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# 7 Knowledge and event leadership

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## Chapter aims

- Introduce and critically discuss aspects of knowledge and their value
- Explore the nature and role of knowledge in events and festivals leadership
- Understand processes and challenges for tacit knowledge management
- Consider methods of tacit knowledge transfer in small and medium sized event and festival organisations
- Focus on leadership in action – knowledge management in small to medium sized enterprises.

## Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explain the value and management of different types of knowledge in an events or music festival business setting, where its potential to maximise profit and help an organisation to outperform its rivals has received less attention in academic literature than other sectors such as manufacturing or information technology. Competition in the events and festivals sectors has increased considerably as more companies join the market, and the nature and scope of events has widened to satisfy consumer appetites for more diverse and engaging experiences. Leaders that nurture, recognise, manage and employ knowledge effectively are more likely to be innovative and successful in their sector. Throughout the chapter, knowledge is explored mostly through the lens of music festivals, although the points made are easily applicable to the wider events, tourism and leisure sectors.

*“Merely mentioning ‘knowledge’ raises problems, for anyone with the temerity to write about knowledge has to confront the pervasive disagreement about what constitutes knowledge.” (Starbuck, 2006: 74)*

Knowledge can be considered in many ways; what we know, how we know it, our beliefs about what is true, how our actions are led by our knowledge, and how what we do creates new knowledge. Philosophers have argued for centuries about whether we can truly ‘know’ anything, and the debate will continue because knowledge, understanding, truth and belief are interrelated concepts that are open to interpretation depending on a person’s perspectives, experiences and environment.

Consider the following questions:

- ◆ If you believe something to be true, is it true for everyone?
- ◆ Does knowing something mean you understand it?
- ◆ Does knowing how a bicycle works make you a competent cyclist?

You may be relieved that this chapter does not debate the different philosophical stances on what knowledge is but does explore aspects of knowledge that can contribute to personal and organisational success.

## **The value of knowledge**

Fierce rivalry is one of the conditions of a highly competitive environment. Most festivals compete using a differentiation strategy (Porter, 1985) meaning organizations need to be evermore creative and innovative in managing their resources, to give attendees unique and memorable experiences to outperform their rivals or even to survive (Johnson et al., 2014).

As a resource, knowledge is said to be more valuable than other tangible resources (such as funding, premises or stock of products) as the primary source of creating value and sustaining superior performance (Grant, 1996; Wang, Wang & Liang, 2014). Through the lens of the knowledge economy *“a firm’s intellectual capital represents the only sustainable source of competitive advantage”* (Grace & Butler, 2005: 56). Providing it remains within the organization, knowledge can be a distinctive resource that is valuable, rare, non-substitutable and inimitable, creating opportunities for competitive advantage (Barney & Clark, 2007;

Johnson et al., 2014). Furthermore, it is tacit knowledge, rather than the manipulation of other available tangible resources, that is said to be the primary basis of core competencies and the key to superior performance (Lubit, 2001).

Generally, in academic literature tacit knowledge is referred to as that which cannot easily be explained or communicated in written format and comes from experience, personal perceptions and values (Werner, Dickson & Hyde, 2015). It is related to intuition and the development of skills (Ambrosini & Bowman, 2001; Taylor, 2007) and knowing how to do things. In 1955, referring to executives, Katz first suggested that what someone can accomplish in an organization is a more important consideration than the traits or personality characteristics they possess (Katz, 1974).

More specifically, it is the set of core skills employed by leaders and managers in pursuit of organizational objectives that is significant, and the combination of skills and knowledge determine what can be accomplished (Peterson & van Fleet, 2004). Furthermore, organizational learning does not occur as new insights are gained about an issue or problem but for learning to take place, action must occur (Moingeon & Edmondson, 1996). This suggests that only when insights gained from 'knowing that' are interpreted and turned into 'know how' is new knowledge created.

This aspect of workplace competence is prevalent in literature in the context of leadership and management (Kotter, 1999; Mintzberg, 2004; Northouse, 2015) but specifically addressed in relation to the skills of event managers by Bladen, Kennell, Abson, and Wilde (2012). They categorize event managers' personal & professional effectiveness as intellectual, emotional and managerial skills. Included within the intellectual category are critical analysis and judgement, vision and imagination, and strategic perspective, and each of these includes aspects of explicit and tacit knowledge.

As you will have understood from the previous chapters and the definition of Yukl (2010: 8) presented in Chapter 1, "*Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives.*" You will also have understood that leader-