

PCOS, ASSOCIATIONS AND LEADERSHIP

Leadership is a term that allows for many interpretations and angles, and therefore I feel obliged to start with setting a few parameters.

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We all face situations in life in which we have to perform as a leader, and in doing so we contribute to the rich and colourful diversity of leadership. Countless books and articles have been written about leadership in general, and even more on specific business cases with a focus on how individuals could best lead a group. As a result, there are many tips and lots of information on types of leadership available for free on the Internet. In this article I do not mean to provide any of such tips, but rather acknowledge a development in the relationships between PCOs and Associations, and the role of leadership therein.

To start off, I choose a view on leadership described famously by Peter Drucker: *'management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things'*. Associations are about communities of minds and interests; they are about people. Associations provide leadership to their members by offering a platform to do the right things. PCOs are individuals, or groups of individuals, who have a drive to deliver professional services in areas where people come together. Facilitating opportunities in which life-saving knowledge is exchanged, or life-long contacts are established, is a shared passion for PCOs.

PCOS AS LEADERS?

When an association and a PCO become partners in organising a meeting, they

create an environment in which the members of an association come together, and thus share a responsibility. Although there may still exist a tendency to brush aside PCOs as mere suppliers in logistical support to that effect, in reality a PCO often has to take up a leadership role in the definition, the planning, the marketing and the delivery of the event. That delivery is crucial for the relevance of the association to its members, and as such the first beneficiary has to be the participant.

So, who leads whom? That depends greatly on the position of the association in its 'life cycle'. For example, a quick analysis of how an association is governed and how it is managed, should give an indication of its maturity in terms of strategic development. It is safe to assume that an association with a separated executive management structure has gone through several stages of development and learning. On the other side of the spectrum there are associations, which survive as a club of like-minded colleagues with very few formalised procedures and management in place. In either case a PCO is able to offer professional services, but taking up a leadership role comes to mind mostly in the latter case.

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development has created a real need for organisers to adjust their services. From an association's perspective of course there are many different factors driving the decision to outsource services relating to a meeting, but improving the participants' experience is certainly one of them, especially those associations with limited resources who realise the urgency to change their platform and require a tailor-made approach by providers of professional services.

Now here is the moment where the PCO has to take leadership in defining the appropriate formats to offer the available content, as well as getting the message out there to the potential participants. The associations with little financial operating space that still have a valid and relevant content proposal to offer their members

are not necessarily looking for a costly solution to overwhelm their audience with the latest technical gadgets or experimental seating arrangements.

LOOKING FOR LEADERSHIP

In fact, these associations are looking for leadership. They are looking for a partner with experience in matching the right solution to the particular requirements of the association's meeting. And these are not just solutions on the executive level, or in other words 'doing the things right', but also offering strategic solutions in the overall planning, marketing and delivery of the meeting by 'doing the right thing'. There is a real opportunity for those PCOs, who invest in continued professional development and value high quality professional services, to offer 'associations in development' relevant assistance in providing their members the right platform.

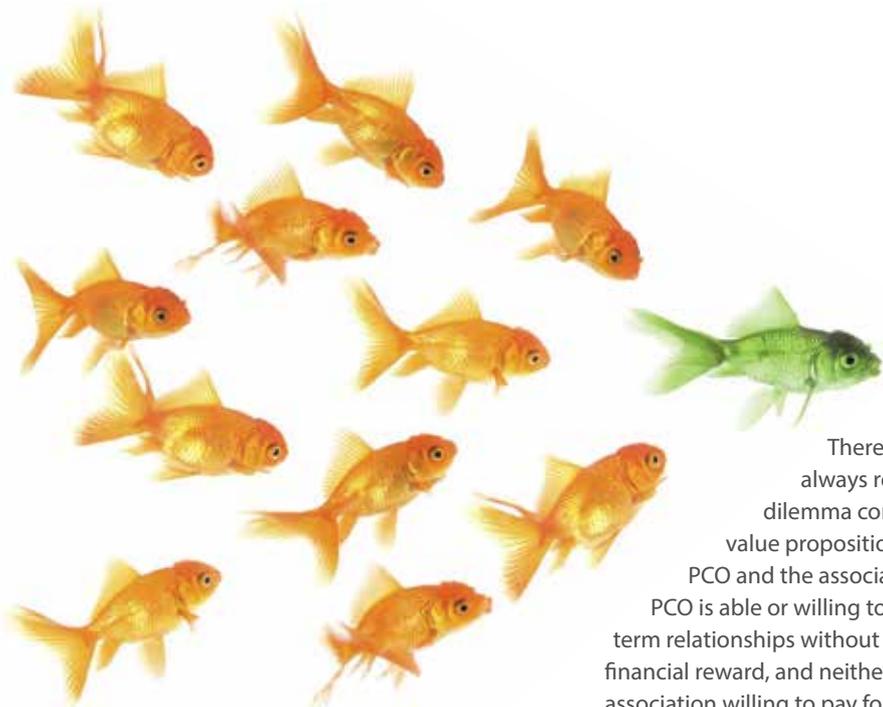
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There is a lot to learn from the development of associations that have a certain number of sponsors providing the appropriate resources to experiment with available technology and format solutions. The PCOs who have experience in assisting these types of associations with the delivery of

their meetings, gain a valuable insight in what works, and what doesn't. That experience can be used to advise other associations in achieving the best possible platform for their members.

It is important to realise that the development of each association has its own time line, and needs to be seen within the scope of its contemporary requirements. The days that the registration and administration of participants were key selling points for PCOs are over. These are now commodity services, which are still part of the available service package,

but no longer 'game changers'. PCOs have the ability to bring together a diversity of specific experiences in each sales argument towards a new association client, based on incorporating the latest developments in the market and understanding the relevance of them for that particular client.



There will of course always remain a dilemma concerning the value proposition for both the PCO and the association. Not every PCO is able or willing to invest in long-term relationships without an immediate financial reward, and neither is every association willing to pay for intangible services such as strategic consultancy. It is therefore that organisations representing PCOs and associations need to seek platforms to meet each other and exchange their views. Together we are able to show true leadership to the meetings industry at large, with a clear focus on a shared mission to deliver the best meetings to each and every potential participant around the world.

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