Creating Meaningful Events in Challenging Times

Developing innovative event elements for more impactful experiences

Innovation Network "Future Meeting Space"
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Business events are real all-rounders as platforms for knowledge sharing and networking. At the same time, as we live in times of multiple global challenges and transformation processes, meetings, conferences, and congresses are in need of repositioning. People who decide to attend an event expect an added value, be it new insights, special experiences, inspiration, or a unique personal experience. They want events to offer them something meaningful and relevant, while leaving a lasting impression. This study reveals which strategic and content elements can make events meaningful. It also provides practical recommendations for the effective implementation of these elements. The term "meaningful" refers to creating events that have a deeper meaning or purpose, that have lasting significance for participants and that create positive experiences. "Meaningful" refers to the intention of creating something meaningful, generating an impact and having a positive influence on participants and society as a whole. For ease of use, we have assigned icons that symbolize corresponding event categories (s. below) to the event elements we discuss in our research.

The five essential event categories identified during the study are "Knowledge Gain", "Community Building", "Bridging Gaps", "Providing Inspiration" and "Emotional Experiences". They represent fundamental event objectives and enable event organizers planning meaningful events to identify their specific goal. The term "event element" refers to individual parts or components that are used in the design and implementation of events. These elements can be diverse and range from physical aspects such as stage decoration to intangible factors such as program design or emotional aspects. In terms of Meaningful Event planning, event elements could include specific content, activities or presentations aimed at achieving the defined event objectives. The selection and integration of these elements is crucial in order to create the desired experience and promote the meaning and lasting effect of the event. Event elements can therefore be seen as building blocks that together form the overall experience of an event.

Based on this, they can then select the most suitable event elements for their event. This clear structure offers event organizers practical guidance and helps them to strategically use the elements that serve their individual event purpose best.

The insights provided by our study thus offer not only important information about developing meaningful events but also serve as a practical guide for organizers to work with purpose towards their goals. In the following chapters, we will analyze the individual event categories and their associated event elements in more detail, as well as explain the methods used for the development and evaluation of these elements.
Key Findings

Knowledge Gain
This event category aims to provide attendees with the opportunity to expand their knowledge, get new information, and gain insights into relevant subject areas. Events in this category are designed to promote education, professional training and knowledge sharing, contributing to lifelong learning. This can be achieved through talks, workshops, discussions, tasks that need to be solved, experimental formats, experience-led sessions, and other formats that aim to deepen understanding and enhance attendees’ skills. The primary goal of events focusing on knowledge gain is to create an environment where attendees can actively work on expanding their knowledge, whether it’s career-related, scientific, or in other relevant areas.

Community Building
Community-building events focus on fostering and strengthening a sense of community or communal feeling. Events in this category aim at connecting attendees, building relationships, and creating a common identity or bond. Community-building events can take various forms, from informal gatherings and networking events to team activities and community-oriented projects. The main goal is to create a supportive and cooperative atmosphere where people can get to know each other, share ideas, and collaborate. These events are intended to foster new relationships, strengthen long-term connections, and build a positive community dynamic.

Bridging Gaps
This event category focuses on bridging gaps or differences between sometimes very diverse social groups, their ideas, or perspectives. Events in this category aim to build bridges between different areas, whether cultural, social, or in terms of knowledge. The goal is to promote understanding, cooperation, and interaction between different groups in order to reduce existing distances or differences and develop mutual understanding. Such events may include intercultural dialogues, cross-industry gatherings, or events aimed at promoting diversity and inclusion. This category wants to establish a positive connection between different groups and create a common platform for constructive dialogue.

Providing Inspiration
This event category intends to inspire attendees, trigger innovative ideas, open up new perspectives, and unleash creative potential. Events in this category are focused on creating an inspiring atmosphere where innovation, creativity, and original or disruptive thinking are encouraged. This can be achieved through motivational speeches, interactive discussions with inspirational people, artistic performances, or other experience-oriented formats.

This category emphasizes the importance of inspiration as a driving force for personal and professional growth and for the development of innovative solutions in various areas.

Emotional Experiences
Events focusing on emotional experiences want to establish a deep emotional connection between attendees and the respective event. Events in this category are designed to create positive emotional experiences of joy, enthusiasm, or empathy. This can be achieved through creative event design, interactive activities, engaging storytelling, or the integration of art and culture.

The primary goal of emotional experience events is to create a lasting emotional bond between attendees and the event. This category highlights that events should not only offer informative or entertaining elements but also a profound emotional experience that contributes to attendees perceiving events as meaningful and unforgettable. Emotional experiences help to generate a positive mood and promote emotional responses of attendees.
Key Findings

Pre-Events
- Nominating Potential Attendees
- Surveying Areas of Interest and Pain Points In Advance
- Social Mentoring
- Attendees Contributing to Event Programming
- Plus One
- Events without Staff
- Community Building through Joint Cooking
- Mysterious Invitation
- Anonymous Event Start
- Socialising Opportunities
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Sharing Content Easily
- Legacy of Events
- Postcards for Attendees
- Surveying Areas of Interest and Pain Points In Advance
- Joint Social or Sustainable Actions for a Good Cause
- Creating Something Tactile
- Community Building through Joint Cooking
- Showcasing Unknown Speakers
- Joint Social or Sustainable Actions for a Good Cause
- Creating Something Tactile
- Showcasing Unknown Speakers
The "Meaningful Events" periodic table...

... comprises the evaluated event elements, categorized according to their chronological sequence in the event process (Building Anticipation, Experiencing and Enjoying, Missing, Communication) and assigned to the corresponding event categories (Knowledge Gain, Community Building, Bridging Gaps, Providing Inspiration, Emotional Experiences).
1. The "Future Meeting Space" Innovation Network

The "Future Meeting Space" innovation network was founded by the GCB German Convention Bureau e.V. and the Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering IAO in 2015, with the key objective of strengthening the role of business events as a driver of innovation and an essential instrument of corporate communication.

Using trend research methodologies, we anticipate relevant developments in the ecosystem of events and identify requirements for successful events as regards concepts, technology and event spaces. Our innovation network develops topic-specific and distinct recommendations for different stakeholder groups and regularly tests them in a real-world lab with practical applications.

As one of the world’s leading destinations for meetings, conferences and congresses, Germany stands for innovation, sustainability and comprehensive expertise in key sectors of business and science. Against this background, the GCB German Convention Bureau e.V. and Fraunhofer IAO as "Future Meeting Space" initiators, together with a diverse range of research partners, take on the role of catalysts for the future of business events "Made in Germany".

1.1 "Future Meeting Space" Initiators

The GCB German Convention Bureau e.V. represents Germany as a world-leading and sustainable destination for conferences and meetings. It supports its members and partner organizations in marketing and positioning their offerings within Germany and abroad and provides thought leadership. The GCB’s approximately 160 members represent some 400 businesses, including leading hotels, convention centers, venues, destination marketing organizations, event agencies, and providers of digital services in the German meeting and congress market. Strategic partners such as Deutsche Lufthansa, Deutsche Bahn, and German National Tourist Board support the work of the GCB.

The Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering IAO is part of Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft, one of the largest organizations for applied research in Europe. The central task of Fraunhofer-Gesellschaft is “researching for practice” in close cooperation with industry and public sector clients to drive innovation processes and the development of key technologies and innovations.
1.2 "Future Meeting Space" Partners

To achieve our complex goals, we partner with innovative technology companies, solution providers, forward-thinking event organizers, and destinations. Our 2023 research partners are:

- 7 Cities
- AllSeated GmbH
- Bayer AG
- Bayern Tourismus Marketing GmbH
- Deutsche Hospitality
- Didacta Verband e.V.
- Encore
- EVVC Europäischer Verband der Veranstaltungs-Centren e.V.
- Hamburg Tourismus GmbH/Hamburg Convention Bureau
- Köln Tourismus GmbH/Cologne Convention Bureau
- Leipziger Messe GmbH
- Münster Marketing GmbH/Messe und Congress Centrum Halle Münsterland GmbH
- Radisson Hotel Group
- SAP SE
- Siemens AG
2. 2023 Research Phase – Meaningful Events

2.1 Objectives and Structure of the Research Phase

In a time when the world is changing faster than ever before, the purpose and effectiveness of business events need redefining. The question of whether business events are still relevant in the face of current global challenges is repeatedly raised amidst these changes. However, research unequivocally confirms that meetings and events continue to play a crucial role in the communication mix of organizations. They serve as platforms for knowledge sharing and networking, as well as central hubs for the consolidation, channeling, reflection, and enrichment of knowledge. Especially in times characterized by significant change, how we handle knowledge becomes of utmost importance.

The goal of the 2023 research phase, headlined “Creating Meaningful Events in Challenging Times”, was to look at the role and purpose of business events in times of increasing economic and societal challenges and to find innovative ways to repurpose events. This includes examining how motives and obstacles for organizing business events have changed, addressing the question of what they contribute to overcoming challenging times and how that can be achieved. Meaningful event elements will be developed to design corresponding event concepts.

Our 2023 research was divided into five phases to address and answer our research questions. First, we identified what triggers and motivates organizers to run business events, with networking, coming together, sharing ideas, imparting knowledge, and experimenting being in the focus. Identifying these motivating factors is essential in planning and organizing such events. They provide insights into the needs and expectations of the target audience, and should be a top priority for organizers as they are crucial for the lasting success of an event.

In the second phase, we focused on identifying meaningful event categories, followed by co-creation workshops with research partners and experts from diverse industries to pinpoint “wow” moments to develop corresponding event elements.

In our fourth research phase, we concentrated on the pilot testing and evaluation of the identified and developed event elements, with the goal of questioning existing event concepts and to accompany and evaluate the implementation of novel best-practice events to assess the acceptance of the developed elements among users.

The results of these tests and evaluations were analyzed in the fifth and final research phase and correlated with the meaningful event categories.
Figure 2: Visualization of the 2023 research phase process.
2.2 Triggers and Motivations for Organizing Business Events

Events serve not only as opportunities for networking and social interaction but also for a variety of other purposes, including fostering a strong sense of community, generating brand identity, knowledge and information transfer, or collecting feedback. They enable forming genuine relationships with customers and employees and simplify the introduction of product or service innovations.

The reasons for organizing events vary depending on the objectives and internal and external target groups. Motivating employees, expressing appreciation, and strengthening their bond with employers are often key motivations, as depicted in Figure 3.

Furthermore, events provide the opportunity to introduce new knowledge into the company. Follow-ups after events enhance the connection with external target groups such as customers. Events convey corporate values, position the brand, raise awareness among potential customers and partners, provide information about products and services, and expand reach to increase short-term or long-term gains.

Figure 3: Reasons for organizing events for internal and external target groups.
At the same time, organizers face various challenges when running business events (Fig. 4). Inflation increases event costs and complicates budget planning. Reduced business travel activities affect the willingness of potential attendees to commit to events, as companies hesitate to send employees. The shortage of skilled workers can both hinder the organization of events and reduce attendee numbers. Extreme weather conditions, for example, can negatively impact events when travel to events is affected. Not all events are suitable for hybrid formats, and the available time for live events has become more limited since the pandemic, focusing increasingly on the summer season. Hygiene requirements demand additional resources, while rising demands on event agencies and exhibition builders increase pressure on the service industry. High costs for hybrid events and increased fees further strain budgets. Organizers face the challenge of overcoming these obstacles to successfully plan and execute events.

Figure 4: Challenges and obstacles in the planning and execution of events.
However, there are also positives, as shown in Figure 5. The event ecosystem recovered faster in 2022 than predicted, and attendees demonstrated a significant pent-up demand, leading to an increasing popularity of in-person events. Europe, and especially Germany, continue to be in high demand among organizers and attendees, suggesting that these destinations are resilient and adaptable in the face of current challenges. Post Covid-19 and given the opportunities to complement live events with digital elements should the need arise, new horizons are opening up.

Innovative technologies such as VR, AR, and the metaverse offer exciting possibilities to enrich events and make them stand out from the competition. Particularly in terms of sustainability, organizers can distinguish themselves when developing events. The use of digital tools and platforms significantly simplifies the planning, organization, and execution of events.

Figure 5: Trends and reasons for optimism.
2.3 Creating Meaningful Events as a Core Event Objective

The successful navigation of comprehensive challenges and participation in significant developments requires the strategic implementation of meaningful events. These events are characterized by a clearly defined purpose, meaning they pursue a clear goal, leaving an impact on the location where they take place and on attendees that extends beyond the actual event.

The key objective is to develop meaningful events that provide tangible added value. This necessitates a precise definition of the true purpose of events, so that attendance becomes indispensable. It is crucial to determine when an event is considered worthwhile and capable of creating emotional touchpoints. After they have ended, events should leave something behind that stays in people’s memory. Events, in this sense, are not just mere occurrences but create unforgettable experiences that unfold a lasting effect. They leave a legacy.

Building on this insight, events are categorized into five types to be considered meaningful events, namely “Knowledge Gain”, “Community Building”, “Bridging Gaps” (bridging differences), “Providing Inspiration”, and delivering “Emotional Experiences”. These categories were defined during the research process because they precisely address the characteristics that should define a meaningful event. The five event categories represent fundamental event objectives, enabling all organizers planning a meaningful event to identify their specific goal. Based on this, they can choose the event elements that best align with the purpose of their respective events. This clear structure provides organizers with practical guidance, helping them selectively employ elements that serve their individual event purposes.

Figure 6: The triad of meaningful events.
The event category “Knowledge Gain” aims at providing attendees with the opportunity to expand their knowledge, get new information, and gain insights into relevant subject areas. Events in this category are designed to promote education and knowledge sharing, contributing to lifelong learning. This can be achieved through lectures, workshops, discussions, hands-on tasks, experimentation, experiential learning, and other formats that aim to deepen understanding and enhance attendees’ skills. The primary goal of events centered around knowledge acquisition is to create an environment where people can actively work on expanding their knowledge, whether it’s in a professional, scientific, or other relevant field.

The event category “Community Building” focuses on promoting and strengthening a community or a sense of community. In events of this category, the emphasis is on connecting attendees, building relationships, and creating a shared identity or bond. Community-building events can take various forms, from informal gatherings and networking events to team activities and community-oriented projects. The primary goal is to create a supportive and collaborative atmosphere where people can get to know each other, share ideas, and collaborate. These events aim at fostering new relationships, strengthen existing ones, and build a positive community dynamic.

The event category “Bridging Gaps” is focused on bridging gaps or differences between sometimes very distinct social groups, their ideas, or perspectives. In events of this category, the aim is to build bridges between different groups, whether cultural, social, or in terms of knowledge. The goal is to promote understanding, collaboration, and communication to reduce existing distances or differences and foster mutual understanding. Such events may include intercultural dialogues, cross-industry gatherings, or events promoting diversity and integration. This category aims at establishing a positive connection between diverse groups and creating a common platform for constructive dialogue.

The event category “Providing Inspiration” wants to inspire attendees, stimulate the development of innovative ideas, open up new perspectives, and unleash creative potential. Events in this category are designed to create an inspiring atmosphere, fostering innovation, creativity, and original as well as disruptive thinking. This can be achieved through motivational lectures, interactive discussions with inspirational people, artistic performances, or other experiential formats.

This category emphasizes the importance of inspiration as a driving force for personal and professional growth, as well as for the development of innovative solutions in various environments.

The event category “Emotional Experiences” aims at establishing a deep emotional connection between attendees and the respective event. Events in this category are designed to create positive emotional experiences of joy, enthusiasm, or empathy. This can be achieved through creative event design, interactive activities, engaging storytelling, or the integration of art and culture.

The main goal of such events is to create a lasting emotional bond between attendees and the event. This category highlights that events should not only provide informative or entertaining elements but also a profound emotional experience that contributes to attendees perceiving the event as meaningful and unforgettable. Emotional experiences help to generate a positive atmosphere and promote emotional responses of attendees.
3. Development of Meaningful Event Elements

Our process of developing innovative event elements in the context of meaningful events consisted of several consecutive steps. A research partner workshop, along with a total of twelve expert interviews and three development workshops involving professionals from various fields such as dramaturgy, education, diversity, psychology, brand design, sustainability, and business ethics, served as the basis for this co-creative process.

We started by asking workshop participants to share memorable moments from events they attended in the past. Subsequently, current trends and developments in society were discussed to draw conclusions for future events. In the expert interviews, professionals from different fields elaborated on their respective perspectives. During the workshops, participants were asked to integrate the previously discussed unforgettable moments into the classic phases of the event organization phase management process – namely, “Plan, Do, Review”.

The interviews and workshops concluded with a forward-looking perspective, prompting participants to describe a fictional event they would like to attend. This participatory approach facilitated the collection of ideas from various perspectives and the development of innovative event elements.

3.1 Creating Event Elements from Wow Moments

A central aspect of developing event elements was the creation of innovative formats for meaningful events that carry a tangible purpose. Participants were asked to identify “wow moments” from events they attended in the past. This term conveys a positive experience that is characterized by overwhelming emotion and achieves a surprise effect as it triggers unexpected enthusiasm. In such a moment, everything comes together perfectly, and the abundance of positive impressions cannot be fully processed initially.

Subsequently, during the development workshops and expert interviews, event elements were developed along the individual event process steps of “Building Anticipation”, “Experiencing and Enjoying”, and “Missing”, as well as for the overarching aspect of “Communication”. These event process steps align with the often-used phase management in event planning – namely, “Plan, Do, Review” – but are tailored to the attendees’ perspective.

This approach allows starting from specific experiences, examining their effects, and developing innovative event elements for the future that can achieve a similarly overwhelming impact.

In total, 126 elements were developed through this process, serving as building blocks for designing meaningful event formats. During the research process, some of the developed elements were tested in real environments and empirically reflected upon for their effectiveness, with the results described in Chapter 4.
3.2 Key Findings from Expert Interviews and Development Workshops

One of the most notable key statements can be best described with the motto *“On to new paths!”*. Most of the interviewed experts are confident that some old models no longer work and should not be applied anymore. It therefore no longer seems promising to hold events according to the "one size fits all" principle, but to tailor them to the individual needs of the participants, as Prof. Dr. Harald Zeiss from the Harz University of Applied Sciences explains. For hybrid events, experts suggest engaging two moderators instead of one to cover and connect the virtual and physical worlds effectively. Networking is evolving beyond exchanging business information, focusing on deeper connections and personal interactions. Therefore, according to Sandra Stäber from Deloitte, the simple exchange of business cards is a thing of the past, as the focus is on qualitative conversations and building real relationships. Depending on the type of event, networking should be considered a central part of the event and actively encouraged to facilitate valuable interactions and the development of long-lasting relationships. Also, a successful event may require more than an impressive setup: It is crucial that all attendees pay attention and feel included in the event.

Experts emphasize the importance of empathy and the ability to understand others in event organization. They suggest that events should be characterized by sophisticated dramaturgy and compelling storytelling to create a lasting impact. Beyond impressive setups, it is crucial for all participants to feel included, requiring organizers to demonstrate empathy and finesse. Successful events should not only inform but also provide a unique experience that takes attendees on an emotional journey, engaging all their senses.

The principle of lifelong learning should guide event content, utilizing individualized content and various measures to address different audience segments. Technology and gamification can enhance content delivery and participant engagement.

Sustainability is considered a fundamental requirement rather than just a trend, reflecting the values of the younger generation. The experts express the need for improvement in hybrid formats, suggesting a clear separation between digital and physical formats. Networking remains essential, predominantly effective in live, in-person settings.

The trends and developments in events reflect the turbulent times and current transformation in society. Sustainability is a top priority, moving beyond being a trend to becoming a fundamental requirement. Younger generations value sustainable ecological, social, and economic actions, discerning greenwashing efforts.

"The topic of networking will continue to develop at events, as participants today want to do more than just to exchange information and are looking for deeper connections and looking forward to making personal connections, as exchanging business cards is a thing of the past"  

Sandra Stäber, Deloitte
Optimizing hybrid formats remains a challenge, with suggestions to separate digital and physical formats. Influencers such as podcasters, YouTubers, and TikTokers are expected to play a significant role in shaping new event formats. The atmosphere of events, including comfort, lighting, and inspiration, will become more crucial and tailored to the needs of each attendee.

The increasing non-committal nature of attendees requires innovative approaches to engage them and create long-term connections with event formats. Topics such as mental health and diversity are gaining importance in professional life and should be focal points in events. “Women’s quotas and ‘we need to talk about it’ are simply no longer enough”, believes Tanja Bauer-Glück. Instead, suitable representatives and experts need to have their say. The blurring boundary between personal and professional life will impact events, with emotions becoming a crucial factor and a festival-like atmosphere gaining significance.

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**Experts from the Interviews and Development Workshops**

- Detlef Altenbeck, m.next
- Tanja Bauer-Glück, Business & Leadership Coaching
- Simon Dauenhauer, Roche
- Aditya Gupta, India Didactics Association
- Kathrin Horn, Telekom MMS
- Cornelia Ilg, Professional Meeting and Conference Organizer
- Dr. Birte Jung, Nachhaltigkeitsexpertin
- Tanja Laub, Walkabout Media
- Nina Laible, Bergmanngruppe
- Daniel Moj, Neyroo
- Zoe Nogai, Telekom
- Dr. Steffen Ronft, SRH Fernhochschule
- Saskia Rudolph, Spiegelneuronen – Angewandte Positive Psychologie
- Thorsten Sievert, smile! producing
- Prof. Dr. Andreas Suchanek, Handelshochschule Leipzig
- Sandra Stäber, Deloitte
- Theresa Troglauer, Hospitality- & MICE-Expertin
- Dennis Vilovic, Troop Travel
- Prof. Dr. Mascha Will-Zocholl, Hessische Hochschule für öffentliches Management und Sicherheit
- Prof. Dr. Harald Zeiss, Hochschule Harz
- Hendrik Zilien, The Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies of Johnson & Johnson
4. Results of the Development Process and Reflection

Online Survey Details

- **Survey period**
  21.09 – 16.10.23
  Average participation time < 10 Min

- **Scope of questionnaire**
  26 questions on interests and attitude to life and evaluation of selected event elements

- **Participants**
  n = 187 (98 % DACH)
  62 % female
  35 % male
  3 % diverse und not specified
  Employees 44 %
  Managers 56 %
  Employed 68 %
  Self-employed 19 %

- **Target group**
  Potential event participants and event planners
  75% Event planners
  25% Event participants

- **Industry composition**
  Event industry and tourism well represented

Throughout the research process, 20 of the newly developed event elements underwent evaluation, based on both a quantitative online survey and their experimental implementation in best-practice events.

The best-practice events were two face-to-face events in German-speaking countries, which were held in July 2023 and October 2023, each with around 40 participants. Representatives of Generation Z were explicitly invited to one of the two events, which is referred to at the appropriate points in the evaluations of the elements used at this event. The event elements in the best-practice events were evaluated using a 7-point approval scale based on the objectives of the individual elements (e.g. the networking aspect for elements that were used for exchange).

Below, the elements are first described briefly, followed by the empirical results of the online survey and the evaluation of the best-practice events. The results of this evaluation are presented based on their association with different phases of events and are assigned to respective event categories using icons.

The evaluation of the event elements in the online survey was divided per element into the question of whether such an element would firstly trigger inspiration or secondly enthusiasm and thirdly whether an event with such an element would be attended or whether an element would be integrated into one's own event. Respondents rated these questions on a 5-point Likert scale from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree".
### Results of the Development Process and Reflection

#### I do not agree at all

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities with locals</td>
<td>4,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving a voice to previously unheard speakers</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atmospheric experiences</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility to easily share content</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity, inclusion and intergenerational exchange</td>
<td>4,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting a joint social/sustainable activity</td>
<td>4,0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create something haptic on your own</td>
<td>3,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Mentoring</td>
<td>3,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy of the event</td>
<td>3,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Events</td>
<td>3,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcards for participants</td>
<td>3,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomination of potential participants</td>
<td>3,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anonymous conference start</td>
<td>3,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mysterious invitation</td>
<td>3,2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffless event</td>
<td>2,8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### I fully agree

#### Figure 7: Overview of evaluated event elements for the question “This event element would inspire me”.

[Figure 7: Overview of evaluated event elements for the question “This event element would inspire me.”]
Results of the Development Process and Reflection

Figure 8: Overview of evaluated event elements for the question “This event element would excite me”.

Activities with locals: 4.4
Atmospheric experiences: 4.2
Diversity, inclusion and intergenerational exchange: 4.1
Possibility to easily share content: 4.1
Starting a joint social/sustainable activity: 4.1
Giving a voice to previously unheard speakers: 4.0
Create something haptic on your own: 3.9
Social Mentoring: 3.8
Legacy of the event: 3.7
Postcards for participants: 3.6
Nomination of potential participants: 3.4
Pre-Events: 3.3
Anonymous conference start: 3.1
Mysterious invitation: 3.1
Staffless event: 2.6

I do not agree at all | I fully agree
Results of the Development Process and Reflection

It becomes evident that the categories, phases, and principles of events serve as stable foundational structures for meaningful events. They provide a solid framework that spans across various events. Simultaneously, individual elements may lose relevance over time, while new ones emerge, and existing ones continue to evolve. This highlights the dynamic and adaptable nature of the system. It is crucial to emphasize that the elements listed in this chapter represent only a selection, limited to those subjected to evaluation. A total of nearly 130 elements were developed, and the comprehensive list is available to research partners. There is no guarantee of completeness for the listed elements, as the concept should be viewed as an ever-evolving, flexible system.

Figure 9: Overview of evaluated event elements for the question “I would implement this event element in my event or participate in an event with such an element”.

- Possibility to easily share content: 4.2
- Activities with locals: 4.1
- Diversity, inclusion and intergenerational exchange: 4.1
- Atmospheric experiences: 3.9
- Starting a joint social/sustainable activity: 3.9
- Giving a voice to previously unheard speakers: 3.9
- Create something haptic on your own: 3.7
- Social Mentoring: 3.6
- Legacy of the event: 3.5
- Postcards for participants: 3.5
- Nomination of potential participants: 3.5
- Pre-Events: 3.5
- Anonymous conference start: 2.9
- Mysterious invitation: 2.8
- Staffless event: 2.5

I do not agree at all | I fully agree

Building Anticipation | Experiencing and Enjoying | Missing | Communication
4.1 Elements of the "Building Anticipation" Phase

The category "Building Anticipation", which corresponds to the "Plan" phase in the phase management process, is crucial for creating a positive and anticipatory atmosphere for an upcoming event. At this stage, the goal is to awaken attendees' anticipation and curiosity. To achieve this objective, targeted measures are taken to make the event appear attractive in advance. This may include releasing teasers, announcing and introducing well-known speakers, unveiling exciting topics, or presenting innovative event formats. The focus is on creating a sense of anticipation and excitement that motivates attendees to want to attend the event and look forward to the upcoming occasion.

The "Building Anticipation" phase is thus a crucial component to make the target audience more interested in the event, gain people's attention, and foster a positive attitude toward the event. Skillful management of this phase can positively influence the overall attendee experience before the actual event begins.

Pre-Events

**Definition:**
Pre-events serve as a platform for attendees to network before the main event. Early dialogue facilitates the development of an active community, enabling deeper discussions and knowledge sharing during the main event. Joining pre-events creates an emotional bond among attendees, leading to sustained positive emotions during the main event. The pre-established connection intensifies the event experience and enhances the emotional resonance of the participants.

**Empirical Reflection:**
The evaluation demonstrates that pre-events are clearly relevant for the main event and exhibit a distinct thematic connection (Mean = 5.9). Survey results indicate that particularly adventurous attendees interested in surprises are enthusiastic about pre-events. In the best-practice event, it was observed that pre-events generate anticipation for the main event (Mean = 5.1). Additionally, more than half of the respondents in the online survey (53 percent) can envision joining such an event.

Nominating Potential Attendees

**Definition:**
The option to nominate additional attendees for an event fosters an atmosphere of appreciation and inclusion. Recommendations bring diverse perspectives and experiences, promoting knowledge acquisition for all attendees. These nominations also contribute to community building by strengthening cohesion and positioning the community as an actively shaping part of the event, enhancing the sense of community.

**Empirical Reflection:**
The online survey indicates that 53 percent of respondents could envision attending an event where the nomination of potential attendees is possible. The results suggest positive correlations between the evaluation of this element and activity on social media, interest in foreign cultures, and career orientation. About half of the respondents express enthusiasm for the possibility of nominating potential attendees (49 percent). There is a positive connection between the evaluation of this element and activity on social networks, as well as interest in foreign cultures.
Attendees Contributing to Event Programming

**Definition:**
Involving attendees in event programming creates a stronger identification with the event’s content. The diversity of suggestions and ideas ensures that various perspectives on a topic are covered, leading to a broader acquisition of knowledge. Attendee interests become visible through their participation in event programming, and the event can be aligned accordingly. By proposing speakers, event locations, and participating in pre-voting, diverse perspectives are considered, promoting the sharing of know-how and experiences across different subject areas to close knowledge gaps.

**Empirical Reflection:**
In the real-world laboratory, participants agreed that involvement in event programming provides the opportunity to look beyond one’s own perspective and gain new knowledge (Mean = 4.9 and 5.8). This was particularly true for representatives of Generation Z. The best-practice analysis shows that engaging attendees in event programming can enhance participation in the event. Both participants in the pilot study in general (Mean = 4.6) and specifically Generation Z representatives (Mean = 5.6) rated this event element highly.

Surveying Areas of Interest and Pain Points In Advance

**Definition:**
The targeted survey of areas of interest and pain points in advance enables the event to align with attendees’ individual needs. This creates personal relevance for attendees, leading to active engagement. Anticipation and involvement positively impact the learning success. Openly addressing interests and challenges fosters a sense of community and an atmosphere of honesty and trust. By addressing individual needs, attendees feel heard and valued, strengthening a sense of community.

**Empirical Reflection:**
The best-practice analysis confirms that attendees highly value their own active participation (Mean = 5.6) and that events have personal relevance for them (Mean = 6.0). Additionally, people attending the best-practice event particularly agree with the impact on the sense of community (Mean = 4.5).

Plus One

**Definition:**
The option to bring a person as a plus one, i.e., a companion, promotes the diversity of the event. Involving individuals from different industries or diverse age groups creates a diverse and inclusive event community. This broadens perspectives and encourages interdisciplinary exchange, which is essential for strong community building and high learning success.

**Empirical Reflection:**
The results of the best-practice event show that the intergenerational exchange facilitated by the “plus one” element was highly rated by attendees overall (Mean = 6.6) and especially by representatives of Generation Z (Mean = 6.5). The diverse character of the event audience resulting from the inclusion of individuals from different generations was particularly positively evaluated in the best-practice analysis (Mean = 6.3).

Mysterious Invitation

**Definition:**
a mysterious invitation sets the emotional tone before an event. The use of secrets and surprises arouses curiosity and creates an atmosphere of suspense (e.g., hinting at a special speaker without revealing the name). Attendees become emotionally involved by anticipating unexpected experiences, leading to a deeper connection with the event.

**Empirical Reflection:**
Almost half of the respondents (4 percent) feel inspired by a mysterious invitation, while 39 percent of them are excited about such an invitation. Especially respondents who enjoy being surprised show great enthusiasm for such a mysterious invitation.
4.2 Elements of the "Experiencing and Enjoying" Phase

The category "Experiencing and Enjoying", which corresponds to the "Do" phase in the phase management process, marks the climax of the event: Planned activities come to life, and attendees can experience the unique atmosphere of the given event. This can include engaging presentations, interactive workshops, networking opportunities, music or art elements, and other planned activities.

The goal of this phase is to create a positive and engaging experience for attendees. By carefully implementing planned elements, an environment is created that meets or even exceeds expectations, leaving a lasting positive memory. This phase is crucial for the overall success of events as it represents the moment when concepts and ideas are brought to life, and attendees get to experience the planned wow factor.

(Social) Mentoring

Definition:
(Social) Mentoring promotes the exchange of experiences between different attendee groups. For example, digital natives supporting older attendees and newcomers being helped by experienced attendees can create an environment where knowledge is shared in a one-to-one setting. (Social) Mentoring helps facilitate knowledge sharing among different groups, such as different generations, in a pleasant environment. Younger people can benefit from the experience of older attendees, while representatives of older generations can benefit, for instance, from the digital expertise of digital natives, creating a personal atmosphere.

Empirical Reflection:
(Social) Mentoring offerings inspire 67 percent of the respondents, as indicated by the survey results. There are positive correlations between the evaluation of this element and environmental awareness as well as activity on social media. The results of the online survey also show that a large proportion of attendees draw inspiration (71 percent) and enthusiasm (67 percent from this type of mentoring and can imagine joining a corresponding event (61 percent). Particularly, individuals active on social networks express interest in the (social) mentoring event element.

Events without Staff

Definition:
The active involvement of attendees in the planning, setup, and running of an event without the assistance of professional event management creates a strong community, promotes emotional connection, and fosters contact among attendees. For example, a collaborative preparation of catering, setting up necessary technology, or arranging furniture can be an approach. Collective engagement generates a sense of unity, as attendees actively contribute to shaping the event. This participatory approach strengthens collaboration and promotes the community-building process.

Empirical Reflection:
In the context of the real-world laboratory, it became evident that being actively involved makes it easier to start conversations and connect with others (Mean = 5.7). Shared engagement generates positive emotions that enhance the sense of belonging and transform the event into a personal experience. The results of the best-practice analysis indicate that the collaborative organization of an event can provide a personal sense of accomplishment (Mean = 3.2 and 4.9), especially among representatives of Generation Z. However, the results of the online survey show that this event element was rated the lowest by respondents compared to other survey elements. Still, 28 percent of respondents would be inspired by events without staff, and approximately one in five (22 percent would be excited about such an event element. About one-third of respondents (34 percent seem uncertain about whether they would attend an event with such an element. The results suggest that personal experience of such an event is needed in order to convince people. Additionally, this event element appears to have room for improvement regarding the nature of automation.
Anonymous Event Start

**Definition:**
Anonymous attendees (e.g., no job titles on name tags) at the beginning of events helps break down hierarchies and facilitates communication on an equal footing. This encourages a more open exchange of ideas and opinions, as attendees can express themselves freely, regardless of professional or personal hierarchies. By allowing attendees to remain anonymous without others making assumptions or having reservations can be avoided. This enables an open exchange of ideas and opinions where all voices are equal, leading to an effective bridging of social differences.

**Empirical Reflection:**
One-third of respondents in the online survey can imagine implementing an anonymous event start or attending such an event. While half (49 percent) of respondents feel inspired by this, the online survey also shows that as hierarchy increases, enthusiasm, inspiration, and willingness to attend decrease. There is thus a weak negative correlation between organizational position and the evaluation of such an event start. Employees without personnel responsibility rate the element significantly higher than managers at all levels.

Joint Social or Sustainable Actions for a Good Cause

**Definition:**
Initiating joint social or sustainable actions for a good cause strengthens the sense of community and the focus on a common goal. This not only promotes social engagement but also enhances lasting community building and an inspiring dynamic. The collective effort for a good cause generates positive energy that leads to creative solutions and inspired actions. Through these actions, attendees look beyond and expand their horizon.

**Empirical Reflection:**
The online survey shows that 75 percent of respondents find inspiration in joint social/sustainable actions, and 76 percent can be excited about such actions. Additionally, the majority (70 percent) of respondents would either integrate such an action into their own event or attend a corresponding event. Furthermore, there are positive correlations between the evaluation of the element and environmental awareness, as well as the willingness to be surprised.

Community Building through Joint Cooking

**Definition:**
Joint cooking and dining not only promote physical but also emotional connections among people. Interactive cooking tasks allow attendees to get to know each other on a personal level. This strengthens the sense of togetherness and creates an informal platform for the sharing of ideas and experiences. Joint cooking and dining facilitate not only getting acquainted but also establish emotional closeness. Interactive tasks like co-cooking enhance cohesion and create positive emotions through shared experiences.
Results of the Development Process and Reflection

Empirical Reflection:
This was also observed in the best-practice events, where attendees indicated that joint cooking had stimulated interaction and communication (Mean = 4.2). This is particularly true for Generation Z (Mean = 5.8). The joy and mood-lifting aspect of joint cooking are evident in the results of the best-practice analysis, where attendees in general (Mean = 4.4) and especially Generation Z representatives (Mean = 6.3) rated the fun factor as high to very high.

Socialising Opportunities

Definition:
Socialising outside the actual event program provides attendees with an additional opportunity to share their experiences, connect, and network in a relaxed atmosphere. This promotes ongoing interaction and engagement beyond the event, deepening relationships within the created community. Reflecting on shared experiences strengthens the sense of togetherness, contributing to the long-term development of a strong community. Socialising activities offer an additional chance for in-depth discussions and collective reflection. Jointly discovering sights and highlights of the event location enhance the experience, foster new connections, and create an emotional bond that extends beyond the event.

Empirical Reflection:
These points are confirmed by the results of the best-practice event, where attendees highlighted the opportunity for informal conversations with others (Mean = 6.0). Socialising seems ideal for rounding off the entire event experience, providing an optimal conclusion at the end of the day (Mean = 6.2).

Showcasing Unknown Speakers

Definition:
Featuring previously unheard and unknown speakers, including newcomers or people with profound personal experiences, such as refugees, provides an opportunity to break down prejudices and build bridges between different experiences and perspectives. Such presentations can inspire participants and contribute to closing existing knowledge gaps by offering new viewpoints on relevant topics. Opening the stage to new speakers creates inspiring moments. Their stories not only broaden horizons but also dismantle prejudices and build bridges between different life experiences. This opens up new perspectives and promotes creative engagement with diverse subjects.

Empirical Reflection:
In the survey, 68 percent of respondents expressed enthusiasm for unknown speakers, and the majority (69 percent) would invite such speakers or attend in corresponding events. This is particularly the case for individuals interested in foreign cultures. Additionally, the online survey highlighted the inspiring nature of presentations by unknown speakers, with 80 percent of respondents agreeing that they would be inspired by such speakers. Here, too, a positive correlation with an interest in foreign cultures and travel could be observed.

Diversity and Inclusion

Definition:
Inclusion efforts, such as addressing diversity in terms of generation, (social) hierarchy, and neurodiversity (diversity in neurological characteristics), build bridges between different groups. This creates an environment where sharing experiences and ideas across diverse life situations becomes possible, demonstrating an appreciation for diversity. Incorporating diversity and inclusion from a variety of perspectives creates an inspiring environment. Different viewpoints and experiences enhance creativity and open up innovative ways of thinking. An inclusive set-up allows for closing knowledge gaps and supporting the creative participation of all attendees.
Empirical Reflection:
The online survey indicates that an event that creates structures to include everyone in their diversity is met with enthusiasm by the majority of respondents (81 percent). Three-quarters of respondents (75 percent) can imagine giving more consideration to diversity and inclusion in their own events. Here, too, a positive correlation with an interest in foreign cultures can be observed. With 80 percent, the majority of respondents state that “Diversity, Inclusion, and Intergenerational Exchange” inspires them and 75 percent can imagine attending an event that consciously considers diversity.

Activities with Locals

Definition:
The integration of activities with locals not only promotes cultural understanding but also strengthens attendees’ identification with the event location. Direct contact with local people and conditions helps break down reservations and prejudices. This contributes to attendees experiencing the event as an opportunity for genuine cultural enrichment and connection. It can create a deeper identification with the event destination and ensures an inspiring environment where new ideas can emerge.

Empirical Reflection:
For 86 percent of respondents, this event element sparks enthusiasm, and 75 percent can imagine incorporating such activities into their event or attending such an event. Especially individuals who value sharing ideas with people who have a different perspective would be more likely to implement activities with locals in their event or attend such an event. “Activities with Locals” is THE event element to integrate for fostering inspiration (85 percent) and it excites 86 percent of online survey respondents. This is particularly true for people who state that they gain new ideas and inspiration from in-person events.

Atmospheric Experiences

Definition:
Atmospheric experiences, as staged at festivals, create an inspiring environment and emotional depth through the use of light, music, temperature, and other sensory elements. A well-designed business event can achieve similarly inspiring effects. The atmosphere stimulates the senses and contributes to creating a creative and inspiring mood. Atmospheric productions can create a sensory experience that evokes positive emotions and creates an unforgettable memory.

Empirical Reflection:
Eight out of ten respondents (81 percent) can imagine drawing inspiration from atmospheric experiences at a business event. Furthermore, there is a weak positive correlation between the evaluation of this event element and new ideas and inspirations that can be drawn from in-person events. Additionally, environmentally conscious people are more likely to be inspired by an atmospheric experience. The survey also shows that individuals, especially those for whom attending in-person events is essential for their motivation and commitment to their organization, can be inspired and excited by emotional outcomes.

Creating Something Tactile

Definition:
The opportunity to create something tactile with your own hands fosters active inspiration through creative actions. Whether it’s brewing your own beer, participating in interactive lectures, or joining in the collaborative preparation of food and drinks (co-cooking), such activities not only create emotionally bonding experiences but also inspire through one’s own creative engagement. Taking part in activities allows allows people to not only have passive attendee experiences but also to generate emotions and create personal experiences.
Empirical Reflection:
The online survey shows that 75 percent of respondents are
inspired by creative activities, and 71 percent can be excited
by them. Meanwhile, 63 percent of respondents can imagine
participating in such an event. This is especially true for people
who find new ideas and inspiration at in-person events. In con-
trast, there is a negative correlation between the perception
of stress and pressure at live events and this event element.
This means that individuals for whom attending live events is a
burden and stressful are more likely to reject creating somet-
thing tactile at events. Furthermore, there is a positive corre-
lation between the evaluation of this event element and the
importance of live events for the motivation and commitment
of respondents to their respective organizations.

4.3 Elements of the "Missing" Phase

The "Missing" phase, which corresponds to the "Review"
phase in the phase management process, refers to the end
of the event and the transition into the post-event phase. During
this phase, attendee experiences are being evaluated with the
aim of gaining valuable insights for future events.

Throughout the "Missing" process, questions are raised such
as: Which elements did attendees particularly appreciate?
Which aspects could be improved? What turned out to be suc-
cessful and could be adopted for upcoming events? The focus
is on collecting feedback, evaluating the overall experience,
and identifying potential areas for optimization. These steps
can be carried out through attendee surveys, group discussi-
ons, or individual feedback collection. The goal is to reinforce
positive aspects, identify elements that can be refined, and
develop improvement suggestions for future events.

The "Missing" phase thus creates a bridge between the imme-
diate event experience and the insights that can be gained
from that experience. This phase is crucial for continuous
improvement and innovation in event planning, ideally instilling
a sense of anticipation among attendees for potentially upco-
ming events. This phase directly follows the anticipation in
perspective to future events, enabling year-round engagement
with the community.

Legacy of Events

Definition:
The lasting impact of events contributes to the acquired
knowledge enduring beyond the event itself and can help
local communities and organizations benefit from the acquired
insights in the long term, thereby achieving lasting knowledge
growth. For instance, you could express what impression an
event should leave at the destination where it takes place (e. g.,
the event was loud, messy, harmonious).

Empirical Reflection:
The survey shows that more than half of the respondents
(62 percent) are enthusiastic about this idea of an event’s
legacy. It resonates particularly well with people interested
in foreign cultures, travel, and discovering new places,
generating excitement and inspiration.

Postcards for Attendees

Definition:
Sending postcards after events nurtures memories and builds
anticipation for future events. Images and anecdotes from
past events, such as pictures of attendees networking, create
an emotional connection that endures over time and evokes
memories.

Empirical Reflection:
The majority of respondents (60 percent) find inspiration in
having event memories triggered. An equal number are excited
about postcards after the event, and 61 percent would also
send postcards themselves as mementos after the event.
4.4 Overall "Communication" Elements

Communication around an event is a fundamental aspect that is present in every phase of an event. For the “Communication” category, a total of nine elements were developed. The way information is conveyed is crucial and influences all other aspects of an event. The elements in this category cover various aspects of communication, including strategic planning, interactive exchange, and the use of different communication tools to effectively reach attendees. These elements are likely to contribute to clear and effective communication throughout the entire event process, from planning and event announcement to implementation and post-event evaluation.

Empirical Reflection:
The online survey indicates that the majority of respondents (81 percent) state that they are inspired by the possibility of easy sharing, and 76 percent are excited about it. 78 percent of respondents can imagine attending such an event or implementing such a format in their own event.

Sharing Content Easily

Definition:
The ability to share content easily promotes communication and interaction among attendees. Through sharing relevant information and insights, attendees can benefit from different perspectives and the expertise of the community. Additionally, this fosters collaborative inspiration. For example, through personalized QR codes and unified hashtags, the shared experience is documented, allowing attendees to effortlessly share ideas and insights, creating a dynamic, inspiring platform for the exchange of ideas and perspectives.
5. Summary

Our 2023 research theme focused on the development of innovative event elements to create more impactful event experiences that leave a lasting impression. The comprehensive analysis of the event elements for meaningful events not only provides insights into the design of meaningful events but also offers practical recommendations for event organizers. To achieve this, this study categorizes the evaluated elements into five central event categories: "Knowledge Gain", "Community Building", "Bridging Gaps", "Providing Inspiration" and "Emotional Experiences". These categories represent fundamental event goals and provide event organizers with clear guidance.

These five categories enable all event organizers to identify their specific goals, choose the most suitable elements, and align them with the phases of "Building Anticipation", "Experiencing and Enjoying", and "Missing", as well as the corresponding "Communication". This clear structure supports event organizers in using elements that serve their individual event purposes. The "Periodic Table for Meaningful Events" shown in Figure 10 assigns the evaluated elements to their respective phases and associates them with the corresponding event categories in this study.
The detailed analysis of the event categories and elements illustrates how organizers can systematically work towards their defined goals. The methods for evaluating the elements provide a transparent foundation for contextualizing the insights gained. Overall, the study’s results offer a comprehensive guide, enabling organizers to plan and implement meaningful and purposeful events.
6. Forecast

Together with the Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering IAO, the GCB German Convention Bureau e.V. will continue to address the challenges of the ongoing industry transformation, with more "Future Meeting Space" research in 2024.

Megatrends such as "New Work", demographic change, and Artificial Intelligence are on their way to becoming firmly established in our daily lives. In the context of business events, these and other trends have already driven significant developments in specific fields. As a result, some offerings are being displaced, certain products and services remain largely unaffected by significant changes, and in other areas, considerable and sometimes hidden potentials are currently emerging.

Thus, our 2024 research will address the question of which standards and processes will endure, disappear, or emerge in the ecosystem of business events. The goal of our exploratory research is to uncover opportunities for all stakeholders along the customer journeys in the events ecosystem – both for organizers and providers – early on and to empower them to make data-driven, well-informed decisions.

The identified developments may have transformative and disruptive effects, potentially giving rise to business model innovations or displacing outdated business models from the market. However, they can also operate on underlying levels, primarily inspiring new products and services that reform existing business cases.

Regardless of the specific degree of change, the focus is always on optimizing solutions with respect to customer needs and, ideally, unlocking new market potentials.
Contact

**Project organisation and project management:**
GCB German Convention Bureau e.V.
c/o WeWork
Taunusanlage 8
60329 Frankfurt a. M.
www.germany-meetings.com

- **Matthias Schultze**
  Managing Director
  Phone: +49 69 242930-14
  schultze@gcb.de

- **Birgit Pacher**
  Manager Research and Development
  Phone: +49 69 242930-18
  pacher@gcb.de

- **Sophie Gienow**
  Consultant Research and Development
  Phone: +49 69 242930-19
  gienow@gcb.de

**Project concept and project process:**
Fraunhofer Institute for Industrial Engineering IAO
Nobelstrasse 12
70569 Stuttgart
www.iao.fraunhofer.de

- **Dr. Stefan Rief**
  Managing Director, Head of Organisational Development and Work Design Research Unit
  Phone: +49 711 970-5479
  stefan.rief@iao.fraunhofer.de

- **Tilman Naujoks**
  Research Associate, Project Manager
  Phone: +49 711 970-2086
  tilman.naujoks@iao.fraunhofer.de

- **Milena Bockstahler**
  Research Associate
  Phone: +49 711 970-5480
  milena.bockstahler@iao.fraunhofer.de