Research on Event Management Personnel Cultivation: An Integrated Perspective of Degree Education and Vocational Education

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Abstract. In the past two decades, the Chinese event industry develops dramatically fast. Meanwhile, the gap is gradually widening between the universities’ event management personnel cultivation and the event enterprises’ employment demands. In order to solve this problem, it’s necessary to re-recognize the differences and similarities of degree education and vocational education, and strengthen the cooperation between universities and event enterprises, associations and governments. This research aims to discuss the paths to cultivate event management personnel from the integrated perspective of degree education and vocational education.

Introduction

Event industry is a high-practical service industry, with high practical ability requirements on event management personnel. However, for quite a long time there are two different sounds on event management personnel cultivation between universities and event enterprises in China. The universities complain that the event enterprises concern more on how to use the personnel than on how to cultivate the personnel and the salary is too low, while the event enterprises complain that the universities’ event management graduates are fastidious but incompetent. On the surface, this is just a cognitive deviation. But in fact it reflects there exists a gap between the universities’ event management education and the event enterprises’ employment demands, which might by related to the factors such as the Chinese universities habitually focus on the high-end education, easily ignore the market demands, and the pertinence and effectiveness of education are not good enough, etc.

In order to narrow the gap, it is necessary to re-recognize the degree education and vocational education and effectively integrate them together. Generally, the event management degree education is a comprehensive and systematic basic education, which is an essential stage in event management personnel cultivation. Event management vocational education is an important supplement and extension to event management degree education, which requires the joint efforts of schools, event enterprises, industrial associations and government. Especially in current, all parties should deeply re-recognize the differences and similarities between degree education and vocational education, enhance the mutual understanding, strengthen the cooperation, and jointly promote the cultivation quality of event management personnel to meet with the rapid development needs of Chinese event industry.

Differences between Event Management Degree Education and Vocational Education

The Dividing Standards and Implementing Bodies Are Different

The degree education is a systematic normative education system established by the government in accordance with certain regulations aiming at improving the basic abilities and overall qualities of the whole nationals. Generally, it is divided by the national discipline categories and trains the students according to the national education standards. As a national behavior, the implementing bodies of degree education are usually schools or institutes admitted or authorized by the government. These bodies must recruit the students and implement the teaching work according to the government’s
educational plans and regulations, and issue the state-recognized degree certificate to the qualified students after they finish their study. The vocational education is commonly divided by the industrial occupation classification standards, mainly includes two types. (1) The narrow vocational education, similar to the degree education, is implemented by the vocational schools or organizations admitted or authorized by the government in accordance with the requirements of the industry aiming at letting the educatees to obtain a certain professional knowledge or laboring skills. (2) The generalized vocational education is more like a form of lifelong education established in response to the enterprises’ job requirements and industry development. The implementing bodies not only include schools and institutes, but also include enterprises, industrial associations and government, such as the event industrial association’s relevant trainings, the event enterprises’ entry training and job training, etc.

The Cultivating Emphases Are Different

The event management degree education is a kind of “know why” education, which generally emphasizes on the understanding of event management theories and principles and strives to improve the students’ learning ability and analysis ability, such as why exhibitors come to the trade fairs, the relationship between exhibitors inviting and buyers inviting, and the economic and social influence of trade fairs, etc. It’s a kind of basic education, focusing on the development needs of people themselves, which is beneficial to train the students’ thinking modes and thinking habits and help them to have a better creativity, adaptability and development potential to the future careers. The event management vocational education is a kind of “know how” training, which generally aims at the requirements of industry development and emphasizes on how to improve the students’ professional knowledge, practical skills and personal qualities, such as how to plan an exhibition, how to make a survey, how to advertise and conduct onsite management, etc. It strives to let the educatees to obtain the required professional knowledge and skills in conducting event business.

The Teaching Methods Are Different

The event management degree education concerns more on theoretical teaching, which strives to help the students to understand and master the event management theoretical knowledge. Therefore, the theoretical teaching periods are far more than the practical teaching periods, which easily leads to the students relatively familiar with the event management theories but do not know how to use the theories appropriately and flexibly. The event management vocational education usually emphasizes on practical teaching. It often sets up some practical teaching periods in some courses or even sets up some independent practical courses to train the students and help them to better understand how to use the professional knowledge and skills in solving the real event management work, which is beneficial to help the educatees to improve their practical ability and experience.

The Closeness to the Market Is Different

The event management degree education is usually conducted according to the requirements of the government, and adopts the prescribed teaching materials (like textbooks) and assessment methods (like examinations) and strives to strengthen the students’ basic knowledge and improve their comprehensive abilities. However, the textbooks and teaching contents often lag behind the industry’s development, which easily leads to a low closeness between the education and the market. The event management vocational education usually keeps up with the development of the industry. It usually updates the teaching materials every 2-3 years according to the industry’s new requirements. The assessment methods are also flexible and diversified, namely as the Australian TAFE vocational educational system is good case in point.

The Attitudes of the Chinese Parents Are Different

The Chinese parents generally think that the vocational education is just a diversion channel for those who cannot continue to study in the normal “primary school - middle school - university” education system. In a relatively long period, most of the vocational college students can only go to work when
graduated, whose continuous studying space is limited. Therefore, many Chinese parents are reluctantly to let their child in vocational colleges unless they have no better choice such as their child’s college entrance examination achievement is not high enough. Meanwhile, the excellent students tend to go to universities to get higher degree educations, or even go abroad to study. To some extent, the cognitive bias and prejudice limited the development of Chinese vocational education. Fortunately, the government has noticed this problem and is striving to build a corresponding vocational education degree system for those vocational college students and let them have the same continuous studying opportunity and space.

Similarities between Event Management Degree Education and Vocational Education

The Functions and Fundamental Purposes Are Coincident
Both the event management degree education and vocational education are striving to cultivate the reserve personnel for the event industry, optimize the overall structure of event management personnel system, promote the event management personnel employment and individual development, and contribute to the national and regional economic and social development.

They Are Mutual Complementary and Indispensable
Both the event management degree education and vocational education are essential to the Chinese event management education. They are the two sides of the event management education. The degree education helps the students to deeply understand the professional knowledge by systematic and comprehensive theoretical teaching, while the vocational education helps to enhance the students’ practical skills and improve their competencies in solving real event management work. The vocational education is also a lifelong education and beneficial to the students’ whole careers. Hence, the event management degree education and vocational education are mutual complementary and indispensable.

Therefore, it’s necessary to integrate their advantages into the cultivation process of event management personnel. To achieve this goal, we still need to properly solve the development mechanism of the Chinese vocational education system, gradually change the cognitive bias and prejudice of public on vocational education, and carry forward the cooperation among schools, enterprises, associations and government, so as to effectively improve the whole cultivation quality of the Chinese event management personnel.

Integrated Paths for Event Management Personnel Cultivation

Stick to Market-Oriented in Determining the Event Management Personnel Cultivation Goal
The universities should closely follow the domestic and overseas development status of event industry, with the philosophy of “close to the industry, close to the enterprise, close to the employment” to determine the event management personnel cultivation goal and cultivate the qualified personnel with the professional knowledge and skills that required by the event enterprises and industry. For example, Shanghai is striving to build the “International Conference and Exhibition Capital”. The large-scale international trade fair will be the main trend in the near future and the proportion of large-scale international trade fair in Shanghai will be close to 80% by 2020. According to this trend, the universities in Shanghai at least should adjust their event management personnel cultivation goals in accordance with the new needs of large-scale international trade fair, including the large-scale international trade fair project planning, marketing, operating and management, etc.

Dynamically Optimize the Event Management Personnel Cultivation Program
Currently, the event projects mainly include conference, trade fair, festival, sport event, incentive tour, wedding event and business show, etc. No matter what kind of project, the theory and principle
of project management is a must in cultivating the event management personnel. Based on the main line of event project management, the event management personnel cultivation program might be set up as modules and properly merged the curriculum system with the knowledge of economics, management, marketing, informatics, foreign language and event management, so as to help the students to establish a systematic and completed event management theoretical knowledge system. Meanwhile, the universities should properly balance the proportion of theoretical and practical teaching periods. As for the high-practical characteristics of event industry, we suggest the practical teaching periods is no less than 1/3 in the whole cultivation program. For example, the Shanghai Polytechnic University has set up 40% practical teaching periods in its event management personnel cultivation program, including some independent practical courses and courses with both theoretical and practical teaching periods. It also sets up two directions for students to select when they are in grade three. One direction concerns on the international trade fair, which is striving to strengthen the students’ professional knowledge and skills in international trade fair planning, marketing, operation and management. The other direction concerns on the event, which is striving to strengthen the students’ professional knowledge and skills in various events planning, marketing, operation and management, such as conference, festival, sport, incentive tour, wedding and business show, etc. Each direction has corresponding optional courses for students to select based on their own willingness.

**Actively Improve the Event Management Personnel Teaching Conditions**

According to event management personnel cultivation goal and teaching needs, the universities should actively improve the teaching conditions. (1) Strengthen the construction of the teaching team by stabilizing the full-time teachers, introducing the part-time teachers from both industry and universities, optimizing the structure of the teaching team, and improving the teachers’ professional knowledge and skills, etc. (2) Strengthen the construction of laboratory and improve the practical teaching conditions to meet with the regular practical teaching needs in campus. (3) Strengthen the cooperation with well-positioned event enterprises to establish the off-campus industrial practice teaching bases, and provide the students with sufficient internship opportunities in the enterprises’ trade fair projects to obtain the important front-line professional skills and first-hand experience. (4) Impel the international cooperation with developed countries and regions, and provide the students with the abroad short-term exchange study or internship opportunities, expanding the students’ eye sights and updating their knowledge and concepts.

**Continuously Push Forward the Teaching Research and Reform**

According to event management personnel cultivation program and teaching needs, the universities should continuously carry forward the teaching research and reform. (1) Enhance the teaching research, strengthen the textbook construction and course construction, update and enrich the teaching contents on the basis of the event industry developing trends and needs, and try to improve the attraction and effectiveness of classroom teaching. (2) Enrich the teaching and assessment methods and actively adopt the project-driven teaching method and university-enterprise joint assessment method. For example, the university may operate some event projects by cooperating with event enterprises or undertaking part of the enterprises’ event project, and let the students fully participate into the whole process of event project planning and operation. The students’ final achievements are jointly assessed by the university and enterprise other than a solo examination. (3) Encourage and instruct the students to participate in some peer competitions. Competition is good method to train and improve the students’ comprehensive abilities by using the professional knowledge learned in class to solve the real problems they meet, and also helpful to increase the students’ collaboration ability and confidence. And the awarded competition works can also be used as good examples or benchmarks for the following students to study. (4) Establish a tutor system and let every student have a corresponding teacher as his/her tutor in the whole university stage. With the instruction and help of the tutor, the student is able to get more assistance in course selection, course
studying, industry practice, competition and career development. (5) Last but not least, the universities still need to build a good learning environment, standardize the teaching process management, and strictly control the teaching quality, so as to cultivate the qualified event management personnel for event industry and society.

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