Assessing the Information Needs of Australian Gaming Managers

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Abstract

There has been an increased need for gaming managers to source and use relevant information to assist them in managing their venues. Gaming managers have been under pressure from governments, the welfare sector, local communities and the media to manage gaming activities in a socially responsible manner. Research into the management of gaming is still in its infancy. This paper reports on a study into the information needs of a selection of gaming managers of clubs, hotels and casinos in two Australian states. This exploratory qualitative research provides in-depth responses from twenty-six gaming managers. These managers report that they want reliable, consistent information on government policies and processes; deeper information about their communities and their values; and relevant information enabling them to identify problem gamblers and assess the efficacy of responsible gambling practices.

Key words: information needs, gaming, management.

Introduction

Australian gaming industries attracted $15,365 million in expenditure in 2002-2003, representing $1,026 per head of adult population (Tasmanian Gaming Commission {TGC}, 2004). They provide taxation revenues of around $4 billion or about 12% of state own-tax revenue (Productivity Commission, 1999). Furthermore, Australian gaming industries continue to display substantial growth as the types and accessibility of gaming products have expanded to include casino table games, gaming machines, a variety of lottery products, on and off-course betting, keno, minor gaming and sports betting in nearly all states and territories. The expansion of Australian gaming industries is reflected in increased expenditure on gaming of over 5% in the past year (TGC, 2004). The largest sector of Australian gaming industries is machine gaming, available in most clubs, most hotels and all casinos in every Australian jurisdiction, except Western Australia. It accounts for $9,095 million in gaming revenues or 60% of all gaming expenditures (TGC, 2004). Collectively, Australian clubs, hotels and casinos operate around 185,000 gaming machines, representing 20% of all 'high intensity' gaming machines worldwide (Productivity Commission, 1999). For instance in New South Wales (NSW) 3,212 venues operate 99,109 gaming machines (NSW Department of Gaming and Racing {DGR}, 2005) while in Queensland (QLD) 1,355 venues operate 38,252 gaming machines (QLD Treasury, 2005) Other Australian states and territories have smaller gaming machine numbers.

The expansion of gaming has been accompanied by an increased need for gaming managers to source and use relevant information that assists them in meeting competitive, social, regulatory and technological challenges. With heightened competition for the gaming dollar, they face an increasingly difficult environment in which to retain their market share and revenues, with numerous researchers commenting on the maturation of the gaming machine industry and the aggressively competitive responses of gaming machine venues (Dickerson, 1996; Hing, 1996; McMillen, 1997; Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal {IPART}, 1998; Productivity Commission,

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1999; Australian Institute for Gambling Research, 1999; Hing, Breen and Weeks, 2002). In the social environment, gaming managers have been under recent and sustained pressure from governments, the welfare sector, local communities, the media and other stakeholders to manage their gaming activities in a socially responsible manner (Hing *et al.*, 2001, IPART, 2004). Most state and territory governments have regulated to introduce mandatory responsible gambling measures, while voluntary strategies have also been introduced by gaming venues (Hing *et al.*, 2001). Thus, gaming managers are now required to ensure personal and community protection and mitigate liability through implementing harm minimisation measures. These managers also need to keep abreast of accelerating developments in game and machine design so that their installations meet the needs of a mature gaming market. Collectively, the expansion of gaming, its high public profile, and the changing social and regulatory environment have heightened the need for relevant and timely information for gaming managers.

However, research into gaming management is still in early stages in Australia. A national inquiry into gaming (Productivity Commission, 1999) expressed the clear need for more and better quality information to guide policy-making, to broaden public understanding of the impacts of gaming and the management of gaming, amongst other findings. This investigation seeks to explore some of the gaps in gaming management information and to identify important research needs of gaming managers.

Managers as information gatherers

In every aspect of modern life people are influenced by information generated and distributed by other people and technology. Today, many individuals create process or distribute information and knowledge rather than be involved in mass-producing goods. The productivity of an organisation lies more in its intellectual and systems capabilities than in its hard assets (Quinn, Anderson & Finkelstein, 1996). Further, Shockley-Zalabak (1999) maintains that the environment characterized by mass production of information requires constant learning of new activities and processes.

Organizations alert to, and gathering information on, changes in their external environment have the ability to introduce measures aimed at addressing the impact of those changes in their internal environment. Waterman, Peters and Philips (1991:311) suggest that "those actions that a company plans in response to, or in anticipation of, change in its external environment – its customers, its competitors" is actually strategic management. Factors in the external environment such as varying economic conditions, progress in technology, resource availability, shifts in competition and legislation amendments affect the internal and external operations of an organisation (Sampson and Daft, 2003). Changes in an organisation's environment can radically alter the business strategies of an organisation. For instance legislation introduced in 1992 for the states of Queensland (QLD) and Victoria (VIC) legalising the use of gaming machines in clubs and hotels, saw some business decline and some failures in border clubs in New South Wales (NSW) (Hing and Breen, 1996; McKercher and Vaughn, 1996: Hing, Breen and Weeks, 2002). While NSW clubs were well aware of the intention to introduce this legislation into neighbouring states, some chose to ignore it to their detriment, while others successfully diversified their business strategies.

Typical Information Sources needed by Managers

Managers in clubs, hotels and casinos have been given the authority for, and are expected to achieve the goals of their organization through managing its resources efficiently and effectively. Thus they need access to balanced information and then need the skills and experience to use it effectively. Managers who recognize the limits of their own experience, skills and resources lessen the risk of business failure. English (2003) suggests that managers who take advice, seek assistance from those more experienced than they and gather information from relevant sources are more likely to succeed.

Hospitality managers, Rhodri (1992) explains, typically use a wide range of sources of information including official, non-official, commercial and non-commercial sources, but claims that there is a shortage of industry-specific information. Looking for industry specific management information the Cherokee Nation Enterprises (CNE) which operates four Class II Indian casinos and several retails stores (Beasty, 2005) was seeking timely and relevant information from all its outlets and for all its products to maximize its business potential. They wanted one management information system to link their casino gaming, hotels, retail, front and back of house to their customer service database. Unable to find this, they have had to build their own system. Access to an industry specific information source was not readily available in this case.

Typical Information Sources used by Gaming Managers

The legalization of gaming has had a turbulent history. In different periods of time and in different jurisdictions, opposition from religious groups, charities and anti-gaming groups have persuaded politicians to outlaw gaming (see for example Caldwell, 1985; Dixon, 1991; McMillen, 1996; Kilby, Fox and Lucas, 2005). In more recent times and with increasing tolerance, gaming has become more liberalized and commercialized. It is also heavily regulated as politicians and voters need to be convinced that legalizing gaming reduces crime, has community recreation value and increases government funds through taxes. Like any business, gaming managers seek to control their operations in a business-like manner to achieve their business goals. But unlike other businesses gaming managers must remain aware of the ambivalent beginnings of the legalization of gaming. To keep gaming in the legitimate fold of business (Reith, 2002) gaming managers need to be alert to changes in information on government policies and monitor social and technological movements.

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Three important informational aspects of a managers role, Mintzberg (1991) maintains are: being a monitor of incoming and outgoing information; being a disseminator of information; and being a spokesperson. Managers as monitors critically analyze the information they gather and use their collected information to better manage the core processes of their organization (Quinn, Faerman, Thompson and McGrath, 2003). Monitors are expected to know thoroughly the internal workings of their organization. In research with five casino controllers in the USA, Ramdeen and Fried (2003) found that 35% of their time was spent in the informational role. Activities undertaken in this time were receiving, giving and reviewing information and carrying out observational tours of the venue. Casino controllers gather, interpret and report on information that is influential in deciding on business strategy. They are at the nerve center (Ramdeen and Fried, 2003: 26) of the casino operations. Their role as information managers is vital to improve the efficiency of the organization and help meet its goals.

In a study of four country clubs in the United States of America (USA), Gustafson and Partlow (2002) asked managers to rate the influential sources of information they use in forecasting efforts for their clubs. Sources of information were groups into three groups: personal, nonpersonal and other. Personal sources of power were rated as having the highest level of influence on strategic planning. On a five point Likert Scale the highest level of influence with mean scores ranging from 4.75 to 4.0 were board members, friends, colleagues, consultants and personal experience. Nonpersonal sources rated much lower overall with mean scores ranging from 2.25 to 1.50. Nonpersonal sources included government and association reports, trade and professional journals, books, newspapers, business and news magazines, information databases, research by universities and consulting firms. The sole source of information in the other category was involvement in professional associations with a mean rating of 4.25. Other sources

included industry conferences, involvement in professional associations, non-industry related activities and travel (Gustafson and Partlow, 2002).

However, this literature is sourced from the United States of America. There is little evidence of industry-specific research into the information needs of gaming managers in Australia. An understanding of currently used information sources and current information needs may assist gaming managers in Australia to manage their gaming operations effectively, efficiently and in a socially responsible manner.

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Research objectives

The research objectives include:
- identifying sources of information currently used to assist gaming managers in making decisions.
- identifying the information needs of gaming managers on which they need in-depth information or clarification.
- comparing and analyzing the differences between the first and second objectives to identify information gaps and set up a research agenda for the needs of gaming managers.

Methodology

For this exploratory research, a purposive sample was selected using the researcher's extensive knowledge of, and contacts within, the gaming industry. Purposive sampling is used when a sample is taken based on certain judgments about the overall population and the feasibility of including some of them in the research (Jennings, 2001: Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Senior representatives from each casino, club manager and hotelier groups and suppliers were targeted for this sample of knowledgeable gaming managers. Using snowball sampling (Zikmund, 2003) each of these informants was then asked to nominate others in the industry that would be able to provide similar levels of informed comment.

The main consideration in determining an appropriate sample size for this exploratory research was that it was large enough to capture a wide range of possible responses, but contained enough data to avoid excessive redundancy. Clearly, the sample size was also driven by the practicalities of conducting the research. In all, 26 gaming managers from a variety of clubs, hotels and casinos agreed to participate.

A qualitative approach was chosen for data collection. This method suits research where in depth responses are required (Ticehurst and Veal, 1997). This process involves gathering large amounts of in-depth information about a small number of organizations (Patton, 1990). Telephone interviews were conducted with the 26 participants in their workplace. An initial telephone call was made to enlist participation, and the interview schedule was faxed or emailed to the participant, allowing about a week for the participant to consider his/her response before the formal telephone interview. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. Extensive notes were taken at the time of the interview with a view to capturing the response in its entirety. The transcripts were typed immediately. Later they were sent to the participant to verify the accuracy and the veracity of the transcripts. Alterations were made on the basis of their feedback.

The participants were asked about sources of information that help them in making decisions for their organization. An informal interview instrument was developed by the researchers regarding the information needs of the participants developed from a range of contemporary gaming issues as highlighted in the literature above. This schedule listed gaming themes and issues from the internal, industry and macro business environment. A list of these themes is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
List of Interview Themes

Internal Management & Operations	The Industry Environment	The Macro Environment	Impacts of Gaming
Gaming machine operations	Competition	Political issues & trends affecting gaming venues	Costs of gaming
Other gaming operations	Customers	Economic issues & trends affecting gaming venues	Benefits of gaming
The gaming environment	Suppliers	Social issues & trends affecting gaming venues	
Advertising	Other Stakeholders	Technological issues & trends affecting gaming venues	
Promotions		Demographic issues & trends affecting gaming venues	
Financial issues		Cultural issues & trends affecting gaming venues	
Legal issues Technological issues Human resource issues Responsible conduct of gaming			

For the qualitative data, both content analysis and inductive analysis were used to analyze the data (Zikmund, 2003). First, open coding was used to break down, examine and compare data to find major elements in the content of the interviews (Berg, 1995). From this, inductive analysis was used to find emerging themes (Patton, 1990). The analysis then pulled together these emerging themes into meaningful core categories of results. This facilitated the development of a list of sources of information that respondents currently used and another list of important issues on which managers felt they needed further information.

Results

Sources of Information
The twenty-six interview participants report that they use seventeen sources of information to assist them in making decisions. Indicative responses illustrate the variety of comments recorded to support that particular information source. To show the recurrence of mention, sources of information are listed from the most frequently mentioned to the least frequently mentioned as seen below in Table 2.

Table 2
Current sources of information used by these gaming managers

Sources of information	Indicative responses	Frequency of mention
Views of customers or clients	"We do lots of random surveys". "We do surveys send them out with our annual report". "We wish to keep growing…we use focus groups". "We find out what their interests are, have a chat to them about what they would like to see". "We rely on our customers via our floor staff for feedback".	14 mentions
Industry networks	"I talk to venue managers; they're the best source of information". "I have access to a very strong old boy's network; I can access a lot of information from them". "The old network…is important". "We're a member of Betsafe group…have access to 24 hour counseling…they come out and audit us regularly". "When we get someone (a problem gambler) we do a report and sent it through to the Betsafe company". "Yes, I'm in a (industry) group…they let us know".	11 mentions
Competitors	"We send small groups of managers and directors out with a list of things to try to find out". "We send focus groups out to…do a mystery shop".	8 mentions
Industry Associations	"I always enjoy the Club Managers Association meetings…(after) I went back and set up my own self exclusion program". "We're part of the QLD Hotels Association… so we don't make any decisions legally without speaking to them". "Clubs QLD association keeps us heavily informed".	7 mentions
Manu-facturers	"We use the information from the (gaming) machines themselves…information supplied by the manufacturers". "It is all done by the manufacturers…their Research & Development (R&D) guys have that sort of thing (available)".	6 mentions
Central Monitoring	"We use the Jupiter's system, they also do our monitoring".	5 mentions
Systems Staff	"Odyssey gaming…we work closely with them". "Talking to our doorman"."Our R&D department is constantly working on new ideas and products that don't smell like gaming …or alcohol".	5 mentions
Professional Advisers	"We have our company solicitors if we have an area that might need a bit of expansion". "We put it in the hands of the solicitor when it gets ugly". "We obtain advice on these issues again through a close relationship with the insurance companies".	5 mentions

Government regulators	"We have...newsletters from the Department of Gaming and Racing, Clubs NSW association, all those updates".	4 mentions
	"On the gaming side we can see what advantage we have there from the Office of Gaming Regulation website".	
Commercial Advisers	"Morgans, Roy Morgan...they survey 64000 people p.a. on expenditure levels on certain items...now that's great information for us". "There is heaps of information out there if you know where to find it...we receive a lot of information electronically". "ClubData is a benchmarking system, very useful. They give us averages on bar, wages, cost of goods".	4 mentions
Industry conferences	"The greatest educational and research tool is getting away...to gaming expos". "The Australian Gaming Expo is useful for information on gaming machine operations and design".	4 mentions
Australian Bureau of Statistics	"(they) have the Australian Bureau of Statistics data on 7000 households". "There is plenty of statistical research available".	3 mentions
Local Government	"Certainly with local government we have a daily working relationship...community activities and so forth". "There is an enormous amount done with local government...liaising with the local member and the council".	3 mentions
Welfare Agencies	"We are constantly looking to extend the benchmarks. We are involved with Centacare (counselors). Early identification is part of the process". "Relationships Australia are our designated counselors for problem gambling. Quite often we speak to them to touch base".	3 mentions
Professional Development	"You keep on top of those by continuing professional development, attending seminars and workshops". "We have in-house monthly training sessions for all staff".	2 mentions
Universities	"The local campus of the university provides assistance". "The University of Adelaide has developed it, point of sale (system)".	2 mentions
Police	"Publicans and licensees in the area meet with police regularly to discuss issues". "Our relationship with the police is good...we have a good relationship with our local member".	2 mentions

From Table 2, the most frequently mentioned source of information that these gaming managers use to assist them in making decisions for their organisation are members and/or customers. Information from members and customers was obtained mostly through surveys, focus groups and informal feedback. The second most frequently mentioned source of information for the respondents was industry networks. Industry networks included other managers and friends developed through industry networking, visiting local competitors, associations formed through using the same responsible gambling system such as Betsafe and being a member of a gaming operations group such as Thommos.

Industry associations, games manufacturers, central monitoring system (CMS) operators, staff and professional advisers make up the next five sources of information

in descending order of frequency of mention. Government regulators and their websites were mentioned as were commercial database companies and industry conferences. The Australian Bureau of Statistics, local government and welfare agencies were mentioned three times each. Continuing professional development, universities, local Member of Parliament and police were all mentioned twice. Thus the most frequently mentioned source of information reported as being used by these managers was their customers.

Information Needs

Results from the twenty-six interviews reveal seventeen issues on which gaming managers needed further or in-depth information. The indicative responses show the range of responses expressing the need for this information. See Table 3 below.

Table 3
Information needs as expressed by these gaming managers

Information needs	Indicative responses	Number of mentions
Government policy & processes	"I'd like to have a better understanding of the relationship of government with gaming policy." "It is hard to get a clear idea of how the structure works, where gaming policy is going. It changes all the time". "I would like to know why certain policies are in place. It would be an advantage to know."	13 mentions
Community identity & local values	"What are their perceptions or hopes...what are their needs, are they being satisfied, how is this affecting the industry, where are the deficiencies"? "I would like to know our community". "What we need here is more (research) based around that demographic type of information". "Feedback from our community involvement".	11 mentions
Identification information on problem gamblers	"Sure it's hard to know who is a problem gambler. Pubs are open so long...they don't know how much money they put through the machines". "You never know when something (someone) is going to slip through". "We do need evidence. Who are they? What can we do to help them"? "We are always looking for evidence-based research". "More research into programs where people are given absolute support but are also given responsibility (for their own acts)." "The piece of research that intrigues me is about the self-help services. There is no outcome information. We don't have any information about who these problem gamblers are".	9 mentions
Smoking	"There is the smoking issue, what does the government intend to do? How much reduction of revenue will it have? This is undetermined". "...the smoking side of things and how to go about doing it. The government has been pushing anti-smoking but they don't want to ban cigarettes".	4 mentions

Gaming machine appeal; player motivations	"What makes one machine smarter than the other? What does a player want? What is in the mind of the player, what do they look for in a machine"? "Why they gamble, would be good to find out, is it killing time? Whether they think they can win? Do they gamble because they enjoy it"?	3 mentions
Gaming machine technology	"With the state wide network there is a reliance on solid information technology skills which are very lacking in this industry…a lot of gaming managers are becoming Information Technology (IT) managers. It is more hybrids…gaming managers need training in reconciliation and how the system works". "With smart cards there needs to be research done on the technological issues before people bring them in".	3 mentions
Human resources	"…receiving correct information on how to do performance appraisals and interview techniques… there is a lack of training…this is one area where we fall down". "We need access to external sources of information… such as with industrial relations". "…the education of managers about gaming, they need further skills in operations, trained staff are hard to come by".	3 mentions
Health & Safety	"The legislation is always changing. You need to be up to date with it all the time…with health and safety legislation. This is a big issue at the moment". "Research into the cause of injuries…is important".	2 mentions
Long-term industry outlook	"How the industry is going, how they are trying to change it…the changes in cashless gaming, the direction they are trying to take it". "The status of the industry in 10 years down the track…what and how will people view this world (industry), do they see it as entertainment, as a benefit to the community"?	2 mentions
Central Monitoring System (CMS)	"Information from the (CMS) operators is abysmal. We get nothing. Their charter is supposed to include assistance and advice. We get a lousy report at the end of the month".	1 mention
Economy & tourism effects	"Research in relation to the overall South-east Queensland and the economy, how the economy is traveling in the tourism area, getting statistics on the type of people in and out of the region".	1 mention
Role of committee/ Board	Referring to committee members or board of directors being inexperienced in their function, one person said "There is a major lack of information on the roles of the committee".	1 mention
Food trends	On food trends, one person commented "We've got two restaurants, a bistro and coffee shop. It would be handy to know what we could be doing better".	1 mention
Financial information	"We need (cooperative industry) Key Performance Indicators on financial performance".	1 mention

RSL ownership issues	The Returned Services League (RSL) was of concern to one country manager. He asked "When they have all gone...what happens? Will their RSL association in Brisbane take over the building"?	1 mention
Internet gaming	"like to know more about internet gambling, 50 % of members are on email, they have time to teach themselves IT".	1 mention
Code of Practice	"I think that we're struggling at the moment to accept the difference between acceptable and unacceptable (advertising and promotions) Öthe main breaches are very grey and they are not sure what is it they can do and can't do".	1 mention

From Table 3, the most frequently mentioned issue needing to be clarified or needing further information was government policy and processes. This was followed closely by a desire for better understanding of the local community, its identity and values. The third most often mentioned issue was identification of, information about problem gamblers. Smoking was the next issue raised as needing more information.

Industry needs were next most frequently mentioned needs with respondents expressing the desire to understand gaming machine appeal and player motivations; gaming machine information technology; and human resources issues. This was followed by health and safety issues and the development of a long-term strategic outlook for industry.

The most frequently mentioned issue needing to be clarified or needing further information was government policy and processes.

Finally there was a long list of issues mentioned only once by the participants. These were: more detailed Central Monitoring Systems operator information; an understanding of the economy and tourism effects; the role of committee / Board; food trends; financial information; RSL ownership issues; Internet gaming and code of practice. Thus the most frequently mentioned topic reported to the researchers as needing further elucidation was government policy and processes.

Discussion

From the results, high priority information needs include: gaming managers wanting much more information on, or clarification about, government policy and processes; a deeper understanding about community identity and values; and identification or and information about problem gamblers and responsible gambling measures. Returning to Table 1, List of Interview Themes, it is obvious that the most frequently mentioned needs for information fall into the macro environment. The macro environment consists of stakeholders or issues which influence, or are influenced by, legalized commercial gaming, but are not engaged in direct transactions. Four items from Table 1 in the macro environment are linked to these findings. These include political, social, demographic and cultural issues.

In the political environment, these managers expressed the need for more information of government policy and processes, to assist them manage their business in a law abiding and effective manner. In speaking about government policies, some managers said that government policies were constantly changing. One person asked "How can we alleviate the uncertainty"? Similarly, another asked "What will the (government) do to stuff us up"? However these managers appear to overlook information readily provided by government bodies. In fact government regulators and their websites were only mentioned four times as sources of information and were thus not rated as very important. Yet English (2003) maintains that government agencies are very useful as sources of advice. These inconsistent results suggest that managers are

not using government sources of advice to inform themselves about government policy because of a lack of knowledge underpinning the rationale for the policy and uncertainty about the length of time that a policy will be in force. Managers recognize that gaming depends on a government license with one person saying "Government policy and regulations determine what you do". However, they seem to be pragmatic in accessing this information because they feel that it will change before they have a chance to implement it properly. While constant learning of new policies and processes as explained by Shockley-Zalabak (1999) is part of belonging to the information society, in practice managers appear to be slow to introduce and implement changing government policies and processes into everyday operations in hospitality venues.

On demographic and cultural issues these gaming managers want more or deeper information about their local community identity and values. Managers want to be really sure that the information they receive from the community is reflective of their entire community. They also want to know if their business is seen as a good citizen, one that contributes to, rather that detracts from their community. Yet one of their most important information sources is members and customers. Ironically, respondents state that they frequently collect information from customers. While their customers are not the entire community, this source should reveal valuable information. Further investigation by the managers is required to reach people outside their customer base. Quinn *et al.* (2003) explain and Ramdeen and Fried (2003) show that managers as monitors critically analyse the information they gather and use this to effectively manage the core processes of their businesses. As critical thinkers these managers need to evaluate how this collected customer information adds value to their achieving the goals of the business. This result shows a gap in the informational role (Mintzberg, 1991) performed by managers.

In the social environment, the identification of problem gamblers and information about effective responsible gambling practices is important for these gaming managers. One manager said "It would be good to know, of the gambling population, how many people do have a problem". The formal status and authority implicit in the managerial role (Mintzberg, 1991) expects that they will undertake informational responsibilities with problem gamblers. Gaming managers have come under pressure to seek information about, and develop relationships with, their customers, their community, gambling support services and government agencies(Hing *et al.,* 2001) to provide responsible gambling activities (IPART, 2004). Adopting the informational role (Mintzberg, 1991) these managers see that in-depth information and research will help them make more effective business decisions while confidently managing a prominent social concern.

Sources of information that help gaming managers make effective business decisions were: members and or customers; networks; and a combination of industry associations, games manufacturers, central monitoring system operators, staff and professional advisers. Members and customers as important sources of information were discussed above. Returning to Table 1, List of Interview Themes, it is obvious that the majority of frequently mentioned information sources fall into the industry environment. The industry environment consists of stakeholders or issues which influence, or are influenced by, legalized commercial gaming, and are engaged in direct transactions. Three items in the industry environment linked to these findings are stakeholders, suppliers and customers.

The value of stakeholder networks and links is apparent as a very important source of information for these managers. Industry networks include other managers, colleagues and members of an industry group. Networks build on numerous interpersonal relationships made throughout a career in hospitality. Gustafson and Partlow (2002) found similar results on the importance of personal networks for managers of country clubs in the USA. Mintzberg (1991) maintains that industry links and personal connections developed from networks are very important for keeping managers well informed about industry and organisational trends, either at a formal or informal level. These gaming managers rely heavily on their internal and external networks to gather, monitor and disseminate information.

These gaming managers seek information from suppliers including industry associations, games manufacturers, Central Monitoring System (CMS) operators, staff and professional advisers. Collectively the associations and professionals are seen to provide essential information to fill the knowledge gaps of gaming managers. Industry associations provide opportunities to discover innovations, for further education, to liaise and to be the public representative for their own organisation. Gustafson and Partlow (2002) found that involvement in professional associations was a highly influential source of information for country club managers in the USA.

Games manufacturers and CMS operators are in regular contact with gaming managers either in sales, maintenance or reporting role. Managers expect manufacturers and CMS operators to support the building of their organisation through supplying meaningful information on which to make effective business decisions. Yet the Cherokee Nation Enterprises (Beasty, 2005) found that this source is not always available or available in the required form.

Listening to what staff and professional advisors is an important source of information for managers. Getting this type of feedback before making business decisions is a sign of being an effective communicator, generating understanding and reducing the risk of dissemination problems. Professional advisers English (2003) are paid to provide information and advice in the best interests of the organisation. But managers need to listen to their advice in order to make gather sufficient information before making significant decisions that affect the core business of the organisation. While the gaming manager operates at the centre of the gaming installation, there are valuable sources of information nearby.

In summary, these managers use interpersonal and informational roles (Mintzberg, 1991) in successfully getting information through their industry networks, associations, games manufacturers, CMS operators, staff and professional advisers. They also use the information role (Mintzberg, 1991) effectively to obtain information on problem gambling issues. However they do not use these roles as much to obtain information on government policy and processes and local community feedback.

Conclusions

Information gaps

For this investigation, effective information sources for gaming managers arise from the industry environment, while information gaps appear in the macro environment, particularly the political, demographic, cultural and social environments.

Gaming managers in this investigation have access through a variety of sources to government information policies and processes but find that it needs to be clarified. They need clear and precise information to be certain that they are abiding by the law. They would like plenty of notice when policies and processes are going to be altered. The fact that they do not access the available information means that either the information is vague and ambiguous or that they are possibly worried about attracting government regulator attention to a matter that they should know about and be acting on, already. Whatever the reason, this is an information gap.

In regards to identifying community members and their values, gaming managers in this investigation actually use their customers as sources of information. There is a possibly that they are not asking appropriate questions to get the information they require or that they do not recognize the value of the information they collect. This is not so much an information gap but more a monitoring and analysis gap, where managers need to gather and critically analyse the information (Quinn *et al.*, 2003) they receive to effectively manage the core processes of their business. While information from customers should meet this demand, a further issue arising from this information

gap is whether venues engage with the entire community, to identify their values and views on venue contributions to the community. The idea of being a good citizen is an inclusive one, not simply confined to customers.

These gaming managers said that they needed much more research information on the identification of problem gamblers and information to inform effective responsible gambling practices. The Productivity Commission (1999) and other researchers (see for example IPART, 2004; Hing *et al.,* 2002; Australian Institute of Gambling Research, 1999) also support this finding. This is an information gap.

There are a number of limitations of this investigation. It is drawn from a small and convenient sample (26 participants) so results cannot be generalised. Further, data were collected by phone interviews so time was limited and face-to-face interactions were not captured adequately. Using a larger more representative sample, replication of this investigation is suggested to better identify the information needs of gaming managers on the following:

- To see if these managers understand government policies and processes, research into the effectiveness of communication channels used by government to explain their policies and processes would be valuable.
- These managers saw a need for in-depth information about the communities in which they operate, in order to be good citizens and consider the effects of their operations on their communities.
- Further research in regard to identifying problem gamblers and assessing the efficacy of responsible gambling practices while reported in relevant literature, has been also been supported by these managers.

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