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Tapahtumien potentiaali monitahoisten elämysten tuottajana ja asiakassuhteen syventäjänä on havaittu parin viime vuosikymmenen aikana myös liike-elämässä. Alan tutkimus on kuitenkin vielä verrattain nuorta, ja keskittynyt pääosin tarkastelemaan tapahtumia markkinoijan näkökulmasta. Itse osallistujan tapahtumakokemukseen pureutuvia tutkimuksia on edelleen hyvin vähän.

Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena oli täyttää tuo tutkimusaukko ja selvittää, millainen on b2b-yrityksen asiakkaan kokemus yritystapahtumassa, sekä miten tuo kokemus vastaa markkinoijan asettamia tavoitteita.

Tutkimuksessa pyrittiin kartoittamaan, mistä asiakkaan tapahtumakokemus koostuu, millaisia vaikutuksia tapahtumakokemuksella voi asiakkaaseen olla, sekä miten tapahtumalle asetetut tavoitteet toteutuivat verrattuna toteutuneeseen kokemukseen.

Tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys koostuu yhdistelmästä usean eri tutkijan, kuten Crowtherin, Gerritsenin ja van Olderenin, Pinen ja Gilmoren, sekä Getzin malleja. Tutkimusongelmaa lähdettiin ratkomaan tapaustutkimuksen kautta, jossa keskityttiin yritystapahtuman osallistujien kokemuksiin. Aineisto koostuu osallistujien narratiivisista haastatteluista sekä tutkijan osallistuvasta havainnoinnista. Tutkielman empiirisessä osassa havaittiin mm., että osallistuja voi päästä flow-tilaan myös passiivisella osallistumisella, ja että jokainen osallistuja tuo tapahtumaan omat ennakkokäsityksensä ja persoonansa, jotka vaikuttavat siihen, miten tapahtuman koee, ja miten ja mitä siitä kertoo. Yritystapahtumissa voi syntyä vapaa-aikaan liitettyjä tunnetiloja ja kokemuksia. Tapahtumalle asetetut tavoitteet täyttyivät kaikkien haastateltavien suhteen ainakin osittain. Tapahtumaan osallistuneet kokivat saaneensa tapahtumasta emotionaalista stimulaatiota, rikkaita näkökulmia, ja ideoita sekä heidän työhönsä että henkilökohtaiseen elämäänsä liittyen.

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Abstract	
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Further information	

Events have potential when it comes to creating multifaceted experiences and deepening customer relationships, and this has been realized in the last couple of decades in the business world. However, the research in the field is still relatively young and focused mainly on looking at events from a marketer's point of view. There are still very few studies that focus on the attendee's experience.

The purpose of this thesis was to fulfill the existing research gap by finding out what the experience of a B2B client is like in a corporate event and how that experience meets the goals set by the marketer. In more detail, the study strived to clarify what the client's event experience comprises of, what kind of impact can an event experience have on the client, and how the event goals are met when compared to the actual client event experience.

The theoretical framework of the thesis consists of a combination of models by several researchers, such as Crowther, Gerritsen and van Olderen, Pine and Gilmore, and Getz. The research questions were answered through a case study focusing on the experiences of the attendees of a corporate event. The empirical material consists of narrative interviews of attendees and participant observation. In the empirical part of the thesis it was discovered for example that an attendee can get into the flow state even with passive participation, and that each attendee brings their own antecedents and personality to the event, which affects how the event is perceived, and how and what is told about the experience. Attendees can achieve leisure experiences within corporate events. The objectives set for the event were met at least partially by all of the interviewees. The attendees experienced emotional stimulation, refreshed views and ideas for the improvement of their professional or personal life.



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# **EXPERIENCES IN B2B EVENTS**

## **Event goals vs. actual client experience**

Master's Thesis  
in Marketing

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION.....	7
1.1	Events as vehicles for experientiality.....	7
1.2	Purpose and outlines of the study.....	8
2	EVENTS FROM A COMPANY PERSPECTIVE .....	11
2.1	Relationships in the B2B context.....	11
2.2	Events in relationship marketing.....	15
2.3	Characteristics of events .....	18
2.4	The marketing space framework.....	21
2.4.1	Setting the objectives .....	23
2.4.2	Designing the event .....	24
2.4.3	Delivery and evaluation of the event .....	25
3	EVENTS FROM AN ATTENDEE PERSPECTIVE .....	27
3.1	Attendee experiences in the core of events.....	27
3.2	Dimensions of experiences .....	28
3.3	Attendee experience journey.....	33
4	RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD .....	38
4.1	Research approach, data collection, and analysis .....	39
4.1.1	Narrative interviews.....	39
4.1.2	Participant observation .....	44
4.1.3	The analysis .....	44
4.2	Research reliability and validity.....	45
5	EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS .....	49
5.1	Company perspective: Case Frantic Future Day.....	49
5.1.1	Objectives of the event .....	51
5.1.2	Design of the event .....	52
5.2	Attendee perspective: The event experienced by the clients .....	54
5.2.1	Client A’s event narrative .....	55
5.2.2	Client B’s event narrative .....	57
5.2.3	Client C’s event narrative .....	60
5.2.4	Client D’s event narrative.....	62
5.3	Analysis of the event experiences.....	65
5.3.1	Client A.....	65
5.3.2	Client B.....	68

5.3.3 Client C.....	71
5.3.4 Client D.....	72
5.4 Cross-case analysis on client experiences.....	75
5.5 Event objectives and delivery vs. attendee experience .....	76
6 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH.....	79
6.1 Theoretical and practical contributions.....	79
6.2 Future research suggestions .....	83
7 SUMMARY.....	84
SOURCES.....	86
APPENDICES .....	92
APPENDIX 1 The interview inquiry message .....	92
APPENDIX 2 The interview template.....	93

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Key elements of B2B relationship marketing (modified from Ellis 2011, 69) 12	
Figure 2 Interaction levels in a relationship (Grönroos 2004, 104).....	14
Figure 3 Marketing space: Company view (modified from Crowther 2010a, 374)22	
Figure 4 The four realms of an experience (Pine – Gilmore 1998, 102) .....	29
Figure 5 Marketing space: Attendee view (modified from Crowther 2010a, 374) 34	
Figure 6 Staged versus attendee-created experience (modified from Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 52) .....	35
Figure 7 Synthesis of staged versus attendee-created experience, and the four realms of an experience (modified from Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 52; Pine – Gilmore 1998, 102) .....	37
Figure 8 Primary objectives of the case event in the context of Pine and Gilmore’s model.....	51
Figure 9 Client A's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore’s dimensions of experience .....	67

Figure 10	Client B's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore's dimensions of experience .....	70
Figure 11	Client C's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore's dimensions of experience .....	72
Figure 12	Client D's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore's dimensions of experience .....	74

#### LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	Summary of general information of the interviews .....	41
Table 2	The operationalization of the research objective .....	42



# 1 INTRODUCTION

*On the surface, live events seem to be about the brand. But in reality, events are all about the attendees.*

(Saef 2014)

## 1.1 Events as vehicles for experientiality

The significance of corporate events has been growing rapidly in the past decade. There has been a paramount shift in the events world, as emphasis is being put on experiential marketing in maintaining relationships with clients and other stakeholders (Getz 2007, 26). Businesses have finally realized the unique and multifaceted potential of events as a corporate marketing and brand building tool. The increasing popularity of events among practitioners stems from the changing marketing landscape, where traditional advertising messages are gaining less and less traction amongst their target audiences. (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005b, 1–2). At the same time, the modern-day event attendee is more experience-craving and harder to please than ever before (Crowther – Bostock – Perry 2015, 96). The progress in the experience economy is constant, with widespread acknowledgement that cultivated, post-modern consumers want one of a kind, customized and memorable experiences (Getz 2012).

In this day and age, events have become vehicles for value creation, producing a plethora of value including for example economic, cultural, and social value. Events fit well in to the modern knowledge economy as they are apt for generating, directing and distributing knowledge to a large crowd quickly and effectively. Events' reliance on face to face communication makes them a powerful value creation tool. (Richards et al. 2015.) As economies are advancing to the next level, only talking about offering services or goods for target audiences is deficient. All businesses, regardless of their target market, will increasingly need to embrace the concept of facilitating experiences for their customers in order to thrive. (McLellan 2000, 63; Pine – Gilmore 1998.) Events offer marketers a tool with a lot of potential, as it consists of a variety of qualities that distinguish events from other communication methods (Crowther 2010a, 369). When utilized effectively, events play a diverse role in the marketing toolkit accomplishing manifold tactical and strategic results, in areas such as brand communications, profile raising, and relationship development (Crowther 2010a, 370).

Event marketing enables marketers to focus their resources on target audiences that are truly interested in “engaging and interacting with the company and its brand-related hyperreality” (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005a, 200). By applying event marketing strategies, marketers can offer their target audiences with “an interactive stage for unique brand

experiences by communicating the brand myth and heritage on a behavioural level” (Zanger – Sistenich 1996<sup>1</sup>, according to Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005, 201). Through event marketers are able to connect the brand with pleasant experiences and also have meaningful conversations with their target audiences, thus potentially gaining precious feedback on how the brand is performing (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005, 201). Compared to traditional advertising, events are better equipped to attach different sensory experiences, such as sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, to brands, as self-lived experiences are apt to have a stronger impact on people’s conception of reality (Whelan – Wohlfeil 2006).

Experientiality has become a buzzword in the marketing landscape, which has led to the inflation of the actual phenomenon and the reduction of experiences into something that’s easily managed and simple to grasp. This is due to the fact that the attention has merely been paid on the processes of creating an experience instead of trying to understand the essence of people’s experiences and how they interact with the event generating such experiences. (Caru – Cova 2007, 2.) Events provide organizations with a strategic and multifaceted platform through which they can achieve different marketing related goals. Organizations frequently fail to utilize this potential by a short-sighted and overly tactical outlook on event planning and delivery. (Pugh – Wood 2004; Crowther 2010b.) Events are often just seen as peripheral activity of sorts and not enough strategic planning is involved (Crowther 2011). This seems contradictory, since it has been argued that brand image can be strengthened by facilitating joint experiences that communicate brand values in a novel way. Academics maintain, that companies can gain a competitive edge by transitioning towards the experiential dimension of human behavior and seeking to establish emotional bonds and relationships between the brand and the client. This suggests that there needs to be a better understanding of how clients truly experience the brand and values the company communicates. (Whelan – Wohlfeil 2006, 314.)

## 1.2 Purpose and outlines of the study

Event marketing is a relatively young construct, and it has been an understudied topic since its conception. Historically, there has been very little research and conceptual development regarding marketing events. (Crowther 2011, 68.) The existing research has focused mainly on measuring the outcomes of events in the B2C environment. To

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<sup>1</sup> Zanger, C. – Sistenich, F. (1996) Eventmarketing: Bestandsaufnahme, Standortbestimmung und ausgewählte theoretische Ansätze zur Erklärung eines innovativen Kommunikationsinstruments. *Marketing – Zeitschrift für Forschung und Praxis*, Vol. 18 (4), 233–242.

be able to design and deliver successful event marketing strategies, one needs a better understanding of attendees' motivations and experiential needs, but it has been largely neglected in the previous research. (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2006, 644.) Getz (2007, 189) points out that very little research has been conducted on behalf of B2B events due to the fact that it is generally assumed that people attend these events for extrinsic reasons, i.e. because it is part of their job description. In the same breath Getz adds, that event studies are eager to find out whether these experiences are categorically different from those at other events.

Event research has begun to thrive in the recent years and the “new and immature” event research is now moving towards a more mature phase in its evolution (Crowther – Bostock – Perry 2015, 93). Event studies are now more focused on the experiential realm than ever (Patterson – Getz 2013, 238). Also, a vast majority of the event marketing related studies have been conducted from the marketer's perspective. Comparatively little research has been carried out to grasp the nature of the experience from the attendee's point of view (Morgan 2006). As a precondition to effective event marketing strategies, marketers need to gain insights on what motivates people to participate voluntarily in them (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2006, 663). Research needs to move towards a direction that focuses on developing a clear understanding of the experience at the event and related factors and more crucially, the longer-term effects of the experience (Wood 2009, 265; Crowther – Bostock – Perry 2015, 96). In an attempt to combat this myopic perspective, this particular study emerged from a real-life case where these two perspectives – attendee and marketer – could be combined. To add another layer of challenge, I – the writer of this thesis – wear two hats in this research process: I am the marketer and organizer of the case event that is examined in this study, but also the researcher who conducts this study, which was first considered as a strength.

The purpose of this study is to find out how the clients of a business-to-business company experience corporate events, and how the experience meets the marketer's goals. In more detail, the study strives to clarify

- what does the client's event experience comprise of
- what kind of impact can an event experience have on a client
- how the event goals are met when compared to the actual client event experience

To better capture the multidimensional nature of events, the study is divided into two major parts; events seen from the organizers point of view, and from the attendees point of view.

The term ‘business-to-business’ can be seen abbreviated in this study and will be referred to as ‘B2B’ for the sake of convenience. The terms marketing event, planned event, live event, and corporate event are used interchangeably and carry the same

meaning in this study. Sponsored events are not included in the examination of the study since the main focus is on events that organizing companies have a full control over. For clarity, in this study I will refer to myself as “the researcher” from this point on.

## 2 EVENTS FROM A COMPANY PERSPECTIVE

*Relationship marketing is as much about keeping customers as it is about getting them in the first place.*

(Christopher – Payne – Ballantyne 1991, 1)

### 2.1 Relationships in the B2B context

In order to better understand the underlying principles of B2B event marketing, one must first understand the context where events are organized. Business marketing, or business-to-business marketing, has multiple differing definitions, and the term has evolved throughout the time. Nevertheless, the core of business-to-business marketing can be encapsulated as “the creation and management of mutually beneficial relationships between organizational suppliers and organizational customers” (Morris – Pitt – Honeycutt 2001, 3).

Business marketing is simply about creating value for business customers – clients if you will – and understanding that your clients are in turn providing value to their customers (Vitale – Giglierano – Pfoertsch 2011, 4). This interconnection means that in the long run the success of your business is dependent on the success of your client’s business, and that you need to be aware of the factors that affect the demand of your client’s products or services. The impacts of the fluctuation of demand within your client’s market can be minimized by the marketer’s participation in the relationship with the client on an ongoing basis. Business marketers need to be thorough in their attempts to continuously boost buying decisions and create more value for their existing clients. (Vitale et al. 2011, 12.)

Since the B2B market consists of fewer but bigger clients compared to the B2C market, companies need to aim for building longstanding relationships to secure the longevity of the business. This phenomenon is called *relationship marketing (RM)*, and it can be described as “the process of identifying and creating new value with individual customers and then sharing the benefits of this over the lifetime of association” (Gordon 1998, 9). The objective of relationship marketing according to Grönroos (1994, 9) is to

*establish, maintain, and enhance relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met. This is achieved by a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises.*

To build and maintain these client relationships, companies have to put efforts into generating client satisfaction and retention. The ultimate reasoning for this is that loyal and satisfied clients ensure the steady flow of revenue coming in to the business. How

exactly this loyalty is established, depends on the clientele and the industry the company is operating in.

To better understand how to approach relationship marketing, we'll now go through the basic tenets that define this school of thought. Key elements of relationship marketing, as can be seen below (Figure 1), comprise of taking a long-term perspective, being trustworthy, showing commitment, managing communications, organizing for service quality, and ensuring mutual benefits.

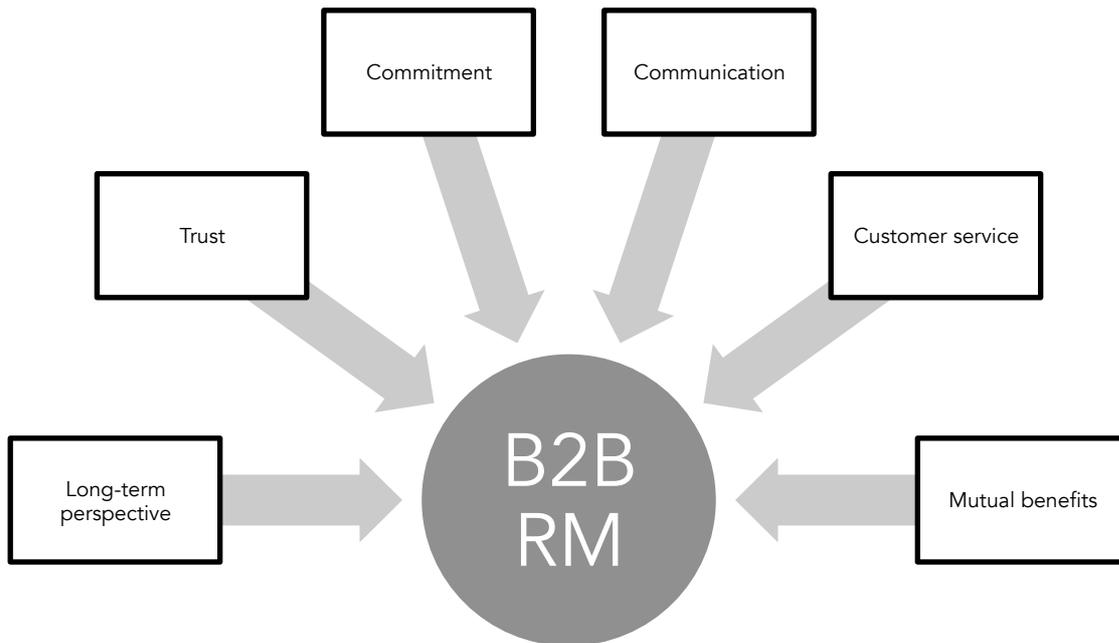


Figure 1 Key elements of B2B relationship marketing (modified from Ellis 2011, 69)

Having a *long-term perspective* is a rudimentary principle of relationship marketing. The longevity can be achieved through strategies that are targeted towards retaining clients, and consequently improving the profitability of the relationship. Since the cost of attracting new clients is usually higher than retaining the existing ones, this causal connection is believed to be accurate. A relationship is not likely to happen without the three following elements: trust, commitment and communication. (Ellis 2011, 69–70.)

*Trust* in a business context is a relatively complex term, but it can be described as “an acceptance of vulnerability to another’s possible, but not expected, ill will or lack of good will” (Blois 1997, 115). Trust can be seen as a “relationship atmosphere that results from cooperation based on predictability, dependability, and faith”. It can be said that trust generated from social interactions can oftentimes be more powerful than contracts. (Ellis 2011, 70.)

Morgan and Hunt (1994, 23) define *commitment* as “an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts

at maintaining it". Commitment prompts partners to maintain a relationship, and to resist alternative partners. Different levels of commitment or loyalty between business actors can be identified, starting from being a prospect to ultimately being partners. The goal of marketers is to move the client upward the loyalty ladder, ideally all the way up to the partner level. Commitment can be attitude- and/or behavior-based, which means that the client or stakeholder can be concerned about the company's intentions, or what the company actually does. (Ellis 2011, 70–72.)

*Communication* is a big factor in evoking trust and commitment, and when designing communications one must remember that consistency is elementary (Ellis 2011, 72). Companies should produce a dialogue with the client, which will allow for co-reasoning and developing a value-adding platform of knowledge, and thus create a relationship (Grönroos 2004).

*Customer service* is an essential component of building relationships. Because if the quality of the service provided by the company is poor, the prerequisites for the existence of the other elements of the relationship management are not fulfilled. Customer service is the glue to the elements of successful client retention and relationship formation, and it should be seen as a cross-functional state of mind rather than a marketing function responsibility. (Ellis 2011, 72.)

Lastly, a strong relationship is formed when the companies have *mutual benefits* invested in the relationship (Varey 2002<sup>2</sup>, according to Ellis 2011, 72). The most obvious benefit for the selling organization could be the revenue, status or visibility they gain from the relationship. For the buying organization the benefits can be more multifaceted, such as the benefit gained from owning or accessing a good quality service or product. It can also be about emotional benefits that an individual organization member achieves when in a relationship with another company, such as reduced anxiety, recognition, or preferential treatment. The main point is to reach a win-win-situation, where both (or all) of the parties provide and receive through exchange. (Ellis 2011, 72.)

The relationship between an organization and its clients can be seen as interdependent *sequences*, which are formed by individual episodes (Grönroos 2004, 104). *Episodes* are in turn formed by acts. This interconnection is illustrated below in Figure 2.

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<sup>2</sup> Varey, R.J. (2002) *Relationship Marketing: Dialogue and Networks in the E-Commerce Era*, Wiley, Chichester.

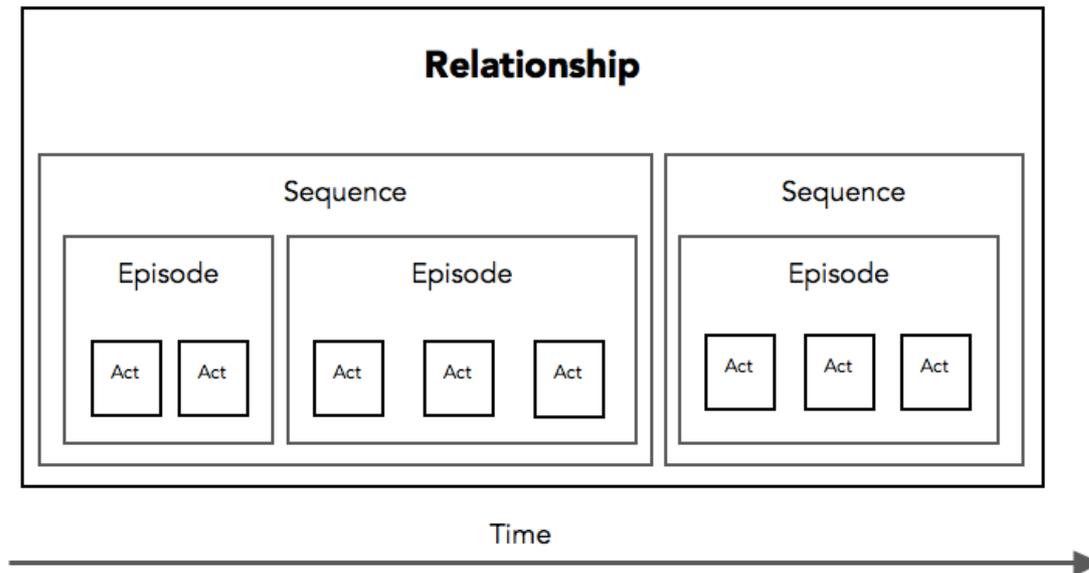


Figure 2 Interaction levels in a relationship (Grönroos 2004, 104)

*Acts* are the smallest units of analysis in the interaction process, and they have been referred to as ‘moments of truth’ (Grönroos 2004, 104). Acts are any encounters the client has had with the company, whether it is a phone call, or an ad the client sees about the company. Interrelated acts form a natural entity in a relationship: an *episode*. A sales meeting could be an episode, consisting of smaller acts such as client entering the office, getting coffee from the reception, being greeted in the conference room etc. Interrelated episodes in turn form *sequences*, which can be defined in terms of a time frame, a project, a campaign or a composite of these. Finally, the sequences aggregated through time form the relationship. (Grönroos 2004, 104.) Depending on the level of observation, corporate events could hypothetically be seen either as episodes or sequences within the relationship interaction level model. If an event is considered as part of a larger marketing campaign or entity that includes many different activities, the event could be considered as an episode within a sequence (=campaign) alongside with other marketing activities. If an event is considered a standalone occasion within the client relationship, the event could be seen as a sequence on its own, formed for example by individual episodes such as the pre-, during- and post-event phases. Each of the phases in turn would include individual acts, like entering the venue, listening to the speakers etc., that form the complete event experience. Regardless, modern event research supports the notion of events as episodes (Crowther 2010a, 370).

B2B and B2C commerce have always been seen as polar opposites in many regards in marketing, and they indeed have multiple distinguishing qualities when compared with one another. One distinguishing and defining characteristic of the business market is the buying behavior. In the commerce between two businesses there are multiple

people involved in the purchase process. The process of buying a product or service can also be very formal, including strict policies regarding e.g. vendor specifications, creating bids or proposals, and the evaluation of different alternatives. The purchase processes usually take more time compared to those of the consumer markets, ranging anywhere from 6 months even up to 2 years. After the purchase is agreed upon, the buyer is usually loyal to the supplier unless notable issues arise. Also, the buyer's economic performance hinges upon the quality of its purchasing decisions. (Morris et al. 2001, 25–26.)

It needs to be stated, though, that *organizations* do not buy services or products, and organizations do not make decisions: *people* within the organizations do. With this in mind, Ellis (2011, 36) encourages B2B marketers to strive to understand how individual buyers in business markets tend to behave. Business marketing has often been thought to be very different compared to consumer marketing, but when it comes to people, we all behave similarly in buying situations, but just with a bit different and more complex motivations (Vitale et al. 2011, 4). Once we accept the notion that B2B buyers have a lot of common ground with B2C buyers, we can assume that they, too, can make decisions based on “misperceptions, emotions, and peer pressure”, just whereas a consumer would (Ellis 2011, 36). After all, research has shown that business decisions are often made motivated by emotions (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 72).

In this study, it is presumed that B2B clients experience events based on their own antecedents, but that they also simultaneously represent their company as a professional whilst attending a corporate event. This interconnection and its possible implications will be researched further in this study.

In the following chapters we will see how the context of B2B environment affects the nature of events, and also how organizing events support the basic tenets of relationship management.

## **2.2 Events in relationship marketing**

According to Getz (2007, 18), an “event is an occurrence at a given place and time; a special set or circumstances; a noteworthy occurrence”. Getz (2007, 21) categorizes events into planned and unplanned events by their spontaneity versus professionalism. According to Getz (2007, 21), planned events are “created to achieve specific outcomes”. Hence, most corporate events can be regarded as planned events.

Crowther (2010a) presents two dichotomies with which to classify events and set them apart from each other; direct versus indirect events, and exclusive versus non-exclusive events. Direct events are driven by the marketing function, whereas indirect events are designed and delivered by other functions of the organisation. As direct

events are designed by the marketing function, they ideally stem from a strategic standpoint. Indirect events, on the other hand, have a tendency to miss the connection to the overall strategy, and therefore present an incohesive image of the company to its stakeholders. Exclusive events are events that the organisation devises on its own, and non-exclusive events are sponsorships or other forms of events made in collaboration with another party. The split between the two forms depicts difference in the sense of control the company has over the event. (Crowther 2010a, 380–381.)

Corporate events can be classified into exhibitions, conferences, seminars, press conferences, factory visits, open days, product launches, charity events, tradeshow, roadshows, corporate hospitality events, and publicity events (Gupta 2003, 88; Crowther 2010a, 371; Wood 2009, 249). Gupta adds training programs into the pool of events, whereas Crowther also mentions sponsorship and award ceremonies. Wood, on the other hand, adds created events, product sampling, and contests into the mix. By created events, Wood (2009, 249) refers to events that are organized as an extension to the core product to communicate brand values.

Events are a temporal phenomena, which means they have a beginning and an end. One cannot fully duplicate an event, since they only happen once. While an event may be similar in form, the unique blend of people, setting and programme will make sure that an event is always physically or experientially unlike others. (Getz 2007, 18–19.) The context of this study lies in the business environment, meaning we are researching events where the aim is to “promote, market or directly engage in commerce, or otherwise meet corporate objectives” (Getz 2007, 38). Event researchers see events as part of marketing communications. In more detail, *marketing events* are a sub-category of experiential marketing, which is an element of an organisation’s communication tools. (Crowther 2010a, 370, 380; Wohlfeil – Whelan 2006, 645.) Experiential marketing is the “process of identifying and satisfying customer needs and aspirations, profitably, engaging them through two-way communications that bring brand personalities to life and adding value to the target audience” (Smilansky 2009, 13).

Kotler (2002, 576) summarizes that marketing events are “occurrences designed to communicate particular messages to target audiences”. In the same vein, Wood (2009, 248) insists that a marketing event can be any event that helps to market a product or service, idea, place or person, and communicates (or has the potential to communicate) with a target audience. Some researchers claim that these definitions are overly broad and fail to capture the full essence of marketing events (Crowther 2010a, 370). Kotler’s rudimentary and chaste definition of marketing events stems from the minuscule strategic role events had in the past, and the definition has since gained more depth through the work of other industry researchers. Researchers have attempted to define marketing events from different angles, for example as a brand hyperreality, live communications, and living the brand (Crowther 2011, 69–70).

Researchers have focused on describing events solely as means of communications, but Bruhn (2003, 328<sup>3</sup>; according to Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005a, 186), brings a hint of experientiality into the definition, and defines *an event* as “a special social function or a special occurrence that can be experienced multi-sensually by targeted recipients and be used as a platform for communication”. Nickel (1998, 7<sup>4</sup>; according to Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005a, 187) took the experience-centricity of events even further, arguing that

*marketing-events are in behalf of marketers staged events, which in regard to companies or brands have the central goal to help participants obtaining experiences as well as to activate their emotions and which, at the same time, are suitable to contribute positively to the implementation of marketing strategies, i.e. in building up corporate or brand values.*

Events are the “key media of event-marketing to communicate brand messages” (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005a, 186). *Event marketing* can be defined as an experience-oriented marketing communication strategy aimed at “positively influencing customers’ familiarity, image, attitude ... to the brand by staging self-initiated marketing events” (Whelan – Wohlfeil 2006, 316). According to Whelan and Wohlfeil (2006, 315), event marketing aims to “utilize the capacity of emotional connections through shared experiences by supplying brand experiences, entertainment and education which clients perceive as adding to their enjoyment and experienced quality of life”.

Crowther (2011, 70) sees that events represent a multidimensional communication of an organisation’s brand. Events are, therefore, marketing activities, which means they should be based on the marketing strategy. Crowther (2011, 70) presents a rationale, according to which the essence of an event is an experience, and that experience should be based on a consistent story that is in line with the marketing strategy of the organisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that any disparities between the organisation’s strategy and events are troublesome. (Crowther 2011, 70.)

The gravity and strategic value of event marketing can be seen in many ways depending on the market and the company, but the overall direction has been towards a more strategic role. Zanger and Sistenich (1996, 234<sup>5</sup>; according to Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005a, 186) identified two approaches in understanding and implementing event marketing; the partial approach and the total approach. The partial approach sees event marketing as “the planning, organising, managing and controlling of events in the

<sup>3</sup> Bruhn, M. (2003) Kommunikationspolitik. 2nd edition. München: Vahlen.

<sup>4</sup> Nickel, O. (1998) Event: Ein neues Zauberwort? In: *Eventmarketing: Grundlagen und Erfolgsbeispiele*. Ed. Nickel, O. München, 3–12.

<sup>5</sup> Zanger, C. – Sistenich, F. (1996) Eventmarketing: Bestandsaufnahme, Standortbestimmung und ausgewählte theoretische Ansätze zur Erklärung eines innovativen Kommunikationsinstruments. *Marketing – Zeitschrift für Forschung und Praxis*, Vol. 18 (4), 233–242.

framework of a company's marketing communication strategy". The total approach, on the other hand, looks at event marketing as a top-level construct for all elements of contemporary marketing communications, which "contribute to the development and implementation of an experience-oriented strategy". The researchers argue that the partial approach may be too narrow of a notion, but the total approach isn't any less problematic either, as it can be seen as too vague. They inferred that in order to make use of the communicative potential of event marketing in a strategic manner, there needs to be a higher-level marketing communications concept that is experience oriented and consists of offering attendees "brand-related realities. (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005a, 186.)

Gerritsen and van Olderen's definition of event marketing ties events together with building relationships. The researchers conclude, that event marketing focuses on developing, intensifying, and expanding a relationship with a certain target group (or many target groups). The event is utilized as a "marketing and communication tool where emotion and experience are brought together". (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 47.)

In this study, marketing events are regarded as episodes that serve as platforms through which companies can implement their marketing strategies in an experiential manner. Within events, companies can engage in a multidimensional communication and interaction with their stakeholders, and facilitate memorable experiences that stimulate the senses of the attendee, activating emotions and reactions, and creating lasting memories and impressions. Ultimately, it is assumed that the experience evoked by the event has an impact on the relationship between the company and the client, and vice versa.

### **2.3 Characteristics of events**

The paradigm shift from product-orientation to a relational orientation is visible in the discussion above, which leads marketers to strive towards maintaining more longstanding relationships with their client base. As the relationship with the client is seen now more as a journey, rather than separate and disparate purchases, any individual points of contact become more and more important. This demands that all of the brand's communication is consistent and integrated in order to maintain and develop these relationships. The characteristics of marketing events are a good fit for the task, as they can be used to support the underlying tenets of relationship management. (Crowther 2010a, 373–374.)

Pursuing an all-encompassing definition of events is challenging due to the substantial and divergent role they play in our society. Despite the varied applications and sub-

sets, this motley field of study is tied together by a number of core features that have endured and developed through time. It has been observed, that events share the fundamental qualities of *experientiality*, *interactivity* and *pervasiveness*, *congregation*, *uniqueness*, and *transience*. (Crowther – Bostock – Perry 2015, 95.) These features are highly apposite and beneficial in regards to the modern marketing environment businesses operate in. On top of these shared qualities, all marketing events have special features, which differentiate and extend their value and eminence. (Crowther 2011, 71.)

*Experientiality* is the paramount feature of events, as it's at the epicenter of event studies (Getz 2007, 9). In the academic world, the experience is often considered only to be the attendee's domain, but ever increasingly also the domain of a wider group of stakeholders such as for example public authorities, partners, and the general public (Crowther et al. 2015, 95). Parsons and Maclaran (2009<sup>6</sup>, according to Crowther 2011, 72) introduce the term "hyperreality" to embody the phenomenon of present-day consumers actively experiencing brands. In this equation, marketing communications can either enhance or decrease the value an attendee obtains from their interaction with a company. Consequently, the experiential essence of events and their capacity to facilitate engagement with participants, is tangible. (Crowther 2011, 72.) The experiential nature of events makes them essential to the relationship a company has with its clients and other stakeholders. Events offer organisations with an unique opportunity to interactively engage with their clients to strengthen the emotional bonds between eachother, and thus moving them upwards the loyalty ladder. (Crowther 2011, 72.) By providing fulfilment to customers' needs in terms of experiential consumption, marketers build brand values through a special communication proposition and establish mutually advantageous relationships between clients and companies (Whelan – Wohlfeil 2006, 317).

As mentioned in the introduction, the vexing reality of marketing in this day and age is the clutter of marketing messages that the consumers are bombarded with (Roy – Cornwell 2004, 186). The experiential nature of events is well suited to organisations attempting to rise above the noise, as events facilitate *pervasive and interactive communication* (Crowther 2011, 71). Especially events where only one brand is present (seminars, launches etc.), the message is stronger, as no other competing ones exist. When you enter such an event, you enter into a communicational bubble of a sorts, where you are immersed in messages coming from only one brand. This is a highly coveted situation for any marketer. Events also offer a great tool for facilitating the AIDA-process (attention, interest, desire, action) if planned strategically, as they contain both structured and unstructured elements and a reciprocal communication environment

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<sup>6</sup> Parsons, E. – Maclaran, P. (2009) *Contemporary Issues in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour*. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.

for the attendee. (Crowther 2010a, 372.) Event marketing offers marketers a platform to engage in a dialogue with their audience, which is where they can attain invaluable feedback for any potential areas of development (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005, 195; Whelan – Wohlfeil 2006, 317). In the B2B context where the market is more fragmented, and the pool of potential clients smaller, the setting calls for targeted and personalized communication strategies. As the event organizer can control everything from invitees to event design, events represent a highly personalized form of communications, which amounts to them being a great fit for the occasion. (Crowther 2011, 71; 2010a, 372.)

Another characteristic of events is *congregation*, which can also be defined as co-presence. Co-presence can be recognized as a noteworthy attribute in our society where networking is key. The present literature interprets co-creation and co-production as means of improving the engagement with the stakeholders (Crowther – Bostock – Perry 2015, 95) *Communitas*, or the feeling of togetherness, aligns with conceptions of engagement, involvement, and participation that enhance the experience and justify the attraction of events (Crowther et al. 2015, 95; Zomerdijk – Voss 2010, 3–4). *Communitas* can be described as “a transformative experience that goes to the heart of each person’s being and finds in it something profoundly communal and shared” (Björner – Berg 2012, 36). *Communitas* can be seen as a momentary situation in which “people are together, removed from ordinary life, so they have something very specific in common” (Pettersson – Getz 2009, 311). Congregation also facilitates the opportunity to maintain a frequency and intensity in relationships, as they offer consistent dialogue and interaction with clients (Gummesson 1999, 73).

Richards (2013, 2) cites co-presence as a solution to attention scarcity, as it can potentially “generate emotional energy leading attendees to be in a state of heightened engagement”. Also the fact that the attendee of the event is an active and more importantly voluntary participant in the marketing process makes a difference on the level of immersion and engagement with the brand (Crowther 2010a, 372). When immersed within the core event experience, attendees are typically more relaxed, uninhibited, and open to new ideas (Getz 2007, 18). Events can also be seen as a place where aspects of social and entertainment are mixed with the usual marketing exchange. This means that elements people are used to experience in their leisure are incorporated into their professional life. This kind of temporary reality allows for freer exchange of marketing messages and a greater level of empathy for the messages received. (Crowther 2011, 75.)

Events are defined by the *reordering of time and space*, which generates the uniqueness and impermanence of events (Richards 2013, 2). Although event experiences are usually established within the time and space boundaries of the event, the role of pre- and post-event activities and communications is becoming an integral part of the stakeholder and attendee experience. The growing body of research around

the experience economy and experience design underlines the purposeful creation and facilitation of an experience. (Crowther et al. 2015, 96.)

It is impossible to duplicate an event, as they only occur once. Even though a similar event concept can be utilized multiple times, the events will never be “tangibly or experientially” alike due to the attendees, programme and the setting. Also the expectations and attitudes of the attendees will always be different, hence their experiences will be different as well. (Getz 2007, 18–19.) Slightly contradictingly, some researchers have argued that marketing events that are based on a specific and unchanging formula are deemed to fail, because they are unable to fulfill the goal of creating unique experiences for the attendee (Wohlfeil – Whelan 2005, 198).

## 2.4 The marketing space framework

In order to examine the interrelations of the different factors that affect the overall event experience, we need a framework against which to reflect them. Event researchers have hovered around the topic, each with their own perspective to it. To name a few, Getz (2007), Crowther (2010a, 2010b, 2011) and Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015) all have their own distinctive, yet somewhat similar viewpoints on how the overall event experience is formulated. Gerritsen and van Olderen’s and Getz’s models will be gone through in the third main chapter that focuses on the attendee side of event experience.

Crowther (2010a, 370), builds upon the notion of events as platforms, and defines marketing events as a wide collection of different event types, called ‘marketing event platforms’. Crowther determines that marketing events supply practitioners with a special space within which they can connect with their stakeholders, and it’s unlike any other communications methods. As a result, the concept of marketing space was born. Marketing space, according to Crowther (2010a, 370), is

*a transient reality where representatives of an organisation come together physically, and in a planned manner, with a gathering of existing and future customers, clients, and wider stakeholders.*

According to Crowther (2010a), marketing space is a variable and adaptable concept, which is determined by a number of factors, and most prominently so by the marketing event platform selected. Marketers can activate these marketing event platforms to achieve different goals. Marketing events are therefore diverse by nature, and these differences become even more prominent depending on the context of the event, such as whether they are employed in B2B or B2C marketing. (Crowther 2010a, 380.) What’s common for all of them, is that they all have the main qualities of an event, and contain engagement with the target audience (Crowther 2011, 70).

Whereas the previous research made minuscule efforts to connect events to the overall marketing strategy, Crowther’s framework is based on the integration of the event and the marketing objectives, “advocating a transition from silo and operational to integrated and strategic” (Crowther 2011, 69). According to Crowther (2010a), events share a common ground with a collection of conceptual areas within marketing. As a result, the framework is a melting pot of its kind as it’s based on and inspired by a range of different kinds of overlapping marketing paradigms, including relationship marketing, integrated marketing communications, and service dominant logic. (Crowther 2011, 69.)

The marketing space concept illustrated below in Figure 3, depicts the individual and simultaneous processes that are in play for both the organizer and the attendee of the event. For clarity, the company perspective of the model has been highlighted, and the attendee side has been greyed out, as the attendee perspective will be gone through more in depth in chapter 3.

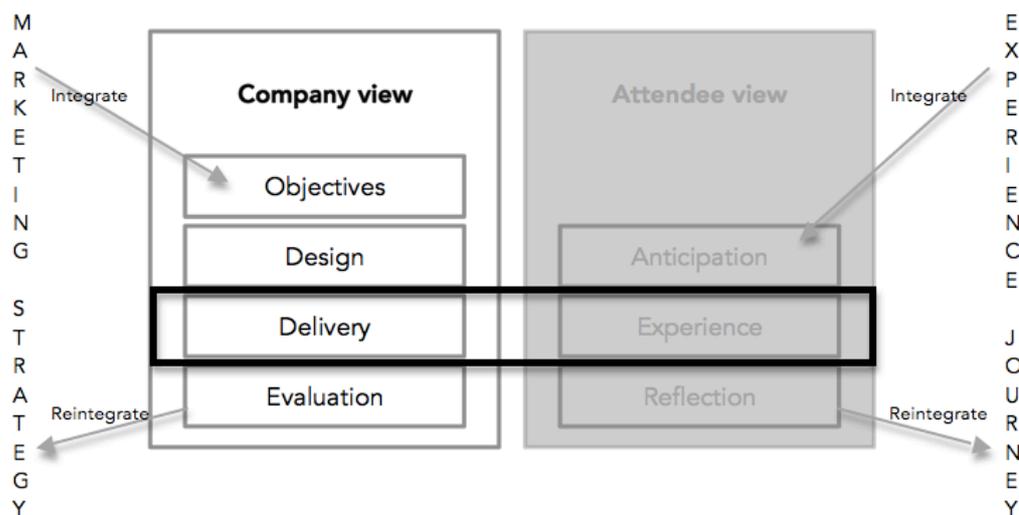


Figure 3 Marketing space: Company view (modified from Crowther 2010a, 374)

For the organisation producing the event the process entails setting the objectives, designing and delivering the event, and ultimately evaluating the outcomes of the event. The organizer’s process is set out to generate a one of a kind marketing space which in turn aims to mold the overall process of an attendee. (Crowther 2010a, 375.) The figure presented by Crowther showcases the concept of how the marketing space reaches beyond the actual event. The event itself is the core marketing space (highlighted with a black rectangle), while everything else beyond that is considered the augmented marketing space. The anticipation and reflection phases are augmented parts of the core marketing space, and they offer multiple opportunities to affect the perceptions the

attendee has of the brand or company. (Crowther 2010a, 375.) The following subchapters will dig deeper into the parts of the marketing space concept from an organizer point of view.

#### **2.4.1 *Setting the objectives***

Crowther (2010a, 375) stresses that events are merely tools for the marketer to implement the overarching marketing strategy. This means that there might be a scenario where events are not the best fit as a strategy implementation channel. Crowther (2010a, 375) states that marketers must identify apposite goals and render them into specific event objectives. These goals should be measurable so as to offer an opportunity to indicate the event's contribution and impact within the marketing strategy, and overall possible return on investment. By setting clear goals to events, it is easier to pinpoint successes and failures, and see how they could be either built upon or remedied. (Crowther 2010a, 375.) It is of utmost importance to tie events to the marketing strategy, or else the strategic potential of events is lost. Ideally, all events of a company would stem from the marketing strategy so that the brand messages can be embedded into the core of the event. (Crowther 2010a, 376.)

When considering the attendee of the event, their event experience should be cautiously aligned with their whole experience journey with the company. (Crowther 2010a, 375.) Extending Crowther's logic, it can be stated that each client has different sort of needs in different stages of the relationship. If the attendee is an old client, their perspective may be completely different from one of a client who just got acquainted with the company, and this should be taken into consideration when setting objectives for events.

Crowther (2010a, 375) reminds that events inevitably expose your brand to the attendees, whether you like it or not. Therefore attention needs to be paid as to how your brand is presented at the event, and how the event will best portray the values and personality of your brand. There are many studies about setting objectives and measuring how the objectives are met, but as those topics aren't the focal point of this study, less attention will be paid to them. According to an event study by Cavanaugh (1976, 101), one must consider six factors before setting any objectives: First, one must consider what the purpose of the event is. Second, one must define the target audience to be reached. Third, one must examine the value in the geographical location of the event, meaning whether it's better to organize a local event versus a nation-wide event. Fourth, one must make sure that there is a balance between efficiency/effectiveness. Fifth, one must examine how competitors deal with similar events. Lastly, one must consider the cost ratio per sales lead obtained.

### 2.4.2 *Designing the event*

As the objectives for the event have been determined, the second thing to consider is the form of the event. Some forms fit better with certain objectives than others, which should be kept in mind. Crowther discloses that for example when augmenting relationships with clients is the main objective, a workshop or hospitality event would work better compared to other event types. Once the form has been selected, it should be creatively customized to ensure a unique and memorable execution. Also, the end result will be more optimized when the event is tailored and integrated in other communicational methods and media. (Crowther 2010a, 376.) As the design of the event is not in the epicenter of this study, the topic is run through in a manner that offers a superficial look into the main themes of it.

As the form of the event has been selected, Crowther (2010a, 377) suggests that determining the invitees comes next. The researcher slightly disagrees on this one, as invitee selection needs to go hand in hand with the setting of the objectives of the event. How could you decide upon any objectives if you did not know your target group in the first place? Crowther (2010a, 377) adds, that the consumers of the event experience should be carefully selected, so as to target the messages to the ideal group of people.

Some researchers claim that coveted experiences can be designed and delivered in the same fashion such as products or services. According to Petterson and Getz (2009, 312) this is theoretically impossible, due to the personal and internal nature of experiences, and the difficulty of measuring them. This said, they add that there are some design principles that you can adhere to evoke specific effects in the attendees. (Petterson – Getz 2009, 312.)

Service marketing acknowledges the notion of *servicescape*, which entails the environmental aspects in commercial places that are under the control of the organizer. Experience-scapes are an evolution of servicescapes, and they can be described as the spaces where "experiences are staged and consumed". (Petterson – Getz 2009, 313.) Servicescapes or experience-scapes are formed by three factors: ambient conditions (such as temperature, lighting, noise etc.), spatial layout and functionality (machinery, equipment, spatial relationships etc.) and lastly, signs, symbols and artifacts (signage, furniture, artwork etc.) (Bitner 1992, 60).

Even before the terms service or experience-scapes were born, Kotler coined the term *atmospherics* to describe the "intentional control and manipulation of environmental cues". These cues can be divided into four parts: visual (color, brightness, size, shape), aural (volume, pitch), olfactory (scent, freshness) and tactile (softness, smoothness, temperature). (Nelson 2009, 121–123.)

Aesthetics are one of the main elements of an event. According to some researchers, extra attention should be paid to create unique and creative aesthetics, as generic events

often fail. Attractive amenities and a magnetic ambience should therefore be a priority for event marketers. This can be done for example by using the rituals and symbols of the host community and associating the festival design with visual graphics. (Aikaterini Manthiou et al. 2014, 29.) McLellan (2000, 62) states that the aesthetics are what "make your guests want to come in, sit down, and hang out". McLellan (2000, 62) encourages event designers to think about what they can do in terms of "making the environment more inviting, interesting, or comfortable".

### **2.4.3 *Delivery and evaluation of the event***

While the marketing space concept includes many phases that lead to the event, the event itself is considered the "core marketing space". The event is the one chance to "deliver a balanced event design that will facilitate the most favorable experience for the attendee". There are many things that affect the final outcome, like the design choices and the objectives set for the event. Crowther mentions that by manipulating certain design elements such as education, social and entertainment, one can optimize the event design. In the same breath Crowther adds, that not only content of the event should be considered, but also the "flow of activities". (Crowther 2010a, 377.)

Crowther maintains, that there are multiple different things one needs to coordinate in order to create an event that meets the objectives. The main components of the event are important, but also the secondary ones (like how the attendees are welcomed, and how their questions and concerns are taken care of) are also significant. A challenge with this is that there is also a vast group of people who affect the overall attendee experience that the organizer cannot fully control, like the cleaners and caterers and other event staff. (Crowther 2010a, 377–378.)

After the event is over, Crowther's model urges the marketer to connect the event 'episode' back into the company's marketing strategy. Crowther stresses that each event is individually valuable, but the best value is reached when all of the events are aligned with other company communications. Crowther adds, that the points of contact between events maintain and amplify the relationship between the company and the client, which is why feedback and analysis become fundamental. Crowther presents this as an opportunity to plan ahead a cohesive event 'episode' calendar that is integrated with other communicational activities, which allows for continual contact with the target audience. (Crowther 2010a, 378–379.)

Although Crowther's model offers a great contribution to event marketing research as it underlines the importance of connecting events to the company strategy, his research heavily focuses on the company side of event marketing. Even though Crowther successfully includes the attendee view in his model, he addresses the

attendee experience in his research papers only on a superficial level. To get a more well-rounded perspective into the world of events and the attendee event experience, one needs to examine what happens on the attendee's mind and how the attendee engages with the different elements the organizer has planned. This is where Gerritsen and van Olderen's model comes in to play.

### 3 EVENTS FROM AN ATTENDEE PERSPECTIVE

*People have a fundamental need to belong, which is equally valid in business context.*

(Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 201)

#### 3.1 Attendee experiences in the core of events

The essence of an event is that an experience is sought after, and unless it was designed, or at least facilitated, it wouldn't take place in daily life. There are many types of planned events created for multiple different reasons, but in each instance there is an intent to create, or at least shape the single and collective experiences of the participants. (Patterson – Getz 2013, 229.) The event experience and its meanings are at the core of event studies, hence forming the core phenomenon and defining the field of study (Getz 2007, 9). While researchers still struggle to find an all-encompassing definition for experience, according to Holbrook and Hirschman (1981), experience is a personal and emotional occurrence that happens when a person interacts with a stimulus coming from a product or brand. Thus, it could be summed that experiences always require participation from a person in order to occur, and they are internal to each person (Knutson – Beck 2004, 25). A Danish experience research report (Mehmetoglu – Engen 2011, 241) defines how an experience is born: “An experience arises in a relation or in a dialectical relation between subject and object, both of which will have an impact on what is experienced. An experience is something extraordinary and stands out from [merely] experiencing.”

Patterson and Getz (2013, 229) state that it is highly challenging to suggest a typology for experiences because they are inherently highly personal, and therefore not directly dependent upon the type or function of the event. Instead, it can be said that the organizer's value proposition will lead to certain events facilitating certain types of experiences. In this context, event organizers understand that they create either entertainment events or business events for quite different purposes, but they cannot dictate, and often cannot determine, what experiences their customers or guests actually acquire. (Patterson – Getz 2013, 229.)

The seeking of experiences can be primarily hedonic (pleasure seeking, consumption as an end in itself) or instrumental (rational, problem solving, need driven) or a combination of the two (Lofman 1991). Events have been studied in multiple different scientific fields, one of the biggest areas being leisure and tourism studies. Researchers assume that most events exist to offer leisure experiences through entertainment, hedonism, celebration, games, and self-development. These elements are believed to

belong to the leisure realm, but they can be (and are) utilized in business related events to add on the experience and make it more memorable. (Patterson – Getz 2013, 233.) Although business events are not usually planned as leisure experiences, some of them still provide elements of those, and organizers should work towards making them appealing and fulfilling (Patterson – Getz 2013, 237). The hyped up startup event Slush can be seen one of the prime examples of mixing business with leisure, from extravagant opening ceremonies, to talk show-like presentations, to massive festival-type after parties, the event is a two-day fun-fest for the startup audience (Slush.fi).

Researchers have recently argued that the event form and purpose are important, but that personal motivations for attending do not take away from the fact that all event organizers must attempt to understand the experiences of guests from a leisure perspective. Personal fulfilment and self-improvement are fundamental aspects even within business events. Many business events seek to base their allure both on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, given the necessity to engage attendees, entertain them, and satisfy self-development goals. The evident split between business and leisure events is rather shallow when it comes to the individual attendee and the social nature of all planned events. (Patterson – Getz 2013, 238.)

### 3.2 Dimensions of experiences

As experiences are intangible and challenging to summarize into an all-encompassing definition, a few different ways to approach them in terms of their dimensions have been identified. One way to observe experiences is through cognitive psychology where the focus is on the interaction between internal psychological configurations, like perceptions, emotions, and attitudes, and circumstantial influences that are part of one's social framework, like other people, norms, and the media (Patterson – Getz 2013, 233). Cognitive psychology identifies three dimensions to experiences: the conative, cognitive and affective (Mannel – Kleiber 1997<sup>7</sup>, according to Petterson – Getz 2009, 310; Patterson – Getz 2013, 233). The *conative* dimension of an experience illustrates actual behaviour, as in; the things people do. The *cognitive* dimension of an experience entails the “awareness, perception, memory, learning, judgment and understanding or making sense of the experience”. The *affective* dimension of an experience depicts feelings and emotions, preferences and values. When you describe an experience as enjoyable it reflects your emotions, whereas many social aspects of an experience reflect values.

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<sup>7</sup> Mannel, R. & Kleiber, D. (1997) *A Social Psychology of Leisure* (State College, PA: Venture Publishing Inc.).

Spending time with your friends can stem from your values of sharing and togetherness. (Getz 2007, 171; Petterson – Getz 2009, 310.)

According to Berry, Carbone and Haeckel (2002), an experience is formed by different “clues”. As a concept, clues are very similar, if not synonymous with touchpoints, and they are described as anything that can be perceived or sensed. Every part of the experience journey from the event venue to the personnel transmits clues to the attendee, each carrying a message to the attendee. These clues can be divided into two categories: *functional* clues and *emotional* clues. Functional clues, as the name suggests, are related to the actual functionality of the event. (Berry et al. 2002, 86.) When you enter an event space, is everything organized well enough for you to find where to go? Is the programme schedule holding? These touchpoints give you clues of the functionality of the event. On the other hand, emotional clues are related to emotions, and they can be emitted either by people or things. The smells, sounds, tastes, sights and textures of the event give off these clues. These two categories of clues are equally important in the formation of the experience, as they work in synergy. (Berry et al. 2002, 86.) O’Sullivan and Spangler (1998) see experiences as much more multifaceted constructs with different sides to them. According to them, experiences can be located along a continuum of real or virtual, novel or communal, mass-produced or customized, and interactivity or solitude.

In 1998, Pine and Gilmore introduced the term *experience economy* and presented their model, which embraces various types of experiences that can be employed, including *entertainment*, *educational*, *esthetic*, and *escapist*. Figure 4 shows the different realms of experience in this model. According to Pine and Gilmore’s model, experiences can be outlined across different dimensions. (McLellan 2000.)

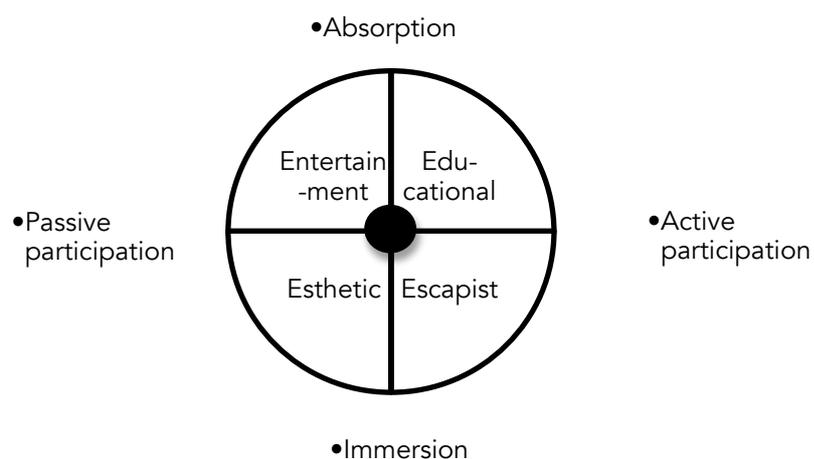


Figure 4 The four realms of an experience (Pine – Gilmore 1998, 102)

According to the model, an experience can be engaged on four dimensions; the type of participation and the type of connection or environmental relationship. The type of participation can be *active or passive*, and the connection can be either *external*, meaning you observe the experience from a distance, or *internal*, meaning you are in the experience, or perhaps even part of the experience. This means that the amount of different experiences within an event can be numerous. Picture yourself in a marathon. You can run the marathon, meaning you are active in terms of participation, and your participation plays a key role in the event that generates the experience. You could also just be a spectator and watch people run the marathon. In this scenario, you would be a passive observer, and your actions would not greatly affect the main experience of the event. It should be noted, though, that these people are not entirely passive participants, because their presence contributes to the visual and aural experience of others. (McLellan 2000, 61; Pine – Gilmore 1998, 101.)

Regarding one's connection to the experience, you can be either *external* to an event but *absorbed* by it, or *internal* and *immersed* in it. Imagine you are at an eGames event where you have the competitors immersed in the game experience through their Oculus Rift headset, whereas you watch and cheer for the competitors as an external observer. Or maybe you are attending a rock concert and managed to get to the front row, right in front of the stage, where you can get splashes of water from the main singer's water bottle on to you, or feel the bass palpitate through your whole body. Your friend, on the other hand, had to settle for a seat in the farthest corner of the concert hall, and she can't even see the band from afar. Your experiences can be very different from each other due to the level of immersion you two experienced during the event. (McLellan 2000; Pine – Gilmore 1998, 101–102.)

The combination of these two spectrums form the four realms of an experience: entertainment, education, escapism, and estheticism. The realms are “mutually compatible” and usually intertwined within an event. The things that people easily regard as *entertainment*, like watching movies from your laptop or attending a gig, produce usually experiences that require only passive participation. The connection to the event is also often based on absorption rather than immersion in this scenario. *Educational* events, like conferences or training sessions, are based on active participation, but do not necessarily facilitate immediate immersion in the event. *Escapist* experiences, on the other hand, can be entertaining or educational, but require greater attendee immersion to truly offer an escape from every-day life. Attending an interactive workshop or trying out falconry on a company off-site both require active participation and immersion in the experience. Lastly, an experience that requires little to no participation but is immersive in its kind, is called an *esthetic* one. Esthetic experiences could be attained e.g. by using virtual reality headset to watch the Google IO event streamed live, or watching beautiful pieces of art. (Pine – Gilmore 1998, 102.)

Pine and Gilmore stress that when designing an event that aims for a “rich, compelling, and engaging experience” for its attendees, one should aim for attaining all four realms in the experience. The experience encompassing all four realms is called the “sweet spot”. (McLellan 2000, 62; Pine – Gilmore 1998, 102.) In contrast to this point of view, researchers Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011, 253) state that it isn’t a confirmed truth that an event has to include elements from all of the four realms to be a “rich or compelling” experience. Some experiences only revolve around one realm, whereas most experiences have qualities of many of the realms. Pine and Gilmore emphasize, that the key is to find the best equilibrium between the elements. (McLellan 2000; Pine – Gilmore 1998.)

Compared to goods and services, experiences are intrinsically private and unique, “existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level”. Consequently, no one else can have the same experience as you, because each and every experience stem from the interaction between the event and the individual. (Pine – Gilmore 1998, 99.)

Practitioners are naturally interested in optimizing and improving event experiences for their attendees. Mossberg and Sundqvist (2003<sup>8</sup>; according to Mehmetoglu – Engen 2011, 241) suggest that an extraordinary experience is composed of: “1) an active, dynamic process; 2) a strong social dimension, which often accompanies this process; 3) the integration of the components of meaning and a sense of joy; 4) the involvement resulting from absorption and personal control; 5) a process that is dependent on the context and an uncertainty associated with something new; and 6) an experience always interwoven with life satisfaction.”

Wood and Masterman (2007) have also identified six factors that have been found to improve the event experience: *interaction* with people and the brand, *immersion* in the event, *intensity* of the experience, *individuality* and uniqueness of the occasion, *innovation* and creativity of the design, *integrity* and authenticity in terms of the value and benefits provided to the attendee. But is there such a thing as an optimal experience? The key concept in this regard is the “state of flow”, coined originally by Csikszentmihalyi in the 1970s. When a person is fully immersed in the experience with their attention completely engaged, it is considered an optimal, or peak experience. An optimal experience is reached when the level of challenge offered by the experience and the skill level of the attendee meet. This can lead to a situation where an event experience can be either stimulating, tedious or even frustrating for different attendees with different experience backgrounds. (Wood 2009, 250.)

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<sup>8</sup> Mossberg, L., – Sundqvist, A. A. (2003) *Att skapa upplevelser: från OK till WOW!*. Student literature.

This concept where the person's "internal state of arousal, activation, and preparedness to engage in a specific experience" meets with challenge at hand, is called personal relevance. Personal relevance plays a big role in the person's involvement with the experience, directly influencing the person's level of engagement. When one's self-image is built on consumption, personal relevance has a direct impact to the quality of the experience. Authenticating acts and authoritative performances are closely linked with the feeling of personal relevance. Activities that are considered to promote flow, peak experience, or peak performance may be experienced as authenticating. (Poulssoen – Kale 2004, 272.)

Researchers have also identified different levels of experiences based on their ability to make the event *memorable* in the minds of the attendees. Hover and van Mierlo (2006<sup>9</sup>, according to Getz 2007, 181) state that the first level is the *basal experience*, in which the attendee has an emotional reaction to stimulus, but the impact is insufficient to make the memory stay in the attendee's memory. The next level is called a *memorable experience*, where the emotion garnered in the event can be recalled at a later date. The highest level is *transforming experience*, where the experience was so earthmoving, that it results in durable changes in the attendee's attitude or behaviour. Getz stresses that in order for the experience to be profoundly memorable, there needs to be significance in additional surprise elements or sensory stimuli. Also, not all stimulating, highly emotional experiences transform the attendee, but merely reinforce the existing values and attitudes. (Getz 2007, 181.)

Some experiences can also be categorized as *superior*. Superior experiences are related to the core benefits desired by attendees. This means that minor service quality failures can be forgiven, if the major elements of event design are spot on. In fact, researchers Getz, O'Neil and Carlsen have found that the overall enjoyment outweighs any specific service quality failures when it comes to visitor satisfaction and future intentions. It has also been found that the attendee's expectations affect experiences. Unexpected positive occurrences make for the strongest positive experiences and utilizing them can potentially be a good way to exceed attendee expectations. (Pettersson – Getz 2009, 322.)

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<sup>9</sup> Hover, M. – Mierlo, van, J. (2006) *Imagine your event: Imagineering for the event industry*. Unpublished manuscript. Breda University of Applied Sciences and NHTV Expertise, Netherlands, Event Management Centre.

### 3.3 Attendee experience journey

As the marketing space frameworks presents, there are at least two sides to each event: the company's side and the attendee's side. In this sub-chapter, the attendee side is examined in more depth to gain understanding on how individual experiences are aligned with the wider attendee experience journey.

While an event has a beginning and an end, the *event experience* starts before the actual event, and it potentially never ends. Anticipating and reminiscing the event can be just as important as the event experience itself, if not even more meaningful. (Getz 2007, 20.) Also researchers Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015) stress that the attendee research should cover the attendee's whole event experience journey. From an attendee perspective, their values and motives form the basis and the starting point, but the consecutive phases before, during and after the event are crucial to the overall experience. Researchers suggest that the whole attendee journey should be investigated, starting from the attendee's values to the touchpoints he/she encountered before, at, and after the event, and ultimately stopping at the outcomes of the event. (Getz 2007; Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015.) In order to be able to create emotionally stimulating experiences – or in other words: memorable ones, the event organizer needs to know which touchpoints are most crucial in this respect (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015). Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015) talk about an "aggregate experience", which is virtually synonymous with "attendee experience journey" or "extended marketing space".

In Crowther's model the idea is similar to Gerritsen and van Olderen's and Getz's conclusions, but just explained in fewer words, as the main focus of his research is the company perspective. In Crowther's (2010a) marketing space model, pictured in Figure 5 below, an attendee possesses a unique experience journey that evolves through time as he/she engages with the organization.

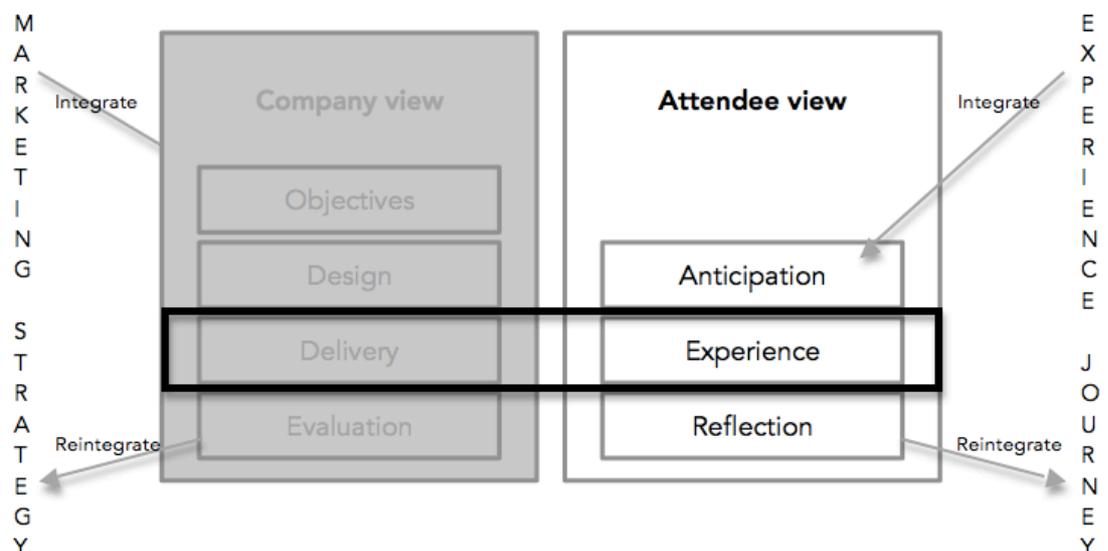


Figure 5 Marketing space: Attendee view (modified from Crowther 2010a, 374)

The attendee brings their previous experiences into the *anticipation* of the event, which is the first step in the attendee's event process. The process continues to the actual event *experience*. After the event is over, *reflection* takes place, and the experience is *reintegrated* back to the experience journey the attendee has with the company. The process goes full circle when the event experience in turn affects the expectations and emotions the attendee has towards the company. Looking at the event from an attendee's viewpoint, Crowther (2010a, 374) proposes that one can describe marketing space as "time out of time". Thus, a marketing space is an event where the attendee becomes more closely familiar with an organisation. Ideally, a marketing space will evoke feelings that have a positive impact on the existing perceptions the attendee has of the company. On the other hand, any negative feelings invoked within the marketing space could naturally be destructive to any existing perceptions. As Crowther (2010a, 374) describes it, marketing space is a place where the organisation is at its most vulnerable and exposed compared to any other medium of marketing communications. By examining the meanings that attendees attach to their experience, and whether the experience meets the needs of the attendee, valuable information can be attained. This way companies can create a set of touchpoints that meet or even exceed attendees' expectations and needs. When the meanings and values evoked by these touchpoints are in tune with the ones of the attendee, companies can create deep-seated, unique preference for a specific experience. (Berry – Carbone – Haeckel 2002, 85.)

*Antecedents* are "all those influences that shape interest in, demand for, choices, and actual event attendance or participation" (Getz 2007, 236). Before any event takes place, there are many things at play for the attendee. Attendees make their preparations for the event, and *anticipate* it in their own way. Most people attend an event having some expectations towards the event and the experience they will obtain or co-create. Much research has been carried out on motivation to attend events, and in most parts it confirms the seeking-escaping theory, which suggests that people without a doubt anticipate that an event is going to be exceptional. Even when the attendee has no expectations whatsoever, there still is the 'entering into' events moment that represents a transition from ordinary to extraordinary. (Getz 2007, 180.) *Generic experiences*, on the other hand, are something that can happen at any event, which means they have more to do with the attendees' frame of mind and specific conditions than with for example the event theme or programme. According to Petterson and Getz, "many people attend events for generic personal benefits such as entertainment and simple diversion". (Petterson – Getz 2009, 312.)

After the anticipation phase comes the actual event. When an attendee enters the event, they embark on a journey, encountering different touchpoints along the way.

Each visitor will react differently to these touchpoints, and therefore their experience of them will be inherently different. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015.) *Touchpoints* are the points of contact or interaction between an attendee and a company, and they can affect the perception, satisfaction and loyalty towards an organization (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 197–198). These points of contact should be made more diverse, stimulate the senses of the attendee, evoke emotions and create memorable experiences, and most importantly – be value oriented and cohesive. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 217.) Researchers stress that each and every touchpoint is important and should be taken into consideration when planning events. Knowing your attendee and their psychosocial processes can help planning an optimal experience for them and achieving the strategic goals set for the event. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 197; 198.)

Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015) present a model (Figure 6) that shows how value is created between the organization’s staged experience and the attendee’s actual experience. These two aspects are on the opposite ends of the spectrum, and what distinguishes the two from each other depends on who the main creator of value is. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 52.)

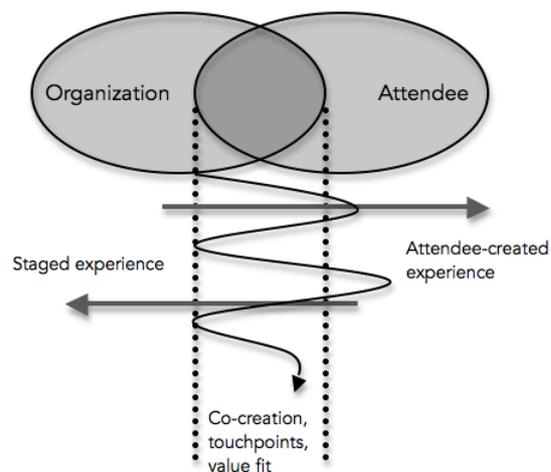


Figure 6 Staged versus attendee-created experience (modified from Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 52)

Values are a critical part of our cognitive system in deciding what we expect from things or other people, and what we hold important for ourselves. Our values have an impact on how we think, act, and handle information. Also how we collect, store and use information is based on our values. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 171.)

Put roughly, seminars could be seen as events that garner staged experiences, because they are largely put together and controlled by the organization, whereas workshops could be seen as events that foster attendee-created experiences because they usu-

ally involve active participation from the attendee. The co-creation of value occurs in the intersection of these two aspects. Co-creation happens when the attendee engages with the event touchpoints the organization has designed (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 52). In reality, the line between attendee-created and company-created value is blurred, and the value is born in the interaction between these two entities (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 201). The arrows in the model represent the fluctuating nature of the value creation process, where there is pull from both sides of the spectrum.

From an attendee point of view, values and motives are the starting point, but also pre-, during and post-event exposure is crucial to the attendee's aggregate experience journey. Which touchpoints then contribute to the formation of meaningful moments differs by each attendee based on the importance and meaning the attendee gives to these touchpoints. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 53.) Not all design choices bring additional value to the attendee, so it should be carefully figured out which ones do (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 206). The optimal experience occurs when the values of the attendee and the company are mostly in tune (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 203).

Gerritsen and van Olderen categorize touchpoints into two groups: *satisfiers* and *dissatisfiers*. *Satisfiers* are the good touchpoints that positively surprise the attendee, or otherwise exceed their expectations. *Dissatisfiers*, on the other hand, are touchpoints that need to meet the expectations of the attendee, or otherwise the experience of the said touchpoint will be negative. Dissatisfiers do not bring any added value to the overall event experience even if the encounter is positive, but if it is negative, it can affect the whole event experience. Experiences are more memorable if the event follows the structure of a story. There's an introduction, tension building phase, a moment of climax, and a descent back to reality. Usually the descent back to reality, to the post-event phase, is most neglected by the organizer, when indeed the last memory of the event is usually the one that sticks with the attendee and affects the overall experience. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 207–209.)

After the event is over, the attendee is “reversed” into normal life, accompanied by a sense of change, of going back from remarkable to usual. The feelings that come with going back to everyday life can entail those of accomplishment, renewal, transformation, relief, or even loss. Getz (2007, 180) stresses, that it is essential to feel something at the end of an event, otherwise the experience was not memorable or special. When attendees feel loss or sadness after events, it is usually due to the loss of social interaction. Anyone who is highly involved in the event, or emotionally moved by it will experience these feelings of loss. The sadness usually leads to the drive to attend future events, therefore being precious commodity to event marketers. (Getz 2007, 180.) Attendee satisfaction is central to all event evaluations, because events are always about the experiences that people have. Importantly, self-development through learning, meeting and sharing with people, meeting challenges, and gaining in self-

confidence or esteem, are common outcomes for business events. (Patterson – Getz 2013, 230.)

In Figure 7 below is the synthesis of all of the abovementioned models of experience. The black dots in the intersection of attendee and company created value, are the touchpoints. Within these touchpoints, in each of them there is the notion of the four realms of an experience.

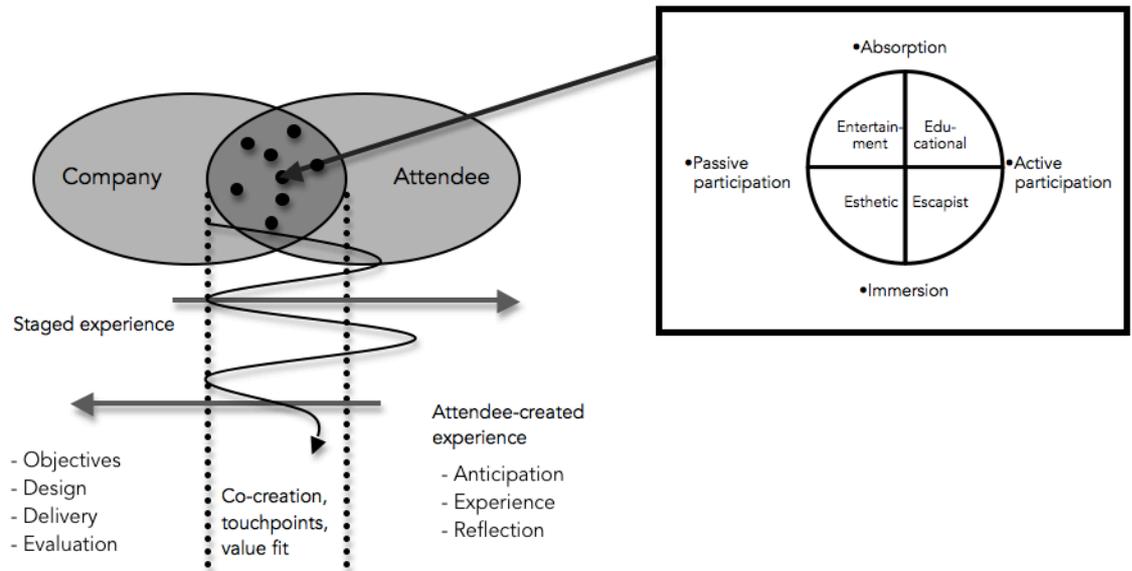


Figure 7 Synthesis of staged versus attendee-created experience, and the four realms of an experience (modified from Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015, 52; Pine – Gilmore 1998, 102)

To sum it up, in this study, it is considered that the attendee experience is ultimately born when an individual, who has their own experience background and values, engages with the different pre-, during- and post-event touchpoints. Each attendee reacts to and engages with different touchpoints depending on their background, personality and values, making everyone's experience different from each other. The level of participation and engagement the attendee has with the touchpoints affects what realms are activated in their event experience.

## 4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

This study aims to deepen the understanding of the subjective attendee experiences in a corporate event, which calls for a *qualitative research approach*. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 2), qualitative research is multimethod by nature and it approaches its research topics in an interpretive manner. Qualitative research studies "things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them". This requires the collection of a range of empirical data that portray "routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals' lives". (Denzin – Lincoln 1994, 2<sup>10</sup>, according to Pinnegar – Daynes 2012, 2.) The objective of qualitative research is to depict the real life in all its diversity, as comprehensibly as possible (Hirsjärvi – Remes – Sajavaara 1997, 152).

The experiential character of events makes the pursuit of a single knowable reality problematic (Crowther – Bostock – Perry 2015, 98). Researchers endorse the need for more studies related to experiences within a qualitative research approach, since it will help to broaden the knowledge base and develop theory forward in the events literature (Holloway – Brown – Shipway 2010, 75). Events also demand the adoption of an assortment of research methods to disclose a more comprehensive picture. This not only improves the reliability of the findings but also uncovers alternative views and deeper information (Crowther et al. 2015, 103).

*Narrative research methods* are gaining more and more traction among business researchers (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 3). "The purpose of narrative research is not to produce one definite truth about something that is 'out there', but to offer one version of it, told by somebody from a specific point of view." (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 17). Stories are richer, more captivating and easier to remember than non-narrative texts, and they offer context to things. People use stories to communicate with one another, and explain and understand the world around them. In this regard, "stories and narratives are always about human action and experience". Narrative research is interested in analyzing individual, organizational and cultural narratives, and the use of narrative inquiry as a methodological approach. (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 2.) Researchers define a narrative as someone telling someone else that something happened. And this happens for some reason and in a certain situation (Hyvärinen 2007, 448).

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<sup>10</sup> Denzin, N. – Lincoln, Y. (1994) *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications, University of Michigan.

## 4.1 Research approach, data collection, and analysis

To best meet the research objective and answer the research questions, this study was conducted as a *single-case study* and the primary data collection methods were a *narrative interview* and *observation*. The *case study approach* was chosen to be able to get a comprehensive picture of the event experiences at hand. Case study research focuses on a single event, confined entirety, or an individual by using diverse data collected on different methods. Case study research aims to investigate, depict and explain cases by answering questions of “how” and “why”. Usually case study research is conducted when the interest is on the processes behind a particular case, event, situation, or a group of cases. When individual cases are being studied, the focus is on investigating them in their natural habitat by describing the phenomenon elaborately. (Saaranen-Kauppinen – Puusniikka 2006.) In this case, the particular event was chosen to be the setting for the study because it offered a great platform to get a first-hand look into the event experience as a whole, both from the company side and attendee side.

The research was conducted in parallel with planning and organizing the event, as the researcher was also one of the organizers of the event. This means that the event objectives and plans were informed by event experience theory to a certain extent. Especially Pine and Gilmore’s four realms of an experience were part of the setting of the event objectives. Some of the theory was introduced to the researcher after the event, which has offered the research more depth. The event itself consists of two parts: seminar in the morning and workshop in the afternoon.

The empirical data was collected using two methods: *narrative interviews* and *participant observation*. The following sub-chapters will present these data collection methods in more detail, starting from the interviews, and then moving onto the observation, and lastly discussing how the data was analyzed.

### 4.1.1 Narrative interviews

This research aims to seek more clarity on the event experiences of B2B clients in the relationship-marketing context. In order to fulfill this goal, the interviewees would specifically have to be clients of the organizing company. The interviewees were selected via a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is a technique in which the researcher chooses the interviewees by his/her own judgment (Saaranen-Kauppinen – Puusniikka 2006). Purposive sampling method is a basic concept within qualitative research, and it usually results in a small sample size (Eskola – Suoranta 1998).

The inclusion criteria for the sample were that all respondents should be clients of the company in question and that they had responded to the event feedback survey that

was sent to all of the attendees after the event. These criteria were set in place because it was assumed by the researcher that people who answered the survey would be more willing to be interviewed as well. Also, it was first concluded that the feedback survey could offer a more holistic view to the overall experience among the attendees and thus potentially act as a basis for the interviews. In addition, since the event was split in two parts, the researcher wanted to hear the attendee experiences on both of the parts, and the survey helped to reveal who actually stayed for the workshop in the afternoon. It was decided that in case the primary targets (clients of the company who organized the event) could not be reached for an interview, then the researcher would move onto contacting other clients who attended but did not fill in the survey. Why was it then decided that mainly clients of the company would be the main target group for the study? The researcher specifically aimed to focus on the clients' experiences, as they are the main target group for the company.

Eventbrite, a tool for event organizers, was used for the registration at the event to keep track of the amount of people who showed up. According to the registration data, there were 117 attendees altogether at the event, 36 of which were clients of the company. Of those 36 clients, 10 (28%) were men and 26 (72%) were women. Majority of the clients (22 clients) had signed up for both parts of the event, the seminar and the workshop, but the registration data does not show how many of them actually stayed for the whole day.

38 attendees answered the feedback survey, at least 16 of which were identifiably clients of the company (because they answered in the survey that they had received an invitation, and only clients received direct invitations to this particular event). 11 of the clients answered the survey with their email addresses (in the form "firstname.lastname@company.com"), while the remainder of them chose to remain anonymous. At this point, these 11 identified respondents served as the main target group for the study. Ultimately, it was found that all of the identified client respondents rated their overall experience either 4/5 or 5/5, which rendered the feedback survey slightly useless in the sampling process, as it did not offer any major points of difference to grab onto. As a result, the sampling method was pivoted to *convenience sampling*, which means that the participants are selected due to their ease of availability (Saumure – Given 2008, 2).

After seeing that the survey offered no real points of difference between the survey respondents, the initial 11 identified respondents were partially dropped from the pedestal, and 10 interview requests were sent to randomly selected clients who had attended the event. Ultimately four of the contacted clients responded and agreed to be interviewed. In addition, one of the contacted attendees responded, but did not want to be interviewed because they felt like they did not have enough to tell since they only attended the event so briefly. One of the respondents wanted to remain anonymous, so it

was decided that all of the interviewees would be kept anonymous in this study, since presenting their names and companies would not bring any additional value to the study.

The

Table 1 below shows that the interviews were conducted in October some weeks after the event.

Table 1 Summary of general information of the interviews

Inter- viewee	Gender	Date of the interview (days passed after event)	Length of the interview (mins)	Attendance in the event (seminar/workshop/both)
A	Female	Mon 03.10.2016 (18d)	42	Seminar
B	Female	Tue 04.10.2016 (19d)	44	Seminar & workshop
C	Male	Thu 06.10.2016 (21d)	32	Seminar
D	Female	Thu 13.10.2016 (29d)	34	Seminar

As can be seen from Table 1, three of the interviewees only attended the seminar part of the event, and only one of them attended both the seminar and workshop. Also, three out of the four interviewees were female.

*Narrative interviews* were conducted to gather the primary data for the research. *Narrative interviewing* is about producing stories, which entails being observant and taking note of the smallest of stories that people tell spontaneously in the interviews. It also demands the interviewer to activate the interviewee to produce these narratives, or even be a co-constructor of them. In a narrative interview, there are no prior hypotheses to be tested, and the participant is motivated to talk freely and candidly. The interviewee is allowed to tell their story from their own perspective in their own words and style of expression. In narrative interviewing there are no predefined lists of interview questions, or structured interview agenda. (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 8.) This means that the interviewer needs to steer the discussion appropriately, which makes this interview type more demanding compared to structured interviews (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997, 198). A narrative interview can also be conversational, in which case the interviewer takes part in the discussion and shares their story on the subject matter. It is important to ask interview questions “without defining the content of what the storytelling should be about and let the participant decide on that.” (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 8–9.)

An open-ended interview was chosen because it resembles most like an actual conversation between individuals, which is preferred in order to achieve the free flow of narrative storytelling from the respondent. In an open-ended interview, the interviewer

and the interviewee discuss a certain topic, but often the exact same topics are not discussed in all interviews. (Eskola – Suoranta 1998.) The interview questions were divided into two main parts: questions regarding the background of the client, and questions regarding the actual event experience. The interviewees were encouraged to be open and answer as lengthily as they felt comfortable. It was emphasized that this research is based on the stories of the interviewees, and that they could be as wordy as they wanted and steer the interview into any direction they wished. It was also emphasized that the interviewees could describe their experiences as vividly as they wanted to. The interviewer asked additional follow-up questions to encourage the interviewee to tell more when they felt like they ran out of things to tell. Interviewees were also encouraged to express how they felt, what they did, and what they thought at any meaningful moments during the event.

To ensure that the data collection methods, especially the interviews, would comply with the research objective, the research questions were first divided into three parts according to their theme and then operationalized into more practical action points, as can be seen from the Table 2 below.

Table 2 The operationalization of the research objective

Research objective	Research questions	Theoretical frame	Interview question / Observation
How the clients of a B2B company experience corporate events, and how the experience meets the marketer's goals.	What does the client's event experience comprise of	Attendee side of the marketing space framework (anticipation, experience, reflection) => Attendee experience journey touchpoints => Dimensions of experience: <i>entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist</i>	Describe your experience throughout the event, as if you would tell a story about it. You may start the story from a part that you feel necessary. Describe your experience using vivid language on your feelings, sensations, thoughts, and actions during the event.
	What kind of impact can an event experience have on a client	Conative, cognitive, and affective dimensions of experience	What kind of an impact did the event have on you? (On your thoughts, emotions, actions)
	How are the event goals met when compared to the actual attendee event experience	Marketing space framework: Company objectives vs. Attendee event experience	Observation: the researcher collected data of the company objectives and other organizational details by participational observation.

The first part of the research examines the attendee event experience, as it aims to uncover what kind of elements emerge from the attendee narratives. The second part is

concerned about potential impacts of the event experience on the attendee. The third part aims to reflect whether the objectives that the organizer placed on the event were actually realized in the subjective experiences of the attendees. The first two research questions were incorporated into the interviews, whereas the third one was answered by analyzing between the researchers own information gathered by observation and the attendee interviews.

Questions regarding the background of the attendee were following:

- *Tell me about yourself and what you do at your company.*
- *Tell me about the relationship between you and Frantic.*

These questions were aimed to open up the interview and give context to the event experience narrative. These questions were also aimed at figuring out how closely the client has been doing business with the company and whether he or she has previous experience on the event concept in question.

Questions regarding the actual event experience:

- *Describe your experience throughout the event. Describe your experience using vivid language on your feelings, sensations, thoughts, and doings during the event.*

As this question is very broad, it was first feared that it might lead to very generic and short answers such as “the event was nice and the day went by quickly”. Although all stories are valuable in narrative interviews, additional questions would be asked in hopes to bring more depth to the narrative (like “describe the moment you stepped inside the venue”) in case the researcher noticed that the story did not formulate naturally. The interview was aimed to collect the whole event experience from start to finish in order to get the most vivid picture of the experience.

Question regarding the potential effects of the event:

- *What kind of effect did this event have on you?*

This question was aimed to address the second research question directly.

Additional questions to be asked in case there was extra time:

- *What was the most memorable moment of the event?*
- *How do you feel about B2B events in general?*
- *What expectations do you have towards B2B events in terms of the value you get from attending them?*

These additional questions would only provide more general information and insight on the client and the way he or she feels about events.

### 4.1.2 *Participant observation*

The researcher transcribed the objectives of the event and background information of the organizing company based on observational secondary data gathered throughout the years and during the event planning process. As the researcher was employee of the organizing company, the observation that took place was participant by nature. *Participant observation* is a "process of registering, interpreting, and recording" (Schwartz – Green Schwartz 1955, 343), and it requires that "the researcher becomes a participant in the culture or context being observed" (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011). The observation was unstructured, unrecorded, and it happened in natural settings throughout a longer period of time (i.e. over the course of the employment of the researcher), like in meetings and other – both formal and casual – company gatherings where knowledge was exchanged. The level of observation was *complete*, meaning the researcher was already a member of the population that is studied (for the company perspective part) to begin with. The more the researcher is familiar with the subject, the more difficult it is to study the topic and remain objective. (Spradley 2016, 61–63.)

The company level strategies, event objectives, company background information, and further event design choices gathered through observation are presented in chapter 5.1.

The researcher thought that it would have been more ideal to set up in-house interviews to collect the company-side data from the CEO or other colleagues, but due to time constraints, it was decided to utilize the researcher's own cumulated observed information as a source instead. As the experiences of the attendees are main focal point of the study, the decision was easy to make. To make sure that the information on the company was accurate, the CEO of the company read the thesis and validated the information, which added to the reliability of the information.

### 4.1.3 *The analysis*

As this study is based on a case study on a specific event, there are some underlying principles and practices to analyzing the data gathered from the case. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011, 130), any case study usually begins with an analysis on individual cases, which is called *within-case analysis*. The event in question offers the main setting for the study, and the client experience narratives that were born in the event are the individual cases. The clients' interviews were first transcribed one by one, after which the analysis part took place. The transcripts were edited into a story format to create a more chronological and story-like narrative. Other than editing the chronological order and structure of the text, the clients' experience descriptions have not been

altered. The interviews were conducted in Finnish, and the interview transcripts were then translated into English. The quotes and descriptions were translated to be as verbatim as possible. Some of the direct quotations may not be completely word-for-word due to the differences between the languages, but the translations were made with accuracy and correspondence in mind.

The *analysis of narratives* is an analysis method where the researcher first collects stories from people, and then uses one or more techniques to analyze "plots, narrative structures, or story types" found within them (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 9). One can analyze narratives in many different ways from multiple different perspectives. In this study, the *content and meaning* of the narrative will be in the core of the analysis. In this case, we address the question of "what is told", and utilize thematic analysis as a technique. In thematic analysis, themes are formed by concepts, trends, ideas or distinctions that emerge from the data. Thematic analysis can be executed either by examining empirical data for themes and then come up with a storyline to fuse the themes into meaningful stories, or by examining the narratives as they are told by other actors to find similarities, or themes, between the stories. In this study, the latter technique will be taken into use. (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 11.)

To better analyze the experience journey of the attendees, it was then necessary to go through all of the touchpoints the clients encountered. In order to do this, the interviews were gone through rigorously, and all of the touchpoints they mentioned from the pre-during- and post-event phases were written down to an Excel sheet. Also when applicable, the feelings or other thoughts the clients had on any specific touchpoints were also marked down next to each touchpoint to gather more data on the importance and meaning of the touchpoints. The interviewees did not specify their emotions or thoughts on every touchpoint they faced. In these cases, the specification could not be done. After marking the touchpoints down, the clients' touchpoints were then compared to one another to discover differences and similarities by *cross-case analysis* (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 130). It must be noted that since the data collection was not executed via a quantitative method, where the moods and priorities could have been systematically measured in each touchpoint, the amount of the touchpoints and the meanings attached to them are not exact, but they still offer a good base for analysis and comparison as they reveal the touchpoints that were most prevalent in the minds of the clients.

## **4.2 Research reliability and validity**

Concepts used to evaluate the trustworthiness of a research, such as reliability and validity, are mainly based on statistical attributes used in natural sciences. In human sciences, on the other hand, the basic tenet of evaluating reliability of a study relies on the

correspondence of the basic structure of the studied phenomenon and the research method. (Perttula 1995, 39.) In other words, if the research method is compatible with the phenomenon that is under investigation, the reliability of the study increases. Perttula (1995, 39) continues, that this compatibility can be reached when the researcher makes visible his or her perceptions of the phenomenon before entering into the empirical research phase, and thus understands better which method suits the research best.

In this particular research, the phenomenon (event experience) was first studied on theoretical level, which aided the selection of a suitable method. Narrative research method was found to be best equipped for this study, because it is especially designed to surface personal stories of people's subjective experiences, and it allows people to reminisce an experience after it has happened. Some researchers suggest that other qualitative data collection methods such as ethnography (Holloway – Brown – Shipway 2010) or experiential sampling (Getz 2007) would be more suitable for deepening the understanding of an experience. Yet, the realities of this study ruled these methods out, as the researcher had to work in the event, and consequently had no chance to be heavily engaged in a research process during the event.

Also Eriksson and Kovalainen (2011) state that in narrative research the truth is interpreted, which means that not one narrative of an event is alike. Hence, the evaluation criteria of natural sciences research cannot be used as is (Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 16). More apt criteria for evaluating reliability of qualitative studies can be found in the following paragraphs. In these criteria, the emphasis is on the research process as a whole and the importance of the analysis on the basic structure of the phenomenon. (Perttula 1995, 42.) First, it's important that *the research process is consistent and interpretations are coherent*. There needs to be a logical connection between all of steps in the process: the basic structure of the phenomenon, data collection method, theoretical approach, analysis method and the reporting method. (Perttula 1995, 42; Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011, 16; Riessman 1993.) Second, the researcher should be able to justify all of his or her decisions in every step of the research, and *reflect the process* to give the reader a fair chance to perceive the study in its entirety (Perttula 1995, 42). Riessman (1993), one of the pioneers of narrative research, calls this assessment of the persuasiveness of the study, where the reader assesses whether the interpretation of the study is rational and convincing. In this study, the notion of self-reflection and the assessment of the role of the researcher has indeed been practiced during the research process, and openly disclosed for the reader to decide upon. Third, the *research process should remain data centered*, meaning that data is the most essential part of the study, and that the process should follow the data and not the other way around. (Perttula 1995, 42.) While this research has been very theory-heavy from the start, the interview questions were designed to be as open as possible so as not to limit the gathering of the

data. The real issue was the applicability of the theory that was chosen as the source of analysis, as Pine and Gilmore's model was not the best fit for this study.

The narrative interview method proved to be more challenging to execute properly in practice than expected due to its level of difficulty. As stated by researchers (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997; Eriksson – Kovalainen 2011), this interview technique demands more skills and experience from its user, and for that reason the principles of narrative interviewing may have not actualized as planned. The interviews were not as lengthy and in-depth as the researcher would have hoped. The brevity of the interviews was caused by the inexperience of the researcher, as more valid information could have been attained if the researcher had been more careful and patient.

The interviews were organized nearly a month after the event. While this may sound like a big delay for the recollection of the experience, it does not pose a real problem for this study, since it has been found that the more vividly a person can remember an experience after it has happened, the more likely it has made an impact on them (Aikaterini Manthiou et al. 2012). This means that the observations that the interviewees share with the interviewer are those with the most potency.

As mentioned before, event research is a labyrinthine and motley mix of different fields, which leads to a diverse set of studies looking at event experiences from different and sometimes very specific angles (like tourism or sponsorship studies conducted via quantitative methods) that do not necessarily aid in forming the bigger picture of event experience studies. This has led the researcher to rely on a few specific researchers (like Crowther, Getz and Gerritsen and van Olderen) when assembling the theory base to create more clarity amidst the confusion.

Lastly, *the accountability of the researcher* and *the subjectivity of the research* must be taken into consideration. The researcher must conduct all of the research procedures systematically, but he or she cannot convey all investigational details in a fashion that another human being could construct the research in the exact same form. Hence, the accountability of the researcher is a substantial part of the reliability of the research. Only the researcher can fully assess the level of their accountability. Also, the researcher is considered as a conscious being and thus a subject of his or her research. (Perttula 1995, 43.) Objectivity cannot be fully obtained in qualitative research, since the researcher and the subject of research are seamlessly intertwined in the process (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997, 152). Consequently, the researcher must analyze and report on the meaning their subjectivity has on each part of the study (Perttula 1995, 43). In this regard it should be noted that the contents of the chapter 5.1 are purely based on the researcher's own observations and accumulated information on the company and the event in question. The researcher has also organized the event and set the objectives for it, thus being the only source for information on the company-side. To ensure information validity and reliability in the absence of external sources, the researcher asked the

CEO of the company to review the information afterwards, who then validated the accuracy of the information.

The researcher had to rely on some second-hand sources in the theory section on a couple of occasions. Firstly, this was due to the fact that the access to the original source of information was limited or non-existent. This was the case especially with some books, that could not be found in any libraries, and a few articles that were not available online at all. Second, much of the previous research in the realm of event marketing and experiences has been conducted in Germany, Netherlands or Sweden, consequently meaning that some of the study papers have been written in respective languages. This generates major limitations to the interpretation of the source material, resulting in having to rely solely on the interpretation of the second-hand source in a few of the instances.

It must be kept in mind that the empirical results of the research could be affected by the nature of the relationship between the company and interviewees. As the interviewees were clients of the company who organized the event, and the interviewer works for the company who organized the event, it could inhibit them from expressing their true feelings and experiences. To minimize the potential effects of this aspect, the interviewees were offered an opportunity to remain anonymous. Only one of the interviewees chose to be anonymous.

## **5 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

This part of the study will strive to answer the research questions one by one by digging into the empirical data. In chapter 5.1 we'll go through the company side of the event by presenting the background information on the company, the objectives set for the event, and the design choices made to orchestrate a staged experience. In chapter 5.2, we will go through what the clients' event experience comprises of, and what kind of impacts the event experience had on the client. Finally, we'll connect the two perspectives to see how the goals set for the event were achieved when compared to the actual attendee experiences.

### **5.1 Company perspective: Case Frantic Future Day**

This study is focused on the fifth installation of event Frantic Future Day, which took place in September 15<sup>th</sup> 2016 in Helsinki. Frantic Future Day is an annual event organized by a Finnish digital agency called Frantic. The event has been organized since 2013, and its main target group has always been the clients of the company. Yet, the event has always attracted attendees from many other stakeholder groups as well, such as competitors, industry peers, and ex-employees. The previous Future Day events were designed to be about inspirational future-oriented content combined with practical tips of the trade, rather than about heavy sales talk. The event is, and always has been, free of charge for its attendees. The first event was organized at a local arts center, and ever since the event has been held at the same location. What's special about the location is the fact that it is an old tram depot that was renovated into a cultural meeting point, and it boasts numerous private and open to the public events annually. (About Korjaamo.) The event could be considered as a small-size conference. The event consists of two parts: a seminar in the morning, and an interactive workshop in the afternoon. Conferences are constructed around educational content and discussion that serves to inform and enlighten attendees, and they are often seen as ideal places to network and share ideas (Allen 2008, 17).

Frantic, the company organizing the event is a privately held company that offers its services within web design and development to other organizations. The company started out in mid 90s as a small out-of-garage business founded by a group of friends who wanted to make the internet a better place. At the time of writing this thesis, the company has over 85 employees, and its clients range from multi-million conglomerates to national charity organizations. The company has grown immensely during the past few years, but the organization itself has not changed much in its ways of operating. The board of directors of the company had not communicated any major guiding

strategies for the company in the near history, but as the competitive landscape in Finland got more and more challenging in 2010s, the need to change the positioning of the company came up.

At the time of the event, the company had a marketing department of two marketers, who had the main responsibility of conducting the marketing strategy derived from company level strategy. Marketing department is also the sole organizer of the event. What's particularly interesting about the case event is that this is the first Future Day event where goals are put into place, and real strategic value is expected. Previously the company saw no marketing strategy conducted or written down, therefore the events had not been tied into any specific set of goals.

Previously, the market where the company operated was relatively big and regardless of a vast group of competitors, the piece of the cake was big enough to be profitable for multiple agencies. Some of the projects could be worth somewhere around tens of thousands euros for a basic website renewal. The market had changed drastically even during the past couple of years, and now similar projects were worth only 10 000 to 20 000 euros. The wave of digitalisation was building up, as more and more companies were facing deteriorating market shares due to new competition entering the market with better customer experience and better value for the customers. Especially media companies and larger companies in older industries struggled to keep up with the ever-changing business environment accelerated by the digitalisation of once stable markets due to their sluggish size and inability to react promptly. There was a real need for strategic digital services that would help companies and organizations either to stay in business or completely transform their business by utilizing service design and other methods that increase the understanding of the ever-changing environment. Frantic did not yet have this kind of offering, which meant that a change was needed.

The situation demanded a new strategic outlook if the company was to endure the ever increasing competition it faced from all directions. In 2015, the company CEO presented the new positioning statement for the company. The company was to move upwards in the value chain, striving to become a more strategic partner to its clients. The aim was to move away from the non-profitable, and often one-time project business into a model where the company has fewer, but bigger and longer-term clients. These clients were to be carefully selected to represent as many business opportunities for the company as possible in the long run. This sentiment serves as a basis for the objectives set for the relationship marketing principles.

The change of positioning was put into action firstly via numerous recruitments in the fields that the company was lacking. Also the existing organizational structures were shuffled accordingly to suit the new strategic vision. The most visible change would happen in the marketing department, as external communications would be the first thing the external stakeholders saw. New messages needed to be formulated and

communicated in order to convey the right kind of image of the renewed strategy. The finalization of the brand renewal was still in progress in fall 2016, making the event one of the first brand communications activities embodying the elements of the new brand. It was also an acid test for the new visual brand, and it would remain to be seen what kind of response it would get from the attendees, and most importantly, the clients of the company.

### 5.1.1 Objectives of the event

As the new company strategy was largely about nurturing the relationships with existing clients and conveying a role of a strategic partner, every communicational endeavour of the company would have to support this vision. The characteristics of events suit the purpose above and beyond. Thus, the absolute *primary objective* of the event was to deepen the relationship with the clients. This objective was hoped to be achieved by creating an event that generates *memorable experiences* that consist of *emotional stimulation, inspiration, new information, and entertainment*.

Looking through the lense of Pine and Gilmore’s dimensions of experience, this particular craved-after experience was hoped to contain all of the elements of the model – hence hitting the “sweet spot” (depicted with a black dot below in Figure 8).

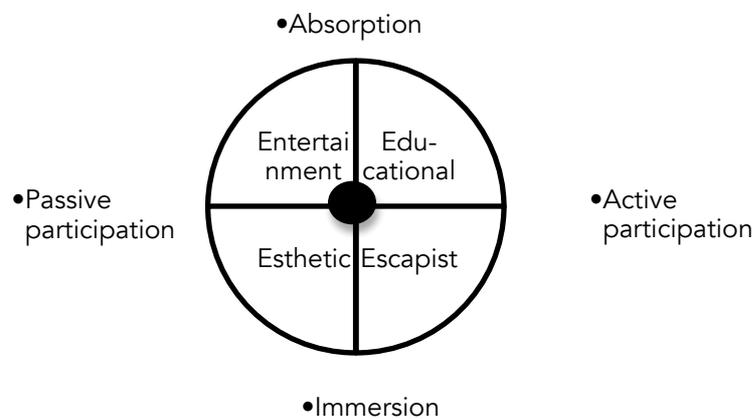


Figure 8 Primary objectives of the case event in the context of Pine and Gilmore’s model

In this case, it would be then ideal if all of the attendees described their experience with all of the elements in the model. Even though the sweet spot is not unanimously considered as the measure of ultimate experience (as was found in the theory section), it still contained a solid enough basis to facilitate a well-rounded experience that the marketer (aka. the researcher) of the event decided to include all of the elements as an

objective for the desired event experience. As the main target is to deepen the relationship with the clients, the amount and depth of social aspect or social interaction would also naturally be a factor in determining whether the event is successful. Pine and Gilmore's model, as iconic it may be, does not take into consideration the social aspect of an experience in the context of an event, among other aspects, so the objectives were supplemented by adhering to additional best practices of an ultimate event experience based on the theory review gone through in chapter 3.

The *secondary objective* was to change the company image to fit the new positioning of the company and differentiate them from the competition. The desired qualities the company wanted people to associate with it after this event are *quality of delivery, professionalism, credibility, meaningfulness and strategic value*. These qualities were then inserted into every aspect possible when designing the event elements from start to finish.

### **5.1.2 Design of the event**

A set of design choices were made to support the fulfillment of the aforementioned objectives. Firstly, the underlying theme for the design of the event was the aspect of *humanizing technology*, and additionally *facilitating learning*. These themes were selected as a result of a back-and-forth ideation process, where it was discovered that these topics were different from the ongoing discussion within the industry at the time. Much of the discussion was very technology-based and one-sided, so this theme where technology and its impacts on humans (and vice versa) was examined on a deeper level seemed to fill a topical void in that sense. The selection of the themes supported the objectives of the event, as they offered differentiation from the competition. These themes were not planned to be visible merely in the content and program of the event, but they were actually set to be the guiding principles of each part of the design of the event. This was considered to offer more depth to the event, as the company would actually 'practice what it preaches' instead of just creating a basic event and slamming on a title and list of speakers.

After the themes were set in place, the selection of the *event format* was made based on a choice that would serve best these themes. It was decided that the event will consist of a seminar and a workshop. The event would start off with a seminar in the morning, and continue with a workshop in the afternoon. This offered the attendees a chance to choose their level of participation to be either half a day or a full day, and between low-engagement or high-engagement. The seminar was planned to contain elements of inspirational, informational and entertaining content and the required participation level from the attendee would be rather low. The workshop, on the other hand, was designed

not only to be informative, but also give the attendees an opportunity to engage with the content on a higher level.

The *duration of the programme* and speeches was also planned accordingly to assure that the attendees would be able to focus throughout the talks, as suggested by Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015). The talks were designed to be 20 minutes each, after which there would be a 10-minute panel discussion on the subject. Anything shorter than 20 minutes would have been too short to cover a subject in a fruitful fashion, and anything over that would have caused the seminar to be a full-day happening. Based on the feedback from previous events, more breaks were put in between the talks to give people the opportunity to go to the restrooms and get some fresh air. The workshop in the afternoon was designed to last for 3 hours, with occasional, more informal breaks in between.

The theme of facilitating learning was also incorporated into the programme in a more visible and practical way by offering the attendees *a talk by a learning coach* in the beginning of the *seminar*. The learning coach gave a brief talk where he offered tips on how to improve your ability to memorize and learn, and also how to get the most out of the seminar. After that, there were four speakers at the event all in all, plus a four-member panel. The first seminar speaker Kaisa Soininen from Yogaia, a company that organizes yoga lessons via the internet, talked about how technology brings services closer to the consumer. After that, Aape Pohjavirta from Funzi, a company offering mobile learning courses to developing countries, talked about learning and its revolution. Then Juho Paasonen from Zalando took the stage to share the future trends of shopping. Lastly, Ella Bingham, a professor from Aalto University talked about artificial intelligence and machine learning. The panel that digged into the topics after each presentation consisted of Tiina Zilliacus, a serial entrepreneur, Christina Andersson, a robotics expert, Kaisa Ruotsalainen, a service designer from Frantic, and lastly Panu Ervamaa, the Chief Technology Officer of Frantic.

The *workshop* started after the seminar and the lunch break. The workshop was built to have a short introduction to the theme of design thinking, after which the audience would be divided into smaller groups. Design thinking is a "human-centered innovation process, that emphasizes observation, collaboration, fast learning, visualization of ideas, rapid concept prototyping and concurrent business analysis, which ultimately influences innovation and business strategy" (Lockwood 2010<sup>11</sup>; according to Miettinen – Valtonen – Markuksela 2015, 26), hence well suited to the overall theme of the event. The groups would then solve a specific design dilemma together by using a tool they were just introduced. The workshop was hosted by Sondre Ager-Wick, an independent

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<sup>11</sup> Lockwood, T. (2010) *Design Thinking: Integrating Innovation, Customer Experience, and Brand Value*. Allworth Press, New York.

consultant, but company employees were part of facilitating the workshop by helping the groups out with their dilemmas. By having company employees at the workshop helping out the participants, the company could ideally show off their expertise, which in turn could portray the company as a professional and capable provider of these services. The social aspect of the event was taken into consideration in the workshop, as the attendees were divided into groups of 4 or more people, and they would do group exercises in collaboration with each other, and also present their findings together through a casual and light-hearted theatrical play at the end of the workshop.

The social interaction would also be heightened during the *cocktail hour* after the event. This was planned to act as an informal platform for the employees of the company to socialize with the clients and hence offer an opportunity to deepen the existing relationship and also to touch base on any potential new business opportunities. Also those attendees who came to the event to network would have a chance to do so accompanied by some drinks. Otherwise facilitating and encouraging social interaction between attendees wasn't planned in any particular way.

The *visual brand of the event* was designed to support the desired image of an event that is professional, credible and one of high standards. The visuals for the event were spread out in the event space to create cohesion across the different areas of the venue. An event banner and A-stands, alongside company representatives with branded t-shirts on, greeted attendees at the door as they arrived. Attendees received a branded name tag, and as they walked through the glass doors that were taped in brand visuals, they were met by blue spotlights that lit the walls of the event space, and a huge lit up F-icon made out of electronic led ribbons hanging from the ceiling. Even the furniture in the event space was all in brand colors; blue, black and white. (Event aftermovie.) The desired qualities were indeed infused in all aspects of the event, from the content of the event to the smallest of details. The coffee served at the seminar was from a boutique brewery located in Punavuori, and the food served on lunch break was casual street food. The free goodie bag that the attendees received contained branded things such as a Moleskine notebook, a canvas tote bag, and coffee. All of these details were thought out to reinforce the image of a company that appreciates high quality and integrity.

## **5.2 Attendee perspective: The event experienced by the clients**

This sub-chapter aims to uncover what the client's business event experience comprises of in terms of different touchpoints he or she encounters. Each respondent's account is addressed separately to present a better view on their individual experiences and background as an event-goer.

To offer some context to the clients' descriptions, here are some brief background details on each of them. Client A has worked in collaboration with Frantic tightly for some years, and the collaboration occurs on a daily basis. Also Client D is in daily contact with the company, especially when an issue arises in her daily work. Client B, on the other hand, has not been in direct contact with the company at all, although she remembers the company from the early 2000s. She initially had thought that the company had gone belly up along with other Nokia-dependent companies in the early 2000s. Client B stumbled upon the event invite as her boss forwarded it to her. Client C is a rather new client to the company, but he knew Frantic even before the current website renewal project that was ongoing at the time of the interview. In his previous job, he even recommended his company to include Frantic to be part of a request for proposals.

### **5.2.1 Client A's event narrative**

Client A arrived at the event venue with two of her colleagues before the actual seminar began. She left her coat at the cloakroom and checked herself in at the registration desk, which, to her own words happened easily. After that, they moved on to the hangout space, had some coffee and smoothie and sat down. The smoothie was "ridiculously good", but the couches and chairs at the hangout space were "not the world's most comfortable". They chatted with acquaintances from the organizing company as they waited for the programme to begin, and then moved on to the seminar area. As the seminar started, a guy - she can't remember who, but he was a "good performer, a good guy" - from Frantic made a small welcome speech. Even though she is more of a doer than a listener herself, she was able to focus throughout the event because the programme was so compact and the tempo was just right. According to her, there were no boring moments, which was partly due to the fact that the performers were so good, and the panel discussions were entertaining. The day went by really quickly. After the seminar, client A had lunch (which was "decent") with her colleagues and left back to work satisfied.

She signed up only for the seminar part, due to her hectic schedule at work, and she also thought that the workshop wouldn't have been so essential to her daily work. Her mood was positive throughout the day, and also her colleagues said they liked the event. She spent much of the event with her colleagues, apart from brief chats with some co-workers from the organizing company and a previously unknown colleague.

Based on her experiences on the previous event by Frantic in 2015, client A expected the event to be inspiring and refreshing. Her expectations were met "perfectly", and the topics covered were interesting. "I was really satisfied with the day and the events and well - from a general perspective - I'm doing development work and I'm always glued to my computer developing these things for my company and even though [my job] is

versatile in a way, it's really like a breath of fresh air to hear what's going on in this world on a general level." The panelists and speakers were chosen really well, as they were a diverse bunch of different personalities. When asked about her opinion on the performers, client A says that she can't criticize them "because you can't criticize anyone's personality". According to client A, they all had interesting topics and they presented their core themes well, so that was good enough for her. If the performer is notably uncomfortable on stage, it affects client A's experience, but only by making her feel compassion for the performer.

Client A can't remember any of the speakers by name, but instead she recalls some talking points that the speakers talked about. She already had some knowledge on some of the topics of the seminar but she felt like it still offered her lots of new information on things like robotics and artificial intelligence. "A good example of how I hadn't known to think about how far the development has gone was -- ... -- I was under the impression that robots still just babble, so it was a reality check." She also mentions the video clip of a movie that was written by an artificial intelligence, which was shown in the seminar. She thought it was "extremely funny", and that it was weird to imagine that an AI had written it.

Overall, the event venue was conveniently located and the space was functional, but there were not enough restrooms for women, which lead to excessive queuing on breaks. The queuing was a minor nuisance to her, though, as was the coffee that tasted bad in the morning. There were also some improvements compared to last year when it came to the seating arrangement. Last year there were only chairs in the seminar area, whereas now there were separate tables with chairs, which was more comfortable in client A's opinion. When the lunch hour arrived, client A and her colleagues managed to get to the buffet before the masses. The hangout space did not receive accolades from her, as it wasn't really compelling as a space and nobody used it. As a person with back problems, she thought that the furniture was uncomfortable and also scrappy looking. "When you would want to lean back then you were like this (pretends to lean back) - you don't want to like slouch like that at an event like that."

Client A describes herself as a curious person with an inquisitive mind, so listening and learning new things is always on the top of the list for her when she attends events. She ranks this event first because it was that interesting to her. "I can say that I can't recall any another event that had as genuinely interesting topics or presentations as Future Day." Client A does not receive as many invitations to events in general compared to her team leaders, but she does not mind it, as she wouldn't even want to go to them so often. She thinks it is good that events are being organized, and it's positive that people can meet new people from other companies, but sometimes her experiences have been somewhat confusing. "Maybe it's been about the topics or the discussions that haven't hit the mark for me - I've been thinking like 'is this the right place for me then'.

And even though I said I'm interested - but then if I feel like [the event] has no connection to my life or work or pretty much anything, then..."

According to client A, her workplace encourages its employees to attend industry events. She adds, that since there are relatively few people doing the work, absences need to be coordinated carefully to maintain a healthy balance. Fortunately, the event was organized on a good month, as she did not have any pressing work hurries at the time.

### 5.2.2 *Client B's event narrative*

Client B starts summarizing her event experience by describing the event invitation email her boss forwarded to her. Client B has not had any direct interaction with Frantic previously, but her boss on the other hand has been involved in projects with the company. She initially paid attention to the good quality of the invite, the fonts and the colors and so forth. The future-aspect of the event intrigued her, even though she had low expectations towards it, as she knew that the content of the event could be just about anything and everything because the overarching theme was so broad and vague. The main reason she decided to attend the event was the workshop, because she hoped it would teach her something new and increase her know-how. Client B is hesitant to attend paid events, unless they are by an esteemed institution or a brand, since otherwise it's harder to properly estimate the value that they could provide for her. As this was a free event, the threshold for attending was lower.

She arrived at the event venue 10 or 15 minutes before the seminar started, which gave her just enough time to drink the breakfast smoothie. She thought it was nice that people from Frantic were there to welcome her at the door, and that there was enough signage and directions around the venue. She also thought it was "ok" that the organizers wore distinct t-shirts so they would stand out from the crowd.

The seminar speeches were interesting, but in her opinion they could have been more concrete. As an example she mentions the "learning evangelist" whose speech stood out from the rest as different and stirring. As a character he was "ok", but his speech did not provide any practical value to her. She enjoyed the panel format, but hoped it could have been given more space and depth. Another speech that she remembered was by Zalando, which she considered interesting. She hoped that the speaker could have opened up a bit about the vision he had for Zalando, instead of offering practical examples of what they do now.

Client B thought that the workshop was mainly alright and well organized, although she hoped that there would have been one leader from the organizing side who would

have steered the group forward. Their group was stuck on the small details and would have needed better guidance.

The giveaways received thanks from client B, as she thought they were better than the usual “junk” that you usually get at events. Especially the white Moleskine notebook captured her attention. “And maybe as an object, that white - that it was specifically a white Moleskine so it was maybe - I’d say that it was cool, kind of like Apple-white so it was a classy gift, whereas if it had been a standard black, or it could have taken a stand and be red or something, but at least it was not just black. Perhaps it was planned - somebody may have planned them to be specifically white - I don’t know if white [as a color] has something to do with [the company].”

She thought it was nice that there was some food served at the event, and to her it was sufficient. The event space was ok in theory, but in practice it was “boorishly hot” and the air conditioning was bad. The heat made it strenuous to sit in the seminar space all day long. Client B tells that she pays attention to visual details, and she noticed that an effort was made to decorate the event space and create an ambiance. She mentions remembering seeing an F-letter and that the organizers were wearing something different. Client B took note that there was music playing in the background, colored lights in the foyer, and the coffee was not your average brew. “The coffee was by Kaffa [roastery] and not some Juhla Mokka by Paulig, and they at least attempted to make [the event] high-class, and like I said in the feedback [survey] that this could have been a paid seminar.” She also thought that the sound systems worked properly, and that the speakers remembered to talk into the microphone, instead trying to avoid it like “Finns probably usually tend to do”. She remembers the learning coach’s talk about how to make the most out of the seminar, and she thought it was well thought out and fun, and it added to the value of the event.

To her opinion, one aspect to improve upon would be the facilitation of interaction between the attendees. “Of course it’s up to each person to communicate with other people, but... Everyone did not have their badge on, so I didn’t see right away who they were and whether they would be interesting, and whether I should even start talking to them.” She continues: “So if you want it to be a social event then -- maybe those people that were in your table, they were greeted - like the one sitting to your left, one to your right, and one sitting across you - but could the attendees be engaged more during the breaks?” Client B says that meeting new people from different industries at events is one of her goals, as it could ideally lead to new ideas and potential follow-up discussions. She considers herself bad at networking and making the initiative, so she suggests that the organizer would take part of the responsibility by offering the attendees more chances of networking. She arrived at the event alone and made an effort to get to know new people by sitting at a different table than her colleagues and joining a group of random attendees during lunch. “On the other hand, in my opinion if someone doesn’t want

to talk, you can't make them, so in a way how could you advance the networking from an organizer point of view...“ And after the workshop when the official programme was over, Client B went home. “I don't usually stay for cocktail parties, I'm not like that at all - I think it's awkward to stand there and talk about weather.”

Besides networking, Client B expects to find new perspectives and inspiration to her own work at events like these. Finding practical advice that you can utilize in your everyday work, or learning something new is important. She needs to evaluate first which event topic would benefit her right then and there to avoid attending events that are too far out. “Like there have been events about Internet of Things, so I can't figure out how it would fit in this world - like I could go there and listen, but somehow I think that it's still too far out in the future - there are still too few of those gadgets that it's not like relevant right now and [the company she works at is] not going to be any pioneers in that area.” Instead, she feels like she would benefit from learning practical skills, like using Google Analytics. Ultimately, she concludes: “Either concrete things or inspiration. Those are probably the things that I expect, either or both.”

How did the event fare with her expectations? She thinks that after having attended the workshop, she may increase the usage of the method that was taught. Otherwise she thought that the workshop felt a bit separate from the rest of the event, as it seemed to have very little connection to the seminar and the overall theme of the event. “You could have made a short introduction on the method and then showed cases where you've successfully used it - kind of selling the idea like ‘you should use this too, this is really ok even though this takes time’ or ‘ok, you've completed this exercise now, but it only means that you need to continue the process like this’ so it doesn't mean anything yet, other than completing one part of the whole process - but it was like a little disconnected.” Though, she then says she thought that the workshop served the learning aspect of the event and worked as a bait for people to attend.

The workshop itself went relatively well, as Client B's group progressed and they got something done in the allotted timeframe. She would have liked to have a bit more time for the group work, and have someone from the organizing company to help out a bit more. “Now there were like people rotating, but it was kind of haphazard when they would come to our table, and the people that visited our table and asked what we've done and whether we were doing ok, they all had different views.” Client B made a conscious decision not to be the most active member of the group. “I just did not want to take that kind of a role there. And in the beginning already - and just for practical reasons, I was there voluntarily and it kind of wasn't my job here, and so...” She mentions that there were one or two stronger personalities in her group, so she did not want to waste her energy on debating with them. Also, there were less experienced people in her group as well, and she wanted to give more space for them to learn. She only cor-

rected them if she saw that they were not applying the method correctly or if she did not agree with them on something, but otherwise she more or less took a back seat.

Client B did not like the theatrical play part of the workshop at all. “I don’t like performing like that - sure you can put yourself out there with the group because everyone is putting themselves out there, but it was a bit uncomfortable.” She says, that as a person who does not want to be in the center of attention, it’s really difficult to be invisible in that kind of a situation. “But yeah, maybe to learn - or get some new thoughts - you need to get out of your comfort zone, it wasn’t that bad. But had I known about [the performance] before, I would’ve left sooner (laughing).”

Client B thought that the organizing company sold their services very little at the event, and wouldn’t have minded if they had pitched their offering a bit more. As B2B-companies run by selling their expertise, she wouldn’t have been offended if she got more information on them at the event. She adds, though, that the line between pitching and imposing is very fine.

### 5.2.3 *Client C’s event narrative*

Client C begins his event experience account by saying, accompanied by a laugh, that the experience was good. When he first received the invitation, he browsed it and thought that for once, this event might have content that was thought through, instead of just being a generic sales event. He thought that, based on the invitation alone, this would be an event that wanted to give people something to think about, and something to get inspired by.

He timed his arrival consciously so that there was only little time until the “show” would start. When he entered the venue, the event organizers greeted him and were very welcoming, which he enjoyed. Since the weather was so nice and sunny, he did not feel the need to drop his coat to the cloakroom. According to client C, he took a cup of water, chatted briefly with an acquaintance, and headed straight to the seminar area where he spotted his CEO. He exchanged a couple of words with him, sat down, and then the seminar started. “Then it was just about sitting and listening and getting into that state, so that was great.”

When the seminar began and the panelists were called to the stage, client C was confused. He wondered whether there would be a panel in the beginning of the program. Then when the program proceeded, he got the hang of it and thought that the format of the seminar was nicely planned. The format where the speech was first and then a panel where the panelists would “go for” or dig into the topic through discussion was really good, because it offered alternative views from different standpoints and also created some depth into the topic at hand. “Even though they obviously weren’t, like, interro-

gating the performer, but they tested the authenticity and the familiarity of the subject in a way.”

The content of the seminar was “brilliant” and consistent, and the performers were chosen well. Client C liked the speech by Aape Pohjavirta best. “The person was... How do you say it... Born to perform. You can tell when someone is born to sing and when someone is born to do something else, but he - the usage of pauses and different tones of voice - and even though he moved on the stage a lot, it wasn’t restless even though he almost tripped once (laughs). But it was a bit like a textbook example how every performer should perform.” He adds, that it would be boring if everyone performed like him, though. The performer used his personality in his speech, which made it more intense. The entertainment value was there, and the content was very good and current. “I think it’s a precondition for a good speech to keep the listener awake and present. There are too many talking heads.”

Client C’s focus did not lapse throughout the seminar, and even the least engaging speaker managed to keep his concentration. “I think that it depends on your own attitude and how you take it - you do have to understand that different speakers are different.” His interaction with other people or the social media during the seminar was nonexistent, because he didn’t want to lose his focus on the actual content. “I was like really in a state of flow at that point, so it was more like ‘Wow’, so my head was more occupied with thoughts on all the great angles and the great content or like the great performances, so I wanted to enjoy that. And a glass of water. (laughs)”

Client C attends business-to-business events frequently, at least once a month. Client C looks to gain genuine inspiration and new conversation topics from the events he attends. Usually he regrets attending some events after realizing that they are just sales events with the same old content. Some of the most uncomfortable event experiences for him have been those where the event did not live up to its promises. In these cases, the invite promises one thing, whereas the actual event is something completely different - usually a blatant sales pitch from the organizer or partner. “That kills the mood, and then you get that feeling like ‘Oh, there are too few people here for me to leave now’, those are some dreadful situations.” The event X was so different from the events he has attended before, that he hoped that it would be organized more often.

Client C does not make attendance decisions based on who else is attending anymore, because he thinks that there will always be someone he knows at the event, and that it is also nice to get to know new people as well. Although, he admits that he does have a tendency to show up to events at the last hour, which minimizes the time for socializing. He throws out an idea about a transport service provided by the event organizer, like a hop-on-hop-off bus of sorts that would take him from his office to the event venue.

After the event, client C was expecting the event follow-up email to arrive sooner. Watching the event video clips is on his to-do list, because he wants to recall and reminisce some of the topics covered at the event. He wishes that the follow-up email would have contained some statistics on the event, like who attended, how many people were there, how did the attendance distribute between the seminar and workshop, and maybe a video showing the cocktail hour to make it more enticing to attend next time. The sooner the email arrives, the better it will remind you about the performances.

All in all, client C says that the event was “exemplary, which is unfortunately something that you see rarely these days”.

#### **5.2.4 Client D’s event narrative**

Client D heard about the event for the first time when an invitation came to her inbox. She immediately decided that she’d be going, one reason being that she’s currently studying a course where you need to attend different networking events and write reports on them afterwards. Her colleague also persuaded her to come, as the event was so good last year. They also came to the conclusion that events like these offer some much-needed variation to their everyday work, as you get to meet people outside your day-to-day routines.

She only signed up to the seminar part of the event, since she could not be away from the office for the whole day. She also did not really get the point of the workshop, so she figured she’d not get anything out of it anyway. When client D’s colleague said to her that she would not be attending the workshop, D’s decision not to attend was reinforced, as she then thought that it would be nice if they could travel back to the office together.

Client D’s event morning began “really well”. The event venue was conveniently located for her, so it was easy to get there. She arrived on time for the breakfast, because the invitation said that there would be coffee before the seminar. There were no queues at the reception, and her registration information was found quickly. After she was handed her name badge, she saw familiar faces from the organizing company having coffee, so she joined them to have a chat. Because she arrived so early, she had some time to chat with people and hang out. The layout of the event venue, especially the seminar area, took her by surprise, as she wasn’t expecting a table setup. The events she had previously attended had been set up more like an auditorium or a movie theater. She also expected there to be more people present. These did not bother her too much, as the tables were nice because you could take notes, and the smaller size of the seminar space made the event feel more “cozy”. There was one downside to the table setup: some people, like one of her colleagues, had to sit with their backs facing the seminar stage,

which was a bit uncomfortable. The small space enabled the stage to be closer to the audience, so you could hear the speakers well.

Client D does not consider herself as an active participator when she doesn't know the other people at an event. If someone comes to her and introduces themselves, she's fine, but otherwise she prefers being a bit anonymous. She does consider herself as talkative and social, but the first step to break the ice is often the hardest for her.

Client D conversed mainly with her colleagues and employees of the organizing company. She sat next to random people in the seminar, and they amicably shook hands, but didn't extend the discussion that much further. "There was this girl from our company there, and we talked about work related things and about the seminar. It's pretty rarely that you would talk about any like general things or your personal life at work, so we chatted about both work related and leisure stuff." The programme was quite compact, and one could not really talk about other things or introduce oneself to anyone during the seminar, but she did chat with the lady sitting next to her during a break. The conversation was rather cursory, and she did not really take any note of it. Client D thinks that when you come to an event with a group of colleagues, you tend to socialize less with new people. Client D felt like no actual networking took place in her case.

The seminar speeches were "ridiculously good and interesting", and they were also not too long. She thought it was nice that the seminar was in Finnish, as you could get more out of the speeches this way. You didn't lose focus even if you were a little tired because the speeches were so easy to comprehend and process as they were in Finnish. The speeches were all a bit different from each other, instead of being just about technology like the usual seminars that she visits. The speech by Tuomo the learning coach was really cool, and he had a good flow in his speech, which made it "the opposite of tedious". Also Aape's speech stuck to her mind. "He was a superb speaker, like, even though his topic was technical but how he like roused people... Like it was just conveniently timed, if anyone felt like the speeches were starting to be a bit long or something - it was just - but it was almost like he was an actor or something so it was really nice." She also enjoyed Kaisa's speech for her approach on the topic and how she told about her company.

She had to take a work related pause during Juho's speech, so she missed parts of it, as she couldn't focus completely. Ella's speech about artificial intelligence wasn't that interesting to client D as a topic, but the speaker's analytical approach intrigued her. "And when she was like this researcher personality, it was cool to observe how many different kinds of performers there can be - like even though she did not really seem to put her soul into the speech, she was kind of like modest and stood there, but after all it was nice." The content of the seminar did not really have any direct connection to her

everyday work, but she thought it was wonderful to experience something new compared to the usual.

Only the panel discussions receive some negative feedback from her. She thought that the panel format was a bit forced and foreign to her, and she didn't really get the point of it. She would have preferred a more prompt approach where the audience could have had the opportunity to ask questions from the speaker after the speech, and then they would have moved on to the next topic. According to client D, panels can be ok if the conversation starts flowing naturally, but if not, then it just feels like everyone has to come up with something to say, and it's just not really as worthwhile.

To client D, entertainment and learning are the main reasons to attend seminars. Out of the two, the more vital part of a seminar is the entertainment. "If the event is all fizzled up already in the beginning, it affects the whole mood - you don't want to learn and you're not interested in anything." One thing that especially affects her enjoyment is the length of the speeches - if they are too long, you lose focus, especially if the topic is not of interest to you to begin with. Also the speaker's overall performance (e.g. how the speaker uses his/her voice, how engaged the speaker is to his/her topic) has a huge impact on the overall enjoyment. "Like Americanism - even though I don't find it that charming in general, but I can imagine these presidential candidates, like how they really agitate their supporters, they do have a superb style of working the room - it really does make a big difference."

After the seminar part client D and her colleagues stayed for the lunch, chatted with some people, and then went back to work. The food was tasty, but she thought that the street food buffet was a bit peculiar choice, as everyone had to make their own portions and then carry the food around. Also she expected the breakfast to be a bit more varied than a smoothie, like a sandwich or something else more traditional. "But [the food] is never the reason why I would go to a seminar - to get food or something - I think it's secondary."

The previous events client D has attended have all had experienced speakers who know how to engage their audience. It's important to her that the speaker makes a contact with the audience somehow. "Even if the topic did not necessarily interest me in the first place, the person who talks about the subject - often you can tell when a person is genuinely excited about their area of expertise - so it's cool to listen to a person who is so committed to their cause, what they are good at - it's wonderful to see people like that."

Client D is mainly interested in events that relate to her work or studies in some way. She would attend events more frequently if only they would be organized at a suitable hour for her at locations that are easier to reach. She really enjoys attending events, because in her opinion she gets so much out of them, for her profession and to gain more general knowledge. She is more avid to attend an event if she knows that her colleague

is joining too. Also if an event is organized by a company partner, she'll attend more readily.

Her company does not particularly push people to attend events, but for example their new Chief Digital Officer has encouraged employees to venture out and go to different seminars, even abroad. When an event is free of charge, it is easier to rationalize why you should get to attend, whereas paid events can be a bit trickier in that sense. If an event was really costly and it didn't concern her industry, client D wouldn't perhaps even consider attending.

### **5.3 Analysis of the event experiences**

In this chapter the clients' event experience accounts will be gone through and analyzed in terms of what kind of impacts the event had on the client, and how they described their event experiences. The clients' answers will be reflected to the theory base gathered in chapter 3. At the end of each sub-chapter, it will be analyzed which dimensions of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience model were activated in each narrative.

#### **5.3.1 Client A**

When asked to describe her event experience freely right in the beginning of the interview, client A begins by reflecting the experience to her previous one from last year's event, and describing how the event met her expectations in terms of refreshingness. She continues by explaining her satisfaction towards the event. Next, she mentions a list of sorts that contains mainly functional elements (in this order); the themes, the morning smoothie, the table arrangement, the performers, and lastly the event space and logistics. She commented the settings of the event both from negative and positive aspects. This would imply, that at that point, her experience contained elements of esthetics. After that, she moves on to talk about the core content of the event – the speeches and panels – and what kind of interconnections she could find between them and her own life.

In terms of benefits gained, client A felt like the event offered her new knowledge and a refreshing change to her everyday work routine. This means, that for her, the event experience was educational and escapist in nature.

*The event had such an invigorating impact that I'm observing the world around me more through news feeds regarding robotics and artificial intelligence. So it did really have an impact on that, and it created a pressure to actively follow [the developments] to stay in the loop.*

(Client A)

The company that she works at has embraced digitalization and placed it as their top priority, so it is an ongoing interest for her to stay on top of the developments in the digital realm as well. Client A continues, that no one will come to you and tell these things, rather one needs to be active and find things out on oneself. The topics of the seminar had a strong connection to her life, as she has personally witnessed the rapid evolution of technology throughout her career.

The event experience had an impact on client A in a way that resulted in her taking topics discussed in the event to her everyday life and reflecting on them:

*After the event day I felt like I encountered [the subjects covered in the seminar] everywhere around me, and then it was like really nice to remember that 'yeah, yeah, this was discussed about', so in a way you felt like you were in the crux of those things for a moment, which is a really positive feeling.*

(Client A)

In a way, it could be said that the event made her feel like she was part of the few chosen ones that were in the know about important and current topics:

*I feel like now that I have attended the event I'm more in the core of the global development and where this world is heading, and not just in my area of expertise in [my company] and what we produce. So, yeah definitely - even though I said that I had high expectations [towards the event], but they were actually exceeded. I feel like I'm more involved in this world now that I got to experience that day. It was really great.*

(Client A)

The event experience offered client A knowledge that she considered as something brand new, on the leading edge of development. The event offered her something that helps her decipher the world around her, and find new perspectives. It also had an impact on her behavior and emotions, so it had conative and affective implications for her. If the change in her behavior will last, the event experience could be seen as a transformational one for her.

From the content of the event, the main things that she mentions as things that stood out to her are mainly ones that contained a surprise element or something otherwise distinctive. She mentioned for example the video clip of a movie that was directed by an A.I. that was shown in the seminar. She also mentioned the memory exercise by the learning coach as a thing that stuck to her mind, which is not surprising, as the presentation was built to stay in people's minds by utilizing memory techniques like using strong imagery in the presentation.

*Although the speaker had only 15 minutes to perform and [the speech] was really short, he drilled into the core, and in principle, if I had something to study or memorize, now I've got a gimmick to use for that.*

(Client A)

It gave her a more minute practical benefit she can apply, not only to her professional life, but also to her everyday life. Client A found the exercise really useful, as she told that she would love to teach the exercise to her teenagers, if only she could get through to them.

In terms of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience dimensions, client A's experience (Figure 9, active dimensions colored in grey) contained all of the four elements: entertainment, esthetics, educational, and escapist.

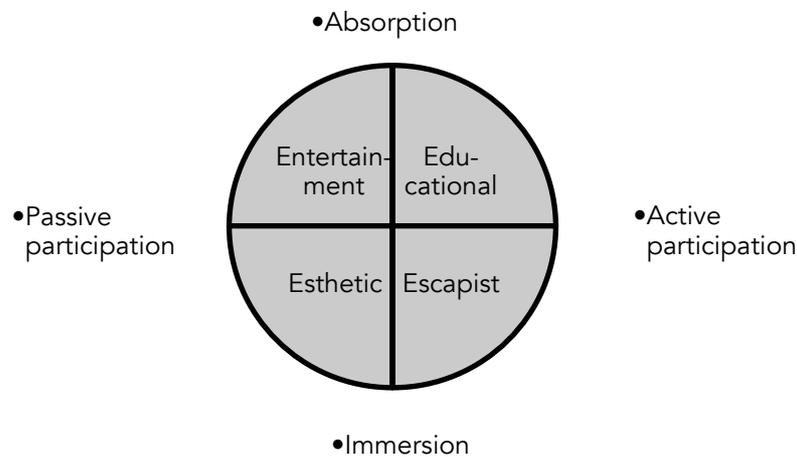


Figure 9 Client A's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore's dimensions of experience

The *entertainment* dimension was achieved at the seminar, as client A was absorbing the contents of the seminar as a passive participant, and truly entertained by it. The *esthetic* dimension was present in her description when she described the visual and functional elements of the event. The *educational* part was activated, when new information was gathered during the seminar. In this situation it is apparent that Pine and Gilmore's model is not completely applicable as is, as the event was indeed educational to client A, even though her participation was not active in nature. Also, the researcher would categorize the experience as escapist to client A, even though she was not actively participating in it. She was deeply immersed in the speeches and panel discussions, and the experience as a whole proved to be escapist in nature to her.

### 5.3.2 *Client B*

When asked to describe her event experience freely in the beginning of the interview, client B begins her event description from the moment she received the invitation, which would imply that she perceives that an experience starts at the first touchpoint. She mentions elements that drew her attention like the visual design of the invitation, the overall theme and especially the workshop. After that, she goes on to describe the event morning briefly, and then moves on to review the actual program and speakers.

During the seminar, the attendees were encouraged to post any questions they might have as tweets on Twitter with a specific hashtag. The host would then pull some of these questions from the Twitter feed after each speech, and the topic would be discussed further. The decision to collect the questions like this was made to lower the threshold for the audience to take part in the discussion without having to do it out loud in front of everyone. The company also tweeted some additional info when necessary on their own Twitter account. Client B checked the ongoing event related discussion on Twitter on a few occasions, like when she wanted to check some book recommendations and studies that the speakers referred to. She also mentioned that there were not that many tweets regarding the event compared to another event she attended a few years ago where the whole event was documented by tweeting. Client B was the only one of the interviewees who connected with the event discussion on a social media platform. Twitter forms a “multidirectional complex space in which the users make notes, share resources, hold discussions and ask questions as well as establishing a clear individual online presence”. The researchers also add, that “the use of Twitter as a conference platform enables the community to expand communication and participation in events amongst its members”. (Ross – Terras – Warwick – Welsh 2011, 214.)

Client B was the only one of the interviewees who, in addition to attending the seminar, took part in the workshop. The workshop portion of the event had the most potential to facilitate immersion and active participation in the attendees compared to the other parts of the event, as it was based on hands-on action and learning by doing instead of passive absorption. Client B’s participation in the workshop was less active by choice, as she consciously took a more passive role in her group. As workshops are usually conducted in groups, the group dynamic and different (perhaps clashing) personalities can affect individual participation levels. According to an agile workshop facilitation handbook, it is part of the workshop facilitator’s role to make sure that individuals don’t dominate the discussion so that everyone in the group have an opportunity to be heard (DSDM Atern Handbook 2008). In this case, the facilitators did not succeed in managing the group to make sure that they were headed in the right direction.

Client B reckons that benefits-wise the workshop taught her yet another version of a design method, but that’s about all there is to it.

*This [workshop] does not motivate me to use [the method], nor order it from Frantic. They should have sold and justified the use of the method so that I as a client would want to order this and be like 'yeah, this is how we want to do it too'.*

(Client B)

She did not get enough motivation from the organizing company to utilize the method in her everyday work, not to mention to buy a workshop from the company. Even though increasing the sales was not the primary objective of this event, it is without a doubt the ultimate goal that any business strives to achieve, so in that regard the workshop can be seen as a failure on client B's part.

Client B's first reaction to the question whether attending the event impacted her in some way was: "Well, maybe not". Client B said that after the event she wondered whether she should do her own job on the same level as the workshop, but then she concluded that it's too burdensome of a method to produce added value for her liking. She adds that now at least the organizing company is now more familiar to her, which means that the brand awareness has improved on her end. Also the incorporation of empathy and humanity in the event theme was something that client B noted, as she hasn't really seen anyone else talk about it until now, except for one other agency. Content-wise this means that the event managed to deliver something new to the B2B scene.

When comparing client B's event experience narrative to Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience dimensions (depicted in Figure 10 below), one can state that the *esthetic* experience dimension was represented most prominently. Client B considers herself as a person who pays attention to details when it comes to design, which undeniably shows in her event experience description. The design elements of the event and how to improve them are the principal subjects of her experience narrative. This could indicate that her overall experience was more on the esthetic side of the spectrum. Client B seemed to have immersed into the design details of the event with specificity, as she paid attention even to many secondary aspects of the event (like the goodie bag contents etc.), while remaining a passive observer. The *entertainment* dimension, on the other hand was activated during the seminar, where she was a passive listener and absorbed the ongoing seminar speeches and panel discussions.

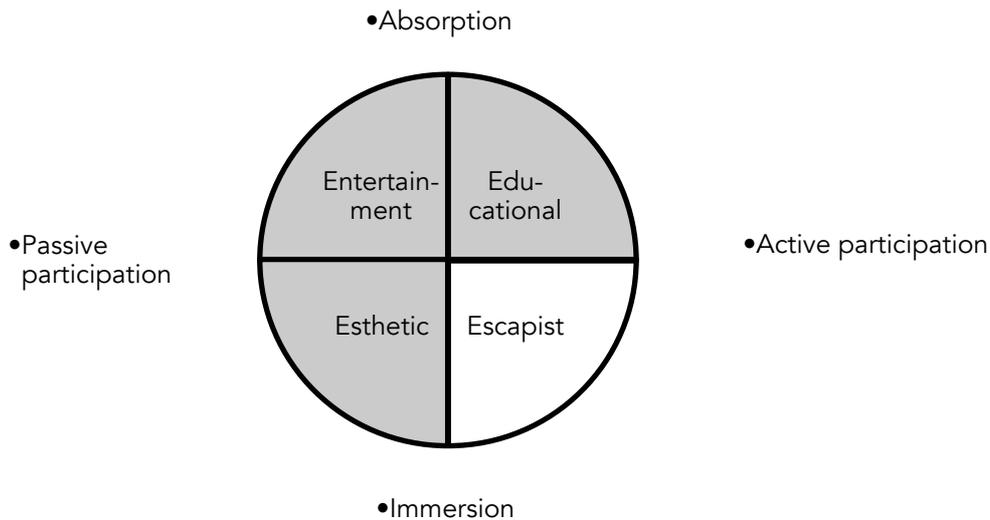


Figure 10 Client B's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore's dimensions of experience

Client B was also the only one of the interviewees who attended the workshop, which relied on active participation from the attendee side. This would have activated the *educational* dimension as well. Client B described her role in the workshop as a less active participant, but in Pine and Gilmore's model she would still be categorized as an active participator, as without her presence the experience would not exist. Though, it cannot be stated that her participation in the workshop would necessarily fulfill the requisites of the escapist dimension due to her lack of immersion. Although, if one takes into account client B's description of her going onstage with her workshop team to perform, it would imply that she was indeed immersed in the epicenter of the experience at least in that moment in time. But does that mean that her experience was escapist in nature? According to Pine and Gilmore's model it does, but one could oppose this view by saying that if the said immersion was not regarded as positive by the attendee, how could the experience be escapist either.

Client B offers plenty of suggestions for improvements throughout her experience depiction, and she even says directly "if you wanted to make the experience more immersive" at one point. This does not necessarily reflect her experience of the event (or whether the event was ultimately good or bad in her opinion) as much as it does her personality and the nature of her profession as a designer who's devoted to creating seamless user experiences. Also the fact that client B is not in a close relationship with the company can affect her answers. By not having a close contact with the organizing company, she can potentially be more honest about how she truly feels about the event, compared to a client who works closely with a team from the organizing company.

### 5.3.3 *Client C*

When asked to describe his event experience in his own words, client C begins his description promptly from the moment he received the event invitation. After that, the natural free flow of storytelling was not achieved, so the interviewer began to ask broader follow-up questions to gain a more vivid image of the experience. Ultimately, client C's answers were short and straight to the point throughout the interview. This simplicity transpires in the way he tells about his experience; instead of focusing on details (like how the coffee tasted or lighting looked), he elevates his description to the broader scale of the experience.

During the interview, client C brings out some examples where his experience was suboptimal (like the least fascinating speaker), but in those cases he returns back to praise the event as a whole, emphasizing that the individual things do not make a difference in the bigger picture. Client C mentions that he looks to be inspired when he attends an event, and he expects the "mandatory" sales element of the event to be executed subtly. He reasons, that when an event is inspirational, it ideally raises conversation topics that can then be brought in to discussions with other people or parties. This, in turn will progress the case in the grander scheme of things.

The speech that made the biggest impression on client C prompted him to take a message from the speech and apply it to aid the situation at his workplace. Client C explains that their company had been planning to move to a new office space together with their parent company. The new office would have an open-plan layout, which would be a big change compared to their current office where everyone had their own rooms. Client C said that people at his workplace have various fears due to this change, but he figured that if a person came to talk about the subject from a learning aspect, maybe it could make the employees more receptive of change. He reasons that it could potentially alleviate the fears and make people see the new office as a possibility. After the event he discussed with his CEO about the subject. This implies that the event and its contents prompted him to act and do something to benefit his company, which would implicate that the event had highly conative impacts on client C.

The main themes of the event - softer values and human perspective - also made client C ponder how to incorporate these themes into his own everyday work. When comparing client C's stated expectations towards events and the outcomes of this particular event, it can be stated that the event experience fulfilled, and perhaps exceeded his needs.

The figure below (Figure 11) depicts the elements of Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience dimensions that were activated in his event experience. Client C describes getting into a flow state during the seminar, and according to his own words, his focus did not lapse once. This would imply that he was deeply immersed in the event, thus mak-

ing the experience an escapist one. In this case, too, the line between active and passive participation was blurry. His focus was fully on the seminar content, but was he actively part of the experience itself? Pine and Gilmore's model would suggest that his experience was an *esthetic* one due to the level of participation from the client. The researcher disagrees, due to the references to escapism from the client, and his lack of attention to external elements like the esthetics of the event.

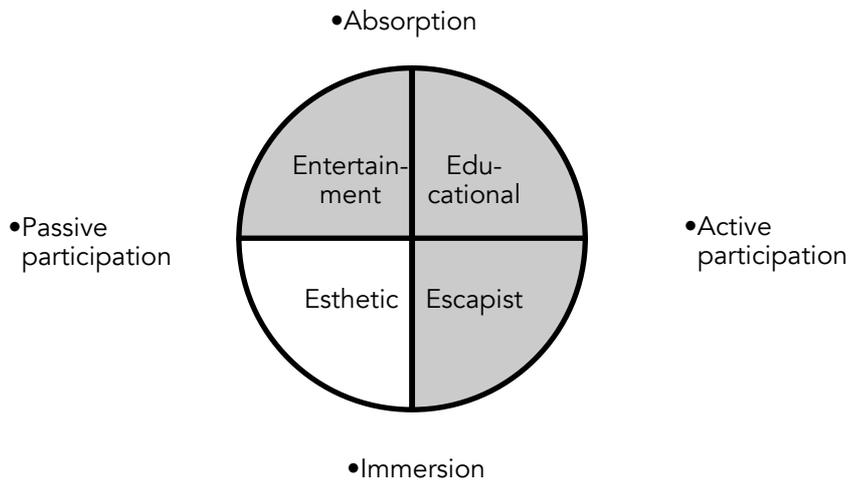


Figure 11 Client C's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore's dimensions of experience

As client C attended the seminar that thrives on passive participation and absorption, it would be assumed that his experience had elements of the *entertainment* dimension. Confirming this assumption, client C described how he was actually entertained during the seminar, which suggests that his experience indeed contained the entertainment dimension. The *educational* element was also activated as client C gathered new information from the event.

#### 5.3.4 Client D

Client D begins her free-form event experience description by mentioning how she was first confused about the location and size of the event, which she had thought to be bigger and with a different event space layout. Client D returns to the topic of how she was surprised of the small size of the event twice more during the interview, but then concludes that it did not play a big role in her final assessments of the event. The fact that she brings up these elements more than once in her experience description is notable and can potentially imply that it was something that truly baffled her. The previous

events she had attended were more on the larger scale, and she had an expectation that this event would have been similar in terms of size, attendee-wise and location-wise. At the same time, she had no previous experience of the seminars by the organizing company, and her only image of the upcoming event was based on her colleague's description of last year's event. This poses a question: what made her expect a larger scale event in this case? Was it the pre-event communications or merely her own experiences of other industry events, or perhaps both? Also, does client D see bigger events superior to smaller, more intimate events? In this case, the disproportion between her expectations and reality lead into a positive experience, as she felt that the size of the event is secondary if the event works, overall.

Client D says that her image of the organizing company and their previous, more informal events was really positive to begin with, and she figures that it had an impact on how she experienced the event. She adds, that had the event been a complete flop for her, that image could have changed.

Client D believes that she received many concrete benefits from the contents of the event. She mentions first, that the event made her think. The event speaker list introduced her new people and companies. She visited the web pages of the companies that were talked about, and looked up information on the speakers, which enabled her to acquaint herself with them even further. She received a lot of new information on the topics covered in the seminar, and she also did a school related assignment of the event, which made her dig deeper into the topics. She also looked up some books that the panelists and speakers recommended, and the memory exercise gave her some practical tips on how to memorize things easier. Although, when it comes directly to her work or technical aspects in general, she did not feel like she gained that much.

Even though she feels like she may not have gained that much new technical information, she feels like the event was emotionally invigorating and it challenged her to think about new things. Especially the aspect of humanity and emotionality resonated with client D, as they are important to her in her personal life.

*The themes were approached from such a different perspective compared to my normal milieu, so I got a lot out of them, and as I said, it made me feel really nice after that day - it was like, hey - there are also nice things in this working life and it's not all negative.*

(Client D)

It could be stated that the event gave client D emotional benefits through feelings of positivity. One reason why client D decided to attend the event was to get an escape from the everyday routines, which on Pine and Gilmore's standards would imply that she seeks event experiences that are escapist in nature.

The fact that client D included the event as part of her school assignment had an effect on her event experience. She took notes of the speeches, which impacted her ability to concentrate and listen throughout the seminar. This had two-fold implications: while her concentration and immersion may have lapsed occasionally while writing things down in the seminar, she can recall all of the speakers by name and the main topics that were discussed, unlike the other interviewees. She also made background work on the event and the speakers due to her assignment, so that may play a big part in what she could remember.

Client D mentioned that she needed to attend to a work related matter in the middle of the seminar, thus directing her attention away from the seminar program. The fact that she had to shift her focus away had a direct impact on her immersion into the event at that moment, but this does not emphasize in her experience narrative.

Client D concludes her interview by stating that she will definitely attend the event next year as well if she gets an invitation and the event fits into her schedule. It has been previously confirmed that a satisfactory experience predicts loyal attitude and behavior, like the spread of positive word of mouth and repeat visitation (Cole – Illum 2006).

When attempting to fit client D's event experience in Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience dimensions model based on her interview, it is challenging to assess whether her experience contained anything else other than entertainment and educational elements. In Figure 12 below it can be seen that only the top half of the dimension model is activated, meaning that immersion was not achieved.

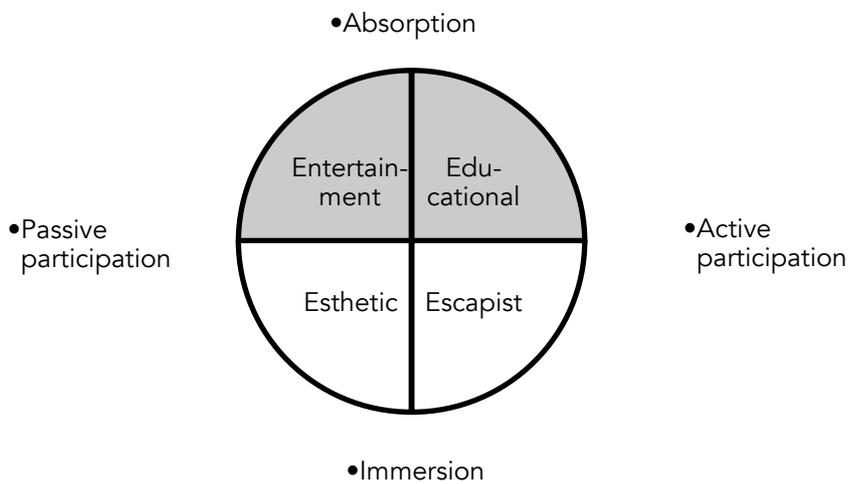


Figure 12 Client D's event experience depicted through Pine and Gilmore's dimensions of experience

The *entertainment* dimension was activated through the seminar, where she – as all of the other interviewees – absorbed the experience as a passive participator. She found

the speeches interesting and entertaining, which fortifies this sentiment. Also the *educational* aspect was there, as she learned new things through active participation.

#### **5.4 Cross-case analysis on client experiences**

Client B was the chattiest of the interviewees, and offered the most data in terms of her experience. This meant that the interviewer did not have to ask that many follow-up questions to take the interview forward, but rather that the interviewee had a flow to their description and steered the interview into the direction they wanted. Client D was also very talkative and open, but the interviewer still wound up asking more structured questions than planned. Client B mentioned the most touchpoints in her experience description compared to the others, while client C mentioned the least touchpoints. This can be due to the fact that B was the only one who attended both the seminar and the workshop, so naturally there were more touchpoints to be encountered. Client C's storytelling style was very concise and to the point, and he made sure to only address the things that he felt relevant.

What's common for all of the interviewees is that they all reflected on the pre-event phase in some form, some a bit more in depth and some a bit less. All of the interviewees except for client A mentioned the event invitation in their event description. All of the three mentioned that the invitation drew them in immediately, but for different reasons. Client B was mostly interested in the workshop part of the event because it offered a promise of learning, while client C was into the promise of inspirational content. Client D was motivated to attend the event due to extrinsic reasons (her school assignment) and colleague recommendation, but also intrinsic reasons (the variety it offers to her everyday life). Client A was highly motivated to attend the event due to her previous positive event experience.

The arrival to the event venue was a pleasant experience for all of the interviewees. Clients B and C mentioned how it was nice to have organizers greeting them at the entrance, while A and D did not pay attention to that aspect in their descriptions. With all of them the registration process went smoothly and quickly. After the arrival phase, the descriptions mainly focus on the seminar speeches. Client D is the only one of the interviewees who mentions all of the speakers, while client C mentions only two speeches. The panel discussion was also present in each of the descriptions, but with mixed reviews. Everyone thought that the way in which the panel was organized was out of the norm compared to other events, but some of the interviewees actually liked the content of the panel and the refreshing nature of it, while others did not really feel like they got anything out of it. Each of the interviewees mentioned the lunch in their description, but none of them stressed that it would be an important factor in their event experiences.

Clients B, C, and D would have craved for more interaction with other attendees at the event.

When examining the activation of the different realms of experiences between the interviewees, client A's experience was the most multifaceted of all, as it had all of the four elements.

## 5.5 Event objectives and delivery vs. attendee experience

The last research question was put into place to see whether the goals set for this event were achieved. The *primary objective* for this event was to *deepen the relationship* with the clients by generating *memorable experiences* that consist of *emotional stimulation, inspiration, education, and entertainment*. The *secondary objective* was to *change the company image* to fit the new positioning of the company. The qualities the company wanted people to associate with it after this event were *quality of delivery, professionalism, credibility, meaningfulness and strategic value*.

When comparing the event experiences of the interviewees to the event goals, it can be determined that the overall goal of creating *memorable experiences* was achieved. According to Poulsson and Kale (2004), for an experience to be meaningful and thus memorable, it should be perceived as personally relevant to the attendee and include elements of novelty, surprise, learning, and engagement. What was distinct in each of the event experience descriptions was the profound resonance with the main theme – the human aspect. Every one of the interviewees mentioned the human aspect, and how they found it important. This proves that the personal relevance factor was achieved with this particular event. All of the interviewees stated that they learned new things and felt like they could (or already did) apply what they learned into their everyday lives. All of the interviewees encountered surprises of varying degrees during the event. When reflecting the interviewees' experiences to Poulsson and Kale's definition of meaningful experiences, it can be stated that the event was successful in facilitating meaningful experiences. To which extent these experiences will actually be remembered throughout the months or years remains to be seen.

All of the realms of Pine and Gilmore's experiences (entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist) were discovered in the experience depictions. What was most enthralling to see as a researcher was how some of the interviewees described getting into a state of flow during the event, which is considered the optimal or peak experience for an event attendee (Wood 2009, 250).

Measuring the fruition of the secondary objective related to the company image is somewhat challenging based on the interview data, as there were not any direct questions aimed to measure that specific goal. Regardless of that, one can draw general con-

clusions based on the mentions of certain attributes attached to different elements of the event. In this light, it can be concluded that some of the image related goals were achieved, but not all. For example, client B mentioned how she thought it was nice that for once, the giveaway stuff was of high quality, and that the coffee was beyond your average brew. She also mentioned how the event could have been a paid event instead of being a free one. These comments point to the direction that she considered the event, or at least the visual elements of it, to be of *high quality*, which would be aligned with the secondary objectives. On the other hand, in client B's situation, the *credibility and professionalism* of the organizer were compromised due to her less than optimal workshop experience.

In the experience depictions of the other interviewees these qualities were not excessively prominent, but not compromised either. The other interviewees were in direct contact with the organizing company on a daily basis, and thus they had an existing image of the company and what it does, at least on a practical level. Each of the interviewees reflected their experiences through their previous experiences and antecedents, which is very much aligned with the findings of Getz (2007), Gerritsen and van Olderen (2014, 2015) and Crowther. This research found, that when a person has experienced a previous event by the company, the person reflects their new experience to the old one. When a person has no experience of an event that's organized by the company, they reflect the new experience to their other industry event experiences. Also, when a person has little to no contact with the company (as client B), the mismatch of expectations and reality can be a bit more likely, compared to clients who interact with the company on a daily basis.

One of the interviewees had been to a previous company event, and formed expectations towards the event in question based on that experience. One interviewee had no previous experiences of events from the organizing company, so she reflected her event experience to her previous ones from other industry events. She found that the event was smaller and perhaps not as extravagant as she would have expected. Based on the comments made by client B, who was least familiar with the organizing company (with little to none interaction with the company in the past few years), she was somewhat surprised that the company was still up and running after all these years. This meant that her expectations were also very different compared to the other interviewed clients. Hence, it could be said that client B's image of the organizing company faced the biggest change thanks to the event.

Even though the interviewees' event descriptions were different from one another, it was clear that the part after the seminar (or exiting the event) was highly underrepresented in their stories. This could imply that the interviewees do not place much emphasis on this part of events in general. What could potentially be even more important than the actual event experience is the recollection that takes place after the event. Some of

the interviewees felt like they got concrete benefits from attending the event in the form of emotional stimulation, refreshed views and ideas for the improvement of their professional or personal life. As these were the qualities that were strived for, the event indeed achieved the goal of deepening the client relationship, at least partially, for each attendee.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

### 6.1 Theoretical and practical contributions

In the existing literature the concept of event experience has been approached from many different angles. It must be remembered, though, that this specific topic has been understudied, as the body of research has mainly focused on leisure experiences, such as festival or tourism experiences. None of the existing literature is directly parallel with this study, as other studies are more tightly defined in terms of theory application, whereas in this study multiple different yet complementary theories are applied.

Event researchers emphasize that event producers need to focus on facilitating elements that are most likely to affect positively on the attendee's experience, and thus create value. Mehmetoglu and Engen (2011) stress, that Pine and Gilmore's assertion of having to have all four dimensions activated in one go has not been proven to lead to a rich experience. The researchers state that one needs to take the context of the event into consideration when planning on incorporating components of entertainment or education in the event, as not all elements are apt for all events. Figuring out which elements are important in each case is elementary, and it takes a market-oriented approach. According to the researchers, there is no secret recipe for this, as each situation is dependent on the context and content of the experience, and also *who* will be consuming the experience. (Mehmetoglu – Engen 2011, 252–253.) In this study it was found that even though the participation level of the attendee is low (like it was in the seminar) presenting itself only in the form of listening, the attendees can be immersed in the event and get into a state of flow, and ultimately get manifold benefits from the event. Comparably, taking part in a more participative form of event (like the workshop) does not guarantee immersion nor satisfaction in the event itself.

It is widely assumed that business events are mostly about economic exchange, learning and networking (Getz 2007), but this event proved that a B2B event can rouse experiences that are aligned with the characteristics of leisure experiences. In this event, the attendees were inspired, refreshed, challenged, emotionally stimulated (from happiness to even annoyance), faced with “novelty”. They also experienced feelings of escape, aesthetic appreciation, intellectual cultivation, and introspection. In event literature these attributes are usually linked to leisure experiences (Lee – O'Dell 1999, 40).

The interaction between people and its effects on the experience have been in focus in many studies in event research (Mehmetoglu – Engen 2011, 244). More and more researchers are grasping the concept of co-creation of experiences as the next means to bring more value to the attendee and the business. It has been proposed, that new kind of value can be created by enabling attendees to create their own experiences by way of

customized interaction (Prahalad – Ramaswamy 2003). This approach has also been applied into the tourism studies and it was found that the co-creative outlook not only adds value, but also adds to the “uniqueness and authenticity of the destination” (Binkhorst – Dekker 2009, 232). In the light of this study, it can be said that event organizers can try and facilitate social interaction as much as they want, but if the situation is “forced” like it may be in workshops where people cannot choose their group members freely, the interaction between members should be somehow monitored and lead to ensure a positive experience to everyone. Otherwise it could lead to frustration and negative experiences, as it did with the attendee who had participated in the workshop. In this case, the social interaction was not as productive or fruitful as it could have been, as it was not properly facilitated. Having one designated and well prepared facilitator per table who oversees that the workshop team is making progress and making the most out of the workshop could solve this conundrum. The workshop part of the event brought another practical learning as well. Basic information, like for whom the workshop is targeted and what the workshop will entail should have been stated more clearly already in the registration phase to attract suitable attendees. Now the interviewee, who’s more experienced in the workshop topic signed up when the workshop was actually more aimed towards beginners.

In terms of the attendee experience journey model, Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015) have concluded that there seems to be a connection between motives and expectations of attendees and the importance attached to different touchpoints by them. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015.) The experience depictions of this study underline expertly the notion of how different everyone’s experience and the way they attach meaning to it truly is. Even though there are similarities in each depiction, each person reflected their experience to their previous experiences of the organizing company. According to Berry et al. (2002), when the values of the attendee and the event or organizer are in tune, preference can be created. In this study it was found that the human-centered approach of the event resonated with most of the interviewees, which would imply a great value-fit.

In Gerritsen and van Olderen’s (2015) research of touchpoints they have found that the most important parts of the attendee experience journey are found in the direct exposure phase, as in the event itself. This study is in line with these findings, as the interviewees were mainly addressing the touchpoints they encountered during the event. In addition to this, although rather briefly, three of the four interviewees addressed the pre- and post- exposure phases in their event experience descriptions. Even though the event experience itself is the most important factor in the overall experience journey, more attention should be put in the pre and post phases of the event, as they constitute an important part of extending the event experience (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015). In this case, the pre- and post-event activities were minimal, limiting only to the event website

and social media pre-marketing activities, and an after-event email with all of the videos of the speeches and a blog post summary of the event.

Gerritsen and van Olderen (2015) have also studied business events from the relationship marketing perspective in Holland, and they drew a couple of conclusions on motives for attending business events based on their findings. Gerritsen and van Olderen state, though, that the results cannot be generalized to represent the whole business events realm as is, but they give some sort of indication of the general direction in the field. The researchers studied the attendee experience journey through touchpoints that attendees found most important in the business context. Firstly, the main reasons why people attended these networking events were to acquire knowledge, obtain information and network. The touchpoints that the attendees found most important were directly linked to these motivations. (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2015.) In this study, the main motives to attend the event were more diverse than that. Two of the interviewees mentioned the same reasonings as Gerritsen and van Olderen found in their research: learning new things and meeting new people. But the other two interviewees mentioned more motivations for their attendance, like inspiration, escape, entertainment, external motivator (school assignment) and “peer pressure”, while they left out the networking aspect. It cannot be fully confirmed whether the attendees find certain touchpoints more important than others according to their motivations, as this aspect was not explicitly visible in the interview data.

The research on what makes a good event experience aligns with the findings of this study. Morgan (2008) has studied what makes a good festival, and landed on a couple of conclusions. One of his findings was that attendees evaluate their experiences as a whole, rather than individual touchpoints. This is very much in line with the findings of this study, as the interviewees had a more holistic view to the experience as they put less emphasis on the details, and more on the event as a whole. Morgan (2008) also found that moments of amazement contributed to the experience, as people get more satisfaction from unexpected discoveries. This is also aligned with the findings of this study, as moments of surprise seemed to arise from the interview data more prominently. Morgan also found that shared experiences make an event better. This sentiment can be debated in the context of corporate events, as some people do not care for the socializing in business events, and may even find it intimidating, whereas some people think it is a vital component of events. The event was planned while keeping in mind to offer space and time for the attendees to socialize, and in some capacity the social aspect was achieved, but for example none of the interviewees felt like they were especially socially active during the event.

This study offers some contributions that have practical implications for event marketing professionals. This study confirmed some age-old truths, and also offered some more fresh insights. The fundamentals of event organizing need to be in check: have

enough bathrooms for the attendees, avoid bottlenecks in the venue design, and make sure that the temperature and ventilation in the venue is all right. Gerritsen and van Olderen (2014, 226) classify the cloakroom, toilets, temperature and personnel as the main facilities-related touchpoints, and that visitors expect these aspects to be organized adequately or else the overall experience is affected. There were some queuing to the bathrooms and the lunch buffet, and the workshop space was hot and unaired in the afternoon. While these annoyances didn't completely overshadow nor damage any of the interviewees' event experiences, they still took away from the core experience and caused unnecessary irritation.

Pine and Gilmore (1998, 103) emphasize that thematizing the experience is key when planning an event. The case event confirms this sentiment. When the theme is clearly stated from the start, it is easier to make design choices to support that theme. The whole event should be packaged in a way that every part of it supports the theme. In this case, the main theme of the human aspect in technology was recognized, acknowledged and appreciated by all of the interviewees. What's more, effort should be made to ensure that the content of the event speeches are in line with the theme; otherwise attendees can be left confused when there's a mismatch between the promise in the pre-event materials and the actual speech. In the event itself, there can always be more clarity regarding the relation of the speakers to the organizing company. Now one of the interviewees was confused how the speakers were connected to the company itself, and what their authority to talk about a specific topic was.

The event taught that the event organizer should know their target audience better. When you know what your preferred audience appreciates and what they want, it is easier to put efforts into those aspects and increase your efficiency. Having said that, people are all different, so pleasing everyone is difficult, if not impossible. All of the interviewees liked different aspects about the event, and had different dislikes about the event.

Food was not the main thing for the interviewees of this study, but it should be taken into consideration, as it often constitutes the largest expenditure item in events. People who stayed for the workshop in the afternoon were hungry, so they left right after the workshop ended instead of staying for the after party drinks. To encourage people to stay, offer food. After the event is over, take care of the after-event communications. Send all of the event materials to the attendees as soon as possible so that the event is still fresh on their minds. Include all of the materials that were presented or used in the event if possible, and facts and details about the event (how many attendees etc.), along with a call to action element.

The key takeaways of this study were more on the practical side of the spectrum, and will aid the planning and producing of future corporate events.

## 6.2 Future research suggestions

Pine and Gilmore's model of dimensions of experiences is not one without glitches. The biggest flaw with Pine and Gilmore's theory of four dimensions of experiences is the difficulty of determining whether an experience was indeed immersing or absorbing, and participation is active or passive. There is no theoretical measurement system in place to determine the level of immersion, hence making the interpretation and analysis entirely up to the researcher, which makes drawing reliable conclusions troublesome. With this particular research method (narrative inquiry) it is more difficult to map out the level of immersion versus absorption as an experience occurs, which leads to the researcher to make assumptions and conclusions based on her own thinking. This has been noted in the research community as well, as there is still minimal empirical evidence of the validity of the concept of the four realms (Jurowski 2009, 1).

The study surfaced some interesting points that could be researched further. It would be intriguing to study whether there are some meaningful differences between different target groups in terms of how they experience events. Are there some generalizations that can be made for example in how a designer experiences events versus how a marketing person does? How does the background of a person really affect how they experience events? In hindsight, this study perhaps should have been targeted towards B2B buyers and decision-makers to create a better connection to the relationship marketing paradigm and to see how this target group sees events in the context of the relationship with the seller organization.

In addition, the empirical part could be conducted as a qualitative interview, a mixture of an open and restricted interview. This would offer a more holistic picture of how people really experience events and interact with all of the touchpoints the organizer has set up. To better evaluate the change in a client relationship, one should take a more long-term approach to the research and include the pre- and post-event phases into the evaluation more prominently (Gerritsen – van Olderen 2014, 238).

## 7 SUMMARY

The purpose of this study was to find out how the clients of a business-to-business company experience corporate events and how the experience meets the marketer's goals. In more detail, the study strived to clarify what the client's event experience comprises of, what kind of impact can an event experience have on a client, and how the event goals are met when compared to the actual client event experience.

Marketing events are platforms through which companies can implement their marketing strategies in an experiential manner. Within events, companies can engage in a multidimensional communication and interaction with their stakeholders, and facilitate memorable experiences that stimulate the senses of the attendee, activating emotions and reactions, and creating lasting memories and impressions. The attendee experience is ultimately born when an individual, who has their own experience background and values, engages with the different pre-, during- and post-event touchpoints. Each attendee reacts to and engages with different touchpoints depending on their background, personality and values, making everyone's experience different from each other.

The empirical part of this qualitative study was conducted as a case study, where the data was gathered through narrative interviews and participant observation. In this study it was found that even though the participation level of the attendee is low (like it was in the seminar), presenting itself only in the form of listening, the attendees can be deeply immersed in the event and get into a state of flow, and ultimately get manifold benefits from the event. Comparably, taking part in a more participative form of event (like the workshop) does not guarantee immersion nor satisfaction in the event itself. It was also discovered that a B2B event can rouse experiences that are aligned with the characteristics of leisure experiences. In this event, the attendees were inspired, refreshed, challenged, emotionally stimulated (from happiness to even annoyance), faced with "novelty". They also experienced feelings of escape, aesthetic appreciation, intellectual cultivation, and introspection.

All of the realms of Pine and Gilmore's experiences (entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist) were discovered in the experience depictions. What was most enthralling to see as a researcher was how some of the interviewees described getting into a state of flow during the event, which is considered the optimal experience for an event attendee. Some of the interviewees felt like they got concrete benefits from attending the event in the form of emotional stimulation, refreshed views and ideas for the improvement of their professional or personal life.

For future reference, it would be intriguing to study whether there are some meaningful differences between different target groups in terms of how they experience events.

Also it would be interesting to study the complete experience journey instead of focusing just on the direct event experience.

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### **Interviews:**

- Client A. Interview 03.10.2016.
- Client B. Interview 04.10.2016.
- Client C. Interview 06.10.2016.
- Client D. Interview 13.10.2016.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1     **The interview inquiry message**

Hei!

Osallistuit 15.9. Frantic Future Day-tapahtumaan, jonka tiimoilta olenkin sinuun nyt yhteyksissä. Teen graduani tapahtumaan liittyen ja tutkin, millainen osallistujien tapahtumakokemus oli. Tutkimuksessani keskityn nimenomaan tutkimaan Franticin asiakkaiden - eli juuri sinun - tapahtumakokemusta ja sitä, miten tapahtuma sinun perspektiivistäsi eteni ja mitä eri tunteita ja ajatuksia se sinussa herätti.

Valikoiduit tapahtumaan osallistuneiden joukosta potentiaalisiksi haastateltavaksi, joten tiedustelisinkin, mikäli sinulla olisi mielenkiintoa osallistua tutkimukseeni graduhaastattelun merkeissä?

Opiskelen markkinointia Turun kauppakorkeakoulussa ja toimin Franticin markkinointijana opiskelujen ohessa. Graduni aihe on tiedemaailmassa (erityisesti markkinoinnissa ja B2B-kontekstissa) vielä alituttu, joten kontribuutiosi arvo olisi siis mittava.

Tutkimus suoritetaan face-to-face haastatteluna, ja se voidaan suorittaa missä vain sinulle on helpointa. Aikaa haastatteluun mennee noin tunti. Myös skype- tai muu etähaastattelu onnistuu tarvittaessa.

Haastatteluprosessi pidetään halutessasi anonyyminä siten, että henkilöllisyyttäsi ei voi jäljittää vastauksien perusteella. Haastattelu nauhoitetaan, mutta materiaalia ei luonnollisesti tulla käyttämään muualla kuin gradussani.

Mikäli olet mukana, toivon pikaista haastatteluajankohtaa, jotta tapahtumaan liittyvät muistikuvat säilyisivät mielessäsi mahdollisimman tuoreina. Itselleni kävisi haastattelu esimerkiksi jo tällä viikolla.

Palataan asiaan, mukavaa viikonjatkoa!

Ystävällisin terveisin,  
Jenny Salmimäki

## APPENDIX 2                      The interview template

Olen Franticilla töissä ja teen tällä hetkellä gradua Turun Kauppakorkeakoulussa. Haastattelu liittyy Future Day -tapahtumaan, johon osallistuit syyskuun puolivälissä. Olet myös vastannut tapahtumaan liittyvään palautekyselyyn. Mutta nyt tarkoituksena on mennä syvemmälle tapahtumakokemukseen, ja haluan kuulla, miten tapahtumakokemus ilmeni sinun näkökulmastasi. Mitä tunsit, ajattelit, teit ja niin edelleen. Haastattelun rakenne on vapaamuotoinen ja avoin, jossa on vain muutama kysymys joihin saa vastata todella vapaasti ja runsaasti käyttäen rikasta kieltä. Vähän niinkuin kertoisit tarinaa kaverille. Onko mitään kysyttävää tässä vaiheessa?

### **Haastattelukysymykset:**

*Kerro vähän itsestäsi ja mitä teet yrityksessäsi.*

*Entä millainen suhde sinulla on Franticiin?*

*Kuvaile minulle millainen sun tapahtumakokemus oli. (Voit aloittaa esim. siitä kun saavuit tapahtumapaikalle)*

*Millä tavalla tapahtuma vaikutti sinuun? (sinun tunteisiin, ajatuksiin, tekemisiin)*

### **Lisäkysymykset:**

*Mikä oli muistettavin hetki tapahtumassa?*

*Mitä mieltä olet yleisesti B2B-tapahtumista?*

*Mitä odotat yleensä B2B-tapahtumilta? Mitä odotat saavasi niistä?*

Kiitos paljon haastattelusta!

Olisiko mahdollista, että voisin tarvittaessa olla sinuun yhteyksissä, jos mieleen tulee muuta kysyttävää? Jos tutkimustulokset kiinnostavat, voin lähettää ne tutkielman valmistuttua.