Communication Networks in Event Planning
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Research Questions
RQ1: How are professional networks formed in the event planning industry?
RQ2: What is the role of informal communication in maintaining relationships with those in your inter-organizational network?
[To be answered later through analysis of interview data]

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of informal communication in forming organizational networks, in the context of event planning. This industry involves coordination throughout planning and is a platform to study inter-organizational networks. Networks play a vital role in providing additional resources, stability and efficient work. Our research aims to understand the role of communication in networks while planning an event. A survey was sent to approximately 600 event planners. Additionally, seven interviews were conducted with event planning professionals. From information collected, we anticipate being able to describe the role of informal communication in forming networks.

Literature Review
• Important pre-networking factors include personal reputation, past relationships with an organization, and the overall reputation of another organization (Larson, 1992).
• Definition of a Network: All networks require links of exchange between two or more nodes. These links can include resources, friendships or informational ties. The nodes may be individuals, organizations, or departments just to name a few (Fombrun, 1982).
• Networking is an evolving process of negotiation that is repeated over time (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994).
• Strategic and social factors are two reasons why organizations are likely to enter a network. Strategic factors focus on personal or informal connections an organization may have (Eisenhardt and Schoonhoven, 1996; Parkhe, 1993).

Method
• Collected data through online surveys
• Surveyed convenient sample of forty-six event planning professionals throughout the United States
• Conducted seven interviews with event planning professionals in the Midwest

Results
RQ1: An analysis of open-ended items revealed that participants formed networks through referrals, previous work experience, and research.

In addition, an analysis of survey data revealed that informal communication is characterized by a focus on work-related issues and the use of multiple channels.

Work or Personal Focus
Strongly agree = 1, Strongly disagree = 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I ask questions about their personal life.</td>
<td>2.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel as though I can share information about my family with this person.</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe expressing my true feelings about a work related issue to this person.</td>
<td>1.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable contacting this person outside of office hours for a work problem.</td>
<td>2.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable contacting this person outside of office hours for my personal problem(s).</td>
<td>3.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I disclose a lot of personal information to this person.</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable asking this person’s opinion about my personal issues.</td>
<td>3.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Channels of Communication
Strongly agree = 1, Strongly disagree = 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable enough to text this person.</td>
<td>1.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am Facebook friends with this person.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable contacting this person at home or on their personal cell phone.</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Implications
• Professionalism is highly valued and helps to establish a foundation for referrals.
• The event planning industry relies heavily on referrals. Throughout the referral process, vendors are able to establish rapport. Rapport often leads to informal communication.
• Continuous communication is used in order to maintain these networks through informal channels.

References

Funding for this poster was provided by UWEC Differential Tuition