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## Chapter 12

# Event organizational culture

## Learning objectives

After reading through this chapter you will be able to:

- Define the term organizational culture and describe an event organizational culture
- List and describe ways in which organizational culture is established
- Discuss service culture in terms of the event product and its features
- Describe stakeholders and how they impact on event organizational culture.

## Introduction

The culture of an organization is reflected in the way things are done within the organization. For example, the level of formality with which senior management are addressed is one feature of an organization's culture. Wimbledon would have a fairly formal culture, with highly developed policies and procedures based on the event's long history. In contrast, relationships between staff planning the Woodstock 1969 Music and Art Festival would undoubtedly have been quite frenetic, given that 50 000 people were expected and 500 000 turned up! In fact, it would have been quite different from any similar event held today, given the values held by those who staged the event and the fact that it was the climax of the hippie era.

Organizations mould a common set of attitudes and values, whether intentionally or not. In most cases it is done intentionally, the culture developing through selection and socialization of members. The language used in the organization is another feature of its unique culture; indeed, the field of event management has a language of its own, summarized in the glossary. Staff at mega events often use more acronyms than words, with the result that outsiders find it hard to understand what they are saying!

Shone and Parry (2004, p. 194) sum up, in general terms, the culture of events: 'events are significant social activities; they are often communal and good natured, and this is reflected in their culture.'

# What is organizational culture?

Culture is a system of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas and products characteristic of a group or society. Organizational culture can be described in terms of patterns of cross-individual behavioural consistency within an organization. For example, when people say that culture is 'the way we do things around here', they are defining the consistent way in which people perform tasks, solve problems, resolve conflicts, and treat customers and employees. Culture is also defined by the informal values, norms and beliefs that guide how individuals and groups in an organization interact with each other and with people outside the organization. A strong organizational culture gives people a sense of identity, encourages commitment to the organization's values and mission, and promotes stability.

A culture is conveyed internally through the following means.

## Organizational structure

This may be stable or unstable. It is unstable, for example, when there is constant reorganization or when there is a high turnover of staff. It can be tall, with many levels to the hierarchy, or low, where there are few levels to the hierarchy.

## Mission and objectives

Many organizations and events have very clear mission statements that encapsulate their culture, as those of the Indigenous Heritage Festival and the Southeastern Surgical Congress indicate:

*The Indigenous Heritage Festival provides crucial opportunities for indigenous peoples of the world to share self-expression and wisdom with communities and initiate inter-tribal relationships that promote cultural exchange and build economic co-operation. Our ultimate vision is to witness the establishment of a united network of flourishing indigenous nations and our global society enriched and strengthened by cultural diversity.*

([www.indigenousfestival.org/MissionStatement.asp](http://www.indigenousfestival.org/MissionStatement.asp))

*The Southeastern Surgical Congress was founded to provide opportunities for surgeons and surgeons in training to come together for educational, scientific and social purposes to promote and advance the study and practice of surgery.*

([www.sesc.org/member/information/MissionStatement.htm](http://www.sesc.org/member/information/MissionStatement.htm))

## Devolution of decision making

Where there are few levels to the hierarchy, individuals at the lower levels are more likely to be empowered to make decisions without sending them up the line. Thus they have higher levels of responsibility.

## Policies and procedures

Approvals for equipment acquisition, petty cash systems, grievance procedures, and reward and recognition programmes are all examples of policies with associated procedures, and their content is indicative of the organization's culture.

## Language specific to the workplace

Unfortunately, the specific language of the workplace becomes second nature to those immersed in the culture, making them oblivious to the fact that some of their communication is incomprehensible to others. For example:

*Our contingency plan must be linked to the risk assessment which is weighted according to probability and consequence. The VCC [venue command centre] will be the base for implementing the VERP [venue emergency response plan].*

(Van der Wagen, 2004)

## Distribution of rewards

Remuneration at different levels of the organization is another feature of the culture, with large differences in some organizations and smaller differences in others. This has a major impact on how people work together.

## Communication flows

Both vertical and horizontal communication varies from organization to organization. There is also the 'grapevine', the informal communication network, where supposition and rumour prevail, which at times can be damaging.

## Resource allocation

The amount of financial and other resources allocated to different departments distinguishes their position in the pecking order. In the event business, if the functional area of waste management is given a very small budget and only one staff member, this is indicative of the value placed on environmental impact by the organization.

# How does event organizational culture differ?

Primarily events are service enterprises, not manufacturing enterprises, so it is necessary to look at the event product and service features in order to better grasp the concept of event organizational culture.

## Service orientation of events

Here we are looking at the organization's culture as it is expressed in its external relationships. Customers have contact with the event at the following four points and at each point the organization's service culture is communicated (Van der Wagen, 2004):

1. Pre-purchase
  - (a) *interactive website*
  - (b) *email*
  - (c) *telephone enquiry*
2. Purchase/pre-event
  - (a) *ticket sale*
  - (b) *transportation*

- (c) *parking*
  - (d) *queuing*
  - (e) *entry*
  - (f) *security check*
3. Event
- (a) *seat allocation/usher*
  - (b) *food and beverage*
  - (c) *information*
  - (d) *entertainment*
  - (e) *performance/participation (e.g. in concert/fun run)*
  - (f) *first aid*
  - (g) *merchandise sales*
  - (h) *lost and found*
4. Post-event
- (a) *exit*
  - (b) *queue*
  - (c) *transport*
  - (d) *online results*
  - (e) *photographs/memorabilia*

Furthermore, the event product is characterized by the following services marketing characteristics, which have implications for human resource management.

### **Intangibility**

Services cannot be seen, touched or taken home, and for this reason the customer has difficulty assessing quality and value until after the service experience. A ticket to an event, such as a concert, is often the only tangible reminder of an experience that is judged worthwhile, but it is difficult for the customer to describe, particularly the fleeting points of service contact described earlier. All form part of a cumulative experience which is intangible.

The implication for human resource management is the necessity for a strong culture built on induction and training. Consistent and positive responses by staff and volunteers that reflect the organization's values need to be developed for every service interaction. Some workforce members refer to orientation as 'indoctrination' as this form of training aims to have everyone understand the event's mission and in some cases (particularly fundraising events) to be inspired and motivated by it. This mission and culture could be peace and harmony; novelty and extremism; political posturing; appreciation of a unique artform; or a love of books. For many events, there is an upbeat mood of community celebration.

### **Perishability**

An event organization cannot keep an event experience such as a seat in a stadium for a cricket match and sell it the next day because by then the match is over – the commodity is perishable. In contrast, a hardware store can sell a hammer any time for months and years after it is put on the shelf. The perishability of the event product means that it must sell at the time it is offered and marketing efforts are generally directed at developing demand for tickets. This often means that large crowds attend and there are queues for tickets, entry, cloakrooms and exits. This puts pressure on service personnel to deal with sudden peaks and high-level consumer demands. If there is any prospect of missing the show, tempers flare. Training to deal with these possibilities is essential. The event organization has to capitalize on the moment, and needs staff to help it do so at an optimal level of efficiency.

## Inseparability

Services quality and consistency are subject to great variability because they are delivered by people, and human behaviour is difficult to control. The service is inseparable from the service provider. The mood or facial expression of the service provider characterizes the service for that encounter. Judgements are made by both service provider and customer affecting subsequent communication. By paying careful attention to recruitment of staff and volunteers and selecting for sound customer relations skills, it is possible to achieve higher levels of service quality. Training, specifically in service provision, is also recommended. For a service-based enterprise, the investment is in preparing the workforce and not in developing systems of quality control checks as would be done for a production line.

## Variability

Following the concept of inseparability, every interaction with the customer is a unique communication. It is thus subject to considerable variation, and in most cases so it should be. The provider customizes their response to meet the customer's needs. However, for this to work successfully, the provider must be empowered to make decisions and solve customer problems. Working closely with management during briefings and debriefings can lead to resolution of many problems, which in turn leads to greater consistency in customer service interactions between staff and clients. Better decision making on the part of frontline personnel is essential for quality service.

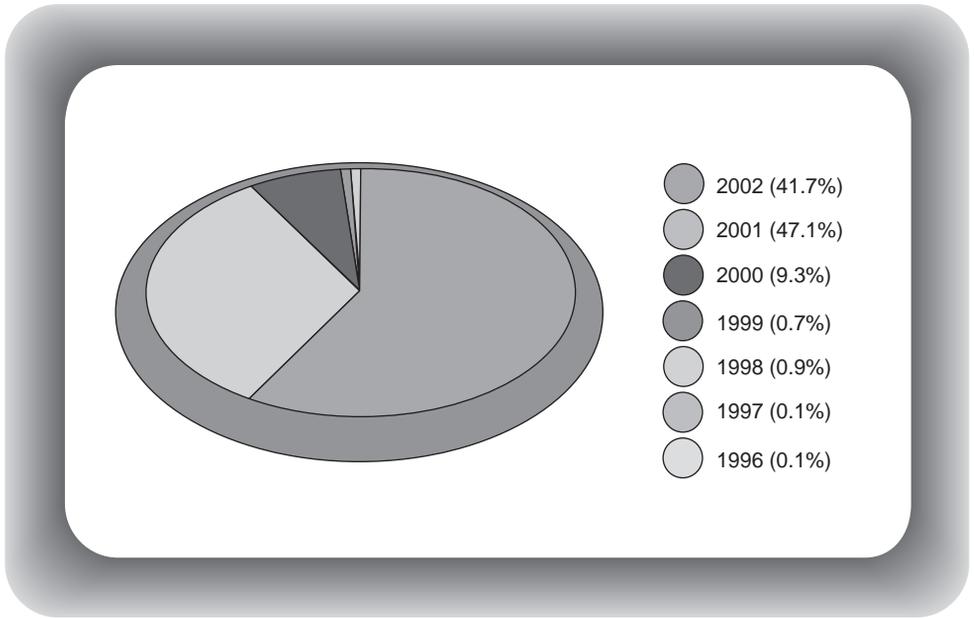
## Dynamic quality of events

It is difficult to describe the culture of an event organization unless it is an ongoing concern such as a music promoter (multiple shows with a permanent staff) or an exhibition hire company. Even this type of organization would be quite a turbulent environment in which to work. Each new performance, road show or exhibition would provide different challenges. Often the culture of the pre-event period is quite different from the culture of the operational and post-event periods. One thing that is common to all events is that they tend to operate in an environment of relative uncertainty:

*The more complex and the more unique an event is, the more likely it is to be more labour-intensive, both in terms of organization and operation. The organizational issue relates to the need for relatively complicated planning to enable the service delivery to be efficient, or put more simply, for the event to be a good one (this is why some events may be outsourced to event management companies, caterers or other types of suppliers). The uniqueness of this type of service implies a high level of communication between the organizer and the event manager. Such a high level of communication and planning will take time and effort, even where the event may be repeating a well-known formula, or operating within a common framework such as a conference. The operational element may also require high levels of staffing in order to deliver the event properly.*

(Shone and Parry, 2004, p. 17)

Much has been made of the idea that the event organization is dynamic and responsive to many situational changes in the life of each event project, and thus theorists are now looking more carefully at the role of human resource managers in non-static organizations. Tyson (1999) suggests that greater weighting needs to be given to process and diagnostic skills on the part of the human resource practitioner than to detailed technical knowledge of human resource management. This is a valuable perspective. From the growth of the event workforce over time, as shown for paid staff



**Figure 12.1** Yearly recruitment of full-time employees for the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games

(Manchester City Council (2003), Manchester Commonwealth Games Post Games Report; for further information see [www.gameslegacy.com](http://www.gameslegacy.com))

alone for the Manchester Commonwealth Games in Figure 12.1, it is easy to see that a process and diagnostic focus would better serve the evolutionary character of events.

## Relationships with external stakeholders

It would be impossible to discuss event organizational culture without covering the important relationships developed with external organizations. Multiple stakeholders are part of the event communication structure and these external bodies have a profound impact on operational planning and execution. Police and traffic authorities are an example of stakeholders; sponsorship providers are another, having considerable input into ensuring that the event meets their sponsorship and branding expectations.

Eunson (2005) uses the term 'boundary spanner' to describe people working at the interface between the organization and the environment of stakeholders. Boundary spanners have a job role that places them in contact with clients and others, sometimes spending more time with people outside the organization than within it. This role is also played out within the event organization, for example, where the marketing manager has considerable ongoing communication with the naming rights sponsor. Figure 12.2 illustrates the most common stakeholders with which the event organization has relationships, and these are described in more detail below.

### Government

Legislative compliance and approval processes are often quite taxing, involving long periods of negotiation by the event organizer with local and regional government bodies, tourism bodies, and authorities such as police, traffic management and environmental protection (see Case study 12.2).



Working with media stakeholders

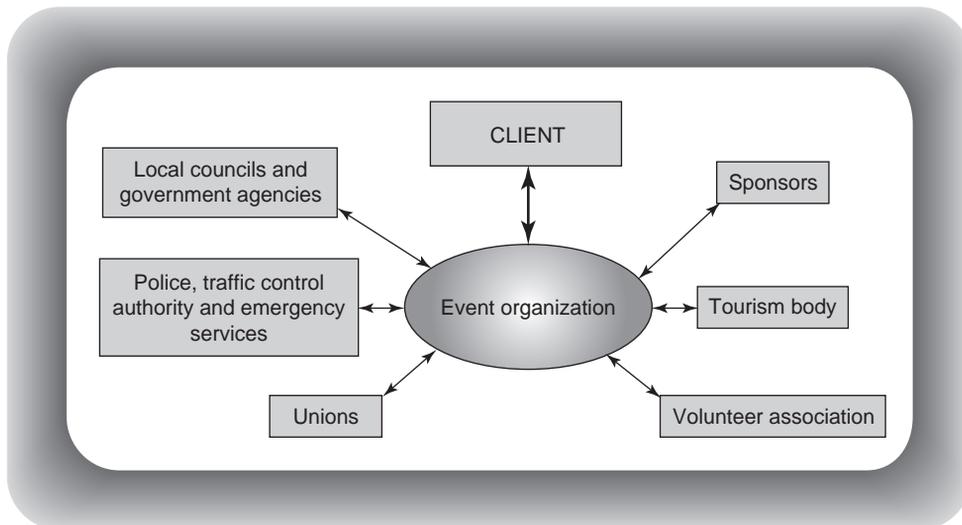


Figure 12.2 Common stakeholder relationships with the event organization

### Sponsors

The level of interaction with sponsors varies in accordance with their financial commitment to the event. In some cases sponsors are happy to leave the running of the event to the organizers; in others, sponsors have a great deal at stake and play a significant role in staging the event to suit their aims. This requires endless communication

and negotiation, and approval at every step along the way. Sponsors might wish to play a part in designing the event programme, providing goods and services at the event, and managing marketing and publicity, and many sponsors like to run corporate hospitality programmes for their business contacts and staff.

## Unions

The role of unions in events was discussed in Chapter 6. For organizations operating in South Africa, United Kingdom and Australia, for example, these relationships are an important consideration for organizational communication. Keeping the unions in the loop can be a pro-active measure with significant and positive outcomes, including simplified planning and improved staff retention (Webb, 2001). Also important are the relationships between contractors and unions, which have been highlighted in Chapter 5. While, theoretically, these contractor organizations operate at arms length from the event organization, the relationship between contractor and union/s is crucial to meeting deadlines. The alternative could be a dispute which could disrupt planning and execution of the event.

In the United Kingdom interest is growing in the role trade unions play in supporting those people employed in freelance or contingent work. Research conducted by Heery *et al.* (2004) has focused on case studies of the media and entertainment unions as well as those representing freelance guides, interpreters and translators. These members of the event workforce have mobile careers and are increasingly concerned with the security, tenure and development potential of their appointments:

*The focus of our research was on trade unions but also yielded information on the reactions of employers. What emerged most strongly from this evidence was the ambiguity with which employers regard the regulation of freelance labour markets, an ambiguity that arguably characterizes the employer view of institutionalized job regulation per se. They cavil at constraint, and avoidance of union-authored rules is common in the industries in which freelance unions operate. The primary purpose of avoiding regulation is to reduce costs and ensure maximum flexibility in the use of labour although, in some cases, such as major film companies, avoidance takes the form of offering high rates of pay that allow the recruitment and retention of the most skilled labour. Where regulation is institutionalized, however, employers frequently accept it and acknowledge its efficiencies.*

(Heery *et al.*, 2004, p. 32)

## Volunteer associations

Associations that support volunteering can provide outstanding support when planning the volunteer programme. For example, Volunteering England provides advice on managing volunteers, including such topics as occupational health and safety.

Case study 12.1 reinforces previous comments regarding the status of volunteers.

## Case study 12.1

### National Minimum Wage and Expenses UK

*The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 came into force in April 1999. The act gives all workers the right to a set minimum wage. In theory, this should not affect volunteers. However, there have been a small number of cases in which individuals volunteering have been able to prove that they have been working under a contract. This has resulted in their being regarded as employees entitled to full employment rights, or included in a wider definition of employment (usually described as 'worker'), used by the anti-discrimination legislation and the National Minimum Wage Act. The legislation behind the*

National Minimum Wage Act can look complex, and the safeguards that organizations need to impose may seem pernickety, but there are some fairly simple steps that organizations can make to ensure that their volunteers are volunteers, and not employees, in the eyes of the law.

### Employee or volunteer?

To prove that they are employed by an organization rather than volunteering for it, individuals would have to show that they had a contract. This may seem fairly straightforward. Volunteers often sign agreements stating that they understand what the organization expects of them and will do their best to turn up on time and follow policies and procedures etc. etc. However, it is usually made clear to the volunteer that this is a statement of what will happen ideally and that it is not legally binding, which means that it is not a contract. Therefore most organizations working with volunteers would assume that their volunteers have not got a contract with them.

What many people do not know is that a contract does not have to be a written document or even a verbal agreement. A contract is created when an individual agrees to carry out a task in return for something. So, for instance, if you agree to water your neighbour's garden while they are on holiday in return for £10, a contract of employment has been set up. If your neighbour does not agree to pay you but says that if you water their garden then they will bring you back some duty-free cigarettes, a contract is still created because you are doing something in return for something with an economic value (legally referred to as a 'consideration').

(Reproduced with permission of Volunteering England; for more information see: [www.volunteering.org.uk/missions.php?id = 432](http://www.volunteering.org.uk/missions.php?id = 432))

### Reflective practice 12.1

The website for Volunteering England also contains advice regarding expenses, training and rewards, as well as:

- Planning advice
- Source of experienced volunteer co-ordinators
- Source of experienced volunteers
- Examples of good practice
- Codes of conduct
- Management programmes.

Visit the website and answer the following questions:

- 1 For an employment contract to be valid, there has to be some form of consideration (usually money). How does an event organization ensure that volunteers are clear about their status and entitlements?
- 2 Identify five ways in which volunteer best practice can be demonstrated and visit an event (online if necessary) to evaluate volunteer management principles of that event.

Some event organizations have an outstanding relationship with their highly motivated volunteers, so much so that these volunteers meet for years after the event and even continue to wear their colourful uniforms! However, in other cases, this level of camaraderie is not achieved and volunteers leave feeling that they have been exploited or underutilized. Developing relationships with volunteer organizations to support the volunteer programme can lead to more effective management of such programmes.

## Clients

Of course, the most significant stakeholder for most events is the client. This could be the person booking the meeting, organizing the company conference, planning the incentive trip or booking the wedding or party. Communication with the client needs to be frequent and clear, so that every expectation is realized. Of course, in some cases, it is impossible to meet every need for the price quoted! Communication with the client needs to be supported by written documentation such as the booking contract. However, from that time on there are likely to be many meetings and conversations that likewise need to be recorded (however briefly), with any changes to service provision and contract price agreed in writing, for which emails will generally suffice.

## Reliance on customer satisfaction

In their study, Getz *et al.* (2001) constructed a service map for an event in which they identified the processes – listed earlier in the chapter – through which visitors experienced the event, judged the effectiveness of encounters with staff, viewed tangible evidence of services provided, conducted observations of crowd behaviour, and applied knowledge of management systems and operations. The study was undertaken using trained observers to supplement visitor surveys. The resulting narratives produced by observers led to numerous recommendations for service improvement, including providing more visible and welcoming staff/volunteers.

While it is impossible to cover all aspects of this study and their implications for evaluation, service mapping was one of the main recommendations. This study also provides a baseline for comparative research.

The authors concluded:

*Events are different from other service encounters, as demonstrated by this research. The event product is unique each time it is offered, and there are no routine service encounters. No matter what management systems are in place, interactions between setting, management and visitors result in unpredictable elements. Indeed, customers help shape the experience through expectations, emotional states and their social interaction.*

(Getz *et al.*, 2001, p. 389)

## Case study 12.2

### Planning guidelines for events in London's Royal Parks

The following extract is from the planning guidelines for London's Royal Parks:

#### 5.2 Liaison with local authorities

*Local authorities can be involved in events through highway management, emergency planning, environmental health (noise, catering, refuse, water and similar) and building control, or as promoters or partners in the event.*

**Noise.** *The local authority has the statutory powers to issue noise abatement notices for events in the Royal Parks as elsewhere. Ultimately this could lead to prosecution if statutory notices were ignored.*

**Food hygiene.** *The officers responsible for food hygiene must be advised of any temporary arrangements for catering at events. The local authority has the statutory power to inspect caterers in the parks as elsewhere and to take action against them if they consider it necessary.*

**Toilets and waste disposal.** For major events the local authority may also want to comment on your arrangements for toilets, water and refuse collection.

**Temporary demountable structures** are required to be licensed by some local authorities.

Particularly large events may have an impact on the streets surrounding the park, such as litter, parking, traffic, evacuation or emergency planning. In such cases the local authority should be invited to join event planning meetings.

### 5.3 Liaison with other public authorities

**Transport for London (TfL)** are responsible for London's buses, the tube network and some roads. Event planning will need to involve TfL representatives if the event could generate significant additional use of public transport in the area.

**The Royal Parks Constabulary** will normally make the decision as to when and how to liaise with the **Metropolitan Police**.

**London Fire Brigade.** The approval of LFB should be sought for the emergency action plans and site plans of all major events. The Fire Brigade should be invited to inspect the event site, particularly if it is an enclosed site.

The **London Ambulance Service** will normally only be consulted for the very largest events. However, first aid requirements should be established for all events and the **Event Safety Guide** provides useful guidance on this.

([www.royalparcs.gov.uk/docs/guidelines\\_for\\_event\\_organisers.doc](http://www.royalparcs.gov.uk/docs/guidelines_for_event_organisers.doc))

#### Reflective practice 12.2

- 1 Illustrate communication relationships with these bodies by means of a diagram.
- 2 Explain some of the communication considerations you would have when dealing with these authorities, for example, expectation and points of difference.

## Social impacts of events

From a study of the key impacts currently being used for event evaluation, Jago (2005) has proposed the concept of triple bottom line evaluation of events, which covers economic, environmental and social impacts. While it is impossible to do justice to the topic of event evaluation here, suffice it to say that human resource management contributes, at least in part, to the social impact of an event. For example, an estimate of the workforce for the Soccer World Cup 2010 in South Africa is the equivalent of 159 000 annual jobs (Swart and Urmilla, 2005). Large-scale events can contribute to direct short-term employment at the event and, in some cases, to long-term employment if there is significant tourism impact. Depending on the scale and scope of the event, training initiatives can be quite significant in attaining such an outcome, particularly if they cover the full scope of training, from management development through to specific skill acquisition.

There are also more intangible benefits such as increase in community pride, leading to greater self-confidence and a 'can do' attitude on the part of individuals and the community. The culture of the event can thus transmit to the general community, bringing long-term benefits. This is what Shanghai is aiming for with Expo 2010 (see Case study 12.3).

While it is tempting to consider only the positive outcomes of events, we must be mindful that some events are not successful. In his analysis of why some festivals fail, Getz (2002) points to the following reasons:

*Human resources*

- Incompetent event managers or staff
- Volunteer burnout
- Corruption or theft from within
- High turnover among volunteers

*Organizational culture*

- Lack of strong leadership
- Internal divisions over goals, programme, strategy, etc.
- The event founders had not permitted needed changes
- The structure of the organization prevented necessary changes

Further, he goes on to point out that an event might fail, not because it has reached the end of the product life cycle or because of market forces, but due to an absence of strategic planning and a sound organizational culture.

## Case study 12.3

### Shanghai World Expo 2010

*11th-Five Year is a key period for the Expo preparations. It is not only a major task for the city of Shanghai but also for the nation as a whole. At the routine news press by Shanghai municipal government yesterday, it was revealed that to host a successful, excellent and unforgettable Expo has become one of the key missions for the Shanghai government. All preparations and efforts will centre around this target to make it materialize in a satisfactory way.*

*The spokeswoman for Shanghai municipal government Jiao Yang said joint efforts from both home and abroad are needed for an impressive Expo. 'We will try our best to make our target come true, including to invite 200 nations and international organizations to participate and to build the Expo park ...'*

*According to Jiao Yang, the mind and wisdom of Shanghai citizens and the whole nation, as well as the ideas of the world, are a must for such a grand gathering. Successful experience should be learned from. Excellent achievements of human beings should also be made full use of. That's the precondition of hosting a successful, excellent and unforgettable Expo.*

*Shanghai Expo 2010 is in need of a full understanding and participation of people from all walks of life.*

([www.expo2010china.com/expo/english/eu/eh/userobject1ai26930.html](http://www.expo2010china.com/expo/english/eu/eh/userobject1ai26930.html))

### Reflective practice 12.3

- 1 Discuss the host city's expectations for this event.
- 2 If 200 nations and international organizations participate, explain how a 'best fit' between national cultures can be achieved.
- 3 If you were responsible for training the workforce for this event, what would you list as five priorities?

# Chapter summary and key points

This chapter has looked at organizational culture and has highlighted some of the dimensions of an organizational culture, such as policies, practices, communication flows and resource allocation. Looking specifically at the event industry's organizational culture, we saw that the emphasis was on characteristics of the service culture as they apply in this context, that is, intangibility, perishability, inseparability and variability. Providing quality service in this complex environment (with a temporary workforce) is exceptionally challenging and, from a human resource perspective, the importance of careful labour force planning, selection and training cannot be underestimated. Other defining features of the event organizational culture were seen to include the dynamic nature of events, the network of relationships with external stakeholders and the heavy reliance on customer satisfaction for the event's success.

## Revision questions

- 1 Select an event on the Internet that you can investigate or visit one in person. Describe the culture of the event organization through your observations and by using the dimensions suggested in this chapter.**
- 2 Elaborate on the statement, 'Events provide services that are intangible and inseparable, therefore staff communication and customer service training is vitally important.'**
- 3 For a specific local event, describe three of the stakeholders and their communication relationships with the event organizers.**
- 4 Events have social impacts. Compare two events in terms of their human resources impact.**

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