

8

Creating the Eventscape

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Learning objectives

- To gain an understanding of the importance of creativity in event design.
- To demonstrate how the event environment can be shaped to influence the emotional responses of attendees.
- To demonstrate application of the eventscape model to help design the best experience for stakeholders, attendees and event employees.

Introduction

As human beings, we make judgements based on our emotional responses, be it to products, services, situations and other people; and what they say or do. Emotions, whether we choose to respond to them or not, influence our actions every day and are deeply connected to memory, as explained in the previous chapter. As event creators, we cannot know the intimate psychology of the people who will come to our events. However, we can apply our knowledge of stakeholders' intended event outcomes and, through careful assessment of attendee profiles, design the limitless combinations of interactions that will engage event attendees. This is achieved by focussing upon their senses, to create emotional responses that are memorable and satisfy and exceed expectations. An outcome-oriented approach to Strategic Event Creation must therefore include the goal of evoking emotions to provoke positive memories for event attendees, employees and stakeholders.

We know from the previous chapter, and also Chapter 4, that different people may have different motivations to attend events and that they also experience things differently at the same event, so we cannot 'control' event

experience. However, we should be fastidious about meticulously influencing the event environment to create an eventscape that achieves the desired outcomes for both attendees and wider stakeholders. This chapter looks at elements of the physical environment that events take place in, and shows how through clever design and management of spaces and people, this can be achieved.

■ What is the eventscape?

We understand landscape to mean the visible features of an area of land and in our imagination the combination of different physical elements, in different seasons and conditions can seem limitless. A cityscape is the urban equivalent of a landscape, seascape is a coastal interpretation and moonscape conjures up images of our crater marked celestial entity. Back down to earth, 'servicescape' was coined by Booms and Bitner (1981) to mean the physical elements that combine to make an environment which has an important impact on customers' and employees' experiences in the service sector, as initially applied to retail services or the hospitality industry. Mossberg (2007) draws parallels between the concepts of 'servicescape' and 'experiencescape', understanding both to represent a complex mix of environmental features that influence internal responses and behaviour, but she also highlights a distinction between the delivery of services and the consumption of experiences.

Bringing these elements together we therefore define 'eventscape' as:

A combination of the tangible elements which shape the event environment and therefore influence the emotional responses and experiences of attendees, event staff, and other involved stakeholders.

The combined desired outcomes and objectives of the stakeholders should always drive the creation of an event. Therefore a key skill of the event creator lies in weaving together these elements to directly shape the eventscape of attendees and subsequent perception of success or value by each of the stakeholders. This chapter explores the range and combination of elements and interactions that can be crafted or orchestrated, to achieve a lasting, positive experience from first awareness of an event, the event itself and memories thereafter, for all the stakeholders of all types of events. That is a tall order, but with knowledge, skill and practice, event creators can manipulate their tangible resources imaginatively to surpass event objectives.

Furthermore, we build on previously published knowledge to enable readers to identify, develop and implement a set of competencies to create events that generate customer value and are a source of value and com-

petitive advantage for other stakeholders. The first thing that we explore is creativity, which is strongly emphasised by the industry voice in Chapter 14 and is often an overlooked element of the event manager's toolkit. However, we argue here that it is a skill that is a pre-requisite to a successful event, rather than an 'add on'.

The skilled event creator

Presented with the same brief and resources, it is fairly predictable that different event creators will propose different events, based on their skills, knowledge and prior experience. Proficient event creators use their expertise to create eventsapes that provoke appropriate emotional responses from attendees and facilitate a feeling of connection between the attendees, the event content and the event staff. In this section we discuss some specific knowledge and skills that characterise event creators and differentiate them from 'traditional' event managers. A review of service sector related literature finds that whilst there is plenty of discussion relating to the generic skills required for successful leadership, management, project management and hospitality management, the literature available for specific skills or competencies related to events is more limited.

Existing textbook literature acknowledges key areas of competence that a professional and successful event creator should be proficient in, including technical, sector and industry expertise, project management skills, health and safety knowledge, marketing, site and stage management and the ability to work to tight deadlines, often at short notice and under pressure. Interestingly, the model presented by Bladen et al. (2012, p.44) examines the competencies of an effective event project leader and does include intuition (or gut feelings, just knowing what will work or not work through experience and practice) and emotional resilience (or the all-important 'can-do' attitude), seen by some as the difference between average and spectacular. Figure 8.1 illustrates this successful combination of traits.

This model also adds 'vision and imagination' to the mix, alongside the need for 'strategic perspective', and 'sensitivity'. This is coming closer to the traits that we argue are needed for 'creativity' and 'awareness of emotion', so that event creators can understand and influence people's emotions to create an immersive event experience. There is a need for more research in this area and perhaps the difficulty in quantifying and capturing these traits explains the current absence. However, the skills of relationship management, creativity and innovation are often missing from such literature, along with the skill of avoiding negative emotional responses as well as creating positive ones.

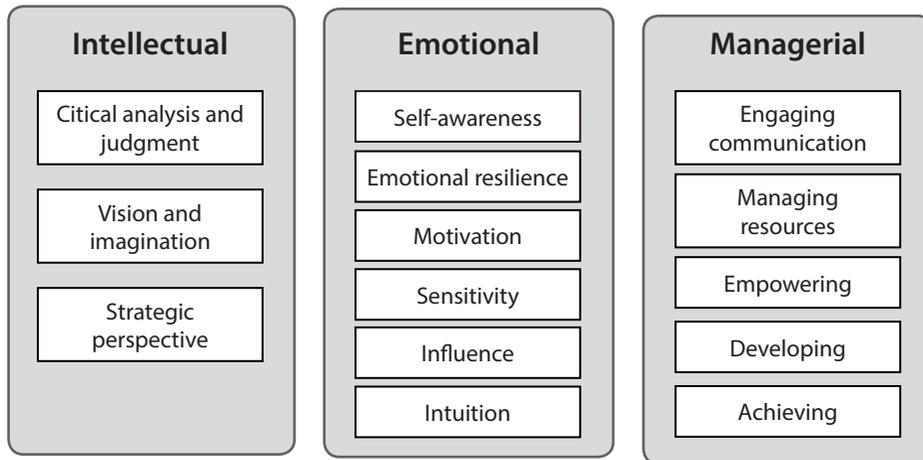


Figure 8.1: The traits of successful event creators. Source: Bladen et al, 2012, p.44

It could be argued that we need to place higher value on creativity within an events creator, to develop new and novel eventscapes that meet the requirements and challenges of the ever-changing environment. Creativity applies not only to the artistic approach we take to the presentation of events, but also to the cognitive skills we can train ourselves to use to generate systematic, planned innovative opportunities and solutions for event creation challenges. Often the challenge lies in finding people with the right skills to work within a creative team, so that collectively, ideas are generated and turned into reality.

Industry voice: Eamonn Hunt, CEO Very Creative Ltd , UK

Early in my career, I worked as a lighting designer in theatre where there is a very clear emphasis on creativity and on a particular show there might also be a desire to challenge the perceived norms around how it is going to be staged. In theatre it is the Director's vision that the technical and creative teams all work to achieve, so it is essential to work collaboratively, and to ensure that all options are considered. No idea is a bad idea; it might just not be the best one today!

Closely associated with taking a creative approach to events is the need for continuous innovation. Innovation involves finding a new and better way of doing something and much of society is based on innovations that have occurred in the past. It can be stated with certainty that innovation provides us with the standard of living we have today.