

Events Employment Crises' Impacts and Resolutions

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5 Events Employment: Crises' Impacts and Resolutions

Richard N.S. Robinson and Yawei Jiang

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to consider employment in relation to the broader events industry and crisis. In doing so this contribution homes in on two substantial research gaps in the literature. The first, related to the intrinsic interdependency between the events industry and the tourism and hospitality industries (Getz & Page, 2016), is that there is a well-documented academic and policy-maker ambivalence towards workforce issues in the broader tourism, hospitality, and event industries relative to other topics in these domains (Baum et al., 2016; Liu, 2018; Muskat & Mair, 2020). The second gap is that although there is a rich literature related to tourism and events recovery from, and resilience to, crisis and disasters, their impacts on workforce, and the role they play in recovery is ill-understood (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

There is, however, also an interdependency between many of the entertainment, cultural and sporting industries and events (Getz, 1997). Almost without exception the global tourism (hospitality and events) and entertainment (cultural and arts) have been the hardest hit economically by the COVID-19 pandemic (Sigala, 2020). A focal point of this chapter, therefore, will be the consideration of not only direct event employment effects vis-a-vis crises but also the ripple effects on other workforces dependent on the 'soft infrastructure' that the event industry generates. In particular this chapter will:

- ◆ Demonstrate that workforce is a neglected area in events research relative to its importance;
- ◆ Outline what we know about event workforces and job creation (including multiplier effects);
- ◆ Reveal the impacts of crises on event workforces;
- ◆ Detail how organizational recovery strategies impact workforces when dealing with crises;
- ◆ Consider events employment-related recovery and resilience strategies.

Crises refer to institutional (organizational) responses or failures vis-à-vis disasters (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Disasters can be natural (e.g., flood, earthquake bushfire), human-induced (e.g., economic, terrorism or conflict) and epidemic events. Disasters can also be unfolding scenarios, for instance climate change, escalating nuclear armament tensions or rising inequality. In practice many of these are not discrete but interconnected – for example epidemic and economic disasters. As a case in point, the context for this chapter will be the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on events, with a focus on Australasia, although in the first case study a crisis in late 2019 compounded the proceeding COVID-19 impacts. Nascent research suggests the impacts on tourism, hospitality and events workforces has been crippling – more than this, Baum, Mooney, Robinson and Solnet (2020) suggest COVID-19 (and by implication other crises) amplify existing workforce vulnerabilities and precarities (cf. Robinson et al., 2019). As such there are several imperatives for the consideration of the workforce impacts of crises on events, extending from the economic, social, political, and humanistic. These imperatives will unfold in this chapter thus. First the literature and background will be critically treated to generate a platform for the presentation of two Australasian case studies that bring the various surfaced perspectives to life. The chapter will conclude with the consideration of employment-related recovery and resilience strategies in both practical but also more abstracted dimensions.

Importance of event workforces

Events are operated on a temporary and project-based structure and are characterized by a high fluctuation of paid employees and volunteers (Muskat & Mair, 2020; Michopoulou, Azara, & Russell, 2020). Event workforces have their unique profiles (Abson, 2017; Kim & Cuskelly, 2017) which reflects in a highly heterogeneous workforce from a diverse nature of contract forms (e.g., long-term permanent employees, casual employees, volunteers, and external contractors) (Mair, 2009). The temporary and project-based structure also indicates a high speed/clear goal performance of event organizations, which rely on constant fluctuations of employees during an event's operations period. This creates a series of workforce management problems to ensure business continuity (Clark et al., 2017; Van der Wagen & White, 2015), especially for small- to medium-size event organizations (SME) with a large number of part-time temporary workers (Michopoulou et al., 2020). For example, the difficulty around ongoing recruitment, employee retention (Muskat & Mair, 2020), storage of knowledge (Stadler, Fullagar, & Reid, 2014) and logistics of employee planning (Van der Wagen, 2007).

In the current uncertain global environment affected by natural disasters and health crises (e.g., COVID-19), event organizations are facing more challenging issues to adapt their strategic planning to achieve resilience. Crises

and disasters can disrupt workforce availability and mobility and can create negative psychological effects to vulnerable populations (Santos et al., 2020). Therefore, workforce training is emphasized as one of the key dimensions in determining the ability of organizations to absorb or mitigate negative impacts (Nyaupane et al., 2020) or to reduce business interruption losses by maintaining functionality and productivity (Santos et al., 2014). However, despite the clear recognition of the heterogenous nature of event teams, existing literature largely focuses on volunteer understanding (e.g., Blackman, Benson, & Dickson, 2017; Kim, Fredline, & Cuskelly, 2018) with a neglect of paid part-time workers (Muskat & Mair, 2020). Event workforce strategies are under-researched in the context of events, specifically on increasing employee retention, improving upskilling, creating long-term positions (Baum et al., 2009; Michopoulou & Melpignano, 2019), and mitigating disruptions to achieve crisis/disaster-related resilience (Nyaupane et al., 2020).

Furthermore, event employment or workforce issues reside in what Muskat and Mair (2021) ascribe as 'inward' perspectives on events research, which include the machinations of organizational, managerial, and human resource matters. Among these 'inward' attributes, industry leaders need more creative strategies to attract and sustain quality workforces. However, the ability of event organizations to recognize the needs of its labor shortage and provide sufficient career development and training opportunities is relatively limited (McCabe, 2012). No specific research is available in discussing quality workforce in the event context. Although Getz and Robinson (2014; Robinson & Getz, 2016; Robinson, Getz, & Dolnicar, 2018) have argued that in some niche event areas there is preponderance of demand-side research in comparison to supply-side, employment issues in the event industry remain neglected.

Event workforce effects and management

Events provide substantial opportunities to create employment, develop new skills, accelerate short-term economic needs, and alleviate long term poverty (Maguire & Hanrahan, 2017). Many countries have leveraged events as an opportunity to build skill legacy and to enhance long-term employment for local people (Jago et al., 2010), and develop event education programs to provide a pipeline of skilled workers (cf. Robinson, Barron, & Solnet, 2008). Moreover, events can generate a large need for labor during events planning and preparation phases, such as construction of event-related infrastructure, maintenance of grounds and facilities, and security planning (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013). Furthermore, events can bring short-term employment effects in other sectors such as retail trade, accommodation and food services, arts, and entertainment (Feddersen & Maennig, 2013). The investment of public projects (e.g., transportation system upgrade, travel infrastructure renewal) can create other economic development opportunities and generate more new

jobs (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013). In the longer term, skills from recruited external experts can be transferred to the local laboring market by skills training or apprenticeship type programs. This is an important positive effect the events industry brings to other economics, especially for poor countries where capacity building or skills development are lacking in the service delivery area (Jago et al., 2010).

Event workforce management is a wide-ranging activity that reflects the long-term strategic development of the event organization (Van der Wagen, 2007). A successful workforce management should help organizations to attain positive culture of commitment and cooperation development as the key outcomes. Key strategic approaches for workforce planning include the analysis of labor markets, analysis of skills requirements, and employee monitoring at multiple event phases (e.g., planning before the event and operation/deliver during the event) (Hanlon & Cuskelly, 2002). However, there is a lack of discussion of event workforce management in a crisis and disaster environment. For example, the current COVID-19 pandemic has created great financial stress on event operations. Choi (2020) reports that until the relaxation on social gathering rules, 87% of events have been cancelled or postpone, according to a survey of events' professionals in the US. Concomitantly, 90% of event businesses have reduced salaries and 58% have been forced into making redundancies (Choi, 2020). Company team culture has been negatively impacted due to mental health and communication issues (Levinson, 2020). A deeper investigation is needed to understand the impacts of these crises on event workforce management and how event workforce can implement successful and effective responses.

Impacts of crises on event workforce

The event industry is one of the most risky and uncertain industries as it comprises a complexity of activities, arrangements, and operational processes (Boyle & Haggerty, 2012). While events' economic and socio-cultural impacts have been widely studied in the literature, there has been limited research discussing the crisis impacts on the event industry, especially the event workforce. A growing number of studies have explored the COVID-19 impacts on hospitality and tourism workforce (e.g., Baum et al., 2020; Sönmez et al., 2020); while limited attention has been given to event workforce that is based on a temporary and project-based structure (Muskat & Mair, 2020). The tourism and hospitality industry has experienced workforce shocks during the pandemic, which not only trigger financial pressure to many individuals (Sönmez et al., 2020), but also exert significant stress on people's mental health and safety (Hsieh et al., 2013).

Lee and Goldblatt (2001) first investigated the impacts of the 2001 economic recession on the event industry, which included the decrease of event num-

bers, increased competition for small companies, and job losses. These have necessitated the event industry to identify niche markets and provide more personalized services to increase their competitive advantages. They also studied the global financial crisis's (2007-2009) impact on events and found a significant profit margin decrease, reduced sponsorship funding, and other revenue sources losses (Lee & Goldblatt, 2012). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased events' uncertainty levels due to social gathering restrictions (Parnell et al., 2020). Financial uncertainty is the single greatest challenge for event operators without a clear date to reschedule and resume operations (Ludvigsen & Hayton, 2020). This could trigger a series of subsequent effects on ceasing current labor contracts, venue cancellation, and activity rearrangement, talent and show procurement, event promotion etc.

Event workforce response to crises

Event organizers need to identify suitable strategies to respond to crises and prepare for the future. Lee and Goldblatt (2012) found four strategies post-crisis to maintain events operation. First, increased marketing efforts could help reduce financial exposure following a recession. Event operators should consider the 'new' needs and wants of customers and customize their business practices in the future. Second, the increased use of technology (e.g., social media, AI) in event marketing would be a new trend. Consistent and reliable information sharing is important to protect workforce and maintain customer relationships (Anderson, 2006) by adopting post-crisis stress reduction strategies such as peer interaction (Heath, 1998). Importantly, the use of technology can be further expanded to event operations (i.e., virtual events and festivals) in the COVID-19 environment to ensure the safety of employees and customers (Sigala, 2020). Third, securing sponsorship relationships and diversifying new revenue sources are important to mitigate financial pressure following a recession or other types of crises. Fourth, seeking out strong political support for events and festivals can be also critical for event organizers to remain sustainable.

In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic impacts, volunteer and security management are essential considerations for events and festivals stakeholders (Ludvigsen & Hayton, 2020). Event organizers rely on large numbers of volunteers to deliver service at all levels (Hoye et al., 2020), and thus can take on security-related tasks and duties in crowd control (Giulianotti & Klausner, 2010) to assist the social distancing rules. This requires a new training process to enable their acquisition of desirable skills. To cope with variations in demand in a crisis environment, event organizations could also use more casualized workforce to increase workforce flexibility (Anderson, 2006). Furthermore, the event industry needs to implement effective safety protocols, including measures to disinfect venue seats and public spaces after each use to

prevent potential risk of virus transmission (Sönmez et al., 2020). More importantly in the long-term, event organizers need to re-design outdoor/indoor experiences to cater for smaller groups of customers (Sigala, 2020). It should comply with social distancing and gathering restrictions but without compromising the quality of experience for customers. They need to also integrate new technologies into their experience design, such as the robotic automation and AI to enable no-touch service delivery (Agrawal et al., 2020). Workforce reskilling and upskilling would become important in a post-pandemic era for new business models.

Case Study #1

Tough times call for empathic communication and community goodwill

Ramping up to becoming a NZ\$1 billion/year operation, two crises befell Auckland's multi-purpose precinct, SkyCity Entertainment Group, in the space of a few months. Incorporating an international convention center drawing on the facilities of a casino, two hotels totaling 635 rooms (with another property nearing completion), multiple food and beverage outlets, a theater, and other public spaces, SkyCity is a jewel in Auckland's and New Zealand's, event and tourism landscape. Crowning the complex, Sky Tower alone attracts half a million visitors annually. In October 2019, a fire tore through the roof of the 'under construction' convention center. Due to the extensive structural and smoke damage and a black sooty pall that hung above Auckland's CBD, the executive took the tough decision to close for two days (three nights) rather than place the public, and just as importantly their employees, at any risk. Over the following three weeks SkyCity resumed trading but at a reduced scale, meaning many of their 3,500 strong full-time equivalent workforce was temporarily stood down. As labor costs represented nearly 40% of revenues for SkyCity, affirmative action was required.

In what became a dress rehearsal for responding to the imminent COVID-19 pandemic impacts, senior management worked diligently to minimize the crisis' impacts on their valued employees. Furloughed staff eligible for annual leave and other entitlements had this buffer enacted. "Our primary concern was for the wellbeing of our staff and the community", related Colin McClean, General Manager of Hotel Operations. Communication became the fulcrum of their response. It was clear there would be job losses – the key was to reduce the impacts on individuals and the community. Over several weeks, communications, via email, text, and one-on-one and group Skype calls, occurred as often as every six hours each day. The messaging was empathetic, but

a deliberate attempt was made not to sugar-coat the situation. Messaging was honest, and ultimately this built trust and loyalty. As a result, job losses were low, mainly through vacancy non-replacement, and business returned strongly through November and December of 2019. Many contingent staff returned to work, with any potential disaffection assuaged by the regular but frank communications. Gaming, then as into 2021, was the mainstay of SkyCity's recovery, accounting for over 50% of the venue's revenue.



Figure 5.1: SkyCity Convention Center Roof Fire and Sky Tower.

Source: <https://pxhere.com/en/photo/1599680>; Permissions: CC0/PD

Ironically, it was a slow decline in casino revenues, amongst a predominantly Asian-heritage patronage, that signaled an even greater disruption than the fire was afoot. Event and accommodation cancellations increased apace until March 2020 when the pandemic had reached New Zealand's shores and the government enforced lockdowns. All events were cancelled, and facilities closed. By April 2020, SkyCity was reporting monthly receipt losses of NZ\$90 million. The New Zealand government wage subsidy enabled SkyCity to keep on many permanent staff, covering 80% of salaries, which the business was able to top-up. As elsewhere, contingently employed workers were not eligible. Mediation processes involved unions. Unite Union, representing most of the convention, casino and hospitality staff, was key to working collaboratively with SkyCity to enact objective measures in the 'right-sizing' process, including the 'last in first out' redundancy policy. So the communications, fine-tuned during the fire crisis, kicked in again, as the marketing personnel pivoted from an outward commercial to internal and community

engagement strategy. Positive language framed decision making – for example, the staff-shedding process normally labelled 'down-sizing' was referred to as 'right-sizing'. Executives involved in the inevitable and difficult process of 'right-sizing' were not unaffected. They experienced grief at the plight of their former worker colleagues and were hurt by the inevitable media coverage that provided platforms for disaffected retrenched staff. *"It was like survivor syndrome"*, recalled Mr McClean. On the other hand, many employees were gracious in departure, appreciating SkyCity's incapacity to keep going but also their empathetic approach – and took to social media to express these sentiments.

Recovery has been slow but steady, driven by pent-up domestic demand particularly in the gaming portfolio. The events and hospitality side of the business, however, remains slow, and in those services resides most of the demand for labor. The theater remains closed. Nonetheless, rehiring commenced as lockdowns eased in mid-2020, prioritizing those staff who were retrenched. *"It's a win-win"*, said McClean, *"we are repaying their loyalty and atoning for the difficulties they and the community faced – but our former staff are already skilled up, know our business and are job-ready"*. In the meantime, reconstruction of the convention center recommenced in mid-2020 – creating jobs in construction, a sector often targeted by policymakers to reinvigorate economies. Alike events and tourism operators globally, SkyCity is waiting for international borders to reopen in a post-COVID-19 world, so they can welcome visitors and their employees back in equal measure.

With appreciation to Mr Colin McClean, General Manager of Hotel Operations, for his valued time and candid insights <https://skycityauckland.co.nz/>

Case Study #2

Performing arts organization creates employment amid COVID-19 disruption

Approaching five years of managing and representing performing artists, Cluster Arts was set to have its breakthrough year in 2020. Founded by experienced arts sector professional, Deb Wilks, Cluster Arts, based in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, is a genuine SME, and provides 'backend' services to performing artists and specializes in representing bespoke circus troupes. Artist services include procurement of performances, or gigs (usually extended season tours), and managing their contractual, administrative, operational, compliance and developing business strategies. Additionally, Cluster Arts project manages events and festivals, or parts thereof. Increasingly, their footprint extended internationally as they managed or auspiced

Australian artists on the signature and 'fringe' festival circuit in the US and Canada, UK, mainland Europe, South Korea, and China.

Pre-COVID-19, Cluster Arts employed three people, Deb Wilks and her Executive Producer, Kate Malone, full-time, and a part-time Operations Manager – or 2.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff. Indirectly, via the circus troupes they represented, Cluster Arts created and sustained employment for nearly 40 performing artists. Their forecasts for 2020 projected (AUS)\$500,000 in revenue. Grant acquisition was a significant but diminishing part of their portfolio, as the business sought greater independence.

Cluster Arts staff were with performers touring in China as COVID-19 broke. Over the coming months the international circuit collapsed and in February 2020 the Australian Government announced domestic lockdowns. The immediate impact of the pandemic was swift and devastating. Future business dried up and Cluster Arts was saddled with legacies – financial and administrative. For example, performers they represented were stranded overseas. Their revised budget reforecast earnings downwards by two-thirds – much of this income was derived in the early months of 2020.

In late March, the Australian Government announced the JobKeeper scheme, designed to enable employers to retain staff on reduced, but government subsidized income. While other players in the performing arts sector claimed JobKeeper for their staff but adopted a passive market positioning, Cluster Arts adopted a proactive strategy. In fact, by the close of 2020 Cluster Arts had doubled its staffing and nearly doubled the number of circus troupes they represented. How did they achieve these employment outcomes at a time when the arts and entertainment industry had been savaged globally by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic?

An immediate response was for Cluster Arts to reach out to all its constituents, in particular the performing artists they represented. As Deb Wilks stated, *"without the artists we would not have a job"*. Cluster Arts considered the artists as their clients and attended to their wellbeing; physical, emotional, and financial. Cluster Arts open plan office became a drop-in center for artists to meet and even train. JobKeeper applications were prepared on behalf of eligible artists, and ultimately 50% of their artists secured the safety net – and Cluster Arts even offered cash to artists who were in dire straits. Ensuring Cluster Arts had healthy relationships, trust and goodwill with their representative performers and advocating for them was key to retaining them as clients for when opportunities emerged.



Figure 5.2: Cluster Arts' Online International Circus Pitching program.

Source: Cluster Arts; Permissions: Ms Deb Wilks, Executive Director.

Like many performing artists Cluster Arts experimented with virtual performances but quickly abandoned this strategy as the value proposition for all stakeholders, including audiences, was poor. Instead, Cluster Arts embarked on an engagement and outreach program. A positive affordance of the lockdown was extra time! As Deb Wilks quipped, *"the pandemic allowed us to work on our business rather than in our business"*. Cluster Arts used this time to network at the highest levels, government and corporate, to seek out opportunities – after all festival directors would be looking closer to home for performers as international travel became an impossibility. The hibernation of Circus Oz proved a boom. As the regional festival circuit picked up Cluster Arts became a go-to agency, especially as Queensland remained relatively unscathed but closed its borders to the southern states who were experiencing higher rates of community infection. Cluster Arts launched an online pitching program for international producers. They received 30 applications from Australian companies for six places and worked with successful candidates to prepare their international 'pitches' for strategically selected international presenters. Subsequently, several performers have signed up with Cluster Arts as their management company!

Cluster Arts 'front-foot' response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have reaped real and potential business and employment growth. Cluster Arts created several positions, supported by JobKeeper, to bring in-house services they previously contracted out. These include a producer, a marketer, and a bookkeeper, bringing the organizational FTE staff to nearly

five. With opportunities created in the domestic market via networking and competitors falling by the wayside, Cluster Arts have provided gigs and tours for several of the troupes. And via its innovative outreach Cluster Arts have also grown the number of performer groups they represent from 9 to 15 – creating competitive advantage and further employment when international travel and the festival circuit relaunches.

With thanks to owner, Deb Wilks, for reflectively and openly sharing proprietary information <https://www.clusterarts.com/>

Discussion and conclusions

In the consideration of crises and their employment-related impacts in this chapter, it is apparent there is an urgent need for more and new knowledge. COVID-19 has been unprecedented in its impacts on the events and allied industries in the modern age, given that the affordances of the airline travel boom since the mid-twentieth century have transformed these sectors into multi-billion concerns employing millions of people (WTTC, 2020) even if many contingently. With travel curtailed, both international and domestically, event demand diminished. Social distancing regimes, implemented by most jurisdictions, deemed even the smallest events impossible. While technology has facilitated virtual events for some sectors (Sigala, 2020), in our case studies, virtual space was either inappropriate or uncommercial. As gatherings became periodically permitted, a focus on creating events for local markets became the focus. Even at this limited scale events organizations had to have recovery and resilience strategies in place to ensure they were ‘geared to go’ including being staffed with the requisite workforce.

The case studies both highlight government proactivity to massive workforce disruptions, albeit typically less dramatically disruptive than COVID-19. In Australia and New Zealand, as in many developing nations, active labor market policies (cf. Solnet et al., 2014) are a common cyclical intervention for attraction, retention, and regional workforce responses. This allowed businesses to retain a standing workforce for recovery, even if revenues almost entirely dried up. In parallel, although the events and allied tourism and hospitality industries are notoriously unrepresented in advocacy bodies for employees and stakeholders (cf. Robinson & Brenner, 2020), unions and peak industry bodies became key to negotiating for labor rights and lobbying governments to ease community and travel restrictions when appropriate. Bucking a trend in developed nations for organizations to resist collectivism, the SkyCity case demonstrated the benefits of embracing Union-facilitated negotiations to achieve transparent and fair processes – even if that meant redundancies in worst case scenarios.

As the literature alludes to, indirectly the event industry can have positive impacts on other sectors and the broader economy. Venues that support auxiliary tourism products and hospitality services (Feddersen & Maennig, 2013), like SkyCity, generate large-scale employment – and even though event recovery was slow these augmented services allowed for the retention or deployment of some staff. In terms of infrastructure and capacity building, so long as finance is available, capital can be invested into overdue renovations or new-builds (Mills & Rosentraub, 2013), creating extra-demand – and so invigorated employment opportunities – as markets normalize.

Drilling down to the firm and individual level, some themes from the literature resonate. Training and development are strategies to engage and motivate employees during downturns in business (Nyaupane et al., 2020). Micro-credentialling has become a go-to product to keep staff engaged while concomitantly up-skilling especially in the occupational and guest health, hygiene and safety regimes that will likely interface with normal services in the job descriptions of events employees (Sigala, 2020; Sönmez et al., 2020). Beyond this, investment in training, whether by employer or employee, constitutes professional development and can free up 'headspace' and stimulate creativity and innovation, as evident in the Cluster Arts case study.

In both case studies communication with employees/contractors was a key strategy in responding to the crises' impacts, particularly recognizing that individual and community wellbeing (Levinson, 2020) were key sensibilities. This is important because, as the literature confirms, event workforces, whether remunerated or volunteers, are often contingently engaged (Muskat & Mair, 2020; Michopoulou et al., 2020). Rather than treating them as disposable, the cases speak to communications strategies that acknowledged, dignified, and respected their workforces – not a universal tourism, hospitality, and event industry affordance (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020b). Multiple media were harnessed in communications strategies to ensure cut-through, consistency and 'care' (cf. Anderson, 2006). It was clear that resilience, harnessing from the learnings of prior crises, was mobilized to more effectively navigate the challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic impacts conjured up. Our cases hint at the impact of crises on management left with tough decisions, who often become the targets of criticism. Their burden can be heavy and bring guilt – and responsibility to try to turn things around and bring back their employees more quickly. Employees who 'survive the cut' equally might feel uncomfortable, especially if they live and socialize in the same communities.

A paucity of literature prevents a comprehensive discussion of employment strategies related to crises. Nonetheless, the case studies highlight a number of practical strategies related to past learnings; clear consistent, regular and

honest yet empathetic communications; harnessing technology and the reach of social media, a concern for individual and community wellbeing, collaboration with representative bodies to mitigate risks, negotiate fair settlements and normalize business, and accepting and leveraging from active labor market policies like wage subsidies (Solnet et al., 2014). Critically, event recovery, at least apparent from these case studies, is contingent on organizations being hopeful and proactive. Both the cases presented in this chapter demonstrated capacity building through investment in infrastructure, human capital, and organizational capabilities such that their organizations are well-positioned to be competitive and resilient for the inevitable turnarounds. After all, events and allied industries have historically demonstrated remarkable resilience and recovery from crises (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019).

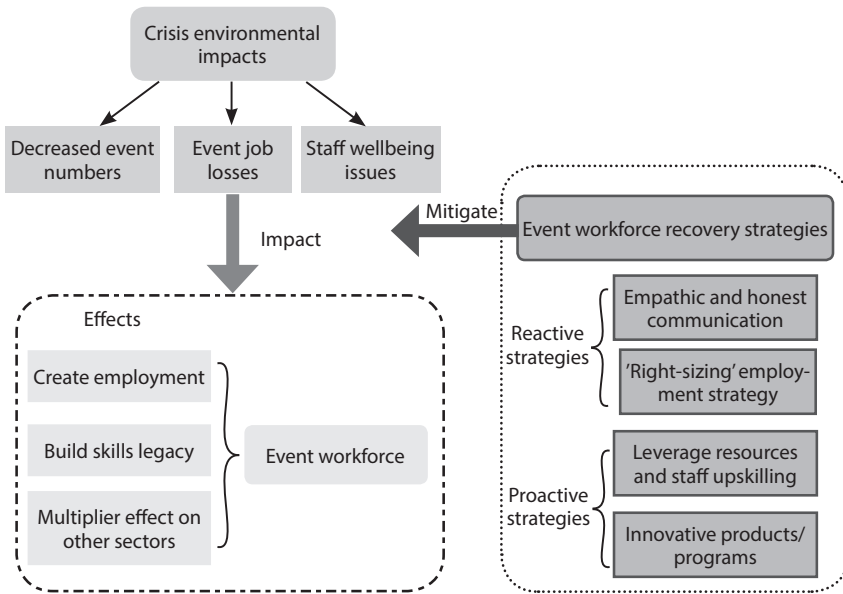


Figure 5.3: Event workforce crisis impact and resolution framework

In summary, this chapter has achieved its objectives in several ways. First, despite the fact that event workforces are unique and vulnerable in facing turbulent environments (e.g., crises and disaster), relevant research is still neglected in discussing how event workforces can be impacted by a disruptive crisis and what recovery and resilience strategies events organizations can generate to deal with employment-related issues. Following on, this chapter outlined several events workforce effects in creating employment, building skill legacies, and accelerating short-term economic needs, i.e., multiplier effects on other sectors such as retail, accommodation and food services, arts and entertainment. By using two case studies, on SkyCity and Cluster Arts, in a COVID-19 environment, this chapter has revealed key impacts of crises on event workforces including the decrease of event numbers, job losses, staff

wellbeing issues, and financial challenges. Key crisis response strategies (e.g., regular communication using empathetic and honest messages) have been adopted to assuage negative emotions and ensure a smooth post-crisis staff return. For smaller event organizations, more proactive recovery and resilience strategies have been used to leverage the resource opportunities from external agencies to foster business model restructuring and innovative products. These have helped to expand their business operations and even employment growth. Figure 5.3 captures these key learnings from this chapter.

Future research

As others have noted, events employment is a relatively neglected field (Muskat & Mair, 2020). Equally, the employment-related impacts of crises are poorly understood (Ritchie & Jiang, 2019). Rich opportunities for research beckon. Given that event workforces are highly contingent, transient, and often-times low-skilled can create precarities. From an employer's perspective crises can impart sudden and dramatic impacts on operations – sometimes, as in the case of the case studies – complete shutdowns. Whole communities share the impacts. The state is not always able to step into the breach, although during COVID-19 governments did provide welfare safety nets in many developed countries. Given the complexities involved networked and system approaches to understanding events, employment and crises are likely to result in more holistic understandings. The search for 'solutions' is likely a futile exercise – conceptually or practically. More likely is a resolutions approach – whereby affected stakeholders negotiate crisis risk and resilience strategies that collectively mitigate impacts and mutually position each in good stead for recovery. Moreover, the two case studies presented in this chapter mostly consider employees as victims of crises befalling events organizations. Clearly, employees can also be agents of emergency responses to crisis on behalf of organizations, in the ways in which hotel staff might shield guests from harm (cf. Deshpandé & Raina, 2011).

Specifically, in a crisis/disaster environment where individual well-being faces tremendous challenges, more attention is needed for the psychological capital of events companies. How business owners, managers, and front-line employees can effectively cope with disturbances through their psychological capital are becoming critical to address sustainability issues for the events industry. Typical psychological capital – self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience – have been found to impact organizational resilience through problem-based and emotion-based coping strategies post-disaster (Fang, Prayag, Ozanne, & de Vries, 2020). Future research should further navigate employees' emotional changes and different individual coping strategies during the recovery process following major crises and disasters. Unique event work-

force attributes (e.g., part-time temporary or voluntary arrangements) can be compared to provide different insights.

To return to employees themselves, greater consideration is required of their plight as crises on the one hand demand more from them but also leave them so vulnerable to unemployment. Unlike other industries, their normal levels of compensation are not such that they can voluntarily 'rest-up' between gigs. Furthermore, volunteers represent a key events workforce (Baum & Lockstone, 2007) not explored in this chapter. A key limitation of this chapter is that sustainability issues as arising from the COVID-19 crisis have not been considered (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020a) – key in relation to the social dimension which includes employment. Critical approaches will be required to work towards equitable strategies, especially for marginalized cohorts that disproportionately bear the brunt of crises (cf. Baum et al., 2020). Events, it is said, is a people industry – reflections going forward should ensure that definition is as inclusive of employees as of visitors and attendees.

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