KEY SUCCESS FACTORS IN MANAGING A CONFERENCE CENTRE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper was to identify the key success factors (KSFs) in managing a conference centre. South Africa has experienced a significant increase in international tourist arrivals as well as an increase in domestic travel. One of the reasons for the increase is because of business travel of which the so-called MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) sector is an important component. In order for the country to reap the benefits specifically of conference tourism, literature showed that quality management is of paramount importance. Identifying the KSFs will assist conference managers to focus on the most important aspects of managing a conference centre. In order to achieve this, 170 questionnaires were distributed via e-mail or were handed out personally to the membership of a conference venues database. Some 100 questionnaires were received back. Responses to the questionnaire were subjected to a factor analysis in order to identify the key success factors in managing a conference centre. Six factors were identified that showed some similarities to similar research conducted in other sectors of the tourism industry, although differing somewhat. The six factors were activities and layout, marketing, operational aspects, planning, design and evaluation and human resources. The value of this research is twofold; firstly this research has never been undertaken in the conference sector in South Africa and secondly, the research confirmed two key success factors found in similar studies conducted in the tourism industry namely, well-trained human resources, and layout and accessibility of facilities. This research thus has implications for the curricula of tertiary institutions offering event and conference tourism. The results also showed that well-trained staff are important, as are the lay-out of facilities for the latter should be based on needs of conference organisers and attendees. Hence, for South Africa fully to benefit from a growing market, these KSFs can contribute to a high quality conference experience.

Key words: Key success factors; KSFs; Conference centre; Strategic management; Factor analysis.