Questions and answers: CPN presentation 19th Nov 2025

Corruptible Events: Why Festivals and Events Foster Misconduct

Thank you to all the people who posted questions. I am pleased to answer them to my abilities and knowledge. This is a new field and I focus on what the event team can do to minimise the risk of corruption. It is important precisely because it is hidden. There is no database. The two parties to a bribe do not advertise it. Yet even a small bribe, in the event context, can cause havoc and death. A simple rule is that every mistake may be multiplied by the number of people at the event.
If you want to discuss anything here, please email me on events@epms.net.

1. You referred to different understandings of corruption across borders. Can you elaborate?

As a lot on my work was events development I worked in a variety of countries and this involves working with the local people, going through immigration, being searched plenty of times, dealing with road blocks, police and military. I mention this as I am talking from experience and, as I say many times, the world of bribery and the like is a secret world. In countries that do not have the Western style of government, taxation and separation or powers, paying for a service directly to the person is not unusual. We would see it as a bribe, but they expect it. Also in some hereditary monarchies or semi tribal societies, nepotism/cronyism is not regarded the same way as in the West. Unfortunately I do not have space to go into details but would be happy to talk to you about this. There are actually some studies that demonstrate that what we call corruption is the only way to do business ("greasing the wheels") or get anything done in some societies.

2 Who would you consider to be the 'gold standard' in terms of integrity in events?

The gold standard would be the correct way to use the risk management process such that it includes the possibility of corruption, discussing it and minimises it. Using this to ensure trust and overall integrity and that starts with the top, the event leadership. Here we are dealing with intangibles so there is no real metric.

3. How do we reinforce that integrity, and ensure that pressure, influence, or hidden agendas don't undermine the "stop the show" mindset that keeps people safe?

The show stop concept is a decision can be the most important decision of the whole event. As I mentioned the value of most events is the event itself. All the planning and work before hand may amount to nothing in terms of most of the event objectives. Hence the concept of the show stop must address one of the objectives. Obviously the almost universal, now, objective of a safe event is the one. It is a huge responsibility on the person or persons who call it and unfortunately it will be judged by people with little or no experience in events. An interesting recent description of this is the cancellation of the 2025 Marathon in Capetown: https://runningmann.co.za/2025/10/27/cape-town-marathon-cancellation-deep-dive/
For many years we have tried to ensure that the events professional is seen as just that: a competent person with experience and skills as well as knowledge. This is why we created the Event

Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK). But there is still the attitude of "anyone can run an event". In engineering, if the chief engineer says 'stop' the project, construction and all the rest stop. Same with doctors.
There is not much more I can do. The person or persons who call it must just stand their ground against the ignorant. Perhaps, they have to explain what the personal risk is to those who want the show to continue and give them the choice of accepting this risk. Generally, I find that when it is a personal risk to them (legal, reputation) they listen**. But I am not in your situation, so it is only my opinion.**

4 Please discuss the scale of tax avoidance and money laundering in events, and measures that governments and law enforcement can deploy to curtail this activity.

This is a huge issue. You could start by looking up Hawala and Hundi. The former was used by terrorists to move money around the world. These are massive schemes - and some of it highly secret. They are also used for legitimate purposes but as they are separate from the banks it is hard to know. The only way I can think of is to study where it has happened, such as the Irish festivals and identify the behaviours to watch. We tend to forget that everyone at your event can be the eyes of the event. There may not need to be cameras and A.I., if we can trust the people who attend the event.
My presentation was to show events teams, themselves, how to prevent corruption. I think that is the basis and from that the Governments and law enforcement can deal with it. But without the event team understanding what corruption is and taking measure to prevent it, the very basis of this type of corruption will always be there.
Unfortunately there is no data on the scale of tax avoidance and money laundering. There are estimates you can find using A.I. – **but it is all secret** and only the exposed can be measured. Even A.I. admits it does not really know.

5 You mention that in the future there may be scaled codes / standards / regulations to support more new kinds of events developing. What might those scaled regulations look like and how could they be developed?

Excellent questions. First why does it need to happen. Events are just becoming too expensive to test and run. As I mention almost all mega events started as small events. Without this 'churn' I believe the events sector will change to mega "bread and circuses" type events. The Edinburgh events strategy realised this many years ago and started to try to address it in their **Inspiring Events Strategy 2007,** www.edinburgh.gov.uk.
I will indeed investigate this as I am sure it has happened in other sectors such as the creation of monopolies.
My presentation was more about how the event team can integrate the risk of corruption into their risk management plan. But this aspect you asked about is well worth investigating.

6 What's an example of a smaller event that manages risk well? What approach do they use? What's the secret of their success?
All that can be said is that they use the risk management process well. It is just common sense combined with ethics. But they have proof of it.
The issue with risk is that if it doesn't eventuate, then was the risk management needed? It sounds crazy, but I hear this all the time. Then risk management becomes about compliance, because compliance can be measured. Then the tick boxing attitude comes in and then the coroner.
Really I can only talk about events I have been involved in. Even then there are problems.

But ultimately it gets down to 'foreseeability' i.e. was this issue foreseeable. Then we get to the legal argument of ' a reasonable person' and expert in the field.
So I am sorry, I can't give you their secret of success.

7 How can an event organiser mitigate the risk of mules?

Aside from just considering it, is there similar behaviour that indicate illegal activity at events. I stress that I have not have to deal with this problem so this is only my thoughts on it. When you look at the Irish example, all those young people had to be approached and convinced. The very fact that a lot of people are needed for it to be successful is the exposure for this. Similar to drug deals that are uneconomic unless they sell enough. So let us say that they want to move a million dollars. For that to work they need at least 100 people to agree. This is generally because $10,000 or the equivalent flags the transaction in banks. That probably means they have to approach a lot more than 100 young people. So of all those people, you only need one to quietly bring it to your attention. So the dealers must know that a system of informing is in place at the event – i.e. the attendees are the eyes and ears of the event. This could be as simple as any announcement on the event website. Then only one person **is seen to be needed** to flush out the dealer. That person does not necessarily exist – just looks like it. The dealer's equation is Benefit must be greater than the Cost times Risk. This increases the risk of exposure to the dealer – exposure ultimately could mean jail – and so shrinks the Benefit.
Once again this is about prevention.

8 Have you come across any Event fraud where Councils have organised events?

Only in my experience and the most common is underreporting stall or vendor income. Of course it is not public, but it is a simple matter of informally asking a few vendors. But most of my work was in other countries and that sort of fraud was in the millions of dollars. Once again I stress, that this is the hidden world. It is a breach of the contract and therefore illegal. The only way we knew was using proxy measures.
From my experience Council events in Australia are very well run mainly because the event teams are highly experienced in operations, which is often the source of the problems. Also they have plenty of resources in terms of risk management and are not dependent on ticket sales.

9. What particular risk might government have in facilitating large events? Ie Public-Private corruption as opposed to Private-to-private wrongdoing particular to events.

Just in terms of risk , it is the information asymmetry of the two parties. In one case the event company has vast experience in running events in different countries and they are negotiating with people with little or no experience in events of that size. You can see it as the cost of ignorance. Also the most disastrous risks come from the event itself, the operations. Crowd crush, drownings, stage collapse, on site electrocution and the list goes on. This is highly specialist knowledge. Often the inexperienced think it can be covered by insurance and contracts. I see this all the time.
In terms of the risk of corruption, I can just recommend the Report on the India 2010 Commonwealth Games. It will give you an example of almost all of the risks and how they relate to corrupt activity.
There was a lot to learn from the Rio Olympics as well. This came after many of the UN publications o major events and corruption. Look up corruption and the Rio Olympics , you may get surprised. To me it demonstrates that no matter what is written, talked about, laws enacted and committees are set up, it gets down to attitude, trust and integrity. This starts with the event team.

10 Sporting & gaming events - what is your recommendation for detection & or prevention?

There is so much written on this that I am hesitant to say anything. It is not my area at all. I can certainly recommend the many UN documents - they are easy to read and draw on the vast experience of their writers. Sporting events have worldwide associations, strong competition hierarchies and a long history. See for example

- Corruption in sport: From the playing field to the field of policy by Adam Masters
- Anti-bribery and corruption in sport mega-events: stakeholder perspectives by Christina Philippou
- Fighting Corruption in Sport Sponsorship and Hospitality 2014 by United Nations Global Compact Office Two United Nations Plaza, New York, NY,

But despite all of this you may like to view the current NBA scandals.

11 Queensland have major events coming up in the next 2 years (Rugby World Cup, Olympics). Have you been asked to consult on these events to assist them get ready and minimise corruption?

No I haven't. But my aim was to look at the smaller events i.e. under $100 million and how they can minimise it as the event team develop the planning and manage the project. These are actions the teams can take that are based on what I know has happened around the world - or at least - I either experienced or was told by events people. For these mega events, the UN documentation is excellent. But as illustrated by mega events since their publication (Rio 2016) the culture is at the base of it all.

12 What about the motivation for a political based change?

Not too sure what you mean by this, but if you email me I'd be pleased to discuss it.

13 The ICAC puts on an annual conference. Is there corruption involved in this conference? How do we know? What anti-corruption controls are applied?

They can apply the Vulnerability Table as well as anyone else. It costs nothing. But the great advantage ICAC has it the vast amount of knowledge and experience of their team. If their excellent publications and past history are anything to go by I would say they are way in front.

FINAL THOUGHT

When you consider events around the world, you will never know if corruption is involved. There are two parties to corrupt activity and neither will admit it. Hence it can only be proxy measures, if at all.

That is one point made in the presentation.

But it must start with fully understanding what corruption is, when it is likely to occur and the devastating effects of it.

Ultimately it is an ethical issue. It is about engendering trust and integrity in the event team and therefore the attendees.

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