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By Emma Delaney

University of Surrey

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TOWARDS A MODEL OF CONVENTION BUREAU COMPETITIVENESS

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Towards a Model of Convention Bureau Competitiveness

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I. THE INTRODUCTION

Convention bureaus are an example of a destination management organisation (DMO) and function to promote a particular destination in order to attract business events and therefore business tourists. Convention bureaus play a significant role in the lengthy and complex bidding process for events such as national and international conventions and congresses. In recent years, competition to host such events has intensified (Park *et al.*, 2014) and although these are events typically held by not for profit organisations (e.g. social, military, educational, religious, fraternal (SMERF) groups) they attract large delegate numbers and therefore generate significant economic spend in the destination (Rogers, 2013). As such there are a growing number of convention bureaus specifically targeting international association conventions (Nolan, 2020). This sector of the events and tourism industry is robust, and pre-Covid-19 had demonstrated exponential growth over the last decade (Nolan, 2020). In particular, the International Convention and Congress Association (ICCA, 2015) suggest that non-traditional destinations (second tier cities) are poised to take over from the current leaders. As the events industry recovers from the global pandemic caused by Covid-19, venues are seeing an increase in bookings for in person events

(Russell, 2021) and research indicates that the events industry will continue to expand year on year (Surplice, 2021). Consequently destinations have found, and will continue to find it increasingly challenging to attract the attention of meeting planners (Chiappa, 2012) yet despite this, there has been limited research to date exploring the role of DMOs in this process or in defining the attributes of an effective convention bureau (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014, Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010).

Most convention bureaus are at least partially state funded and many operate in accordance with a national business tourism policy (Reinhold, Beritelli & Grünig, 2018). Yet although tourism policy has been identified as the mechanism to move the events sector toward a more stable and profitable future (Spiller, 2002) governments lack a framework of analysis which will determine the level of support required within a policy (Dwyer *et al.*, 2000). This paper will explore the development of convention bureaus and the literature on the role of DMOs in attracting association meetings, conventions and congresses. This paper presents the results of interviews with senior convention bureau staff and meeting planners from around the world and concludes with the development of the first model of convention bureau competitiveness. This model makes a significant contribution to knowledge of the role of convention bureaus in attracting events to destinations. Furthermore, this research illustrates how this new model can be applied to convention bureau benchmarking and policy related decisions for business tourism organisations.

II. CONTEXT

The interrelated private and public stakeholders who jointly serve the needs of business events (conventions, conferences, exhibitions etc.) can be grouped into physical attractions, sociocultural attractions, infrastructure (event venues, transport providers, restaurants etc.) and accommodation providers (Caber, Albayrak & İsmayilli, 2017). As a whole, this cluster of suppliers form a destination which is then marketed to both leisure and business tourists and meeting and event planners through a DMO who manage and coordinate the overall brand of the destination. A DMO or a destination management company (DMC) may be any private or publicly funded organisation that has responsibility for officially

Author: University of Surrey, UK. e-mail: e.delaney@surrey.ac.uk

representing an area as a tourism destination (Rogers, 2013). These terms have evolved from the previously established phrase 'destination marketing organisation' and the change reflects the contemporary role of the organisation which extends far beyond just marketing the location (Reinhold, Beritelli & Grünig, 2018). There is also a general consensus that a DMO or a DMC is a privately-owned organisation whereas a convention bureau or a convention and visitor bureau, carries out the same function but is, at least in part, state funded (Lee, Kim & Kang, 2019, Aureli & Del Baldo, 2019).

Historically, most established destinations have had a national as well as several regional and city convention bureaus, all funded through central and/or local government (Reinhold, Beritelli & Grünig, 2018). However, funding for tourism has been reduced or cut altogether in many parts of the world in recent years as governments have had to tighten their belts and prioritise spending. This has resulted in the creation of wholly or partly privatised organisations tasked with the management of the destination and thus many bureaus are now semi-public organisations that partner up with both private sector companies as well as local or regional authorities (Raj, Rashid & Walters, 2013). Given their links to state funding, convention bureaus are thought to be impartial organisations, serving the destination stakeholders equally, whereas DMOs and DMCs are profit driven which may influence how they work with clients and their destination stakeholders (Aureli & Del Baldo, 2019, Rogers, 2013).

A recognisable convention industry emerged in the nineteenth century in the US and it continues to grow exponentially. The Professional Convention Management Association (PCMA) are predicting that the industry will change but thrive post Covid-19 (PCMA, 2020). Most conference and exhibition venues are now operating in line with Covid safe policies and are ready to welcome back large business events. Although the pandemic instigated wide global embracing of virtual event technologies (Russell, 2021) which continues to fuel the appetite for hybrid meetings, the interest in face to face MICE events is returning (Wood, 2021) and destinations are already showing signs of recovery (ICCA, 2021).

The promotion of convention destinations is a challenge as it requires a particular approach that involves condensing the many identities that the destination may have, created by its diverse stakeholders, into one that is makes it identifiable as business city (McCartney, 2008). Convention bureaus will spend much of their marketing budget focusing on attracting meeting planners to include placing adverts in trade journals, direct mail campaigns and running familiarisation visits in order to win lucrative meetings, conventions and congresses (Opperman & Chon, 1997). In a number of destinations worldwide, the main

convention and exhibition center is also owned and operated by the convention bureau. The prevailing trend in destination management is to combine the sales function of both the bureau and the principal event venue as this attracts association meeting planners looking for a one stop shop style of service in the destination (Fenich & Bordelon, 2008). Other standard services offered by convention bureaus to meeting planners include sourcing additional venues, providing an accommodation booking service to delegates as well as a range of marketing support services to promote the conference. The bureau will also connect planners to relevant suppliers (e.g. AV providers, caterers, florists etc.) and they provide help and advice on transport to and within the destination.

Given the scope of competition for conventions and congresses, bureaus also offer a number of financial incentives to encourage bookings. This can range from providing discounts for delegates (accommodation, transport, entrance to attractions etc.) to substantial financial support for the organisation of the event, often referred to as subvention. Subvention can take the form of discounted venue hire, a contribution to marketing costs, a company loan, the provision of an event (e.g. a civic reception) or simply a donation (Davidson & Rogers, 2016). Subvention is usually funded through central or local government budgets and as such it is generally available to convention bureaus but not to DMOs (Nolan, 2020). It is generally administered by the convention bureau and offered to not for profit organisations and although the practice is much disliked by industry professionals it is widely used, particularly in destinations where the bureau owns the main convention center (Davidson & Rogers, 2016). A number of traditional convention destinations offer subvention including Vienna and Barcelona and there is much evidence of newer destinations such as Singapore, Jeju (South Korea) and Tallin actively promoting their subvention fund as part of aggressive campaigning to win association congresses (Spalding, 2017). Furthermore, as Nelson & Rys's (2000) and Weber & Chon's (2002) investigations discovered, meeting planners have identified a number of benefits of working with second tier destinations, which includes affordability, generous incentives and exceptionally proactive convention bureau staff. This is strong evidence that in order to survive, convention bureaus must now compete with an increasing list of powerful, rival destinations (Jiang *et al.*, 2016, Chiappa, 2012, Park *et al.*, 2014). Yet despite the multifaceted, significant role of the convention bureau in bidding for and securing destination events, to date there has been very limited scholarly research to conceptualise the important topic of convention bureau competitiveness, which this paper seeks to address.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

It is a logical assumption that the competitiveness of a convention bureau will be largely determined by the attractiveness of the destination. In terms of identifying and assessing the components of

becoming a successful destination for attracting congresses, Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) model of destination competitiveness synthesises the apposite literature and research and it is illustrated in figure 1.

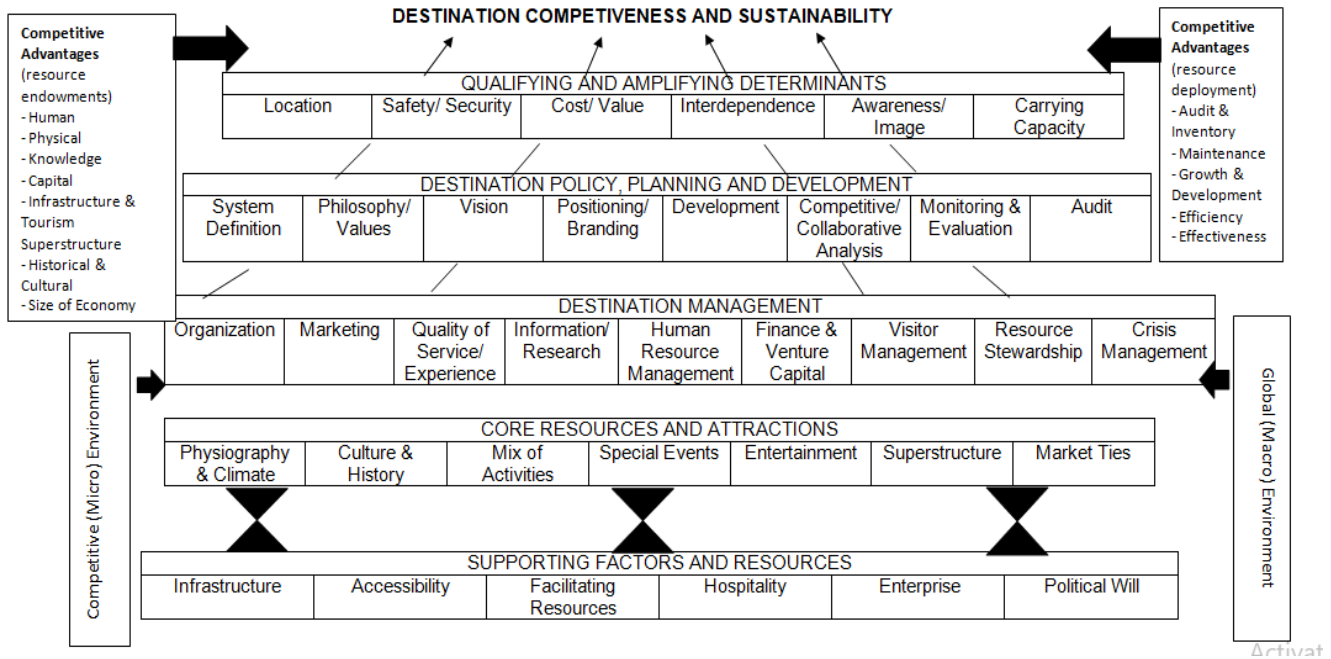


Figure 1: Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) Conceptual Model of Destination Competitiveness

This is a comprehensive model as it is underpinned by theories of competitive and comparative advantage including Porter's (1991) five forces, illustrating the affect of existing and new competing destinations, the power of suppliers to the industry, the power of associations and the meeting planners that work for them, and the threat of substitutes (e.g. virtual conferencing). The model points to the fundamental aspects of a destination in 'qualifying and amplifying determinants' such as the need for the destination to be known, to have resources such as infrastructure and (road and/or air) accessibility. Of particular note, is that the model draws attention to how the destination is managed and indicates that destination policy can significantly impact the competitiveness of a destination.

There is no single definition of what is meant by destination policy, but this generally refers to the process of setting and developing rules and regulations, guidelines and strategies for destination success (Gursoy, Saayman & Sotiriadus, 2015, Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Although it would appear that tourism policy is still developing (Dredge, 2014), Ritchie and Crouch (2003) suggest that policy formulation should ensure that a destination remains sustainable (it must retain and protect its resources) and competitive (be able to compete effectively within the marketplace). There is

also evidence to suggest that a policy for business tourism should be determined at a national rather than a regional level in order to set the tone for the country's industry, mitigate against internal competition for events and ensure its long-term sustainability (Jones & Li, 2015, Weber & Chon, 2002). Such a suggestion was endorsed at the IMEX Policy Forum in 2018, where a national policy was determined to be important as:

an integrated approach [helps] to avoid conflicts with other areas of government policy and regulation [plus] immigration, taxation and security policies support a meetings strategy (Cameron, 2018, p.2)

In terms of competing for conferences, destinations must also consider that a competitive advantage is gained not just through resources but also through the capacity to deploy them (Crouch, 2011). It can therefore be concluded that the competitiveness of a destination is centred on adding value to the products available, much of which is achieved through an appropriate policy (Zehrer & Hallmann, 2015). Therefore, investment in infrastructure but also in bidding capabilities (such as subvention) have a pivotal role to play in destination competitiveness (Getz & Page, 2015). Additionally, Treacy and Wiersema's (1995) value positioning strategy could also be applied to destination competitiveness. This strategy suggests that to prosper a business must match its competitors in

two key areas and outperform them in one other with the areas being: organisational competence; operational excellence, product leadership and customer intimacy (Treacy & Wiersema, 1995). Applying this to Crouch and Ritchie's (2003) model would suggest that for destinations to survive they must have a range of resources which are managed by a competent team and they must have strong relationships with customers and clients (e.g. meeting planners).

Despite the attention given to destination competitiveness, there has been extremely limited

research exploring what makes a convention bureau competitive, yet it is clear that the performance of a DMO is inextricably linked to the success of the destination. Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010) noted this gap in literature and developed the first conceptual model of DMO success. This was subsequently updated by Volgger and Pechlaner (2014) into a model that identifies four determinants of DMO success: resources, networking, transparency and professionalism as illustrated in figure 2.

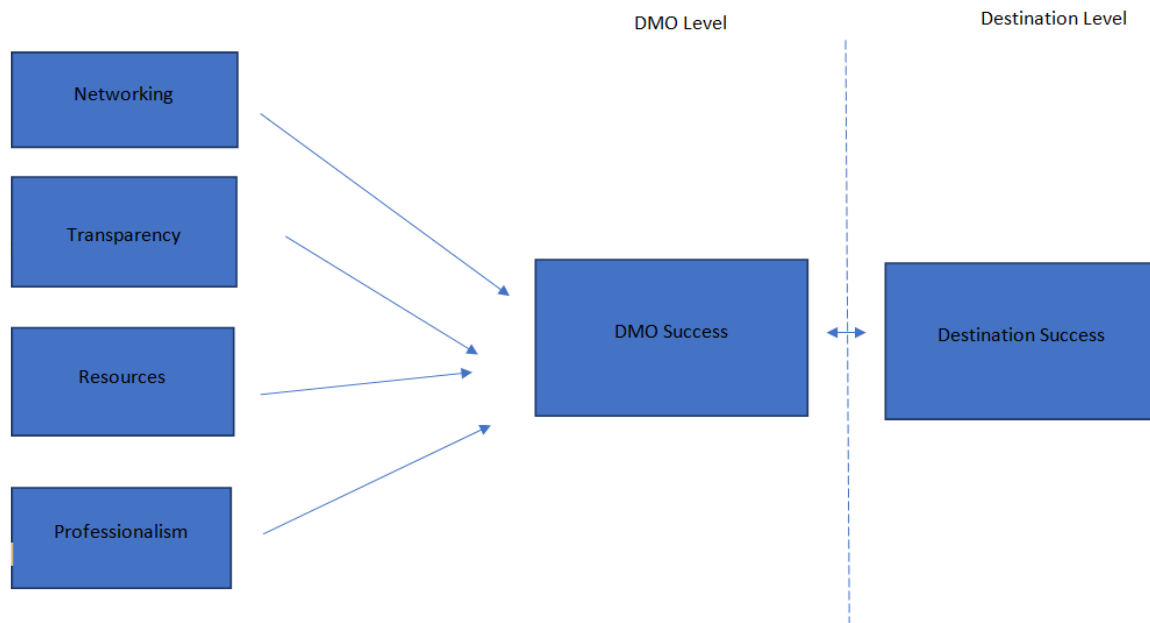


Figure 2: Determinants of DMO Success (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014, p.66)

The discussion of these determinants in these two articles is very limited. Resources is likely to refer to the essential elements of DMO services, as outlined by Weber (2000) as including information about products and services within the destination, marketing materials (e.g. destination images), a venue finding service, an accommodation booking service (e.g. for delegates) and staff to support advance promotion of the congress and delegate registration at the event. Networking may refer to a DMO's relationship with destination stakeholders such as venues, accommodation providers, attractions, transport operators and event suppliers (caterers, florists, photographers etc.). Transparency and professionalism are, however, more oblique terms and more difficult to understand. These terms could refer to the DMO's experience and the trust placed in them by meeting planners.

Although Volgger and Pechlaner's (2014) model of DMO success has begun an important discussion on the determinants of a convention bureau's ability to operate effectively, there is clearly much scope to conduct further research to explore and expand on the terminology in this model. Furthermore, there have

been a number of barriers to successful policy development for the tourism and events industry felt across the globe, identified by Weber and Chon (2002) as the fragmented nature of the events industry, and by Jones and Li (2015) as a lack of evidence-based decision making. There is however scope to develop such a framework which could be informed by competitive theory and this could influence future policy decisions that underpin business tourism. The starting point for such a framework could lie within a model of DMO competitiveness. Therefore, this investigation has been designed to test and explore Volgger and Pechlaner's (2014) model. Given the level of influence of government policy over convention bureau operations in particular (as opposed to privately owned DMOs), this investigation will focus on convention bureaus. As such, the results of this investigation will culminate in the first model of convention bureau competitiveness. The model has the potential to inform policy makers as well as provide a benchmarking tool for convention bureaus that will enable them to identify areas for development that will increase their effectiveness in an increasingly competitive arena.

IV. THE METHODOLOGY

A key challenge of social science research is choosing appropriate techniques from the myriad of options now available (Arksey & Knight, 1999) and both qualitative and quantitative methods offered plausible options for this investigation. Both Clark and McCleary (1995) and Crouch (2011) have suggested future research should adopt qualitative methods to look at the broad concept of destination competitiveness. Furthermore, qualitative research has been described as the better approach to capture the 'soft core concepts' that are to be found in organisations that have strategic relationships within a tourism environment (Pansiri, 2005, p.193).

As such, a methodology was developed to entail semi-structured interviews with twenty-five elite professionals; a mixture of senior convention bureau managers and leading meeting planners that use convention bureaus when organising association conferences. The target population for this research is extremely large as, based on ICCA league tables, the number of convention bureaus actively competing for association congresses is more than three hundred (ICCA, 2015) and the number of meeting planners operating worldwide is incalculable with global membership of MPI (Meetings Professionals International) totalling more than 60,000 (MPI, 2020). Therefore, interviewees were sourced using industry databases (e.g. ICCA members) and LinkedIn and selected based on their role and experience. Participants were deemed suitable if they had at least ten year's experience in the sector and either led a national or regional convention bureau or worked as a meeting planner in the association conferences sector. Convention bureaus in first and second tier destinations were selected from across Europe, North America, Asia, Africa and Australasia and meeting planners were also based across the globe, working on both domestic and international association conferences. Although this research has no geographic aims or boundaries, a variety of participants was deemed appropriate as this can strengthen the generalisability of results (Easton, 2010). Construct validity was addressed by using multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2014) and a percentage of participants read the transcript of their interview (which was conducted via telephone or Skype) to check, and verify, the content thereby ensuring ecological validity, or communicative validity which authenticates the data (Flick, 2006).

The coding of the data was broadly conducted through content and domain analysis. This was done first to determine commonalities in data based on semantic relationships (Savin-Baden and Major, 2012) and then to reduce the data into relevant and noteworthy categories (Flick, 2006) and to create categories based on substantive statements (Gillham,

2000). Data was analysed by using Saldaña's (2016) two-cycle, seven-step approach. First cycle coding was used primarily to breakdown the large quantity of data and second cycle coding was used for meta coding, clustering and annotating key themes. The analysis of the data confirmed the four key determinants of DMO competitiveness (core resources, additional services, trust and experience and a network of relationships). Furthermore, the detailed and rich data has provided a much more explicit discussion of these terms, and in particular has drawn attention to the key role of additional services. The data suggests that convention bureau competitiveness is underpinned by these determinants and this has resulted in the creation of the first model of convention bureau competitiveness.

V. RESULTS

The twenty-five interviewees, all elite professionals and either professional conference organisers or senior convention bureau staff, were asked to articulate the services provided by convention bureaus that they consider to be integral to their effectiveness. The detailed responses confirm that a convention bureau's core resources include being able to provide meeting planners with destination information and the opportunity to attend familiarisation visits. It includes helping them to find suppliers in the destination and in particular liaising with the principal venue and providing a delegate accommodation booking service. Core resources also includes providing staff to promote the conference and support registration at the event. The results very much endorse Weber's (2000) list of convention bureau services and can be used to annotate the determinant of 'core resources' on Volgger and Pechlaner's model (2014).

Every participant also made reference to subvention, which is the provision of financial incentives such as a venue discount, which is typically available to not for profit congresses and administered by a convention bureau. Meeting planners discussed how they will generally ask for subvention, but not always receive it. As one planner explained:

"subvention is a great help. It's not something that's routinely offered I've noticed, it tends to be for bigger events. I don't know that it makes a difference as to whether we will or won't go (to a destination) but it's definitely a factor, it's nice to have rather than a decider, it's added value".

Similarly, some convention bureaus confirmed they offer subvention, while others do not. Those that do not identified this as a barrier to winning bids with one bureau commenting:

"it's very difficult to compete against destinations that offer subvention. We've lost a lot of bids because of it".

Interviewees also discussed the significant issue of visa requirements and how convention bureau

support for the process of securing visas (e.g. for delegates and speakers) is rare but much sought after.

One meeting planner described visa requirements as “a big issue” while another confirmed that:

“most countries have a visa problem, so if the convention bureau is there...fast tracking visas for the registered delegates, fast tracking the immigration once they enter the city... these are very important things”.

One planner stressed the importance of the convention bureau being able to accurately advise on visa regulations, stating:

“otherwise what happens is people are groping about in the dark as the first time they’re entering a country, they have no clue. They go by what’s on the internet, and many a time the internet is not right”.

Four of the convention bureaus confirmed that they offer support with visa applications. One bureau in Australasia has direct links to government departments to fast track visa applications which in terms of giving them a competitive advantage, they described as making a “massive amount of difference” when bidding for conventions. Another bureau in North America offer a comparable service, stating that this level of support is something “only a destination can do, it can’t be done by an individual hotel, it can’t be done by a standalone convention center, it really has to be from a destination”. This once again suggests that offering support with visas can give convention bureaus a competitive edge. Therefore, subvention and visa support are additional services, not always available through the convention bureau, but nonetheless a distinct and valued resource. As such, a model of convention bureau competitiveness could include core resources but also additional resources.

As anticipated, a convention bureau’s ability to connect meeting planners with local venues and suppliers was mentioned throughout the interviews. Additionally, both sets of participants discussed the importance of a bureau being able to introduce planners to leading industry professionals and academics in the destination. With one bureau confirming that having strong links with government and access to industry leaders “is key” to winning bids for association conferences. Another European city convention bureau explained:

“We are very much part of that host partnership across the city and we work very closely with all of our industry whether that be with venue X or with our universities. The package of support...the way we all work together...makes it a very attractive destination to association meetings”.

An Australasian city bureau commented that:

“we have a very close collaboration with them (convention center) which works well... What they (meeting planners) love to see is a very joined up approach within a city. So rather than people operating in silos, it’s operating in

collaboration. It’s very much appreciated that we can make those introductions and facilitate those collaborations”.

Similarly, five other convention bureaus cited their connections to business leaders and universities (for potential keynote speakers) as a strength of their organisation. Furthermore, the head of one regional convention bureau discussed his senior role in a local trade organisation gives him access to 330 organisations based around the globe which he uses as a gateway to sourcing exhibitors and delegates for meeting planners. He described this convention bureau service as:

“unique to our destination because we are part of X (trade organisation) and because I am the Executive Director”.

Finally, the head of a North American city convention bureau indicated that having such relationships has given them a competitive advantage, stating that their strategy to work with their government and develop partnerships with leading businesses and academics in the destination put them “really ahead of the game in terms of what other destinations were doing and now other destinations are starting to catch up”.

This all points to the determinant of networking as being the convention bureau’s ability to connect meeting planners with venues, suppliers, business leaders and academics. It also confirms the importance of the bureau’s connections to government.

Finally, throughout the ensuing discussions with participants, many strong references to trust and experience were discussed as being an integral component of the meeting planner/convention bureau relationship. One bureau commented:

“we succeed by being able to empathise with a client, which is a much-overlooked aspect of the sector”

While another confirmed that they are not promoting any one venue or supplier and as such they see themselves as:

“a very unbiased, service orientated sales team”.

One city bureau articulated this in detail, describing the organisation as:

“a safe pair of hands. I think the team are very established here. We’re lucky that the average length of service for the city with our sales team is about ten years so they’re incredibly experienced”.

She also went on to say:

“I think that there are some conference organisers that have worked with convention bureaus and realise there is this realm of impartial advice available, and they’ve had a good experience so they will always use a city bureau”.

Another European city bureau made comparative comments, describing their organisation as “a very well-oiled machine” later adding:

“it’s all about reliability and continuity...and my team has been here a long time”.

Experience, as a part of why convention bureaus can be trusted, was also mentioned by national bureaus with one stating:

“we’ve been in business for twenty-two years...we’ve done many, many, many events in the past so it’s quite reassuring for the meeting planner”.

And a regional bureau adding:

“we’re in our twentieth year which means we’ve been doing this a fair amount of time”.

Meeting planners also discussed the importance of being able to trust an experienced bureau as this impacts client relations, with one confirming:

“we will put forward a destination that we’ve worked with before (to clients) and had a good experience of. If they are a convention bureau owned by a council or similar, then you gain a bit more trust with them (clients)”.

Another planner explained:

“I would say that we almost exclusively involve convention bureaus because when it comes to associations, they like that reassurance that the city’s behind it and it’s a team effort”.

Another planner commented on how a convention bureau will “handhold” their client, providing much needed reassurance during the planning of the congress. This was reiterated by the least experienced planner interviewed who explained that the last bureau she worked with provided “advice...understanding...and sort of just guided me and I can’t explain how helpful that actually was”. The data collected clearly illustrates that meeting planners value experienced convention bureaus and trust is an integral element of their relationship. Therefore, the terms “trust” and “experience” merit an entry on a model of convention bureau competitiveness and succeed the comparatively unclear terms “transparency” and “professionalism” on Volgger and Pechlaner’s (2014) conceptual model of DMO success.

The results of the interviews, and the subsequent analysis, has resulted in the creation of the first model of convention bureau competitiveness, as illustrated in figure 3.

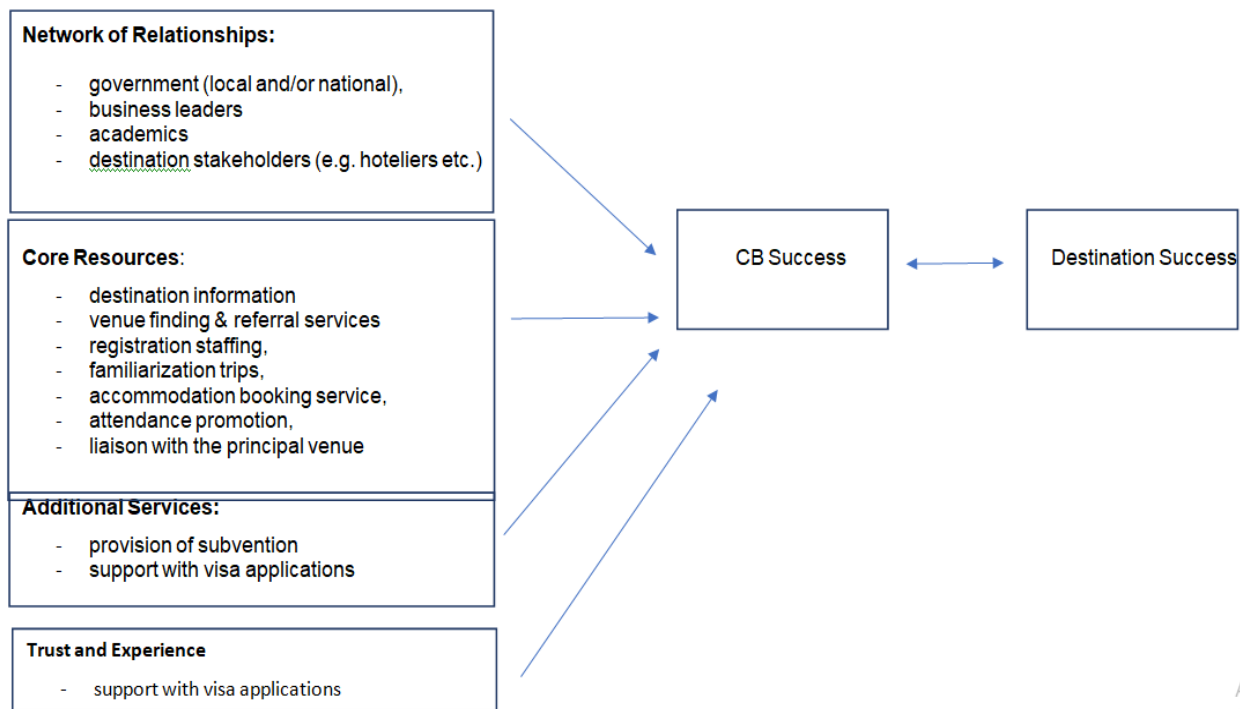


Figure 3: A Conceptual Model of Convention Bureau Competitiveness

This conceptual model of convention bureau competitiveness represents a reworking of Volgger and Pechlaner’s model, using more detailed terminology that can be applied to convention bureaus. This, the first model of convention bureau competitiveness demonstrates that there are four key elements of success: a network of relationships, core resources, additional services and trust and experience. The model is underpinned by Weber’s (2000) list of convention bureau services, which are represented here in “core

services”. This is comparable with the term “resources” used by Volgger and Pechlaner (2014). The data collected in this investigation corroborates this literature which points to these various fundamental elements of convention bureau services as including providing destination information and an accommodation booking service, offering venue finding and referral services, organizing familiarization trips and staffing promotional events and delegate registration.

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The “additional services” entry on the model represents the findings from the research which shows that the provision of subvention and support with visa applications are distinct elements of convention bureau support but can be considered to be additional rather than core services. They are clearly an element of support that meeting planners value but as they are not routinely expected or offered, they warrant a specific segment on the model.

The section of the model called “network of relationships” represents the results of the interviews which have clearly shown that a bureau’s relationship with external agencies, notably business and academic leaders, are valued by meeting planners and are key to the competitive strategy of a number of convention bureaus operating around the world. The bureau’s links to government, academics and industry leaders is significant. As such, the “network of relationships” section of the model takes into account a convention bureau’s connections to all of these, individually named, external bodies.

Trust and experience is the final element of convention bureau competitiveness on the model. Most of the convention bureaus interviewed have all been in operation for more than twenty years and they all commented on their length of experience as a significant factor of why they are successful. It may be logically concluded that as the competition to host association conventions has intensified in recent years, these bureaus have drawn on their experience to remain competitive. It may be suggested that the entry on Vollger and Pechlaner (2014)’s model entitled “professionalism” is comparable to trust and experience. Although there is no discussion of this term in their work, or in that of Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan (2010), upon which their model is based, it may represent the importance of the bureau having experienced staff and being able to build a relationship with meeting planners based on trust. Finally, in line with Vollger and Pechlaner (2014)’s model, Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan’s (2010) study, this new conceptual model of convention bureau competitiveness also reflects the strong interrelationship between bureau success and destination success.

Applying Treacy and Wiersema’s (1995) theory of competitive advantage to the conceptual model of convention bureau competitiveness, it can be logically concluded that for a bureau to survive it must have a core competence (in this case core services) or a unique resource (in this case a network of relationships, additional services or be trustworthy and have experience). In order to prosper, a bureau must excel in one area and match the competition in the other three. This suggests that a convention bureau could outperform the competition by, for example, offering subvention or visa support. Equally, a bureau that offers both could gain a competitive advantage by developing

its relationships, particularly with government, business and academic leaders.

VI. SUMMARY

As destinations emerge from the global disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, convention bureaus will once again face increasing competition when bidding for international association conferences. To date there has been some scholarly investigations of destination competitiveness but very limited research exploring the closely related topic of convention bureau competitiveness. This paper provides a significant step forward in terms of progressing the academic narrative on the role of the CB in site selection. This new conceptual model of convention bureau competitiveness, which has emerged from the data collected through this qualitative enquiry, illustrates the application of Treacy and Wiersema’s (1995) theory of competitive advantage within the context of the PCO/CB dynamic. The model is a tool that can be used to identify ways in which a convention bureau can gain a competitive advantage and it can be used to benchmark the performance of DMOs. Although ICCA rankings are widely used by convention bureaus to gauge and monitor destination performance, there is no such system in place to measure their own performance. This model of convention bureau competitiveness now facilitates this by providing DMOs with criteria by which they can assess their performance as well as that of their competitors. As such the model can also be used to guide capital investment in destinations and their management organisations and can be used to direct convention bureau operations and underpin future policy and strategy for destination management.

The limitation of this investigation is the small number of participants and there is certainly scope to continue to test and develop models of convention bureau, DMO and destination competitiveness. However, as this is the first model of its kind, it represents an initial synthesis of our collective knowledge of convention bureau competitiveness and represents a substantial development to the very underexplored area of destination management for business events. Furthermore, as convention bureaus re-establish their post-pandemic role in promoting their destination for face-to-face events, such new insight is potentially of great value and significance to academia and industry.

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