

Review article

DIGITALIZATION OF SPECIAL EVENTS PROJECTS DURING THE CRISIS

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Abstract: Digitalization is one of the leading topics of today, as well as one of the changes that leaves consequences and brings large-scale influences. However, it is still often debated what exactly it means and what its negative sides are. Crisis and crisis management are concepts that are constantly being researched, and projects of special events that should happen during a crisis, whatever it may be, are usually postponed or cancelled completely. Digitalization of such projects brings a large number of new opportunities and indicates a completely new approach to project implementation. On the other hand, there are certain issues related to the digitalization of special events projects, so every aspect of the new approach needs to be planned in detail and carefully implemented.

Keywords: Digitalization, project, special event, digitalization of projects, crisis, crisis.

1. INTRODUCTION

Crisis are one of the major threats to the image of organizations, companies and corporations. In addition, they can very often influence communication in the team that should accomplish the project during a crisis (Coombs, 1998). However, the realization of projects should not stop even during crisis, so it is an increasingly common case of trying to find a solution for organizing special events projects during crisis. Transferring some aspects of work to a digital environment, especially in the moment of global crisis, has once again turned out to be not only a solution to a current problem of events organization but also a decision that opens more possibilities.

2. WHAT IS DIGITALIZATION?

Digitalization represents a change in the represented business model, using digital technologies to generate revenue and certain values (Bloomberg, 2018). The term digitalization first appears in 1971 in an essay published in the North American Review. In

this essay, Robert Wachal comments on and discusses the social implications of “digitalizing society.” Since then, digitalization has been widely and widely written about. Manuel Castells views the digitalization of society, economy and culture as one of the main characteristics of the modern age (Brennen, & Kreiss, 2016). Discussions about digitalization are constantly deepening, and many claim that the media and computers have announced a new historical moment and have accelerated many spheres of life, just as mechanization has accelerated the industrial revolution.

Also, many scientists claim that digitalization affects the convergence of different sectors of social life. As a result of digitalization, different services converge through a common infrastructure, which many see as a mixture of once separate content (Brennen, & Kreiss, 2016). Scientists also say that since the beginning of the 2000s, we have been able to see many differences and innovations in the field of culture and knowledge. The reason for this is life on platforms like Facebook, Twitter,

Wikipedia and others. Namely, on such platforms, it has become much simpler and more accessible for each individual to find out, collect information, as well as to share it with others (Brennen, & Kreiss, 2016). The value of information that can be collected using digital technologies and existing platforms is declining. The growth and development of digital technologies have influenced this decline in value, from the advent of the iPhone to blogs that spark various discussions (Brennen, & Kreiss, 2016).

3. IMPACTS OF DIGITALIZATION

Digitalization is one of the leading trends influencing changes in both society and the business sphere. Digitalization is causing changes both in today's business and in what awaits us in the near future (Parviainen et al., 2017). It already greatly affects the business of corporations, companies, organizations. Digitalization has an impact on both the business environment and the internal relationships within an organization. However, digitalization brings with it new opportunities, as completely new jobs in the market or new and more workable solutions to some problems (Parviainen et al., 2017).

The impacts digitalization causes can be seen from three starting points (Parviainen et al., 2017):

- Improving internal processes and relationships, or work within an organization;
- New external capabilities. That is new business opportunities in the environment of the organization.
- Changing roles in the business world, which can have a negative effect if roles are not redefined accurately and precisely.

If we specifically look at the digitalization of certain projects of an organization or company, it is certain that all three aspects that digitalization has an impact on could lead to a change in work on projects of the same organization or company. If there is a redistribution of roles in the organization, there will also be a redistribution of roles on a particular project, which can lead to non-fulfilment of the goals of that project. That is why it is important to adapt to changes that are

internal or external, i.e. to act during the implementation of projects. One such example is the project of organizing a scientific congress in a physical environment, which would be a project of a special event that is planned and realized without major problems. However, if such a project is affected by external factors such as crisis like the global epidemic, the preparation and implementation of that project change completely in accordance with the online environment in which the scientific congress needs to be held. First of all, it is necessary to provide quality technical support, an online platform through which congress participants will communicate, prepare presentations or some other type of material that can be used in the online environment and use digital channels to promote online events. Potential risks need to be considered during the preparation and implementation of online projects. Some of them are technical problems or different time zones if the participants come from all over the world.

4. WHAT ARE THE SPECIAL EVENTS PROJECTS?

Special events projects represent an economic phenomenon of the 21st century, about which little is known, and little is researched. One of the reasons for the lack of research is the difference between societies, organizations, individuals working on the organization of special events projects in different fields (Tara-Lunga, 2012).

The term event is of Latin origin, and some of its meanings are: happening, to happen, to appear, manifestation etc. (Tara-Lunga, 2012) Analyzing different languages, differences in the meaning of the term event in relation to cultural perceptions are also noticed (Tara-Lunga, 2012). Since the term event is used every day, a special attribute has been added to emphasize the importance and difference of a particular event. Special events are most often projects of a corporation, company or individual that wants to achieve certain goals (Tara-Lunga, 2012).

Some of the special event definitions are:

- "Special events are themed public celebrations." (Getz, 1993)

- “A special event is a one-time or infrequently occurring event outside normal programmes or activities of the sponsoring or organizing body.” (Getz, 2005)
- “A special event is a gathering of human beings, generally lasting from a few hours to a few days, designed to celebrate, honour, discuss, sell, teach about, encourage, observe, or influence human endeavours”. (Matthews, 2008)

There are numerous definitions of project. According to Tuman, a project is an organization of people focused on a specific goal, which mainly involves endeavours that need to be undertaken within a certain period, with a certain budget and deliver the expected level of quality (Tuman, 1983). A slightly different definition of the project was given by Turner, who says that the project is defined as an endeavour in which human, financial and material resources are organized to cover a single unit of work with a defined specification, within time and cost constraints, with the aim of creating a positive change defined by quantitative and qualitative goals (Turner, 1999). The PMBOK issued by the International Institute for Project Management (PMI) contains the most commonly accepted definition. This definition says that a project is a temporary endeavour that aims to create a single product or service (Project Management Institute, 2013). According to Petar Jovanović, a project is *a complex and unique business venture that is undertaken in the future in order to achieve the goals in the foreseen time and with the foreseen markets* (Jovanović, 2006). The IPMA ICB 4.0 provides the following project definition: *The project is a unique, temporary, multidisciplinary, organized venture whose goal is to realize the agreed deliveries within the previously defined requirements and restrictions* (International Project Management Association - IPMA, 2015).

Based on the previous definitions of the term special event and the term project, we can come to the conclusion that special event projects are actually unique ventures with a certain budget, which last a certain time, and aim to gather a number of people to discuss, learn, to celebrate something, etc. So every

company, corporation or group of individuals gathers for some reason certain people with whom they want to fulfil their goal. Of course, the goal depends on the nature of the company, corporation or organization itself. In order for such a project to be successful, like any other, it is necessary to have a project team headed by a project manager or project coordinator to work on it.

5. CRISIS CONCEPT

The term crisis refers to an unexpected, unplanned situation that brings with it some consequences. Whether it refers to personal or professional life, the concept of a crisis is understood as a negative connotation and something that causes instability (Milašinović, & Kešetović, 2008). The word “crisis” is of Greek origin and means judgment or decision (Milašinović, & Kešetović, 2008). A crisis carries with it danger, but also the possibility and chance that something positive will emerge from it or after it, and therefore its use is wide. Very often, when the term crisis is mentioned, it means something that cannot be overcome without major or minor damage (Milašinović, & Kešetović, 2008). The different use of this term is usually reduced to some of the following meanings (Milašinović, & Kešetović, 2008):

- A condition that is not under control;
- A condition that is unplanned;
- A condition that is unpredictable;
- A condition that is caused by some human or technological factor and for which a solution needs to be found;
- A major inconvenience that causes changes or fatal outcomes.

Given that this term is used in various spheres of everyday life, a crisis is a much broader concept than it seems at first glance. When an unfavourable situation befalls an individual, company, state or the world, it is necessary to find a solution for it. Furthermore, when this unfavourable situation exceeds all allowed limits, the crisis begins (Milašinović, & Kešetović, 2008).

6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN CRISIS

During the '70s and '80s, the term project began to be used more and more often in everyday life. Today, a large number of

businesses are said to be project-oriented; that is, their business models are project-oriented (Zack, 2004). Project management has a vast area of application: infrastructure, ICT, healthcare (Obradović et al., 2012), maintenance (Semolič et al., 2008), service sector (Grebić, 2019), etc. Many believe that project managers are the ones who should deal with crisis in companies, organizations, etc. Regardless of which business sphere it is, every organization can find itself in a crisis, and how well it will respond to it depends on its team. (Sawle, 1991). James Zack states that there have never been more certified managers on the one hand and never more projects in crisis on the other (Zack, 2004). He explains this phenomenon by saying that project management is not an area in which anything can be predicted with certainty and that one of the key roles in project management is played by experience (Zack, 2004).

Basic steps that should be taken in the event of a crisis (Gillanders, 2003):

- Determine what crisis are possible;
- Establish sponsorship for Crisis Management;
- Create a Crisis Management team;
- Re-establish project objectives for the crisis scenario;
- Create a Crisis Management project plan;
- Implement the plan.

7. WHAT IS THE DIGITALIZATION OF SPECIAL EVENT PROJECTS IN CRISIS?

The organization of special events projects brings with it a number of problems and difficulties, even if implemented in a time of crisis, the challenge grows, as do the potential risks. However, the digitalization of such projects is one of the main topics of today because crisis can lead to the impossibility of physical contact. With its appearance, the Internet has enabled us to follow many things, even though we are not physically present. It creates a sense of belonging to many of its consumers. Although many are unaware, the digitalization of events began several years ago. From the appearance of websites through which it is possible to track certain events, to the appearance of QR codes and e-tickets. When digitalizing special events projects, it is

very important to consider all aspects that affect the maintenance of such an organization and turn all potential shortcomings into advantages. In order for the project of digitalization of special events to be successfully realized even during the crisis, it is necessary to set a clear goal, as with other projects. Then determine the target group and see if the fact that the special event will take place in an online environment affects it positively or negatively. In addition, it is very important to take into account and see what that the potential participants expect from such an event.

As with some other projects and special events projects, attention should be paid to the goals set before the project itself and whether they are changing in the digital environment and under the influence of the crisis situation. Furthermore, it is necessary to anticipate in time the potential risks that will be much different from those that exist when the special event project is executed in a physical environment under the normal circumstances and be ready to react preventively and reactively to them. If we look at what we previously noted in this paper, which is that digitalization is a change in the business model of doing business in a company or corporation, we can conclude that digitalization would cause a change in the project plan designed to implement a special event in the physical environment under normal conditions. That is if we had to pay special attention to finding a hall in which a congress will be held on a project that takes place in a physical environment, now the task is to find an appropriate online platform through which it is possible to hold a congress in an online environment affected by the crisis.

8. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE OF SPECIAL EVENTS PROJECTS HELD IN SERBIA DURING THE COVID19 EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CRISIS

One example of a digitized special event is the digital congress organized by the Serbian Project Management Association - IPMA Serbia in May 2020. This congress, which has been held in a physical environment for 23 years, for the first time, was held in an online environment. Considering that the

epidemiological crisis that occurred all over the world, even in Serbia, led to the fact that it was impossible to gather a large number of people in one place, the Project Management Association of Serbia has completely adapted its project plan to the newly emerged situation. The results of the twenty-fourth online congress indicate the success of this project. Namely, this year the congress gathered 287 participants from 19 different countries in 9 time zones (<http://www.ipma.rs/>). The numbers lead to a conclusion that a result achieved would be difficult to reach in “normal” conditions.

Also, another online event organized by the same organization is an online conference on the occasion of the beginning of the Digital Women’s Project Entrepreneurship project. This online conference was attended by participants of the Digital Women’s Project Entrepreneurship project, who come from less developed regions of Serbia.

The goal of this online conference, among other things, was for those women who do not have the conditions to physically attend the conference, to the conference from their homes (<http://www.ipma.rs/>).

The continuation of this project has also been fully digitalized, ie training that would otherwise be held in physical conditions for the participants, is planned in a digital environment. Namely, all the material for the training participants was recorded and posted on the online platform. After the scheduled period for listening to the recorded lessons, a certain number of participants go through the process of online mentoring. This process is designed so that the mentors work with the participants to fill in the forms of their project proposals and all that, again, in the online environment (<http://www.ipma.rs/>).

New digitalized special events projects planned for the future

As stated in the aforementioned Project Management Association – IPMA Serbia, there are more digital projects planned in the near future. In November 2020, Project Management Days are planned during which will be held several online workshops and meetings. An online training for Young Crew Serbia members is announced, as well as a new

meeting of the Special Interest Group in the digital environment (<http://www.ipma.rs/>).

9. CONCLUSION

As we have already stated in this paper, a large number of scientific discussions result in the opinion that digitalization has accelerated many spheres of life. This opinion could be transferred to the organization of special events projects, which now has a new chance even during the crisis. The open possibility for the existence of events that have an impact on people and that during various crisis can bring something good, such as new knowledge or networking of people from different parts of the world, brings certain level of security for individuals and corporations.

One can conclude that all the steps that are taken in projects in the physical environment and under normal conditions should be taken in projects that are held in an online environment in crisis while trying to achieve all the goals, as well as that the characteristics of the organization of special events are not lost.

Although people are accustomed to physical contact, the benefits of digitizing special events projects such as networking and participation of people from around the world, then participation of those coming from less accessible environments, greater availability of information, easier exchange of information and expansion of contacts should be highlighted. However, the physical environment gives people a sense of security and belonging, and that is precisely the lack of digitalization. In addition, the technical support without which the online environment does not work, is often unreliable, and there are problems in the implementation of special events projects.

Therefore, it is necessary to act in two directions. The first implies preserving the traditional approach of organizing special events projects in the physical environment, but not necessarily, but with open access to digital projects that could be the only solution to certain problems in the near future. And the second is the improvement of digitalization and continuous work on improving the implementation of special events projects in

the online environment, in order to maximize their importance as soon as possible.

Despite the fact that the concepts of digitalization and special events projects are

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- not new or unknown, due to the crisis, they have gained in development and acceleration, so their reflections will be measurable only in the time ahead.
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