

Sustainable Business Events and Usage of Information Technology

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable business events demand the commitment of event practitioners. Information technology is used in mitigating the process of sustainable business events. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the role of information technology in the process of organizing a business event as it was found that there is lack of knowledge on how to organize a sustainable business event in the Malaysian context. It was found that using information technology assists the process of organizing an event through the use of several technological devices and reducing the use of paper. For this reason, inductive methods with 14 informants were studied involving company directors, event managers, venue providers, event delegates and event suppliers. It was found that the role of information technology is important to mitigate the process of organizing a business event. Triangulation was used to ensure the reliability of the findings and members' check and interview protocols were used for validation purposes. The constant comparison on method of analysis was used to analyze information that result from semi-structured interview.

Keywords: Sustainable business event, process, inductive, constant comparison and information technology

1.0 BUSINESS EVENTS

The exploration of a sustainable business event process begins by discussing the growth of business events that creates a positive impact on the economy and society. The discussion also elaborates on the negative environmental impact that results from business event activities. Malaysia was at number 29

in the world ranking and number 7 in the Asia Pacific ranking for organizing business events. By comparing cities, Kuala Lumpur is 21st in the world ranking and 5th in the Asia Pacific ranking (Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Report, 2010; 2011). It is also estimated that the economic impact value of international business tourism for 2010 was more than RM17.6 billion (Malaysia Convention and Exhibition Report, 2010; 2011). It was estimated that between January 2012 and December 2015, MyCeb would have secured some 45 major business events. These events are estimated to produce a revenue of RM597 million (Performance Management Delivery Unit, 2012). This number shows that there is a growing demand for organizing business events in Malaysia.

2.0 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY IN BUSINESS EVENTS

In a book entitled Green Impact: Low Carbon Green Growth, which was published by the Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water, Malaysia and Green Purchasing Network Malaysia in the year 2010, p. 84, "In order for energy efficiency to take on, there needs to be a higher level of awareness, firstly, of what energy efficiency is all about and secondly, on how it will profit owners and users". Therefore, it can be said that energy efficiency practices among event organizers is one of the processes involved in organizing a business event. The awareness among event practitioners about the importance of energy efficiency practices during business event activities is vital to ensure the success of organizing a sustainable business event. Efficient

energy practice is also related to the use of information technology specifically the use of system applications. This is because the use of system applications such as the registration system; namely, EventPro and the use of digital board are examples of the role of technology in the process of organizing a sustainable event. However, it seems that there is lack of discussion on the use of information technology in business events; therefore, the aim of this paper is to explore the role of information technology in the process of sustainable business events.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The inductive method was chosen as it provides a better view of the phenomenon. Yin (2009) has illustrated this by saying that the inductive method provides an in-depth discussion on issues. Rittichainuwat and Mair (2012) suggested this method for future research related to their study because according to them the qualitative method will provide better insight on an issue. For this reason, the inductive or qualitative method was chosen for this study. As mentioned by Creswell (2012), four to five interviewees are enough for data to achieve its saturation point. This study achieved its saturation point only after analyzing all the 14 interviewees as all the information obtained from the interviewees were triangulated. Triangulation is also one of the strategies used to ensure that the data are valid. Yin (2009) discussed this and found that the triangulation method confirms the validity of the data. Semi-structured interviews are used as they give a chance for an interviewer to obtain in-depth information about an issue as the researcher is not knowledgeable enough about a phenomenon to ask relevant questions and it is usually used at an early stage of a study (Merriam, 2009). This study applied the one-to-one interview approach, which is a data collection process that enables the researcher to ask questions and record the answers from one participant at a time. This type of interview is suitable for participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably (Creswell, 2012) The semi-structured interview outline was included in the interview protocol. An interview protocol uses a set of procedures and queries that is applied during an interview (Yin, 2009). The interview protocol includes a range of questions to gauge the interviewee's opinions on the process of organizing a sustainable event. Merriam (2009) described the list

of questions to be asked during an interview as an interview guideline.

“The interview guideline will probably contain several specific questions that you want to ask everyone, some more open-ended questions that could be followed up with some probing and perhaps a list of some areas, topics and issues that you want to know more about but do not have enough information at the outset of your study to form specific questions”, p. 103.

Initially, interviewees were asked open questions about the idea of organizing a green event among the employees. The open question is designed to enable interviewees to give their own views and opinions before any specific question is given to them (Mair & Jago, 2010). In addition, interviewees were asked questions that were pertinent to their experience in organizing a sustainable event at their firm, with the intention of gauging any issues during the process of organizing a green event. The semi-structured questions are guided by literature. Semi-structured questions are between structured and less structured interview questions and all questions are flexible in order to gauge the individual's experience. It involves structured questions that were prepared before the interview and less structured questions, which were actually open questions that provide fresh insights and new information (Merriam, 2009). Apart from semi-structured interview, data collection was also based on observation carried out by using field notes, which would ensure the reliability of the data. During the data analysis, they were analyzed by categorizing the code based on interview transcriptions and field notes. The data that was produced during the interview were triangulated, together with all the information produced from event managers, company directors and associations. This study involved 14 event practitioners; namely event managers, event suppliers and company directors. For confidentiality purposes, their personal details are represented by using acronyms. The list of informants is listed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: List of Informants

Person's code	Position	Company
A1	Director	A
A2	Event Manager	A
A3	Event Manager	A

Person's code	Position	Company
A4	Event Manager	A
P1	Event Manager	C
P2	Event Manager	D
P3	Event Manager	E
P4	Event Manager	F
P5	Event Manager	G
P6	Event Manager	H
P7	Event Manager	I
B1	Convention Centre Manager	J
B9	Director	K
B2	Event Executive	L

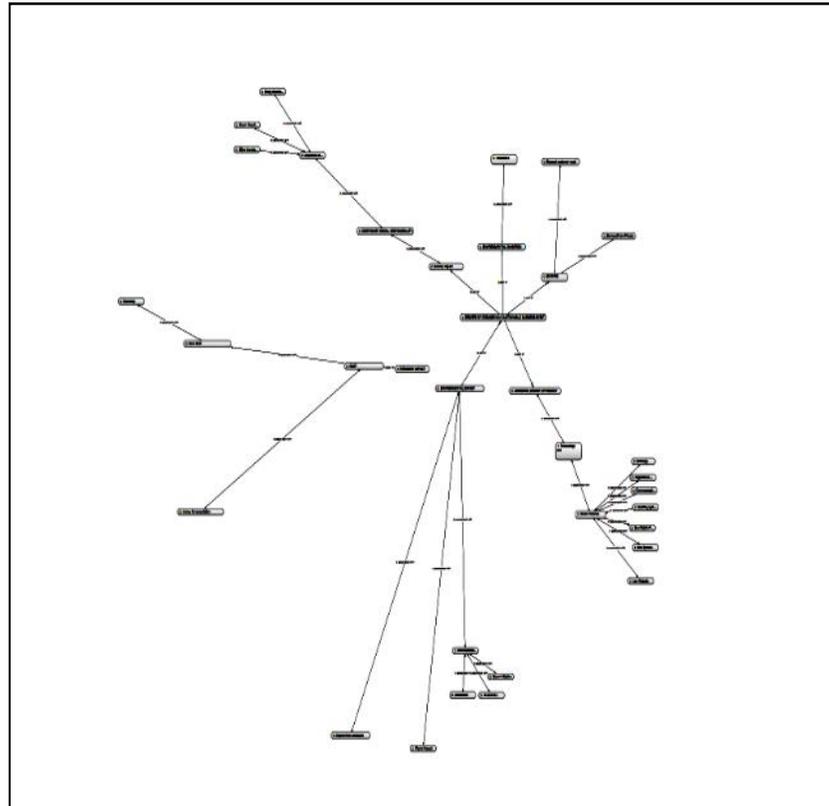
Note: 14 informants

ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis software was used to identify the codes and themes. ATLAS.ti keeps track of all data and they are saved in a container called hermeneutic unit or HU. HU can be understood as a container which holds everything that needs to be interpreted such as quotes, codes, words, notes, memo links, code families and super codes (Friese, 2012).

4.0 RESULT

The result is illustrated below.

Table 4.1: The use of Information Technology



Note: Result from data collection

The use of information technology during business event activities helps the cause of greening. This is acknowledged by P4, “As far as knowledge of the event is concerned, we introduce the technology earlier since the use of technology is important for greening”. The use of registration software and several mediums of communication assisted in ensuring the efficiency of an event (refer photo 1).

Photo 1



Note: Based on researcher’s personal photo collection

The use of several information technology devices creates paperless environment and this indirectly creates sustainable business environment. The use of information technology was seen during one of the events organized at the event venue.

A registration system based on information technology was used to keep track of the number of conference participants registered as well as for security purposes. However, based on observation during the event, although the purpose of the system is to assist the registration, the conference participants’ attitude hindered the effectiveness of such system. This is because registration was instructed to be done a day before the actual event. However, most of the conference participants registered only on the day itself. This scenario indicates that although the purpose of using information technology is good, uncooperative attitude of participants will not lead to an event’s success.

Apart from the issue of achieving efficiency from the use of information technology, the discussion revealed by P4 shows that the use of technology is important as one of the processes in reducing the use of paper. As mentioned by P4, “We use registration software such as event prop, because, as you know if the conference is attended by more than 500 people, the organizers would print at least 2000 registration copies”. This was agreed upon by PA2, “We email the program book and burn it on a CD upon request, if they request the program book we give the CD, we do print but the copies are limited”. The discussion indicates that the use of information technology may reduce the use of paper and assist in reducing time to disseminate information.

This shows that one of the processes in practicing sustainability is from the use of information technology by event practitioners. The use of email, websites and event software is a push factor that drives the use of technology for event promotions (Arcodia & Dickson, 2010). This is also the same strategy used by event organizers when promoting their event by using information technology such as the social media, through the use of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.

According to Lee and Tyrrell (2013);

“Increased use of social networking media for meeting planners has been motivated both by the on-going economic recession and the dynamic behavioural adjustments of meeting planners in terms of social media use. The implication is that promotion of social media by meeting planners will be most effective if it stresses the number of planners who have already adopted the technology and the usefulness in the planning process. The results of this study indicated that the ease of use strongly influenced adoption of social media as a tool. Thus, when promoting the use of social media to meeting planners, aspects of convenience and fun should be emphasized” (p.16).

The discussion revealed that the use of information technology helps in driving the process of greening an event. Thus, the use of several event materials was replaced by several paperless technologies such as corporate and social media software. Based on this, it can be stated that green information technology devices assist in reducing wasteful consumptions. The practice of using information technology devices

is observed from the practices at the convention centre and Company A. Several event organizers confirmed the use of information technology in their office. This highlights the usage of information technology as one of the processes in organizing a sustainable business event. However, there is lack of information on green practices on events' websites organized by event organizers in Malaysia. One of the reasons based on the interview with some of the event organizers was the aim of the event, which was to make profits and green practices are not the main motivator in organizing an event. As said by P5, "When organizing events, the emphasis is on profits and implementing sustainability might defer the aim of gaining profits". The discussion emphasizes the use of information technology as one of the processes of organizing a sustainable business event. However, the event organizers did not highlight the assimilation of green practices during an event by using the website. This is actually similar to the discussion made by Dickson and Arcodia (2010) who mentioned that website was not used in disseminating information about green practices among event companies.

5.0 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATION OF THIS STUDY

Based on the discussion above, the role of information technology has an influence on the commitment towards a sustainable business event among stakeholders. The study is limited to the business event sector in the context of Malaysia, therefore, future research should explore other geographical areas and other types of event.

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