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An Analysis on Whitehead Golf Club and its Members

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Abstract

A study was conducted on an analysis of Whitehead Golf Club and its visitors, with the outcome of the study helped in the developing the club through new ideas that have attracted more members and visitors as well maintaining loyal members. A survey that was sent out to the members to gather information on the interests and preferences of club members was used, which revealed that they would be interested in more events at the club, both on the golf course and in the clubhouse. The paper highlights the growing popularity of the golf industry and argues that the club can take advantage of this trend by offering more events for women and juniors as well as the men. The results of the study suggest that by implementing these new ideas, Whitehead Golf Club can increase its membership and attract more visitors, thereby ensuring its long-term sustainability and success.

The study also conducted findings for the current and past challenges faced by Whitehead Golf Club, such as increasing competition from other clubs and the cost of membership issue. To address this issue, the study offered several strategies for improving the club's offerings, including the introduction of new events, improved marketing, and enhanced facilities. The study discussed the importance of catering to women and juniors as if the club can tap into these markets further then they can attract a wider range of visitors.

Overall, the study provided valuable insights into the current state of Whitehead Golf Club and offered practical recommendations for its future development. By implementing these ideas, the club has begun to strengthen its position in the competitive golf industry and provide a high-quality experience for its members and visitors.

Golf tourism, Golf industry, visitor attraction, events, development, strategies.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

Within my thesis I will be studying the past and current trends within the golf tourism industry and using these to analyze the success or failure of capitalizing on these by Whitehead Golf Club. My thesis will also contain recommendations based on research on how Whitehead Golf Club can develop and grow its visitor and member numbers. The aim of this thesis is to provide a realistic analysis of the club and identify the key areas for improvement and suggest realistic solutions.

As with all areas of tourism over the Covid pandemic, golf tourism has suffered greatly. With courses being closed for several months over the pandemic, many clubs struggled to keep the course managed and had no real source of income. Although tourism is increasing once again, it will still be months or years before tourist numbers rise to what they were before the pandemic. Whitehead Golf Club has felt the suffering of the decline in golf tourism which has led the club to struggle financially during 2020 and 2021.

The two focus points of my thesis will be, how can I bring more visitors and members to the club? And how can I create new opportunities through events for current members to spend more time and more money at the club? If I can find suitable answers for these questions, then I think my thesis will be a success not only for me but Whitehead Golf Club as well. If I am to find these answers, I must conduct extensive research not only into the trends of golf tourism but specifically the wants and needs of members themselves in Whitehead Golf Club. Within this thesis plan I will identify how I can best find these answers.

2 IDENTIFYING ISSUES AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose and research of my thesis is to study golf tourism trends along with the needs and wants of Whitehead Golf Club to make the club more appealing to golfers and outside visitors. The focus of my thesis will be domestic tourists within the United Kingdom and island of Ireland. These research questions have been decided upon between me and Trevor Wright the Honorary Treasurer of Whitehead Golf Club and these include.

- What issues do current members have with Whitehead Golf Club?
- What are the most effective and logical improvements that can be made to the club from a venue and golf facility point of view?
- How do current Whitehead Golf members perceive the success of the club and what do they want to see improved or implemented?

Having a close relationship with Mr. Wright is great as it allows me to see what kind of budget the club is willing to spend on marketing or special events. Mr. Wright has highlighted that the focus of the club now is increasing member numbers as this is the biggest source of income for the club. He has identified the struggle of getting new members through the door and keeping them at the club for longer than their first year. This will be an area that will be researched hopefully through the surveying of new members. Now, I have several ideas on how to develop the club and achieve the goal of getting more visitors to the club. These include special themed nights in the club which don't have to be golf related, special golfing events which could be less formal than usual. Although these are both very broad ideas now, they open a wide range of opportunities which cater for both a lower budget and non-golf visitors.

Now the social media pages of the club are run sporadically and with not much professionalism. This is another area that could be a potential to work on. The pages would not have to active daily but if there is weekly content and promotions of the events and competitions it would work greatly for getting Whitehead Golf Club more known.

A great part of having my task to develop a golf club is that there are several aspects to it, with Whitehead Golf Club there is a bar, restaurant, conference/event room and of course the golf facilities. This leaves several possibilities open and hopefully through the course of my thesis I can highlight and develop the best of these.

3 WHITEHEAD GOLF CLUB

Whitehead Golf Club is rich with history and ancient story telling with reminders scattered across the course. The course was originally pitched by a number of prominent gentlemen from whitehead who gathered in a local café to discuss the benefits of creating a golf course in Whitehead. The year of this successful gathering was 1904, which is when the original plans for the course were developed for the Blackhead area. The course itself cost £114 to build and was constructed by a Belfast man, George Morrow. Just four years later a second course was developed and built in the Donegal area. In 1935, yet another relocation took place with the development of a new Clubhouse as well. This course is currently known as Bentra Golf Club and is owned by the local council. Finally, in 1970 the decision was made once again to relocate the course, this time on Muldersleigh Hill, which has been constantly developed and is still the home of Whitehead Golf Club now in 2023 (Website of Whitehead Golf Club).

The history of this current location is rife, with eight ancient sites across the 18-hole course. Ancient man once lived on the top of Muldersleigh Hill and the evidence shown around the course shows that there was many local residents who took part in church services and burials on the course grounds. On the second hole green there is an ancient site called Rath-Cimbaeith which was a hillfort built in the early first Millennium. On just the hole after there is remains of an ancient church and burial place. During the building of the course there were two stone axe heads found where the current fourth green lies and to this day, these axes still form part of the Rath-Cimbaeith Trophy which is played for every year by the members (Website of Whitehead Golf Club).

Fast forward to 2023 and the course is continuing to develop and change the experience it offers to golfers. Whitehead Golf Club now hosts over 400 members ranging from ages as young ten to older senior members aged eighty and over. The club boasts a 4.3 star rating out of 5 from TripAdvisor and is known around Ireland as "Hidden gem on the beautiful Antrim Coast." The course itself offers year-round golfing facilities and attracts a full range of golfers from novice to professional, from young to old as well as hosting many larger travelling society groups across the spring and summer months. The club currently offers five membership types including a full membership which allows you full access to the course and club house all year round, a house membership which allows you only in the clubhouse all year round with 5% all bills, a junior membership which offers full course and clubhouse access for under 19s, a senior membership which is discounted for players of over 65 years and offers full access to course and clubhouse, and a non-resident which is for overseas players who are permitted to golf limited times per year with access to the clubhouse. In addition to the golfing facilities offered by the club, the clubhouse also provides golfers and visitors a casual dining experience in their restaurant as well as a lounge area and a snug bar which is exclusively for members. The clubhouse is also capable of hosting large private functions in its large function room connected to the lounge area, which is used for special events such as weddings, birthdays, funerals and the clubs own special events (Website of Whitehead Golf Club).

4 MARKET SEGMENTATION

4.1 The Concept and use of Segmentation

Segmentation can be described as the division of something into separate sections and groups. When we look at market segmentation it means that we are dividing the market into separate groups to study them. When segmenting a market, we are dividing it into groups that are definable as well as accessible and profitable. For an organization or business this is essential as they would struggle to target the whole market due to time, cost, and personnel restrictions. (Website of The Economic Times 2017.)

To identify a market segment, we are looking for a set of customers or potential clients who all share similar needs and wants. The businesses' role is to identify these segments and decide upon which ones to target. (Kotler, Keller & Brady 2009, 334.) Market segmentation allows businesses to identify groups of clients that differ location, wants, buying trends and resources which will then allow for them to reach these segments more effectively and efficiently (Kotler & Armstrong 2014, 215). Segmentation can be compared to the act of eating an orange to better describe it. When eating an orange is it easier to do so when you split it up into its segments. This compares to a business in the sense that it is more profitable and easier for the business to focus on certain segments of the market compared to the entire market. However, unlike an orange, each of the market segments are different from one another in terms of size and characterization. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 132). Each segment of the market is based on multiple criteria variables which include age, gender, location, country as the most used. These variables are selected carefully by the marketers as their aim is to segment the market in a way that aids their service or product. (Brassington &Pettitt 2013, 132.)

The goal of market segmentation is to collect a group of customers who are similar in their purchasing patterns and needs. Each customer is going to have a different buying pattern or need, and they are the ones who decide what they are going to buy and where they are going to buy it. (Dibb & Simkin 2008, 4-5.) Each company or business is not going to have a product or service for every customer, so it is not the aim to appeal to every customer. The marketing team for the business works most effectively when they know the customers' needs and wants which will allow them to focus their marketing on customers more likely to buy. The marketing and sales team within the business must use market segmentation as the process of trial and error is not effective and resource intensive (Dannenberg & Zupancic 2009.) For the business it is important that they find what areas they are strong in and what market they are profitable in as again this will allow the marketing team to focus stronger on this market. A market segmentation applies a good understanding of the of the customers' needs along with understanding how they will be obtaining the product or service (Dibb & Simkin 2008, 4-5.)

4.2 B-to-C & B-to-B Segmentation

Business to consumer segmentation (B-to-C) is described as when a large customer base is split into smaller customer groups such as age, location, gender, hobbies, spending patterns. Once these customers have been split down into these smaller groups it becomes easier to reach them effectively with a product or service that will be of interest to them. (Armstrong & Kotler 2013, 193.) Business to business segmentation works through looking at buyers within two businesses and uses this for the market segmentation (Brassington &Pettitt 2013, 132). Both business and consumer markets use some of the same variables, but they remain very different from each other. Within the business markets other variables will be used such as the size of the businesses, the user status and usage rate. (Armstrong & Kotler 2013, 193.) Within the consumer market the segmentation is based heavily on the lifestyle of the customer compared to the business market which doesn't. The biggest different between the markets is the number of the potential buyers. The consumer market is much larger than that of the business market. This handicaps the consumer market segmentation as it is much harder to pinpoint and get close to the exact segmentation that you want. (Brassington & Pettitt 2013, 132.)

A business can see huge benefits using segmentation, but the customers will also see a host of benefits. Customers have a range of needs and wants that will have been identified by the business and then acted upon by the business to offer them a service or product that will reach these needs. Dibb & Simkin (2008, 2) write that the basis for understanding the market and creating a profitable business is to divide the market into segments of similar needs. A clear image of the customer can be created by the marketers which allows them to find the product or service that is best suited for that customer. This results in the customer getting what they wanted or needed which leads to a sense of fulfillment. This also creates a positive for the business as that customer will potentially become loyal to them and feel a sense of connection to the business (Brassington &Pettitt 2013, 152-153).

Across all businesses the competition has been greatly increased through globalization. This has made market segmentation even more important to businesses as customers

are having a bigger demand to get more from their budget and have multiple more options to get the product or service that they want. Market segmentation is key as the business must identify exactly what customer they will target and target them strongly before the other businesses can target them get their rewards. (McDonald & Dunbar 2012, 3.)

Market segmentation will be used by myself to identify which market groups will be most beneficial to Whitehead Golf Club. Within this thesis business-to-consumer segmentation will be utilized as it is most appropriate for my recommendations. To gain an understanding of the existing and potential customers for Whitehead Golf Club, collecting data to conduct market segmentation will be greatly beneficial for this thesis and its recommendations.

5 CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

5.1 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be described as a customers' expectation before they consume one's product or service and their final feeling or emotion towards the service or product after they have experienced it. A customers' satisfaction can be somewhat described although it is hard to describe for each individual as one's expectation may be more or less of another therefore meaning just because one experience was satisfactory for one person does not mean that it will be satisfactory for another. (Goodman 2009, 22.) Every company and business will have a focus on ensuring customer satisfaction and it is one of the primary objectives and driving forces of their business model. Managements of these company's and businesses are ever trying to satisfy their customers. (Oliver 1999, 33-44.) In this constantly changing business environment it is the customers' who are creating the difficulty for the organizations through their ever-increasing expectations, this makes it harder for these companies to find an effective progression which satisfies customers higher expectations. If the company can

find this progression and focus on the main factors that contribute to customer satisfaction, then the company will be on track to remain successful over longer time frames. The big issue with customer satisfaction is that it is subjective, and a company may satisfy one customer but leave the other unsatisfied, and that is what makes customer satisfaction hard to describe accurately. (Goodman 2009, 22.)

If a company or business can get a strong grasp on the meaning of customer satisfaction, then they can continue to work effectively to ensure that their customer satisfaction is sustainable. Organizations best do this by analyzing their services and highlighting those of which are not of a high standard and developing them to create a better experience for the customer. (Anderson & Srinivasan 2003, 122-138.) Satisfaction was described by Kotler & Keller (2006, 144) as "a person's feeling of pleasure or disappointment which resulted in comparing a product's perceived performance or outcome against his or her expectations."

5.2 Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is a concept that has been defined by several authors however there is still no concrete definition to the term. Customer loyalty has been described as the act of buying a good or a service from a business or company on a regular basis rather than swapping to other suppliers of the same product or service and buying of them. There are three primary conceptualizations of loyalty highlighted by Walsh at el (2008, 977-1004) which include an attitude that leads to a relationship with a brand, expressed in terms of revealed behavior and the final one being buying moderated by individual characteristics, circumstances or the purchase situation. Loyalty is described by authors, Robinson et al (2006, 5-6) as being an emotional and attitude-based preference which causes spontaneous purchases. Robinson et al also describe loyalty as a deeply held commitment to re-visit or re-buy a product or service from the same supplier on a repetitive basis.

With more and more companies facing fierce competition it is becoming increasingly costly for them to attract in new customers. This has caused companies to take the

approach to provide exceptional services and products to the customers to create loyalty from the customer to their company. A way in which a customers' retention can be achieved is through ensuring a high customer satisfaction rate which will in turn create a loyal relationship with the customer. (Kotler et al, 2003, 23.)

If you are then able to create a loyal customer, then a company will see an increase on their profit margin. Loyal customers are also unlikely to switch to a competitor's service or product just because of the price or special promotions. Loyal customers also benefit the company through word-of-mouth marketing as well as them being less expensive to maintain than new customers. (Yoo & Bai, 2013, 166-177.) It is also important that the organization understand that they will not bring in new loyal customers every time. A loyal customer is something that takes time to gain and is gained through design decisions which create a personal relationship with customer, it is important that the organization know that not every customer will be a loyal customer. (Gremler & Brown, 1999, 34.)

5.3 Factors Influencing Customer Loyalty and Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction plays a huge role for any business of any size and is the core reasoning for a business being successful. For the business or organization to achieve great customer satisfaction then it must first understand what contributes to customer satisfaction and what may inhibit a customer being satisfied. It is also key for the organization to understand the differences between that of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction is an attitude while customer loyalty is a behavior. (Srivastava (2015, 15.)

Customer satisfaction is key for an organization to understand; however, they must understand what it is that makes a customer satisfied and what does not, another key point is that one thing may be satisfactory to one customer and not to another. The main contributor to customer satisfaction is value of service quality or product quality. Every customer, no matter what they are buying are wanting to see good value for their money and this is what they are expecting when they are buying a product or a service.

If when the customer receives the product or service and it is well above their expectation then you will have a very satisfied customer, however, if the product or service is below that of what the customer is expecting then the customer will be left unsatisfied, which makes it essential for any company to focus on ensuring that the value of the product or service is worth the customers time and money. (Coutts, 2011.)

Another possible detriment to a customer's satisfaction is simply what state of emotion is the customer in. When a customer is angry and has external factors affecting his emotion, it is very hard to for them to simply put that to the side. A company must understand that simply, they will not be able to please an angry customer all the time. For the company or business to achieve satisfaction across their service or product then they must offer as close to possible experience for each of their customers. If a customer has paid the same amount of money and another and are visibly seeing differences in their experience, then that customer is going to be left unsatisfied. (Coutts, 2011.)

Customer loyalty plays a massive role in the success of any business and many studies have highlighted that a satisfied customer is much more likely to become a loyal customer. Most successful businesses are recognizable, whether it be their name, logo or slogan. When a customer is in need or want of a service or a product then they will instantly think of the well-known brands, these are brands that have built a lasting relationship with their customers through satisfaction which then leads to the customers returning through knowledge of their product or service. As well as being well known these successful businesses also built their loyal base through service quality. Service quality refers to the results of comparison that a customer has expected from the service and what they received. (Grönroos, 93.)

When looking at Whitehead Golf Club, which is primarily a membership-based business it is made clear through the studies above that if the club is going to be successful over many years, then it will have to implement and take into account each of these deterrents that could cause an unsatisfied customer and also look at how their services and products will keep existing customers while also keep newer customers. Whitehead Golf Club is a bit more complicated as not only does it offer the golfing facilities but also a dining area, a snug bar and a private function room. This means that there

are four separate areas where the product and service will be analyzed to investigate the customer satisfaction and loyalty. I hope through my questionnaire I can find out more about the existing customers satisfactory aspects of the club and unsatisfactory areas of the club and look to see how they can be addressed.

6 NORTHERN IRELAND GOLF TOURISM

6.1 Characteristics of Northern Irelands Golf Tourism

To get a better understanding of golf tourism in Northern Ireland, it would be beneficial to first know about the history of golf in the country. Golf has been a part of Northern Irelands identity since the 1800s and over the past centuries has been host to many worldwide golf championships. (Website of Tourism Northern Ireland. 2016.) The Open Championship is one of the four major tournaments in the golfing calendar. This competition is held exclusively in areas of the United Kingdom annually and hosts typically over 200,000 visitors across its week duration. The course selection for the Open Championship is a process that requires time, money and dedication from the clubs who wish to be selected. In 1951, Royal Portrush (Northern Ireland) was selected meaning that for the first time in history, The Open Championship would be played in Northern Ireland. After a long wait The Open Championship returned to Royal Portrush in 2019 after 68 years. This was a long-anticipated return and put all the worlds golfing eyes on the small country of Northern Ireland once again. The wait was clearly worth it as the Championship drew in a crowd of 237,750 spectators, making it the second-highest attended Open Championship of all time. Looking to the future, Northern Ireland will not suffer such a wait this time round in waiting for The Open Championship to return as it is scheduled to take place in Royal Portrush in 2025. (Website of Northern Ireland Business Info. n.d.)

Northern Ireland also presents many other worldwide golfing tournaments throughout the season, The Irish Open and The North of Ireland Amateur Championship being the most known. Along with housing some of the most prestigious golf tournaments on

the calendar, Northern Ireland is also the home of several of the world's best golfers including Rory Mcilroy and Graeme McDowell. Rory Mcilroy is a multiple major championship winner and has become known across the world, this has put Northern Ireland on the golfing map and has played a part in major competitions being played on the island. Mcilroy has not only helped at a professional level for the game of golf in Northern Ireland but a casual level and younger level. (Website of BBCNews. 2014.)

6.2 Modern Market of Golf Tourism in the United Kingdom

A study carried out by BRS Golf, the company, which is responsible for golf bookings across the UK, revealed that the number of visitors to golf courses has risen to new highs in the past two years. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, all golf courses throughout the UK were ordered to close in guidance with the government lockdowns meaning golf booking plummeted to zero. In March of 2021 the lockdowns ended, and golf courses were once again permitted to open, in the first three months that the clubs were allowed to open BRS reported that six and a half million rounds of golf had been booked by their service in the UK. In April alone of 2021 over four million rounds were booked which is an increase of 60% compared to April 2019. The study carried out by BRS also showed that members and visitor bookings made through the BRS technology has increased by over two and a half million in 2021 which is an increase of 19% over the numbers in 2019. The studies compare figures from 2019 instead of 2020 as courses were closed for a majority of 2020. (Crombie. 2021.)

BRS's booking service GolfNow recorded its busiest day on March 29th 2020, the day which the UK began reducing restrictions, the study showed that over 13,000 people visited the sight and a total of 5,000 round of golf were booked, that is an increase of over 80% on the same date a year prior. The April of 2020 was another record breaking month for the BRS service with a reported 17,500 app downloads for the booking service which led to 76,000 rounds being booked, generating over £1.8 million for course affiliates. (Crombie. 2021.)

Through looking at these numbers and figures from the BRS report, there is a major shift in what the golf market wants in the UK. Like many other industries, the use of technology is being implemented which allows for much easier access for the customer. An increase of over 80% in BRS bookings and 17,500 app downloads in a single month shows that the typical UK golfer is looking towards technology to make their booking experience easier and more efficient.

Research carried out by the R&A (The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews) which is a golf governing body revealed that golf participation has nearly doubled from 2017 to 2022. The research project was carried out in partnership with the four main golfing bodies in the UK being, England Golf, Golf Ireland, Scottish Golf and Wales Golf. The research report shows that 5.3 million adult golfers enjoyed playing a round of golf during 2021in Great Britain and Ireland which is the second highest number recorded since 1990. During the Covid-19 pandemic, golf was one of the few sporting activities that saw a rise in participation due to its ability to be played safely while still gaining mental and physical benefits, in the most recent research carried out by the R&A it shows that golf participation numbers are still well higher (4.8 million, 2021) than what they were pre pandemic (2.5 million, 2017). (R&A. 2022.)

In the report R&A also highlight that more females are now playing golf than pre pandemic and that females now make up 34% of all full course golfers with the number of participants rising from 1.4 million to 1.6 million. It is not just 18-hole courses that are seeing an increase in participation either with driving ranges seeing their second highest participation numbers since 2000. Par 3 courses also saw an increase from 27,000 participants to 41,000 over the same period. Junior golf is also on the rise with there now being over 350,000 junior players across Europe which is an increase of over 43,000 from 2019-2021, junior golfers now account for 8% of golfers across Europe which is an increase of 0.5% from 2019. Phil Anderton, Chief Development Officer at the R&A said "Golfers are enjoying positive experiences of the sport, supported by a wide range of participation initiatives and communication around the benefits of the sport for physical and mental health. It is important to maintain this momentum and ensure golfers enjoy the sport at all levels". (R&A. 2022.)

6.3 Potential Issues with UK Domestic Golf Tourism

Although the golf industry is experiencing an uptrend in its participants across all levels of the game as shown by the R&As report, an article from Golfshake.com has highlighted that there are still aspects of golf that are holding it back from reaching higher levels. In the article Golfshake highlight the 20 biggest issues that golf clubs and golfers are facing right now and how they are impacting the game, the issues are taken from their responses to their 2018 Golfshake Survey in which 500 golfers took part in.

The cost of golf and memberships was at the forefront of responses with golfers with many comments that the value for money at the course is not what it has been in the past. One response stated that "A club membership is too expensive for a once-a-week golfer and it is very difficult to get a Saturday or Sunday tee time." The issue that this causes is that for people who are looking to get into golf for the first time will be put off by the high fees required which won't even guarantee them the playing schedule that they want. (Golfshake, 2019).

Golf may also be facing issues with the shift in our modern-day society, in the past two decades technology has become the engine for many industries and with golf it is no different. The days of travelling to your golf club to sign in and book a tee time are behind us and have been replaced with an app on our phones. For older players of the game this has caused issues as most of the older generations are not fully comfortable with the use of phones and the always updating technology. This technology has led to golf becoming more accessible but on the other hand older golfers are suffering as they are not able to get the tee times that they once could, and some cannot get any tee times as they don't have the technology. The modern society has also made longer working hours and working weekends which will deter new golfers if they cannot play on a Saturday or Sunday which are typically the competition days. (Golfshake, 2019).

7 EVENT MANAGEMENT

In this chapter of the thesis the objective is to look deeper into event management and what is contained within the industry. We will investigate the definition of events, what types of events can take place and what is the purpose of hosting an event. Through looking at the views and concepts of researchers it will help further in the thesis to apply the theory effectively to my recommendations for Whitehead Golf Club.

7.1 Definition of Events

An event can be described as a single recurring occasion which is planned at a specific venue. An event needs to be accessible to an audience and requires one or more persons to be involved. (Beech & Al. 2014, 379.) The main objective of an event manager is to create an experience for the customer which is memorable while using what resource are available to them (Ferdinand & Kitchin, 2017, 94). Before planning the event, the objective and target audience of said event is first found. This allows the event manager to best plan the running's of the event to best suit the target audience while reaching the objectives. (Ferdinand and Kitchin, 2017, 95.) The objective and purpose of the event is critical to determine before beginning the planning of the event. As described by the Finnish Event Management Association the purpose of an event is "An experience-based marketing process, where a corporation or brand meets its customer and/or other stakeholders in a predetermined situation and environment". (Kallio, 2015, 1.) In her research Kallio explains how an event with a predetermined specific purpose is more likely to succeed due to the marketing being more defined. When looking at the purpose of an event we must look first at what event is best suited for the objective.

7.2 Typology of Events

Events are planned for a host of different reasons and audiences and can be planned for just a small crowd of people or crowds of hundreds of thousands of people. Over the years that events have been taking place, researchers have tried to categorize events using different methods.

One method which is used by Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, Harris and Macdonnell (2012) is the use of determining the scale of the event. A major scale event is one of three terms used to categorize along with small scale events and hallmark events. Small-scale events are those of which take part within a smaller neighborhood and are used to give value to those in the immediate vicinity. Such events will not usually attract visitors from further destinations. Major scale events however will be targeted to and attended by an audience of a much larger demographic such as music concerts. Hall-mark events take the scale even larger and will attract in an international audience. The Olympics is a great example of a hallmark event which bring in a large audience from every corner of the world.

Goldblatt (2002) is a researcher who uses purpose to define events compared to that of another researcher, Allen (2000) who defines events as "a specific ritual, presentation, performance or celebration." In Goldblatt's definition of an event he describes reunion as a purpose for an event which is the coming together of people for a certain occasion. Goldblatt also focused on the purpose of marketing for an event and the using is as they key to boost the sales of a service or product.
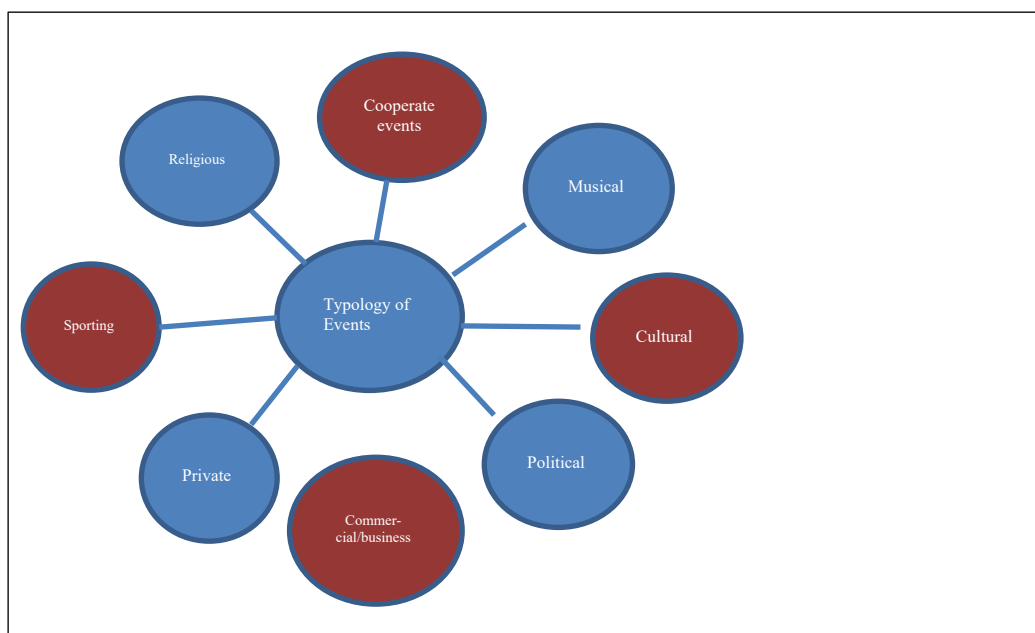

Figure 1. Typology of event (Ray at el, 2013, 8)

After looking at the previous researcher's categorization of events, we should then look to Shone and Parry (2013, 7) who focused their research on an events purpose,

aim and objectives. They split events into different groups under the umbrella term of special events, these include leisure events such as sporting events, cultural events such as historical celebrations, organizational events such as political events, and personal events such as weddings and birthdays. The authors state that strict labelling of an event could cause confusion as it is possible that an event is part of two groups.
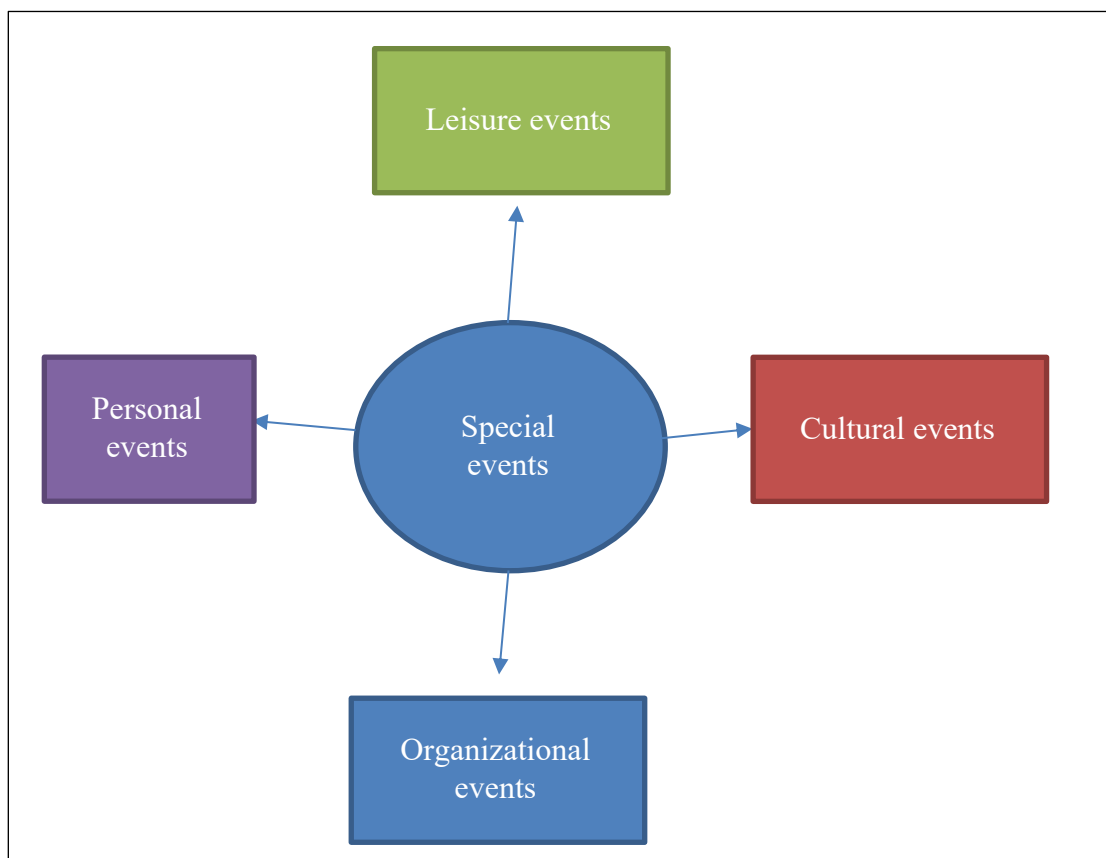

Figure 2 Types of special events

7.3 Event Process

Researcher Killkenny said in 2006 that when creating and processing any event at any level you must ask yourself and your team the 5 W questions; why are you creating the event? What is your goal for the event? When will the event take place? Where will the event take place? And who will attend the event? This is a simpler process that others but if the planner can answer each of the questions, they will be set up well to proceed with the key areas of the event before moving into the finer details. (Kilkenny, 2006.)

Researchers Dowson and Basset have another method in which they believe events should be planned by. This method is made up of three phases which include the preparation phase, detailed planning phase and post event phase. (Dowson & Basset 2015, 22.) The preparation phase begins with determining how the event is going to take place and what the objective of the event is. This will include figuring out specifics such as what the concept of the event is and what budget to, they must facilitate this. It is also important to create a feasibility study along with a contingency plan in the preparation phase. The detailed planning stage is next and involves a lot more specific tasks such as creating a logistics plan, recruiting the required staff, creating a promotion plan and also specific financial planning and specific layout planning of the selected venue. The final post event phase is key when thinking about later events. The object of this phase is to investigate "what went well and what went wrong" (Dowson & Basset 2015, 23).

An adaptation of the phase process has been used by Ferdinand and Kitchin, their process differs slightly due to there being five phases instead of the previous three. Within each phase Ferdinand and Kitchin have three stages which are the input, the process, and the output (Ferdinand & Kitchin 2012, 78). The first of the phases is called the initiating phase, in this phase you would have the input such as the event environment, the process where you would select the event concept and then finally the output which would be a description of the event (Ferdinand & Kitchin 2012, 79).

The second stage 'planning' would consist of inputs such as event description and the business case. The process of this phase consists of managing risk, managing time, and managing resources with the output hoping to be a functioning and accurate event plan which will allow the mobilizing phase to commence. It is in this phase that resources start to move, and the suppliers are now being monitored along with the promotion now being under way. (Ferdinand & Kitchin 2012, 80.)

The final two phases include the staging and closing of the event. Both phases require the resources as an input ensuring that they are in sufficient quantity and quality. During the event itself the process includes executing the event plan and the activities expected as well as monitoring these activities ensuring that the event is running how it was planned. After the event has ended an evaluation report if created which is then

used in the closing phase to determine what lessons have been learnt from the event. (Ferdinand & Kitchin 2012, 80-82.)

7.4 Key Personnel in the Event Industry

Dawson and Basset (2015) highlight that there are three main personnel components in the event industry. These include the clients, the event organizer, and the suppliers. For an event to run successfully these three components need to work effectively, an event process will begin when the client approaches an organizer that they feel is suited for the event. This could be as big as hiring a huge organizer company that will have a full team working or it could be as small as hiring an independent organizer for lesser scale events. It is then the job of the event organizer to find suitable suppliers that will attend to their needs. Finding the right supplier is essential as they must be able to cater to every specific that the event needs to run effectively.
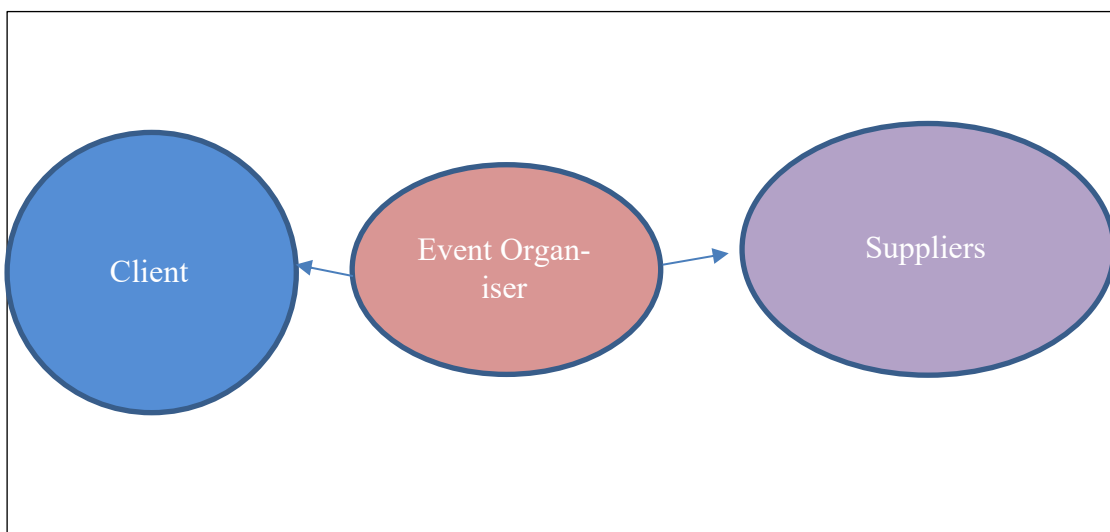

Figure 3 showing the key players in the event industry (Dowson & Basset 2015, 11)

7.5 Event Manager

Within every event there is an event leader who is responsible for the running of the event and making sure that it is successful. Cambridge Business English Dictionary describes the event manager as someone whose job is to plan and manage large events such as conferences, trade shows and parties.

As it is the responsibility and job of the event manager to coordinate the events to be successful and meet the needs and wants of the clients it is vital that they have the required skills and characteristics. Researcher Laura Capell has defined 12 key skills and characteristics that she believes every event manager should have. The first of these is that the event manager needs to passionate about their job and the events she is managing. Event managers must also understand that the job is tough and requires long hours and a lot of commitment, but they understand that it will be worth it. A skill in event management is communication. As the manager of the event, you will be in contact with many people and will be the one ordering them which requires you to be able to communicate effectively with them. The communication skill will be used right from the start of the process when first speaking with the client, throughout the event planning process when speaking with potential suppliers through e-mails, phone calls and face to face discussions. In an event it is not always going to go to plan and there will be a lot of issues that need resolved throughout the process, this makes it essential that the event manager has adequate problem-solving skills and have the knowledge and ability to carry out a contingency plan to deal with this. (Capell 2013, 10.)

One of the biggest issues faced when managing an event is the time management and meeting the deadlines. This is the cause for the long hours as there will be issues that can arise at any time, meaning the manager needs to be flexible and available for many hours throughout the day even if they are having a day off. Multiskilling or resource-fulness is a skill of a great event manager as they will be managing many different groups of people and being required to help with each of them, sometimes at the same time. A good time manager will often have several time frames planned out for the objectives or duties to be carried out during and will ensure that these time frames are made. Within all of the tight time frames the event manager must also ensure that the tasks are carried out effectively and that no detail is left out as the smallest detail missing could affect the event in a big way. (Capell 2013, 10.)

Before any of these skills can be used the event manager must first secure the position of event manager at an event. This requires negotiating skills and the ability to sell your service. Negotiating skills also come into play when speaking with suppliers as

they will be looking to get the most resources and services for the smallest price available. With this comes organization skills as you must have a budget in place to acquire the required resources and respect that the client has giving you this budget. (Capell 2013, 10.)

People managing skills along with being respectful are two other skills that all great event managers have. Especially when planning a large event, there will be several subgroups of people who are working on their own aspect of the event. It is important that the manager leads each group effectively but also respect that they know their role and will be capable of fixing their problems themselves.
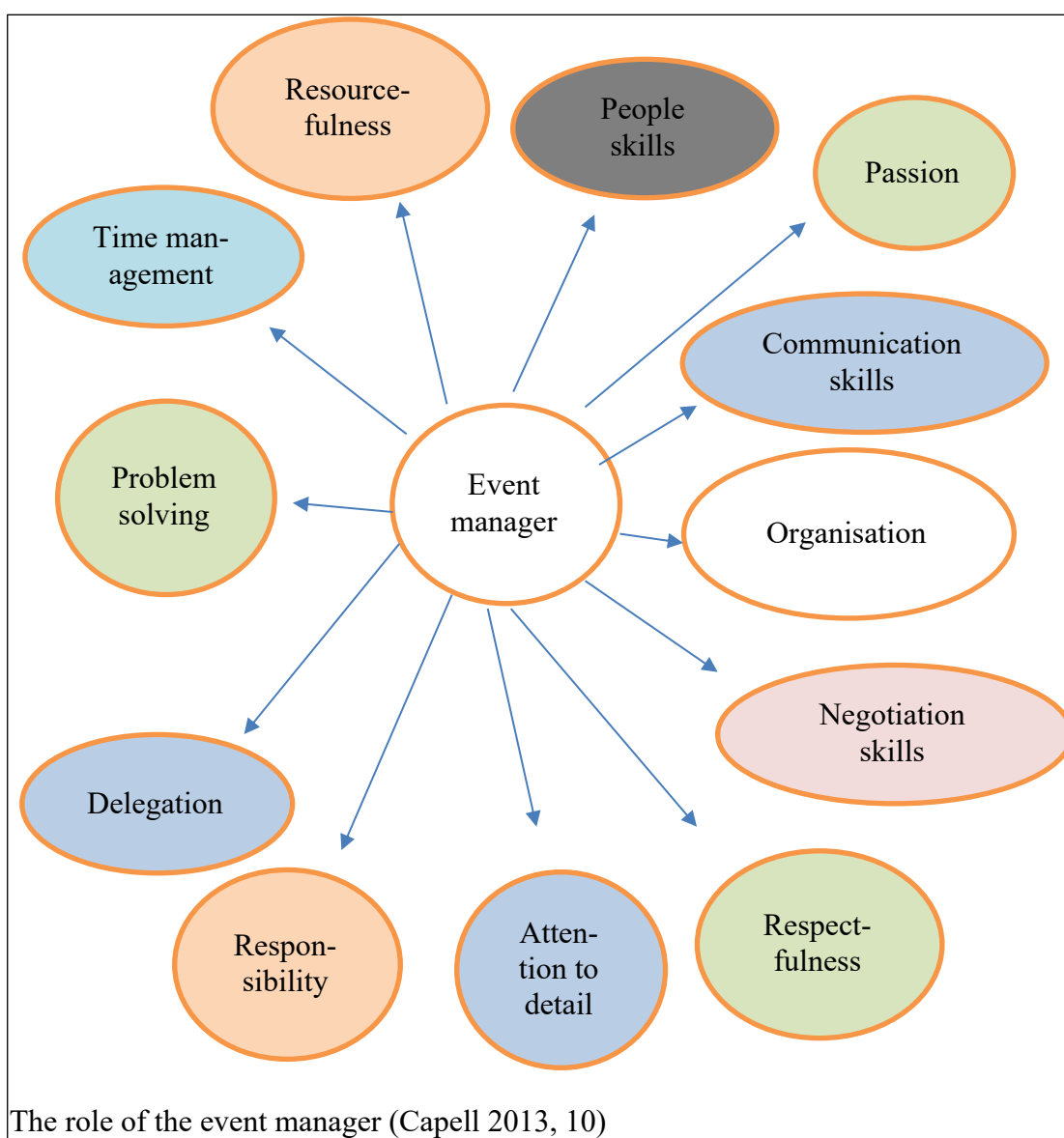
The role of the event manager (Capell 2013, 10)

Figure 4 showing characteristics of an event manager

8 METHODOLOGY

When conducting research, the adequate design of the research is essential to answer the research questions. The plan is the foundation on accurately deciding upon which methods and procedures will be used to collect and analyze the needed information. (Adams and Khan 2007, 81.) To gather research and data for my thesis I will use several methods both qualitative and quantitative. Within this thesis I aim to use a combination of both methods but hopes using qualitative methods that they will reveal information that will help with the thesis writing. The use of the qualitative method uses several methodological approached which stems from theoretical principals. This research method is used to develop an understanding of the respondent's reality and is a method that has been used in social science for many decades past. (Adams and Khan 2007, 26).

Within quantitative research methods there are six key scientific principles that are needed to allow the research to be scientific. The first of these is the data must be empirically testable which simply means the researcher has to be able to collect data. The second principle is that the research must be able to be replicated by anyone at any time in the same manner. The third is that the objective of the research is clear, and the methods used are also clearly laid out so that anyone can easily follow the conduct the research without needing the original researcher. The fourth principle is that the results must be published publicly for anyone to see. The fifth is that the data should be falsifiable which means the data can be proven wrong using scientific evidence. The final principle is that the results must be logically consistent so all the findings must be made clear If they are confirmed observations or contradictory observations (Pritha Bhandari, 2022).

Qualitative research is the opposite of quantitative, using non-numerical data such as text, speech, and audio. Qualitative research allows the researcher to get an in depth understanding of a concept or an opinion and can be used to find out problems within

the research and create new ideas. Qualitative research can be carried out several ways depending on the topic, which is being studied, these include, observations, interviews, focus groups, surveys containing open ended questions and through secondary research. A researcher who partakes in qualitative research would be named instruments in their research process as they are taking the information that they gain through these methods and look at them from their own personal view, this makes it important for the researcher to understand what they are asking and for what purpose the information will be used (Pritha Bhandari, 2022).

Once the researcher has obtained their data from their chosen method then they must analysis it effectively. To get the most out of the data it is important that the researcher prepares and organises their data such as transcribing an interview. This will allow it to be easier for the researcher to then review and explore their data for potential patterns or ideas. The use of this method of research allows for the researcher to be flexible in their studies while also getting meaningful insights through the description of peoples' experiences and feeling which can then be used to generate new ideas. However, qualitative research can also have negatives to the researcher, the data collected may be unreliable due to the nature of an interview where there could be some misunderstanding from the parties, the data received could also be subjective and although the view of one person in an organisation could be saying one thing, if you were to interview someone else from the same organisation the data collected could be different (Pritha Bhandari, 2022).

8.1 Research Design and Data Collection

One of my focus points within my thesis is keeping hold of new members, from my previous interview with Mr. Wright I found that a lot of new members are joining for the new member discount and once their first year is over, they will simply move clubs to get another new member discount. To find more about this situation I plan to use the clubs mailing list to send out a survey to all members who have joined in the past five years. Within this survey the questions included:

- How long have you been a member?

- Do you plan on leaving the club? Why?

- What do you think about membership prices?

- What would you like to see at the club?

- What would you like to see less of at the club?

- Do you feel there is adequate golfing events throughout the year?

- Do you feel there is adequate special event function throughout the year?

- Would you pay increased fees to facilitate more events?

- How likely are you to recommend Whitehead Golf Club as a golfing destination?

- How likely are you to recommend Whitehead Golf Club as a dining destination?

8.2 Validity and Reliability

When conducting any survey, it is crucial to ensure that the data collected is accurate and trustworthy. To ensure that mine survey was both I used the use of two concepts: validity and reliability. Validity refers to the how well the survey measures what it is intended to, reliability refers to the stability and consistency of the results. Validity is a vital aspect of any survey and refers to the accuracy of the results that are obtained. To ensure validity the researcher must create and propose questions that are relevant to the research questions that are being investigated. This means that the survey should be designed so that it is able to capture all the necessary information to answer the research questions. To ensure this in my survey I made sure to ask questions that are relevant to Whitehead Golf Club and its development and issues. (Fowler , 2014.)

Reliability is the other key aspect to any survey. Ways in which reliability can be ensured is using standardized questions which are clear and concise and offer the same answer options for all of those answering. Another key to reliability is to keep the survey confidential and anonymous as members will be more likely to answer honestly and accurately if they know that their answers will remain anonymous, so it was vital

to me to ensure this anonymity throughout my survey. The survey must also be administered in a consistent manner in a way that makes sense to the goal of the survey, whether it be posting the survey online or answering it in person, the instructions and process should be the same. Once you receive the data it is important that the correct data analysis is used, and this should be sued to check for consistency in results and identifying the outliers. (Fowler, 2014.)

When taking this into account for my survey I ensured that I posted the survey out through a mailing list, so everyone received the same message and instructions. The questions were designed so that they would enable me to answer my research questions and were designed so that answers could be easily managed, and the key information could be taken and used, with trust that it is reliable and valid.
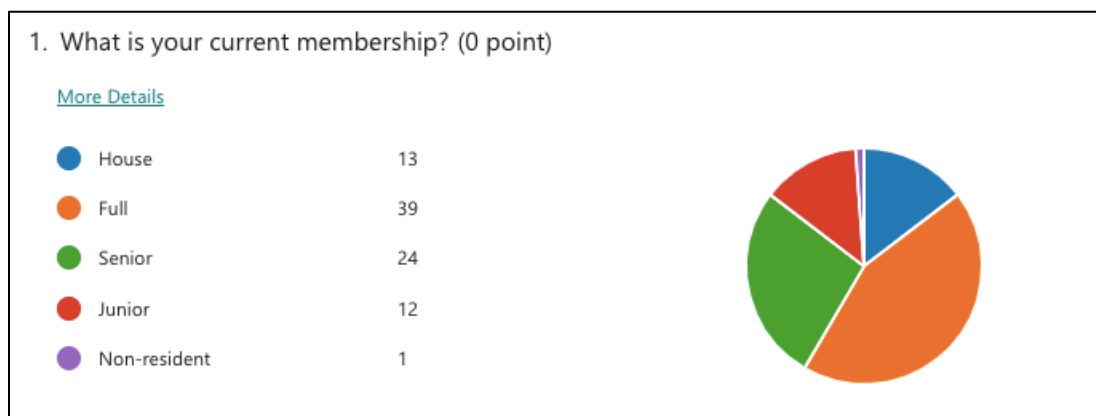
9 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Figure 5 Current membership status

To gather the responses to my questionnaire I used the clubs mailing list which sent the questionnaire to all the members who are signed up to receive emails. From my questionnaire I received a total of 90 responses which is adequate to get a strong understanding of the clubs 400 members views. The questions included where aimed to find out what parts of the club offered a positive experience to the members and what areas could be improved or developed in the club to keep current members happy and loyal and bring in new customers from the golfing aspect but also the clubhouse facility aspect. From the 90 participants there were 77 members who held either a house,

full or senior membership. This is beneficial to the analysis of the questionnaire as these are the members that make up the core of the club and are the most likely to be affected by any decisions or changes made by the club (Figure 5).
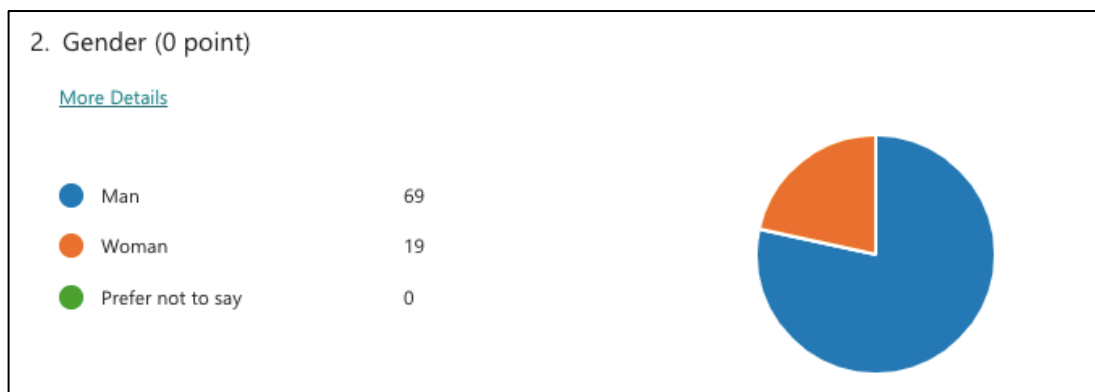

Figure 6 Current members genders

Unsurprisingly, there was 68% male dominance in the questionnaire which is to be expected in a sport dominantly played by men. Also, rather usurpingly over 50% of member were aged 50 and over. I would have expected this to be the dominant age group as typically older people have more disposable time due to retirement and not having as many reasonability's such as children or longer working weeks. This finding also correlates to question 4 as there are 33% of members that have had a membership for over 10 years with the majority of this 33% also falling in the 50+ age category (Figure 6 & 7 & 8).
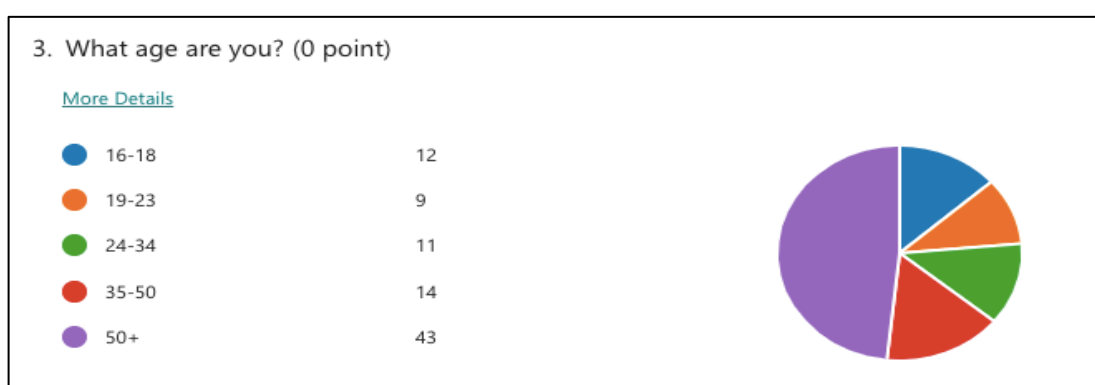
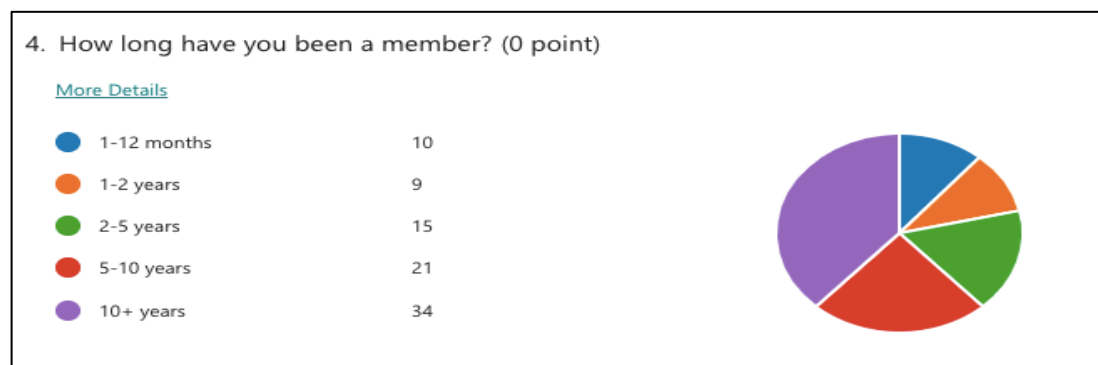

Figure 7 Age of current members

Figure 8 Membership durations

Question 4 highlights a positive in the club's customer satisfaction and loyalty as 61% of asked members have held their membership for over 5 years. This highlights that the club is offering satisfactory products and services for a majority of its members. 9% of members have held their membership for less than one year and this is the group requires the attention to create a satisfactory environment which will hopefully lead to them becoming loyal members to the club. In question 7 a short-term member offered the response that they would be leaving the club in the future to find lower fees and 6 of the 10 members also stated that golf quality is of the biggest importance of them and added no additional importance areas. This could highlight a danger that these members are not interested in the clubhouse facilities and therefore could be easily swayed to another golf course if the golfing facilities are seen to be better. This could be an area to improve on through adding functions or events that target these new members and get them in the clubhouse to see what else the club has to offer. (Figure 8).
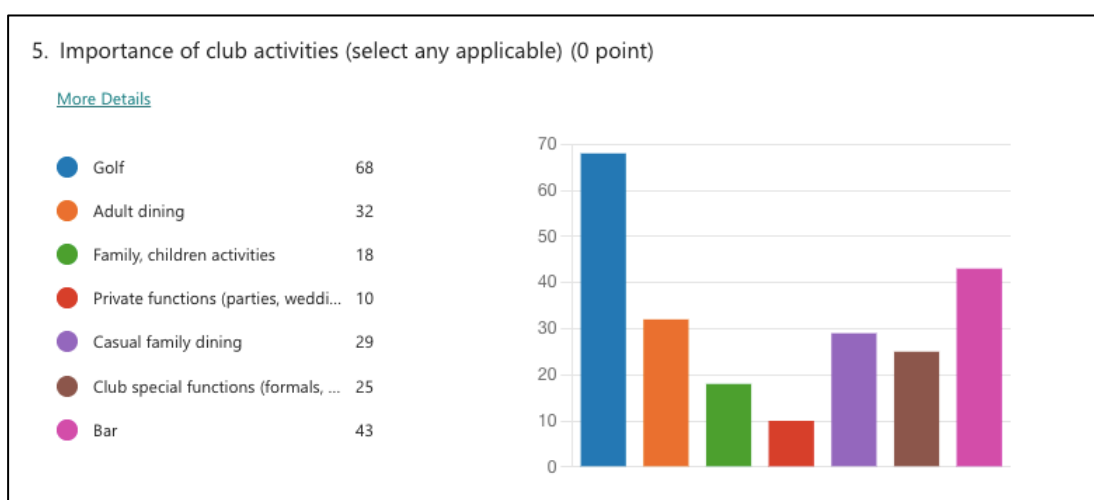

Figure 9 Showing what members value most

Question 5 was designed to see what areas each member was most engaged in with the obvious top answer being golf. Looking at the other answers dining is important to members being both casual dining and adult dining. The second most favored answer was the bar facilities with most of these answers coming from male members who also favored the golf facilities. This question gives insight into what the members are enjoying the most so these should be the areas that are developed further to keep the interest in them (Figure 9).

Questions 8 & 9 were designed to gauge the members interest in the functions in the club and whether they take part in them and whether they would be willing to pay an increased membership fee to allow for more functions and special events to be developed and hosted at the club. Question 10 highlights most people that would not be willing to pay an increased membership fee in order to see more functions at the club with only 18 members willing to pay extra. Out of these 18 members only 2 of them are full paying members with the rest being either senior members or house members which both pay a reduced fee. This question highlights that raising the membership fee is not an option and if done would immediately cause unsatisfied members, so this is not the solution to developing new functions or events. Question 8 highlights that 52 of the members would be likely to attend special events or functions in the club which shows that there is interest in these events happening in the club if they were available. Question 9 also shows that the majority of the members that answered were unsure if there was enough special events on throughout the year as they answered "maybe" This could indicate a lack of promotion around the club of these events or there could simply be so few events happening that they don't think it is fully satisfactory (Figure 10 & 11 & 12).
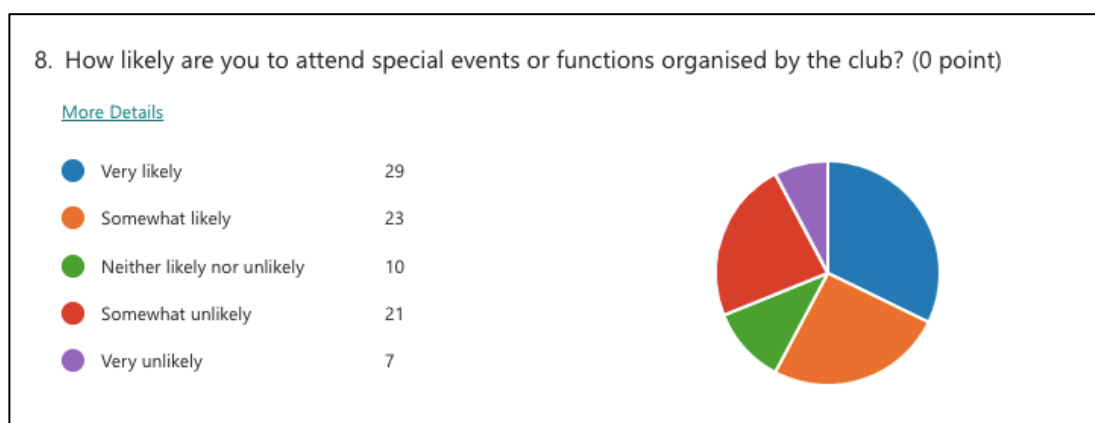
8. How likely are you to attend special events or functions organised by the club? (0 point)
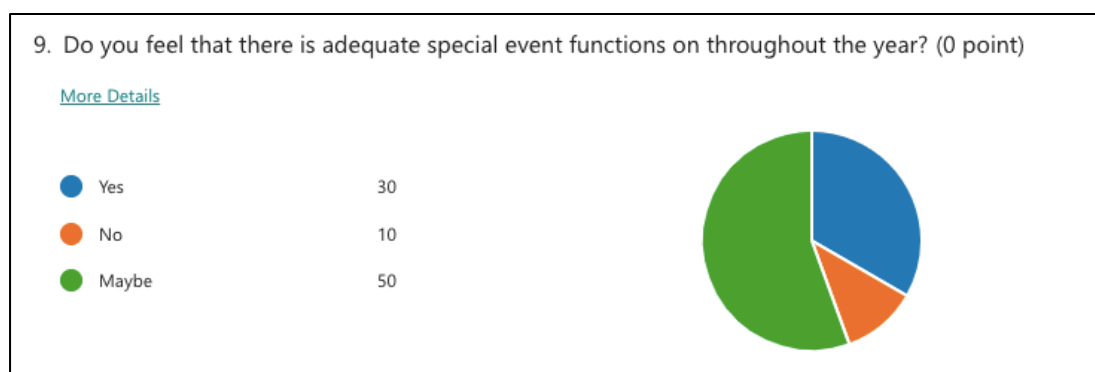
More Details

Very likely	29	
Somewhat likely	23	
Neither likely nor unlikely	10	
Somewhat unlikely	21	
Very unlikely	7	

Figure 10 Members likelihood to attend special events

9. Do you feel that there is adequate special event functions on throughout the year? (0 point)

More Details

Yes	30
No	10
Maybe	50

Figure 11 Members feeling on if there is enough adequate special event function

10. Would you be willing to pay increased membership fees in order to allow for more special events?

More Details

Yes	18
No	57
Maybe	15

Figure 12 showing if members would be an increased membership fee

Questions 18 & 19 in the questionnaire are extremely positive towards the clubs golfing facilities as well as the dining facilities. 83 of the members answered likely to recommending the golfing facilities to others with 53 of these being very likely. 81 of

the members also stated that they would be likely to recommend the club for dining, 67 of these answering very likely. This clearly shows the club has the facilities and services to attract in other customers and with the word of mouth of members recommending the golf and dining is greatly beneficial to the club. It is also worth to note that the club received a 4.55/5 rating on the golfing facilities in the questionnaire. It is also worth to mention that these results closely mirror the rating of 4.2/5 that TripAdvisor has given the club which is a rating given by non-member visitors (Figure 13 & 14).
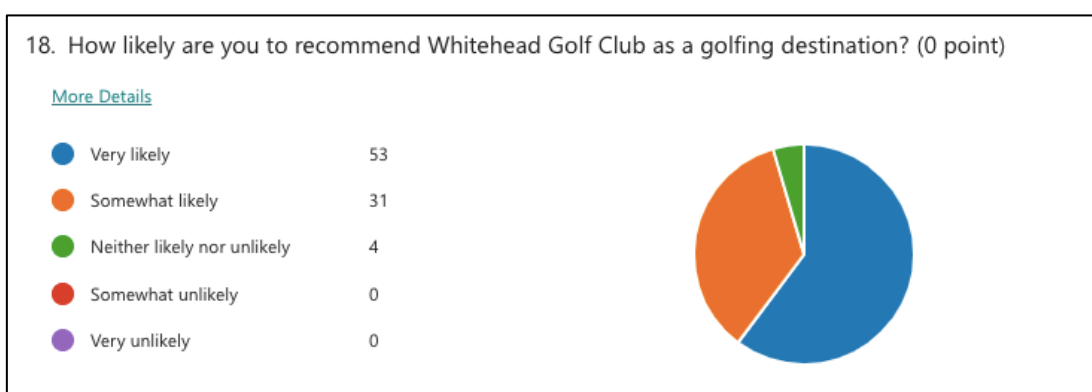

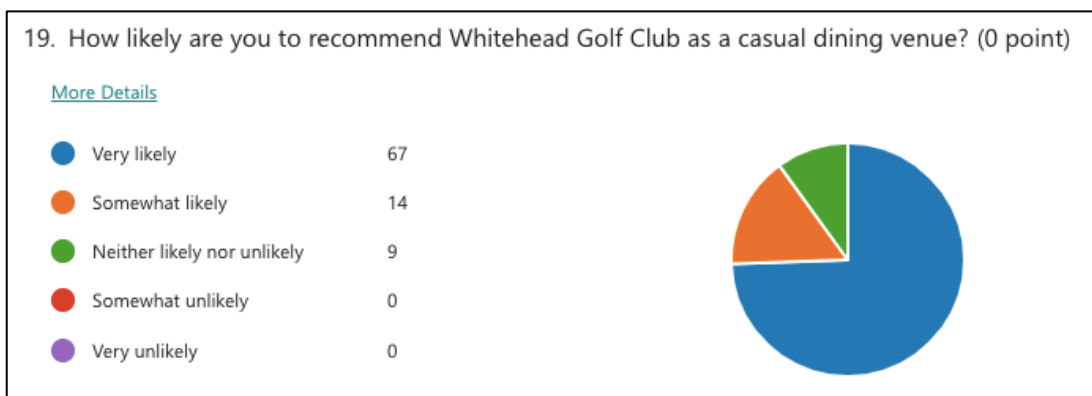**Figure 13** showing how likely members are to recommend WGC as a golf destination

Figure 14 showing how likely members are to recommend WGC as a casual dining venue

Overall, this questionnaire has helped highlight the key areas that the golf club is carrying out well and also highlighted some areas that could be worked on as well as areas

that members feel should be developed more. These areas for development will be talked about in the next stage of my thesis in the recommendations.

10 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, based on the survey results, the members of Whitehead Golf Club are more than satisfied with the dining facilities at the club as well as the golfing and bar facilities that it is currently offering. The members are somewhat not as happy about the price of the membership especially the full members who are middle aged. Within the survey I included multiple function ideas to see the interest from the members and there was clear interest in each of the wine tasting, themed nights, cultural nights and also the more formal dinner nights. This leads me to recommending that the club will look further into providing these events which could lead to improving the member satisfaction further. In terms of some of the members not being happy about the cost of the membership, I would recommend that the club conduct a cost analysis to determine if there are any areas where costs can be reduced without compromising the quality of the services provided. The club could also consider offering more flexible payment plans or discounts for long-term memberships to keep those members active as well as continuing to offer deals and discounts to newer members.

Regarding the member functions, the club could consider hosting more events such as wine nights or themed nights and special event nights which align with the interest of the members as this could help build a stronger sense of community between the members and increase their overall satisfaction with the club. With all of my recommendations if the club decides to use my findings, it is important that the club communicates with the members regarding the changes and improvements. This will show the members that their opinions are valued and taken into consideration by the clubs committee. In doing so the club can create and maintain a positive relationship with its members and ensure their continued satisfaction with the club's services.

With the rising popularity of golf within juniors and women, it is also a high recommendation that the club begin to implement more courses and coaching to these groups

to become more attractive to these potential members. It is also a recommendation that the club hosts more junior events all year round rather than just during the summer months and more women's events rather than just on one day a week.

After discussing with Trevor Wright throughout this research process and final presentation of my findings from my survey and my ideas for improvement and development, he has been very happy to see how some of the members are feeling and what they enjoy most about the club and what they least enjoy. Trevor has noted that he has already brought up the survey and ideas in a council meeting and they are looking at possible avenues to increase events and participation throughout all areas of the club using my ideas and he is excited to see where the club can go in the near future through the use of my findings. (Wright, personal communication on 01.04.2023.)

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