service delivery and client satisfaction (Kokt & Strydom, 2014). When asked to reflect on the ability to manage stress and control emotions during stressful periods at work, Participant 6 reflected: “...*my ability to control my emotions is very bad, I stress easily and cannot handle stress, I let stress control me and end up losing focus*”. Participant 7 noted an inability to control emotions, and stated that, “...*at times I just have a breakdown and think a lot, which leads me to forgetting tasks that I have to do*” while Participants 9 and 11 also indicated difficulty with managing stress, the latter indicating: “*I tend to wear my heart on my sleeve, there are times where I can’t hide my emotions.*” Participant 14 considers personal emotional control as a severe limitation in that, “...*when I’m feeling down and weak, I cannot help myself but lash out at innocent people.*” Although some reflections were positive, as Participant 19 notes: “...*I think about what is at stake, put my emotions aside and focus on bigger goals I want to achieve*”, most of the insights gained in the findings highlighted the need for more effective stress management techniques.

#### **4.3.3 Be available at odd times not necessarily only during office hours**

*Related to GAC B: (B3)*

Flexibility and commitment for graduates entering the world of work remain a key requirement for employers (Beaven & Wright, 2006; Kock & Strydom, 2014) and from responses obtained in this study, it was clear that graduates were divided in their individual dispositions towards flexible office hours: *"...I won't avail myself when I am not on duty, I love my time"* was the response from Participant 1, supported by Participant 14 who stated that: *"...I am not good at this; my off time is my time to relax"*. Similar insights were gained from Participant 19 who felt that work needs to be done *"...during office time and not my personal time"*. However, it was clear from the reflections that most of the graduates understood that by its very nature, business event tourism management will require flexible hours of operation as Participant 4 noted, *"...it is not really a nine to five job, one has to be able to work odd hours"*. Participant 16 shared the following insight: *"...I do not really like it, but I am in a service business which means hours are odd. Like my odd hours this Sunday at 01h30 for the Cape Town Cycle Tour"*.

#### **4.3.4 Show creative flair for design tasks**

*Related to GAC B: (B7)*

In terms of creative abilities, Participant 3 noted it is *"...not a skill I would consider a strength"* whilst Participant 11 considered it important in order to differentiate events from one and another, *"...but not always necessary"*. In sharp contrast, creative design competencies were regarded as very important by the majority of the graduates, as Participant 7 argued that it is *"...very important for your work to be noticeable"*. According to Silvers (2011), creativity can be regarded as a core value for event practitioners towards successful event project and business management. Supporting this view, Participant 16 proposed a good understanding of creative design and considered it as *"...one of the most important aspects in the events business to make money. You need to blow peoples' minds."*

#### **4.3.5 To keep abreast of current news and events in the industry**

*Related to GAC B: (B4)*

According to Rogers and Davidson (2012), event practitioners should have a good grasp and understanding of the forces and broad trends that impact the wider community in which event tourism operates. Participant 7 displayed a personal lack of interest in keeping up to date with industry news: *"...I don't keep abreast, I think it's just laziness"* and in agreement Participant 9 noted *"...I think I'm lazy, I don't follow event news or trends"*. Participant 4 noted that: *"...my ability to keep track of event trends is average"*. Keeping up to date with industry was critical to Participant 8: *"...I use Twitter, social media and found out what is happening in the event industry, I read blogs as well"*. Participant 13 also alluded to the use of electronic platforms to keep abreast with industry role players and considered it vital to read industry magazines when working with well-informed clients and suppliers.

#### **4.3.6 Ability to effectively engage in intelligent communication**

*Related to GAC C: (C3; C5; C8)*

According to Kruger (2003), South African employers require graduates to be self-confident, possess good manners and to have effective communication abilities. The insights given by participants of this study indicated an ability to communicate, but a lack of confidence in certain areas that restricts their interaction abilities, for example, *"...I hold back due to a lack of industry experience"* noted Participant 3 about communication in the world of work. Participant 4 shared that: *"...I'm not so confident because at times I feel like my English is not polished and I don't know whether what I will be saying would be appropriate when sharing ideas"*. In agreement, Participant 5 contemplated: *"...when networking, I normally hold back as I am sometimes not sure if what I am going to say is right, I need to work on my communication skills"*. The limitation is often linked to a lack of confidence in graduate responses: *"...I am often afraid of criticism"* (Participant 10) and *"...I am not so confident. I often doubt myself, but I try to connect with people"* (Participant 20). When considering the fact that graduate attributes should ideally be fostered during the years of study at a university (Chalmers & Partridge, 2013), Participant 14 remarked: *"...I have grown as a person in these three years of study and have the ability to engage in meaningful conversation"* indicating a level of graduate maturity.

#### **4.4 Conclusion and recommendations**

Employer participants' insights are presented in Table 4.3 and the consensus reached by the DACUM committee on the most important graduate and personal skills required for employability in the event industry are highlighted.

The findings from this study established that employers in the South African business event tourism management sector require and recommend a diverse range of graduate attributes and personal skills. Stress management with the ability to cope under pressure, a willingness to learn, intelligent communication and multi-tasking aptitudes were specified as significant for the industry. Graduates who manage their time effectively, without being clock-watchers, and with creative abilities as part of their personal core values would be most suited to work in the industry in an entry-level position across the event management spectrum. The paper further explored graduates' perspectives and personal competency levels in terms of workplace skills related to graduate attributes and found that there are noteworthy gaps in the soft skills required after three years of study at a university. These gaps relate to inability to handle stress and control emotions in a professional environment, reluctance towards flexibility required in the world of work, mediocre multi-tasking abilities and challenges with regards to communication abilities.

Related to the context of a developing country, there are certain challenges in terms of graduate attributes and skills in the sector. As an example, the unwillingness of graduates in this study to be available at odd hours may be related to unreliable public transportation and safety concerns when travelling home late at night. Furthermore, graduates expressed a lack of confidence when communicating in a corporate environment. This may be attributed to limited exposure as the graduates often move from rural areas to the city seeking education and employment. Graduate reflections in this study also provided in-depth insight in terms of soft skill insecurities and corporate communication limitations where English is a second language for most of the participants. These critical insights lay the foundation for considerations when syllabi have to reflect global content in an African context. In response to these findings, curriculum developers should consider the reinforcement of graduate attributes in the holistic development of students as academic citizens during their time of study.

As the decolonisation of curricula increasingly features on the agenda of UoTs in South Africa, all stakeholders' needs have to be considered and inclusive approaches to the embedment of graduate attributes are required. It is imperative to provide an interactive

teaching and learning environment where soft skills and business ethics are embedded in curriculum content. Educators in this niche should ensure students are exposed to industry engagement opportunities such as membership affiliation to industry associations, event volunteering and guest lectures where skills development can be facilitated. In terms of limitations and in line with the exploratory nature of the research, this article gained insight from one UoT as a case in reference. Similar research at other higher education institutions offering business event management tourism related qualifications may be useful in broadening the scope to generalise the findings for the South African context. Further research is also recommended to explore how industry can be strategic co-creators of business event tourism management curricula and how graduate attributes can be effectively implemented as part of the teaching, learning and assessment strategy.

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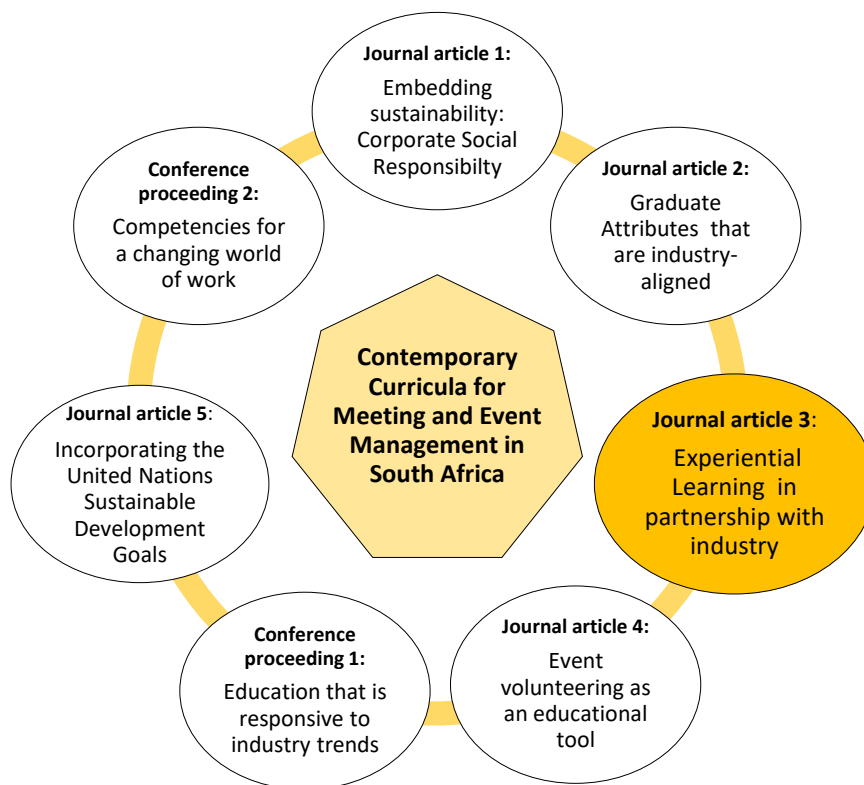
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**CHAPTER 5  
(JOURNAL ARTICLE 3)  
RISING TO THE OCCASION: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EVENT  
MANAGEMENT STUDENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

Figure 5.1 illustrates how journal article 3 (Chapter 5) forms part of the coherent body of work related to the development of contemporary curricula.



**Figure 5.1: Contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements (Experiential learning in partnership with industry)**

**(Researcher's construct)**

## **5.0 Abstract**

Event management educators in South Africa are faced with the challenge of educating culturally diverse students for progressive workplaces in the business events sector of the tourism industry. This dynamic sector requires work-ready skilled practitioners at entry-level positions. In this regard, experiential learning (EL) plays an important role in bridging the gap between university theory and industry practice in vocationally oriented event management qualifications. This study explores how students experience EL as part of a formal event management qualification at a South African University of Technology (UoT). Following a qualitative approach, data for this study were collected by means of focus group discussions and key informant interviews with

selected participants. Data were transcribed and analyzed by applying six steps of scientific qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis identified four key themes that emerged, which highlighted student expectations of EL and student experiences during EL in the actual world of work. The findings indicate that students experience the need to be coached in the necessary soft skills required to be effective future event managers. The findings suggest that it is essential for academic and industry supervisors to develop mentorship strategies to close the knowing–doing gap in order to enhance student experiences. This article provides new insights on how event management students perceive the role of industry and academic supervision as part of a student-centered approach in EL.

**Key words:** Experiential learning (EL); Event management; Student experiences; Qualitative case study

## 5.1 Introduction

Internationally, event management has progressed as a specific field of study affiliated to tourism, lei- sure, and recreation studies (Getz, 2012). Academically institutionalized at universities in the 1990s (Lei, Lam, & Lourenco, 2015), event management has been established as a specialized academic program in higher education around the world (Getz & Page, 2016). In South Africa, the event sector of the tourism industry is considered to be a major niche with extensive growth potential and significant efforts are being made to develop this area (Tassiopoulos, 2010). This includes the development of specialized event management academic programs linked to other well-established tourism and hospitality management courses. It is against this backdrop that the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in Cape Town pioneered South Africa's first formal qualification in event management in 2007, with a number of national Universities of Technology (UoTs) following suit. The South African higher education system consists of traditional universities that have much in common with their international counterparts; UoTs focus on both theoretical and practical preparation of students as skilled contributors to the national economy (Du Pré, 2013).

Spowart (2011) observed that employers are increasingly reliant on academic institutions to produce students with a sound theoretical understanding of the tourism and hospitality field, as well as the practical skills to operate independently in challenging situations typical to the event sector. However, most academics share two common challenges, namely the challenge of educating increasingly culturally diverse students for progressive workplaces, as well as the challenge of bridging the knowing–

doing gap between university theory and workplace practice (Kim, Lin & Qui, 2015; Papamarcos, 2002). Essentially, these challenges are amplified in event tourism education due to the practical and diverse nature of the field.

Lei et al. (2015) expressed that extensive hands-on industry experience is required from an event management student in order to facilitate an easy transition into this dynamic sector upon graduation. For this reason, experiential learning (EL) is one method that may be implemented to overcome these conceptual and contextual challenges of vocationally orientated event management qualifications. Additionally, Robertson, Junek, and Lockstone-Binney (2012) reiterated that authentic learning environments with adequate practical exposure are of significant importance in the development of employable students for the event sector. Therefore, it has become imperative for event educators to design relevant EL syllabi in partnership with industry to optimally benefit students and the event sector at large.

Various studies have investigated the EL learning outcomes of placements in tourism and hospitality education and concluded that it plays an important role in developing transferable skills such as problem solving and time management (Beggs, Ross, & Goodwin, 2008; Mistilis & Harris, 2009). In addition, extant work related to learning and the world of work in the hospitality sector has focused on the impact of internship on career development (Chen & Shen, 2012) and student expectations for working in the tourism and hospitality sectors in South Africa (Kokt & Strydom, 2014). The latter study underlined the importance of technical and people skills in an extremely demanding and labor-intensive industry. Specifically, research on EL in the field of event management studies has been relatively sparse. Wilson (2012) considered the impact of EL on skills development and career outcomes in event management students, while a recent study conducted by Khuong (2016) presented the views of industry and academia on EL in tourism training programs in Vietnam, emphasizing the importance of strong university–industry partnerships in EL. Moreover, Lei et al. (2015) investigated the effectiveness of EL in event education derived from insights of students who hosted a live event and organized a conference as an EL mechanism (Kim et al., 2015). These studies concluded that participation in this type of EL contributed significantly to personal development and the improvement of practical skills.

Existing research exploring students' experiences of workplace-based internships at workstations in the event tourism industry as an EL method is scant and there is no

research documenting EL experiences of event management students in a developing country such as South Africa. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how students experienced EL as part of a formal event management qualification at a South African University of Technology. The study further aims to understand how students perceive the role of industry and academic supervisors at work- place-based internships. From the insights gained, a framework is proposed for the mentorship of students by way of coaching techniques while on-site at EL workstations. The research will be of interest to both academics and industry partners concerned with the employability and rapid absorption of skilled students in the event management sector.

## **5.2 Literature review**

### **5.2.1 Event management education in South Africa**

In South Africa, business events tourism is regarded as a key force in the tourism sector's 9.5% contribution to the country's gross domestic product (Hanekom, 2015). Indeed, 1 in every 10 jobs in South Africa is positioned within the tourism sector, which accounts for more than 1.4 million jobs (Hanekom, 2015). Presently, the tourism industry is creating opportunities for many South Africans and this includes prospective occupations in the event management sector (George, 2014). Hanekom (2015) points out that the discriminatory apartheid system prior to the first democratic elections in 1994 had a negative effect on South Africa's tourism sector. Subsequently, efforts to diversify and transform the industry have moved post-apartheid universities with tourism-related qualifications such as event management to widen access and open enrollment opportunities for poor and previously disadvantaged students.

Prior to 1994, South African government policy did not prioritize the skills development or higher education for the vast majority of the population and, similarly, the university sector of the country was not particularly concerned with the delivery of academic programs that provided appropriate skills to the populace (Du Pré, 2013). Hence, only vocational higher education institutions saw the need for career-focused education. Since 1994, programs within these institutions that offer strong, practical, and applied curricula—coupled with EL—have intensified the delivery of immediate and relevant knowledge in the workplace (Du Pré, 2013). In a country where the youth unemployment rate is in the vicinity of 54%, it has become critical for higher education institutions to provide learning environments that will optimize graduate success in today's challenging work environment (Altman, 2013).

According to Huang (2013), students view the ever-growing tourism industry and related subsectors as an avenue that offers a number of different career opportunities. Considering the educational legacy and culturally diverse backgrounds of con-

temporary students, D. A. Kolb (2015) asserts that not all would have been equally exposed to rigorous textbook learning prior to university access, and that some may in fact possess stronger practical

skills. For these students, EL platforms may be an empowering experience that allows them to promote and reap benefit from their practical strengths while applying textbook theory in field placement (D. A. Kolb, 2015). South African UoTs typically specialize in vocationally oriented qualifications with major EL components to develop practical skills in support of academic knowledge. Thus, these UoTs typically combine theoretical concepts with practical application in all modules of their curricula; workplace-based learning is integrated into the formal academic program (Du Pré, 2013).

### **5.2.2 Vocational education for a career in event management**

Silvers, Bowdin, O'Toole, and Nelson (2006) posited that event management programs at university level have become a popular specialization choice for students advancing in tourism and hospitality-related studies worldwide. McCabe (2008) contended that the meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE) sector has become a prevalent career pursuit avenue, as it is considered to provide good opportunities with accelerated promotion potential for event managers. Essentially, the increased demand for skilled event management professionals in this growing industry has driven the continuous development of event management curricula and qualifications in higher education globally (Nelson & Silvers, 2009). This is why Silvers (2010a) suggested that event management curricula should provide students with the technical and soft skills required for daily business events operations and interpersonal workplace relationship management.

Relating to the aforementioned, Page and Connell (2009) explained that event management entails the practical aspects of the preparation for, and staging of events. Thus, event managers should essentially understand the social nature of an event organization and develop leadership skills in those whom they manage (Silvers, 2010b). As noted by Shone and Parry (2010), the initial preplanning stages of an event involve various complexities that are vital to its successful execution. For this reason, it is critical that students are either directly involved or exposed to this and other phases of event planning while studying. This is why EL provides the ideal platform for such real-life engagements. The vocational nature of event management compels the practical exposure of students to various aspects of event planning, implementation,

and management. Additionally, when managed successfully, the ideal event leads to the satisfaction of internal stakeholders and ensures their commitment to future events, especially if the work takes place in a safe and enjoyable environment (Westerbeek et al., 2005). According to Mingun and Fortune (2013), when students' satisfaction is considered, there is greater interaction in participatory activities such as EL. In essence, graduate unemployment has brought about strong competition and the effective preparation of employable students at universities has become a decisive factor in securing relevant employment (De Vos, De Hauw, & Van der Heijden, 2011). For this reason, the satisfaction of the needs and the expectations of students in terms of increased employability upon graduation is becoming a major aim for institutions specializing in tourism and hospitality management programs such as event management (Butt & Rehman, 2010).

However, to find and retain employment in today's challenging environment, academic subject knowledge is not enough (Wakelin-Theron, 2015). Zopitas and Theocharous (2013) noted that EL provides students with the opportunity to gain invaluable job experiences and training in a potential career or specific field of interest of EL activities, also referred to as internship, practical work experience, work placement, workplace learning, work-integrated learning, or cooperative education. In this regard, experience and transferable skills in practical event management is important for career advancement in the sector. On the other hand, growing concerns have been reported related to the gap between the classroom and the real world of work in MICE education (Kim et al., 2015). Reflecting on the nature of EL, Miller and Boud (1996) argued that learning is socially and culturally constructed and influenced by the socioeconomic background within which it occurs. This inseparability of students' diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds from how EL is experienced necessitates a serious review for educators involved with EL to reconsider a one size fits all approach in the implementation of EL.

Moreover, Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) maintained that although management education can add significant value to individuals, ultimately managers cannot be created in university classrooms alone. This view echoes the need for a practical, student-centered approach to meaningful EL in event management education. Increased diversity in the classroom, together with the multicultural nature of the event tourism sector has also necessitated the delivery of culturally responsive education and thus EL provides a platform where students extend their cultural interaction beyond the classroom into the real world of work, through working with real people

requiring professional decorum. Docherty and Fernandez (2014) stressed that it is essential for higher education institutions to be focused on the skills that are sustaining the employability of their graduates. For this reason, Nachmias and Walmsley (2015) contended that it is imperative for the education system and the labor market to share knowledge related to the required skills and competencies that students attain at university, and those required in tourism and hospitality-related industries. In this instance, EL, which strives to close the knowing–doing gap in event education, can play a cardinal role in creating a competitive advantage for higher education institutions as it focuses on work-ready graduates.

### **5.2.3 An overview of experiential learning in higher education**

As the name suggests, EL refers to learning by doing and provides students with a learning platform where the theoretical concepts can be translated into practical work contexts (Kim et al., 2015). More specifically, Bohn and Schmidt (2008) defined it as “the process by which a learner creates meaning from direct experience” (p. 5). Some of the key scholarly contributors to model the theory of EL are John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, Carl Jung, and Carl Rogers (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). These scholars assisted in the development of a holistic model of the process of EL and although posing individual views, the theory is collaboratively built on six propositions shared by all:

- Learning is best conceived as a process, not in terms of outcomes.
- All learning is relearning.
- Learning is best facilitated by a process that draws out the students’ beliefs and ideas about a topic, so that they can be examined, tested, and integrated with new, more refined ideas.
- Learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed modes of adaptation to the world.
- Learning is a holistic process of adaptation to the world.
- Learning results from synergetic transactions between the person and the environment.
- Learning is the process of creating knowledge (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 194).

EL is a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior. As stated by A. Y. Kolb and Kolb (2005) learning is “the major determinant of human development, and how individuals learn shapes the course of their personal development” (p. 195). Parcell and Franken (2009)

established that by having students participate, they become more actively involved in their own learning process. As EL is concerned with learning from first-person experience, D. A. Kolb (1984) indicated that there should be a link between the classroom and the actual future work for which the classroom is preparing the students, stating that there is a need to “translate abstract ideas of academia into the concrete practical realities” (p. 6). In this instance, EL is an opportunity for students to reinforce classroom knowledge and to learn new skills. In many cases, EL represents the first real opportunity for students to deal with the realities that accompany the responsibility of securing a job, and at elementary level this may include issues such as arriving for work punctually and being suitably dressed (Fanthome, 2004). EL or work placement best emphasize the six stages of learning in Blooms’ 1964 taxonomy:

- Remembering, as the student retrieves relevant knowledge from long-term memory;
- Understanding, as meaning is constructed from examples;
- Applying, using a procedure in a given situation (EL);
- Analyzing, as the student breaks and relates constituent parts to another;
- Evaluating, as judgements are made based on standards and criteria; and
- Creating, as the student at the end of the practical EL put elements together to form a coherent whole while recognizing new patterns (Anderson et al., 2001).

Recent years have witnessed EL theory steadily gaining popularity in education as it serves for a helpful resource for teaching and learning (Robert, Mark, & John, 2010). Success in EL is more likely to be achieved if the lecturer assumes the role of a facilitator as guided by a number of steps proposed by Wurdinger and Carlson (2010), which included factors such as:

Being willing to accept a less teacher-centric role in the classroom, explaining the purpose of the EL situation to the students, tying the course learning objectives to course activities and direct experiences so students know what they are supposed to do, providing resources to help the students to succeed, finding balance between the academic and nurturing aspects of teaching, and clarifying students’ and instructor roles. (p. 13)

Sharing similar views, Kosnik, Tingle, and Blanton (2013) argued that a traditional academic model with the emphasis on theory-driven lectures with no real-world experience is irrelevant as it does not offer sufficient groundwork for graduates in

decision making and competitive performance required in the global marketplace. Furthermore, Simons et al. (2013) considered EL to be a transformative pedagogy that can lead to the achievement of multicultural objectives and social justice for students when these objectives are clear to students in their learning outcomes. Therefore, these authors contend that effective EL requires the comprehensive process of defining learning outcomes and the development, alignment, and assessment of learning activities around educational initiatives such as workplace-based learning that has the potential to improve the quality of graduates.

#### **5.2.4 Experiential learning considerations for event management**

Berg and Karlsen (2012) postulated that management development involves a mentorship approach that supports and challenges individuals to reach goals. In event management workplace-based internships, industry supervisors are in partnership with educators as mentors. For this reason, it is vital that students immersed in EL at workstations within the event sector develop a broad set of skills essential to event managers. A manager's toolbox of coaching techniques can hereby assist industry and academic supervisors in developing future managers. This is echoed by Connor and Pokora (2012), who asserted that the central principle of coaching and mentoring determines that learning occurs through the relationship with a mentor or coach where personal experience, knowledge, and skills are shared.

Nadiri and Tanova (2010) believed that in tourism and hospitality-related fields, such as event management, the central role played by employees should seriously be taken into account as the service quality depends on employee competence and performance. Therefore, it is imperative that supervisors at EL workstations take their mentorship role seriously due to the nature of the service-oriented event sector. Speaking to the aforementioned, Truesky and Gallagher (2011) asserted that the ability to develop service-oriented and leadership traits is central to the effectiveness and sustainability of service industry organizations such as event companies. Fundamentally, interpersonal communication remains at the forefront of service industries and EL provides the ideal platform for students to experience and practice this critical skill required for success in the world of work. Owen (2011) proposes a number of interpersonal communication skills necessary as part of an effective repertoire for success in the workplace. The author suggests that certain key skills should ideally be practiced and reinforced during EL. Among these include the ability to communicate nonverbally, the ability to listen, to question, and to explain, as well as the ability to participate and working with others (Owen, 2011). To ensure that students

have acquired the knowledge and skills required as graduates who enter the workforce, such as interpersonal communication competencies, Banta (2001) asserted that the assessment of student learning outcomes is an essential component of curricular design. Therefore, careful consideration is required in terms of the assessment of EL in event management education. In this regard, students who have completed EL can provide valuable insight in terms of the realities, relevance, and overall experience of assessment during and after workplace-based learning in the field.

Moreover, assessment should form part of mentorship and coaching and function as a learning tool rather than a tool to judge performance. Mentors (or supervisors) of interns are critical figures in the work lives of EL interns because they determine the assigned tasks that lead to opportunities for students to utilize and improve their work-related skills (Liu, Xu, & Weitz, 2011). Essentially, guidance in terms of coaching techniques such as goal setting, emotional intelligence, empowerment, feedback and conflict management, the identification of talents and strengths, and self-management can deepen the learning experience and lead to enriched student experiences during EL (Berg & Karlsen, 2012). Mentorship has proved to support job performance (Bowler & Brass, 2006), as mentors are also responsible for evaluating the performances of student interns, which may have an impact on future recruitment decisions (Feldman, Folks, & Turnley, 1999).

### **5.3 Methodology and research design**

Due to the lack of existing research on students' perspectives on EL experiences in event management education, a qualitative research method was paramount in obtaining the relevant in-depth information from selected participants as part of a case study to express their opinions in an open-ended format. Qualitative research strives to understand, and is considered most appropriate for, research of an exploratory nature (Cresswell, 2014; Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati, & Brackstone, 2014). Millar and Park (2013) emphasized that exploratory research seeks to describe phenomena in its developmental context and enables the gathering of foundational information.

In this investigation, a qualitative case study approach was used to gain insights into the experience of event management students who participated in EL through workplace-based internships at a South African UoT. Commonly used in educational research settings, case study methodology captures potential concerns and issues as they occur in practice (Fleming, 2015; Linn, Howard, & Miller, 2004). Case studies are

particularly useful to unearth underlying aspects such as “how” and “why” in event management-related research (Fox et al., 2014). More specifically, this study seeks to understand how students experience EL as part of event management education and explore why EL was experienced positively or negatively as a mechanism of improving EL in vocational event management qualifications.

Furthermore, when combined with qualitative data collection, a case study offers an in-depth look at a particular issue and the phenomenon at play in certain environments within the everyday context (Yin, 2009; Fox et al., 2014). In this instance, an intrinsic case study approach amplifies recurring themes and issues within the context of the specific case, which can subsequently be generalized to inform other and future settings (Merriam, 1998). Fleming (2015) affirmed that a single case study presents the most suitable means for generating deep, contextualized insights, and for this reason the predetermined nature of intrinsic design was selected to create boundaries for the research.

The case was identified as the compulsory workplace-based internship of the National Diploma: Event Management, at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in Cape Town, South Africa for the year 2016. Wassenaar (2006) highlighted that the welfare and protection of participants are key considerations in research ethics. In this study, consent was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of data collection. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of the research and assured of their anonymity. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from CPUT’s ethical committee, linked to ongoing research related to the development of the event management curriculum.

### **5.3.1 The context for the study**

In this specific case, the National Diploma: Event Management at CPUT requires students to undertake EL in the form of an internship placement at an events-related company (workstation) for a period of 6 months (25 weeks) from January to June. In order to enhance student employability, workplace-based internship forms part of compulsory EL at CPUT. The qualification offers a curriculum aligned to the knowledge and skills chartered in the international event management body of knowledge (EMBOK) that strives to increase the global mobility of students (Silvers et al., 2006). EL is given academic credit, which makes up half of the full exit-level year of study. Annually, during the first semester of their third and final academic year, students are immersed in the world of work on a full-time basis and no theoretical classes take

place. In the second semester, students return to the university to complete their final theoretical component of study. This allows students to share what they have learned in practice with their peers and provides context to the final theoretical concepts presented in class. Thus, the aim of EL within the event management diploma at CPUT is to integrate academic knowledge with work experience and it provides a platform for students to establish a comprehensive understanding of the interconnection between the event industry and the classroom.

In this particular context, 72 students had undertaken their internship placements at various workstations reflecting the diverse event tourism industry in 2016. Support is offered to event management students by means of one academic supervisor who is designated to coordinate all EL placements, engagements, and assessments. Workstations are selected based on their ability to accommodate EL areas in event management related to the academic program requirements. Students participate in work preparedness classes for 6 months prior to EL placement as facilitated by the academic supervisor. Once at the workstation, students are monitored continuously by means of monthly work records, a midpoint feedback form, and site visits where possible. The key role of industry supervisors is to mentor students and to evaluate their performance in terms of communication skills, technical competencies, interpersonal characteristics, and quality of work. EL assessment includes the submission of a portfolio of work, a performance appraisal from the industry supervisor, including a face-to-face meeting where the accumulated work records and overall experience are discussed with the academic supervisor.

### **5.3.2 Data collection**

Cresswell (2014) proposed that the experiences and views of participants are more important than the number of participants in qualitative research. Qualitative research typically does not aim to draw statistical inference or produce a numerically representative sample. Wilmot (2005) explained that in purposive non-random sampling, the number of people interviewed is of less importance than the criteria used to select them. In this case, a total of 26 National Diploma: Event Management students at the CPUT were identified as informants to the research: 18 students participated in two respective focus group discussions and 8 students expressed their individual opinions as key interviewees in an open-ended, unstructured format. Participants were purposively selected based on the successful completion of their compulsory workplace-based internships.

Initial primary data were collected by means of focus group discussions, as this method has proved to be useful when gathering information about experiences from a small number of people focused on a particular area of interest (Cresswell, 2012). Furthermore, Fox et al. (2014) suggested that interaction between the participants could raise issues that might not be established when interviewed individually and therefore, they consider focus groups that contain 6 to 12 participants most suitable in size. In this study, two focus group discussions comprising 9 participants each were held. This ensured that the groups were small enough for all members to share their thoughts, yet large enough to ensure diversity (Lasch et al. 2010). Participants were allowed to communicate openly with the freedom to draw from the commonalities and differences in the group's experiences to further explain issues to the focus group facilitator where needed (Bosco & Ferns, 2014). The focus group process of collaboratively constructing a joint perspective from the contextual dialogue of participants was utilized in this study (Smithson, 2000; Smithson & Diaz 1996). The open discussion among the participants allowed for consensus to be reached, which justifies the collective voice, instead of individual views presented under the key themes of this study. The second stage of primary data collection was conducted by key informant interviews with eight selected participants and was administered by means of an interview guide and audio recorder. Open-ended questions enabled participants to describe their experiences by using their own words. The purpose of this research instrument was to gain participant views and experiences and not to quantify their opinions (Fleming, 2015). These interviews were used to achieve in-depth insights from participants and to further probe themes that emerged from the preceding focus-group analysis.

### **5.3.3 Data analysis**

The qualitative data generated from the two focus groups and the eight key informant interviews were respectively transcribed into text and analyzed separately, following Cresswell's (2014) six steps for qualitative content analysis of data and interpretation (Manners, Saayman, & Kruger, 2015).

The first step involved organizing and preparing data for analysis by transcribing the data verbatim. Secondly, a sense of meaning of the data was gained by reading through the data several times and reflecting on the emerging issues related to participants' experiences of EL. During step three, all the data were manually coded into categories in relation to usefulness, suitability, and relevance considering the research objectives as presented in Table 5.1. An external recoding process allowed

for a comparison with the initial codes documented, in order to obtain an overall perspective in an effort to ensure reliability. This step was facilitated in part ATLAS.ti v.5 statistical qualitative data analysis (QDA) software. The analytical process identified codes that were systematically assigned from quotations in the text. During the fourth step, themes linked to subthemes were created to display diverse quotes from the coded categories (Table 5.1). Four key themes emerged and were used as the headings presented as the key findings of this study. Step five progressed to select a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis and considered descriptive information about the themes as identified by the participants. Main views and relevant quotes were identified by means of the thorough coding process. The final step involves the use of a theoretical lens to formulate research-based personal meanings and facilitate interpretation and understanding from the results.

**Table 5.1: Themes and coded categories from the data**

<b>Key themes</b>	<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Coded categories</b>
Student expectations of EL in event management	Industry mentorship	Understanding intern role
		Teaching and training student
		Fair treatment
	Industry exposure to events	Event management related tasks
		Exposure to event management learning areas
		Real life exposure to events
Actual workplace-based experiences for event management students	Unclear student roles and responsibilities	Confusion and uncertainty
		Induction gaps to company
		Lack of communication
	Professional growth	Exposure to workplace politics
		Exposure to real life challenges
		Confidence and competence issues
Role of academia in EL for event management students	Student and workstation preparation for EL	Credibility and relevance of workstation
		Clear communication of expectations
		Competence limitations
	Student support during EL	Academic visitations
		Academic mentorship
		Continuous engagement
Role of industry supervisors in EL for event management students	Mentorship and coaching	Skills development and improvement
		Performance review
		Recognition
	Clear expectations of tasks and performance	Communication, meetings and briefs
		Inclusion in event planning, implementation and closure
		Learning areas covered

**(Researcher's construct)**

Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) claimed that saturation can be attained after six interviews, depending on the sample. For focus groups the recommended size for saturation ranges between 6 and 12 (Lasch et al., 2010). Data saturation for this study was reached when the ability to obtain additional new information was exhausted and when further coding was no longer feasible (Guest et al., 2006). The perspectives of the two focus groups consisting of 9 participants each were cross-checked to present the combined insight of the 18 participants in the findings. Reliability for this research was achieved by means of the data coding and recoding process and by means of an outsider’s view via peer inspection, in order to ensure the adequacy and soundness of the qualitative methodology (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002).

#### 5.4 Findings and discussions

From the data analysis of the focus group and key informant interviews, four key themes emerged and appear as the headings for the key findings of the research. Table 5.2 provides the background of the eight key informant interview participants to provide background of their EL workstations and main areas of practical exposure. The collective voice of the focus group participants is presented as a first-person plural point of view using “we,” “us,” and “our.” No individual participants are identified as the group “speaks” as a unit. Due to the scope of the article, only a small number of verbatim excerpts from the eight key interviews (Participant A–Participant H) are presented.

**Table 5.2: Experiential background of key informant interview participants**

<b>Key informant</b>	<b>Type of event company (Workstation)</b>	<b>Main tasks and responsibilities (Practical exposure)</b>
Participant A	Banqueting and Conference Hotel	Requests for Quotations (RFQs) Working with suppliers and invoices Event coordination
Participant B	Catering and design company: High end private and corporate events	Site inspection and floor plan design Supervising junior staff on-site Inventory management
Participant C	Event management company and venue: High end corporate events and weddings	Client liaison and meetings management Working with suppliers and invoices Event coordination
Participant D	Conference and exhibitions company: Large-scale commercial events and festivals	Digital marketing and web design Sponsorship coordination Media partnership management
Participant E	Event management company for government and corporate events	Requests for Quotations (RFQs) Financial account management and budgets Administrative support for completing bidding documents

Key informant	Type of event company (Workstation)	Main tasks and responsibilities (Practical exposure)
Participant F	Events and Conference Hotel	Assisting with weekly pool party coordination Assisting with corporate gala dinner coordination Guest transport and tour bookings
Participant G	Event management company: Small-scale weddings, private events, gala dinners	General office administration and event bookings Research and present venue options, catering trends and design ideas Event coordination
Participant H	Conference and exhibitions company: Large-scale commercial events and festivals	Exhibition sales Operational logistics management On-site event coordination

**(Researcher's construct)**

**5.4.1 Theme 1: Student expectations of EL in event management**

The first theme uncovered student expectations and desired outcomes pertaining to EL. As suggested by D. A. Kolb (2015), EL processes are expected to effectively link aspects of education, work, and personal development. The following summative statements of the focus group participants list their shared experiences:

- We expected to do only event management related tasks. We ran a number of personal errands for our supervisors.
- We expected to be mentored and not to be treated just like employees that know everything about events.
- We expected no discrimination or rude treatment. Sometimes people at the workstation were quite rude.

According to Tovey (2001), socialization and acculturation of interns into the workplace are of significant importance to reinforce positive EL among students. However, the findings reveal that students experienced a lack of workplace orientation and social integration. As noted by Silvers (2010b), event managers should recognize the social nature of an event organization and develop leadership skills in those whom they supervise, including interns. But, as Du Pré (2013) argued, students are exposed to the so-called real world and so they should be able to “hit the ground running.” Nonetheless, from the participant insights, it is clear that a more nurturing approach can facilitate a sense of place for interns. These expectations are expressed in the following verbatim quotes:

My idea of the experience was to ultimately learn what the real life of this industry entails. The ideal internship would be...a fair environment, where learners are not exploited by workstations by means of having them take over a job of some- one who should be paid for their work, but instead have them shadow someone and be exposed to various departments. (Participant D)

Doing an induction with the intern and doing a meet and greet with all staff . . . understanding that I am an intern and that I do not know everything about the event and hospitality industry...not giving me things to do that is not related to the industry such as being a waiter, I felt they used me for cheap labor for this company. (Participant A)

Getting maximum exposure to the industry...with a mentor who walks the internship road with you, showing you the ropes and exposing you to all the business functions as identified in the learning areas. (Participant B)

Going into internship you expect people there to teach you properly, like baby you, because you are an intern. But when you come into the work environment it isn't like that. You're exposed to everything like it is live now, not like when it is in class and you get examples...this is actual peoples' accounts that you are dealing with, actual clients you have to phone...so it is a whole different world compared to when you're in class. (Participant H)

The findings indicate that students expected that their workstations would orientate them, make them feel valued, and provide individual mentorship in event management specific tasks. As noted by Parcell and Franken (2009), when students participate, they became more actively involved in their own learning process. For this reason, it may be argued that greater acknowledgment for student EL needs and active participation is required for EL to reach its optimum learning outcomes. EL is essentially a process where students create meaning from real experiences (Bohn & Schmidt, 2008). From the insights shared, it may be deduced that students discovered the true nature of a demanding workplace and indicated that their expectations and the actual world of work sometimes differed. This coincides with the findings of Kock and Strydom (2014), who noted the importance of technical and people skills in the particularly demanding and labor-intensive tourism and hospitality-related industries. Students found the real world of work to be far less glamorous than anticipated. The following theme further explores this notion.

#### **5.4.2 Theme 2: Actual workplace-based internship experiences for event management students**

McDonald and McDonald (2000) claimed that students thrive in educational environments where they are stimulated and empowered to accomplish objectives. Learning environments accurately reflecting the world of work plays an important part in student development (Robertson et al., 2012). Although individuals had experienced different workplace-based environments, collectively the majority of focus group participants conceded that they had similar experiences in certain areas:

- We experienced company politics first hand. We heard people talk about colleagues and internal management issues and sometimes we were directly caught up in it.
- The first few weeks were largely unpleasant, we felt excluded at first and only really started enjoying internship in the last 3 months.
- We generally felt that we were left to fend for ourselves. We were thrown into the deep end and had to learn to swim to make it.
- Towards the end of internship our independence and confidence grew.
- We often felt confused and unsure of expectations due to a lack of clear communication.

Interestingly enough, the findings also reveal that although industry requires a number of inter- personal communication skills as part of a student's repertoire for success in the workplace, EL supervisors do not necessarily display the ability to explain and communicate effectively to ensure a participatory working environment (Owen, 2011). The findings suggest that effective communication remains a key component of effective workstation integration for students. Based on the premise that learning is socially and culturally constructed, it is crucial to reflect on the diverse cultural backgrounds and social standing of students and industry supervisors as a cause for the poor experience related to communication (Miller & Boud, 1996). Hence, it is important to consider the nexus between education, cultural praxis, and the world of work for students at EL workstations, as it may be an unintentional barrier to effective communication. Even though students may find it difficult to experience company politics and other conflicts, it does provide them with a real picture of the world of work (Kim et al., 2015) and emphasizes the value of EL (Moscardo & Norris, 2004) as expressed in the following statements:

There were a lot of problems under staff and somehow, I always got involved, whether it was just asking for my opinion...I tried to stay clear from any situations like that. (Participant A)

After my internship I feel that I have grown more mature like I know to handle situations...I now deal with situations in a professional way. At your internship you could not get angry with your manager, the main priority was getting the work done. I take away so much more from my internship and it is difficult to be back in class. (Participant H)

Most students recognized the role of EL as a valuable experience, albeit challenging at times. From a personal development aspect, the students commented that they had learned to be decisive, to work in a team, and to cope under pressure. Kokt and Strydom (2014) observed that people management skills and communication are of indispensable value to managers in the service-oriented tourism and hospitality industry. EL developed students' personal skills, which led to increased levels of confidence in their day-to-day work routine. This insight is shared as follows:

I enjoyed my internship so much...the most important thing about my internship is that it helped me build confidence in myself. When I first started, I was trying to run away from the phone whenever it rings...I've learnt so much about the event industry that I don't think is possible for a student to learn just by being in a classroom. (Participant G)

I felt like communication lacked because even though we sat in one office we did not speak; we would send emails to each other...I felt like I was more a secretary than an intern when there were no events. I would do administration and when that was done, I would have nothing to do for the whole day...but I have learnt to do proper budgets and gained confidence. (Participant E)

Customer care was one of the most important factors that I believe I grasped quickly working with other companies and managing their staff. It is important to know that you must keep the client happy at all times. Professionalism is key...like how you speak, what you do and even the use of appropriate language. (Participant C)

As proposed by Nadiri and Tanova (2010), quality depends on the competence and performance of employees. This was observed in the study where participant reflections implied increased confidence levels among students and the reinforcement of theoretical customer service principles in practice. Connor and Pokora (2012) note

that the central principle of mentoring determines that learning occurs through the relationship with a mentor where personal experience, knowledge, and skills are shared. Therefore, it may be contended and in fact reiterated that it is essential for supervisors of EL to understand their mentorship role and to lead by example. D. A. Kolb (1984) eloquently noted that EL is concerned with learning from first- person experience. Thus, it is imperative that universities and industry do not take lightly the role of mentors or supervisors during EL internships, especially in a service-orientated industry such as event management.

#### **5.4.3 Theme 3: The role of academia in EL for event management students**

Vocational institutions in South Africa typically strive to combine strong, practical curricula with EL in order to intensify the development of technical and soft skills in all aspects of career-focused programs (Du Pré, 2013). The third theme of the findings relates to students' perception of academic involvement in the EL process and their experiences thereof. Because students are active participants in the learning process, it is important to understand and make sense of their experiences in order to adapt EL approaches where required. Although EL is a popular and essential resource for education, Robert et al. (2010) argued that successful EL will only be possible if academic lecturers effectively implement a student-centered approach to learning. Sharing this view in support of a student-centered approach, Docherty and Fernandez (2014) contended that it is crucial for academia to be focused on skills development leading to long term employ- ability of graduates. This is why Spowart (2011) believed that educators are responsible for implementing teaching and learning approaches such as EL, which is designed to enhance the application of theory to practice for students that enter the world of work. McDonald and McDonald (2000) agreed and maintain that instructors involved with EL should encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. As documented in the study, the focus group participants particularly found the level of academic involvement of supervisors to be limited. The following quotes provide context to their experiences:

- More visits by academic supervisors in the beginning, midway, and at the end of internship will be good. Not just at the end.
- Preparing us in business and office etiquette is essential.
- Demonstrating to industry supervisors how to complete monthly reports is important. Industry did not always align tasks to event management specific learning outcomes.

- The university should ensure the professionalism and credibility of the workstations. Small start-up companies for event management workplace-based internship should be avoided.

In support of the key focus group findings, key informant participants expressed a need for greater involvement from the university. Indeed, the findings uncovered that increased academic support would enhance student experiences. This is in agreement with the notion that effective EL requires the holistic process of defining learning outcomes and the development, alignment, and assessment of learning activities around educational initiatives that cannot be achieved without focused academic support (Simons et al., 2013). Furthermore, a traditional approach to theory-driven lectures may be considered as outdated and non-relevant for globally competitive students who require experience and exposure to the real world (Kosnik et al., 2013). Therefore, it is essential for lecturers to find a balance between academic and nurturing aspects required by EL students and to provide students with the necessary resources to help them succeed (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010). Therefore, it may be argued that lecturers need to reconsider their approach and involvement in EL activities. The following reflections illustrate the need for increased lecturer involvement for EL students in the field:

Lecturers should make themselves more available to do more frequent site visits so that they can see that the students are getting proper exposure to the event industry and are not only used in the background. (Participant B)

Inviting academics when there are events taking place to see first-hand how students perform under pressure would be nice. (Participant C)

Students can be checked upon regularly to see if they are coping and that they are doing the learning areas that the company said they will cover, because when they call us for interviews, they tell us what we're going to do, but when you start working, you do things that are not part of the learning areas agreed on. (Participant F)

The university should have a midpoint meeting to get feedback from students and make the necessary changes for the duration...of the internship. There should also be someone students can speak to at any time with any issues they are faced with. There should be a session...where past intern students give advice and share their experiences. (Participant E)

In support of the findings, Wurdinger and Carlson (2010) argued that EL success is only possible if the lecturer becomes a more practically minded facilitator, by accepting a less teacher-centric role in the classroom and by providing students with access to more meaningful resources to help them succeed. Participant insights indicate that more clarity in terms of student and lecturer roles are required, and it is essential that event management learning objectives are clearly defined and linked to EL activities, and for students to know what they are supposed to do. This could arguably increase confidence and workplace performance. Banta (2001) identified the existing link between performance, the fair assessment of student learning outcomes, and curriculum development, along with the EL academic supervisor occupying a central position in this aspect. However, student insights in this study revealed that there was a lack of preparation for EL by the university, along with unclear assessment requirements due to unclear learning areas and outcomes. Thus, for students to benefit from EL, they have to actively participate and by doing so, take ownership of their own learning process (Parcell & Franken, 2009). For students to enthusiastically participate in EL, they should have a clear understanding of the learning expectations and how it relates to their performance at the workstation.

#### **5.4.4 Theme 4: The role of industry supervisors in EL for event management students**

The fourth and final theme reveals students' experiences of their interaction with industry supervisors. According to Lei et al. (2015), EL provides students with a platform to learn new skills and knowledge through experience and action and therefore, industry supervisors play an intensified role as mentors in the process. In this investigation, focus group participants strongly emphasized the need for open communication, coaching, and mentorship from their experiences, as documented:

- Share the big picture of the company and projects. We often felt excluded and uninformed.
- Communication should be open and clear. Tell us exactly what is expected, what must be done and how you want it to be done.
- Have regular one-on-one meetings to align our work tasks to learning areas and show us where to improve. Recognition for good work will build morale.
- Coaching us by example. Taking us with on networking engagements.

The findings support the notion that mentorship and management development requires an approach that supports and challenges individuals to reach goals (Berg & Karlsen, 2012). It also clearly indicates that appropriate internship program planning,

industry participation, and student commitment positively influence the overall satisfaction of internship experiences (Chen & Shen, 2012). If students are nurtured during EL, it is possible for them to develop into communicative, critical thinkers with the ability to work independently with little orientation (Spowart, 2006). These views were affirmed by participants:

I've learned so much about how to understand people...how to deal with things emotionally, how to delegate tasks and how to get work done in a specific time frame. My senior operations manager always told me "You can do this, don't limit yourself, you've shown me you can do it" ...that really motivated me. (Participant H)

Internship should show students their strong and weak points and...the opportunities for success. It should give them clarity about what position they should pursue in the event tourism industry...mentors should help grow someone as a person. (Participant C)

The most important thing would be to always be part of the planning and making decisions and watching how the plan comes together...give the student as much responsibility to make him/her gain enough knowledge and skills. (Participant C)

If you as a student can get actively involved in the planning...and set-up of an event, you will learn more when you do things yourself than by just watching someone do it or listening to someone telling you how to do it. (Participant G)

Internship should include more mentoring and working with my mentor instead of being left alone...sitting in on important meetings such as doing a pitch, event briefings and being part of all aspects of the event planning. (Participant E)

Shone and Parry (2010) indicated that the planning stages of an event are complex, yet vital to the success of the project. For students to benefit from EL, ideally, they need exposure to these critical aspects of the event management profession. However, in the study interviewees expressed a level of disappointment that they were not adequately exposed to event planning in practice. Here, mentorship from an assigned EL supervisor is the most significant source of learning during internship (Liu et al., 2011). The findings allude to the fact that students' experiences of learning, confidence in the workplace, and attitudes towards a career in event management are influenced by the degree to which mentoring was received from EL supervisors. This points to Liu et al. (2011), who observe that the levels of learning and mentoring received by interns while in the EL field are significantly related to job satisfaction (Bowler & Brass, 2006)

and a positive attitude toward the industry they interned with as a potential future career. As EL is largely concerned with learning from first person experience, the significant role of an industry mentor that understands the importance of knowledge sharing cannot be overemphasized.

## 5.5 Conclusion and recommendations

Since 1994, vocational higher education institutions in South Africa have acknowledged the need for career-focused programs that offer strong, practical, and applied curricula, coupled with EL. Considering the educational legacy and culturally diverse backgrounds of contemporary students in the country, a key finding of this study uncovered the tangible need for students to be coached and mentored by industry supervisors during internship. Guided by coaching techniques that reinforce mentorship (Berg & Karlsen, 2012), Table 5.3 proposes a general framework for the co-mentorship of students in workplace-based internships. The implementation of such a framework (Table 5.3) is a major recommendation based on the findings of this study.

**Table 5.3: A framework for the co-mentorship of students in workplace-based internships**

Coaching technique	Industry mentor role	Academic mentor role
Goal setting	Point out progress in feedback meetings	Provide a demanding target in consultation with student
Emotional intelligence awareness	Relationship management practices at workstation Empathy by example	Self-management workbook with self-awareness reflective journal
Conflict management	Post-mortem of conflict resolution strategies of real-work scenario	Ethical business practice and behavioral etiquette charter
Identifying talents and strengths	Productive use of abilities	Provide an analysis of knowledge and skills areas that require development
Self-management	Practical strategies at the workplace to improve personnel well-being	Review of cognitive strategies to improve well-being and joy
Empowerment	Give responsibility for achieving own and organizational goals	Reinforcement of values in knowledge and skills development
Feedback	Positive, constructive ideas for improvements at regular meetings	Impose bi-monthly feedback meetings between supervisor and student

**[Researcher's construct: adapted from Berg & Karlsen (2012)]**

The findings further suggest that EL is a valuable experience for South African UoT students specializing in event management as it provides insight to the contextual world of work. Therefore, soft skills development, conflict resolution, and relationship management should form a key component of teaching and learning content prior to work placement. Developing a data base that will facilitate an improved match between the corporate culture of a workstation and a prospective EL student can assist in higher satisfaction levels for all stakeholders. In this study,

participants became increasingly confident in dealing with clients and thrived at workstations where open communication prevailed and where sharing of ideas was encouraged and valued. Therefore, it is recommended that innovative platforms for open communication are

created for students to engage with both industry and academic supervisors. Still, in certain instances students experienced limited alignment of their daily tasks to the event management focused areas of learning, as initially agreed upon. Based on student perspectives, it was evident that they required better support from the university. As a result, student reflections obtained in this study can assist academia to introspectively adjust the current EL student experience and to improve outcomes and better align workstation exposure to learning areas. Additionally, EL should view sociocultural dynamics as having a likely influence on students' understanding of theory and their practical application thereof in the event management industry. The findings imply that students have a limited understanding of the expectations related to working in the corporate event sector. This may be attributed to the lack of exposure of South African students from diverse sociocultural backgrounds to event management as a profession. Additional platforms for industry engagement prior to EL is a strong recommendation and may be achieved through a number of initiatives; for example, industry guest lectures and volunteering at actual events during the first 2 years of study as prerequisite to workstation placement. As learning occurs throughout the experience, it is essential that academic resoluteness and commitment towards EL be established in the university by way of reflective, monitoring processes and through reporting, documentation, workstation visits, and the sharing of knowledge between industry, students, and academia.

Furthermore, it is also recommended that the university facilitate intensive and collaborative workshops with workstation supervisors to clearly unpack the required event management specific learning areas that students need to engage with while on site. When implementing EL, the findings reveal that there is a need for academic supervisors to visit students more frequently during their internship. In many instances, students experienced EL as a lonely journey with an overall lack of supervisory support. Participants felt that they had to single-handedly face various challenges at the workplace with limited academic support. As a recommendation, additional lecturers should be apportioned to students to support the academic supervisor spearheading EL. This support would be most valuable

in the development and implementation of a more frequent, structured visitation schedule during the internship period where lecturers visit the workstation in the beginning, midway, and towards the end of EL. The visits should coincide with a performance review and task analysis of the students' duties to ensure alignment to relevant event management learning areas.

As a limitation to the study, the multifaceted nature of the event management sector needs to be considered, and although robust attempts were made to ensure a diverse set of participants from varied workstations, it was not possible to include all event company typologies in this study. Despite this limitation, the study contributes to literature by pioneering EL experiences of event management students as a specific field of study in South Africa. It offers insights on how to improve EL experiences for both industry supervisors and students and proposes a practical framework for the co-mentorship of students in workplace-based internships. The exploratory research probed in-depth perspectives that can be used to enhance EL program design in event management education. Fundamentally, the case study approach identified themes related to student expectations and experiences as a result of EL, which may be generalized to inform other future settings. Also, similar research at other higher education institutions that offer EL within their event management programs may be useful in broadening the scope for the South African context. Moreover, EL will continue to play an important role in bridging the gap between university theory and industry practice in the formal CPUT event management qualification. Further research is recommended to determine the extent to which event management learning areas are covered during EL, and the subsequent effect thereof on competency levels related to work-readiness. In closing, the importance of the mentorship role of academic and industry supervisors as a key finding in this study cannot be over-emphasized. Mentorship and sharing of knowledge related to it is a significant component to enhance experiential learning experiences not only for students, but for all event management stakeholders. Further research in event management mentorship programs and knowledge sharing models is needed to ensure a competent future work force.

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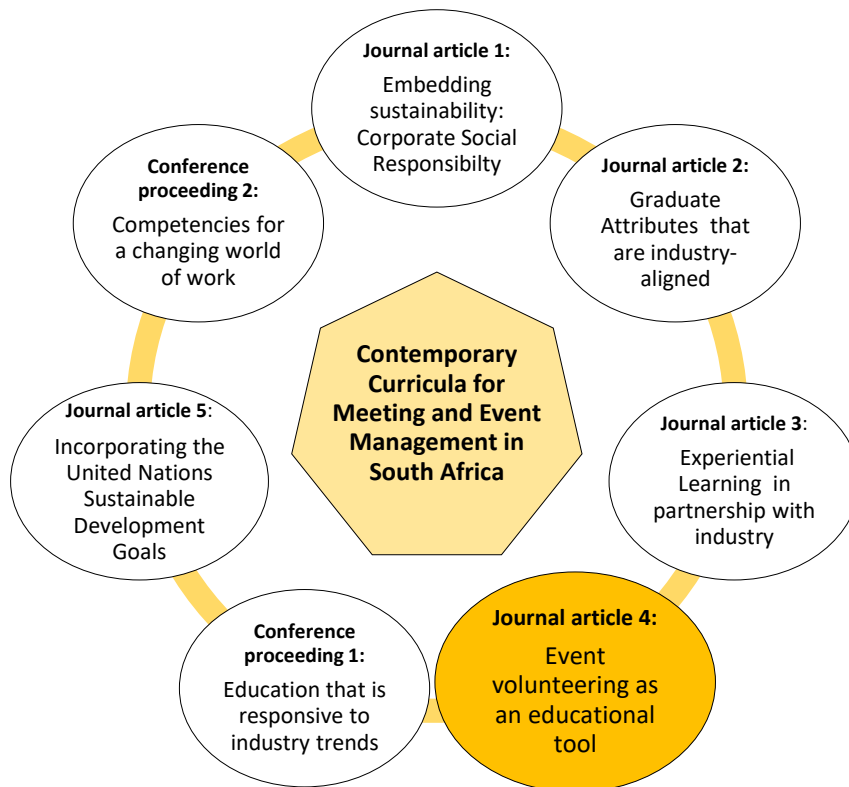
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**CHAPTER 6  
(JOURNAL ARTICLE 4)  
EVENT VOLUNTEERING AS AN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE IN BUSINESS TOURISM**

Figure 6.1 illustrates how journal article 4 (Chapter 6) forms part of the coherent body of work related to the development of contemporary curricula.



**Figure 6.1: Contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements (Event volunteering as an educational tool)**

(Researcher's construct)

**6.0 Abstract**

The growth of the business tourism industry globally has catalysed the need for responsive academic programmes to cultivate skilled graduates for the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector. The vocational nature of the industry requires academic programmes to provide students with the opportunity to fortify the hard and soft skills required to manage business tourism events by means of industry exposure initiatives. The purpose of this paper is to explore students' perspectives on volunteering at business events to assist educators effectively in utilising volunteer participation as a means to meet students' educational needs in partnership with industry. This qualitative study generated data from 15 interviews with

event management student volunteers at the 17th World Conference for Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) in Cape Town, South Africa. Following Creswell's steps for qualitative data analysis, thematically categorised results reveal that students' motivation to volunteer is closely linked to self-improvement goals, and suggest that students have a strong desire to learn from the event organiser (EO) as opposed to just being a helping hand. The research concludes that purposeful collaboration between educators and industry practitioners is required to utilise event volunteering opportunities effectively as a way of enhancing business tourism education.

**Key words:** business tourism; event management education; qualitative methodology; volunteering; South Africa

## 6.1 Introduction

Business tourism, widely recognised as tourism generated from the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector, has developed into a significant economic sector worldwide (Kumar & Hussain, 2014). Congruently, there has been considerable growth in academic delivery geared towards meeting the needs of MICE-related industries through event management qualifications. Internationally, higher education institutions (HEIs) have established specialised courses aimed at developing future event management professionals (Getz & Page, 2016), while numerous tourism-related qualifications offer modules specifically linked to event management (Rogers & Davidson, 2016). Specialised business tourism education, such as that resulting in event management qualifications, aims to meet the specific, professional needs of the MICE sector, where graduates are expected to hit the ground running in the world of work.

Due to the vocational nature of the MICE sector, industry exposure initiatives are crucial in bridging the gap between theory and practice for students pursuing careers in business tourism organisations. Lee, Lee and Kim (2009) argue that event management education programmes repeatedly neglect to take into account industry needs, whilst Silvers (2010) maintains that event management education should provide students with both the hard and the soft skills required to successfully run business tourism operations. It is therefore imperative that students engage with the real world of business tourism through as many industry exposure opportunities as possible, including volunteering. Adopting an essentially student-centred approach to business tourism education, this article seeks to explore event management students'

perspectives of the value of event volunteering as a means to reinforce their knowledge and skills development.

The paper thus seeks to contribute to literature on volunteering at business tourism-related events in the MICE sector. In addition, it aims to expand the dialogue on the role event volunteering can play as an educational measure to strengthen students' grasp of theoretical concepts by means of industry exposure. A review of the extant research reveals that event-volunteering studies have been dominated by mega-events and sport events, covering themes associated with event volunteer and stakeholder expectations, motivations and profiles (Lockstone & Baum, 2009; Khoo & Engelhorn, 2011; Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Smith, Baum & Storer, 2015; Tomazos & Luke, 2015; Koutrou & Pappous, 2016; Lockstone-Binney, Holmes, Shipway & Smith, 2016). Similarly, while growing interest in event management education is evidenced by the increase in research geared towards this sector (Ryan, 2016), there is a lack of research relating to volunteering at business events and the role it can play in event management education. Laing (2018) maintains that there is a need for research specific to events that extends the theoretic fundamentals of management to event tourism in particular. This paper begins with a review of literature pertaining to business tourism, event management education and event volunteering. Then the qualitative methodology used in the research is described, after which an account of the results is given and discussed. The paper concludes with recommendations stemming from the key findings of the research, in respect of harnessing event volunteering as a supportive means of strengthening business tourism education.

## **6.2 Literature review**

### **6.2.1 Business tourism and event management education**

Although 'business tourism' is widely used to describe the sector in tourism that encompasses meetings, conferences, incentive travel and trade exhibitions, the terminology is not clearly defined and the terms 'MICE industry' and 'business events' are often used interchangeably (Rogers, 2013; Ismail, Yusoff & Rahman, 2014). MICE events are typically planned in advance and generate business tourism from large groups of delegates who are brought together for the main purpose of business engagements (Zulu, 2016). Business tourism and leisure tourism are entwined due to the fact that they rely on similar support services and infrastructure (Rogers, 2013). However, for the reason that MICE delegates typically spend more money than leisure travelers (Stewart, Warburton & Smith, 2017), business tourism has become a major role player in the tourism industry for both private and public sectors in host

destinations. In South Africa, for example, business tourism is thriving (Marais, Du Plessis & Saayman, 2017) and tourism generated from MICE events is a significant driving force in the tourism industry's 9.5% contribution to the gross domestic product of the country (Hanekom, 2015). As the knowledge hub for the international association meetings industry, the International Congress and Convention Association (ICCA) represents a global community of more than 850 members in 80 countries. According to ICCA, Cape Town ranks as the leading meetings destination in Africa and is in the top 40 destinations for business tourism in the world (ICCA, 2017; Business Events Africa, 2018). Thus, HEIs offering business tourism-related programmes in Cape Town are ideally positioned to diversify industry exposure opportunities for students, promoting their practical skills development through initiatives such as volunteering.

There is an increased demand for skilful event management practitioners because of growth in the business tourism sector. McCabe (2008) notes that the pursuit of careers within the business tourism sector has become increasingly popular due to the apparent job-related growth potential of the industry. In South Africa, for instance, the tourism industry is spearheading the creation of jobs through prospective careers within the event management sector (George, 2014). According to Juneke, Lockstone and Osti (2007), students believe that a qualification in event management will give them the knowledge and skills to find a suitable occupation in this dynamic field. This underlines the need for the continuous development of HEI programmes relevant to business tourism (Nelson & Silvers, 2009).

Silvers (2010) argues that event management education should deliver to students both the technical competencies and soft skills that are needed to run business event operations. It is therefore imperative that students engage with the real world of events through opportunities such as volunteering at events. Laker and Powell (2011) are of the view that it is costly and time-consuming when new employees do not have the required soft skills to do their jobs, as effort and time are required to bring them up to standard. Schwagerman (2016) maintains that the skills needed to be successful in the business tourism sector are typical of the service industry, and should include technical proficiencies as well as interpersonal skills. Emphasis must therefore be placed on university-industry partnerships to enable the skills required by the industry to be better matched with the skills generated in the education system (Beddie, Ceaser, Hargreaves & Ong, 2014). As Juneke (2014) notes, the role of universities has evolved in recent times, to the extent that students are not only consumers of

educational products but also active co-producers of their own education. Event volunteering can provide a useful platform for a collaborative approach to business tourism education.

### **6.2.2 Event volunteering**

In spite of the fact that there are several definitions of volunteering in existence, it is a slippery concept because there are many and various forms of it (Tuan, 2005). Wilson (2000) notes that volunteering essentially occurs when individuals give their time freely to benefit a cause, group or person. However, volunteers often sign up for events to gain something in return. In the case of event volunteering, this may be to gain industry exposure, free access to an event, the opportunity to learn from experts, or networking with stakeholders. Event volunteers essentially sacrifice their time to work at events with no guarantee that they will receive any of these benefits. The choice to volunteer is multifaceted and influenced by a variety of circumstances and events (Tomazos & Luke, 2015).

Whatever the reason for volunteering, the reality is that although event volunteers work in a stimulating setting, they rarely have the chance to enjoy the event due to their operational duties behind the scenes (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). It is therefore important that the event organiser (EO) considers ways to make volunteering attractive by understanding the needs of volunteers. Volunteers play an integral role in the operational components of events and they contribute significantly to the success of many events (Holmes & Smith, 2009), underlining the importance of gaining volunteer perspectives. Han (2007) notes that it is costly to train and retain volunteers, hence it is essential to understand their motives. Furthermore, by understanding the motivations, abilities and experiences of volunteers, EOs may improve the level of volunteers' emotional engagement, leading to better teamwork and an increased desire to volunteer again (Fallon, 2015).

Ryan and Deci (2002) suggest that intrinsic motivation to volunteer is based on inherent fulfilment, either through personal gain that makes volunteering worthwhile, or through the sheer enjoyment of volunteering. However, it appears that volunteers are increasingly seeking personal growth and self-satisfaction as they shift to more non-committal and self-orientated types of volunteering (Macduff, 2011). According to Hustinx, Handy and Cnaan (2010), the new generation of volunteers are non-committal by nature and esteem their individualistic orientations. As part of this generational cohort, current event management students may display similar

perspectives. This self-centred approach to volunteering (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003) may require that educators and industry practitioners regard student volunteers as individuals on a journey in which self-actualisation is the goal and where meeting their own needs is a priority in their decision to volunteer. Extrinsic motives outside of the volunteers' immediate control may motivate individuals to volunteer while suggesting some degree of self-interest (Antoni, 2009), such as the need for recognition from others, the enticement of rewards, or other self-beneficial outcomes. Event volunteers seem to be driven more by self-interest than altruism, with a view of "what is in it for me?" where the need for recognition from others or the enticement of rewards, for example, may play a role. Furthermore, personal skills and external expectations may strategically link volunteers to an event (Khoo & Engelhorn, 2011), as is the case with event management students volunteering at a business event. Educators are often faced with a lack of knowledge about volunteering amongst students doing business tourism-related courses, and skills development has been put forward as both a key motivation and major benefit for event volunteering (Junek, 2014).

For the reason that they are the vital link between the event and the community, volunteers generate some form of social capital through the formation of social networks and teamwork towards a common goal (Nichols & Ralston, 2012). International MICE events benefit from working with volunteers who are from the host city, as it adds to the delegate experience by creating a medium for them to engage with locals, adding to the authenticity of the tourism experience.

### **6.3 Methodology**

This research adopted a qualitative approach. According to Travers (2001) there are no advantages to large data sets in qualitative research as they will incorrectly encourage a positivist approach to analysis. The experiences and viewpoints of participants are more significant to qualitative research than the number of participants (Cresswell, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research does not aim to draw statistical inference or produce a numerically representative sample, but rather seeks to explore deeper insights gleaned from participants. In support of this view, Ryan (2016) claims that what is vital to qualitative research is to obtain a sufficient sample of a population relevantly connected to the core activity being investigated.

In order to gain relevant insight aligned to the objectives of this research, it was important to identify an event management student cohort familiar with volunteering at events. The MICE sector offers a number of volunteering opportunities in Cape Town,

South Africa, which is Africa's leading convention destination, ranking in the top 40 destinations for business tourism in the world (ICCA, 2017). The population for the study therefore consisted of Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) event management students who participated as volunteers at the 17th World Conference for Tobacco or Health (WCTOH). Purposive sampling was employed to select participants from the population, and data was generated from interview questions answered by 15 event volunteers. The 17th WCTOH was hosted on African soil for the first time in Cape Town from 5 to 9 March 2018, at the Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC). This annual MICE event is a global forum attracting international tobacco control experts, civil society, policy makers and medical experts. The EO approached the CPUT students by way of the Cape Town and Western Cape Convention Bureau as all three of these entities are members of the South African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI). SAACI is the reputable and recognised umbrella body that promotes learning, professionalism and growth within the South African MICE sector.

Following Cresswell's six steps for the analysis and interpretation of the qualitative content of data, the data collected according to a structured interview guide was analysed as follows (Cresswell, 2014):

*Step 1:* The first step involved organising and preparing data for analysis by copying the data exactly from the interview questions and answers.

*Step 2:* A sense of the meaning of the data was gained by reading through the data numerous times and reflecting on the emerging issues relating to participants' viewpoints on volunteering at events.

*Step 3:* The data was manually coded into categories in respect of practicality, suitability and relevance to the research objectives. A re-coding process using ATLAS.ti v.5 statistical qualitative data analysis (QDA) software allowed for a comparison with the initial codes to gain an overall perspective on reliability.

*Step 4:* Themes aligned to subthemes were created to display diverse quotes from the coded categories. Four key themes emerged and are presented as the headings in the findings section of this paper.

*Step 5:* A narrative passage to express the findings of the analysis was selected and descriptive information about the themes as identified by the participants was considered. The preceding coding process assisted in identifying the main views, presented as quotes in the findings.

*Step 6:* A theoretical lens was utilised to formulate and facilitate theory-based understanding and interpretation from the results.

Data saturation for this research occurred when no new information was forthcoming from the coding of interviews. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) saturation can be achieved after only six interviews and is reached when further coding is no longer feasible and yields no additional information. Reliability in this research was achieved by means of the data coding and re-coding process (Marais et al., 2017) that sought to ensure the trustworthiness and dependability of the qualitative methodology (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002).

## **6.4 Results**

The results are presented with verbatim quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings, while a discussion is incorporated under each theme. Participants are numbered 'Participant 1' (P1) to 'Participant 15' (P15) in order to facilitate the narrative approach and safeguard their anonymity. The word 'event' is used in the context of business tourism and relates to MICE events in particular; it accurately reflects the conversational tone of participants' responses.

### **6.4.1 Theme 1: Personal motivations for event volunteering**

This theme provides participants' opinions on what would motivate them to volunteer at events. Participants frequently mentioned aspects relating to personal growth, in line with the view that self-interest (Antoni, 2009) or personal gain (Ryan & Deci, 2002) are motivating factors for volunteers. Participant 1 explained it in this way: "if I know the event is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity...then it motivates me to volunteer. I want to be able to say, 'I was there' when people talk about it". Hustinx et al. (2010) note the non-committal nature of the new generation of volunteers, who essentially prioritise their personal preferences and goals when volunteering. Interestingly, although driven mainly by the goal of self-actualisation, the participants in this study had strong individual views regarding the potential of volunteering for goodwill and social upliftment (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). This is reflected in the following response: "I find it satisfying to say that I changed something in the life of others, or made things much easier for someone that needed something... It teaches me something new about people, cooperation, compassion and about myself. In helping others, I am reminded that we should support each other in life" (P6). Participant 4 added that "events that have to do with giving back and having an impact" would motivate volunteering, while Participant 8 would volunteer only "if the event is about, or will bring

about, change" and contribute to society in a positive way. Industry practitioners should be aware of and understand this new generation of volunteers' desire to be part of events that leave a positive legacy in some way. Participant 15 encapsulated the sentiments of most of the participants in summing up the key reasons to volunteer as to get "satisfaction from helping others, get work experience and make new friends". While this sentiment corroborates the argument that volunteers are looking for individual growth and self-satisfaction (Macduff, 2011), what is remarkable is that the personal goals are not self-centred as such, but rather evoke a sense of personal growth aligned with self-fulfilment by giving back to society.

Participant 8, however, added that "some kind of incentive linked to the event" would be an additional motivation for volunteering. EOs have to be mindful that volunteers may view access to the event experience as an exciting incentive to volunteer, but may never get the opportunity to actually experience the event due to overwhelming responsibilities (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). The incentives to motivate volunteering suggested by participants include monetary stipends (P2, P7, P10, P11) and the opportunity for networking through industry exposure (P2, P3, P6, P9, P10, P12) such as "engagement opportunities with business event associates" (P14). Finally, the study found that there is a connection between the personal skills of volunteers and a particular kind of event, as proposed by Khoo and Engelhorn (2011). The participants all agreed that the opportunity to improve their personal skills through practical experience in a live event setting would be a key incentive to volunteer. This is a reminder that for event management students it may be important to provide future employers with a track record of their practical experience at events, given the vocational nature of the sector. Volunteering can certainly boost such a track record and therefore entice volunteer participation. As participant 13 explained, "the prospect of gaining practical experience" would be an important reason to volunteer at events, because it would assist with securing a sought-after job and a future in the sector.

#### **6.4.2 Theme 2: Event volunteering constraints**

It is instructive to gain insight from participants into factors that might discourage them from event volunteering. Such insight can help to identify aspects that negatively influence the attitude of students, impacting on their willingness and commitment to volunteer. The availability of time was a key concern shared by participants in this study, who pointed out that their busy academic schedules and other obligations at university would most likely impede participation (P6, 8, 9, 12, 15). Students trust that business tourism-related qualifications, such as event

management, will provide them with the requisite skills to secure appropriate jobs (Junek et al., 2007), and given the vocational nature of the sector, educators are responsible to create supportive educational environments where industry exposure is encouraged. Educators therefore need to find ways to make arrangements with student volunteers that will assist them with time management and create opportunities for industry exposure so as to strengthen their practical knowledge and skills.

Another hindrance to event volunteering worthy of note is the limited access to reliable public transportation for student volunteers in Cape Town, who often live in locations far from the business tourism hub of the city. Participant 13 stated that "some companies don't pay you for your transport, or provide you with it, and that can be a problem", while "transportation issues" (P4) and the distance between the event and where students live were cited by most participants (P1, P2, P3, P7, P10, P14). This may be a significant aspect to consider for international stakeholders and EOs of international events, who may not be aware of the fact that the provision of transportation could serve to increase access for volunteers.

It cannot be emphasised enough how crucial it is for volunteers to have sound expectations of the tasks and duties that they have to perform at the event (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). All the participants in this study concurred that a lack of clear communication from the EO in terms of arrangements, expectations and deliverables would severely hamper their desire to volunteer, and EOs should ensure that "the volunteers know what they are expected to do" (P13). It is especially important that EOs "make sure volunteers get enough information about the event" (P10) prior to volunteering, to allow them to feel confident and enthusiastic about participating. Participants want to be assured that they will be well informed about the event and "EOs need to ensure that the volunteers know exactly what to do, how to handle situations and who to call when things get complex" (P1). EOs need to provide volunteers with clear guidelines and procedures (Van de Wagen & White, 2018). Therefore, educators and EOs need to collaborate to ensure the dissemination of useful information to volunteers to address any uncertainty around the volunteering opportunity. Noteworthy from participant responses in terms of communication was not necessarily the 'what' that needed to be communicated, but rather the 'how' it needed to be communicated. Participants across the board consistently mentioned the need for "respectful" (P10, P13) communication between EOs and volunteers at all times

(P6, P8, P9, P11, P14). Participants across the board indicated that they would be reluctant to volunteer if there was a lack of respect from EOs, as Participant 2 explained: "As a volunteer I expect respect from the EO and they need to be friendly so that you are not afraid to ask a question if you don't understand anything". When EOs recruit volunteers, the way they communicate should set the tone for open, friendly and respectful communication, as participants in this study were adamant that they be treated with respect, otherwise they would not be interested in volunteering. This view is also expressed by Participant 2, who stated that: "You also expect the same and equal amount of respect from the organiser that staff, who get paid for the job, get". This statement reiterates that volunteers want to feel valued for their contribution to the event. The following theme focuses on the perceived value of volunteering at events.

#### **6.4.3 Theme 3: The value of event volunteering**

Participants were probed to share their views on how volunteers can add value to an event, and in turn, how volunteering can add value to volunteers. Because the attitude of students and their university context influence event volunteering, understanding the feelings of participants in this regard can assist with identifying the benefits of volunteering (Junek, 2014). These perceived benefits can be used as leverage by educators and industry practitioners to encourage student commitment in future volunteering initiatives. Most of the responses provided by the participants reveal that they regard event volunteering as mutually beneficial, seeing that "volunteers are there to get the job done and gain experience from it" (P1). Participant 9 contributed to this theme by suggesting that volunteers "can bring a different energy...they are usually young and vibrant...wanting to gain personal experience", whilst providing a "cost-effective" staffing solution for EOs. Similarly, Participant 6 explained: "involving volunteers at an event can help to provide...skills development and employment opportunities", while EOs can save money because they do not need to hire expensive staff.

In line with the spirit of goodwill identified in theme 1, Participant 5 noted that the value of volunteering lies in being a helping hand and being able to contribute to the success of the event by "lifting the weight off the EO's shoulders" in order to allow the EO to focus on "much bigger things" (P5). Furthermore, volunteers can "really have an impact, because they won't be busy with the logistics and the bigger problems of the event" (P2); instead, volunteers can play an important role in delegate interaction and attendee management on behalf of the EO. As noted by

Nichols and Ralston (2012), volunteers serve as an important linkage between the event and the local community, as volunteering "provides opportunities for social inclusion" (P6) and is used as a platform to meet new people and contribute to the delegate event experience (P11, P15). Most of the participants viewed this interface with delegates as beneficial: Participant 14 explained that it allows volunteers "to engage with well-known business-people to gain more skills and tips on how to work with different characters". It is important to possess 'people skills' in the business tourism sector (Schwagerman, 2016), and volunteers gain confidence by being on-site and experiencing the real world when meeting and interacting with new people, allowing them to practise and reinforce their soft skillset.

Furthermore, participants were in agreement that networking with EOs and the opportunity to build industry relationships would be major benefits associated with volunteering. Holdsworth and Quinn (2012) state that volunteers use the platform to build industry relationships and expand their social network in an effort to acquire superior jobs in future. Participants 4 and 9 indicated that volunteering could boost their résumés for seeking employment while broadening their understanding of event management jobs. From the analysis of this theme, it is evident that participants value highly the benefits of volunteering associated with industry exposure. As emphasised by Participant 5, "Students get to see and be involved in events at an early stage in the studying period of their lives...not to say that the theory is inadequate, but there is a big difference in just learning work from a book and actually being in the game with real life challenges that may come. Life is not always by the book, some things can but only be taught through experiences".

#### **6.4.4 Theme 4: Knowledge and skills development**

In accordance with the findings presented in the preceding themes, Juneke (2014) notes that skills development is regarded as a significant benefit and major motivation for event volunteers (Juneke, 2014). Theme 4, therefore, seeks to further interrogate participants' perspectives relating to the development of knowledge and skills as a result of volunteering. As a service sector, the MICE industry requires practitioners to possess a comprehensive set of skills, including technical competencies, emotional intelligence, problem-solving proficiencies and information management expertise (Auld, Cuskelly & Harrington, 2009).

Participants revealed that the transfer of knowledge and skills from EOs to volunteers is an important aspect in event volunteering. In fact, the findings suggest that volunteers view the EO as a co-educator or mentor. Participant 12 explained that EOs should guide volunteers and "teach them new things that they don't know" about practical event management. Participant 8 insisted that EOs should teach volunteers "all the things you, as an EO, wish someone taught you when you were a student". It was evident from the analysis of responses that participants want EOs to demonstrate their skills, share their knowledge and offer training specifically aimed at enhancing the volunteers' practical event management abilities (P5, P8, P10, P11, P12, P14). For EOs volunteer coordination is but one aspect of the mammoth event project, and student volunteers may have unreasonable expectations of EOs in respect of mentoring and guidance. HEI educators can assist here, harnessing their academic expertise to facilitate knowledge sharing and skills transfer during volunteering. EOs should nevertheless understand that student volunteers are in apprenticeship while volunteering, and seek meaningful industry exposure experiences. For example, participants in this study indicated a strong desire for EOs to be inclusive towards volunteers by exposing them to the "behind the scenes" know-how of the event. Participant 9 suggested that volunteers could learn "by attending meetings" while Participant 11 noted that volunteers can contribute ideas if they are afforded the opportunity to be included in more aspects of the event. Participant 2 expressed concern that often "students are too scared to ask for help at events because they are afraid they might be bothering the EO". To make volunteering a meaningful experience, EOs need to understand the significant impact they have as role models for student volunteers.

Focusing on the hard skills sought from volunteering, participants concurred and evidently wanted "skills that will help me plan and produce an event" (P13) and to "understand what goes into planning an event" (P2). Volunteering was viewed as an opportunity to improve technical and organisational skills relating to project management (P3, P9). Participant 6 was more specific, stating that volunteers would like to know how the event was conceptualised and planned, how to solicit relevant sponsorships, and how to select the right venue.

From a soft skill point of view, Fenyes and Pusztai (2012) state that volunteers are likely to grow in terms of self-confidence and acquire skills in leadership, critical thinking and conflict resolution. Supporting this view, Participant 1 declared that "People skills are vital as well as communication skills...and knowing how to handle

conflict" (P1). In addition to these skills, data saturation occurred when participants also recurrently noted leadership skills, customer service skills and the ability to apply business etiquette in an event setting. The findings in this theme correlate with the recommendation put forward by Beddie et al. (2014), namely, that educators and industry practitioners should collaborate to ensure that the skills generated by business tourism education qualifications are matched with industry requirements. It is therefore essential for EOs and educators to work in partnership and find ways to expertly utilise volunteering to develop and strengthen the industry knowledge and skills required by students.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to shed light on the perspectives of students regarding volunteering at business events as a way of enhancing business tourism education. The following section provides an overview of the study's findings, draws conclusions, and recommends implementable strategies resulting from the latter.

From the data collected through interviews, it was evident that event management students value the opportunity to improve their résumés with the practical experience gained from volunteering. It is recommended that EOs and educators collaborate to identify the knowledge and skills required for success in the dynamic MICE sector as technology and international event practices continue to evolve. Consultation between EOs and educators prior to student volunteering should take place to ensure feasible ways in which the requisite knowledge and skills can be linked to the event areas where volunteers will be needed. It is furthermore recommended that educators themselves get involved with event volunteering alongside students, not only to support the EO in the achievement of event objectives but also to experience first-hand how this form of industry exposure can facilitate education for specific student cohorts.

The findings also indicate that student volunteers are motivated by more than personal career-driven goals, and in fact would be inspired to volunteer if the event promised to make a difference and generate positive benefits for society. EOs should be aware of this new generation of volunteers' desire to participate in events that leave a positive legacy in some way. It is recommended that business event stakeholders and EOs strive to host 'green' events with positive legacy and sustainability components as part of the event objectives. These green initiatives should be founded on strong corporate social responsibility (CSR) goals that seek to have a positive impact on local socio-economic conditions and the environment. Volunteering programmes in themselves

could meet the CSR objectives for business events if, for example, event management knowledge and skills are transferred and developed amongst volunteering students from the host community.

Networking with business event practitioners was also highlighted as a key enticement to volunteer. In the future, EOs and educators should collaborate to enhance networking platforms; for example, EO guest lectures could be hosted before or after the actual event takes place to allow for student engagement with industry. Educators should also actively engage with local convention bureaus and industry associations to create a database of student volunteers for future event participation, and in so doing, facilitate networking between students and the industry for upcoming business event volunteering opportunities.

This study furthermore confirms that students value the interface with delegates as a way to practise and develop their business etiquette and communication skills while volunteering. It is therefore recommended that educators and EOs point out the essentials of business communication etiquette and protocols before student volunteers engage with delegates. It is important to include role playing and general delegate management etiquette in the preliminary groundwork prior to the actual event. This will allow volunteers to feel confident and engage professionally with delegates, adding to the event experience whilst strengthening their soft skills.

The findings also highlight that there are perceived benefits for students in that the practical exposure enhances the theoretical underpinnings covered in class. It is therefore important for EOs to understand and accept their role as co-educators when they sign up students to engage in volunteering, and to find ways to impart practical knowledge to them. This could include holding briefing and debriefing meetings with students, providing them with clear volunteer manuals, assigning supervisors to oversee their volunteer activities and providing training workshops before the event. It is furthermore reiterated that educators should utilise their academic expertise in teaching and learning to support EOs in their mentorship role and act as intermediary between the EO and the student in meaningful knowledge and skills transfer.

From the participants' responses, limitations of time, access to transportation and poor communication were identified as obstacles that hinder volunteer participation. It is therefore recommended that educators set a supportive, realistic volunteering schedule and consider building practical assessments into volunteering in order to

effectively manage time and add gravity and student commitment to volunteer participation. Transport plans should be negotiated between EOs and university transport operators to enable equal access for all. EOs should be hosted in the classroom prior to volunteering initiatives and clearly communicate the background of the event, volunteer expectations and protocols, volunteering areas, general arrangements and the benefits of volunteering at the particular event.

It is accepted that this research of student volunteer perspectives is limited due to the nature of the qualitative methodology, and therefore conclusions are typically not generalisable to a larger population. However, the findings can assist educators and industry to better understand the expectations of student volunteers and develop closer relationships, in order to help close the gaps that exist in business tourism education between theory and practice. In closing, further research is recommended to explore how industry and educators can collaborate to create more practical educational platforms for students in business tourism education.

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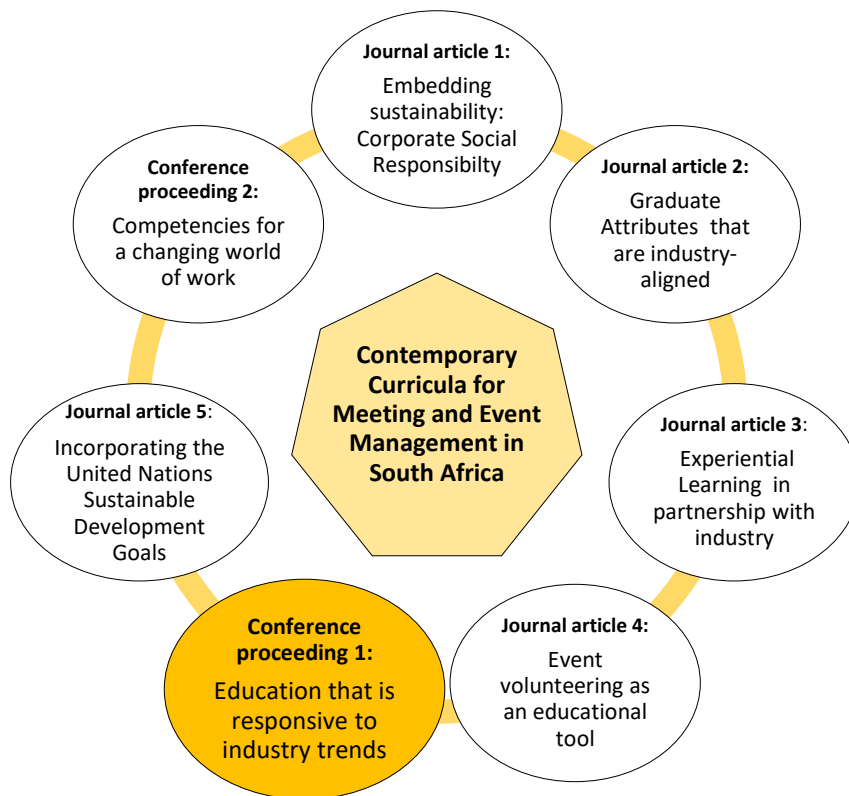
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**CHAPTER 7  
(CONFERENCE PROCEEDING 1)  
INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY TRENDS THAT AFFECT CAPE  
TOWN'S MICE SECTOR: IMPLICATIONS FOR EVENT TOURISM CURRICULUM**

Figure 7.1 illustrates how conference proceeding 1 (Chapter 7) forms part of the coherent body of work related to the development of contemporary curricula.



**Figure 7.1: Contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements (Education that is responsive to industry trends)**  
**(Researcher's construct)**

**7.0 Abstract**

In South Africa, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) events have become a key economic sub-sector of the tourism industry and Cape Town is regarded as the leading meetings destination in Africa and one of the top 40 global MICE destinations. Due to the dynamic nature of the tourism industry, the MICE sector is susceptible to changes in the business environment. It is therefore imperative for university educators and industry practitioners to continuously gauge the trends that influence the sector to ensure relevant academic content and business sustainability. The goal of this study is to explore industry perspectives on contemporary trends that affect the MICE sector of the tourism industry in Cape Town, South Africa. The paper

further considers the implications of MICE trends on responsive curriculum development. By means of purposive sampling, qualitative data was collected between July and September 2018 by means of key informant interviews amongst nine senior MICE practitioners in Cape Town. Participant perspectives were analysed using Creswell's six steps for qualitative analysis. The four key themes emerged as the prominent contemporary trends, namely: sustainability, technology, delegate experience and safety and security. The MICE sector requires knowledgeable and skilled practitioners to effectively manage trend- related opportunities and threats to ensure business sustainability. University educators should consider future knowledge base competencies when developing responsive curricula for qualifications in the MICE profession. In order to remain relevant to industry and academically robust, innovative teaching, learning and research should reflect contemporary trends.

**Keywords:** Curriculum; industry perspectives; MICE; trends; qualitative methodology.

## 7.1 Introduction

Worldwide the business events sector is growing due to the increased frequency of MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibition) events and the rapid expansion of business tourism initiatives in many countries (Doshi, 2018). Congruently, careers and university programs offering event management have grown in recent times (Stone, Padron, Wray, La Lopa & Olsen, 2017) and the development of related curricula for emerging MICE professions have become more significant. The business events (or MICE) sector supports over 250 000 direct and indirect jobs as a key economic sub- sector of South Africa's tourism industry (Naicker, 2018). Cape Town is regarded as the leading meetings destination in Africa and one of the top 40 global MICE destinations (ICCA, 2018; Business Events Africa, 2018). Tourism generated from business events is an important economic contributor globally and the MICE sector is exceedingly susceptible to changes in the business environment (Weber & Ladkin, 2005).

It is therefore imperative for university educators and industry practitioners to continually establish which trends affect the sector. Getz and Page (2016) mention that research related to trend analysis and futurism have become increasingly important to the events sector whilst Mair (2012) acknowledged the need for more qualitative research to explore meanings and experiences in business events. Laing (2018) identified a gap in current research that examines the challenges and relevance of conventional events in a modern, technological age. Although research has been

undertaken on trends shaping the business events sector (Weber & Ladkin, 2005; Van Niekerk, 2017) and the future of event tourism (Yeoman, 2011; Jones, 2012; Yeoman, Robertson, McMahon-Beattie, Backer and Smith, 2014) there is no existing or current research on contemporary trends affecting MICE destinations in South Africa. Further to this, compared to more established curricula in the field of tourism and hospitality management, business events curriculum developments are scarce in South Africa (Fenich, Hermann and Hashimoto, 2012). Stone, et al. (2017) note that event management is considered as a relatively new area of study, and although research in events has progressed in recent decades, it is regarded as an emerging research phenomenon (Aguiar-Quintana, 2015; Park & Park, 2017).

According to Rogers and Davidson (2016), although rapidly growing, the business events sector outside Europe and North America is still immature and lacks an intelligence base that can provide information on trends in the industry. In addition, the nature of ever-changing business events trends leads to a dearth in current literature on the topic. Therefore, this paper seeks to expand on previous knowledge on MICE trends through qualitative research and contributes industry perspectives on contemporary trends that affect South Africa and the implications thereof on responsive curriculum development.

## **7.2 Literature review**

### **7.2.1 MICE in South Africa**

In order to capitalise on worldwide MICE growth, the South African National Convention Bureau (SANCB) was established in 2012 and has achieved a 5.7% growth target over the past five years whilst securing a bids pipeline of future MICE events as a key economic contributor to the country's tourism sector (SAT, 2018). Subsequently, the formation of the Cape Town and Western Cape Convention Bureau has contributed to positioning Cape Town as a globally competitive MICE destination and Africa's premier city for business events (Business Events Africa, 2018). The expansion of business events in South Africa is linked to the burgeoning African association industry, exponential growth in government events and sectors with cutting-edge technology and new business development potential (SAT, 2018).

### **7.2.2 MICE trends**

South African Tourism has identified the rapid surge of millennial travellers, the increasing role of technology in tourism experiences, and opportunities in green and business events travel as international tourism trends (SAT, 2018). Globalisation,

technological innovations and dynamic consumer needs have dramatically altered the way in which event practitioners operate in turbulent and ever-changing business environments (McLoughlin, 2015). Innovation and modernisation are crucial at MICE events in the digital age as it creates positive perceptions amongst delegates and adds value to the destination (Aguiar-Quintana, 2015). Practitioners are amending their events and operations to meet perceived future needs, and how they are doing this, has a direct impact on the creation of futurism in the industry (Baker, 2015).

MICE practitioners are increasingly compelled to organise sustainable MICE events as clients and delegates embrace green values. The greening of MICE events incorporates the sustainability pillars, namely socio-cultural, economic and environmental issues in event management, alongside concepts related to transparency, ethical governance and inclusivity (Jones, 2017). Crowie (2017) notes that events strain the environment on several fronts due to the over-utilisation of resources and event practitioners are proactively seeking ways to deliver more sustainable events. More event practitioners are incorporating greening practices into their business operations, objectives, and planning (Laing & Frost, 2018) by, for example, implementing environmentally sustainable initiatives that keep the carbon footprint small at venues.

Event tourism and technology trends are inter-connected as tourists use technology at all phases of travel and delegates have come to expect technological sophistication at MICE events. The advancement and affordability of hardware and devices such as smartphones as well as tools using wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) and radio frequency identification (RFID) are steering event technology trends. Whereas the availability and provision of the latest technological infrastructure have enabled numerous applications including virtual meeting technology, three-dimensional venue tours and social media which has transformed delegate communication before, during and after meetings (Lee, Boshnakova & Goldblatt, 2017). According to Benckendorff, Xiang and Sheldon (2019) technology in the event sector provides channels for information management, communication, and delegate management systems. Technology also supports the staging of memorable experiences through interactive multimedia entertainment contributing to delegate satisfaction.

Events are becoming more experience focused as clients and delegates are no longer satisfied with just sitting in a conference room. To enhance MICE experiences for increasingly digital-savvy delegates, traditional event offerings must be replaced with

modern, innovative event options (Laing, 2018). Modern MICE practitioners must consider the changing demographics and increasingly diverse cultural background of delegates when designing content and delivery of events (Lee, et al., 2017). The event experience should offer satisfaction and excitement, while meeting the business needs of delegates and incorporating mental wellness and healthier lifestyle trends (Kriva & Malama, 2017). It is paramount that organisers appreciate the importance of memorable event experiences in the meetings industry (Halim & Mokhtar, 2016) event planners must consider how attendees view the value of event experiences by creating enticing programmes with interesting auxiliary programmes.

The need for increased safety and security at MICE events has necessitated transparency around security measures and capabilities of venues, as delegates seek safety surety. MICE events are often large gatherings and the modern-day business events require extensive security measures to mitigate potential safety risks and protect event stakeholders (Tarlow, 2014). Tourists seek destinations where risk to safety is perceived to be minimal and they will opt to stay away from destinations where they feel unsafe (Fowler, Lauderdale, Goh & Yuan, 2012). Perceptions of a destination's safety and security influence travel decisions to a similar degree than concrete data (Tarlow, 2014) and perceived major security threats influence the tourism destination choice (Kurez & Prevorsek, 2015). Globalisation and world- wide access to news and information via digital platforms have increased safety and security awareness among potential delegates. Uncertainty around safety due to potential risks such as crime, terrorism and political unrest may negatively affect travel and attendance decisions to MICE destinations.

### **7.2.3 Curriculum implications**

As the tourism industry changes, it has become imperative to adapt to circumstances in a relevant way (Yeoman, 2011). It may be argued that the growth of the business sector in itself is a trend as it has become a popular career choice with the workforce of this sector expanding rapidly, consequently triggering curriculum development in related educational fields (Rogers & Davidson, 2016; Millar & Park, 2017). University educators responsible for curricula development are tasked not only with the development of curricula in line with industry standards, but simultaneously have to deliver updated content in terms of industry trends. Fenich, et al. (2012) reiterated that the evolution of event industry developments and research should be applied to the curriculum development and modification of new and existing events qualifications. University educators faced with curriculum development should earnestly consider the

knowledge and skills that are required from the industry in day-to-day event management operations (Silvers, 2010). To address apprehensions related to the gap of knowledge and skills between theory and practice in MICE education (Kim, Lin & Qui, 2015), it is imperative to gain current industry perspectives.

### **7.3 Methodology**

This paper seeks to examine the key trends that may impact on the growing South African MICE sector and the subsequent bearing it may have on responsive curricula. Trends can be understood through the gathering of information from discussions with industry practitioners (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). Qualitative research is considered as the most appropriate method for research of an exploratory nature and the number of participants are less important than the criteria used to select them (Cresswell, 2014; Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati & Brackstone, 2014).

The target population consisted of senior business event practitioners in Cape Town affiliated with the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI). SAACI is the official umbrella body that ensures professional credibility in the South African MICE sector. As the top meetings destination in Africa (Business Events Africa, 2018), Cape Town retains a selection of leading, knowledgeable MICE practitioners able to share real-world industry insights. By means of purposive sampling, nine interviews with key informants were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide between July and September 2018. Data saturation was reached when no new information was forthcoming from the interview data and additional coding was unfeasible (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The data were analysed using Creswell's six steps for analysing qualitative data (Creswell, 2014) as presented in Table 7.1. To ensure reliability and soundness of the qualitative methodology, re-coding of the data by an independent researcher was performed (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002). Ethical research considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality. To ensure anonymity and facilitate the narrative presentation of results, participants were assigned letters during transcription and are referred to as Participant A – I.

**Table 7.1: Application of Cresswell's six steps in the qualitative data analysis**

Steps in qualitative data analysis	Application
Organise and prepare the data	Interviews were electronically transcribed, and the data was manually arranged
Read the data	Depth and meaning of the data was gained through re-reading and thorough inspection
Code all of the data	Data was organised as verbatim quotes were categorised, and colour-coded links were identified with accompanying memos
Use the coding process to generate themes for analysis	Themes emerged from categorised codes and memos and were grouped as key findings. To validate the reliability of themes, a second independent researcher performed steps 2 to 4 on the data set
Expand on how the themes will be represented	Narrative passage was selected to present the qualitative findings considering descriptive information from participant perspectives
Make an interpretation of the qualitative research	A theoretical lens was used to interpret personal perspectives and gain research-based understanding

**[Researcher's construct: adapted from Cresswell (2014)]**

## 7.4 Results and discussion

Four key themes related to contemporary trends emerged as results from the data analysis and feature as the headings of this section. The boxed display approach in qualitative data presentation allows the researcher to extract and frame text in a box to place emphasis on a specific narrative considered as important (Verdinelli & Scagnoli, 2013). To encapsulate the crux of each theme in the words of the industry practitioners, selected key verbatim quotes from participants that are central the four themes of this paper, are highlighted using boxed display.

### 7.4.1 Theme 1: Sustainability

All the participants in this study alluded to aspects of sustainability as a contemporary trend in business events. Central to this theme, Figure 7.2 highlights how the three pillars of sustainability namely, people, planet and profit currently shape South Africa's MICE offerings.

**Participant A**

Greening is a very big thing...When you look at a venue, you also look at what it offers in terms of sustainability, event organisers look at how venues source their food, how they deal with their waste. In essence, clients want to know where they are spending their money as it contributes towards the sustainable objectives woven into the fabric of their events. Clients now want things to be sourced locally which lessen the carbon footprint of events. They also want to support the local economy.

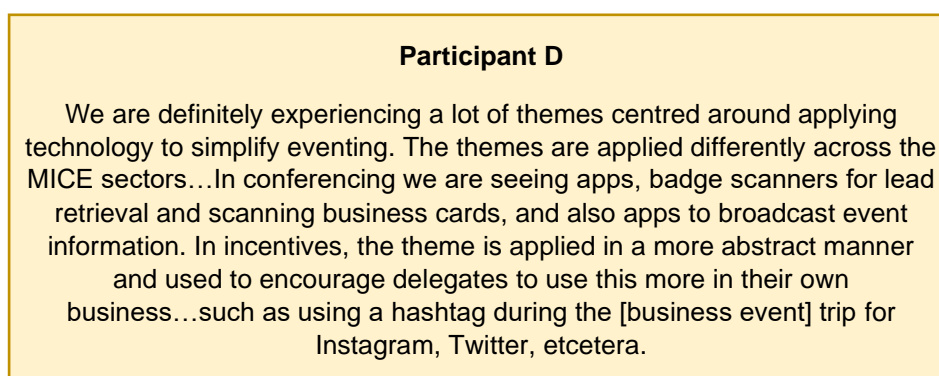
**Figure 7.2: Industry viewpoint: Sustainability**

In line with the global movement towards environmental conservation, targets for greener business events have risen. Consequently, destinations promoting responsible tourism are competing to host green MICE events that will reinforce their brands as sustainable travel destinations (McCartney & Leong, 2017). At the time of the research interviews, Cape Town was suffering one of the worst droughts in recent history, which led to serious water scarcity and tourism concerns. Since then, the 2018/2019 rains brought substantial relief and water levels have stabilised, however the region's water resources remain vulnerable (Cape Town Tourism, 2019). This has catalysed more environmentally conscious business practices as explained by Participant D, "With the recent water crisis, we've seen a lot of focus on resource development and conservation incorporated into all facets of eventing and conferencing, specifically in Cape Town." Interestingly, compared to festivals and sport, the MICE sector has been slow to engender excellence in greening practices (Jones, 2017). Green event initiatives for business events are often only incorporated when clients specifically request it as a deliverable. Therefore, the adoption of sustainable business practices may be lagging when greening is not a client directive as the onus is on the MICE practitioners themselves to drive sustainable practices up and down the event value chain (Jones, 2017). It will serve practitioners well to consider the constant evolution of people's values which is subject to change (Yeoman, 2011).

Currently people have a heightened awareness of the environment and our impact on it, and this is of significance to business events as delegates "want to be more involved in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) projects and contribute to sustainable tourism" (Participant D). This statement is supported by Participant H who noted that there is a substantial increase in CSR projects across the MICE sector, including the production of "simple things like conferencing bags and lanyards...and entertainment like choirs and dancers by community development projects". Sustainable event practices could contribute to a destination's socio-cultural, environmental and economic upliftment. For this reason, industry considers it vital for students in MICE education to not only understand general sustainability concepts, but to learn about sustainable business cases in a practical context (Millar & Park, 2017). Students should essentially be able to critically analyse event scenarios, identify challenges and formulate practical solutions for sustainable events. As a case in point, Participant H used a medical conference as an example and posed the question, "Yes, you bring a thousand doctors here, but what legacy is the event going to leave for the destination?"

#### 7.4.2 Theme 2: Technology

New technology continues to revolutionise the events industry and is a driver of change in the sector (Robinson, Wale & Dickson, 2010). To remain relevant, practitioners must anticipate rapidly evolving technology that may impact the business events sector. As a collective, the participants concurred that technology is a trend that affects the MICE sector in a variety of ways as displayed in Figure 7.3.



**Figure 7.3: Industry viewpoint: Technology**

According to Participant C, “Technology is one of the most impactful trends at present. People are travelling less to physically attend a conference” and “people can now stream events instead of actually attending the event” (Participant B). “Conference organisers are starting to make money by having inexpensive options such as streaming” (Participant C) and innovative practitioners allow delegates to login via an online platform “to access various sessions of a conference at a small fee” (Participant B).

Conference organisers require effective technological systems to remain competitive as “everyone wants to register, receive an invoice, submit an abstract instantaneously” (Participant A). Similarly, destinations need to keep up with the newest technologies to remain attractive (Participant E). Event technology and high-speed Wi-Fi are essential for integrated digital event experiences such as live streaming, video conferencing, electronic surveys, and event apps for programmes (Participants F & G). Artificial Intelligence (AI) is currently a hot topic at every industry conference where MICE innovations are discussed (Participants A & H). Virtual Reality (VR) can be incorporated to simulate conventional site inspection and actual meeting interactions

(Lee, et al., 2017). “In a nutshell, technology is impacting the industry all round” (Participant A). The modern event management domain requires novel practitioners to enter the field not only with fundamental knowledge and traditional event management competencies, but also with the relevant technological skills set (Lee, et al., 2017). The digital expectations of clients must be met at MICE events to ensure delegate satisfaction (Participant E). However, Fotiadis and Sigala (2015) argue that technology should not only be used to enhance delegate experiences at events, but it should also be used as an effective educational tool at universities to bolster the technological savviness of future event practitioners.

### 7.4.3 Theme 3: Delegate experience

It is paramount importance that organisers recognise the significance of memorable event experiences for delegates in the meetings industry (Halim & Mokhtar, 2016). Organisers should keep up with trends “so that they are able to enhance the event experience” Participant B. One of the key trends that influence the MICE industry, is the changing demographics and diverse needs of multiple generations that are now attending business events (Lee, et al., 2017). Evidently, participants shared these sentiments across the board as Figure 7.4 highlights below:

**Participant B**

Attendee experience is also a trend that's surfacing more and more. Attendees no longer just want to sit in a conference and listen to someone talk for an hour, attendees desire sessions to be more interactive...especially for the millennials. Event organisers now have to take this market segment into consideration as they now too have tremendous spending power.

**Figure 7.4: Industry viewpoint: Delegate experience**

In South Africa, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) events have become a key economic sub-sector of the tourism industry and Cape Town is regarded as the leading Delegates increasingly want experiences that positively contribute to sustainability initiatives at event destinations. According to Participant E, delegate experiences need to be more interactive, positive, and engaging and should include “authentic experiences where they get to interact with the local community and learn about their culture”. Delegates want to “go local” and really experience the destination as part of the event (Participant G).

MICE delegates often reflect what the environmental cost of attendance will be versus the experience gained from attending (Participant I). Many event organisers are now incorporating greening practices that allow delegates to contribute to the event's green objectives through participatory experiences in innovative spaces. Participant I shared, for example, that "People want to have an exercise bike in the middle of the venue because they charge their cell phones" with the renewable energy that is subsequently generated to offset the carbon footprint of the event. This link between delegate experience and environmental impact was especially evident during the recent drought in Cape town. On the one hand, it impeded on the leisure experience linked to MICE travel as convention hotels, for example, had empty swimming pools and limited spa services due to severe water restrictions. On the other hand, even though meeting planners could guarantee water for delegates at scheduled MICE events, they did not want to contribute negatively to the water crisis and opted to postpone or cancel their events explaining, "No, why must we have water if your local people don't have water?" (Participant I).

Delegate satisfaction is influenced by the quality of the event experience (Chatzigeorgiou, Christou & Simeli, 2017). Participant C stated that MICE planners have to offer "unique experiences, tailor made to meet the needs of the target market" to ensure satisfaction. Furthermore, MICE delegates want to experience innovative programme content that is delivered in exciting ways, and if they "feel that the programme has no significant impact on their career development", they will simply choose not to attend (Participant C).

The mental wellbeing and healthy lifestyle trend need to be incorporated in the overall event experience. Programme content and delivery should reflect delegate wellbeing and healthier lifestyle needs. For example, more meetings will take place outdoors and incorporate healthier lifestyle options (Kriva & Malama, 2017). Event spaces need to consider innovative experiences and MICE practitioners increasingly think out of the box to reinvent and create unique settings (Participant I). Venues that offer innovative, health-conscious food experiences "beyond buffet food" and offer activities that are central to health and wellness of attendees should be reflected in MICE programme content (Participant F).

MICE practitioners need flexibility, knowledge, and skills to enhance delegate experiences by carefully coordinating experiential elements throughout the event.

MICE planners should have the ability to customise the programme exactly meet client needs and know how to best incorporate more interactive event elements, such as teambuilding and CSR options, to enrich delegate experiences and secure future business (Participant E).

#### 7.4.4 Theme 4: Safety and security

The perception of major security threats influences the tourism destination choice (Kurez & Prevorsek, 2015). As an important sub-sector of the tourism industry, MICE practitioners rely on destination attractiveness as an important component in attracting business events. As travellers, MICE delegates also seek to attend events in destinations where they feel safe (Fowler, et al., 2012). Figure 7.5 displays captures the sentiments shared by participants of this study that that issues around safety and security have become important trends to consider in the South African MICE sector.

**Participant B**

Security is also a trend coming up in the industry, with terrorist attacks on the rise and increase in crime, more high-profile events require more advanced security features to ensure the safety of event attendees. The current political instability and the current state of crime in our country [is a threat to the MICE sector]. Not too long ago the latest statistics for crime had been released in South Africa, and immediately thereafter the US and UK issued travel warnings.

**Figure 7.5: Industry viewpoint: Safety and security**

Because perceptions of a destination's safety and security influence travel decisions data (Tarlow, 2014), it is important that the destination manages communication and messaging around travel safety. Participant A explains that "how [international] media portrays Cape Town, is a big threat if the message is distorted out of context. Participant A further explains that when international news agencies report on crime that occurred in an isolated unsafe precinct, tourists may incorrectly perceive the entire Cape Town as being dangerous, "without realising that Cape Town is big geographically" with abundantly safe spaces. In agreement, Participant C notes that "security is a massive problem affecting the MICE industry in Cape Town" due to plaguing reports on international news networks portraying Cape Town as an unsafe destination for delegates to visit. Globally destinations and countries are experiencing increased economic and political instability which affects event tourism. According to

Participant H, when South African crime statistics recently released the crime statistics, the repercussions were immediate as the USA and UK issued travel warnings to the destination. Participant D noted that this poses a threat to the local MICE sector “as large corporations are reluctant to invest their MICE budgets in our industry”.

As technology advances in the event tourism sector (Lee, et al., 2017) cyber security and information protection is becoming more pertinent in the management of MICE events. This includes mitigating online payment fraud and the data protection related to delegates attending a MICE event. Participant H notes that international laws, for example the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) affect the management of international MICE events and association meetings and in South Africa, we similarly have the POPI (Protection of Personal Information) act. It is crucial for MICE practitioners to keep in trend with these regulations as Participant H explained by means of an example, “In the past for a conference we might have asked the delegate for a copy of their passport because we need the detail to put on the invitation letter. That companies now need new processes in place because you can’t keep that information.” In reviewing safety and security trends, Participant E conceded that it is difficult to manage external factors that threaten the MICE sector, however “we can manage South Africa’s reputation and educate people that it is a safe destination to travel to” with the support of national and local tourism agencies and convention bureaus. Similarly, education related to MICE events, should ensure prospective MICE practitioners are aware of trends related to cyber security and international regulations in delegate data protection.

## **7.5 Conclusion / Implications**

The results have established that contemporary trends affecting the MICE sector are related to sustainability, technology, delegate experience as well as safety and security. The implications thereof on MICE education is for university educators to develop a responsive curriculum in relation to these developments. However, university educators should be cautious when implementing trend-related aspects in teaching and learning as trends continuously evolve in the MICE industry. Therefore, foundational knowledge and skills of MICE curriculum should be complemented with fluid, supplementary concepts related to advancements in the industry.

From the results in this study, sustainability issues and green event practices need to be embedded in event project management curriculum. Opportunities should be created for students to take an active role in creating sustainable solutions for MICE

events and in so doing, strengthen sustainability concepts in contextual learning environments. Modern-day MICE education should provide students with an adequate understanding of business event technology concepts and foster teaching and learning environments where these concepts can be applied in practice. MICE curriculum should therefore include technological components, for example, software programmes to manage event projects and digital marketing design on social media. MICE related curriculum should be designed to fortify skills related to creativity, innovation and event design for future event planners that will be tasked with managing delegate experiences. University educators should continuously scope global trends in lifestyle, design, delegate demographics and delegate behaviour to create content relevant to contemporary business events. Current safety and security trends should feature as case studies in MICE curriculum to allow students to critically analyse, formulate strategies and mitigate safety and security risks that affect the industry.

In closing, to remain relevant in this dynamic sector, university educators should utilise industry platforms to engage with MICE practitioners on a regular basis and consistently rejuvenate curriculum to reflect current trends in business trends. Academically robust MICE curriculum should include progressive topics, innovative research approaches and updated conceptual frameworks that can be applied to modern-day MICE events.

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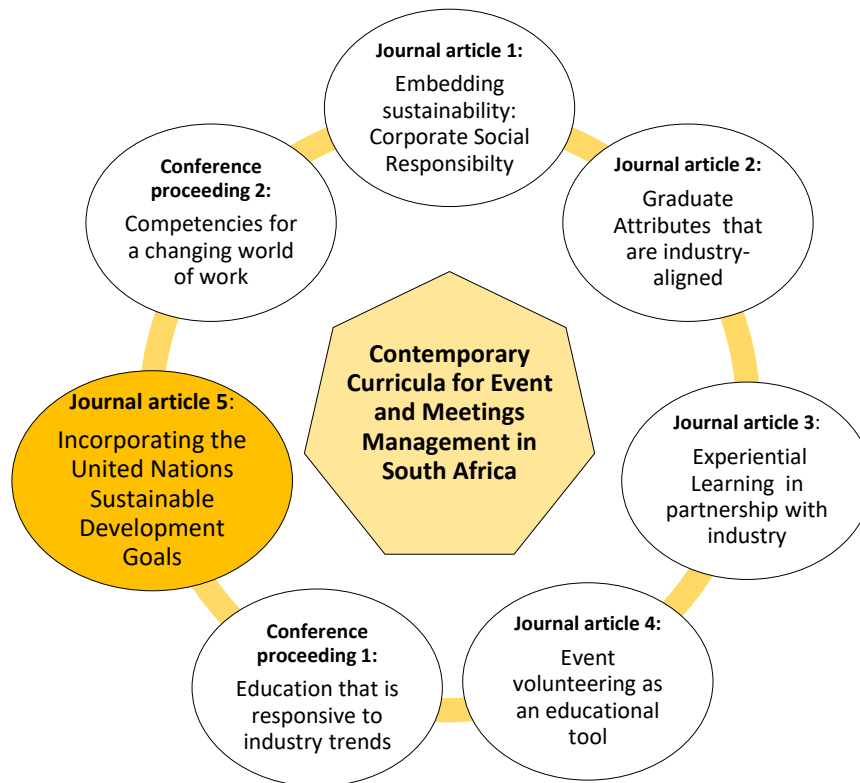
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**CHAPTER 8  
(JOURNAL ARTICLE 5)  
QUALITY EDUCATION: INDUSTRY CONTRIBUTIONS TO EMBED SUSTAINABILITY IN  
A MEETING AND EVENT MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM**

Figure 8.1 illustrates how journal article 5 (Chapter 8) forms part of the coherent body of work related to the development of contemporary curricula.



**Figure 8.1: Contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements (Incorporating the UN Sustainable Development Goals)  
(Researcher’s construct)**

**8.0 Abstract**

**Purpose** – With the global adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), it has become increasingly important for educators to develop a responsive curriculum where future event practitioners understand, value and implement sustainability as a core component of meeting and event management. The purpose of the paper is to explore the viewpoints of industry to embed sustainability as part of developing a Meeting and Event Management curriculum that is responsive to industry needs, and in so doing, contribute to quality education (SDG4).

**Design/methodology/approach** – Qualitative data was generated from 10 key informant interviews amongst top-level meeting and event professionals. Open questions elucidated industry viewpoints to develop content for a Meeting and Event Management curriculum at Advanced Diploma level in South Africa. Content analysis and data interpretation revealed key topics that guided the embedment of SDGs in the curriculum as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes (KSVAs).

**Findings** - Curriculum content was linked to six specific, corresponding SDGs, namely: good health and wellbeing; quality education; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; climate action; and partnerships for the goals.

**Originality/value** - The paper contributes valuable industry insights to academic educators concerned with responsive curriculum development in the field of meeting and event management by outlining how SDGs can be integrated as competencies and learning outcomes in a tertiary qualification.

**Key words** Curriculum, Industry viewpoints, Meeting and event management, Qualitative methodology, Quality education

## 8.1 Introduction

Meetings and events form a significant sub-sector of the broader tourism industry worldwide and has a positive impact on the growth of businesses and destinations by generating job opportunities (Sable, *et al.*, 2019). Related vocational qualifications have emerged to meet the demand for knowledgeable and skilled professionals through specialised education. Likewise, in South Africa qualified meeting and event management professionals are needed to support the continuous development of the sector as a vital part of country's tourism economy (Fenich, *et al.*, 2012). Collaboration between industry practitioners and academics are required to adequately educate credible professionals for a sustainable event sector that can contribute to socio-economic development (Brown, 2014). The launch of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has steered an increased focus towards sustainable development in events to drive social, economic and environmental progress (Jones, 2018). The UN SDGs were adopted by member states in 2015 as a collective call to action to advance the five Ps of sustainable development, namely: prosperity, people, partnership, peace and planet (Visser, 2015). With more and more forward-thinking event professionals embracing the principles of sustainable development in practice (Jones, 2018), there is a rising need to ensure that

sustainability principles are included in meeting and event management education. Education is crucial in developing strategies to advance sustainability (Buckler and Creech, 2014) and to be successful, green economies need highly skilled workers from quality vocational qualifications (Diep and Hartmann, 2016). Alongside graduate attributes such as creativity and innovation, Robertson, *et al.* (2012) highlighted 'sustainable development' as a key competency that should be embedded in academic programmes.

Park and Park (2017) suggest that aspects relating to education in events, such as curriculum development, are not well-researched. Continued research is required to explore effective ways to enhance student preparedness for the shifting event industry as current, existing research that explores issues related to event management education and pedagogy is scant (Mair and Weber, 2019). Despite a growing body of research discussing SDGs in relation to events, there is a lack of literature specifically related to SDGs as part of event education and curriculum development. New approaches are required to consider structured discourse on sustainability for planned events (Getz, 2017). It is hoped that this paper will contribute to this discussion by exploring event industry viewpoints to embed SDGs in academic curriculum. This may be particularly meaningful to educators concerned with sustainability education and responsive curriculum development in the field of meeting and event management.

The author is part of an ongoing multi-level curriculum development initiative to enhance the alignment of academic content with industry needs for vocational meeting and event management qualifications. This paper presents the viewpoints of industry professionals that provided contextual input for competencies at Advanced Diploma level at a University of Technology in South Africa. The current curriculum does cover sustainability to a peripheral extent. However, more exploration is required to meet industry's growing adoption of and commitment to sustainability goals in practice. There is a need to explore how meeting and event industry competencies can be linked to SDGs as a roadmap to ensure that event education supports industry practice for a sustainable future. Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to explore the viewpoints of industry to embed sustainability as part of developing a Meeting and Event Management curriculum that is responsive to industry needs, and in so doing, contribute to quality education (SDG4).

## **.8.2 Literature review**

### **8.2.1 Responsive curriculum**

When designing a responsive curriculum, input from industry is valuable to identify areas where the curriculum can be enhanced and infused with meaningful content. Possible areas of improvement are revealed when industry stakeholders collaborate to assist academics with the critical appraisal of event management education (Gerard, 2016). Gaining industry perspectives is a useful way to understand events in practice as the sector continuously evolves. Educators can ensure that academic content adequately reflects any significant changes affecting the sector and society at large. Students are better prepared for the industry if practitioners are invited to participate in academic education initiatives (Mei, 2019). Furthermore, sound university–industry collaboration is essential to enable social and economic benefits to flow from quality education, knowledge sharing and more innovative society as a result of such partnerships (Sobaih and Jones, 2015). The innovative application of knowledge is a fundamental driver of social progress and economic development (Salmi, 2017). Therefore, creative collaboration with industry can close the knowing-doing gap for students in event education and lead to the advancement of sustainability in general.

There are essential components to curriculum content which collectively make up competencies namely, knowledge, skills, and values and attitudes (KSVAs). KSVAs are inter-related in curriculum content development. Knowledge is fundamental for skills development whilst values and attitudes in turn, allow skills to be effectively deployed in the knowledge context (Osman, *et al.*, 2017). While knowledge relates to theoretical and practical understanding, skills refer to the proficiency and ability to apply knowledge. Values and attitudes are the beliefs and principles that influence an individual's judgements, choices and behaviour towards environmental and societal wellbeing (OECD, 2019). In event education, competency implies that a student can effectively utilise KSVAs to meet the complex demands of the meeting and event workplace. Sustainability competencies relate to KSVAs that build a student's individual capacity towards critical thinking and reflection, systems thinking, problem solving, responsibility, ethics and sense of community among others (Osman, *et al.* 2017). In order to meet the SDGs for a more sustainable event sector, it is essential to develop both sustainability and event management competencies among students. So as to play a significant role in the development of students as future sustainability leaders, academic courses need to be focused and committed to engender sustainability KSVAs in curriculum content (Heiskanen, *et al.*, 2016).

At Advanced Diploma level knowledge and skills should facilitate problem solving “in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to identify, analyse, evaluate, critically reflect on and address complex problems, applying evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments” (SAQA, 2012, p.10). It is therefore vital to consider suitable pedagogy as part of curriculum planning to ensure that students attain adequate competencies associated with sustainability education in events. One way to enhance both the application of industry knowledge and student engagement, is by providing professional event education focused on the development of reflective practice (Bladen and Kennel, 2014). Reflective practice as a pedagogy (Schon, 1991) plays an important role in student learning as it provides the bridge between classroom theory and real-world experience. Reflective practice requires critical thinking which is defined by Chance (1986, p. 6) as “the ability to analyse facts, generate and organise ideas, defend opinions, make comparisons, draw inferences, evaluate arguments and solve problems”. Reflective practice, with an emphasis on critical thinking, is therefore an important element of student learning, especially because critical thought is crucial to sustainability leadership and management (Ayers, *et al.*, 2020). Building reflective practices into sustainability content could effectively allow students to consider and learn from challenging content, topics, and exchanges (Ayers, *et al.*, 2020). Reflective practice is also a way to cultivate awareness, empathy, engagement and collaboration with diverse perspectives, creativity and enriched responses towards sustainability (Eaton, *et al.*, 2017). Along with awareness, the ability to critically assess and respond to complex dilemmas is essential for sustainability leadership (Ayers, *et al.*, 2020) and indispensable when working in the dynamic events sector.

### **8.2.2 Sustainability for meetings and events**

Sustainability means meeting the environmental, economic and social needs of present generations without compromising the needs of future generations (Pelham, 2020). Therefore, meetings and events can only be sustainable if the inextricably linked environmental, socio-cultural and economic aspects that relate to events are managed effectively (Jones, 2018). Due to climate change and environmentalism, economic sectors worldwide are embracing more sustainable business practices such as the use of renewable energy sources, waste recycling and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. Sustainable economic progress considers fairness and inequalities in the socio-cultural context where the event takes place without degrading the environment (Jones, 2018). From an environmental perspective, large meetings and events are notorious for their contribution to greenhouse-gas emission due to travel and the high number of resources required to operate them (Rittichainuwat and

Mair, 2012). For this reason, there is particular pressure on the events sector to meet sustainability goals. Consequently, the meeting and event sector has to take serious steps to adopt and implement sustainability goals across the board in order to remain relevant, continue to grow and contribute to national economies. It is increasingly important that events are perceived as environmentally responsible and socially beneficial (Holmes, *et al.* 2015) and that these socially and environmentally responsible practices are at the centre of event planning and management. Events can contribute to social sustainability through corporate citizenship efforts such as non-discrimination and fair labour practices in the workplace and by ensuring universal access to events (Jones, 2018). It has become clear that these responsible practices in events are part of a long term movement, and not a fleeting trend. Many major event producers and industry associations, for example, the Global Association of the Exhibition Industry (UFI) and Meeting Professionals International (MPI), are now recognising and offering sustainability related event services (Lee and Goldblatt, 2020).

There are various reasons to integrate sustainable practices into meetings and events, including environmental and resource conservation, and simply because doing green business is better for the planet, its people and economic prosperity (Goldblatt, 2012). Events have also become progressively important as policy tools for destinations since they are able to produce positive economic impacts, bring about image change, generate social capital and support cultural regeneration (De Brito and Richards, 2017). Goldblatt's (2012) theory of greener meetings and events proposes that the following five inputs, namely, CSR, 'outgreening', sustainable development, ecotourism and fair trade essentially form the definition of green meetings and events, and in turn, generate three core outputs, namely: education, innovation and conservation. In terms of these inputs, CSR adds charitable value to businesses through socio-environmental initiatives whilst 'outgreening' refers to green strategies that are implemented by forward-thinking businesses that are environmentally incentivised by profit as a result of savings due to green initiatives (Friedman, 2009). Goldblatt (2012) contends that, because the tourism industry preceded meetings and events in the development of sustainability, there is a lot to be learnt from ecotourism strategies. In turn, fair trade aims to counteract unfair labour practices and inequality by means of fair pay and projects that lead to the enhancement of workers' quality of life among others. The three key outputs of greener meetings, according to Goldblatt (2012), apply to events as follows:

- *Innovation:* Event practitioners should find innovative ways to utilise green technology and harness creativity to produce sustainable events;
- *Conservation:* The intelligent conservation of natural resources with sound waste management strategies in place; and
- *Education:* The advancement of ethical behaviour and awareness among event stakeholders and the continuous improvement of sustainable event management.

Understanding the importance of sustainable development and putting mechanisms in place to advance sustainability in the sector begins with education. In 2015 the ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ was adopted by all UN member states, and the UN SDGs were launched. The UN SDGs are a roadmap for governments and businesses to work together towards sustainability (Pelham, 2020) and provide directions to areas of commitment to reach a better and more sustainable world for all. The launch of the SDGs has provided renewed consideration to the significance of education related to aspects of sustainable development (Salmi, 2017). The SDGs fall under five areas of critical importance, referred to as the five Ps (Visser, 2015) as follows:

- *People:* No poverty (SDG1); Zero hunger (SDG2); Good health and well-being (SDG3); Quality education (SDG4); Gender equality (SDG5); and Clean water and sanitation (SDG6).
- *Prosperity:* Affordable clean energy (SDG7); Decent work and Economic development (SDG8); Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG9); Reduce inequalities (SDG10); Sustainable cities and communities (SDG11); Responsible consumption and production (SDG12).
- *Planet:* Climate action (SDG13); Life below water (SDG14); and Life on land (SDG15).
- *Peace:* Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16).
- *Partnership:* Partnerships for the goals (SDG17).

For the sector to progress, it has become increasingly important to position meetings and events as a means for businesses and governments to achieve the SDGs by bringing people together to collaborate (Pelham, 2020). An isolated approach to event sustainability is to be avoided, rather it is important to ensure that various stakeholders are brought together in a collaborative manner to work towards sustainability. The positive impacts of events can be realised and sustainability can persist when stakeholders join forces (Jaimangal-Jones, *et al.*, 2018). Industry experts and academic educators are key stakeholders in the meeting and event sector and by

sharing knowledge and expertise, they can support sustainable event management to ensure a better future for all.

### **8.3 Methodological approach**

Ensure that Ms Word is set and defaulted to English (UK) or English (SA). Your margins should be 3cm (left) (as this allows for binding) and 2cm (right, top and bottom). The research followed a qualitative approach which is suitable for exploring participant experiences in the workplace. These viewpoints can be utilised to identify issues that impact the industry and inform practical knowledge and skills requirements (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Qualitative research does not aim to draw numerical inferences, rather it aims to explore perspectives and gain in-depth understanding of the viewpoints of participants (Creswell, 2014).

The scope of the research was limited geographically to South Africa where the researcher was located and included top-level meeting and event professionals with membership to the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI). Industry associations are a recommended and reliable source for researching event industry trends and careers (Van der Wagen and White, 2018). SAACI is considered one of the country's major industry associations and represents members from across the meeting and event services spectrum.

Qualitative data was generated from 10 key informant interviews utilising purposive sampling during the month of October in 2019. Interviews are considered to be a powerful way to understand the viewpoints of participants (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). While there are no definite rules guiding sample size in qualitative research (Patton, 2002), McCracken (1988) suggests that eight interviews are adequate to generate categories and themes. Data saturation for this explorative inquiry was reached after the 10th interview when no new perspectives on the topic was gained (Mason, 2017). The sample of key informants included 'influential, prominent or well-informed people in an organisation' (Marshall and Rossman, 2011, p.113) who could share expert viewpoints on issues pertinent to the national and international meeting and event sector. The profile of the participants allowed for industry perspectives that are associated with various professional roles and companies (see Table 8.1).

**Table 8.1: Profile of key informants**

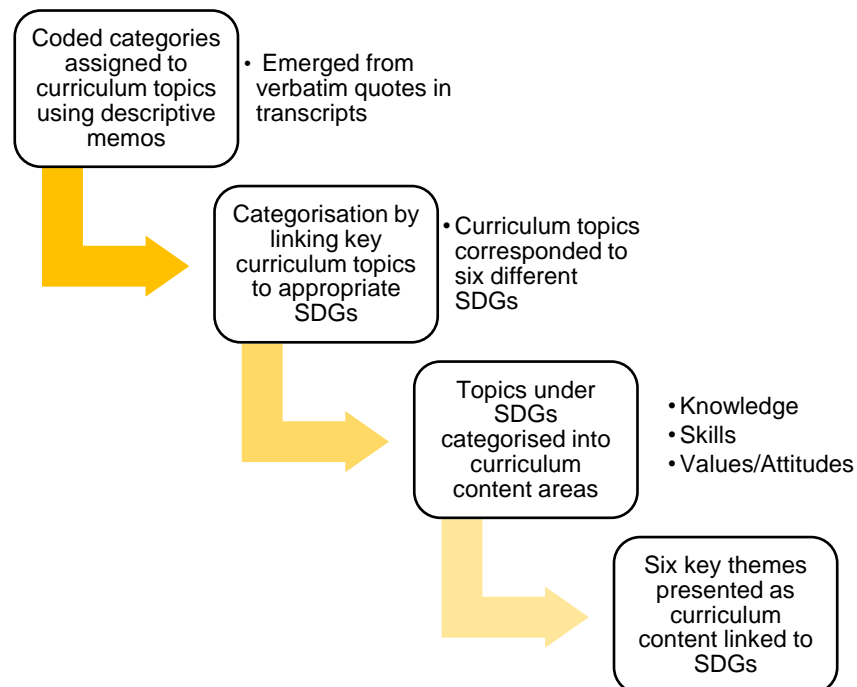
Key informant	Professional role	Type of event company
P1	Business development manager	Convention bureau
P2	Head of sales	International convention centre
P3	Senior manager	Destination management company
P4	Lead sales executive	Event management company
P5	Regional director	International meeting and event association
P6	General manager	Event design and production company
P7	Managing director	Professional conference organising company
P8	Director and facilitator	Event consulting company
P9	Founder and senior project manager	Event project management for non-profit organisations
P10	Senior brand influencer	Corporate conference and functions venue

**(Researcher's construct)**

Semi-structured interview questions were developed to guide the interviews and generate the data (Yin, 2014). Questions related to the development of curriculum content for an existing Advanced Diploma qualification in meeting and event management. A test interview with a peer researcher preceded the actual interviews and furnished the researcher with an opportunity to refine the language and clarity of the questions (McGrath, *et al.*, 2019). Ethical research considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Qualitative research implies a thorough engagement process with the generated data involving analytical and interpretive activities (Mason, 2017). The data from the inquiry was analysed using Creswell's six steps for analysing qualitative data (Creswell, 2014). Firstly, the data was organised and prepared by manually arranging the electronically transcribed interviews. Then deeper meaning was gained by reading and re-reading the data. As a third step the data was coded by linking verbatim quotes to categories using descriptive memos as part of the initial categorisation of key themes. The next step involved further categorisation by linking the key emerging curriculum topics to

corresponding SDGs and finally grouping the curriculum topics under KSWA curriculum content areas (see Figure 8.2).



**Figure 8.2: Categorisation of key themes  
(Researcher's construct)**

Narrative passage was then selected to present the key themes. Finally, the data was interpreted with a theoretical lens providing understanding by means of a literature-based discussion. To ensure reliability of the qualitative inquiry, re-coding of the data was done by an independent research assistant (Brink, 1993). The proposed curriculum content themes that emerged from the categorisation were circulated amongst the participants for input, verification and consensus. In the following section, the viewpoints of the participants are presented collectively as the KSVAs and supported by individual verbatim quotes where appropriate.

In addition, follow-up interviews with participants were carried out in April 2021 (during COVID-19) supplementary to the initial interviews (pre-COVID-19). This was done to explore any new insights related to the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on sustainability in the event sector. It is important to note that although this was not the focus of the research, these viewpoints are included as a separate heading

(8.4.7) to enhance the exploratory nature of this paper. It seeks to provide an additional layer of context related to COVID-19 and sustainability considerations for meeting and event management curriculum, speaking to the aim of the paper.

## **8.4 Results and discussion**

The KSVAs linked to the key SDGs that are presented in this section are based on participant comments and consensus. Participants are named P1 to P10 in the sequence of transcriptions to facilitate the narrative and safeguard anonymity. Because events essentially bring people together to innovate, collaborate and exchange knowledge, it could easily be argued that every SDG should be achieved (Pelham, 2020) and embedded in the curriculum. However, in line with the nature of exploratory research the interpretive viewpoints of industry participants were pursued, and the following key six SDGs could be correlated to their views on curriculum:

### **8.4.1 Curriculum content linked to SDG3: Good health and wellbeing**

- *Knowledge:* Health and safety management complexities and challenges to ensure stakeholder welfare at events; Health and safety legislation, protocols and related local and international standards; Security management and response planning.
- *Skills:* Critical thinking to develop and implement risk and security management plans; Crisis management abilities, including effective communication.
- *Values/Attitudes:* Ethics; Respect for the health, safety and well-being of others.

When seeking to understand the link between event risks and sustainability, one needs only to consider whether an event can ultimately sustain itself after an emergency or major crisis (Holmes, *et al.*, 2015). As event practitioners “not everyone is aware of how to put a safety plan together or how to create a medics plan” (P2). However, event practitioners have a legal, ethical and professional duty to safeguard event stakeholders and attendees (Hilliard *et al.*, 2011). It is not only important that students understand “duty of care” (P10) but they should also know “the different risk categories for events, what warrants them being allocated that category...and how you can mitigate it” (P7). P7 further highlighted the need for crisis management competencies to deal with event risks associated with “external situations that you have no control over, for example, the water issue that was faced in Cape Town”. During 2017 and 2018 the city, regarded as South Africa’s top event destination, experienced an unprecedented water crisis. Due to extremely dry weather conditions over a period of two years, the city’s water sources were nearly depleted as the water crisis worsened

early in 2018 (OECD, 2021). Strict water restrictions were implemented and the severity of the situation made international news headlines which led to the postponement and cancellation of many event tourism activities. The considerable local and global media coverage not only raised awareness, it also caused a degree of panic when the term ‘Day Zero’ was used to describe the possibility of a day when the city’s water sources would run dry (Rodina, 2019). Although, the outlook was stark, this ominous message created a somewhat distorted view about the state of the crisis amongst residents and tourists as the date of ‘Day Zero’ was moved forward a number of times. P10 provided context by explaining that even when they could guarantee water for their clients, the clients were reluctant to continue with scheduled events and meetings, “they said, ‘no, why must we have water if your local people don’t have water’. So the message that went out was just horrible and clients skipped us for the year [2018].” Likewise, “security issues” (P7) related to crime, terrorism, political unrest and cyber safety have become more prevalent and impacts negatively on events and the destination’s reputation may be tarnished by international reports on crime and violence. It is therefore important to have strong communication competencies and demonstrate “understanding in terms of clients’ needs, while also anticipating and flagging risk areas” (P4). In doing so accurately and transparently, event professionals establish respect for the health, safety and well-being of all stakeholders while implementing effective risk mitigation plans. Future practitioners can also learn how to navigate various risks to ensure event business is sustained over the long-term utilising real “risk issues as case studies” (P6) to enhance critical thinking skills.

#### **8.4.2 Curriculum content linked to SDG4: Quality education**

- *Knowledge:* Importance of industry exposure as part of event education; Importance of lifelong learning, re-skilling and upskilling in various areas of events; Learning through service to society.
- *Skills:* Career path planning for lifelong learning and improvement; Ability to apply knowledge in practical settings; Goal-setting and self-management skills.
- *Values/Attitudes:* Values education as a tool to eradicate social inequalities; Diversity; Inclusivity.

Many event practitioners are committed to the advancement of quality education by providing internships to young people and through knowledge sharing related to

sustainable development (Budd and Palmer, 2020). In fact, collaboration between educators and event practitioners is an important aspect of quality education and sustainability, because it ensures that the skills obtained from qualifications match industry requirements (Beddie, *et al.*, 2014). Relevant practical knowledge and skills that are transferred directly from industry to students are important to the sustainable development of the sector. For example, mentorship with “local PCOs [Professional Conference Organisers], convention centres and convention bureaux” where students can be educated via first-hand experience (P1). Educators should also engage with industry organisations to utilise student volunteering as an educational tool for practical learning in real event settings with industry mentors. “The PCO or DMC [Destination Marketing Company] can guest lecture to run through the risks identified prior to the event, how they mitigated the risks and what actually happened during the event – almost like a post event report, which includes the planning process and execution of the event” as part of the mentorship (P2). In this way, industry are co-educators contributing to SDG4 by closing the knowing-doing gap in event management education.

At the same time, students should demonstrate a “willingness to work, learn and expand their skills and also accept guidance” (P4) during industry exposure activities. Integrating academic curriculum with community services is a good way to facilitate the active engagement of students within the community (Lamb, 2015). Through service-learning projects, students can assist local communities in organising events. This allows them to learn by doing whilst reinforcing the value of education as a tool for social upliftment. Lifelong learning and “life skills that help a person discover who they are and understand their place” in society (P9) are important for holistic development. Education can address the need for “diversity training” (P10) and improve our “understanding of people of different cultures” (P9). It also allows critical thinking and sharpens cognitive skills to generate creative and sustainable solutions that have innovative, creative and “different effects or outcomes” on events (P6). In fact, lifelong education is regarded as crucial for the achievement of other SDGs (English and Carlsen, 2019). Quality education (SDG4) strives towards equitable and inclusive education for all and also alludes to lifelong learning where KSVAs contribute to democratic citizenship, socio-economic wellbeing, personal growth and cultural identity (SAQA, 2013).

### 8.4.3 Curriculum content linked to SDG8: Decent work and economic growth

- *Knowledge:* Key economic influences, challenges and impacts of events; Labour legislation: Ethical work practices for decent work environments.
- *Skills:* Entrepreneurship; Leadership with the ability to lead a team and champion sustainability issues; Strategic thinking; Stress management.
- *Values/Attitudes:* Respect; Transparency; Honesty; Integrity; Diversity: Inclusivity.

Events, as a subsector of tourism, can reduce poverty through ground-level economic initiatives and projects (Phi, 2017). Events are frequently utilised as a means of regenerating destinations experiencing economic decline (De Brito and Richards, 2017). Meetings and events are also leveraged for general economic development, and in this way, it can contribute to economic development policies in a destination (Getz and Page, 2016). Although events can create positive economic spin-offs, the opposite can also be true. Events can create a lasting economic burden to the host destination if it is not planned and managed properly (Holmes, 2015). Therefore, when it comes to event management, students should “understand the impact that it would have and then devise a strategy to deal with the impact” and drive sustainability through leadership (P2). Green event leaders recognise the value of sustainability to long-term business growth and view greening as “a new way of generating business power” (Lee and Goldblatt, 2020, p.317). Sustainable event management requires green leadership and commitment to push sustainability objectives and provide strategic direction to event businesses (Jones, 2018).

Future event leaders should demonstrate sustainability in every aspect of the event project while keeping staff “happy, productive and not unnecessarily stressed” in a decent work environment (P6). Increased demands on event workers as well as precarious working conditions may adversely affect employee wellbeing. Indeed, event practitioners should be skilled in “working under pressure” (P5) however, “if you are empowering the students to one day be business owners”, they should not only understand the labour laws that underpin fair and appropriate working conditions (P7), but also the importance of employee wellbeing. Pertinent discussions around current social issues impacting the workplace and economy, such as “xenophobic” prejudice (P10) should aim to reinforce tolerance in the workplace and society as a whole. Globalisation of the event sector has brought together many different people from various cultural backgrounds, leading to more diverse perspectives and discussions (Werner, *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, business events provide a platform for

intercultural understanding (Foley, *et al.*, 2013) in a diverse, yet inclusive environment. If students learn to be resolutely “understanding of the culture and community” (P3) where they study, then these values will extend to the various work milieus where they may be leaders in the future. Sustainability education is essential in shaping people’s capacity to make choices that encourage values such as “respect” (P4), “honesty and integrity” (P7) and “transparency” (P3) in the workplace.

#### **8.4.4 Curriculum content linked to SDG9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure**

- *Knowledge:* Technological innovation and advancements in events; Impacts of digitalisation on events; Technology as a tool for sustainable event management.
- *Skills:* Technological savviness; Able to utilise technology for event marketing and management; Change management; Creative thinking.
- *Values/Attitudes:* Appreciation for technological advancements that improve the environment, economy and society; Adaptability; Innovation.

Societal transformation, globalisation and fast evolving technologies have created a complex and uncertain event business environment (Werner and Ding, 2020). For this reason, “change management skills to deal with our ever-changing business environment” is essential (P2). Innovations are disrupting and impacting on meetings and events at an accelerated rate due to technological advancements and digital phenomena such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) (Werner and Ding, 2020). Students should undoubtedly learn how to embrace connectivity and utilise technology in events “which include but are not limited to AI (artificial intelligence), AR and VR, live streaming of events...and event apps” (P10). In terms of event marketing, “social media” have become important tools not only in creating general awareness for the event (P9), but also to educate stakeholders about the greening initiatives that form part of the event. P8 stated that, “the majority of youth think that because they grow up with technology, they know how to use it. They know all about self-promotion, but they have no idea how to effectively present a company on a [social media] platform. Technology should be used in the right ways to better your business”. This reiterates the need for students to learn how to use event specific technology and specialised applications as an integral part of event design and sustainable business operations.

Events are strongly impacted by the call for increased sustainable development and digitalisation (Ophoff, *et al.*, 2020). In fact, technological developments can significantly contribute to greener events, for example, it can be used to make venues

more energy-efficient and limit attendee travel via digital meeting platforms (Mair, 2014). Consequently, educators should support sustainability in the sector through technological skills development, and in that way contribute to enterprise development which has a positive impact on the economy and society. Adaptability is key in dealing with “the fourth industrial revolution, the unconventional conference and breaking the mould” and the only way to stay ahead of the game, is through the “constant realignment of goals and strategies” (P6). Similarly, creative thinking is required to integrate technology and implement sustainable event solutions. P1 noted that creative thinking can only be applied when students have an understanding of the workplace, and this can be achieved through “job-shadowing, site-inspections and on-site support” as part of industry exposure initiatives.

#### **8.4.5 Curriculum content linked to SDG13: Climate action**

- *Knowledge:* Importance of sustainability and how it applies to meetings and events; Green practices in events; Carbon footprint of events.
- *Skills:* Strategic thinking to develop green initiatives and mitigate the impact of events on sustainability; Planning for carbon-neutral events.
- *Values/Attitudes:* Commitment to environmental stewardship and climate ethics.

Climate change poses a threat to meeting and event destinations and environmental regulations at destinations increasingly demand that event planners make better use of resources and incorporate green initiatives (Holmes, *et al.*, 2015). Although there is “more talk about the SDGs in the event industry, people don’t always understand what it really entails, or how to put plans in place to deal with sustainability” (P5). In order to graduate with green skills, event students require extensive knowledge and understanding of “sustainability and greening, including the 17 SDGs” (P10). Climate change can influence economic success of events (Pelham, 2020) and understanding how to implement sustainable solutions to combat climate change requires “a complete mind shift” (P8). Many event practitioners are committed to incentivise attendees to embrace green event initiatives, for example, using public transport and enjoying plant-based menus at events (Budd and Palmer, 2020).

To really understand climate change and provide strategic solutions, students need “practical experience and knowledge related to the specific contexts where events take place” (P4). P5 reiterated that resource management and sustainability remain important issues on the meeting and event industry’s agenda and noted that there has

been “a lot of global focus on resource development and conservation incorporated into all facets of eventing and conferencing”. Therefore, academic content should include actual sustainability tools that is used in the industry, for example, the ISO 20121 which is considered the most appropriate ISO (International Organisation for Standardisation) standard for sustainable events (Pelham, 2020). Strategically applying such sustainability tools will enhance practical applications and reinforce industry knowledge amongst students. Future event practitioners should know where and how to source products and services for event participants that contribute to low carbon (Kitamura, *et al.*, 2020). When people gather for events, they use resources and generate waste and affect the environment, society, and the economy (Jones, 2018), but if managed sustainably, events offer a powerful platform to create awareness of green initiatives.

#### **8.4.6 Curriculum content linked to SDG17: Partnerships for the goals**

- *Knowledge:* Importance of knowledge sharing in events; Relationship between various role players in the meeting and event sector; Significance of relationship management and networking.
- *Skills:* Systems thinking; Communication; Networking and collaboration skills; Able to conduct meaningful research for the benefit of industry and community partners.
- *Values/Attitudes:* Sense of community; Values teamwork and knowledge sharing.

The meeting and event sector is complex and includes various types of events (Bladen and Kennell, 2014). To achieve KSVAs related to SDG17, it is firstly important for students to have “a good understanding of the industry as a whole” as well as how different role players work together to secure a bid, or stage an event, for example (P6). Understanding “how multifaceted this industry is and where you as the individual will fit into the industry” (P7), is an important aspect of systems thinking in event management. It is also crucial for students to understand the importance of maintaining good “relationships with suppliers” to produce successful events (P4). To ensure green events, many event organisers are committed to partner with preferred suppliers who have a sustainability track record (Budd and Palmer, 2020). Building relationships with sustainable partners are vital to ensure that green business practices filter through the entire events supply chain. “The industry suppliers are interlinked and depend on one another for success. If you run an event, you are part of one big team made up of individual companies working together to reach a common goal” (P8). Young event professionals should therefore understand that they are part of an interdependent

event ecosystem and recognise the value of teamwork to reach sustainability goals. Students should also understand “the importance of networking with local associations” (P1) and working with industry partners while studying. Meetings and events promote networking, collaboration and knowledge diffusion which leads to innovation and support educational outcomes (Foley, *et al.*, 2013). Students and industry should have meeting platforms and “networking events” where they can engage and share knowledge on relevant topics (P2). Partnerships between industry and universities may further benefit student learning in the form of volunteering and mentorship programmes, workplace exposure and research projects. For truly meaningful research partnerships, students and supervisors should “ask industry what research is lacking and what are the gaps in industry that need to be filled” (P3). When students and educators “speak to industry bodies and stakeholders to get an understanding of what research they require” (P7), it leads to better collaboration and support from the industry. It is equally important to collaborate with local communities for purposeful research that seeks to understand the potential impacts of events and how it affects them (Budd and Palmer, 2020).

#### **8.4.7 Exploratory viewpoints on COVID-19**

Adding to the preceding six key themes, the following viewpoints offer supplementary perspectives on sustainability considerations in the context of COVID-19. It seeks to illuminate any additional noteworthy aspects on the long-term sustainability of the meeting and event sector that may be of significance to curriculum development. It is reiterated that these viewpoints are included in the spirit of exploratory research in line with the aim of the paper.

There is little doubt that COVID-19 propelled technological innovation in events which can be linked to theme 4.4 (SDG9). “We have been pushed ten years into the future in terms of how we integrate technology into events” according to P6. “Video conferences and streaming services are a non-negotiable for events going forward as there will always be persons who will feel safer connecting via an online platform. The positive impact of this is that companies can reach larger audiences” (P10). “Hybrid events are here to stay, depending on what kind of event you are doing. Is it for a live experience? Is it for knowledge sharing, or is it a combination? That is going to determine whether it is online, face-to-face or hybrid” according to P6. Congruent with the rapid adoption of technology in events, skills related to “the IT and technical side of event organisation” have become more pertinent requirements in the workplace (P5). Substituting meetings and events with virtual platforms such as video

conferencing, makes the sector particularly vulnerable in terms of sustaining long-term business (Mair and Popely, 2019).

COVID-19 has impacted negatively on the economic sustainability of the event sector (linked to SDG 8). P4 explained that, “travel restrictions per country and gathering restrictions as outlined by governments have resulted in major job losses”. In addition, meetings and events have become “more expensive to host for both the supplier and the client due to the virtual inclusion of hybrid options which often mean that the cost is doubled to include both in-person and virtual delegates” (P10). P3 also shares the view that COVID-19 is “driving prices up as venues have to increase space to meet social distancing requirements, offer individualised food and beverages and purchase COVID-19 kits” among other implications. Interestingly, P3 highlighted that the COVID-19 crisis presents opportunities for local economic growth as people are increasingly “buying local” and focusing on supporting local suppliers and products “instead of purchasing international goods”. P10 shared that “suppliers are also more flexible than in the past with contract negotiations, deposit payments and delegate numbers” which is indicative of a new disposition towards economic support and goodwill in the sector. Concerns around environmental sustainability, linked to theme 4.5 (SDG13), include the increased need for individual food packaging and items such as sanitisers and masks to meet new health and safety requirements (P5 and P10). In an effort to be COVID-19 compliant, events are generating more waste thereby negating pre-COVID-19 event greening initiatives. P10 provides the following example referring to COVID-19 food packaging: “The 100 % compostable and renewable packaging is much more expensive than the single-use plastic versions and in a time where budgets are really stretched, it is often a difficult choice to make”.

COVID-19 has also emphasised the need for flexibility and networking skills among practitioners corresponding to theme 6 (SDG17). P10 provided the following context: “Overnight our halls and meeting rooms were empty, and the forward book cleared. In order to survive, we had to adapt, and most importantly, focus on relationships with our clients”. This is a challenge according to P4, as companies are “short staffed and working shorter hours to save money, but clients expect the same service”. Therefore, to flourish in the sector going forward, practitioners will require good relationship skills and flexibility. P10 reflected that people are more appreciative of human connection and many clients “cannot wait to gather and network in large groups again”. In future, creating valuable networking opportunities will become more important to stimulate the

sector as people will consider the “expenses versus benefits” of attending virtual vs face-to-face meetings (P3).

COVID-19 has impacted on the risk management protocols at both live events and the live components of hybrid events. The need for safe event spaces that meet COVID-19 related health and safety requirements has revealed “a skills void and created a new area for expertise” in event risk management (P3). The re-skilling of services in areas related to health and safety management have become more pertinent (P5 and P10) with new occupational roles such as COVID-19 marshals and event safety officers emerging corresponding to theme 4.1 (SDG3).

## **8.5 Conclusion**

The paper explored and utilised views from event professionals to embed sustainability in a meeting and event management curriculum; and in so doing, demonstrated how industry input can contribute to the fourth UN SDG, namely, quality education. The results revealed that reflective practice, with an emphasis on critical thinking, is an appropriate pedagogy to reinforce competencies related to sustainability and event education at Advanced Diploma level. The KSVAs could be linked to six key SDGs with the following associated implications:

*Good health and wellbeing (SDG3):* Knowledge and skills in health and safety management should utilise real risk management case studies and by implication, stimulate the critical thinking that is required for sustainability education. Case studies should consider the additional health and safety protocols required at events due to COVID-19 to enhance present-day practical application;

*Quality education (SDG4):* A mind-set of lifelong learning should be encouraged through industry mentorship initiatives to embolden necessary self-management skills. Service-learning projects where students can work with non-profit organisations to stage green events will enable learning by doing whilst contributing to the greater good of society. Educators should create comprehensive volunteering opportunities for students in partnership with industry mentors. In that way, students will be enabled to critically reflect on sustainability practices they observed whilst volunteering;

*Decent work and economic growth (SDG8):* Students should understand the economic influences and sustainability impacts related to events and, through critical analysis, be able to develop sustainable strategies in response. This could be accomplished by

incorporating reflective discussion papers on concepts such as the polarity of event sustainability in relation to economic growth vs environmental preservation, as an example. Diversity and respect are essential values required in the event workplace, and can be engendered through meaningful group projects reinforcing teamwork in the classroom;

*Industry innovation and infrastructure (SDG9):* Earnest consideration should be given to responsive innovation and technology content. On the one hand, digitalisation immensely supports the achievement of SDGs through green technologies and initiatives. On the other hand, the rapid integration of virtual components due to COVID-19, exposes the long-term sustainability of traditional face-to-face event companies. It is therefore vital that curriculum content incorporates sustainability aspects related to the digitalisation of events. Critical skills to embed include technological savviness, change management, and adaptability;

*Climate action (SDG13):* COVID-19 is impacting negatively on past gains made in the sector with regards to green event practices. Practical context should supplement theoretical content. Relevant sustainability tools used by event practitioners, for example ISO 20121, should be integrated in the curriculum content. Students should not only be able to implement these tools, but also critically analyse and apply them to new contexts such as COVID19; and

*Partnerships for the goals (SDG17):* Systems thinking skills are required to manage the complex issues involved with the production of sustainable events in unison with industry and community stakeholders. Meaningful partnerships between educators, students, industry and the community are essential to engender KSVAs related to sustainability education in events. For example, academic experiential learning projects could be aligned with industry CSR projects to uplift underprivileged communities. Educators will do well to harness these partnerships to engender sustainable event management KSVAs for the benefit of the broader community, economy and environment.

Although input was garnered in a South African context, the curriculum competencies linked to SDGs, are sufficiently flexible to allow for adaptations in a variety of academic settings. Limitations of the study relate to difficulties in generalising the findings to larger populations, therefore findings can only be suggestive. Academic course evaluations come with the limitation that industry cannot always discern the level of

competence required at various qualification levels and surface-level descriptions of KSVAs may be provided despite the opportunity for detailed, open-ended responses. Further research is recommended among industry sustainability champions to understand how meetings and events should be managed to attain the UN SDGs. This should be followed by an inquiry as to how appropriate event education pedagogies can be applied to reinforce sustainability competencies in academic qualifications.

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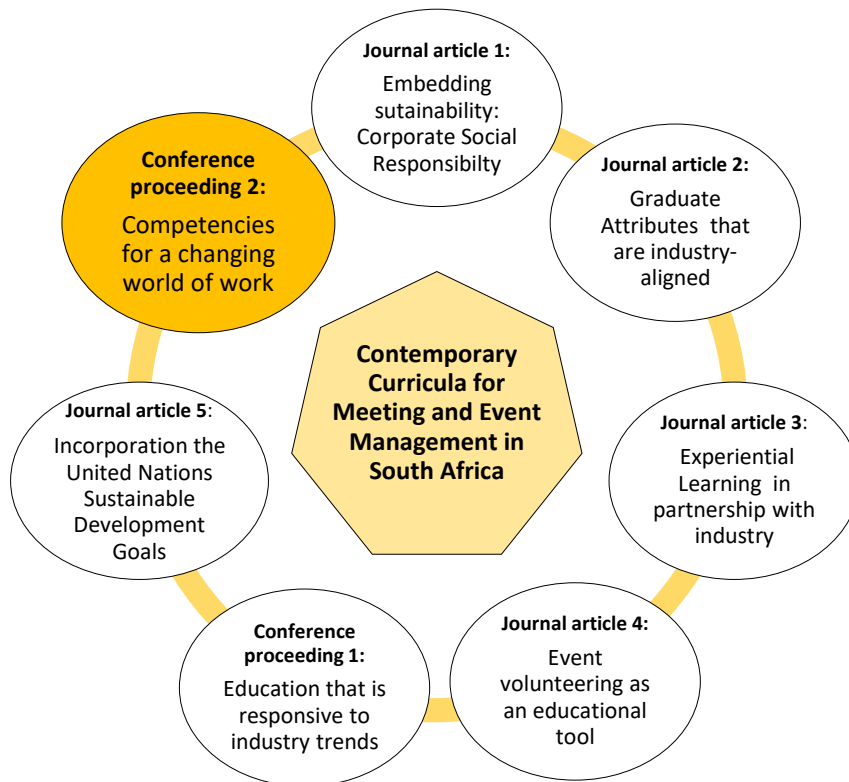
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**CHAPTER 9  
(CONFERENCE PROCEEDING 2)  
THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL BUSINESS  
EVENT MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM**

Figure 9.1 illustrates how conference proceeding 2 (Chapter 9) forms part of the coherent body of work related to the development of contemporary curricula.



**Figure 9.1: Contemporary curricula for meeting and event management in response to industry requirements (Competencies for a changing world of work)**

**(Researcher's construct)**

**9.0 Abstract**

Innovation, responsive and 'responsible' curricula, sustainability, citizenship and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are but a few of the aspects in Higher Education (HE) impacting on curriculum development (Beeton & Morrison, 2019; Getz & Page, 2016; Mair, 2018; Sheldon & Fesenmaier, 2015). In addition to this, the COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted on the event tourism industry of South Africa due to subsequent lockdown and travel restrictions affecting mobility and the attendance of gatherings (Bartis, et al., 2021). As a result, the landscape of business events, a key socio-economic subsector of the country's tourism industry, has forever changed. Gaining industry viewpoints from business event professionals

are vital to ensure vocational context and curriculum relevancy as occupational needs in event management shift (Frost & Gronow, 2019). The aim of this paper is to explore the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business event sector and the implications thereof on Business Event Management curriculum. This study is exploratory in nature and utilised qualitative methodology to analyse data (Creswell, 2014) generated from purposive interviews with key business event industry informants in South Africa during curriculum development at a University of Technology prior to the pandemic between 2015 and 2019, and during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. From the findings broad event management knowledge areas and specialisations emerge that have implications on the forms of conceptual and contextual knowledge, programme design decisions, exit level outcomes, graduate attributes and subjects. The findings provide an overview of the key lessons learnt in a South African context for responsive business event management curriculum. The study concludes that the alignment of curriculum outcomes to contemporary competencies required in the workplace can support occupational progression and the recovery of the sector during and after the COVID-19, and in so doing, advance the long-term sustainability of the sector.

## **9.1 Introduction**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the business events industry, also referred to as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), was recognised globally as a growing, lucrative sub-sector of tourism. In 2018 business event tourism contributed ZAR115 billion to South-Africa's economy (Meetings Africa, 2020) and supported over 250 000 direct and indirect jobs (Naicker, 2018). A variety of business events organisers, suppliers and services are involved in developing and delivering MICE events that achieve a range of business, professional, cultural and academic objectives across many sectors (Joint Meetings Council, 2020). Specialised knowledge and skills are required for these industry professions which have accelerated the development and establishment of academic qualifications in the field (Stone, et al., 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the business events industry of South Africa due to subsequent lockdown and travel restrictions limiting mobility and the attendance of gatherings (Bartis, et al., 2021). The cancellations and postponements of events had a negative effect on revenues and jobs. Professionals were forced to be innovative and embrace virtual eventing and technology to remain sustainable (Madray, 2020). COVID-19 has had a significant impact not only on the business

events industry, but also on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that offer related qualifications. As industry works towards business event sector recovery, academics should also ask themselves what the 'new normal' will look like? Gaining industry viewpoints from business event professionals are vital to ensure vocational context and curriculum relevancy as occupational needs in event management shift (Frost & Gronow, 2019).

The aim of this paper is to explore the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business events industry and the implications thereof on curriculum. Emphasis is placed on knowledge and skills requirements, emerging occupations and experiential learning issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper hopes to contribute to current discussions related to curriculum renewal that may be of value to industry and academics concerned with the post-pandemic recovery and transformation of the sector.

## **9.2 Literature review**

In light of the devastation caused by COVID-19, educators in the field of business events management have a crucial role to play in the recovery and long-term sustainability of the industry. Prior to the pandemic, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), innovation, responsiveness, sustainability and citizenship have been pertinent to event management curriculum research and development (Beeton & Morrison, 2019; Getz & Page, 2016; Mair, 2018). At present, further research is required to facilitate curriculum renewal in the disrupted, post-pandemic events environment. Educators need to understand the transformed industry context and look at ways to think outside-the-box and develop authentic learning experiences for students (Dean & Campbell, 2020).

Education in event management experienced continued growth in popularity and importance before the pandemic (Pardon & Stone, 2019). However, there has been a shift in educational needs as most emerging jobs in business events are demanding new and higher skills levels. The ability to reskill and upskill students in the wake of COVID-19 is not only essential, but also an economic imperative (Kandri, 2020). The acquisition of new skills to cope with technological advancements and evolving client expectations is not novel. However, the pandemic has fast-tracked the digitalisation through virtual and hybrid eventing (Solaris, 2020) and introduced drastic new health and safety measures at events (Ponting, 2021). Educators have to prepare students for careers in a rapidly changing business events environment.

Responsive curriculum is needed for graduates to develop adequate, transferable knowledge and skills and adapt to changes in the world of work (Jackson, et al., 2019). Digitalisation and remote working are not new notions in industry or academia. However, these trends were accelerated by the pandemic resulting in the wide-spread adoption of a digitalised 'new normal'. Whilst academia braced for (and ultimately embraced) the over-all transformation and implementation of virtual and blended learning models (Kandri, 2020), business event professionals had to rethink event strategies for survival in a globally disrupted, virtualised environment. Issues like business continuity, the monetisation of future events and reducing pandemic-based risks at live events have become central to long-term event sustainability (Russel, 2020). It has been widely accepted that hybrid events are here to stay (Solaris, 2020) and whilst it is certain that virtual events do have a place in the future, it is not likely to replace the need for in-person events (Getz & Page, 2019). Among academics, there is a more widely shared appreciation for digital tools as complements, and not substitutes, of face-to-face education (Kim, 2020). Headway has been made towards designing educational programmes in collaboration with event industry partners in the past (Davidson, 2019) and COVID-19 has created an unprecedented opportunity for curriculum content and delivery to align with the transformation of a future-forward business events industry in blended learning environments.

Students need agility and skills in creativity and innovation for the careers of the future (Thompson & Cook, 2019). Professionals in event management typically fulfil occupational rolls such as event bidding, planning, organising, producing and servicing (Getz & Page, 2019) and event graduates should be able to transfer related knowledge and skills to be able to work across various MICE establishments such as venues, convention bureaus and destination marketing companies (Davidson, 2019). Event organisation, communication, business relationship management, decision-making and health and safety management has been highlighted as significant competencies for success in the industry (Van der Wagen & White, 2018). Business events management often require the planning of large-scale international meetings or exhibitions that are learning- or trade-related whilst incentive events are focused around entertainment and rewards (Goulston, 2020). In order to successfully produce such a variety of events, professionals are compelled to harness their creative and organisational capabilities (Van der Wagen & White, 2015). Specific to business events, is the need for people skills to negotiate and build supplier and customer

relationships and sustainable event management competencies to boost the sustainability credentials increasingly sought by clients (Davidson, 2019).

The expanded role of technology in events have had a profound impact on the business events industry requiring event professionals to adopt digitalisation in almost all spheres of event management. This in turn has stimulated the need for flexibility, problem-solving and excellent communication and people skills (Eventbrite, 2021).

Emergent during the pandemic is the need for knowledge and skills related to the design and implementation of virtual and hybrid event experiences as well as COVID-related safety management (Solaris, 2021). Knowledge and understanding of pandemic-related health and safety protocols have become significant in building confidence in the sector. Indeed, as world economies gain momentum post-pandemic, business events provide the perfect structure to drive recovery by bringing people and businesses together to meet in safe environments (Goulston, 2020). Companies are expanding their teams to include new specialist roles in the areas of virtual and hybrid eventing and COVID-19 safety (Hoffman, 2021).

Emerging occupations include virtual event and technology specialists, virtual experience managers, on-site safety experts and risk assessors (Hoffman, 2021; Whitehorne, 2020). Job opportunities have also arisen due to the so-called 'brain-drain' whereby experienced event experts have left the industry in search of job security in other sectors during times of uncertainty, taking with them substantial knowledge and skills (Copans, 2021).

It is ideal for industry and educators to collaborate, not only in the design, but also the delivery of curricular activities such as experiential learning (Jackson, et al., 2019). Prior to the pandemic experiential learning through internship placement provided allowed knowledge and skills application in business event settings (Davidson, 2019). This enabled learning-by-doing in authentic work-spaces. In business events, both the constructs of work and education has changed drastically due to the pandemic and it is inevitable that experiential learning, which links these two worlds, have been impacted. It may be useful to remove the idea of actual events and workstations as the only place where practical experience can be gained. In a post-pandemic environment, the focus should rather be on 'practice' as opposed to 'place'. "When we focus on practice, it centralises what students do to assume the authentic roles of a professional rather than where they do it and opens possibilities for student participation in virtual, physical or hybrid spaces of learning" (Dean & Campbell, 2020:361).

### 9.3 Methodology

This qualitative study explored the viewpoints of business event professionals as part of ongoing curriculum renewal at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in Cape Town, South Africa. The Southern African Association for the  
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Conference Industry (SAACI) is recognised as the country's official business events association. Therefore, purposive sampling was utilised to select participants with SAACI membership in senior positions across a spectrum of business events companies (Table 9.1). Qualitative data was initially generated through interviews with 10 key informants (Creswell, 2014) in 2018-2019 prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interviews were conducted again in 2020-2021 to explore the changing needs in the world of work in light of the pandemic. Building rapport is crucial in qualitative interviews as it contributes to comfortable interactions enabling participants to provide rich information (McGrath, et al., 2019). A sense of proximity was established between the researcher and participants during the 2018-2019 interviews making it easier to follow up and gain related, meaningful responses from the same participants in 2020-2021 (P1-P8). As a result of the pandemic, two of the original participants (P9 and P10) were no longer in a position to participate, and two new participants (P11 and P12) were interviewed in 2020–2021 to reach data saturation.

**Table 9.1: Business event companies (where linked to participants)**

Participants (2018–2019)	Participants (2020–2021)
P1: Professional Conference Organisation	P1
P2: International MICE Association	P2
P3: Convention and Event Centre	P3
P4: Convention Bureau	P4
P5: International Convention Centre	P5
P6: Destination Management Company	P6
P7: Conference and Incentive Travel	P7
P8: Stage and Production Design	P8
P9: Event Consultation and Training	P11: Conference and Functions Venue
P10: Event Project Management	P12: Audio-visual and Technical Production

**(Researcher’s construct)**

Table 9.2 presents an overview of how the qualitative data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was applied. In qualitative data analysis “the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (Creswell & Poth, 2018:186).

**Table 9.2: Data analysis spiral application**

Data analysis spiral →	Procedure →	Application ↓
Starting point ↓	Data collecting	Interviews generated data
Loop 1 ↓	Data managing	Data transcripts were organised electronically
Loop 2 ↓	Reading / Memoing	Transcripts were read and reflected upon / Notes were made
Loop 3 ↓	Describing / Classifying	Codes were classified into categories
Loop 4 ↓	Interpreting	Inferences were drawn and correlated to literature
Exit point	Presenting / Narrating the account	Propositions were developed and presented via tables and verbatim quotes

**[Researcher’s construct: adapted from Creswell & Poth (2018)]**

As a validation strategy and in order to present the narrative account in a collective table format, a focus group with participants was convened to endorse consensus of the collective viewpoints. Ethical research practices included informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality (Brinkmann, & Kvale, 2018).

#### 9.4 Results and discussion

The results provide an overview of viewpoints shared from participants in the South African context with a focus on the business event management curriculum renewal. Collective viewpoints are tabulated supported by selected verbatim quotes in the discussion.

##### 9.4.1 Category 1: Knowledge areas

The comparison between the knowledge and skills requirements pre-pandemic (2018-2019) and during/post pandemic (2020-2021) may prove to be meaningful to the industry and the education sector in referencing significant areas of recovery.

A comparison is presented in Table 9.3 of the knowledge areas highlighted as pertinent to the success of business event management.

**Table 9.3: Knowledge areas**

Participants (2018-2019)	Participants (2020-2021)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislation and regulations related to Health and Safety</li> <li>• Understanding the business events industry and role players</li> <li>• Marketing strategies including digital marketing</li> <li>• Computer literacy</li> <li>• Financial and budget management</li> <li>• Risk management</li> <li>• Site planning</li> <li>• Project planning</li> <li>• Sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legislation and regulations related to Health and Safety</li> <li>• COVID-19 protocols</li> <li>• Understanding the context of how the sector has changed and the role of different suppliers</li> <li>• Marketing management</li> <li>• Digital and software platforms</li> <li>• Hybrid vs virtual events</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship and creating different revenue streams</li> <li>• Space planning and management</li> </ul>

##### **(Researcher’s construct)**

Noticeably, sustainability did not emerge as a knowledge area during the 2020-2021 participant interviews. Prior to COVID-19, it was considered as significant conceptual knowledge area (2018-2019). P3 expressed the importance of “really understanding sustainability and greening, carbon footprint and more” in event management. Sustainable and green events seek to balance the environmental, social and economic imperative associated with events (Toneva, 2017). COVID-19 provided event

professionals with an unprecedented opportunity advance sustainability in events through virtual platform engagement requiring less resources. However, sustainability inefficiencies have also surfaced, or rather resurfaced, as a result of the pandemic. For example, the increased use of hand-sanitisers, disposable masks and single-use plastic have had a detrimental effect on gains made in venue waste management and on the environment. It is not possible to re-use or recycle many of these items. Rigorous health and safety standards and green event practices can be compatible with COVID-19 regulations (Sustainable Event Alliance, 2020). According to P9, “understanding sustainability and how to implement it takes a complete mind-shift”, and educators have a role to play in bolstering sustainable event knowledge and application as the industry reactivates Hybrid and in-person events.

In the 2020-2021 interviews emphasis was placed on knowledge related to the digitalisation of events including the differentiation between virtual and hybrid events, whilst 2018-2019 participants concurred merely on the need for digital marketing and computer literacy at the time. In this new world of work students “need to be knowledgeable in online platforms, these platforms are upgraded weekly and we need specialists in these fields” (P12). P2 provided further context in that “technology has a huge role to play as we have seen in the deep dark days of COVID. Technology has a role in augmenting the event hosting experience for the clients in that delegates unable to attend events physically, are able to join online. Technology also allows potential clients to do virtual site visits of venues and make quick decisions on them without having to travel to the venue, saving on time and money”.

Site planning (2018-2019) now includes the understanding of space management and planning (2020-2021) related to venue limitations as a result of social distancing and more stringent venue capacity management systems. Understanding the event business environment (2018-2019) has shifted to understanding how the business environment has changed (2020-2021). Whilst legislation related to health and safety management are highlighted both prior and during the pandemic, in the latter, it is emphasised with the inclusion of COVID-19 protocols.

Understanding financial and budget management systems was pertinent for participants prior to COVID-19. P7 used questions to elaborate on the complexity of budgets, “Did you make sure you covered every aspect of the event in the budget? What elements are included in the bid that makes you stand out from others? Were you creative in your approach with added value but still within budget?” Hybrid events

are more complex and expensive than in-person events as it often utilises more than one physical venue with added production staff and virtual platform costs (Carey, 2021). However, participants (2020-2021) rather highlighted the understanding of entrepreneurship and how to create additional revenue streams as important business acumen.

#### 9.4.2 Category 2: Skills requirements

Table 9.4 indicates the soft and technical skills that emerged from participant interviews prior to (2018-2019) and during (2020-2021) the pandemic.

**Table 9.4: Skills requirements**

Participants (2018-2019)	Participants (2020-2021)
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Soft skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication</li> <li>▪ Leadership</li> <li>▪ Time and deadline management</li> <li>▪ Working in a team</li> <li>▪ People management and understanding client needs</li> <li>▪ Time management</li> <li>▪ Problem-solving</li> <li>▪ Decision-making</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Soft skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Communication</li> <li>▪ Leadership</li> <li>▪ Time management</li> <li>▪ Multi-tasking</li> <li>▪ People skills such as empathy</li> <li>▪ Flexibility and adaptability</li> <li>▪ Innovation to solve problems creatively</li> <li>▪ Ability to self-market and self-promote</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Technical skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Social media and digital marketing</li> <li>▪ Site inspection and on-site management</li> <li>▪ Risk mitigation implementation</li> <li>▪ Legacy implementation</li> <li>▪ Project management</li> <li>▪ Crisis management</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Technical skills</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ IT skills and technological savviness</li> <li>▪ Technical ability to run online and hybrid events</li> <li>▪ Presentation skills to create and present via numerous platforms</li> <li>▪ Data management and analysis</li> <li>▪ COVID-19 Safety implementation</li> </ul>

#### **(Researcher's construct)**

According to Russel (2020), the ability to design virtual events and align in-person event experiences with COVID-19 protocols have become vital technical skills in business events. Likewise, participants (2020-2021) viewed technical savviness and skills related to running online events as important, whereas participants (2018-2019) prior to the pandemic mentioned social media and digital marketing skills. This can be ascribed to the fact that digital marketing is widely used to boost in-person events and full-on virtual eventing was still on the periphery of business events at the time.

The participants (2020-2021) viewed time management, and people skills as important soft skills, which may be appreciated against the backdrop of working remotely in senior level positions. P6 explained that one should have the “ability to work in one’s own space and feedback clearly and effectively” to your team with a “willingness to go the extra mile, both for the client but also for your colleagues. It is a team effort and a close-knit work environment. You should have respect for the hours your colleagues work and the pressure that is on them all the time”. These soft skills were also highlighted in 2018-2019 albeit more task-orientated as expressed by P8, “I would place emphasis on the planning process of the event and the importance of timelines and deadlines which is a great way to eliminate risk”.

Leadership skills are linked to soft skills such as communication, accountability and commitment and should be incorporated in academic event management programmes (Padron & Stone, 2019). Correspondingly, P9 stated that students need to display leadership with “true communication skills. We have a lot of managers out there, but they lack an understanding of how to communicate”. These skills were prominently mentioned in interviews both prior to and during the pandemic, where the latter participants (2020-2021) emphasised communication skills for virtual settings, that is, the “ability to communicate across technology platforms” (P6). Related to this is “data analytics to understand the consumer better, communicate better with the consumer and engage directly with the customer”. The MICE industry is distinctively designed for organisations and individuals that attend events for the purposes of networking, knowledge transfer, lead generation and sales (Disimulacion, 2020). The digitalisation of events has allowed for “lead generation databases to be created instantaneously” (P6) unlocking the potential for sponsors, speakers, clients and event companies to meet objectives through unprecedented access to big data, therefore data analysis and management was regarded as significant amongst participants (2020-2021).

#### **9.4.3 Category 3: Emerging occupations**

Table 9.5 shares participant viewpoints (2020-2021) related to emerging occupations and job opportunities as a result of changes in the business event workplace due to the pandemic. Responses could be classified under two areas, namely, technology and health and safety.

**Table 9.5: Emerging occupations**

Participants (2018-2019)	Participants (2020-2021)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Event technical production manager</li> <li>▪ Event Information Technology (IT)</li> <li>▪ Audio-visual (AV) specialist</li> <li>▪ Event technician</li> <li>▪ Digital Event Specialist</li> <li>▪ Virtual event organiser</li> <li>▪ Hybrid conference / event organiser</li> <li>▪ Data analyst / manager</li> <li>▪ Marketing and PR consultant</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Event safety officer</li> <li>▪ Event safety professional / consultant</li> <li>▪ COVID-19 safety officer</li> <li>▪ Health risk officer</li> <li>▪ Events Compliance Officer</li> </ul>

**(Researcher’s construct)**

The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated the need for occupations related to event technology and health and safety management. To reactivate the sector and drive recovery, the business events industry has had to embrace virtual and hybrid events (Solaris, 2020). P2 explained that, “due to limitations on capacity in venues, we’re starting to see new opportunities in companies offering hybrid event services”. P6 noted that the “workplace is moving more online with job opportunities to support this in AV and IT production” and according to P12, there is a “greater need for skilled AV staff and technicians, because hybrid events are the new norm”. Online event platforms are rapidly evolving to offer comprehensive event solutions such as networking solutions alongside registration, ticketing, live streaming and gamification (Wolff, 2021). P1 explained that “it is no longer just the web, abstract and registration portal. We need to rely fully on technology to run two- to three-day conferences with speakers and delegates around the world in different time zones”. The digitalisation of events has unlocked unprecedented access to big data that can be leveraged to deliver exceedingly personalised events, boost sponsorship returns on investment and enhance attendee engagement (Ewen, 2019). P3 explained that data analytics are vital to “understand consumers better, communicate better with consumers, and engage directly with consumers”.

Event safety and compliance officers are in demand as in-person and hybrid event attendance gain momentum under strict capacity and safety restrictions. Ensuring that delegates feel safe and confident will be crucial in driving future in-person event attendance. It is therefore necessary for event professionals to prioritise and implement stringent health and safety measures as the reputation of event brands will be largely dependent on effective health and safety management (Solaris, 2021). Due to retrenchments and staff shortages, P11 stated that there is “redeployment of staff to other divisions” often as ad-hoc COVID-19 safety officers. However, health and

safety at events have intensified and “we need to upskill current staff and ensure that all safety protocol material can be drawn up and it should be made available for students” (P12). Industry associations in South Africa have collaborated to develop the Event Safety Council (ESC) Reopening Guidelines to guide COVID-19 protocol implementation alongside existing risk management legislation (ESC, 2020).

#### **9.4.4 Category 4: Experiential learning**

Prior to the pandemic, participants (2018-2019) concurred that experiential learning via internships and working in live event settings are imperative for students to gain industry experience and reinforce practical knowledge application. P6 stated that students have to be in-house, because “the best way for event managers to learn, is to be a part of the planning and coordination of an event from start to finish”. All the participants mentioned the importance of experiential learning to gain a deep understanding of the business events with P4 highlighting the importance of sector-wide “internships with local PCOs (professional conference organisers), convention centres and convention bureaus”. P7 reiterated that “the industry is completely different in theory than in practice. Students need practical experience and knowledge” that can only be gained in the workplace.

According to Dean & Campbell (2020), experiential learning should be viewed as preparing for the workforce, as opposed to the workplace. P3 suggested enhanced industry engagement with students through, “site visits to industry suppliers with Q&A sessions” and by doing “actual case studies including contracts from suppliers which can be used as exercises for students to manage and present afterwards, with actual organisers giving feedback and evaluating” the project. When industry professionals are invited to collaborate in educational initiatives, students are better prepared for the world of work (Mei, 2019). In contemporary times, HEIs have to reconsider alternative experiential learning options. Internship placements should not be seen as the “only solution to authentic work practice when work practice itself continues to shift and is enabled by technology” (Dean & Campbell, 2020:360). In the 2020-2021 interviews, this shift is clearly expressed by P6 who stated that HEIs need to “rethink practical exposure, as internships are not feasible”. All participants were in agreement that “taking interns are challenging” (P11). In the wake of COVID-19, P5 offered the sobering explanation that “the challenge we have is that we don’t have time to mentor; staff that are left are doing two jobs due to huge retrenchments”. Similarly, P4 stated that “internships need to be revised, it does not work, employees are working from home”. As the sector recovers, more workplace-based internship opportunities will

become available. However, academics should embrace the opportunity presented by digitalisation to pivot in sync with industry to develop innovative approaches for experiential learning in these new business event contexts.

## **9.5 Conclusions**

The aim of this paper was to explore the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business events industry and the implications thereof on curriculum. The findings highlight the importance of knowledge and skills in relation to the virtualisation of events and COVID-19 health and safety management. Emerging occupations include virtual and hybrid event specialists, data analysts and health and safety professionals. New opportunities for experiential learning should be created to contextualise learning in transformed business event operations. The following implications with related recommendations are emphasised:

Knowledge and skills related to COVID-19 health and safety are required in addition to existing risk management issues associated with gatherings at live business events. The inclusion of regularly updated industry resources, for example, the SEC Reopening Guidelines, may assist educators to design responsive curriculum content. Vaccination passports, COVID-testing and space planning for social distancing are but a few of the emerging considerations impacting future event organisation at live events. Innovative platforms for knowledge sharing with industry professionals should be created to understand the practical implementation of event-related COVID-19 issues and protocols as they evolve.

Future event professionals should possess digital fluidity and technological savviness to effectively navigate and manage virtual and hybrid events and applications. Highlighted are knowledge and skills related to all aspects of hybrid and virtual event planning and production. The challenge for academia is limited technological or financial resources to support in-depth virtual and hybrid event education in the classroom. Hybrid events require advanced infrastructure and technical production support as evidenced by venues revamping spaces to offer hybrid eventing solutions alongside traditional in-person events. Blended learning approaches with industry as facilitators and co-creators of content may provide meaningful platforms to enhance the contextual understanding of virtual and hybrid eventing.

The practical application of knowledge in virtual or simulated settings can reinforce the new technological competencies required for the evolving, digitalised workplace.

Experiential learning via industry mentorship may include support in planning a virtual event utilising industry-based digital platforms. Industry association membership can further facilitate collaborative networking and provide access to mentorship opportunities. Changes in the business environment demand competencies in entrepreneurship, creativity, communication and teamwork, these attributes can be embedded in actual virtual event management group projects that is co-mentored by educators and professionals.

Sustainable and green event management should not be relegated due to the pandemic. The assumption that virtual events are green by virtue of their nature, fails to recognise the socio-economic impact of event digitalisation on host destinations in South Africa. For example, communities that supply local products and services to business events are largely dependent on high-volume, in-person attendance. The embedment of knowledge and skills related sustainable event management in new business event contexts enables not only responsive, but also responsible curriculum.

The study's limitations are acknowledged in that data was generated from qualitative interviews with a snapshot of participants, and thus, the views are not necessarily generalisable. Nevertheless, the study is the first to provide some industry insights on changes in South Africa's business events industry that affect related curriculum due to COVID-19 and may be of value to industry and academics concerned with skills development for post-pandemic recovery. Further research is recommended to analyse job descriptions of emerging event occupations in alignment with graduate competencies and the implications of digitalised eventing on event management education.

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## CHAPTER 10 GENERAL DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

### 10.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions of the study in line with the article-format thesis guidelines (Annexure A). The chapter therefore summarises and discusses the findings as they relate to the key research objectives announced in the introductory chapter. The conclusions are drawn in such a way as to demonstrate the interrelatedness of the DHET-accredited research publications that comprise the body of the study (Chapters 3 to 9). The achievement of the study's research objectives is reviewed, and a summative account of the overall scope, methodology and findings of the research publications is presented. The chapter then provides a general discussion of the implications of the study for vocational business event curricula in the South African context and expands on further recommendations relating to the objectives of the study. The meeting and event management curriculum topics identified from the findings are mapped onto the international EMBOK model and the overall contribution of the research is summarised. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research directions.

### 10.2 Review of the research objectives of the study

The primary aim of the study was to determine and develop responsive strategies for the design of contemporary vocational meeting and event management curricula in South Africa in line with industry requirements. This overall aim was fulfilled in **Chapters 3 to 9** through exposition of the findings of the seven research publications. These findings contribute in their various ways to the development of industry-responsive curriculum strategies for vocational meeting and event management qualifications. The objectives of the study were:

- **Objective 1:** To understand how industry practitioners in the business event sector perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) in relation to sustainability, and to establish mutually beneficial partnerships between university educators and industry stakeholders to embed CSR in business event curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa. This objective was achieved in **journal article 1 (Chapter 3)**.
  
- **Objective 2:** To ascertain the graduate attributes and personal skills that are fundamental to success in the South African business event management sector; to

explore the expectations of employers regarding workplace skills; and to understand how graduates perceive their personal competency levels in relation to industry-specific graduate attributes. The objective of gaining perspectives to guide the development of a responsive event-management curriculum was achieved in **journal article 2 (Chapter 4)**.

- **Objective 3:** To understand how students experience Experiential Learning (EL) as part of a formal, vocational event-management qualification in South Africa, and to propose a framework to consolidate the mentorship role of industry and academic supervisors at workplace-based internships in the development of a more responsive business-event tourism curriculum. This objective was achieved in **journal article 3 (Chapter 5)**.
  
- **Objective 4:** To adopt a student-centered approach by seeking students' perspectives on the educational value of volunteering at business events, and to establish how volunteering might be utilised in curriculum development to enhance students' knowledge and skills in partnership with the business events industry. This objective was achieved in **journal article 4 (Chapter 6)**.
  
- **Objective 5:** To examine the trends in the MICE sector, and to determine the implications of these trends for responsive curriculum development in the South African context. This objective was achieved in **conference proceedings paper 1 (Chapter 7)**.
  
- **Objective 6:** To explore the viewpoints of industry professionals regarding aspects of sustainability derived from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). The aim is to develop meeting and event management curricula that are supportive of the SDGs, responsive to industry needs and contribute to quality education. This objective was achieved in **journal article 5 (Chapter 8)**.
  
- **Objective 7:** To understand the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business events industry because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to determine the implications thereof for the development of curricula capable of accommodating the knowledge and skills requirements of emerging occupations. This objective was achieved in **conference proceedings paper 2 (Chapter 9)**.

### **10.3 Summative integration of research publications**

Table 10.1, below, provides a summary of the research publications – touching on scope, methodology and key findings – that demonstrates their interrelatedness and integrity as a research study. In terms of methodology, the study has as a whole employed a qualitative research design that addresses the need for more data on stakeholder perceptions of various aspects of business events and business event management education (Draper et al., 2021:17; Le, 2022:15). The key findings of the publications collectively have implications for the design of an educational curriculum responsive to the needs of the contemporary business event industry.

**Table 10.1: Summary of the scope, methodology and key findings of research publications**

Publication	Scope	Methodology	Key findings
One (Ch. 3):	Sustainability: embedding Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Qualitative: 18 key informant interviews with business event practitioners	CSR is aligned to the industry's philanthropic values and holds financial and positive public image benefits. CSR can be socially beneficial by empowering the local community, developing skills, fundraising, forming partnerships and understanding community needs. CSR-orientated knowledge, skills and attitudes should form part of sustainability education in meeting and event management curricula. This can be bolstered via industry-academic partnerships on CSR projects, ethical business practice education and through critical thinking, reflection, and deep engagement with sustainability concepts.
Two (Ch. 4):	Graduate attributes, competencies, and workplace skills	Qualitative: DACUM focus group with seven (7) expert meeting and event practitioners and 20 key informant interviews with Event Management Diploma graduates	Graduate attributes and general areas of competence for an entry-level position as a Business Events Assistant relate to time and stress management, professional profile, and personal characteristics. Graduates should be able to handle stress and cope under pressure; be willing to learn; communicate effectively; manage multiple tasks simultaneously; manage their time appropriately; be flexible beyond typical working hours; and possess creativity and a flair for design.
Three (Ch. 5):	Industry exposure: Experiential Learning (EL)	Qualitative: Case study approach using two focus groups (18 participants in total) as well as eight (8) key informant interviews with Event Management Diploma students	Coaching in collaboration with industry partners is essential to develop much-needed soft skills such as conflict resolution and relationship management. Academic and industry supervisors should develop mentorship strategies to close the knowing-doing gap, thus enhancing student learning and boosting their on-the-job confidence. Educators should ensure that there is effective communication among stakeholders regarding EL expectations, and that workstation exposure is appropriately aligned with meeting and event management curriculum learning areas.
Four (Ch. 6):	Industry exposure: event volunteering	Qualitative: 15 key informant interviews with event student volunteers	Volunteering at business events provides students with the opportunity to gain practical experience and build their personal resumes. Student volunteers are motivated by more than monetary benefits and regard the positive legacy and sustainability aspects of an event as important. There are constraints to participating in event volunteering stemming from access to transportation to and from the event, and poor communication in terms of expectations and time limitations. Educators should work in collaboration with industry to ensure that knowledge and skills are transferred in a meaningful way and conceptual knowledge is applied in a real-world context.
Five (Ch. 7)	Business event industry trends	Qualitative: Nine (9) key informant interviews with business event practitioners	Meeting and event management educators should complement foundational knowledge and skills with relevant and evolving trends that impact contextual practice. Sustainability, technological advances, enhanced delegate experience and risk management relating to safety and security were highlighted as business event industry trends to take into consideration. A robust academic curriculum should include progressive topics and innovative research topics chosen in close collaboration with industry partners.
Six (Ch. 8)	Sustainability: embedding SDGs	Qualitative: 10 key informant interviews with top-level meeting and event professionals	Through reflective practice and critical thinking, competencies in respect of sustainability can be embedded in business event education. Knowledge, skills and values/attitudes in the meeting and event management curriculum were linked to: good health and well-being (SDG3); quality education (SDG4); decent work and economic growth (SDG8); industry innovation and infrastructure (SDG13); and partnerships for the goals (SDG17).
Seven (Ch. 9)	Competencies and curriculum implications for a changing business event landscape	Qualitative: 10 key informant interviews prior to Covid-19 (2018-2019) and 10 key informant interviews during Covid-19 (2020-2021)	Covid-19 has galvanised technological advances and virtualisation in the business event industry, with new specialisations such as virtual and hybrid event management emerging. Health, safety, and risk management have become more prominent aspects of meeting and event management. Changes in the business event landscape require competencies in creativity, entrepreneurship, communication, and teamwork. There are new opportunities for EL in the virtual event space, with representatives of industry acting as co-mentors to bolster technological savviness. Sustainability education should remain on the curriculum agenda and not be relegated while the industry focuses on post-pandemic recovery.

**(Researcher's construct)**

## **10.4 General discussion**

The general discussion in this section synthesises the overall findings of the research within the context of developments in the business event industry. These developments have significant practical implications for business event management curricula. The coherence among Chapters 3 to 9 is evident in the interrelated topics discussed below.

### **10.4.1 Graduate attributes, competencies, and professional skills**

The business event industry requires highly-trained and skilled graduates with the appropriate attributes to complement the growth of business event tourism and the subsequent development of destination capacity, such as infrastructure, to host successful events (Yodsuwan & Butcher, 2022:30). The key findings of the study (cf. Table 10.1) identify several graduate attributes and general areas of competence for students entering the world of work. Treleaven and Voola (2008:169) propose an integrated approach to ensure the effective inclusion of graduate attributes in university curricula.

Educators should carefully consider the attributes and workplace skills relevant to the business event industry, and graduate attributes should be constructively aligned with assessment. For example, the assessment of teamwork, leadership, communication, and ethics (cf. Chapter 3; Chapter 7; Chapter 9) may be included in group work projects. Collaboration between industry and academia can make sure that the development of graduate attributes is a part of course content by aligning the presentation of that content with how students might encounter it in real life or during on-the-job training (cf. Chapter 5; Chapter 6). Educators are responsible for explicitly advancing awareness of the value of graduate attributes among students (Barrie, 2012:81). For this reason, graduate attributes should be pertinently mapped onto subject guides and lesson plans as learning outcomes.

Substantial opportunities for students to engage in problem-solving, critical reflection and critical thinking activities are essential (CHE, 2013:19). Cultivating relevant graduate attributes will contribute to quality staff in the sector, which may be leveraged as a competitive advantage for South Africa when the country is bidding against other destinations for lucrative business events (Huang & Chung, 2016:123). Resilience has become more prominent as a graduate attribute as the business event landscape has changed post-Covid-19 (Chapter 9). Coherent resilience training tools and content will thus need to be developed as part of a responsive curriculum. It is also important that teaching, learning and assessment are designed to support students' needs, strengths,

and contexts. This is highly pertinent to resilience issues faced by South Africa's business event industry such as political uncertainty, safety and security concerns, and unreliable infrastructure.

Because graduate attributes are sometimes indistinguishable from workplace competencies and professional skills (Winberg et al., 2018:234), it is prudent to consider the skills required for success in the business event industry. These include organisational skills and attention to detail, effective business communication, networking abilities, multi-tasking skills and technological savviness (Cvent, 2021). Although these workplace competencies were pertinent prior to the pandemic, they have escalated in importance during and after the Covid-19 pandemic for various reasons, most notably rapid technological change (Chapter 4; Chapter 7; Chapter 9). Since the resources commanded by vocational training institutions are too limited for them fully to embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution, greater clarity regarding industry requirements for digital literacy may help to address curriculum renewal efforts by identifying the most relevant and realistic competencies. Improved dialogue across the industry-academia divide and industry exposure opportunities to close the knowing-doing gap will also help to ensure that graduates meet current and future workplace skills requirements (cf. Chapter 5; Chapter 6; Chapter 9).

#### **10.4.2 Sustainability education for business events: Embedding CSR and SDGs**

The embrace of CSR and SDGs may broadly be defined as the voluntary adoption of organisational practices aimed at the advancement of sustainability domains relating to the environment, business event clients, employees, and society at large (Bunlueng & Butcher, 2022:97). Although there has been widescale adoption of CSR, embedding CSR practices and policies in business events and education remains challenging. This can be remedied to some extent by a thorough understanding of the context of the business event or organisation. Practitioners should have the skills and capability to measure the success and performance of CSR practices in relation to their context. This will enable suitable decision-making that will be of value to business events and society in terms of long-term sustainability (Musgrave & Woodward, 2016:378). In the South African context, this result will require the ability to conduct a sustainability-orientated situation analysis to determine the needs of the host destination and identify CSR projects and partnerships that may be integrated to enhance the socio-economic and environmental legacy of meetings and events (cf. Chapter 3; Chapter 8).

After the widespread, negative socio-economic effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on both the business event industry and local communities, meeting and event

practitioners are searching for more ways to infuse the return of in-person events with a sense of purpose and social responsibility (Donoho, 2021). In the wake of this world-shifting crisis, educators and industry practitioners should make the most of the fact that people (and prospective clients) are seeking ways not only to reconnect with one another but also to strengthen and rebuild communities through meetings and events. While industry may use the opportunity to improve CSR initiatives at business events, educators can provide meeting and event management students with the ability to take ownership of practical CSR initiatives as part of event projects with measurable performance criteria linked to learning outcomes. Integrating CSR and ethics into well-designed curricula renders these concepts a natural and essential part of students' thought processes and capacity to work towards a sustainable and inclusive economy. Experience in green practices and knowledge of the benefits thereof are essential for the adoption and implementation of meaningful CSR policies and projects by graduate students when they enter the world of work. They should be strong advocates of CSR and well-versed in comprehensive, system-wide processes to embed CSR into everyday business event operations (Bunlueng & Butcher, 2022:105).

Collaboration and dialogue between academics and industry practitioners should be established to accelerate CSR integration in the curriculum. This could be done, for example, by organising interactive discussions and workshops involving academics, NGOs and business event practitioners to highlight relevant topics and promote CSR education (Mahameed & Riaz, 2019:258). CSR, as part of sustainability education (cf. Chapter 3; Chapter 9), graduate attributes (cf. Chapter 4) and trends in a changing business event landscape (cf. Chapter 7; Chapter 9), has an important role to play in responsive meeting and event management curricula development.

Sustainability education in the meeting and event management curriculum should also embed SDGs in designing guidelines or toolkits that assist students to map the achievement of SDGs in practical event projects, and aim for best practice in applying social, economic, and environmental sustainability to business events (Bunlueng & Butcher, 2022:104).

Due to the nature of business events, the industry finds itself increasingly pressured to embrace broad-spectrum sustainability across all areas of meeting and event management (Mair, 2022:107). It is reiterated that the alignment of SDGs with the learning outcomes of indicative curricula content goes beyond promoting awareness among students of sustainability and green practices to preparing them for entrepreneurship and employment opportunities in emerging green business event

specialisation areas. Quality education for business event sustainability, education about business event sustainability, and education regarding SDGs and CSR in the context of meeting and event management can influence graduate opinions, attitudes, and behaviour regarding these topical and complex issues. Moreover, academic programmes in the field have an ethical obligation to embed sustainability in holistic curriculum development, because students are prospective employees and leaders who should be devising sustainable business solutions for the sector. This responds to the call for meeting and event professionals to approach sustainability more purposefully and broadly enhance the effectiveness of green strategies for business events (Musgrave & Woodward, 2016:272). The role of educators is not only to facilitate the understanding of sustainability concepts, but also to motivate students to become sustainable leaders in their field. This may be achieved by bringing together meeting and event leaders and academics to identify sustainability-specific changes needed in the curriculum, benchmarking on existing industry standards and guidelines and leading programmes in the field of sustainability. In this manner, future qualifications centred on sustainable business tourism management can be developed. Vocational institutions currently offering qualifications in the field should take immediate steps to reorientate curriculum development staff and educators to integrate sustainability concepts such as CSR and SDGs into education programmes and projects (cf. Chapter 3; Chapter 4; Chapter 7; Chapter 8; Chapter 9). In sum, sustainability education is critical to facing and finding solutions to national and international challenges to meeting and event management on the ethical, socio-cultural, economic and environmental fronts.

#### **10.4.3 Business event industry exposure: Event volunteering and EL**

The exposure of students to industry to close the knowing-doing gap has become increasingly important to stakeholders (cf. Chapter 5; Chapter 6), and vocational courses are well positioned to develop effective industry engagement opportunities through modalities such as volunteering and EL (Werner et al., 2022:877). Volunteering at business events can provide students with an insider's perspective and thus afford insights into the world of work that are otherwise unavailable (Qi & Qi, 2022:241). It has been established that event volunteering develops the practical skills of students, enhances leadership capacity, and fosters preparedness for employment (Wee et al., 2018:319-320). In the South African context, it is vital to maintain a student-centred approach to volunteering as students are faced with unique constraints to taking up volunteering opportunities arranged via their institutions of study (cf. Chapter 6). Safe access to transportation, difficult socio-economic circumstances, and time limitations or constraints in terms of academic schedules may be barriers to the effective use of

volunteering as an educational tool. For this reason, business event volunteering should be integrated as part of the assessment strategy in practically orientated subjects, with adequate logistical support to ensure fair access for all students.

Modalities to improve practical skills have become increasingly important to academics, the business events industry and students (Werner et al., 2022:877), and the academic mandate for institutions offering vocational qualifications is to reinforce conceptual knowledge with contextual application (cf. Chapter 5; Chapter 6). However, volunteering for the sake of volunteering does not equate to deep learning, and the value of the event volunteering experience must be established via a consultative approach to be of mutual benefit to students and the industry. Fairness in the distribution of roles and responsibilities across the operational areas of meetings and events must be ensured, which will require industry-academic collaboration and mentorship commitment. The knowledge, skills and attributes that will be addressed during students' time at the event should be identified, and interactive exposure to trends and advances in event sustainability and technology should be planned and monitored (cf. Chapter 4; Chapter 7; Chapter 8; Chapter 9). It is also important to note that students who were impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic have missed out on volunteering opportunities. There is therefore additional ground to cover to get students work-ready for a sector that is short-skilled because of the brain drain caused by experts leaving the industry as a result of the pandemic (Werner et al., 2022:141). The rapid adoption of virtual and hybrid eventing has also created new opportunities for unconventional learning-by-doing volunteering opportunities. These should be explored, not as a replacement for traditional business event volunteering but as an additional or alternative form.

An experiential approach to learning may assist with better understanding the relationship between event management competencies in the field and what is taught in academia (Arcodia et al., 2020:661). Learning by doing in business event management education should include a more focused approach to the use of technology, not only in ways that help develop the knowledge and skills required in a more digitalised environment, but also utilising digital and virtual platforms as a mechanism for students to access EL opportunities with industry. This has become more critical not only because EL workstations require technological savviness (cf. Chapter 4; Chapter 7; Chapter 9) but also because Covid-19 has had an impact on the resources of time and staff availability to mentor in-service students on the job. Experiential learning allows students to learn, make connections, and draw inferences between what they are learning in the classroom and what they are expected to do in

the world of work (Austen & Rust, 2015:143-144). The integration of EL into the business event management curriculum should be done with a student-centred approach marked by careful planning, mentoring and authenticity. It should encourage students to reflect critically on their experience, thereby enhancing their academic growth and employability.

#### **10.4.4 Implications of business event industry trends: a changing world of work**

It has been established that business event industry trends correlate with changes in business events in the world of work (cf. Chapter 7; Chapter 9). The Covid-19 pandemic has catalysed educators to reflect on the new event landscape and its impact on skills development. Curriculum renewal has as a result been placed firmly on the academic agenda of vocational training in the field (Werner et al., 2022:867). The pandemic has radically disrupted the way meetings and events have traditionally been conducted, obliging the industry to adjust rapidly to a digitalised event environment. Academic institutions have had to follow suit to meet transformed demands and remain relevant, effectively committing themselves to a process of continuous curriculum renewal. Major shifts in the profession and the concomitant competencies required for success are necessarily at the forefront of academics' efforts to develop the next generation of meeting and event managers. The skills now needed include technological design and programming, creativity with a focus on originality and innovation, experience-focused event design and architecture, and critical thinking and analysis (Solaris, 2022:4). For educators, skills such as flexibility, adaptability and critical thinking cannot be taught in traditional ways but rather need to be embedded in student attitudes and ways of working. Given the rapid and substantial changes in the staging of meetings and events, it is vital to reconsider how meeting and event management should be approached and curriculated. By taking a holistic approach and threading technology through academic courses, emphasising soft skills such as teamwork, critical and strategic thinking, communication and innovation, educators can infuse the overriding need for proficiency in technology with the soft skills required for the changing business event environment (Chapter 4; Chapter 7; Chapter 9).

It is vital for educators and practitioners to keep an eye on trends and innovations in this dynamic sector to enable rapid adaptation to new environments (Le & Yung, 2022:201-203). Virtual eventing will continue to play a role in the future of the industry, and even as in-person events return, virtual and hybrid formats have become established. Vocational qualifications should therefore focus on virtual events, technological infrastructure, and the logistics that go into hybrid event management to produce graduates that can 'hit the ground running', familiar with and skilled in various

aspects of digitalisation. It is also sensible to consider strategic digital analytics for future meeting and event managers in a world that is increasingly data-driven: content should be focused on how data can be used to understand clients better and how it interacts with other elements in the business event knowledge economy. Although it is impossible to predict exactly how the future landscape of events will unfold, meeting and event management curricula should provide students with a strong foundation of process to react and adapt to changes as they emerge in the world of work. Despite the uncertainties brought about by the pandemic, the industry is resilient and continues to adapt to survive (Celuch, 2020:60).

In South African higher education, students were taught virtually during and for some time after the pandemic (2020-2022), so there is probably a need to improve their in-person exposure and communication (Chapter 5; Chapter 6), to reinforce specific skills and working knowledge now expected in a reopened industry. Diversity, inclusion and cross-cultural understanding responsive to the country's demographics should feature in the strategic design of meetings and events, with curricula that are focused on creating a more positive socio-economic environment (Chapter 3; Chapter 9).

#### **10.5 Mapping meeting and event management curricula topics on the EMBOK model**

The EMBOK model (cf. Chapter 2) aims to provide a flexible framework comprising all the essential aspects of event management and may thus be used to facilitate curriculum development (Heuchert, 2021:46-47). Table 10.2 is a visual representation of how the topics identified in the findings of the seven publications (Chapters 3 to 9) may be integrated into a practical, recognised, international model conducive to industry professionalisation. Topics mapped on this model allow for global fluidity and should be contextualised for the South African case and student cohort, while remaining cognisant of and aligned with international industry standards. By synergising critical reflection and critical thinking pedagogies (Chow et al., 2011:2015) with selected meeting and event management topics, contemporary educational strategies can be devised to respond to industry requirements.

**Table 10.2: Contemporary meeting and event management curricula topics mapped onto the international EMBOK model**

<b>PHASES:</b> Initiation Planning Implementation Event Closure  <b>PROCESSES:</b> Assessment Selection Monitoring Documentation Communication	<b>CORE VALUES</b>
	<b>Continuous Improvement</b> Industry exposure to close the knowing-doing gap through EL and business event volunteering; Professionalisation and industry standards to meet recognised industry certification
	<b>Creativity</b> Think out-of-the-box in event design; innovative use of technology
	<b>Ethics</b> CSR and sustainable business event legacies; professional business practice
	<b>Integration/Sustainability</b> Sustainable business practices, integration of sustainability and consideration of impacts relevant to all spheres of event management
	<b>Strategic Thinking</b> Reflect on future trends and preparedness to evolve with the ever-changing landscape of the business event industry

DOMAINS				
Administration Management	Design Management	Marketing Management	Operations Management	Risk Management
<b>Financial:</b> Increased budget layers for hybrid events and suppliers; Additional costs to consider meeting updated health and safety requirements for events	<b>Catering:</b> Sustainable procurement; Creative food and beverages; Catering trends and delegate expectations	<b>Marketing Plan:</b> Digital marketing strategy	<b>Attendee:</b> Virtual, hybrid and in-person attendee registration and access management; Encourage green practices and galvanise delegate support	<b>Compliance:</b> Updated health and safety guidelines as a result of Covid-19; Diversity, inclusion and non-discrimination; International standards for green events (ISO20121); Use of technology to mitigate event risks
<b>Human Resources:</b> New emerging occupations in business events; Volunteer management; Inclusion of the local community for sustainable business events	<b>Content:</b> Meaningful content for virtual, hybrid and in-person delegates; Sustainability awareness; Engaging content, for example, gamification, networking opportunities and relevance to delegates	<b>Materials:</b> Paperless business event strategies	<b>Communications:</b> Communication formulation and instructions for virtual delegates; Technological advances in communication technology	<b>Decision-making:</b> Identification of key role players and decision-makers for virtual, hybrid and in-person events; Bidding and permit documentation and policies.
<b>Information:</b> Technology and digital systems to manage information	<b>Entertainment:</b> Crafting an engaging and unique delegate experience for virtual, hybrid and in-person delegates	<b>Merchandise:</b> Sustainable procurement (and disposal) as part of event legacy	<b>Infrastructure:</b> Hybrid event venues; Smart cities as event destinations; Sustainability issues for local communities because of business events	<b>Emergency:</b> Non-traditional emergency management in terms of virtual and hybrid events related to cybercrimes; Virtual event contingencies
<b>Procurement:</b> Sustainable guidelines and green practice policies	<b>Environment:</b> Hybrid event venues; Virtual platforms; Creative event settings that encourage delegate interaction and meet event objectives for all eventing formats	<b>Promotion:</b> Social media campaign for business events	<b>Logistics:</b> Business event tourism value and supply chain and how it has changed due to Covid-19	<b>Health &amp; Safety:</b> Impact of Covid-19 on the current status quo and the future of business events – increased health & safety expectations and awareness

Administration Management	Design Management	Marketing Management	Operations Management	Risk Management
<b>Stakeholder:</b> Relationship management; Networking; Business event industry associations and role players in government and private sector; sustainability in local community involvement	<b>Production:</b> Virtual and hybrid event production and technology; Innovative event spaces	<b>Public Relations:</b> Crafting ethical CSR and sustainability messages for organisations and events	<b>Participant:</b> Engagement to link operational deliverables to SDGs and sustainable legacies for events	<b>Insurance:</b> Insurance applicable to virtual and hybrid eventing; Technological platform use insurance; Cancellation insurance affected by Covid-19 for events
<b>Systems:</b> Software and technology for event project management	<b>Programme:</b> Diversity and inclusivity in event programme architecture; Virtual and hybrid event programming nuances, for example, considering international time zones	<b>Sales:</b> Online ticketing and registration systems	<b>Site:</b> Green practices and sustainability in site management; Creative and safe use of non-traditional event sites; Importance of the geographical spread of business events to benefit rural communities	<b>Legal:</b> Virtual and hybrid event contracting; Flexibility and contractual negotiations; POPI act and GDPR rules for data protection and privacy
<b>Time:</b> Time management and multitasking	<b>Theme:</b> Sustainability awareness as part of theme design; Themes that centre around or incorporate SDGs and / or pillars of sustainability	<b>Sponsorship:</b> Alignment of sponsorship opportunities with CSR initiatives; Virtual and hybrid event sponsorship management to meet financial objectives of business events	<b>Technical:</b> Integration of technology and digital platforms	<b>Security:</b> Cybersecurity; In-person delegate safety and security; Current trends impacting on business event safety and security

[Researcher's construct; adapted from EMBOK (n.d.) and Silvers (2013)]

It is important that meeting and event management academics and curriculum developers embrace the philosophical foundation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as it relates to applied competence and outcomes-based curricula in the South African context (SAQA, 2012:3). The topics presented in Table 10.2 provide the possibility for academics to scaffold appropriate pedagogy and associated curricula across the various NQF levels of vocational qualifications in the field; and while it is not intended to be prescriptive towards a particular qualification level, the study context does relate to higher education programmes at Diploma level (NQF 5 and NQF 6) and Advanced Diploma level (NQF7) in particular. In line with the flexibility of the EMBOK model, Table 10.2 provides a broad indication of responsive professional curricula content which may be adapted for outcomes or learning achievements at various qualification levels.

## 10.6 Contribution of the research to the meeting and events body of knowledge

The study made contributions to the field in the following ways:

**Literature contribution:** The research contributed to the body of knowledge in the field of business event education through seven published research outputs (five journal articles and two publications in conference proceedings). In addition to its scholarly contribution to the field, the research addressed by example the perceived dearth of qualitative methodology in business event research. The study as a whole is distinctive for its focused approach to curriculum development issues in business event management education in the South African context.

**Industry contribution:** The development of relevant and responsive curricula enhances graduate readiness to work in the industry, thereby addressing the current need for updated competencies in technology, sustainability and soft skills appropriate to a changing world of work. The study is also valuable in improving industry-academic collaboration and advocating closer partnerships to better align academic concepts and industry contexts. In this way, it enhances the relevance of vocational education for the benefit of a growing industry.

**Academic contribution:** As a result of the research conducted in the publications that make up this body of work, academic qualifications in meeting and event management could be updated and renewed to meet both student and industry expectations and requirements.

## 10.7 Limitations of the study

Curriculum development and renewal is a continuous and complex task that is effectively inexhaustible. The limitlessness of the field means that any one trajectory of enquiry is limited in scope. This study was nevertheless framed by no fewer than seven objectives (cf. Chapters 3 to 9), which together offer a qualitatively-driven series of insights into the field of inquiry. The study sheds new light on the selected topics that it is hoped will galvanise more research to inform contemporary curriculum design in the field.

The editorial preferences of individual publications, existing research terminology, and industry sources guided the use of interchangeable definitional terms such as 'MICE', 'meeting and event management', 'business event tourism' and 'business event tourism', exacerbating the fact that no single definition is universally used. This might conceivably make coherent topics appear inconsistent in the body of work.

Conducting qualitative research to advance the development of a student-centred and industry-aligned meeting and event management curriculum proved useful in meeting the objectives of the study. While it is accepted that by its nature a qualitative study has limitations in terms of generalisability, it is nevertheless hoped that the insights gained from the qualitative data analysis may help academics and curriculum developers in the field of business event education gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of relevant stakeholders.

The submission of research publications as a collective body of work towards an article-format thesis had limitations. The progression from one publication to the next was a time-intensive process because of the publication protocols and the academic rigour of reviews required by DHET-accredited journals. The research papers also had to meet the requirements of the academic journal and conference themes, while keeping their findings aligned with the overall aim of the study. The candidature commenced before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and ended as the pandemic subsided and the industry returned to a new normal. This resulted in the limitation of having to present the impact of Covid-19 on findings in the already published journal articles as part of the chapter discussions. The researcher sought to address this limitation by including Covid-19 perspectives in the literature review (Chapter 2) and the Conclusion (Chapter 10).

### **10.8 Future research directions**

In addition to the recommendations for further research presented at the end of each of the seven publications in the study (Chapters 3 to 9), the following future research directions are proposed:

- It is suggested that the qualitative research be extended to include the perspectives of academic stakeholders on the challenges and practical implications of integrating curriculum strategies for vocational qualifications in South Africa;
- The international EMBOK model can be further developed to include pedagogical considerations and best practices to reinforce the teaching, learning and assessment of the topics mapped from the findings of this research. An analysis of the adoption of the EMBOK model across national vocational qualifications may elucidate the standards of practice, knowledge and skills required for full professionalisation of meeting and event management in South Africa;

- Similar research at other universities into graduate attributes, industry exposure and engagement, sustainability in education, and professional knowledge and skills may be useful in generalising this study's findings more broadly and narrowing the knowing-doing gap between industry and academia;
- Further research to analyse job descriptions and emerging occupations may be useful for ensuring that relevant knowledge and skills are included in curricula for the promotion of graduate employability; and
- An inquiry into appropriate sustainability pedagogies that may be applied to business event management contexts may provide the insights required to galvanise broad-spectrum industry understanding and adoption of sustainability across the industry.

### **10.9 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a summary of the seven publications included in this study, demonstrating their interrelatedness. The findings of the research gave rise to strategies and recommendations that are distributed throughout the body of work. In the concluding chapter, the findings are integrated by being mapped as potential meeting and event management curriculum topics on the international EMBOK model. The research may be useful to academic stakeholders in the wider field of business management concerned with ensuring graduate preparedness and employability, a key objective of South African vocational qualifications. While the findings of this qualitative study indicate areas for responsive curriculum development in line with industry requirements, it was not the intention of the study to conduct pedagogic analysis of the findings relating to curriculum implementation, but merely to use the viewpoints obtained as a basis for identifying areas of curriculum renewal.

In conclusion, this research, presented as a collection of interrelated accredited publications, may be characterised as a pioneering study, both theoretically and practically. It proposes measures and strategies to enable student-centred vocational qualifications to respond to industry requirements for contemporary curricula for professional meeting and event management education in South Africa.

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## APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR THE ARTICLE FORMAT THESIS



### Guidelines for the Article-Format Thesis

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#### 1. Background

As an alternative to the traditional format for a thesis, it is permissible for DTech candidates to submit a thesis in the form of a series of published, co-published or “ready-for-publication” articles **prepared during candidature**. With regard to MTech candidates, HDC approval is first required, based upon an application from the supervisor/candidate on the merit of submitting an article-format thesis. Furthermore, the article-format thesis only applies to 100% master's or doctoral theses and excludes “case study” types of theses.

**There are numerous advantages of incorporating publications into a thesis, namely:**

1. Research students are increasingly advantaged in postdoctoral, academic and other professional employment applications if they have published or have prepared to publish during candidature.
2. Candidates write up their work only once, instead of once as a traditional thesis and later again as a publishable article.
3. In conjunction with proactive and appropriately planning, the envisioned articles set clear milestones for the candidate's research.
4. The acceptance of articles for publication during candidature, gives candidates the confidence that their research is of an international standard.
5. If much of the thesis has already been accepted as refereed publications, an examiner is less likely to be over-critical.
6. Where articles that have been submitted at the time of thesis submission are subsequently accepted for publication, the candidate is in a much stronger position to rebut an examiner's criticisms.
7. Having publications accepted at the time of submission significantly enhances the prospects of the candidate's securing employment or a postdoctoral position.

#### 2. General Guidelines

1. The overriding principle is that the thesis should remain an **original contribution to the discipline** or field by the candidate, irrespective of the format of the thesis.
2. Chapters containing the journal articles should form a **coherent and integrated body of work**, which could be focused on a single project or set of related questions or propositions. It is important that all journal articles form part of a sustained thesis with a **coherent theme**. It is not sufficient to merely reproduce a series of unrelated works, whether published or unpublished.
3. Inclusion of work published **prior to commencement of candidature** is not permissible.
4. The **number of articles** to be included depends on the content and length of each article and should take full account of the University's requirements for the degree as well as the amount of research expected for the degree in that discipline.

##### **Recommendations:**

- a. For a DTech thesis, the norm is that **at least THREE** journal articles, with the candidate as major contributor and of which **at least two are already published**, must be included. A third article “ready-for-publication” should also be included if not yet published.
  - b. For an MTech thesis, the norm is that **at least ONE** journal article, with the candidate as major contributor, must be included already published or “ready-for-publication”.
5. The **thesis will be examined in the normal way** and according to the normal requirements as set out by the “Guidelines for Examiners of Dissertations and Theses” (form HDC 1.7).

### 3. Proposed Outline of Theses in Article Format

#### MASTER'S THESIS: Chapter division

- **Title page** (*page 1*)
- **Declaration** (*page 2*)
- **Summary/Abstract** (*no longer than 2 pages*)
- **Acknowledgements** (*no longer than 1 page*)
- **(Optional) Dedication**
- **(Optional) Biographical sketch** (*no longer than 1 page*)
- **Preface** (*an explanation of the chapter division and that certain chapters are written in article form according to a specific writing style*)
- **Table of contents** (*complete*)
- **Chapter 1: Introduction**
- **Chapter 2: Literature review**
- **Chapter 3\*: Research results** (*written according to the style of the journal in which it will be published*)

#### **Specific Article Format**

Proposed subheadings/sections – e.g., Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion, Conclusions, Reference List

- **Chapter 4: General discussion and conclusions** (*stating the integrated conclusions for the manuscript as a whole*)
- **(Optional) Chapter 5: Recommendations**
- **References/Bibliography**

---

*\*Chapter 3 is prepared in the form of an article and should be publishable in a reputable international/DoE-accredited journal. The norm is that a master's thesis should produce at least **one** (or more) journal article(s) with the candidate as major contributor.*

*If there is any information (methods, material and results) that is normally not included in journal articles, but which is relevant to the thesis, this may be added after the final chapter as an Appendix.*

#### DOCTORAL THESIS: Chapter division

- **Title page** (*page 1*)
- **Declaration** (*page 2*)
- **Summary/Abstract** (*no longer than 2 pages*)
- **Acknowledgements** (*no longer than 1 page*)
- **(Optional) Biographical sketch** (*no longer than 1 page*)
- **(Optional) Dedication**
- **Preface** (*an explanation of the chapter division and that certain chapters are written in article form according to a specific writing style*)
- **Table of contents** (*complete*)
- **Chapter 1: Introduction**
- **Chapter 2: Literature review**
- **Chapters 3-5\*: Research results** (*written according to the style of the journal in which it will be published*)

### Specific Article Format

#### *First Article*

Proposed subheadings/sections – e.g., Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion, Conclusions. Reference List (for article 1)

#### *Second Article*

Proposed subheadings/sections – e.g., Introduction, Review of Literature, Method, Results, Conclusions. Reference List (for article 2)

#### *Third Article*

Proposed subheadings/sections – e.g., Introduction, Review of Literature, Method, Results, Conclusions. Reference List (for article 3)

- **Chapter 6: General discussion and conclusions** (*stating the conclusions for the manuscript as a whole*)
- **(Optional) Chapter 7: Recommendations**
- **Bibliography/References**

---

*\*Chapters 3-5 are prepared in the form of articles and should be published/publishable in a reputable international/DoE-accredited journal. The norm is that a Doctoral thesis should produce at least three journal articles, with the candidate as major contributor.*

***If there is any information (methods, material and results) that is normally not included in journal articles, but which is relevant to the thesis, this may be added after the final chapter as an Appendix.***

## 4. Specific Formatting Guidelines

1. Technical presentation of the thesis must still **follow the guidelines** as stipulated by the CPUT “Guide to postgraduate studies”.
2. The article format thesis requires that the **text of the articles must be retyped** for inclusion in the thesis according to CPUT standards. It is **not acceptable** to insert copies or offprints of published articles directly into the thesis.
3. **Continuous pagination** is required throughout the thesis manuscript.
4. **References should follow the style of the journal** to which the article was/will be submitted.

## 5. Co-authorship Guidelines

Journal articles may often have multiple authors. Nonetheless, a candidate signs off on the Thesis Declaration as follows:

“I, *type your full first names and surname here*, declare that the contents of this thesis represent **my own unaided work**, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.”

### **Recommendations:**

1. Any articles included in the candidate’s thesis that mainly describe work of other people in a team, would be inappropriate to include in the thesis.
2. With respect to joint authorship the candidate is expected to have made a **significant and leading contribution** to the work reported, equivalent to that expected for a traditional thesis.
3. Depending on the discipline, the **position of the main author** may differ, but it is recommended that the position of the main contributor be negotiated in the author list between the candidate and supervisor prior to the completion of the thesis.
4. The candidate must be in the **first/main author position on the majority of articles** submitted in the final thesis manuscript.
5. In cases where the candidate is not the first/main author of an article, it is essential to state explicitly who else contributed to the work and the nature and extent of their contribution in the **Preface** section of the thesis. The exact **contribution of each co-authored article should be addressed** in terms of:

Conception of the study, Design of the study, Collection of data, Analysis of data, Interpretation of data, Conclusions, Writing up of paper.

The contribution of co-authors could also be specified in the thesis **Acknowledgments** and/or in relevant **footnotes/endnotes**.

6. **If deemed necessary**, the HDC could request additional evidence from the candidate where the thesis included journal articles with joint authorship. An example of such additional proof, could be a signed statement from the co-authors

# APPENDIX B: AFRICAN JOURNAL OF HOSPITALITY, TOURISM AND LEISURE (JOURNAL ARTICLE 1)

African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure SPECIAL EDITION Vol. 5 (3) - (2016)  
ISSN: 2223-814X Copyright: © 2014 AJHTL - Open Access- Online @ [http://: www.ajhtl.com](http://www.ajhtl.com)

## Learning to leave a legacy: corporate social responsibility in South African business event tourism curricula

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to understand how industry practitioners perceive corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the business event tourism sector and to explore how university educators and industry stakeholders can form mutually beneficial partnerships in an effort to embed CSR in business event tourism curricula for vocational qualifications in South Africa. The study utilised qualitative methodology that gained in-depth information from key informant interviews with 18 business event tourism practitioners involved with CSR engagement at various levels and representing several business event environments. The sample represented experienced practitioners affiliated with the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) and also qualified practitioners with a university diploma or degree in event management. Industry participants acknowledged that CSR has become an important part of the corporate agenda and revealed that CSR leads to increased staff morale, public image and business benefits for companies. Five strategic themes were identified to enhance CSR benefits of which the analysis of community needs were highlighted as vital. University-industry partnerships and student engagement with real projects, such as fundraising and greening initiatives, were reiterated as to develop and engender CSR knowledge and skills amongst graduates of vocational business event tourism qualifications. The paper provides new insights into how business event tourism practitioners perceive CSR and underpins the need for enhanced university-business collaboration. In addition, the paper presents a practical framework for CSR curricula embedment that will be of interest to both academics and practitioners in the business event tourism sector.

**Key words:** Business event tourism, corporate social responsibility, industry-academia partnership, curricula

### Introduction

Corporate social responsibility (CSR), according to Supanti, Butcher and Fredline (2015), is of fundamental interest to the academic world and the corporate sector alike and therefore features as an important item on many corporate and academic agendas. CSR takes the fundamental premise that businesses, rather than merely pursuing economic gain, have to be of service to the community in which they operate and have to justify their existence as good corporate citizens (Bohdanowicz & Zientara, 2008). Although companies are publicly committed to CSR in response to societal demands (Moratis, 2013), there has been an increased need for the further exploration of CSR undertakings in an effort to better understand and implement initiatives that will positively impact on society (Jones, Hillier & Comfort, 2014).

There is a substantiated need for CSR in developing countries that experience the continuous growth of international tourism as it is considered one of the main service industries in the world which impacts on the society in which it operates (Martinez, Perez & Del Bosque, 2013). Events have been well established as a theme within tourism research (Getz & Page, 2016), with

## APPENDIX C: AFRICAN JOURNAL FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND HEALTH SCIENCES (JOURNAL ARTICLE 2)

*African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences (AJPHEs)*, June 2017 (Supplement), pp. 32-45.

### **Graduate attributes for contemporary business event tourism management qualifications: Employee and graduate reflections at a South African University of Technology (UoT)**

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#### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article was to determine the graduate attributes and personal skills that are fundamental to the South African business event tourism management sector in order to develop responsive higher education qualifications. The article seeks to understand employers' expectations in terms of workplace skills and to explore how graduates perceive their own personal competency levels related to the industry-specific graduate attributes. This qualitative study considered two data sets at a South African University of Technology (UoT). It was firstly informed by a panel of seven expert practitioners utilising the Developing a Curriculum Method (DACUM). Complimenting this perspective, the second set of stakeholder insights was gained from semi-structured personal interviews with 20 National Diploma graduates enrolled for further education in the degree Bachelor of Technology: Event Management in Tourism Management, indicative of business event tourism career specialisation. Data was analysed systematically by means of manual qualitative data analysis steps and ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis (QDA). General areas of competence (GACs) related to graduate attributes and personal skills were categorised into several critical workplace competencies. Communication, conflict and stress management were highlighted as critical workplace competencies. Insights further indicated significant limitations in the conflict and stress management competencies of graduates. Focusing on the broader needs of the different stakeholders involved, this article provides new insights into how employers and graduates perceive the workplace competencies significant to the South African business event tourism management sector and suggests the deeper engenderment of graduate attributes in higher education syllabi for business event tourism qualifications.

**Keywords:** Business event tourism management, graduate attributes, qualitative methodology.

#### ***How to cite this article:***

Venske, E. (2017). Graduate attributes for contemporary business event tourism management qualifications: Employee and graduate reflections at a South African University of Technology (UoT). *African Journal for Physical Activity and Health Sciences*, June (Supplement), 32-45.

#### **Introduction**

Event management has become well-established as a key area of specialisation in the academic discipline of tourism (Getz & Page, 2016). Globally, there has been significant growth in the academic provision of event management education in order to meet the needs of the tourism industry for skilled event professionals

## APPENDIX D: EVENT MANAGEMENT (JOURNAL ARTICLE 3)

## RIISING TO THE OCCASION: EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF EVENT MANAGEMENT STUDENTS AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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Event management educators in South Africa are faced with the challenge of educating culturally diverse students for progressive workplaces in the business events sector of the tourism industry. This dynamic sector requires work-ready skilled practitioners at entry-level positions. In this regard, experiential learning (EL) plays an important role in bridging the gap between university theory and industry practice in vocationally oriented event management qualifications. This study explores how students experience EL as part of a formal event management qualification at a South African University of Technology (UoT). Following a qualitative approach, data for this study were collected by means of focus group discussions and key informant interviews with selected participants. Data were transcribed and analyzed by applying six steps of scientific qualitative data analysis. Thematic analysis identified four key themes that emerged, which highlighted student expectations of EL and student experiences during EL in the actual world of work. The findings indicate that students experience the need to be coached in the necessary soft skills required to be effective future event managers. The findings suggest that it is essential for academic and industry supervisors to develop mentorship strategies to close the knowing–doing gap in order to enhance student experiences. This article provides new insights on how event management students perceive the role of industry and academic supervision as part of a student-centered approach in EL.

**Key words:** Experiential learning (EL); Event management; Student experiences;  
Qualitative case study

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### Introduction

Internationally, event management has progressed as a specific field of study affiliated to tourism, leisure, and recreation studies (Getz, 2012). Academically institutionalized at universities in the 1990s

(Lei, Lam, & Lourenco, 2015), event management has been established as a specialized academic program in higher education around the world (Getz & Page, 2016). In South Africa, the event sector of the tourism industry is considered to be a major niche with extensive growth potential and

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Esti Venske

## Event volunteering as an educational resource in business tourism

### Abstract

The growth of the business tourism industry globally has catalysed the need for responsive academic programmes to cultivate skilled graduates for the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector. The vocational nature of the industry requires academic programmes to provide students with the opportunity to fortify the hard and soft skills required to manage business tourism events by means of industry exposure initiatives. The purpose of this paper is to explore students' perspectives on volunteering at business events to assist educators effectively in utilising volunteer participation as a means to meet students' educational needs in partnership with industry. This qualitative study generated data from 15 interviews with event management student volunteers at the 17th World Conference for Tobacco or Health (WCTOH) in Cape Town, South Africa. Following Creswell's steps for qualitative data analysis, thematically categorised results reveal that students' motivation to volunteer is closely linked to self-improvement goals, and suggest that students have a strong desire to learn from the event organiser (EO) as opposed to just being a helping hand. The research concludes that purposeful collaboration between educators and industry practitioners is required to utilise event volunteering opportunities effectively as a way of enhancing business tourism education.

**Key words:** business tourism; event management education; qualitative methodology; volunteering; South Africa

### Introduction

Business tourism, widely recognised as tourism generated from the meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions (MICE) sector, has developed into a significant economic sector worldwide (Kumar & Hussain, 2014). Congruently, there has been considerable growth in academic delivery geared towards meeting the needs of MICE-related industries through event management qualifications. Internationally, higher education institutions (HEIs) have established specialised courses aimed at developing future event management professionals (Getz & Page, 2016), while numerous tourism-related qualifications offer modules specifically linked to event management (Rogers & Davidson, 2016). Specialised business tourism education, such as that resulting in event management qualifications, aims to meet the specific, professional needs of the MICE sector, where graduates are expected to hit the ground running in the world of work.

Due to the vocational nature of the MICE sector, industry exposure initiatives are crucial in bridging the gap between theory and practice for students pursuing careers in business tourism organisations. Lee, Lee and Kim (2009) argue that event management education programmes repeatedly neglect to take into account industry needs, whilst Silvers (2010) maintains that event management education should provide students with both the hard and the soft skills required to successfully run business tourism operations. It is therefore imperative that students engage with the real world of business tourism through as many industry exposure opportunities as possible, including volunteering. Adopting an essentially student-centred approach to business tourism education, this article seeks to explore event

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**TOURISM**

Original scientific paper  
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Vol. 67/ No. 3/ 2019/ 268 - 280  
UDC: 338.48:005.745(680)

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## INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY TRENDS THAT AFFECT CAPE TOWN'S MICE SECTOR: IMPLICATIONS FOR CVENT TOURISM CURRICULUM

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### ABSTRACT

*In South Africa, MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) events have become a key economic sub-sector of the tourism industry and Cape Town is regarded as the leading meetings destination in Africa and one of the top 40 global MICE destinations. Due to the dynamic nature of the tourism industry, the MICE sector is susceptible to changes in the business environment. It is therefore imperative for university educators and industry practitioners to continuously gauge the trends that influence the sector to ensure relevant academic content and business sustainability. The goal of this study is to explore industry perspectives on contemporary trends that affect the MICE sector of the tourism industry in Cape Town, South Africa. The paper further considers the implications of MICE trends on responsive curriculum development. By means of purposive sampling, qualitative data was collected between July and September 2018 by*

*means of key informant interviews amongst nine senior MICE practitioners in Cape Town. Participant perspectives were analysed using Creswell's six steps for qualitative analysis.*

*The four key themes emerged as the prominent contemporary trends, namely: sustainability, technology, delegate experience and safety and security. The MICE sector requires knowledgeable and skilled practitioners to effectively manage trend-related opportunities and threats to ensure business sustainability. University educators should consider future knowledge base competencies when developing responsive curricula for qualifications in the MICE profession. In order to remain relevant to industry and academically robust, innovative teaching, learning and research should reflect contemporary trends.*

**Keywords:** Curriculum; industry perspectives; MICE; trends; qualitative methodology.

# Quality education: industry contributions to embed sustainability in a meeting and event management curriculum

Quality  
education

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Received 9 December 2020  
Revised 12 May 2021  
24 July 2021  
Accepted 25 July 2021

## Abstract

**Purpose** – With the global adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), it has become increasingly important for educators to develop a responsive curriculum where future event practitioners understand, value and implement sustainability as a core component of meeting and event management. The purpose of this paper is to explore the viewpoints of industry to embed sustainability as part of developing a Meeting and Event Management curriculum that is responsive to industry needs, and in so doing, contribute to quality education (SDG4).

**Design/methodology/approach** – Qualitative data were generated from 10 key informant interviews amongst top-level meeting and event professionals. Open questions elucidated industry viewpoints to develop content for a Meeting and Event Management curriculum at Advanced Diploma level in South Africa. Content analysis and data interpretation revealed key topics that guided the embedment of SDGs in the curriculum as knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

**Findings** – Curriculum content was linked to six specific, corresponding SDGs, namely: good health and well-being; quality education; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; climate action and partnerships for the goals.

**Originality/value** – The paper contributes valuable industry insights into academic educators concerned with responsive curriculum development in the field of meeting and event management by outlining how SDGs can be integrated as competencies and learning outcomes in a tertiary qualification.

**Key words** Curriculum, Industry viewpoints, Meeting and event management, Qualitative methodology, Quality education

**Paper type** Research paper

## 1. Introduction

Meetings and events form a significant sub-sector of the broader tourism industry worldwide and has a positive impact on the growth of businesses and destinations by generating job opportunities (Sable *et al.*, 2019). Related vocational qualifications have emerged to meet the demand for knowledgeable and skilled professionals through specialised education. Likewise, in South Africa, qualified meeting and event management professionals are needed to support the continuous development of the sector as a vital part of country's tourism economy (Fenich *et al.*, 2012). Collaboration between industry practitioners and academics are required to adequately educate credible professionals for a sustainable event sector that can contribute to socio-economic development (Brown, 2014). The launch of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has steered an increased focus towards sustainable development in events to drive social, economic and environmental progress (Jones, 2018). The UN SDGs were adopted by member states in 2015 as a collective call to action to advance the five Ps of sustainable development, namely prosperity, people, partnership, peace and planet (Visser, 2015). With more and more forward-thinking event professionals embracing the principles of sustainable development in practice (Jones, 2018), there is a rising need to ensure

This paper forms part of a special section ISL 2018 23rd Symposium on Logistics, guest edited by Drs Ubaldino Couto, Brendon Knott and Julie Whitfield.



International Journal of Event and  
Festival Management  
Vol. 12 No. 3 2021  
pp. 297-325  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
1758-2958  
DOI 10.1108/IJEFM-12-2020-0079

## THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK: IMPLICATIONS FOR VOCATIONAL BUSINESS EVENT MANAGEMENT CURRICULUM

ESTI VENSKE

### INTRODUCTION

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the business events industry, also referred to as MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), was recognised globally as a growing, lucrative sub-sector of tourism. In 2018 business event tourism contributed ZAR115 billion to South-Africa's economy (Meetings Africa, 2020) and supported over 250 000 direct and indirect jobs (Naicker, 2018). A variety of business events organisers, suppliers and services are involved in developing and delivering MICE events that achieve a range of business, professional, cultural and academic objectives across many sectors (Joint Meetings Council, 2020). Specialised knowledge and skills are required for these industry professions which have accelerated the development and establishment of academic qualifications in the field (Stone, et al., 2017).

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted the business events industry of South Africa due to subsequent lockdown and travel restrictions limiting mobility and the attendance of gatherings (Bartis, et al., 2021). The cancellations and postponements of events had a negative effect on revenues and jobs. Professionals were forced to be innovative and embrace virtual eventing and technology to remain sustainable (Madray, 2020). COVID-19 has had a significant impact not only on the business events industry, but also on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) that offer related qualifications. As industry works towards business event sector recovery, academics should also ask themselves what the 'new normal' will look like? Gaining industry viewpoints from business event professionals are vital to ensure vocational context and curriculum relevancy as occupational needs in event management shift (Frost & Gronow, 2019).

The aim of this paper is to explore the changing needs of the world of work in the South African business events industry and the implications thereof on curriculum. Emphasis is placed on knowledge and skills requirements, emerging occupations and experiential learning issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper hopes to contribute to current discussions related to curriculum renewal that may be of value to industry and academics concerned with the post-pandemic recovery and transformation of the sector.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In light of the devastation caused by COVID-19, educators in the field of business events management have a crucial role to play in the recovery and long-term sustainability of the industry. Prior to the pandemic, Information and Communication Technology (ICT), innovation, responsiveness, sustainability and citizenship have been pertinent to event management curriculum research and development (Beeton & Morrison, 2019; Getz & Page, 2016; Mair, 2018). At present,

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## APPENDIX I: LANGUAGE CERTIFICATE

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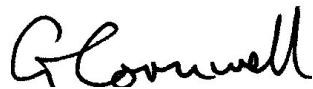
tel. 084-9897977

26 October 2022

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This serves to confirm that Chapters 1, 2 and 10 of the doctoral thesis by Esti Venske (CPUT student number 211092908), "Contemporary curricula for professional meeting and event management in South Africa: strategies and responses to industry requirements," have been proofread and edited to my satisfaction for English idiom and correctness of expression. The referencing has been checked against the CPUT Harvard standard.

Chapters 3-9 had been previously edited for accredited journal publication.



Professor D G N Cornwell  
(PhD, Rhodes University)

## APPENDIX J: ETHICS CERTIFICATE

P.O. Box 1906 • Bellville 7535 South Africa • Tel: +27 21 6801680 • Email: saliefa@cput.ac.za  
Symphony Road Bellville 7535

Office of the Chairperson Research Ethics Committee	Faculty: BUSINESS
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At a meeting of the Research Ethics Committee on 16 September 2015, Ethics Approval was granted to VENSKE, ESTI (211092908) for research activities

Related to the MTech/DTech: DTech: TOURISM & HOSPITALITY MANAGEMENT  
at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

Title of dissertation/thesis:	Contemporary curricula for professional meeting and event management in South Africa: strategies and responses to international industry requirements  Supervisor: Prof J Steyn
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Comments:

Decision: APPROVED

	16 September 2015
Signed: Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee	Date

	16 September 2015
Signed: Chairperson: Faculty Research Committee	Date

Clearance Certificate No | 2015FBREC300

## APPENDIX K: PERMISSION LETTER

Wednesday, 20 May 2020

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Permission for continued data collection

I hereby extend permission to Esti Venske from CPUT's Tourism and Event Management Department to continue with data collection as granted since 2015 among SAACI members.

SAACI supports ongoing research in the field of contemporary curricula in South Africa's business event tourism sector and look forward to findings related to the industry viewpoints of the sector.

We trust that you find the above in order.

Should you have questions or wish to arrange a virtual meeting, please contact the undersigned below.



**Glenton De Kock**  
SAACI Chief Executive Officer  
082 5757 565  
[ceo@saaci.org](mailto:ceo@saaci.org)

The Southern Africa Association for the Conference Industry (SAACI) is a Non-Profit Company - Section 21 Reg No 2001/019411/00 PBO No: 930 007 905

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**Executives:** Kim Roberts (Chairperson), Jacques Fouche (Vice Chairperson), Glenn van Eck (Treasurer), Denise Kemp (Public Officer), Glenton de Kock (Chief Executive Officer)

**Directors:** Loris Bowen (Johannesburg), Leon Pfeiffer (Tlozwane), Tracey Delport (KwaZulu-Natal), Andrew Stewart (Duties Cape), Angela Lortzer (Acting Western Cape), Michelle Singham (Vesna Representative), Minister Kganyago (Youth Portfolio)

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Rosebank Mail, 2132

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Twitter: @SAACIOfficial  
LinkedIn: SAACI Official  
Instagram: SAACIOfficial  
YouTube: Saaci Official



## APPENDIX L: CONSENT FORM



## Introduction and Informed Consent

### Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups

**Study Title:** Contemporary curricula for professional meeting and event management in South Africa: strategies and responses to industry requirements

**Researcher:** Esti Venske, Senior Lecturer: Event Management, Tourism and Events Management Department at the Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). The research will contribute to the completion of a D Tech: Tourism and Hospitality Management thesis.

**Sub-topic of inquiry:**

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*(List particular area of related to study title)*

**Date and Place of inquiry:** \_\_\_\_\_

Before agreeing to participate in this research, it is strongly encouraged that you read the following explanation of the study. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study and also describes the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Background and Explanation of Procedures:**

The South African business event sector continues to face challenges due to the lack of suitably skilled and qualified professionals; a phenomenon which exists and persists due to a number of contributing factors. These include increased regulatory requirements from international government and industry bodies for qualified event managers in the move towards industry professionalisation, the aging of current event practitioners that exit the market place without transferring their knowledge or skills, an increasing demand for personnel as the business event industry continues to grow with more association meetings and an increased number of events held annually, and the fact that recent event management graduates from the Higher Education spectrum are relatively inexperienced with limited contextual knowledge. This study is designed to explore the knowledge, skills and abilities required by industry for vocational qualification design in international business event management, with a focus on industry needs in terms of career advancement, areas of specialization and industry as co-creators in curriculum design. The study may seek to draw insights from companies, educational institutions, individuals and students with affiliated membership in the field of meetings and events. The knowledge obtained from this study will be of great value in guiding professional development and vocational qualifications for business event management practitioners in South Africa.

**SAACI Collaborative Support:**

As the recognised umbrella body for the business event management industry in South Africa, the affiliation of key informants of this study to SAACI (Southern African Association for the Conference Industry), and access to the membership of SAACI, is central to achieving the research outputs in

order to contribute to the knowledge of the business event management discipline. In the South African meetings and event management industry, SAACI membership constitutes the vital recognition of professional practice. Participation in the study may involve the completion of a face-to-face key informant interview with experts in South Africa, related to the field of international business event management, that asks in-depth questions about meeting and event management issues related to curriculum development, in interviews which will last for approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. The key informant interviews will be conducted by the lead researcher, audio-taped or recorded by scribe, and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. Informants will be interviewed at a time and a place that is suitable at various times over the duration of the study on several curriculum related topics. True to the nature of qualitative research, the study will cover topics for research as they unfold or emerge. The study also draws on focus group discussions (6-12 participants per focus group) and this would take place in the major business events management destinations of South Africa, namely Cape Town, Johannesburg and / or Durban at a time and a place convenient to the participants as the research unfolds. All research undertakings are for the researcher's account.

**Confidentiality and Withdrawal without Prejudice:**

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential in secure premises during this project. Only the researcher(s) will have access to the study data and information. There will not be any identifying names on interview transcripts; they will be coded and the key to the code will be kept securely. The results of the research will be published in the form of research papers and may be published in academic journals or presented at academic conferences. Participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are also free to refuse to answer any question the researcher might ask you.

**Further Questions and Follow-Up:**

If you have other questions or concerns about the study please contact the researcher, Esti Venske at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology via email: [venskee@cput.ac.za](mailto:venskee@cput.ac.za).

Yours Sincerely,



Esti Venske

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read the attached letter of information and informed consent and freely agree to participate in this study. I understand that participation to this study is voluntary and that participants are free to refuse to answer any question(s) and have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that the participant responses in this study will be kept anonymous

Check the response that applies with X:

I would like information about the study results

I would NOT like information about the study results

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX M: DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS**

## **Semi-structured key informant / focus group guide: schedule guiding all interviews/focus groups**

### **Study title: Contemporary curricula for professional meeting and event management in South Africa: Strategies and responses to industry requirements**

#### **Interviewer/researcher:**

- Greet and thank participant(s) as per the details of consent to participate in the research.
- Provide the title and sub-topic with brief background (from consent form).
- *Explain the key informant interview guide and process of the interview (expected duration and sub-topic).*
- *Ask for consent to record / scribe. If no consent to record, notes will be made by hand / per laptop.*
- *Remind participant of right to withdrawal without prejudice; confidentiality; anonymity; respectful engagement; and further clarity if needed.*
- *Ask for referral at end of interview*

#### **Background of industry/student participant (if applicable)**

- Please state your name and your job title/qualification of study.
- What would you regard your area of expertise/what area of learning do you enjoy most?
- How long have you been involved in the events industry/what industry experience do you have?
- How did you start your career in the industry and what is recipe to success in this industry/why did you choose to study in this field?
- Which professional industry associations are you affiliated with and in what capacity?

### **Sub-topic: Corporate social responsibility (CSR) – sustainability in education**

#### **Open-ended questions:**

1. Briefly describe CSR projects that you have been involved with.
2. What motivates your involvement in CSR projects and what are the corporate benefits, if any?
3. In your opinion, what strategies work best for maximizing community benefits?
4. How do you measure the impact/ legacy of your CSR project involvement?
5. Can you highlight any other innovative local or international CSR projects that you have heard about and thought to yourself: "This is a good initiative, it will make a difference!"?
6. How can educators and industry work together in a mutually beneficial partnership to reinforce social awareness among future industry practitioners?
7. What CSR knowledge and skills are essential for graduates to successfully advance sustainable CSR initiatives in SA?
8. Event tourism acts as a catalyst for other forms of desired development, such as community capacity building and sustainable green (triple-bottom line) legacy. What are your thoughts around this statement?

### **Sub-topic: Graduate attributes and professional skills**

## *Develop a curriculum (DACUM) Session*

- *Explain the process and role of facilitator and scribe for this focus group.*
- *Note who is present.*
- *Note participants who make up the DACUM Committee.*

### Introduction

Higher education in South Africa is currently undergoing renewal and change within its qualification structure. This implies that certain qualifications would need to be revised while other qualifications might be new to an institution. Higher education institutions will be required to submit all qualifications to the Council on Higher Education for accreditation before that qualification may be offered at an institution.

Within the Faculty of Business at the CPUT the focus area was to revise and develop the current diploma programmes for accreditation. Revising and developing a qualification is a long and arduous process that should, ideally, respond to national, institutional, departmental and stakeholder imperatives. Since CPUT needs to be vocationally oriented, input from employers is pivotal to developing a qualification that is responsive to the needs of industry. To this end, the Department of Events Management arranged a Develop a Curriculum (DACUM) workshop in order to determine a typical position in which students might be placed as well as the skills and competencies that are required for those positions.

The DACUM process departs from the premise that an occupation may be described in terms of skills, tasks and procedures, and this in turn could translate into developing a curriculum that prepares students adequately for the world of work. Expert workers and supervisors form part of the DACUM committee, as they are best able to describe and expound on the specifications for a particular occupation.

It should be noted that higher education is much more than skills-based training and that the focus is not to provide graduates with a set of competences or skills. On the contrary, there are many philosophies and theories that underpin workplace skills, which should be not ignored in the curriculum. The DACUM exercise is, therefore, none other than a means of gaining insight into what students actually do in industry. The feedback is used as *one* of the points of departure for curriculum renewal and does not form the basis for curriculum renewal.

### 1. The DACUM Session

#### 1.1 Defining the occupation/position

The first part of the DACUM session required the committee to reach consensus on a typical occupation/position that a student with a Diploma in Events Management would occupy. Based on the discussion it seems as if Events Management students are placed across a wide spectrum of occupations and organizations.

- Note the positions that entry-level staff currently hold when entering the world of work.
- Reach consensus for a title that a typical entry level position for an Events Management Diploma student

#### 2. Establishing the GACs, Workplace skills and Competencies

The General Areas of Competence (GACs) describe the major functions and responsibilities of a particular occupation. Each GAC is further analysed into workplace skills and competencies that an employee in that position would be required to perform. It should be noted that while there are commonalities, each company /organization operationalises workplace skills differently based on the company/organizational profile, culture and needs.

- The DACUM process allows for discussion amongst committee members until consensus is reached on each skill and competency.

A few points concerning the wording of workplace skills and competencies:

- Skills are identified as actions and begin with an action verb;
- Should be stated concisely and unambiguously;
- Terminology should be consistent with occupational usage across organizations.
- On a whiteboard, reach consensus on the following:

<b><u>Typical entry-level Position for meeting and event management student:</u></b>	
<b><u>General Areas of Competency</u></b>	<b><u>Workplace skills and Competencies</u></b> <b><u>A Business Events Assistant should be able to:</u></b>

Interview questions in addition to DACUM with selected key informants:

**Industry partnership with academia:**

1. In your opinion, what are the major challenges for industry in terms of training and professional qualifications in the event management industry?
2. How do you think this can be overcome?
3. How would you describe the role of industry, government and higher education in the development of qualifications in business management?
4. How do you think industry can play a more collaborative role with educational providers of event management qualifications?
5. What practical exposure to industry do you regard as critical in a qualification geared towards your field of expertise in event management?
6. How does one currently go about getting that?

**Qualification positioning:**

7. What constitutes a good vocational qualification in your opinion?
8. What would you enroll for, or encourage your entry-level staff to enroll for?
9. What would make you recommend a vocational qualification in the field of business event management

**Young entrants to the world of work in events:**

10. What is your understanding and opinion around the professionalisation of the event management industry?
11. What are the major challenges for SA business events management in terms of knowledge, skills and expertise of entry-level practitioners (aged 18-35) specific to your field of expertise?
12. What would be the ideal balance of knowledge, skills and abilities for employment at your company?

**Sub-topic: Experiential learning (EL)**

**a) Focus group:**

- *Note participants present*
- *Explain the process and questions*
- *Record on a white board / flip chart to reach consensus and for scribing purposes*

<b>Focus group questions: (flexible to respond to emerging content as participants respond)</b>
What were / are your expectations of EL? Probe.
How do you feel about your actual EL experience? What was good? What was bad? What can be improved? What worked well?
What do you think is the role of your lecturers when you go out for EL? What can be improved upon / what works well? How can lecturers help you on the EL journey?
How did you experience the EL industry where you worked? What was the role of the supervisor? What do you think the role of the supervisor should be?

**b) Selected key informant interviews**

- To further probe one on one responses and gain deeper understanding.
- Use same questions as above.
- Be guided by the conversation and note topics that emerge.

**Sub-topic: Event volunteering as a tool to enhance industry exposure / practical learning**

**Open-ended questions:**

1. What do you think is the role of a volunteer at an event?

Answer:

2. What would motivate you to volunteer for an event?

Answer:

3. What obstacles may stop you from volunteering at events?

Answer:

4. How do you think volunteers can add value to an event?

Answer:

5. How can volunteering at an event add value to you as a student?

Answer:

6. What do you think is the role of the Event organiser in managing volunteers at an event?

Answer:

7. As a volunteer, what do you expect from the event organiser?

Answer:

8. How can event organisers improve the event volunteer experience for students?

Answer:

9. How can volunteering at events be beneficial to students?

Answer:

10. What knowledge and skills would you like to learn at events when you volunteer?

Answer:

11. Why do you think practical experience is important to event students?

Answer:

12. What training needs do you have to be more confident as an event volunteer?

Answer:

13. Which events have you volunteered at before?

Answer:

14. What do you think is the educational value of volunteering at events?

Answer:

### **Sub-topic: MICE Trends**

<b>Key informant questions:</b>
What are some the trends currently impacting the MICE industry globally?
What are the threats that are currently impacting the MICE industry in South Africa?
What trends are currently impacting the MICE industry in Cape Town specifically (as South Africa's top MICE destination)?
How do you think these threats can be overcome or managed?
What are the opportunities that are currently impacting the MICE industry in South Africa?
How will you describe some of the economic benefits of hosting MICE events in Cape Town?
What can event organisers do remain competitive within the MICE industry?

## Sub-topic: Responsive curriculum for Business Event Tourism

### Further abstraction in addition to interview questions across various sub-topics (Among selected groups of key informants per sub-topic, including key informants to Sustainable Development Goals mapping)

The objective of this research is to explore the viewpoints of industry in refining a BET (Business Event Tourism) curriculum responsive to industry needs

1 Please peruse the subject descriptions below.	2 Provide your view in the space provided under a) – j).	3 Consider industry specific needs in your responses.
Subject name and description	Gaps in knowledge and skills identified	Practical implications
<p><b>Advanced research in events:</b> This subject provides the learner with the knowledge and skills to do basic applied scientific research on a problem relevant to the event management field and to present the research finding to relevant stakeholders using appropriate academic, professional or occupational dialogue (field reports and reflective journals).</p>	<p>a) What would make the research knowledge and skills in the subject more relevant to industry?</p>	<p>b) Please provide suggestions for practical research projects, partnerships and areas where industry can collaborate to enhance industry research.</p>
<p><b>Advanced Event Business Management:</b> This subject covers management, leadership and ethics as well as organisational and human resource development. Management theories and techniques enabling learners to understand the dynamics of strategic management, including contemporary issues such as e-commerce are introduced. Learners will explore management within the context of strategic purpose, analysis, decisions and implementation. Legal aspects related to events will also be covered.</p>	<p>c) What essential event business management knowledge and skills will make the content more relevant?</p>	<p>d) What are the current biggest drivers of change that influence the industry and require strategic management?</p>
<p><b>Advanced Event Marketing:</b> This subject includes the event bidding process and the development of an event marketing plan for an existing event or event organisation. The bidding module covers the event description, factors to consider when deciding to bid for an event, the bidding process, preparation of a bid proposal and the critical success factors for event bidding. The marketing plan module covers event marketing research, budgeting, the situation analysis, implementation, evaluation and control.</p>	<p>e) What essential event marketing knowledge areas can be included to respond to industry needs more accurately?</p>	<p>f) What practical skills in event marketing would make a graduate more employable in the industry?</p>
<p><b>Advanced Risk Management for Events:</b> The subject reinforces risk management strategies by providing learners with an overview of the event project management process and application thereof in <i>MS (Microsoft) Project</i>. The subject covers the planning and risk management considerations for events: the feasibility study, Work Breakdown</p>	<p>g) What project and risk management knowledge components should be included to make the content more relevant?</p>	<p>h) How can industry and educators collaborate to provide more hands-on practical experience to learners in the area of event project management?</p>

1 Please peruse the subject descriptions below.	2 Provide your view in the space provided under a) – j).	3 Consider industry specific needs in your responses.
Subject name and description	Gaps in knowledge and skills identified	Practical implications
Structure (WBS) and time management of event projects, as well as project and risk management techniques and tools for risk identification. The application of an effective communication plan and the implementation of risk management systems form part of the content and present day skills for risk managers related to health and safety and emergencies at events are included.		
<b>Business Event Protocol and Ethics:</b> The subject introduces students to discipline specific theoretical and practical knowledge areas including successful event business tendering, negotiation skills, fair business practice, international event protocol and best practice when managing events. Contemporary issues such as doing business in a global economy, building business partnerships and accountability are explored. The importance of professional and ethical behaviour and the assimilation of present day soft skills required for event management practitioners such as business conversational skills, social introductions and verbal diplomacy, networking proficiency, cultural etiquette and corporate function etiquette are incorporated.	i) What knowledge areas are critical to practitioners to ensure professionalism and ethical conduct in the business events world of work?	j) What are the soft skills that make a graduate employable in the business events industry?

Which essential knowledge and skills required from business event management practitioners are lacking in the subjects described here? Provide your answer here: \_\_\_\_\_

### Sub-topic: Responsive knowledge, skills and changing world of work

#### Key informant questions: (prior to Covid-19 pandemic)

#### Trends and general practice:

1. In your opinion, what are the current challenges facing professional practitioners in business events management?
2. Speaking to the challenges mentioned do you have any suggestions on how these challenges may be overcome?
3. In Southern Africa and Africa potentially, which area of business event management holds potential for growth, and why do you say that?
4. How do you see the industry changing in the next 10 years and are there any future trends to consider?
5. What do you think the challenge would be in terms of training professionals in your area of expertise for the future?
6. What international trends should event professionals be aware of?
7. What innovative content specific to business events in South Africa should be included in effective curriculum content?

8. If you could make your own list of three or more event management subjects, what would you call these subjects and what would they cover in terms of content?
9. administration management, and why?
10. marketing management, and why?
11. risk management, and why?
12. design management, and why?
13. operational management, and why?

**Follow-up key informant questions in addition: (during and post Covid-19 pandemic)**

What are new job opportunities and / or changes in the workplace that emerged due to Covid-19?
What key practical skills and competencies do event practitioners need to operate in a Covid-19 world?
What must event practitioners know, have sound knowledge in, to cope with events during/post Covid-19?
How has the role of technology in events changed due to Covid-19?
How can industry and academia work together to close the knowing-doing gap during and post Covid -19?