Chapter 1: An introduction to Events (This sample from prior edition)

Aims

To consider a definition of, and framework for, special events.

To provide a categorisation and typology for special events, together with an overview of the historical context.

To identify the key characteristics of events, in order to understand the business of events management as a service activity.

1.1 Introduction

Events have long played an important role in human society. The tedium of daily life in former times, with its constant toil and effort, was broken up by events of all kinds. In most societies, the slightest excuse could be found for a good celebration, though traditional celebrations often had strict ceremonies and rituals. In Europe, particularly before the industrial revolution, routine daily activities were regularly interspersed with festivals and carnivals. Personal events or local events to celebrate certain times of year, perhaps related to religious holy days, were also common. This role in society was, and is, of considerable importance. In the modern world some of the historic driving forces for events have changed. For example, religious reasons for having major festivals have, perhaps, become less important, but we still see carnivals, fairs and festivals in all sorts of places and at various times of year. Many of these events, although religious or traditional in origin, play a contemporary role by attracting tourists (and thus tourist income) to a particular place. Some major events, though, do still revolve around periods such as Christmas or Easter in the Christian calendar, and towns and cities, throughout Europe, often hold major festivals based at these times. Even in those countries where religion is no longer as important as it once was, the celebration of originally religious, and other folk festivals, still takes place; so do older festivals related to the seasons, including the celebration of Spring, with activities such as dancing round a May-Pole, decorating water wells or crowning a "May Queen". Harvest time also still provides a reason for a seasonal celebration in rural locations. Although many historic, traditional or 'folk' ceremonies and rituals are, in practice, recent inventions or re-creations.

We can grasp, therefore, that special events were often historically crucial to the social fabric of dayto-day life. In modern times we are often so used to special events we do not necessarily see them in this context (e.g. Mothers Day). It is also sometimes difficult for the student of events to understand the full extent of these activities, their variety, their role and how they are run. Unlike many industries we cannot say, 'well, this industry is worth maybe thirty billion Euro a year' or whatever. In fact it is almost impossible to quantify, in monetary terms, how much events are worth 'as an industry'. Such a calculation would probably be problematic, because the range of events is staggering, from big internationally organised sports spectaculars such as the Olympics, to the family naming ceremony of the new baby next door. All we can reasonably say is, perhaps, that we could look at any one event, in isolation, and see what value it generated. Indeed, certain events have the purpose of creating wealth or economic value in some way, as well as in entertaining and cementing society, but these are not the only reasons for holding events.

1.2 Definitions and frameworks

For the student of events, we have to provide some context, or framework, to begin to understand the nature of the activity and the issues about management and organisation surrounding it. This being the case, and for convenience, we need to attempt both a definition and a means of classification.

Figure 1.1: Definition

Special Events are:

That phenomenon arising from those non-routine occasions which have leisure, cultural, personal or organisational objectives set apart from the normal activity of daily life, whose purpose is to enlighten, celebrate, entertain or challenge the experience of a group of people.

Authors such as Goldblatt (2001), have chosen to highlight the celebratory aspect of events: "A special event recognises a unique moment in time with ceremony and ritual to satisfy specific needs."

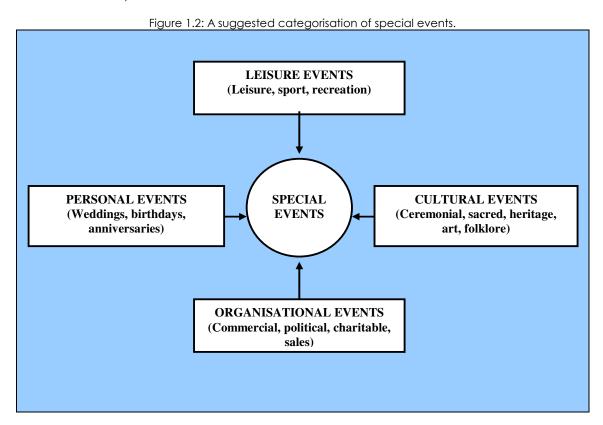
Although this definition clearly works for events like weddings, parades, inaugurations and so on, it works less well for activities like engineering exhibitions, sports competitions, product launches etc.

Getz (1997), in referring to the experience which participants have, states: "To the customer... a special event is an opportunity for a leisure, social or cultural experience outside the normal range of choices or beyond everyday experience." This definition, too, has its advantages, but seems to exclude organisational events of various kinds.

Nevertheless, it is a place to start and from it we can then begin to look at the vast range of events that take place. To do so, it helps to have some means of classification. The diagram which follows, for convenience, splits events into four broad categories based on the concept, (in our definition) of events, having leisure, cultural, personal or organisational objectives. It is crucial to bear in mind, when considering this categorisation that there are frequent overlaps. For example, the graduation of a student from university is both a personal event for the student and his or her family, and an organisational event for the University. A village carnival is both a cultural event, perhaps celebrating some aspect of local heritage or folklore, and a leisure event, possibly both for local people and for tourists. Therefore overlaps can be seen as inevitable, rather than exceptional, and any attempt to categorise an event, even by analysing its objectives, its organisers or its origins, will have to take account of this, even if we can say, yes, this event does fall into such and such a category.

1.3 Categories and typologies

In the following section we will begin to consider how this proposed categorisation may need to be developed to take in the great variety of events. It is a useful starting point, and one we can adopt to help us look at the context and precedents for modern events and as a means of understanding their breadth and variety.



3

In looking at the various kinds of special event, whether these are leisure based, personal, cultural or organisational, it is possible to identify a number of characteristics which are common to them, thus helping us understand what special events are and how they work, as well as differentiating them from other activities.

Our definition of events could be given a shorthand version: "Those non-routine occasions set apart from the normal activity of daily life of a group of people" does not necessarily give a feel for the specialised nature of the activity. We can say 'specialised', because of the uniqueness of events, but also because such events may often be celebratory or even ceremonial in some way. This is an aspect, which other authors, such as Goldblatt, have highlighted. Clearly this approach can be applied to activities such as weddings, product launches, prizegivings etc. On the other hand, it may be less suited to events such as exhibitions, sport days, or annual conferences, although it can be argued that even an exhibition of paintings or a sales conference may have an element of ceremony about it - someone has to open it; but in so far as exhibitions, conferences and so on, are non-routine, the definition is useable. For the purpose of illustrating the four categories, and to demonstrate historical progression, this chapter will explore four case studies as we go on: For leisure events, the ancient Olympic Games; for personal events, a Roman wedding; for cultural events, the Coronation of Elizabeth the first of England (which for those interested in the overlaps, could also be said to be political and therefore organisational); and for organisational events themselves, the Paris Exposition of 1889.

Special events vary tremendously in size and complexity, from the simple and small, such as the village fête, to the huge, complex and international, such as the Olympic Games. To understand the relative levels of complexity involved in various events, we can attempt to provide a typology. It is necessary to consider events as having both organisational complexity and uncertainty. Complexity is fairly easy to understand, uncertainty, as a concept, a little more problematical. By uncertainty we mean initial doubt about such issues as the cost, the time schedule and the technical requirements. Thus, it can be understood that, at the beginning, the uncertainty about the cost, the timing and the technical needs of organising the Olympic Games far exceeds the uncertainty of, say, a training conference or a small wedding reception. In order to quantify the complexity, in this typology (adapted from Slack, 2001) varying levels of organisational complexity have been used, ranging from individual to multi-national.

Using this typology it is possible to propose a classification of various events, in order to understand the comparative demands which such events might place on organisers or events managers.

Figure 1.3: A typology of events

High		ge.	e 1.3: A typology	<u> </u>		Olympic Games
. L	Wedding Reception	Notting Hill Carnival		Lions Clubs Convention		World Fairs and Expos (Hannover)
Uncertainty			Political Party Conference		French Grand Prix	
	Birthday Party		Car Company Sales Exhibition	London Motor Fair (Dealers)		Geneva Motor Show
		Local Agricultural Show			Deventer Bookmarket	Berlin Film Festival
		Village Fete				
Low	Small Private Dinner Party		Training Conference			
	Individual	Group	Organisation- al	Multi - organisationa I	National	Inter- national
			Complexity			

Source: Author, adapted from Slack, 2001

Even where an event is relatively simple, the number of people attending may make it very complex indeed. There is the world of difference between a birthday party for six people and a birthday party for sixty, even though the format, structure and basic idea may be the same. The typology must be seen with this limitation in mind. Indeed, it is this concept of size which often means the difference between an amateur organiser, or a family member running an event, on the one hand, or having to employ an event manager, go to a hotel, or find specialist advice on the other. Size or number of attendees is something, which easily catches people out. We can all organise a dinner party for eight or ten people, even a buffet for maybe twenty or thirty, but after that the sheer effort involved would overwhelm us: not enough space, not enough equipment, not enough people to help and so on. The events management business, whether it is about the annual dinner of the local town council or the European Figure Skating Championships, is often, in the contemporary world, about the need for trained staff, specialist companies and professional expertise.

1.4 Historical contexts and precedents

Events management can be thought of as an art, rather than a science. Historically, the organisation of small local events was relatively uncomplicated and needed no extensive managerial expertise. The organisation of a wedding, for example, could be done, most often, by the bride's mother with help from the two families involved and the vicar, priest, religious or other official representative. (Although in past times, especially up until the Victorian period, 'expert' advice often came in the form of a Dancing Master, employed to give the wedding festivities some formality of style. There were also quite specific local rituals to be observed, which acted as 'checklists' for the activities). Some weddings are still done this way, and are within the ability of non-specialist people to organise and run: The bride and groom to deal with the ceremony, the bride's mother to order the cake and a buffet from a local baker, or with family and friends doing some or all of it; the reception held in one of the family houses or a church hall, flowers from gardens or obtained from a nearby flower shop and so on. All these tasks were, and can still be, coped with in an intimate and sociable way, without need of great cost or fuss.

While special events, by their nature, were (and are) not routine, pressure for formal organisational or technological skill was not so great for these local, family or small-scale activities, in the past. This is not to say that large-scale events management is a particularly recent development, only that the modern world, with its many complexities, often requires specialists to do what, in gentler times, could be done by thoughtful amateurs, or ordinary people. We should not mistake the history, however. The scale and complexity of, say, the Greek or Roman gladiatorial games (which comprised vast numbers of activities, set piece contests and even theatrically mounted sea battles - the Romans were sufficiently advanced that they could flood their arenas), would certainly have had what today would be considered as professional events management organisation to run them. This can also be seen in our first case study, of the ancient Olympic Games, which helps to illustrate our first category of events – leisure events.

Looking back in history, we can see, however, that events have always had a significant role to play in society, either to break up the dull, grinding routine of daily life (toiling in the fields, maybe) or to emphasise some important activity or person (perhaps the arrival of a new abbot at the local monastery). We can trace all sorts of special events far back in time, even if those events are the result of some recent 're-invention'. For as long as mankind has lived in family groups there will have been celebrations of weddings, births, religious rites and so on. In following up the categorisation suggested

earlier, of events being: Leisure, personal, cultural or organisational in origin, we can seek various historical examples or precedents. This said, we must be careful not to believe that earlier times or other societies have the same cultural attitudes as we have today.

Case Study One: Leisure / Sporting Events: The Olympic Games

The modern Olympic games are loosely based on the games of the ancient Greeks. Those games, first held in 776 BC at Olympia, in Peloponnesian Greece, had the purpose of celebrating the festival of Zeus, the most important Greek God. The games, organised by the temple priests and their helpers, carried on for hundreds of years at four yearly intervals, even though Greece was normally at war (which was quite a usual thing in those times).

Location



Factbox

Ancient Olympic Games first held in 0776BC, last held in 0393. Restarted in modern times in 1896. Held every four years.

Ancient games were part of the religious festival of Zeus, the chief Greek god.

Modern games are a major economic activity.

One of the most important aspects of the games was the truce which existed during the games to allow them to take place and to allow the participants, mostly the nobility and professional athletes, together with pilgrims (who were travelling to the temple of Zeus at Olympia), to get to the games safely.

The ancient games at first only had one component, the 'stade', a foot-race, but later included not only the 'stade' (about 150 metres, hence the word 'stadium'), but also the pentathlon (the discus, the jump, the javelin, another race and wrestling), together with a chariot race, a horse race and the pankration - a very violent form of wrestling. All of these were performed naked, in the Greek style, although, as the games also celebrated military prowess, the final foot race was performed in full armour.

The games lasted for five days and included various religious ceremonies, the main religious aspect being the worship of the Greek god, Zeus, although the women had their own games, for the goddess Hera. (Married women were not permitted at the men's games, even to watch). The games were

organised by the religious authorities of Olympia and had professional trainers and referees for the events as well as judges (Swadding, 1999).

There were also social events, and rather like the modern games, a parade of champions on the final day. The ancient games continued, in all, for about 1,200 years and were closed down by the Roman Emperor Theodosius II in 0393AD (the temple at Olympia was destroyed later, about 0426). The modern games began, again, at Athens in 1896, followed by Paris in 1900 and then, more or less every four years to the present day.

Based on this case:

Investigate the modern Olympic Games - where were the most recent games held? - How many people attended them? - How many people participated? - How were the games organised and what support services were involved? - How many people did the games employ during the peak period? To what use were the games' buildings put after the games had finished? How much do the modern games differ from the ancient ones?

Related website for those interested in the Olympics: www.olympic.org

The second category of special events, in our approach, is that of personal events. This includes all the kinds of occasions, which a family or friends might be involved in. Many modern aspects of family life can be seen to revolve around important occasions: birthdays, namings, weddings and anniversaries all fall into this category, as do many other personal events and celebrations (a dinner party is a special event in our definition). Of all these, weddings can be one of the most complicated to organise, involving friends and family, and a whole range of related service activities, from catering to entertainment, as well as the formal aspect of the marriage ceremony itself. (This is not to say all weddings are a 'big performance', some are small, friendly and relaxed, and just as good for it - size is no measure of the success of an event). Almost all cultures known to history have some form of partnership ceremony, in looking for a historical precedent for personal events, the Romans can provide one.

Case Study Two: Personal Events: A Roman Wedding

As with modern weddings, Roman weddings were organised by the families of the bride and groom. A ring was often given as an engagement present, although no ring was involved in the ceremony itself until changes in the ritual after the second century (Kamm, 1995). The bride wore a special bridal

gown, generally with a flame coloured veil and garlands of flowers. The wedding would be arranged with the respective families each dealing with various aspects. There was a legal contract to be signed by the two fathers on the day of the wedding. The joining of hands at the ceremony would be ensured, not by a priest, but by a married woman, known as a 'pronuba'.

Location



Factbox

The Roman empire covered a huge area of western Europe, from Britain to north Africa.

Rome was pagan until the 300s, when it began to become Christian in religion.

Roman weddings had many similarities to modern ceremonies, also a number of differences

At the ceremony, prayers would be said to the family gods and especially to the goddess Juno, with a sacrifice offered to the god Jupiter. This might involve the killing of a donkey, as donkeys were thought to have considerable sexual prowess, thus the sacrifice was thought to ensure a suitably exciting wedding night.

Following the ceremony the party would make their way to the bride's parents house, where there would be a major feast in the Roman style, of some excess - a great deal of food and wine would be consumed. Once the feast was over, there would be a torchlight procession, from the bride's parent's house to the bridegroom's house. The procession would generally be led by the torch carriers, often children, and accompanied by flute players and the families, with friends, relatives and other locals joining in. There was a great deal of loud and happy singing during the procession and of the cheerful shouting of obscene poetry and jokes, (known as 'Fescennine Verses'). This was the Roman equivalent of writing obscene messages on the couple's car with foam, and often referred to how good the donkey was in bed.

On arrival at the bridegroom's house the bride would anoint the doorposts with oil as a sign of dedication to the gods and the bridegroom would carry the bride over the threshold. At this point we will leave them to it.

Based on this case:

Perhaps from your own experience of going to a wedding, how did it differ from the Roman one? Who organised what? Suppose you have a wedding to organise with 100 guests, how long does it realistically take to get things done? Also, begin to look for possible similarities between the special events in these case studies - what are their common characteristics?

Related website for those interested in Roman history: www.roman-empire.net

Special events cover all kinds of human activity, not only sporting and family activities but also cultural and commercial or organisational activities. Culture, with its associated ceremony and traditions, has a role in all kinds of social activity, and for all kinds of people, organisations and institutions, but has been especially important for governments and leaders, such as Royalty. In cultural events ceremony becomes very evident, often as a way of emphasising the significance of the event itself or of the person at the centre for the ceremony, the intended effect being to secure support, or to allow as many people as possible to recognise the key individual. For example, the news media often shows heads of state (Kings, Queens, Presidents) inspecting a 'guard of honour' when arriving at the airport of a country they are visiting: they listen to the national anthems and then go and walk past the guard of honour. The original purpose of this ceremony is not for the Head of State to see the guards, but for the guards to see the Head of State: for the guards to recognise someone they were to protect.

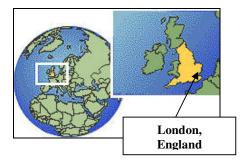
In the middle ages, special events and ceremonies had a major role to play in the life of the time, in ensuring that a dull daily existence was enlivened, and that people were entertained or at least impressed. There was no TV, video, movies or internet for entertainment, all these are less than 100 years old. It was, for example, accepted wisdom in the England in the Tudor period (about 1500-1600) that: "In pompous ceremonies a secret of government doth much consist" (Plowden, 1982). Government, in this case the king or queen, was expected to make a good show, or put on a good sight for the people, and the people expected to see royalty in all its glory, this was intended to ensure, to a certain extent, respect and allegiance.

Case Study Three: Cultural Events: The Coronation of Elizabeth I

At a time when the country had a huge foreign debt, and the treasury was empty, with a new queen not known for spending money, the coronation of Elizabeth the First had a huge amount spent on it, to put on a good show. This was felt to be important in order to generate loyalty and allegiance to the

new queen and to ensure the stability of support for the monarchy and the government (which at that time were the same thing).

Location



Factbox

Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the first of England
Took place over four days in January 1559
Run by the Lord Chamberlain
The event comprised:
A river procession on the Thames
A foot procession through the city
The coronation ceremony and a banquet

The ceremonial lasted several days. It began with the queen travelling along the River Thames to take possession of the Tower of London, escorted by her guard (the 'gentlemen pensioners'), the royal court, the Lord Mayor of London and many others including several bands of musicians, in a fleet of barges, boats and other water craft (Plowden, 1982). This river journey took most of the first official day of the event, after which the queen stayed at the Tower (then a royal palace as well as the most important fortress of the country), while other preparations were made.

Two days later a tremendous procession took place, on horses and on foot, from the Tower of London to the City of Westminster (London consists of two cities - London and Westminster) and the Whitehall Palace. This took the entire afternoon to travel through the medieval city so that as many people as possible could see the new Queen. Unlike modern processions, the medieval one stopped frequently for the Queen to look at displays and tableaux, to talk to all kinds of people from the great to the poor and to receive gifts and to listen to loyal speeches. The coronation itself followed on Sunday 15 January 1559, in Westminster Abbey, the crowning place of English kings and queens for centuries. There then followed a great banquet, which ended at one in the morning.

A task of this size would be a challenge to even a modern events manager; at Elizabeth's coronation it was the responsibility of the Lord Chamberlain and the Treasurer of the Household. The court of a medieval monarch was not only involved in the occasional coronation, but more or less existed in a constant state of pomp and ceremony. So much so that its organisation reflected this. The Lord Chamberlain's department was responsible for entertainment of all kinds and had a special office

called the 'Office of the Revels' which arranged anything from plays to pageants, and which consisted of a relatively large number of specialised staff, by the standards of the period (Plowden, 1982).

Based on this case:

Think of a recent ceremonial event you have seen, perhaps a Royal or Government event, a church event or some ceremony, which takes place locally in your town or city, perhaps involving the mayor. What was this event about and what was special about it - was there much ceremonial - perhaps a procession, music, ceremonial dress or some kind of tradition being enacted? Does the ceremony still have a modern use? What is that use? If it is a traditional event, does it now have some other useful purpose, such as attracting tourists or emphasising the long history that it relates to?

Related website for those interested in Queen Elizabeth 1st: www.luminarium.org/renlit/eliza.htm

One of the things which these historic examples serve to show is that there have long been specialists available of various kinds to organise events, (the temple priests for the Greek Games, the Lord Chamberlain's Department for Queen Elizabeth). Some events, such as the coronation of a king or queen have been, and still are, highly complex. Very often, where great ceremony was needed for state events, the military could also be called on to organise them, and officers of the army were often seconded to do just that, as is still the case with much modern state ceremonial: parades, state visits, pageants and festivals.

Although the organisation of historic ceremonial events might be seen as a matter of the injection of military organisational prowess, very often, such prowess was no such thing. In fact great historical ceremonial disasters were quite commonplace. The modern events manager has no monopoly on things going "pear shaped". Many coronations and other great events were, in parts, famously shambolic. Even where these involved a non-military organisation, such as the great royal fireworks held to celebrate the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle, in 1749, for King George the Second, there was no guarantee of success, even though these were organised by George Frederick Handel, the famous composer, and set to his music. The fireworks were to be held in a specially built pavilion in Green Park, London. Handel was designated as 'Comptroller of the Fireworks'. This was such a major event that a full dress rehearsal was held, which went perfectly. However, on the night itself, Handel had an argument with Servandoni, the pavilion designer, at which swords were drawn, and during the middle

of the performance, with 100 musicians playing and a crowd of over 12,000 people watching, half the pavilion burned down.

The modern world is no different; faster maybe; more complex, perhaps; but no less susceptible to things going wrong, falling down, being rained off or flooded out; the guest speaker stuck in the traffic; acts of God, both tragic or comic; the groom still drunk after the stag night, the buffet being dropped on the kitchen floor and the bride falling over the cake at the reception. In some ways, events management is a rather thankless task, one of those roles where everyone notices when something goes wrong, but few people notice the tremendous effort involved in getting even a simple event right. Indeed, some of the things which go wrong at an event may be beyond the organiser's ability to prevent: the weather, the traffic and so on.

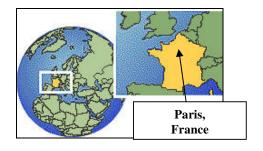
Nevertheless, events can be considerable triumphs of organisation and leave lasting legacies. The fourth in our categories of events is the organisational event; this may be anything from a political party conference to a motor show. There are any number of suitable examples. Some of the world trade fairs have left some interesting legacies: As trade and commerce developed following the industrial revolution, many countries sought to celebrate and display their industrial achievements. This led to a number of industrial and commercial exhibitions in many major cities. These exhibitions had often developed out of local trade fairs in towns and cities around mediaeval Europe. Fairs had been held for many centuries as a way to show off all kinds of products, goods and other wares. One of the first great international industrial fairs was the Great Exhibition in London of 1851 (there had been earlier ones, such as that in Paris of 1849), which was held in a specially built hall, the 'Crystal Palace', that held some 13,000 exhibitors from all over the world.

These fairs have taken place at irregular intervals in many major cities ever since. Recent fairs or 'Expo's' having taken place in New York, Montreal, Seville and, in 2000, Hannover. In the Victorian period many cities held fairs, not only London, but also Amsterdam (in 1883 with the 'International Colonial Exposition' and several later fairs), and especially Paris, which held a series of fairs from 1855 to 1900 (and two since, in 1925 and 1937). One such event, which has left a very obvious legacy, was the Paris Exposition of 1889.

Case Study Four: Organisational Events: The Paris Exposition

The 1889 Paris exposition was the idea of the French Prime Minister of the time, Jules Ferry. He wished to see an exhibition which would demonstrate France's industrial might, her commercial activity and her engineering skill. The result was the largest, most varied and successful world's fair ever held until that time.

Location



Factbox

The Paris Exposition of 1889

Intended to display France's industrial power

Resulted in a major building programme in the exposition area, including the construction of the Eiffel Tower

32 million people visited the fair

The fair was opened on May 6th 1889, a wonderful spring day, by the French President, Sadi Carnot, who rode in horse-drawn procession from the Elysee Palace. The procession, led by a detachment of mounted cuirassiers, made its way along the Champs Elysees and the Avenue Montaigne amongst joyful crowds, and entered the exhibition area passing under the arches of the Eiffel Tower, arriving at the Central Dome at 2.00pm. A short ceremony took place at which the Exposition was formally presented to Msr Carnot: 'This splendid result exceeds all hopes...' Indeed it did. The exposition was huge. It covered the whole of the Champ de Mars and the Esplanade des Invalides, and stretched along the Quai d'Orsay and the Trocadero Gardens to the Eiffel Tower, some 228 acres (95 hectares), including a huge Ferris wheel, a precursor of the 'London Eye'. There were almost 62,000 exhibitors from all over the world and by the time an exhausted President Carnot had left at 5.30pm, almost half a million people had streamed in through the twenty two entrances to the exhibition, which then lasted 176 days. Some 32 million people visited the fair and amongst the exhibits was the world's first ever motor car, a Benz. (Harris, 1975)

The lasting legacy of the exhibition is the Eiffel Tower. When the event was being planned, a member of the French cabinet, Edouard Lockroy, had suggested a thousand-foot tower to highlight its importance. The idea of a tower built of iron and steel was not new, one had been suggested by the Cornish engineer, Richard Trevithick, in 1833, and another by Clarke and Reeves, two American engineers, for the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876. But it was Gustave Eiffel who supervised the building of the Paris tower. The Tower was begun on January 26th 1887. It opened at ten minutes to twelve on

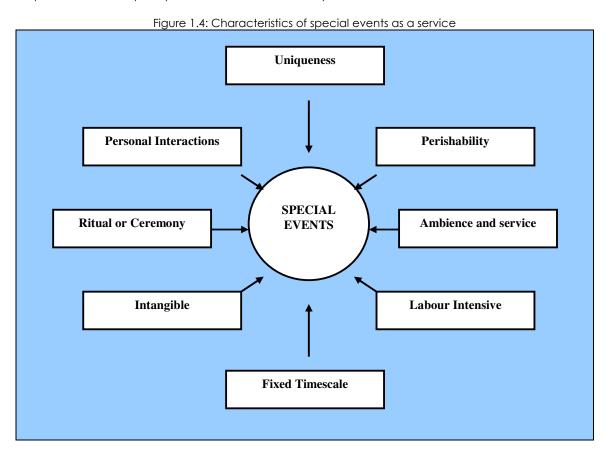
the 15th May 1889, to Eiffel's considerable relief, and has been the symbol of Paris ever since, though for the first twenty or thirty years it was rather disliked by some.

Based on this case:

Think of a recent engineering project you have seen launched, perhaps even the Millennium Dome. What was its purpose? How was it organised? In the long term, was there some benefit from having it, even if it was knocked down later? Does this apply to other kinds of events? How could a town or city benefit from holding an event? Could that event be used to help renovate a run down area? Who would pay for the event? Related website for those interested in the Eiffel Tower: www.tour-eiffel.fr/indexuk

1.5 Characteristics of special events

In our definition of special events, we noted key characteristics of events as "non routine" and "unique". However, events have many other characteristics in common with all types of services, and in particular with hospitality and leisure services of many kinds.



These characteristics can be grouped together as being: uniqueness; perishability; labour intensiveness; fixed timescales; intangibility, personal interaction, ambience and ritual or ceremony.

Uniqueness

The key element of all special events is their uniqueness, every one will be different. This is not to say that the same kind of event cannot be repeated many times, but that the participants, the surroundings, the audience, or any number of other variables will make the event unique. Even where we have looked at special events which are very frequent, such as weddings, all are different because of the different people involved, the choice of location, the invited guests, the timing and so on. The same is true of events which may have followed the same format for years and years. The ancient Olympic games took place at four-year intervals for nearly 1,200 years, or put more simply, 300 sequential events. But each was unique, because each had different athletes, different organisers and a different audience. The format also changed slowly over time, at the beginning, it was a religious festival for the Greek god, Zeus, and only the 150 metre foot-race, the 'stade' was run. At the end, there was no major religious aspect, but the athletics had become the main activity, with 12 or so different sports in the games.

The uniqueness of special events is therefore the key to them. We are not doing something which is routine, nor are we producing the same item of work repetitively. Nevertheless it is important to recognise that certain types of event do recur; they may recur in the same kind of format (such as weddings - each wedding is different but the format or structure is similar), or they may recur on the basis of time interval (such as an annual conference - again the format or structure is the same, but the participants and the subject will be different). Uniqueness alone, however, does not make a special event. Events have a number of characteristics and the uniqueness of them is closely related to the aspects of perishability and intangibility.

Perishability of events

Almost by definition, if we regard events as "unique", then the event is tremendously perishable, it cannot be repeated in exactly the same way. Two wedding anniversaries at the same location, with the same number of people will not be the same. Even where a reasonable level of standardisation is possible, such as with activities such as training seminars, each will be different and will be very time

dependent. They exist briefly and cannot be repeated in precisely the same way. The perishability issue also relates to the use of facilities for events. Let us suppose we have a banqueting room. It may be used to its peak capacity only on Saturdays, for weddings, so the rest of the week its revenue generating potential may not be exploited. If the room is empty for even one day of the week, the revenue generating potential of that day is lost for good - it is perishable. Yes, you can use the room on a different day, but the day it is empty cannot be replayed and used for an event.

One of the key issues, therefore, in the events manager's role, is the extent to which facilities and services can be used effectively, given the uniqueness or irregularity (perhaps better to say infrequency) of use. In consequence events can be expensive to provide. Many things will have to be produced on a one-off basis and cannot be used again, for example, a large banner saying "Happy Wedding Anniversary Anna and Frederick" would be a unique item and thus (relatively) expensive to provide. On the other hand a banner saying "Happy Anniversary" may have a number of potential uses and can be stored.

The issue of perishability also means that events venue managers may have to use a variety of techniques, such as differential pricing, to try to encourage activities in quiet periods when a facility or service on offer might not sell. So, perhaps, a mobile disco can be obtained at a discount for an event on, say, a Tuesday, rather than at a peak period of the week or year, perhaps a Friday or Saturday night or New Year's Eve. This too illustrates the perishability issue; if the disco is not booked one night of the week it will have lost the revenue for that night forever.

Intangibility

When you go out to buy a chocolate bar or a pair of socks, you are buying something tangible - you can see it and touch it. With events, however, the activity is more or less intangible. If you go to a wedding, you will experience the activities, join in, enjoy it and remember it, but there are only a few tangible things which you might have got from it - perhaps a piece of wedding cake and some photographs, or a video you took of the happy couple and the rest of the guests. This intangibility is entirely normal for service activities - when people stay in hotel bedrooms they often take home the complimentary soaps and shampoos from the bathroom, or matchbooks from the bar. These are efforts to make the experience of the event more tangible - something to show that the experience

happened and something to show friends and family. It is important for event organisers to bear this in mind - even the smallest tangible item will help support people's idea of how good an event has been. A programme, a guest list, postcards, small wrapped and named chocolates, even slightly more ambitious give-aways such as badged glasses or colour brochures help in the process of making the intangible more tangible.

Ritual and Ceremony

This is, for authors such as Goldblatt, the key issue about special events, or, simply, the major thing which makes them special. In our history cases it was very evident that ritual and ceremony often played an important part. In practice, many modern ceremonial activities are 'fossilised' or re-invented versions of old traditions. The old tradition might originally have had some key role in the ceremony, now lost, but the ritual of doing it (like the inspection of honour guards) still continues. Often, the ritual ceremony is there because it does, in fact, emphasise the continuity of the tradition, even though the reason for the tradition has gone. In Ripon, in England, at dusk, a horn is blown to signify the setting of the night-watch. In olden days this had real purpose, (now it is just a small event for tourists): The town was in open countryside and could be invaded or attacked by brigands or barbarians, and the sounding of the horn was to set the guard on the town walls and to ensure the night watchmen, known as 'wakemen', came on duty. Even this was not thought enough, and Ripon being a cathedral city, God was appealed to: "If God keep not ye citie, ye wakemen waketh in vain". Or put into modern English: if God didn't look after the town, the watchmen were wasting their time. Thus, for hundreds of years, this short ceremony has taken place in Ripon and continues every nightfall even now. The watch is still called to the walls, though the walls are long gone and the last watchman long dead.

Modern events may not, by any means, rely on old tradition and old ceremony. If you think of a contemporary ceremony, such as the Hollywood Oscars, which are essentially prizes given for good filmmaking and good acting, the whole ceremony was specially made up. This is true of all kinds of events, in fact, it is often the case that a town or city wishing to attract tourists might do so by creating a brand new special event, containing a brand new ceremony, something for the visitors to watch. This can be done for all kinds of special events, and the creation of new ceremonies and 'new' traditions is very common, although it can be argued that for a special event to have a 'traditional' element in it, that traditional element should have some basis (however tenuous) in historical reality.

Ambience and service

Of all the characteristics of events, ambience is one of the most important to the outcome. An event with the right ambience can be a huge success. An event with the wrong ambience can be a huge failure. At a personal event, such as a birthday party, the ambience may be simply created by the people who are there, without the need for anything else - good company amongst friends can make an excellent event.

Some events, however, may need a little help to go well. At a birthday party, there might be the need for decorations, music and games, as well as food and drink. But it is very important to realise that the presence of these things does not, in fact, guarantee things will go well, one can have a wonderful environment, expensive themed decor, large amounts of excellent food and drink and the event could still be a flop. One of the roles of an events manager, though, is to try and ensure the event succeeds by careful attention to detail and by trying to encourage the desired outcome. Nevertheless, people cannot be compelled to enjoy themselves. If they've had a bad day, or feel grumpy, your wonderfully well organised event might turn them round, or... it might not.

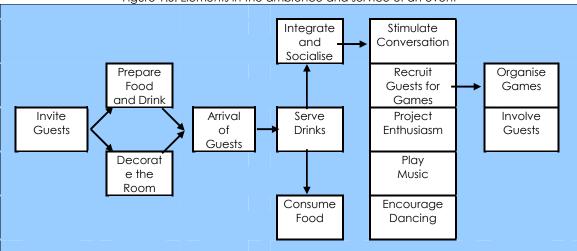


Figure 1.5: Elements in the ambience and service of an event

Source: Adapted from Berkley, 1996

Personal contact and interaction

In manufacturing situations, customers have no contact with the staff producing the goods, only with, perhaps, the sales team. In service situations, customers have frequent contact with staff, and often this contact determines the quality or otherwise of the experience. People attending events are frequently

themselves part of the process, that is to say, for example, the crowd at a sports tournament is not only watching the event it is also helping to create the atmosphere, it is interacting with itself, with participants and staff and is part of the whole experience. Much the same is true of the guests at a Christmas Party, it is the guests themselves interacting with each other, with the hosts and perhaps with entertainers, which create the atmosphere and contribute to how enjoyable the event is. A room decorated for a party may look nice, but will not come to life until it is full of guests. Therefore, in considering how to make an event successful, event managers must be fully aware that this is largely dependent on the actions and reactions of people attending. It is perfectly possible to have the same event twice in a row, such as a pageant or procession, and have one event a complete success and one event a complete failure due to audience reactions, interactions or backgrounds. An awareness of the attendees is vital on the part of event planners.

Labour intensiveness

The more complex and the more unique an event is, the more likely it is to be more labour intensive, both in terms of organisation and of operation. The organisational issue relates to the need for relatively complicated planning to enable the service delivery to be efficient, or put more simply, for the event to be a good one (this being the reason why some events may be outsourced to event management companies, caterers or other types of event suppliers). The uniqueness of this type of service implies a high level of communication between the organiser and the event manager. Such a high level of communication and planning will take time and effort, even where the event may be repeating a well -known formula, or operating within a common framework, such as a conference. The operational element may also require high levels of staffing in order to deliver the event properly. A banquet for 300 people will require not only food service staff, but bar and drinks staff, kitchen staff, management and perhaps support staff, such as cloakroom attendants, cleaners and staff to set up and break down the room. Staffing needs are also likely to peak at certain times. In the case of the banquet, peak staffing will take place at service time, but a long sequence of preparation has also to be taken into account.

No two events are likely to require the same number of staff, except in so far as events which have an element of routine, such as banquets and conferences, will require a known number of staff. Managers can forecast staffing needs for these types of events from experience, depending on the number of guests, the types of service, the experience and quality of the staff, the time required to complete the

service, even the layout of the building. Staffing ratios will be dealt with later in more detail (see catering). The labour intensiveness of special events is rather less predictable as it depends entirely on the type of event, in addition to all the above conditions. An event such as an athletic competition will require a completely different staffing structure to support it (including competitors, judges, timekeepers, etc.) than a company annual outing to a theme park. An event manager will have to forecast staffing needs directly from the requirements of running the event, based on what the organiser specifies as the events objectives and needs, and on the experience and forecasts of departmental leaders.

Fixed timescale

Events, rather like building projects, run to a fixed timescale, unlike routine activities which can carry on indefinitely. The timescale could be very short, such as for the opening ceremony for a new road, or can be very long, as with the Paris Exposition noted earlier - the planning phase taking about three years. Even these are not extremes. Many special events are actually composed of a sequence of short bursts of activity, with pauses or breaks in between. Constant ceremony, lasting many hours, might become dull and tiring. The example of the coronation, of Elizabeth the First, shows that while the event lasted several days, this was composed of several shorter activities of varying lengths, depending on what was going on and why. For those planning special events, this issue of timing must be kept in mind, for an event to be successful and striking, it will need to hold people's attention and interest them; better that this is broken up into sections than it takes place all at once, without a respite. This is not to say that the fixed timescale cannot be varied. Some events, such as a birthday party, may carry on longer than intended because 'it just happened', other events may even be extended in a planned way, for some special reason, e.g. to recoup the costs.

1.5 Summary

Special events have always had a major role to play in human society. In many respects, modern events are not that much different from those of ancient times, especially in helping to enliven daily life. In understanding this, we can also see that society has developed and changed. Increasing public knowledge, and technology, often means higher expectations of modern events. Whatever role events play in the social context, the management of events should be seen as a service activity. This context helps us understand how events work, what their major elements are, and how we can classify them.

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