The Effectiveness of Hosting an Event on Learning Outcomes in Event Education

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Abstract

This study is formed based on experiential learning theory to provide students with real life experience to plan, organise, and host an event. It aims to evaluate the overall satisfaction and effectiveness of the course in knowledge and skills acquired by participated students. Two forms of evaluation – Reaction and Learning based on Kirkpatrick's learning evaluation informed the study. Online questionnaire was developed to collect data from two classes comprising of 80 students who completed a course on Event Management in hosting a live event. The data revealed that experiential learning is a satisfactory learning method for event education; meanwhile, insights on effectiveness of knowledge and skills acquired through experiential learning method implemented are revealed.

Introduction

The academic institutionalization of event management has started since 1990s. Universities offering event management programme have increased rapidly. Although event management is always attached with tourism, leisure or recreation (Getz, 2012), it endeavours to become a separate study of its own, and, the popularity of the study area is undeniably growing. Thus, pedagogical advancement on event education becomes an area of importance.

This study aims to investigate the reaction and access the learning outcomes of students from a bachelor degree programme in tourism and event management major after undergoing an experiential learning experience – organising a live event as a course work. The study results are intended to contribute to the area of event education, particularly dedicate to course enhancement and development. There are five sections in this paper. First, introduction and research context are briefed to explain the background of the study. Second, literature review on experiential learning and evaluation of training programme are reviewed to inform the conceptual framework of the study. Thirdly, the methodology section describes the research method employed, data collection process and analysis made. Research findings are discussed subsequently. At last, the paper is concluded with insights revealed from the study, limitation of the study and future research path are discussed.

Research Context

Two classes with a total of 80 students enrolled in a course – Event Management: Hosting an Event (here after called the course). The course is composed with two major components, lectures on event management concept and practical experience to host a live event. Lectures occupies two fifth of the course time while practical experience in terms of forming, organizing and managing the event occupies three fifth of the course. Lectures are conducted to supplement the knowledge required to tackle difficulties and hurdles encountered during the event organization and implementation. Student evaluation is based on project proposal (10%), quizzes on management concepts (15%), organization of the event (40%), peer evaluation (10%), final project report (20%) and overall participation (5%). The first component of the course is assessed based on the project proposal and the quizzes, while the second

component of the course (practical experience) is assessed based on the rest of the evaluation, a total of 70%, excluding the 5% of overall participation.

Students have the liberty to form an event proposal based on their own interest, but within a context of charity; hints, similar to fund-raising and all fund raised is donated to a designated charity organization at the end of the event. In one example, a class of students had organized an event and had successfully achieved a new Guinness World Record. Meanwhile, more than ten thousands of US dollars were raised out of this event and were donated to a local charity organization. Experiential learning took place in this course through a live event was hosted by the enrolled students. In-class knowledge lecture and the real life experience are supplementing each other to form the experiential learning exercise. The course usually takes place in a period of fourteen weeks. A class of students usually organizes a series of activity within a theme which they had created at the beginning of the course. Activities are usually organized to synergize the event theme, such as photography competition, visit to local charity organization, and a gala event is often hosted in a form of carnival with different performances as well as food and beverage arrangement to draw the event to a close.

Literature Review

The popularity of event studies is undeniably growing in the last two decades. Universities introduce event studies as an independent degree programme or integrate the subject area into tourism, leisure or recreation studies. Event management is one of the core subjects that students majoring in event studies have to enroll. The subject itself is very much based on business management discipline, while knowledge of marketing, sponsorship, finance, risk and recently sustainability management are combined. The types of 'hands on' experience required for a student taking up the course of event management is usually more than a student taking

up a general business management course. Thus, the balance of a right combination between theoretical knowledge and practical experience for such a course is a constant challenge to educators who are responsible for the course. It is also a prominent issue for business management education, in which has a longer tradition then event management. Mintzberg and Gosling (2002) argued that "managers cannot be created in the classroom" (p.65) (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002); however, management education can add substantial value to those who have *experienced* the practice of management (Gosling and Mintzberg, 2006).   The effectiveness and value of mixing conventional knowledge teaching approach with experiential learning has been empirically researched in different disciplines (Hoover et al., 2010, Ng et al., 2009). Empirical research on experiential learning in the field of tourism and leisure are sparse (Hawkins and Weiss, 2005, Lashley and Barron, 2006, Xie, 2004) and even absent in event studies.

Experiential learning theory was established by Kolb, Rubin and McIntyre (Kolb et al., 1971). Experiential learning theory defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience"(p.41) (Kolb, 1984). In addition, experiential learning is a "holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, cognition, and behavior" (p.21).   Experiential learning thus takes place in different forms, such as field visits, projects implementation, simulations, and case studies. In essence, experiential learning theory defines learning taking place in a cycle with four stages. In sequence, they are grasping (experiencing), transforming (reflecting), reflective observation (thinking) and active experimentation (acting). A learner should undergo the four bases in order to transform an experience effectively into the learning of new knowledge. The four bases are interconnecting with each other, for example, having *grasping* an experience without doing anything with it *(transforming)* is not sufficient. Experiential learning theory literature is extensive, Kolb and Kolb (Kolb and Kolb, 2012)

maintain a database to date and record experiential learning theory researches. Research studies cover varies disciplines, from business to education. In this study, the course (Event Management: Hosting an Event) under examination is unquestionably a form of experiential learning because enrolled students are required to plan, organize and implement a live event.

In order to access the effectiveness of learning outcome after students undertook the experiential learning experience, this study was enlightened by Kirkpatick model of training evaluation (Kirkpatrick, 1975). Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation was developed in 1950s. The model consists of four-level of training evaluation, which were *Reactions, Learning, Behaviours* and *Results.* The four-level model has been refined over the last few decades; however, the core principles remained essentially the same (Kirkpatrick, 1996). According to Kirkpatrick (1996), understanding reactions of the trainees after attending a training is similar to measuring customers' satisfaction after using a product. Assessment of reactions involves depicting trainee' feelings about the training programme, for example, overall satisfaction, self-performance satisfaction, team performance satisfaction if there is any team work involved in the training programme and alike. Thus, a post-training satisfaction survey is a good way to collect information to understand whether the trainees were happy with the training programme or not. However, 'happy with the programme' is not necessarily equivalent to 'learning something', and vice versa. As a result, further measurements on learning outcomes are required no matter trainees expressing positive or negative satisfaction towards the training programme. Nonetheless, positive evaluation linking positive emotions of trainees are essential for learning, while negative evaluation is deemed for extra vigilant of trainer or educator in this case. In this study, we measured not only the overall satisfaction but self and team performance because team work was entailed mostly in the course. More importantly, *Learning* as another training evaluation level of Kirkpatrick's model is integrated into the research design. Knowledge and skill acquisition from the course are considered to be a precise way to measure learning outcome besides overall satisfaction. Thus, items of

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knowledge and skill which are expected to be acquired after taking the course, are measured in the questionnaire, such as assessing event impacts beforehand (knowledge), event marketing (knowledge), communication skill (skills), coordination skill (skills) and alike.

The other two levels of Kirkpatrick's model are *behavior* and *results*. Kirkpatrick (1996) advocates that in addition to measuring reactions and learning, changes in *behaviors* should also be evaluated in order to ensure training transfer. *Result* is the last level of Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model. Improvement in performance is usually the ultimate goal in conducting training. However, it is not easy to measure the result of training evaluation at school, particularly at tertiary education, in which students will graduate only in a few years' time, when such measure can be obtained. In this study, due to time and resource constraints, only the first two levels – *Reactions* and *Learning* were adopted for the evaluation of the learning outcome instead of the four levels.

Methodology

Participants

The school where this research is based usually admits a total of eighty students in the major of tourism and event management yearly. Students majoring in tourism and event management will enroll in the course during their third year of study. Thus, eighty students were targeted as the respondents of this study. The eighty students who completed the course during the junior year (Year 3) of their bachelor degree program were invited to complete a survey at their senior year (Year 4). The survey was administrated via a format of online questionnaire. The age of participated students are ranged from 21 to 25 years old. There was no restriction set to gender, nationality or academic performance to participate in the study. The

participants had seven days in responding the questionnaire. As the questionnaire was administered online, they were free to answer it at their preferred time. The flexibility provided with online questionnaire may reduce any potential negative effects caused by limited time in answering questionnaire. Anonymity was ensured throughout for all participants. In addition, the researchers declared to the participants that there would not be any linkages between their responses of the questionnaire and their academic results of any subjects that the researchers are in-charge. This is to ensure that participants would not be bias to return favorable answers, and participants would provide the most genuine responses. The participants thus completed the online questionnaire entirely on a volunteering basis. By the end of the survey period, 60 usable questionnaires were received and one additional questionnaire was submitted after the deadline, which was excluded. Thus, the online questionnaire has achieved a response rate of around 75%.

Materials and Procedures

This study is part of a larger research study initiative and aims to access the learning outcome of students undergoing experiential learning exercise. Survey approach was adopted using an online questionnaire with 59 questions. The questions were divided into eight parts, which described seven categories under three major areas of study. Responses were structured based on both item-specific (IS) response options scale (Edelen and Reeve, 2007) and the common rating Likert scale (Burns and Burns, 2008). Two levels of Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation: Reaction and Learning are based to inform the construction of the questionnaire. The three major study areas were: 1) General satisfaction; 2) Effectiveness of the course work; and 3) Extent of transformation. However, due to the limited length of a conference paper, the

researchers reported the findings of the first two areas of study – General Satisfaction and Effectiveness of the Course Work.

Satisfactions on the three course's categories were measured, namely individual, team performance, and learning attitude. The information was collected by means of three, nine and six variables respectively on each of the three categories. A bipolar 5-point Likert scale has been applied, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This area of study is based on *Reaction* of Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation (Kirkpatrick, 1996). The second area of study – *Learning*, the effectiveness of the course work was investigated based on two categories, level of skills acquired and level of knowledge acquired. A total of 11 types of skills and 12 kinds of knowledge were measured. An item-specific response option scale was used, which extended from none to expert level (Edelen and Reeve, 2007). This thread of enquiry is formed based on *Learning of* Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation (Kirkpatrick, 1996).

The questionnaire was set-up and refined based on the course that has applied experiential learning. The questionnaire has been tested for four days on technical viability and reliability. A pilot test was carried out by selected students who have completed the course in their Year 3 of study and have achieved good grades. The final questionnaire was then concluded after modifications based on the pilot test results. Two e-mail reminders were sent during the data collection period to the targeted participants.

The data undergone data cleansing and ten questionnaires were found not usable due to unreliable information was reported; for example, the participants chose Year 1 as the year they took the course, but it was indeed in their Year 3; participants indicate their age were less than 18 while they are currently in their Year 4 of study, who should be older than 18 years old. At the end, 50 completed questionnaires were included in data analyses. The reliability of the data was checked to ensure data was ready for further analysis. Conclusion was then made on

the richness of course content and what have been learnt through experiencing by reflective observation.

Findings and Discussion

This section reports the findings of the study and is structured based on the two evaluations of General Satisfaction (*Reaction*) and Effectiveness of the Course Work (*Learning*) of Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation. Demographics of the participants are first reported and followed by the two major areas of this study.

Demographics

A total of 50 completed questionnaires were included in the final analysis. All participants are studying at the senior year (Year 4) of their bachelor degree program when the questionnaire was administered. The sample consists of 72% of female and 28% of males. This corresponds to the actual student structure of target participants under the tourism and event management major. Their ages are ranged from 21 to 25 years old, with majority of the participants at 22 years old (50%). Based on the course structure, students were assigned on a three-level hierarchical structure to manage the event, namely leader, supervisor and member. The distribution of the participants on these three levels was 11%, 5% and 34% respectively. They received grades that spread from A to C, with majority within the category of B (56%).

Reliability

The reliability is measured by the internal consistency assessed by Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Cronbach, 1951). Table 1 shows high reliability is found on the overall collected data and each of the major areas of study, reaching a peak of 0.946. Thus, the data set possess good reliability of measure to produce consistent results.

Table 1: Internal Consistency Coefficients (Cronbach's Alpha) for the overall research and major areas of study

	Cronbach's Alpha
Overall	0.946
General satisfaction	0.888
Effectiveness of course	0.869

General satisfaction

The general satisfaction was studied based on three categories, namely course satisfaction, satisfaction of individual and team performance, and learning attitude. The majority of the participants (around 90%) showed good satisfaction at taking part in the course work and the organization of the course (Figure 1). Only a minimal percentage of 2% demonstrated dissatisfaction. A further investigation on the self and team performance found that the dissatisfaction was probably related to the undesirable perception on teamwork and performance of team members (Figure 2). Regardless of this, results showed that the majority of the participants were satisfied with the various aspects on individual and team performance, the accomplishments of the course work, the working atmosphere and improvement in skill-sets. The satisfaction rate on these aspects peak at 92% for improvement in interpersonal skills and trough at 80% for own performance.

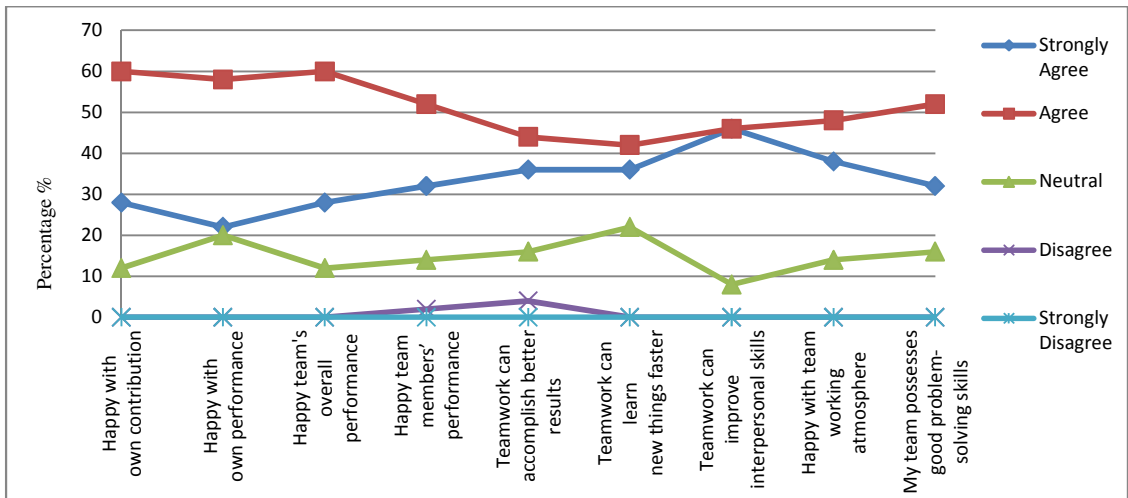Figure 1: Level of Satisfaction on the Course

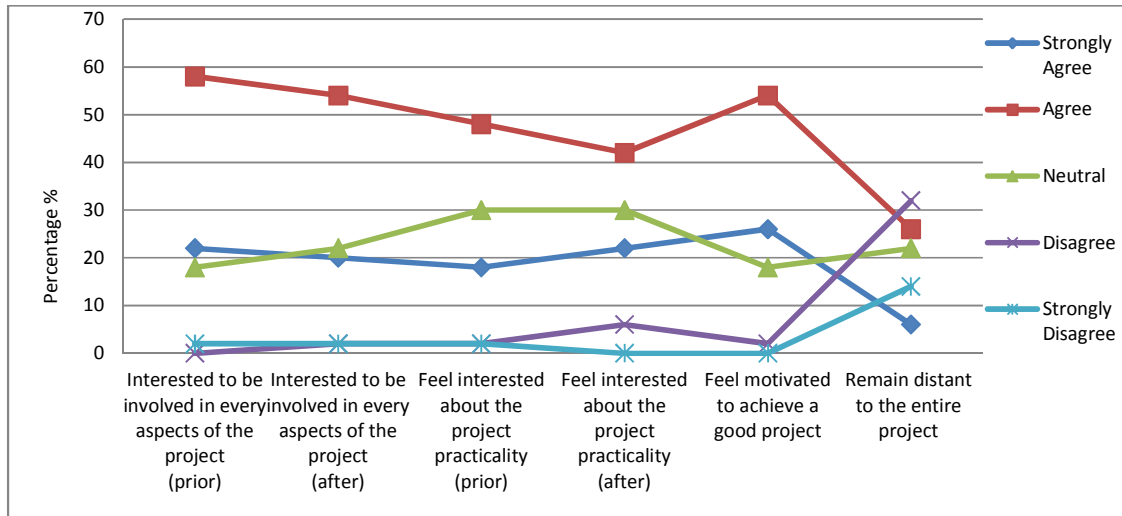Figure 2: Level of Satisfaction on Individual and Team performance

Figure 3: Degree of Learning Attitude

For the undesirable perception on teamwork, an examination on the third category of general satisfaction, learning attitude was made, and it provided some indications. It revealed that although there was a slight decrease in the percentage of participants who were interested to be involved in every aspect of the course work before and after their actual involvement, the intention to be involved in every aspect still stood high at 74%. This was supplemented by the findings that the majority (80%) felt motivated to achieve a good course work. However, around 32% of the participants concurrently expressed that they remained distant to the entire project even on completion (Figure 3).

These incongruous findings are perhaps related with the design on distribution of responsibilities that are imposed by the hierarchical structure of the teams. The three-level of hierarchy, in which participated students playing different roles as leader, supervisor or member, has inherited either extra or limited involvement in various aspects of this experiential learning exercise – hosting an event live. These may prevent participants from taking part in aspects that they are interested in or have more confidence on. Therefore, even though they are motivated

to achieve a good course work, they may feel frustrate due to unwelcomed responsibility matching.

Despite the feeling of remaining distant from the project, the high average satisfaction rate on both the overall course and the overall individual and team performance signify a positive perception on incorporating the practicality in the course. Based on the Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation, this denotes affirmative responses to the area of evaluation - *Reaction*.

Effectiveness of course

The second level of the Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation - *Learning*, examines the precise types of knowledge that have been acquired. This level of evaluation was studied through the type of skills acquired and the kind of acknowledge learnt. From the findings, an average of around 78% of the participants indicated that they have achieved good or expert level on the 11 types of skills under study. Amongst which, being a good team player and being a good learner were rated at the top, when 92% of participants believed they have acquired good or expert level for these two types of skill set. On the contrary, the least proportion of participants (54%) rated they have acquired the good or expert level on leadership skills (Figure 4). The cause of this may again connect to the hierarchical structure, when only a designated percentage of participants can play the role as a leader.
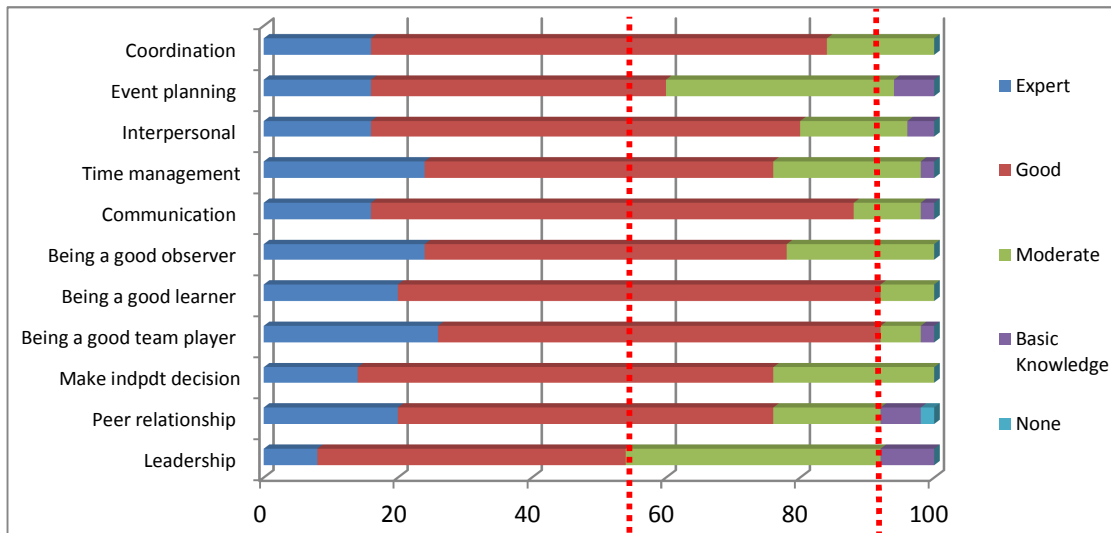
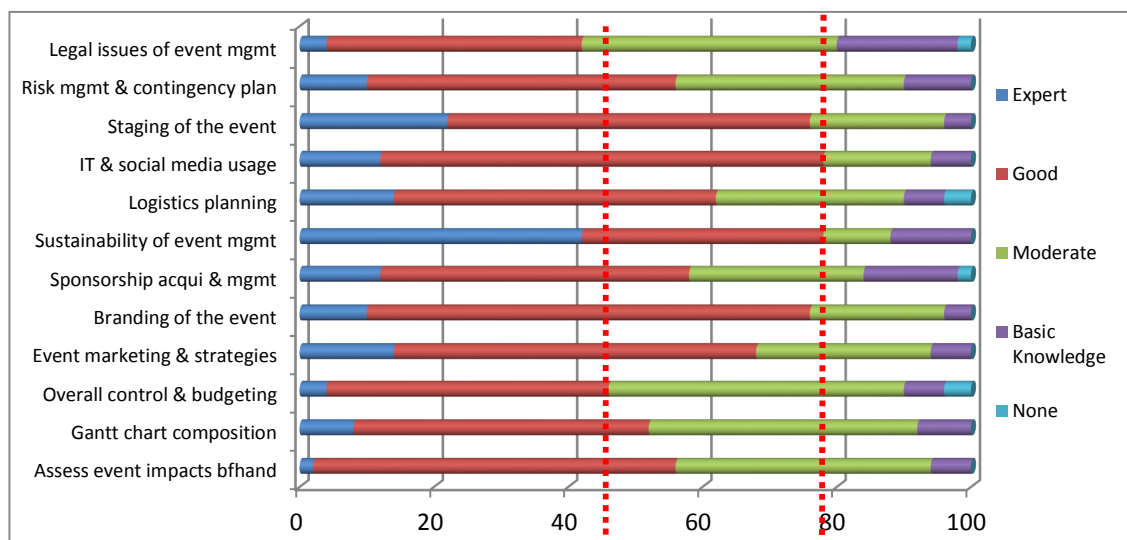Figure 4: Skills Acquired during the Organization of the Event

Figure 5: Knowledge Learnt during the organization of the Event

In regard to the kind of knowledge learnt, results were less encouraging than that on the type of skills acquired. Amid the 12 kinds of knowledge under study, only an average of 62% of the participants indicated that they have achieved good or expert level. The knowledge on the information technology (IT) and social media usage, as well as branding of the event were the two areas of knowledge that the most participants (78%) evaluated as reaching the good or

expert level. Conversely, only 42% of participants believed they have reached good or expert level in the legal issues of event management.

The data revealed that the majority of participants have acquired substantial level of IT knowledge and social media usage experience along the course period. It is understandable because participants of the course always utilize various forms of social media, e.g. Facebook, to promote their event to the public. Good (66%) to expert level (12%) of IT knowledge acquisition happened when participants had to demonstrate the event in video, graphical and text formats via social media. Furthermore, achieving good knowledge in event branding (66%) is possibly due to the nature of the course, in which enrolled students are required to run a series of activities to commensurate a theme that they had set up at the beginning. This structure of the course expects the class constantly working on a theme event, which requires more effort in themed event branding. The theme that the class created at the beginning is normally required to be carried out from the beginning until the end of the event organization. Any activities that the class organized are necessitated to echo the theme of the event. As a result, the knowledge grasped by the participants is associated to the formation of the event type, in this case, themed charity event.

On the other hand, four out of the total 12 area of knowledge assessment were reported by the participants that no knowledge was acquired. These were namely, overall control and budget (4%), sponsorship acquisition and management (2%), logistic planning (4%) and legal issues of event management (2%). These provide warning alert to the educators. The 12 areas of knowledge accessed are under the knowledge domain in which the course meant to deliver. Any of the participants reporting no knowledge should be grasped as a serious matter, and it reckons for further investigation in order to enhance the knowledge acquisition level, at least to a basic understanding but not none.

Conclusion

To conclude, the course (Event Management: Hosting an Event) has achieved an overall positive reaction from the participated students. Overall satisfaction (90%) and interest to be involved in every aspect in the course after completion (74%) are relatively high. These are encouraging findings as positive emotion towards any kind of training is fundamental and essential prior knowledge and skill to be acquired. To reveal further insights behind a satisfactory course undertaken by the participants, skills and knowledge acquired were also measured in this study. The level of skills acquired when comparing with knowledge acquired seem better perceived by most of the participants. To this end, attention on knowledge transfer to participants may require more effort spent by the educators. The loading of test is rather small in the course (15%), increase the loading may offer better result on knowledge transfer. The study results provide strong support to educators in organizing experiential learning exercise (hosting a live event) for event education. Meanwhile, interesting insights concerning the structure of the learning exercise, e.g. hierarchical structure of the event organisation, and a themed charity event will impose effect on the learning outcomes. To better understand the learning taking place in this kind of experiential learning exercise in event education, a pre- and post-training assessment, as well as a control versus treatment group comparison may offer better results. In addition, the other two levels of Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation also offer interesting research path in the future.

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