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Concluding Remarks and Future Gazing

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This chapter offers some closing reflections by the book's editors and then provides a valuable future perspective through an interview with Howard Lyons, who as a futurist shares his thoughts on the future and events.

Editors' reflections

Our intent has been to communicate the step change in the events industry, and particularly the changes this demands in the approach and behaviours of individual and teams of event creators. As we reflect on the many contributions to this book we recognise that for some readers the shifts that we are announcing, and advocating, will feel considerable and perhaps alien. For others, such as the industry voices conveyed throughout the book, there is no change at all as this is quite simply the business of event creation as they already know it.

For the most part this book has taken a strategic perspective. Yet many of the readers will, so far in their events careers and studies, have a much more operational basis to their experience. Their reading and consideration of the many ideas is no less important. For event creation to provoke the best outcomes 'operational' must be galvanised as the delivery mechanisms for the many strategic considerations and aspects considered in this book. As stated by Mark Shearon in Chapter 14;

Strategy and Execution turn out to be twins so clients could never tell them apart -- and never really needed to.

Therefore the creator(s) of any given event must repeatedly instil this, and the operational individuals and teams must learn to intuitively recognise it. Perhaps this is a remaining barrier to the professionalisation of the events area.

A lurking danger for students of events and event practitioners alike is that operational becomes detached from the strategic. It is taught in different modules, undertaken by different people, and talked about in different meetings. Therefore some of us are strategic, others operational. The dynamic and inter-related character of events makes that an unpalatable situation. It undermines the spirit of Strategic Event Creation and presents a significant challenge to the individuals and teams at the heart of the process.

Event creation is inevitably the totality of the efforts of many and disparate individuals and teams that contribute to the event project. The ability of the event creators to identify and instil clarity of purpose, and also spark synergies between these many protagonists, is often the acid test of Strategic Event Creation. Too often a strategically sound vision does not exist from the event creators, and when it does it is distorted by a failure to effectively influence the disparate operations that strongly determine the event's execution.

This book is therefore offered as an antidote to the above scenario, and our undertaking is endorsed in the previous chapter by leading industry professionals who re-emphasise this perennial challenge of uniting strategic and operational. In many other respects, Chapter 14 provides an encouragingly fitting conclusion with the informed views of the contributors convincingly endorsing the DNA of Strategic Event Creation.

The below concluding discussion returns to the five interwoven principles which embody Strategic Event Creation and considers how they are particularly revealed in the discussion throughout this book.

■ Outcome obsessed

The need for event creators to take time to interpret the ambitions and concerns of stakeholders and use this knowingly as the bedrock for event creation reverberated through many of the chapters. The frameworks and ideas introduced in Part 2 are very influential in revealing the variety of interests that inform and shape an event. Chapter 5, for example, examined the opportunity to consciously bring together stakeholders with a commonality of interest, and how these synergies can be of benefit in successfully aligning the overall event purpose.

Whatever the composition of the stakeholder mix, their combined interests are perceptively reflected in the purposeful design expressed in Part 3 of the book, through key areas such as eventscape design, marketing and so forth. The circle is incomplete unless the evaluation examined in Chapters 12 and 13 are undertaken to both capture and communicate these outcomes and also learn from them for future event creation.

■ Stakeholder centric

From the beginning of the book, particularly in Chapter 2, the stakeholder centric ethos was conveyed as a fundamental aspect of Strategic Event Creation. The suggestion, in Chapter 2, to ‘flip the norm’ and place *locality* at the centre of the thinking process is a direct attempt to evolve the thinking away from the outdated language that is exclusive rather than inclusive. It provides a foundation for longer term development as expressed through the portfolio ideas debated in Chapter 11 and the need for event creators to think beyond the here and now.

Chapter 6, in discussion of the host community, introduced the very appealing notion of event creators as ‘community animators’, positioned at the intersection between the host community and the event funders and other stakeholders. This extends the remit of the event creator with a focus beyond the immediate and a requirement to engage wholeheartedly with a wider range of stakeholders and in so doing interpret their concerns and hopes, and facilitate activities to mitigate event related risk and to trigger opportunities. The alternative is that they are not stakeholder centric, pay lip service to the community, and wider stakeholders, and in so doing destabilise the current event and also future relationships and opportunities. And, of course, also behave in an anti-sustainable manner.

■ Purposeful design

The output of both of the above principles is that they combine to provide a holistic rationale for the event(s) and an explicit internal logic that steers the purposeful event design. The ideas introduced throughout Part 3 of the book can only prosper if this considered purpose exists. Chapters 4 and 7, for example, focus heavily upon the experience of attendees, and the considered and skilled role of event creators in interpreting and influencing this. Through the development of the eventscape discussion in Chapter 8, food in Chapter 9, and marketing in Chapter 10, we see how each event has its own strategic event context (as depicted in the diagram in Chapter 1). It is evident how a close understanding of this strategic event context is a pre-requisite to event design decisions.

The plethora of variables available to event creators is both an opportunity and a risk. The following interview with Howard Lyons (Futurist and Visiting Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University) refers to ‘me too’ events, where he alludes to the ever present risk, given the multitude of events that exist, of event creators (un)intentionally achieving replication rather than differentiation. The challenge for event creators is to wield more purposefully, and skilfully, the many variables of event creation. In doing so we should note the important early content in Chapter 8 which calls for a

renewed focus upon competencies of creativity, risk taking and innovation in the skill-set of event creators.

■ Reflective practitioner

An undercurrent in the book is that there is a requirement for a considerable realignment in the emphasis from 'doing' towards 'consulting, thinking and then doing'. Consider the marketing related discussion in Chapter 10, or the legacy oriented content in Chapter 11, which both convincingly set progressive agendas for event creators in how they consider and undertake their activities in these areas. The necessity to pause and engage in considered dialogue and thought before acting is palpable.

Chapter 12 makes a strong case for strategic evaluation throughout the event creation journey. It also emphasises the integrated nature of this evaluation to have meaningful implication during the creation of the existing event, immediately post event, but also a much longer term resonance to positively affect the event creators and their future events through providing rich learning. A reflective approach underpins Strategic Event Creation, for without it much is lost.

■ Strategic persona

The totality of this book presents a significant challenge to event creators. It demolishes the traditional stereotypes of event creators as low-grade organisers with a more short term and restricted remit. The discussion in all chapters commentates upon a maturing of the event creation role from junior to senior and from operational to strategic. Event creators, as indicated in Chapters 3 to 6, are architects of strategic outcomes, deliverers of returns for funders, designers of human experiences, and animators of communities. Re-read the conclusions to each chapter and envision the persona and competencies required for the event creator of today and the future, they look very different from the stereotype.

This book has far reaching implications for both the individuals who are, and aspire to be, event creators, for event stakeholders (in the broadest sense), and also for educators who are challenged to rethink their academic delivery to ensure it is appropriate. The interview below is a fitting conclusion.