

The Assistant's Role in Organising Wedding Fairs

Nina Pyykkö



Author(s) Nina Pyykkö	
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<p>This thesis is a descriptive guidebook about the assistant's role in events industry and event management. The final product is a guide for new interns at an event management company where the writer completed her work placement during the autumn of 2019. During her internship, she noticed that the company's orientation could be developed, so she created the guide for them to hand out during the orientation as a supporting tool.</p> <p>The thesis objective was to create a comprehensive guide for new event management assistants at company X. It will provide additional support for the interns by listing all the important information about the job from tasks to communication and workplaces, as well as general responsibilities before, during and after the company's events. The new interns are able to update the guide, for example, whenever there are new main tasks for the interns, or their job description changes.</p> <p>The thesis has two main components. First component introduces the background of the thesis and the topic, theoretical part, interviews to former interns of the company, the process of producing the guide as well as discusses the results and development areas. Second component is the final product, ergo the guide for new interns.</p> <p>Theoretical part introduces relevant theory and describes the overall event management process of wedding fairs as well as the assistant's role before, during and after events, including topics such as descriptions of the processes, general tasks, necessary attributes, and communication.</p> <p>Interviews to former interns of the company X were conducted in order to receive a more comprehensive insight of the assistant's role so that the guide would be as including and useful as possible.</p> <p>The chapter about tells more about the planning phase, timeline and methods used for creating the final product, and the final discussion covers topics such as results, development areas and evaluation of the process.</p> <p>The thesis process started during the summer of 2020 with data collection and event management literature reading and the process was completed during autumn 2020.</p>	
Keywords Assistant, guide, event organising company, events industry	

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1 Introduction

The first chapter gives an overview of the thesis. Firstly, there is information about the background and the purpose of the thesis. Secondly, there is more technical information such as the objectives and delimitation, and lastly the structure of the thesis will be introduced.

1.1 Background

The product-based thesis is about the event management assistant role in an event organising company. The final product of this thesis is a guidebook for the new interns/assistants in the company where I completed my work placement, which gives insight to the role and tasks before, during and after the event. To protect the company and its operations secrets, in this thesis it is called company X and the two managers are called E and F.

As a part of my studies, I completed my work placement at the company X during the autumn of 2019. I worked remotely and only went to the office once for orientation, where I received information about the company and its operations. The atmosphere was quite relaxed and friendly instead of a formal work environment that I am used to. When I worked from home, the daily communication was through an online platform and during the work placement, I worked as an event management assistant and always took notes from the managers' messages and turned them into short guides of different tasks for other interns and assistants. After the work placement, we stayed in contact with the manager F and I expressed my wishes of writing my thesis about them. We decided that guidebook for other interns would be the best topic since there was a clear need for one at the company in question and I already had some experience in creating guides for them. Interns are a large part of its workforce and there are new interns to train quite often and this guidebook will help the managers in briefing of the interns and in their orientation.

1.2 Objective

The thesis objective is to get insight of the assistant role in the company that I completed my work placement and write a coherent guidebook for their new interns. This is achieved by using my own experiences as well as theory of the events industry and the results of interviews created for former interns.

Most of the previous studies and courses of events industry are made for event managers and planners, especially those who are just beginning their careers. There is not that

much material specially made for other parties of the events industry, such as assistants. I believe that my product will come in handy for other event management assistants as well, besides the ones organising different types of fairs. Also, organising wedding fairs is a very small part of the industry, and the previously made studies have not addressed it much, so I am confident about my thesis's usefulness.

1.3 Delimitation

My thesis solely focuses on company X and its events since each event management company has their own organisational structures, values, and strategies etcetera, and each event is managed differently. I also only write and interview about the role of the event management assistant since different positions have very diverse tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, other job positions and events are not incorporated in the thesis.

Besides the demarcation of the company, the former trainees' educational backgrounds and experiences in event management are incorporated in the thesis in order to understand their views of their work placement better. Other aspects of their personal life and background are not included.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis has general information of a wedding fair management process as well as the final product for the interns at the company X. The thesis has six chapters: introduction, theoretical background, description of the assistant's role in event organisation, information of compiling the guidebook, interview to former interns and discussion about the topic and the thesis process. Introduction gives information about the thesis topic, objectives, and delimitation. Theoretical background has more information about the general topic of event management and the industry as well as the company X. Chapter three is dedicated for the assistant's role in organising wedding fairs before, during and after the event, based on event management theory and my own experiences. The fourth chapter is a description of the guidebook writing process after which come the interviews for the former interns of the company X and analysis of the interviews' results. Finally, there is a discussion chapter of development areas and results, reliability and validity of the thesis and evaluation of the product and the thesis process.

2 Theoretical background

This chapter introduces event management theory better and briefly introduces the events industry and company X.

Since there has been events throughout history and event organising has existed for hundreds of years ever since ancient rituals, naturally there has been many studies and books written about the events industry. People who are interested in the industry can go to almost any university and find tens of great books about the topic. That said, although every event can be compared with others, they all have unique characteristics (Fenich 2015, 123) and usually the books, for example, have very general knowledge about organising and planning an event even though the industry is very broad and diverse. Therefore, in my opinion, all new products (books, studies, research) of the industry are always welcome.

There are also many courses and programmes available about events management or assistant work where people can learn about the topics as well as new skills. For example, I am studying in Multilingual Management Assistant programme, and therefore have studied many courses from the perspective of an assistant in addition to my event management specialisation studies in Bournemouth University.

2.1 Introduction to the events industry

Events are planned gatherings that with limited time and resources. Event management is literally managing events as well as seeing events as projects with limited time and phases (Fenich 2015, 99.)

Event industry includes all event management companies no matter their size. There are many ways to categorise events, for example, by their size, whether the event is for leisure or business and based on their typology. Events can be organised to raise money or awareness for a company or a different cause, to build customer relationships or to launch a new product or service etcetera.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, fairs are large public events where the attendees can buy goods or services from the exhibitors and where there usually is some sort of entertainment. Fairs are usually larger than regular events, and can last multiple days. Wedding fairs are organised to provide more information of the industry's companies to engaged couples and their close family. Most of the attendees are planning their own wedding for the first time and it is easier for them to attend one event where companies

from different areas of the wedding, such as florists, bakeries, and dress shops, gather. Since these fairs are quite large and complex, the companies that organise them usually focus only in management of these types of events instead of creating additional, smaller events throughout the year.

2.2 Concepts

Key concepts of the thesis are assistant's role in organising wedding fairs and assistant's position in an event management company, as well as events and event management.

2.3 Commissioning party

As mentioned before, I completed my work placement in the company X as an events management assistant as well. The company is considered to be quite small with only two fulltime workers, managers E and F, and a few interns. They organise large wedding fairs biannually and include the interns in them and the daily tasks of planning and organising the fairs. During the fairs, there is an event team which consists mostly of former employees, friends, and family. Other than organising the fairs, the company has a large social media network and a website full of information for weddings to maintain. The core team usually work remotely before and after the fair because of inconvenient locations, thus creating some problems in daily working life which I hope to improve with this thesis.

3 Working as an assistant before, during and after the event

This chapter introduces the main areas of event management process and the tasks that the assistant of an event management company commonly has, as well as some tips for them.

3.1 Before the event

Event planning starts with coming up with the idea of the event. The company should fine-tune the idea by defining the concept and objectives of the event since detailed planning in the beginning of event organising is extremely important. There are many different objectives as well that the company can have: technical objectives, change in the attendees' behaviour or influencing them somehow (Vallo & Häyrynen 2016, 59-60). The company should choose the right objectives for them and keep them in mind during the planning phase in order to have a successful event. In order to receive a true picture of the success, this is the phase where the company should decide the correct ways of evaluating their event that correspond to their objectives.

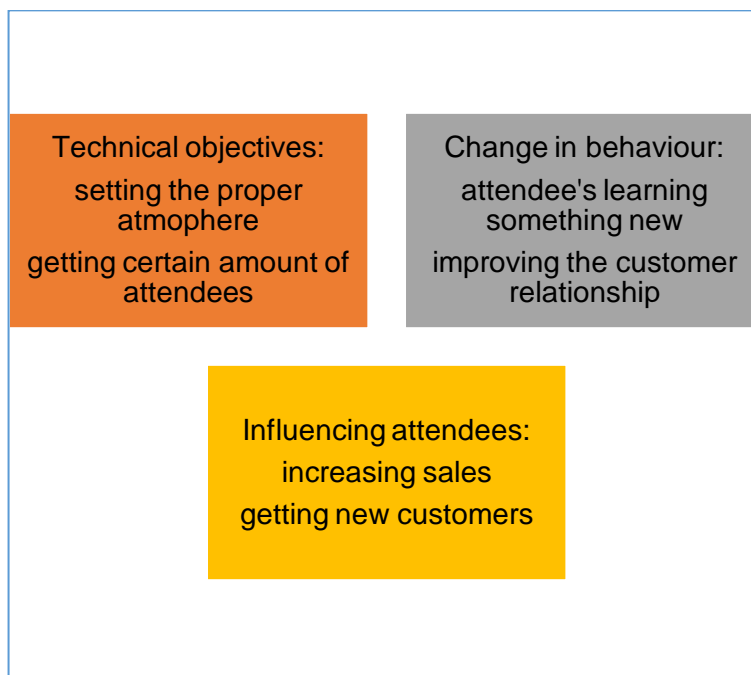


Figure 1: Different types of event objectives (Vallo & Häyrynen 2016, 59-60)

After that, the company can proceed to other processes of event management including choosing the best venue for the event, gathering a team, creating a project plan, budgeting as well as marketing/promoting. When choosing a venue, it is important to keep in mind that booking the best venue with the right atmosphere for the event is essential since both physical and mental environment will determine what the attendees will think about

the event and the company (Shone & Parry 2013, 268) and therefore are a significant part of the event experience. The venue should match the ideal image of the event and have everything necessary such as enough facilities.

Eventually, organising an event is a team operation that includes employers as well as employees (Campbell *et al.* 2003, 53). Therefore, the company should hire enough skillful people that can manage the tasks given to them (Conway 2009, 186). The team should create a detailed project plan with information about all the phases and tasks they need to accomplish. This includes budgeting and marketing/promoting. Budgeting should cover all the costs and incomes and make sure that there is some revenue from the event if that is one of the company's objectives. Marketing plan should define the target group of the event and marketing, the marketing strategy and platforms, people responsible, and it should also have goals of what the company wants to achieve with the marketing. For example, company X's marketing plan is, shortly, to provide interesting information about the fair to people planning their own wedding through social media.

In company X's case, most of these are already planned before the assistant starts working and then repeated since they focus only on organising the same type of wedding fairs. If the company is relatively young or organises different types of events, these might be things that they still need to plan and therefore might require the assistant's input considering their skills and knowledge.

3.1.1 Orientation

During orientation, it is very important that the employer explains more about the company to the assistant and answers the basic questions; what, why, how, who, when, to whom etc. since it crucial that all the people working in the company knows the answers to these questions (Vallo & Häyrynen 2016, 25). Then, all the necessary programs and tools should be installed and checked to assistant's own computer if they work remotely. If the assistant works at the office with rest of the team, a demo of the tools should be given. It would be wise to check (either purchase or update) the computer's virus protection software as well because nowadays there has been growing problems with viruses and hackers (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 178). This protection should also be maintained regularly and updated to a better one if needed.

3.1.2 Workplace

If the assistant works at the office, a proper work environment including breaks and lunch should be provided by the company, or the manager should give instructions to purchase

one's own lunch and when they can take breaks etcetera. If the assistant works remotely, it is their responsibility to take care setting a good work environment for themselves. Where and how they work on a daily basis also affects the quality of their work (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 7).

When working remotely, the assistant should make sure that they have a separate space, a dedicated space that is comfortable and calm, and only for working (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health 2020). This makes it easier to focus on the work and not on other things around the house. All the necessary equipment needs to be ready for work in advance to improve efficiency and reduce the time needed to look for things. Since there might not be anyone reminding the intern to take a break and eat lunch, they either need to remember that themselves or set a notification. It is recommended to take breaks at the very least once per hour (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 198), but according to an article of the Boston Globe (2014) Alan Hedge, a design and ergonomics professor at Cornell University, recommended changing positions regularly. This means that the assistant should move around at least for 2 minutes twice an hour to maintain muscle, joints, and mind's productivity.

3.1.3 Daily tasks

Assistant's role depends on the organisational structure of the company. The organisational structure defines, for example, what type of relationships there are at the company and how the information flows. There are functional, divisional/multidivisional, flatarchy and matrix structures. At the company X, the organisational structure is matrix, meaning the assistant could have tasks from different departments such as finance and marketing. This differs from other structures since, for example, in a functionally structures company, the assistant would most likely have tasks from only one department (Kenton, 2020).

As an event management assistant, the assistant's task will most likely include creating and working with documents and graphics (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 73), checking and writing emails, updating the company's social media, database and/or website, writing articles or press releases and supporting the managers and their operations in other ways. Although, there might be some tasks outside of the agreed frame because of changes in the different processes of event organising (Bladen *et al.* 2012, 122). But this is also a good time to learn some new skills, which is one of the best professional opportunities anyone can have in the business life since after developing their skills they might be qualified even for a better position (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 480). The assistant should always try to learn and develop essential business skills even if they do not need them right then (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 479).

During the daily work, France's study (2015, 41-42) lists key attributes that managers would like the employee to have:



Figure 2: Desired key attributes of an employee (France 2015, 41-42)

Handling daily tasks might also be difficult from home because of different distractions, or the start of the work placement might feel overwhelming. A tip for keeping on-track with tasks and deadlines is creating a to-do list, in which the assistant could write everything they need to do and when is the deadline. It is very difficult to forget something if it is written down somewhere where they can see it, and the assistant can also see their progress which could ease their stress and/or anxiety. This method is recommended by many people (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 65-66) and I agree with them.

Scheduling is also a very good skill that improves the efficiency and poise of working. The assistant should plan how long each task will take, that way they can see how many tasks they can realistically accomplish (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 66).

3.1.4 Social media

The internet and social media are a very large part of event organising nowadays. Therefore, companies are putting more effort into improving their coverage, and usually these tasks belong to the event management assistant or an employee hired precisely for that. The company can build their community; talk with (possible) attendees and post information and promotions through social media (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 194). Activity in social media also attracts engagement from sponsors (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 473).

Event management companies should use social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to their advantage because using visuals (images and videos) with the provided information can have a more powerful impact on how the message is received (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 179). Before the event, there will be constant feed of daily posts and the pace of posting will increase when getting closer to the event in order to for example promote the event or possible sponsors.

Possible attendees will look through these pages to get information before the event and even see the highlights of the event after it has ended (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 241). Therefore, there is a big responsibility to provide enough relevant information of the fair as well as somehow convey the feeling and atmosphere to make them want to participate (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 369). The key is to carefully choose the words and phrases that they use (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 179) to appear to be in a certain mood. The people looking through the content will form an image of the person responsible for social media and then connect the same image to the event organising company. Therefore, if the posts seem excited and happy, it could be that the possible attendee thinks that the company is very passionate which might increase the change of them attending.

3.1.5 Remote communication

If the assistant works remotely, the communication platforms need to be agreed and taught during the orientation. There should also be a plan B if there is something from with someone's technology or the platform, and both parties, the employee as well as the employer follow the routine that was agreed on. It is also as important to keep the communication platforms open and to be active in them with constant communication as well as to show initiative by letting the managers know if the employee is done with their tasks or how they are progressing (Finnish Institute of Occupational Health 2020).

There are times when the whole management team will be extremely busy. That is when the communication might be a bit more difficult than usual because everyone is off doing their own job. It is also not uncommon that the event managers is very worried and stressed about some details since the event depends on how it is planned (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 20) so the assistant should be mindful of this when the communication is not as smooth as it could be.

3.2 Working as an assistant during the event

The implementation phase begins with setting the venue up and ends with clearing up and post-event tasks. Depending on the event that the company is organising and its size, setting up could start even a few days before the event. Setting up includes the gathering of the event team and orientation of tasks, setting up the venue and communication channels and overall preparations for the event. Company should have some plans for the transportation and accommodation as well as the food and beverages of the event team for this phase; whether they are going to stay somewhere near the venue or at home, how they are going to move around between the locations and do they have good enough F&B plans to take care of everyone on the team for the duration of the event etcetera. I will later in this chapter talk more about the tasks of the implementation phase such as tasks during the event and clearing up.

3.2.1 Tasks during the event

As mentioned before, the tasks of the assistant depend on the organisational structure. If the company has a functional structure, the assistant will have tasks regarding their own department. These tasks could be for example taking care of social media, managing the info station or being responsible for selling tickets. If the company has a matrix structure like company X has, most likely they are no specific, assigned tasks for the assistant for the entire duration of the event. Rather, they will have many smaller tasks and otherwise help the managers and the rest of the event team. During the set-up, the assistant might need to help the exhibitors as well and answer their questions. The exhibitors are there to improve their business since at the event they meet a lot of more potential customers than regularly (Jansson *et al.* 2007, 13). Therefore, the event is very important for them and they might want to outperform their competition, so they might request specific things and/or help before the event begins.

The assistant should also, regardless of the organisational structure, be very proactive, walk around the venue and observe everything for possible problems (Conway 2009, 22) and ways that they can help to make the event a success. They should also keep in mind that the physical surroundings of the attendees play an important role on how they perceive the event (Shone & Parry 2013, 268) so it is important to clean any rubbish or unpleasant sights away. This includes checking all the facilities since they are a part of the customer experience too (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 533).

Even if the assistant is not responsible for social media or marketing, taking pictures and videos is always additional help for the company and therefore the assistant should take

as much quality material as possible. The material taken from the event is extremely useful for the post-event marketing since it can show how great and successful the event was (Conway 2009, 254).

Maybe the most important task of the entire event team is to manage the interactions with the attendees well. The event could either be a success or a failure based on the attendees' interactions and their responses (Shone & Parry 2013, 24). Nowadays most of the people who attend fairs have specific goals; they want new ideas and information (Jansson *et al.* 2007, 13). Especially in a wedding fair, most of the attendees are planning their own event and want help with that. Therefore, it is very likely that they have a certain deadline and have done a lot of research about the exhibitors before coming to the event (Jansson *et al.* 2007, 30). Everyone on the event team should get a map of the exhibitors' stands and one of the main responsibilities is to help the attendees find the specific stand they are looking for or help them in any way possible.

The event team also has an enormous responsibility of ensure everyone's health, safety and welfare at the venue (Conway 2009, 21). The assistant can do their part by looking around the venue for potential issues, whether small such as cords in the way or large like loose structures (Bladen *et al.* 2012, 201-202), and report them immediately to the managers or other supervising members of the event team.

3.2.2 The “fair mindset”

Organising events is exhausting, especially during the event. The assistant should prepare that they will be very busy for multiple days and get only a little rest, so this part of the process will be very demanding. That said, the assistant cannot show any of this from the arrival of the first attendee to the departure of the very last. I would compare this to performing on stage; the performer could have a lot of personal issues, but as soon as they enter the stage, the viewers should not notice any of it. So, the assistant should image being on stage whenever there are attendees at the venue, because they mean everything for the event (Fenich 2015, 61) and the company's reputation is determined by them (Vallo & Häyrinen 2016, 31).

If the assistant desires to be an event organiser, they need to understand the importance of the attendees and great hospitality towards them (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 17). As far as the attendee is considered, the members of the event team should be the sweetest, kindest, and most helpful people in the world. They should always keep in mind that during the event they are hosts for the attendees and representing the company and the brand (Vallo & Häyrinen 2016, 274). Therefore, they should provide quality service, which

happens when the service is beyond attendee's expectations (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 387). This means, for example, escorting the attendee to the stand instead of pointing them which way it is. The assistant should also be mindful of their non-verbal communication such as tone, gestures, expressions etc. (Robinson *et al.* 2010, 10) because those are the moments which make either excellent or awful impressions for the attendee (Jansson *et al.* 2007, 73). So the assistant should not keep their arms crossed but try to keep a smile on their face.

The assistant should also keep in mind that they will have many similar encounters during the event, but they cannot let that affect their mood or answer. The two parties in this communication situation have very different starting points and expectations for the interaction (Robinson *et al.* 2010, 10) since the attendee does not have many encounters with the event team and is expecting great services when in the other hand, the assistant probably already knows what the attendee wants to know and has to answer the same question multiple times a day. Nonetheless, it still needs to be as delightful as possible.

Vallo & Häyrynen (2016, 111-113) created a list for the traits that an event organiser should have and I personally completely agree with these:



Figure 3: Traits of an excellent event organiser (Vallo & Häyrynen, 111-113)

3.2.3 Communicating during the event

The main channel of communication during events is usually walkie-talkies or phones. It is the event managers' responsibility to teach everyone in the team to use the channels correctly, but the assistant should practice using them in private with someone, if they are not

confident that they can easily communicate through them. The channels are usually for general communication, but if something happens and the intern is not able to get a message through, it could be an embarrassment or even fatal (Conway 2009, 169). Dealing with a large number of attendees requires excellent communication inside the team (Conway 2009, 22) and leaves little room for error. This is especially crucial during the beginning of the event when a large part of the attendees will arrive at a similar time (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 136).

3.3 Working as an assistant after the event

3.3.1 Clearing up

Despite the common assumption that the hard part is over when the event is over, there are still many things to do when the shutting down of the site begins (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 140). The venue must be returned to its original state in only one evening, so the event team cannot relax just yet. The most important task for the assistant is, again, to help the rest of the event team in clearing up. There will be a lot of traffic since the exhibitors are clearing up as well, so the assistant should make way for them (Conway 2009, 267) and look out for everyone's safety.

3.3.2 Post-event tasks

After the event is done and everyone has recovered from the demanding implementation phase, the post-event tasks begin. It is very important to start the evaluation process as soon as possible, when all the occurrences are still fresh in everyone's mind. The company should evaluate whether they succeeded in the event objectives or not by for example analysing the visitor and sales data or creating feedback surveys, depending on the objectives. The evaluation process should not be kept only inside the company; instead they should take advantage of different sources such as exhibitors and visitors and ask for their feedback (Shone & Parry 2013, 313). That way the company, and the assistant, can get a better picture of possible learning points and development areas.



Figure 4: Sources for event evaluation (Shone & Parry 2013, 313)

Post-event marketing of event should be one of the most important tasks for the company since promoting is essential (Robinson *et al.* 2010, 154) and that way the event organising company can maximise the event's impact (Campbell *et al.* 2003, 109). Post-event marketing is necessary in managing different relationships: to showcase the events to possible new attendees and bring in old and new exhibitors (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 405).

As mentioned before, events are eventually projects. Therefore the switch to the next event or the return other tasks, depending on the company, should be quite easy and effortless if the company has planned the timelines well. In order to be as efficient as possible, this switch could be done even during the previously mentioned tasks.

4 Interviews for former interns

The company X has operated for many years already but that does not mean that there is not anything to develop. Many event organising companies tend to focus on developing the event process since it is so complex with such a large range of different roles and activities that require the managers' attention (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 146) instead of focusing on the internal development. Still, it should not be forgotten considering the fact that event crew is, after all, the factor that makes the event successful (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 239-240).

4.1 Objectives and target of the interview

The interview objectives were to create a themed interview for the former interns in order to get insight of their experiences as the assistants of the company, to make the managers aware of the possible development areas and to introduce these areas to new interns so that they could prepare themselves for possible troubles. I also wanted to add here other perspectives of almost the same internships since people see and receive information very differently and the other interns have different educational backgrounds which might affect their answers. I wanted to provide the new interns with a comprehensive picture of the experience and things that they would maybe like to change. Instead of only asking how things are I made an effort to find out how the former interns think that things could be, sort of as an activity analysis as it is usually more practical and focus on the social aspect and people (Aaltola 2001, 204).

4.2 Interview plan

Because of the current pandemic, I conducted the interviews as Zoom interviews, where I shared the questions made in advance and we talked as broadly as possible with the former interns about the topics. I chose this method because I would have not been able to make any additional observations from answers in a questionnaire (Aaltola² 2001, 239) and using a qualitative method is more likely internally valid and useful than for example the previously mentioned questionnaire (Veal & Burton 2014, 230). I realise that this method of collecting data might have some problems with the reliability of the answers such as exaggeration and/or under-reporting (Veal & Burton 2014, 240), but each interview started with a general introduction of the topic since it is very important that all the parties understand the purpose and goal of the interview in order to avoid any problems with accuracy.

To protect the interviewees' privacy, I will not share their names and instead I will use letters A-D to differentiate their answers. Since the event crew is very close and compares themselves to a family, I want to protect the people who I interviewed from potential harm since it could lead to embarrassment or damaged relationships between friends and colleagues (Veal & Burton 2014, 99).

4.3 Implementation

4.3.1 Interview questions for former interns:

- What is your educational background? Where were you studying while working with company X?
- What were your main tasks during the work placement?
 - How do you feel that your studies prepared you for that job and the tasks?
- Did you have any event management experience before working at X? If yes, did that help you and how?
- What kind of orientation did you have? How would you develop it?
- What were the best/worst parts of working with them? How could they improve the experience?
- If you would be the manager of X, what would you do differently regarding assistants and interns?
- If you could give advice to the new interns, what would it be?

4.3.2 Interview answers

What is your educational background? Where were you studying while working with company X?

- A: marketing BBA. I was not studying during the time that I was an intern at the company; I just wanted more work experience in the event industry.
- B: I studied in a vocational school and we did not really have the same type of programmes as you do, but I would say that I studied finance. Working with X was a part of it.
- C: I studied in Lahti's University of Applied Sciences in service business program and X was a part of my studies.
- D: I studied in Haaga-Helia as well, I am a marketing BBA. The experience was a part of my studies and work placement.

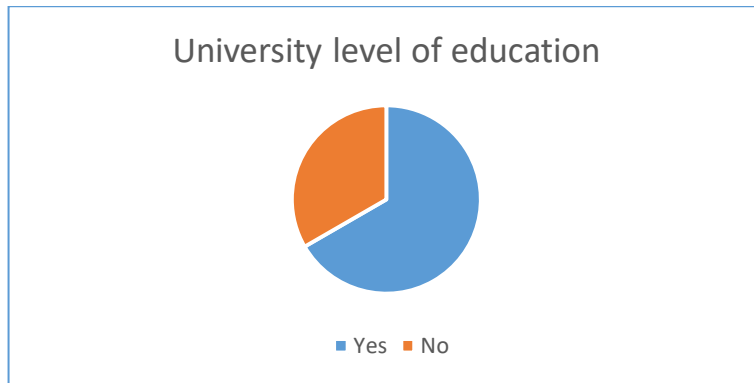


Figure 5: Former interns' level of education

What were your main tasks during the work placement?

- A: social media and participating in the fair by taking videos and pictures for social media marketing.
- B: background assistant work such as emails and inventory, as well as articles and updating the website. During the fair I was assisting in any ways I could and doing what the managers asked me to.
- C: mainly I oversaw the social media content in Instagram and Facebook, I also updated the website. I was also a part of the fairs during the autumn and spring. There I oversaw the catwalk and the VIP seats, as well as took care of a competition's organisation, filming and posting.
- D: posting to and updating Instagram and Facebook, communicating with the exhibitors and people in social media as well as regular assistant work such as sending emails and updating our databases. I of course participated in the fair too where I mostly just ran around helping as much as I could, there I did not have a main task that was given to me beforehand.

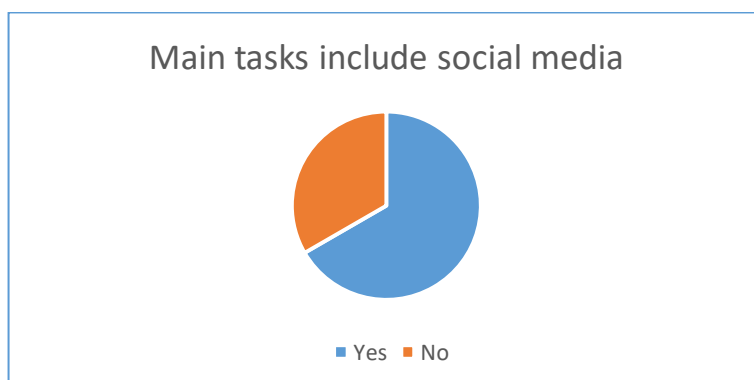


Figure 6: Former interns' main tasks include social media

How do you feel that your studies prepared you for that job and the tasks?

- A: I graduated 2014 and social media marketing was not really a thing back then, so we did not study it a lot. But otherwise I think that my studies helped me to be prepared and the internship was like I thought it would be.
- B: honestly, I do not think that they helped at all, but that has more to do with our teachers, the quality of my education and the courses than X.
- C: I do not think that my education helped me to prepare to any job. You learn by doing! But of course, the education opened some doors and opportunities, that is how I found the company.
- D: I do not feel that it helped a lot. Of course, I knew the basics of event planning, but I did not know much about the practicalities and requirements of assistants in this industry.

Did you have any event management experience before working at X? If yes, did that help you and how?

- A: I participated in organising a fair during my studies, and I have been an exhibitor for my previous workplaces. The previous experience did help me during the actual fair, since I already knew how things worked and what to expect. It also helped a bit with the social media since I knew what fairs are like.
- B: I did not have any experience
- C: A little bit. We had a "project spring" in our school. It helped because I got a general understanding of what organising is and what you must consider when planning an event.
- D: I had some experience; I have participated in Slush and other small event before. It helped me a bit, I knew what to expect and what to prepare for as well as how to normally act during events.



Figure 7: Former interns' previous experience in event organising

What kind of orientation did you have? How would you develop it?

- A: we did not exactly have any orientation, we just had lunch. It would have been better to have some orientation, especially about the fair, and I think it would have been helpful to attend the previous fair before actually being a part of one.
- B: we had a great orientation about what is the starting point and background of the company but not much about anything else. It would have been nice to hear more from E as well in the beginning, so the communication with her would have been easier.
- C: I spent the first day with F at the office. I thought it was really important to be physically in the same location in the beginning. We looked through all the important programs and installed them and talked generally of what's to come. I guess that is all you can ask for from an orientation.
- D: we met at the office with F, talked about some general things and then made sure that I had access to every database that I needed to start working. Maybe it would have been nice to see some examples of the work that I should start doing, to really see how to do things before starting to do them remotely.

What were the best/worst parts of working with them? How could they improve the experience?

- A: I loved the fair weekend, and I cannot really think of any worst parts except the attending the fair beforehand, but I realise that is not really possible since it is only biyearly event.
- B: the best part was to learn new things; you get a great image of what you actually like to do. The worst part was the poor communication with E since that really affected me and my work.
- C: the best thing was the freedom; I could work independently from anywhere. And of course, the event was an amazing experience! I cannot really think of any negative sides.
- D: I loved the event crew and of course the fact that I could work from home. I would say that the only negative about it was that the communication was sometime a bit hard remotely: the managers were too busy or there were some problems with the chat and understanding the instructions etc.

If you would be the manager of X, what would you do differently regarding assistants and interns?

- A: we only met once so maybe it would have been better to see face-to-face more since the communication and relationship building is always easier that way.

- B: since the communication was mostly online, the messages and short instructions were hard to interpret. I would pay more attention to the way that I treat interns and the atmosphere; you should give detailed instructions and express yourself better, so you do not end up affecting the interns in a negative way when you get frustrated that the task is not done correctly.
- C: I would make my own life easier by creating some sort of “start package” to the new interns. I would also create one day in a month where everyone comes to the office and we would check the process and how everyone is doing.
- D: I would tell them as much info as possible if they were ready to listen. Sometimes it was hard to know what was going on or what was expected from us.

If you could give advice to the new interns, what would it be?

- A: social media takes time, that was surprising to me. It is also really hectic, especially if you do something wrong and you need to be ready to fix the mistake immediately. Also, if you do not understand something, you need to be brave and ask.
- B: you definitely need patience, you need to demand clear instructions, so you get the job done well, but you still need the will-do attitude.
- C: Be prepared that you will have to work independently, especially the event days are extremely busy and you will not get constant instructions. Do not stand constantly in the way but do not be a wallflower either and just drink coffee.
- D: Be understanding, the managers have a lot of things to do. But at the same time, it cannot affect your work so ask for better instructions and harass them until you get answers. Be mentally prepared for working independently, especially during the event weekend.

4.3.3 Results of the interviews

The first finding of the interviews was that even though most of the former interns had a higher education during their internship at X, they did not feel that it helped that much. According to Shone and Parry (2013, 292), even if an event organising company hires people with degrees or higher knowledge of event management, they will have to teach them their specific roles and ways of working. I agree with this completely since all events have unique characteristics and each event organising company works differently. It is also important that the company provides additional training if needed (Shone & Parry 2013, 292). Hence the education that you have before starting to work does not necessarily matter besides that you know the basics. There are so many different entry points and

educations to enter the event industry and they all have equally valid qualifications (Robinson *et al.* 2010, XIV).

Working in the events industry is very different from other industries in a sense that there is a greater variety in job roles, lengths of service etc. (Robinson *et al.* 2010, 113). This said, according to the interviews, the new intern might want to be prepared that their main tasks as an event management assistant includes social media tasks such as posting on the company's Instagram, Facebook, or website. I believe that most of the former interns, myself included, did not think much of this task, but it should be something that the intern goes through with the managers in detail. A common misconception of social media marketing in events industry is that it is only "event promotion" when instead it is an important way to achieve marketing objectives and increased event attendance, awareness, and satisfaction (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 412). If the person in charge of the social media does not understand this and the societal effect of the posts, it can lead to dissatisfied attendees and strongly influence the event's survival (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 368). So, it is good to get familiar with the topic and the desired outcomes of the posting since it is very likely that the new intern will get social media as a task at some point.

The third important finding is that previous experience in event management might be useful but not at all crucial, and most of the literature of events industry agrees. Vallo and Häyrynen (2016, 113-114) said that the skill of event organising is mostly experience. The more people participate in organising events, the more they get tips of what makes an unforgettable event. But still, previous participation in events is not a requirement nor will the interns be in a significant disadvantage if they have no experience since after all, the previous experience might only be useful in that you will learn to adapt to new situation quicker and better (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 5) because the event industry is so dynamic. In my opinion, I had some previous experience of event organising as well, but you can never truly be fully prepared for what is going to happen. You might know what to expect in certain situations and how to behave/react, but in the end all events are different enough that you can never be sure of how they are going to go.

4.4 Development areas according to the interviews

The biggest development area that became clear during the interviews was communication, which seemed to be some type of issue for almost everyone, which is very alarming since good communication is essential to the company's success (Stroman *et al.* 2014, 491). The managers have been successful in communicating the vision and philosophy of the company with everyone and that is very important for the event to be a hit (Bowdin *et al.* 2010, 239) but besides that, they should be very clear about everyone's role and the

expectations they have for the interns (Vallo & Häyriinen 2016, 289; Campbell *et al.* 2003, 57). Additionally, it is really important that the managers speak with the right tone of voice to the interns because if they speak with condescending attitude, boredom or anger, it will affect the interns in a negative way and it will affect the way that they receive your message (France 2015, 34)

The most useful advice about communication for the new interns is that you should always learn about yourself first and know your own strengths and weaknesses as well as communication preferences (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 167), it will make communication with the managers so much easier if you can talk about the differences in the very beginning of the internship. A successful internship experience can be achieved by constant communication, also a heart-to-heart of each other's boundaries and expectations. That way you can also find out about the managers' ways of working and you can understand each other and find a way to adapt or compromise (France 2015, 42).

Besides the communication, another point of critique was the short orientation. Specially, when the main tasks can differ daily and most of the interns work remotely, a proper, long orientation might be difficult. I too, had some difficulties getting used to the company's way of working and the tasks, but hopefully this thesis and product will help the new interns in the future.

5 Producing the guidebook

This chapter describes the planning and implementation processes of the final product. First, there is detailed information of the planning and timeline, after which the methods, content and structure are described.

5.1 Planning of the guidebook

As I mentioned in the beginning of my thesis, during my work placement I took notes from the managers' instructions and made them into small guides for myself and other interns, so I was unknowingly already practising for my thesis. Later, after the work placement was complete, I wanted to do a product for the company and we decided that a guidebook for interns would be the best option since they always have a few interns included in their processes and I already had some experience in creating guides for them.

As found out during the interviews, most of the interns will most likely work remotely and that the orientation was quite short. Therefore, there was a distinct need for a guide for the new interns which would be given to them at the orientation to make them feel more comfortable and confident about their internship, especially because there are no written guides for interns made before this. The guide should give a better insight to the internship, introduce the daily work at the company as well as have some useful tips. It would be quite general since the interns have variable tasks that they agree upon with the managers and that could often change, but it will still be a supporting tool for them.

The company did not have any specific request of the guide; they have been very pleased with the smaller guides that I made previously. I decided to make it from each phase of event management in order for it to be as useful as possible, and a form that would be easy to print. I also wanted to make it centralised around the company instead of providing event management theory because that is not necessarily important information for the interns, and they can study the subject more by themselves if they are interested in it.

5.1.1 Project timeline

I noticed the possible need for guides during my work placement during autumn 2019 and as I had a lot of experience in working with the company X, I knew the tasks and responsibilities of the event management assistant and felt that I would be more than capable of writing the guide for them.

The planning of the product started during the spring of 2020 and the production started in July with data collection and background reading. I started reading background literature and theory in July 2020. Other data collection, conducting the interviews, talking with manager F, and looking for the information I had obtained during my work placement started in August. I wanted to find as much useful information for the interns as possible in order to be able to provide a coherent insight of the company's processes. The writing process started in September and the first draft was ready in the late October. Corrections were made in the beginning of November according to the thesis advisor's advices. Some more information of the general assistant's role and the events industry was added instead of only writing about the role in the company X, and the structure was rearranged in order for it to be more academic and logical, after which the thesis was again submitted to the advisor.

Table 1: Timeline of the project

Task	Summer	August	September	October	November
Background reading					
Literature review + notes					
Data collection					
Data analysis					
Writing first draft					
Draft review					
Corrections					
Submission					

5.2 Product Producing Methods

I followed Veal and Burton's (2014, 52) elements of research process; first I selected the topic, conceptualised the framework and studied literature. Then I conducted the interviews, gathered more data, and wrote this study. The topic and its development were quite a fast process since there already was a need for the product. Therefore, it was easy for me to come up with the topics and plan the structure of the product. Because of my studies and experience of event management as well as my experience of working in the company, I already had some theory and literature ready and I was able to gather more information by using Haaga-Helia's databases and my connections with the company and the former interns.

During the thesis process, I kept contact with manager F and discussed the topics of the guide with them and received comments from the manager's perspective which helped

me to see the role of an assistant more objectively and broadly. Other than that, they did not have much feedback to give since they do not have anything to compare the guide or any wishes for the implementation of the product.

5.3 Content and Structure of the Guide

The final product is nine pages consisting of: a cover page, table of contents and three chapters. The purpose of the graphics was to make the guidebook look elegant, clear, and concise. The first chapter introduces the daily work life in the company, from orientation to the start of the event. Manager F will tell more about the company during the orientation and interview phase of the internship and therefore I decided not to repeat the same information in the guide. The second chapter gives insight to the events during the fair and how to prepare and what to expect from the fair, especially if the intern has not participated in similar events before. The final chapter describes the tasks after the event, and the switch from one event to another.

6 Discussion

This last chapter consists of a description of the importance of assistants in the company X, reliability and validity of the thesis, suggestions for development and evaluation of the process and final product.

6.1 The significance of assistants in the company

Assistant are a great asset to the company; they are a large part of executing of the event since the company has interns included in every part of the event planning process. Assistant save significant time for the managers and boost the company's productivity (Duncan 2011). The most important thing is that each employee has given tasks that they are best suited for (Dowson & Bassett 2015, 46). Technology adds their efficiency and productivity (Vallo & Häyrynen 2016, 100) and in my opinion, the interns are essential for the company and its processes. This is not uncommon; volunteers and part-time workers are very important for the whole events industry (Robinson *et al.* 2010, 117).

6.2 Reliability and validity of the thesis

Using qualitative methods, such as interviews, has often some issues with reliability since as mentioned before; there is always the possibility of for example exaggeration and/or under-reporting. But as the importance of honest answers was emphasised in the beginning of each interview, I do not think that the possibility of dishonest answers is high at all.

The final product for the new interns will be very reliable and valid. Data used to create it included a lot of insight from former interns as well as from my experience and therefore I was able to create a realistic guide for them.

6.3 Results

The objective of this thesis was to create a comprehensive guide of the event management assistant's tasks and responsibilities before, during and after events for the new interns at company X. I wanted to provide them with an inclusive, overall, and clear picture of the internship especially if they have not had any previous experience in event management. The guide will be an extremely useful tool for the company to hand out during the orientation.

I decided not to have too much theory on the final product since it is not really part of the internship to study those topics. It was interesting to see the correlation between event management theory and event management in practice. The processes were very much

alike, and that is one of the reasons that I was able to create such a strong and reliable product. But on the other hand, many of the Haaga-Helia's event management books highlight communication as well as team management, and those were ones of the biggest development areas for the company. I believe that this is because, in my opinion, theory does not describe the stress and hassle of event management very well, and of course there are a lot more disturbance and variables in real life. I do realise that each company is different with varied operations and therefore I can only speak for company X based on my own experiences and the interviews I conducted.

6.4 Suggestions for development

As mentioned before, the biggest development area for the company seems to be communication. Thus, for future development of the company's operations the managers should brief the interns well and clearly communicate their responsibilities and the expectations for them (Campbell *et al.* 2003, 53-54). Campbell *et al.* (2003, 54) suggests that the managers of an event organising company should always give the best tools, such as regular meetings and briefings, for the interns and other employees for fulfilling their roles.

As events industry is constantly changing according to megatrends and trends, I would also recommend that one of the new interns or even the managers would update the guide whenever there are changes in the mentioned topics or some new and important tasks/responsibilities arise for the assistants. The guide is suited for new interns now, but the job description might change in the future along with the company and/or the industry.

6.5 An evaluation of the thesis process

In my opinion, the thesis process went very well and very smoothly. The project was completed in the timeline that was formed during the planning phase of the thesis, and the objective of the thesis was achieved.

This process allowed me to learn so much more about the events industry as well as the company X, and I also got a better understanding of my own work placement at the company and my skills that I learned/developed there. My own experience at the company made the thesis process significantly easier. When creating the final product, I was able to use and develop the professional and academic skills that I had learned during my studies at Haaga-Helia, as well as practice for the professional life since creating different types of documents is considered to be one of the assistant's/employee's main responsibilities. This process also taught me more about project and time management, overcoming tasks this size by myself, data collection and analysis etcetera and I am sure that those skills

will be useful later in life as well. I have been able to use these skills before during my studies and part-time jobs, however this was a much better learning environment to be able to do this project almost fulltime.

Of course, there were some other learning experiences as well during the process. I had some difficulties with structuring the thesis as well as the academic style; this has been a problem of mine even in previous parts of my studies, especially during my student exchange to Bournemouth University in England. I have also always thought that I was excellent at project management and motivating myself to work, but this process taught me a lot about myself as a possible employee. In the future, I have to work on managing stress since that was a big issue for me during this autumn. It might be because I do not have any previous experience in handling a project of this scale, but I tend to get easily stressed which might affect my productivity and professionalism negatively, which clearly needs to be fixed. Nevertheless, I was able to become better at being more academically correct with the help of my thesis advisor. The former interns and manager F were also extremely helpful, and they provided support as well as additional information and insight of the company and its operations.

I am very pleased with the final product; as is the company X and I strongly believe that it will be an extremely handy tool for them and the target audience.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Guidebook for new interns (company X only)

HAAGA-HELIA University of Applied Sciences

Guidebook for New Event Man- agement Assistants

Nina Pyykkö
autumn 2020

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1 Before event:

1.1 Orientation

You should get some basic info of the company and instructions on what programmes to use and how. You should have, update, and maintain some kind of virus protection software since nowadays there are so many viruses and hackers.

1.2 Workplace

If you work at the office, you will work together with manager F and the company will provide you with lunch and a proper work environment etc. But if you work remotely, you need to take care of those things yourself.

You should always have a separate, comfortable, and calm working space at home, that way it is easier to focus on the work and not on other things. You should have all your necessary equipment (computers, pens, paper etc.) ready before work so you do not waste working hours. It is also very important that you remember to eat regularly and take breaks at least once per hour (if possible, move around for 2 minutes twice an hour) to maintain your physical health.

1.3 Daily tasks

Your tasks will most likely include:

- creating and working with different types of documents and graphics
- checking and writing emails
- updating the company's social media, database and / or website
- writing articles
- other assistant work

You should agree about your specific tasks with the managers and let them know if there are any areas of operations that you are really interested in, they will listen to you. There might be some surprising tasks that were not agreed on beforehand because of some changes, but do not worry about it, it is an excellent opportunity for you to learn some new skills that might help you later in your professional life.

The key attributes that you should have in your daily working life with the company are:

- good communication skills, communicate about any thought you have regarding the internship
- you need to be trustworthy
- committed to your tasks and try your best
- actively listen to the managers' instructions and expectations
- be an active worker as well a team worker

If you feel overwhelmed or cannot fully concentrate on the work, try creating a to-do list. Write down everything you need to do and when they need to be done, that way you remember to do everything, and you can see your progress. In order to make your daily tasks easier, you can take notes of the managers' instructions until you get used to doing the tasks independently.

Scheduling is also an excellent way to keep track on all your tasks. Estimate the time that it will take you to complete one task, and then you can clearly see what you can realistically accomplish during a day.

1.4 Company's social media

You probably have to participate in updating the company's social media at some point since it is such a huge part of the operations, but this section is mostly for the interns whose main task social media is.

The company is using common social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook because using visuals can have a more powerful impact on how the message is received, and there they can build their community; talk with (possible) attendees and post information and promotions through social media. Activity in social media also attracts sponsor. Therefore, you might want to familiarise yourself with these platforms. Before the event, there will be constant feed of daily posts and the pace of posting will increase when getting closer to the event.

The biggest responsibility of posting on social media is to provide relevant information of the fair and try to convey the atmosphere so that people browsing the pages want to participate. The key is to carefully choose the words and phrases that you use. You should look at some of the old posts beforehand and mimic their language in the beginning. There have been many interns creating the previous posts and it is always very important that the message and tone of them remains coherent. Usually, the managers have the images and videos ready for you and they also help with writing the message and tone,

but still it would be best and timesaving for everyone if you learned the “correct” way of posting yourself.

1.5 Daily communication

If you work remotely, the daily communication will be done by messaging platforms. It is very important that you follow the routine that you agreed with the managers (wake up when you are supposed to etc.) and that you let them know when you are ready for work. If you have not completed some task the previous day, you can automatically continue working on it, but still remember to send the team a message. It is also important that you keep the platforms open during the working hours and that you are active in them. Show initiative by communicating when you are done with your tasks or how you are progressing.

There are times when you and the managers will be extremely busy. Especially then the communication might be a bit more difficult than usually. The managers can also be very worried and stressed about the planning process and the event so be mindful of this.

2 During the event

2.1 Transportation

At the beginning, you will meet with the rest of the team at the venue to set everything up. You need to travel there by yourself if you have not made any other plans with the managers, and after the team has gathered, you will travel to the accommodation or restaurants together and the company will take care of rest of the transportation.

2.2 Accommodation

You have the option to stay at home and travel to the venue each morning, but since the event lasts for quite long and can be very tiring, I recommend using the accommodation that they will book for you. It is located somewhere near the venue and the food will of course be included as well.

2.3 Tasks during the event

Most likely you will not have specific tasks for the entire event. Rather, you will have smaller tasks that the managers will ask you to do and then you can always help the rest of the event team. When you are setting the fair up, you might need to help the exhibitors as well since they will have questions about their spaces and decorations etc. They are participating in the fair to improve their business, and that is why the event is very important to them. They might want to do better than their competition, so they might have some specific requests or questions, or they might need help setting their structures up.

You should always be proactive and walk around the venue to look out for any problems or ways that you could help. Also, keep in mind that the environment is an important part of how the attendee perceives the event, you, and the company, so clean any rubbish or unpleasant sights such as cords away as soon as possible. This includes checking the facilities regularly as well.

Even if you are not responsible for social media or marketing outside of the fair, take as much nice pictures and videos as possible during the fair weekend. The material is extremely useful for post-event marketing since it is “evidence” of how successful, fun, great etcetera the event was.

Maybe the most important task for you is interacting with the fair attendees. The event will be either a hit or a miss mostly based on the interactions with the attendees' and how they respond. It is very likely that they have a specific deadline and they have done research about the exhibitors before even coming. You will get a map of the site before the event starts and there you will have all the information of who is exhibiting at the fair and where they are, and one of your responsibilities is to help attendees find the right stands that they are looking for or help them in any other way.

The event team, you included, also has a huge responsibility to make sure that everyone is safe at the venue. You can do your part by looking out for possible hazards or issues, whether they are cords in the attendees' way or even loose structures and report them immediately to the managers or anyone with more experience in the event team if the managers are not available.

2.4 The “fair mindset”

Organising events is exhausting, especially this part of the event. You should prepare that you will be extremely busy for half a week and that you will get only a little rest, so it can be very demanding for your body and mind. That said, you cannot show any of this struggle from the arrival of the first attendee to the departure of the last. I would compare this to performing on stage; the performer could have a lot of personal issues that they are going through, but as soon as they enter the stage, the viewers should not notice any of it. So, imagine being a performer. The attendees mean everything to the success of the event, and they determine the company's reputation, therefore it is important that they remain clueless about all the negative sides of the event.

As far as the attendee is considered, you should be the sweetest, kindest, and most helpful person in the world. Keep in mind that you are representing the company, and therefore you should always provide quality service. This is done by exceeding the attendee's expectations. For example, escort them to the stand that they are looking for instead of pointing them the right way. On top of this, you should be mindful about your non-verbal communication such as tone, gestures, expressions etc. because those will greatly impact whether you make an excellent or an awful impression on the attendee.

Keep in mind that you will have many similar encounters during the fair, but you cannot let that affect your mood or the way that you behave and answer. You and the attendee have very different starting points and expectations for your interaction, you might think it is dull

and repetitive, but the attendee has higher expectations for you, so try to be as delightful as possible.

There is a list of traits that a great event organiser (you) should have:

- positive attitude
- hard worker and handles pressure well
- humble and willing to learn
- extremely detailed

2.5 Communicating during the event

The main channel of communication will be walkie-talkies. It is the managers' responsibility to teach everyone how to use them, but you should practice using them in private maybe with another event team member if you are not confident that you know and are able to use them. They are usually for general communication, but if something happens you need to be able to get your message through. This is especially crucial during the beginning of the event when a large part of the attendees will arrive at a similar time.

The event team consists mostly of interns and relatives / friends of the managers. They have participated in the fair already multiple times before, so they most likely they have more experience and confidence in executing of the fair. Therefore, you can always ask for help, support, or advice from them.

3 After the event

3.1 Clearing up

Despite what you might think, there is still a lot of things to do when the fair is over, and the clearing up starts. The venue must be returned to the exact way that it was in one evening. The most important task for you is, again, to help everyone in this. Beware that there will be a lot of traffic since the exhibitors are clearing up as well, so stay out of their way unless they ask for help and be mindful of everyone's safety.

3.2 Returning to normal

After clearing up, you will have one last night at the accommodation and then everyone will go home and rest and recover for a few days. If you want some feedback on how you did during the fair, you should wait until the managers have rested as well or make plans with them to talk about the matter.

3.3 Post-event tasks

You will go back to your normal tasks. There will be some feedback and summaries and then the main focus will already be on the next event. The planning of the biannual events is usually overlapping, so the switch should be quite easy and effortless.

Even when you are moving on to the next event, post-event marketing will go on for quite a while on social media. This is to showcase the event to possible attendees and to bring in old and new exhibitors.