

European Association Summit #EAS23

28 April 2023, 9:00

Why competition & competitiveness?

Companies think about these factors all the time. In some cases how to be more competitive and constantly worrying about rivals, in others, how to keep competition to an absolute minimum, to maintain monopoly power!

Associations have been traditionally immune. We've subconsciously thought of ourselves as monopolistic (protected by our Mission). Historically, in many cases belonging to an association was a prerequisite for practicing in a career, in others it was the only way to lobby policymakers. As a result, I believe most association thinking about this issue is both simplistic and too abstract.

And yet...competition will become ever greater. Inevitable – globalisation (mention Global Assoc Hubs); tech (esp AI). If associations can't become more competitive and think more seriously about this topic, it's an existential risk.

Associations are typically SMEs, and SMEs are most vulnerable to increasing competition, because they are resource-constrained.

Today I'd like to change mindsets on this subject! In just 30 minutes I want to challenge you to totally re-think what your association is competing FOR (in other words, what are you trying to win, or increase), where your competition is coming FROM, and what you can do RIGHT NOW to significantly increase your association's competitiveness.

What are you competing to win/increase?

- Members
- Marketing spend (by partners/sponsors/members themselves)
- Attendance
- Attention
- Engagement/community
- Knowledge - accuracy/breadth/up-to-dateness/speed
- Relevance/credibility

Of course, these are not independent factors, many (if not all) are linked & interrelated.

What factors are you competing on?

- Price
- Quality
- Speed
- Service
- Innovation
- Talent/expertise

- Your personal contribution

Where is competition coming from (today & tomorrow)?

- Other associations
- Your own members
- New ad-hoc groups of non-members
- Entrepreneurs/event owners
- Rival communication channels
- Rival sources of knowledge and data (including AI)
- Day jobs
- Private lives & interests

The latter two are incredibly important. They determine the time-window that is available for an association to compete for member/community attention/engagement, because they will always take precedent.

How will you measure your competitiveness?

- Past- and future-focused: metrics showing how you performed, and potential changes to factors that you believe will influence future performance
- Quantitative and qualitative

USPs & world-class performance

- Do you have a USP (“unique selling proposition”)? Is it really unique?!
- Is your association world-class (in what, precisely?)
- Is your association world-leading?

Compete or collaborate?

- What does competing imply/require?
- When to retreat/stop
- Growing importance of partnerships

Who is responsible for protecting/increasing/measuring competitiveness?

- Everyone
- Every touch point matters, because so few are available (given the ever-increasing competition for attention/time).

Global dimension

- Even in a deglobalised world, competition in knowledge fields is naturally global
- Societal problems & issues don’t recognise borders
- National policymakers have been retreating from engaging with such issues

- Associations are therefore becoming even more important
- Global Association Hubs Partnership – Brussels, Dubai, Singapore, Washington DC

Personal competitiveness

- Imposter syndrome is ubiquitous
- No matter what we do, we can only know a shrinking % of knowledge
- We're happy to talk about our organisation's competitiveness, rarely about our own
- Same type of analysis re association competitiveness. What important dimensions in your own attributes don't you have a competitiveness plan for? Where are you not consciously competing when you should be? How can you change this? Talk to someone (who?), take a course, get structured feedback from your team, attend an event, hire someone to complement your skills, change a current habit or belief/viewpoint, learn a new language, etc.
- Dimensions of personal competitiveness: skills; knowledge; qualifications; faults/weaknesses; team; languages/culture; tech; confidence; etc.
- Solutions to increase competitiveness: courses/training; MBA/CAE; mentors/experts; recruit others; 360 degree conversations; collaboration; self-evaluation; meditation/life-work balance; etc.

Meeting design aspects of this session

- Overcoming room set-up restrictions
- Personalising large/abstract concepts
- Feedback/reinforcement – peer pressure
- Inclusion (everyone has a role, no-one simply passive)
- Forced action
- Energy – standing/body use has an impact on outcomes
- Permission (vulnerability – “I'm an imposter, too”)
 - Surprise (you thought this was about your association, but it's also about you!)