Event Experience

A qualitative study on the impact of the Peak/End Rule in event experiences

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Summary

Events engage at a personal level, and therefore form an important marketing tool. It is important to comprehend the way an event contributes to a personal experience. It is assumed that an event experience can be manipulated by the designing the program of the event. In this study it is researched whether the Peak/End rule can be extended to event experiences.

The Peak/End rule describes the factors affecting a retrospective evaluation. The characteristics that influence the retrospective evaluation are peak, end, and trend characteristics. The trend characteristic is described by the velocity, segmentation of the trend, and the segment location when the trend is segmented.

A qualitative research method was used to collect data from experts. 16 in-depth interviews were taken from experts, collecting 30 described event experiences. A distinction was made between the cases described from a visitors' point of view (n=16) and cases described from an organizers' point of view (n=14). Transcripts of the interviews were coded and analyzed. From the analysis of the transcripts a framework was constructed that describes the event experience of event visitor and event organizer.

From the interviews it is concluded that not all the expected characteristics were retrieved from the cases. The peak intensity was indicated to exert a positive influence on the retrospective evaluation. Furthermore segmentation and segment location have an influence on the retrospective evaluation of event experiences. Future research is needed to prove the importance of trend, velocity, and end characteristics, as the results from the present study are inconclusive about the influence of these characteristics. From the results two other characteristics were found to have an important influence on the retrospective evaluation. The concept of flow and the sense of communitas are found back in the case descriptions. Future research needs to further study the impact of these two characteristics on the event experience.

1. Introduction

Events are an important tool in the marketing and communication toolkit of foundations and corporations. The impacts and roles of planned events within the communication strategy of foundations and corporations have been well documented, and are of increasing importance within their strategies (Getz, 2007).

Planned events are spatial-temporal phenomenon. Each event is unique because of the interactions taking place between the setting, people, and management systems such as the program. Events are such a powerful communication tool, as they always are unique, produce a feeling that you 'have to be there' to fully enjoy the full experience, since it will be a lost opportunity once you have missed it (Getz, 2007).

Planned events are organized for a purpose. While centuries ago events were created from individual and community initiatives, these days the organizing of events is mainly carried out by entrepreneurs and professionals for the simple reason that events are too important, organized for strategic goals, and too risky to be left to amateurs.

This shift has led to the development of the field of event management; a field of study devoted to gathering the practical knowledge around the design, production, and management of planned events. Planned events include festivals and other celebrations, entertainment, recreation, political and state, science, sport and arts events, events within the domain of corporate and business affairs (such as meetings, conferences, conventions, fairs, and exhibitions), and events in the private domain (such as weddings, parties, and other private social events). Table 1 gives an overview of the types of events as they are distinguished by Getz (2005).

Table 1
Typology of planned events (Getz, 2005)

Cultural celebrations	Business and trade	Arts and entertainment	Educational and scientific
Festivals	Meetings, conventions	Concerts	Conferences
Carnivals	Consumer and trade shows	Award ceremonies	Seminars
Commemorations			Clinics
Religious events	Fairs, markets		
Political and state	Private events	Recreational	Sport competition
Summits	Weddings	Sport or games for fun	Amateur/professional
Royal occasions	Parties		Spectator/participant
Political events	Socials		
VIP visits			

Still, the field of event studies is a relatively new, but fast growing field of study. Before the 1990s there were few, if any, academic programs in event management. Since then a vast body of

literature on events has been published, along with academic degrees coming to existence ranging from event management, courses related to tourism, and leisure, sports, and hospitality programs. It has been since the early '90s that various journals were brought to press.

The study of events is not something new. Before events have been studied and manifested in research and theory development on anthropology, economics of events, and dramaturgy. The term 'event studies' cannot be traced back further than 2000, when Getz coined the term in a speech at the Events Beyond 2000 (Sydney) conference.

Events are an important strategic tool for modern business. From a marketing perspective it is important to understand the impact of events, as events are experiences. Pine and Gilmore (1999) describe the importance of experiences in modern day economics within their model of the progression of economic value. Experiences have come to play a more important role in the way a business communicates with their clients and customers.

Over the past 150 years the value of experience in our modern society has gone through a couple of changes. The model of Pine and Gilmore (1999) describes how it has come to the importance of creating a valuable experience for modern organizations within today's society. Companies cannot survive by competing on the level of services any longer. In order to differentiate themselves from the competition, companies are more and more looking for ways to compete on the level of experiences.

According to Pine and Gilmore (1999) experiences are events that engage individuals at a personal level. Delivering an experience is not the same as serving a customer; it builds a relationship with them. The good thing about an experience is that while the work may be finished, the value of the experience persists in the memory of the event. The memory of the experience is the hallmark of an event, and it is therefore necessary to understand what characteristics contribute to a better experience.

Mobile Monday Amsterdam

This study is conducted for Mobile Monday Amsterdam. Mobile Monday Amsterdam organizes non-profit events for mobile enthusiasts. The aim of the organization is to encourage innovation within the mobile communications sector by facilitating networking between small and large companies. The organization also facilitates local companies to effectively participate in international initiatives through the import and export of visions, concepts, technologies, know-how and best practices by offering a place where innovative visions, trends, studies and forecasts from the mobile marketplace are shared. To fulfill this aim Mobile Monday Amsterdam organizes events around specific mobile related themes every other month. Every event is sold out in advance and is attended by over 350 people. The community around the event has grown to over 2000 members within one and a half year (www.mobilemonday.nl).

Mobile Monday Amsterdam is the most active and fastest growing chapter among over 60 global chapters. Mobile Monday Global was founded in Helsinki, Finland in 2000. Since then the organization has grown into the world's leading mobile community.

Study aim

Mobile Monday Amsterdam organizes highly successful events. Within the global organization, Mobile Monday Amsterdam is well known for their events. The events receive a lot of positive press and cause quite some positive buzz both online and in traditional media. Although the organizing team has no professional background in organizing events, and therefore operates on what they think is right, there

must be something which makes these events successful. This study aims to find out what it takes to organize successful events. The outcomes of this study provide a theoretical foundation for the design of successful events. This study aims to answer the following question:

What contributes to a good event experience?

In this paper the event journey of an event visitor is described, insight is provided in organizing events, and the influence of temporal sequence effects on the event experience is discussed. The study results in a practical framework that provides insight in the experience of events from the visitor point of view. Furthermore, theory describing the characteristics affecting an experience is tested for compatibility on the program design of events. These two insights serve as a guide for event organizers who want to improve the experience of their events, as well as a source of inspiration to further innovate their event concepts.

Structure

Six chapters are subsequently presented. This chapter described the importance of experiences for modern organizations in the contact with their customers. Furthermore, it described the context of the study. The chapter concluded with the formulated goal of the study. In the second chapter introduces the theoretical field within which this study is embedded. Chapter two starts by scoping down the study from the field of event studies to medium or large sized planned events. The concept of an event is then divided into logical parts, and theory concerning experiences is introduced. The third chapter discusses the motivation behind the chosen research method for this study. The chapter then presents the interview scheme used for this study, describes the study sample, and the data analysis. Chapter four describes the results of the interviews describing the cases of event visitors. The results from the interviews are described per event episode and lead to a framework of the visitors' event experience. Chapter five sums up the results of the lessons learned from the interviews that describe events from an organizer point of view. Finally, chapter six presents the conclusions drawn from the study by comparing the study results from visitor and organizer experiences with the existing theory. The conclusions describe the implications of the findings for the theory when applied to event design. It relates the results of the study to the peak/end rule, and concludes whether the collected cases describe similar experience developments as would be expected from the Peak/End rule. Furthermore the conclusions define areas for future research.

2. Theory

This chapter describes the theory available on characteristics affecting experiences, in particular event experiences. At present only a few studies around this subject have be published, but similar theories from other kinds of experiences might be applicable to the experiences of events. Although there is a fair body of literature on the subject of temporal sequence evaluations, the findings of studies sometimes contradict each other. First, this chapter sets the scene for this study by first framing the type of events this research describes. Second, the authoritative studies in the field of temporal sequence effects are described. The characteristics thought to be of influence on event experience will then be translated to the context of events. The final section posits the research question and formulates expectations on the influence characteristics based on the reviewed literature.

2.1 Events

The field of event studies is a relatively new field of study. Most of the knowledge available from this domain is focused on praxis (e.g. tourism, sports, arts, leisure studies, and recreation). There are some points where the field overlaps with other scientific fields of study: social and behavioral sciences, and

to a lesser extend environmental psychology. In a practical way, event studies also relate to communication, culture studies, political studies, tourism, hospitality, leisure, recreation, venue, arts, and sports administration. Due to the relatively new field of study, a limited scientific base of theories is available for research. This section introduces the various kinds of events in existence and narrows down to the type of events this study addresses.

The subject of this study is event experience. In order to define the concept of an event the following definition is provided by Donald Getz (2007):

> *"An event is an occurrence at a given place and time; a special set of circumstances; a noteworthy occurrence."* (p.18)

Getz' definition of the concept of events covers all events. To be more specific about the kind of events that are studied, a more specific domain is defined. This study focuses on planned events. This still is a very broad concept of events as it includes a lot different types of events (e.g. cultural or religious celebrations, political and state events, arts and entertainment related events, business and trade events, educational and scientific events, sports events, recreational events, and private events). Therefore, the scope needs to be narrowed down to a more specific kind of events. Getz offers another differentiator along which events can be indexed: scale. This research focuses on medium sized, planned events. The events which are subject of study are all organized around a specific theme and for a specific target audience. The concept of events as described by Getz (2007) therefore is divided into events which differ in terms of scale and structure as is illustrated in figure 1 below.
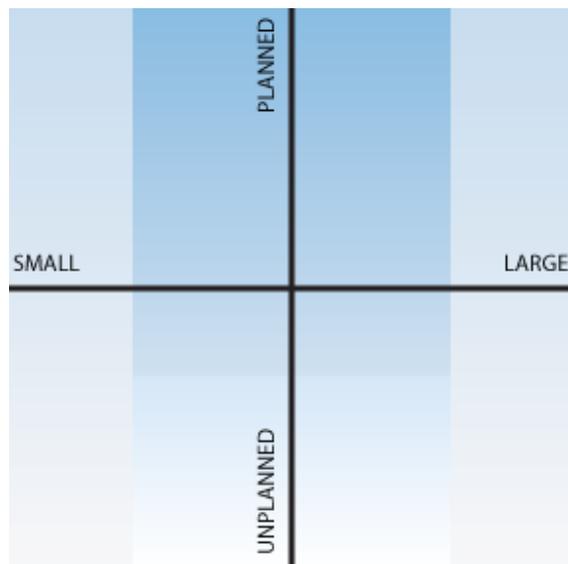

Figure 1. Event typology in terms of structure and scale

Acts, episodes, sequences, and relationship
To study the concept of an event within the limits just described, a structure needs to be defined. This structure makes it possible to analyze specific characteristics of the components that constitute to the concept of an event. A way of dividing experiences in logical parts is described in the literature on interaction processes in services. The structure divides interactions in terms of acts, episodes and relationships (Liljander, 1994; Storbacka, 1994; Liljander & Strandvik, 1995; Stauss & Weinlich, 1995; Strandvik & Storbacka, 1996). Holmlund (1996, 1997) has further developed the understanding of the

interaction process by adding sequences as an interaction concept to the model. Holmlunds' concept of the interaction within a relationship between a business and the customer is suitable for dividing the interaction between event organizers and event visitors. The model divides the relationship in four levels of aggregation which are in level of abstraction: (a) act, (b) episode, (c) sequence, and (d) relationship.

The level of acts contains any kind of interaction element, physical good, service, information, financial aspect or social contact (Grönroos, 2004). Within the context of an event these acts can be translated to reading the announcement for an upcoming event, making a RSVP for the event, traveling to the location of the event, or attending a presentation of a speaker.

Multiple acts form an episode. Examples of episodes are the process of ordering a product, service, or receiving the service. Within the context of events examples of episodes are registering for the event, attending the presentations of the speakers, networking after the presentations are over, or looking up material related to the event, such as photos and videos, when the event is over.

Several episodes form a sequence. A sequence, for example, is the whole process of buying a product on the Internet, like making an account on Marktplaats.nl, searching for the product on Marktplaats, bidding, arranging a place to meet the seller and pay for the product. In the context of an event the sequence might consist of being notified about the event, registering for the event, attending the event, and looking up photos and videos after the event.

Multiple sequences form a relationship between the business and their customer. The idea that events are a process with a certain chronologic order in their experience further narrows down the scope of the events which are subject to this study: events need to have a program in order to analyze the importance of specific moments during the event experience.

Applying the structure of Holmlund (1997) for dividing the event into logical parts provides this study with a practical structure. The structure makes it possible to analyze the experience of an event on various levels: this study focuses on the level of episodes within an event sequence.

2.2 Temporal sequence effects

In order to understand the elements that constitute to an event, the relation between those spate elements needs to be understood. The goal of this study is to set the first step in understanding how designing the program of an event can constitute to a better event experience. To understand the characteristics of good events the relationship between the various levels of elements that constitute to an event needs to be understood. This study applies the elements as Holmlund (1997) proposed them to analyze the event experience at the various phases.

Temporal sequence effects might describe how these characteristics influence the experience. These effects have been studied in various contexts. Experiences of which retrospective evaluations have been subject of study contain both pleasant and painful experiences. Pleasant experiences such as the evaluation of classical music pieces, advertising, search, and video clips have been subject of study. Examples of painful and disturbing experiences contain studies which evaluate listening to annoying sounds, painful medical treatments, and watching disturbing videos. Results from these studies suggest the same rules apply for both pleasant and painful experiences.

Although most of the studies that explore the factors contributing to summary assessments appear to be consistent in their findings, some differences do occur. Most of these differences might be assigned to either situational moderators or different methodological approaches. However, a few

characteristics are often mentioned to be of influence in retrospective experience evaluations. These characteristics of experiences are therefore believed to influence the way a temporal sequence is evaluated. This section summarizes previous findings on these characteristics: peak, end, and trend intensity. Research focused on the influence of the moment to moment trend intensity has made a distinction between trend characteristics such as trend velocity, segmentation, and segment location. These characteristics are therefore included in the description of temporal sequence characteristics too.

2.2.1 Peak

Various studies have analyzed event factors related to the moment with the highest intensity. Studies make a distinction in the weight given to characteristics during the passing of an experience. Studies have indicated that the location of the peak intensity is relevant to how the experience is later remembered (Frederickson & Kahneman, 1993; Schreiber & Kahneman, 2000).

Frederickson and Kahneman (1993) conducted two experiments (n=32 and n=96) on the impact of duration on the retrospective evaluation of affective experiences. The experiment design was to show both aversive and pleasant film clips that varied in length and intensity. The results indicate a presence of duration neglect in people's global evaluations of past affective experiences. Instead retrospective evaluations appeared to be determined by the weight of the moment-to-moment intensity of the experience.

Four experiments by Schreiber and Kahneman (2000) studied the determinants of retrospective evaluations for aversive episodes. The stimuli for the experiments were unpleasant sounds of variable loudness and duration. The results indicate that sound intensity and duration are additive in multi-trial experiments. The last experiment provides a robust indication for a preference of aversive episodes that are "improved" by adding periods of less aversiveness.

2.2.2 End

When people summarize a past experience they appear to extract only a few characteristics from the sequence. Together these characteristics form an overall summary evaluation of the experience (Kahneman *et al.*, 1993; Carmon & Kahneman, 1996; Rozin, Rozin, and Goldberg, 2004). These characteristics will differ in intensity and, therefore, it can be stated that they differ in importance. The end intensity of an experience is said to have an impact on the overall retrospective evaluation. In other words, previous research has indicated a recency effect (Miller & Campbell, 1959) in experiences. This effect has been reported in various studies (Kahneman *et al.*, 1993; Carmon & Kahneman, 1996; Redelmeier & Kahneman, 1996).

Kahneman *et al.* (1993) studied how adding a period of diminishing comfort to an aversive episode affects the choice of individuals to prefer more pain over less pain in a direct choice (n=32). The results of two different experiments showed that a significant majority preferred to repeat the procedure that resulted in a larger amount of total pain, but with a diminishing end of the pain intensity at the end of the sequence. Furthermore, the results indicate that duration has only a small effect in retrospective evaluations of aversive experiences.

A study by Redelmeier and Kahneman (1996) recorded the intensity of pain in real-time of various patients in two categories (n=154 and n=133). The study examined the retrospective evaluations of the total pain experienced during the procedure and related these evaluations to the online recordings obtained during the experience. The results indicated the importance of the end intensity. Redelmeier and Kahneman suggest that patients' memories of painful medical procedures largely reflect the final part of the experience, as well as the peak intensity of pain.

The peak and end intensity are important characteristics for constructing hindsight evaluations in various contexts. For example, Rozin and colleagues (2004) found that both the peak and end intensities of classical music pieces were best remembered when recalling a musical piece. Literature indicates a strong correlation between peak intensity and end intensity in various contexts, e.g., advertising (Baumgartner *et al.*, 1997), pain and discomfort (Kahneman *et al.*, 1993; Redelmeier and Kahneman, 1996; Kahneman and Schreiber, 2000), music (Rozin, Rozin, and Goldberg, 2004), search (Diehl and Zauberman, 2005), and video clips (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993) with their influence on the retrospective evaluation of an experience.

2.2.3 Trend

The trend of an experience is considered to have a strong influence on retrospective evaluations of temporal sequences (Ariely and Zauberman, 2003; Zauberman *et al.*, 2006). Previous studies indicate that individuals have a preference for improving sequences in an experience, opposite to a declining trend in sequences. Loewenstein and Prelec (1993) call this a negative time preference. This trend preference is found in various studies of both positive and negative sequences of experiences, including discomfort or pain (Ariely, 1998; Varey & Kahneman, 1992), health sequences (Chapman, 2000), and wage profiles (Loewenstein & Sicherman, 1991).

Two experiments conducted by Loewenstein and Prelec (1993) on preferences for sequences of outcomes (n=52 and n=57) indicate that when an inter-temporal trade-off is embedded in two alternative sequences of outcomes, the psychological perspective, or frame, shifts. Individuals become more farsighted and often wish to postpone the better outcome to the end.

Redelmeier and Kahneman (1996) studied patients' memories of painful medical treatments. In their study they analyzed the influence of painful medical treatments on their decision about future treatments. In two studies (n=154 and n=133) Redelmeier and Kahneman examined the retrospective evaluations of the total pain during the sequence. The results indicated that patients varied substantially in the total amount of pain they remembered. The peak amount of pain strongly correlated with the amount of pain recorded in the last three minutes of the sequence.

Two experiments conducted in a study by Ariely (1998) examined the effects of various factors on retrospective pain evaluation. The experiments used the multiple intensities of pain as a factor of retrospective pain evaluation. The results suggest that the trend of intensity change influences the way painful experiences are evaluated, especially late in the sequence of the experience. In addition, the results indicated that duration had little impact on retrospective evaluations for stimuli of a relatively constant intensity.

The concept of a trend is defined by various characteristics such as velocity, segmentation, and partition location amongst others. These characteristics have been studied. The most influential studies are mentioned in the following section.

Velocity

The velocity of the development of a temporal sequence influences the retrospective evaluation of the experience (Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Hsee, Abelson, and Salovey, 1991; Hsee, Salovey, & Abelson, 1994; Baumgartner *et al.*, 1997). In addition to this assumption a study by Soman and Shi (2003) provides evidence that consumers' temporal sequences evaluations of improving sequences are impacted when the consumer has a perception of improvement towards the end of an experiential sequence. Therefore, experiential sequences that are perceived as improving more rapidly are rated better than those that improve less rapid or not at all. Obstacles such as delays in a sequence, periods of negative

progress in a sequence, and periods of low perceived progress in a sequence heavily impact retrospective evaluations. When individuals are provided with a choice on the order of the sequence, they show a preference for having negative obstacles earlier in an experience over experiencing obstacles later in the experiential sequence (Soman, 2003).

Segmentation

The level of segmentation of an experience, referred to as the cohesiveness of an experience as a whole, is another factor that influences retrospective evaluations of events. When an experience is segmented into components, global retrospective evaluations are heavily dependent upon the mean intensity of each segment rather than the pattern of the experiences (Ariely & Zauberman, 2000; Ariely & Zauberman, 2003). Studies indicate that segmented experiences are evaluated different from single experiences in two ways: (1) the overall evaluation of a multiple segmented experience differs from a single experience, and (2) the pattern and trend are experienced differently.

Ariely and Zauberman (2000) prove that segmented experiences lower the overall evaluation of the experience. In two experiments they played sequences of varying annoyance levels of a tone. In the first experiment (N=54) the patterns were segmented, while in the second experiment (N=120) the perceived cohesiveness of the experience was manipulated. The tone played during the experiment was continuous which caused the respondents to experience a continuous pattern rather than a segmented one. The results of the experiments showed that patterns with an increasing final trend were experienced as more intense, while patterns characterized by a decreasing final trend were evaluated as less intense. Ariely and Zauberman did not only test trends developing in a single direction, but also studied multiple segmented patterns. They found that patterns with a single trend are experienced more intense than experiences that contain multiple segmented trends.

The research method used in studies affect the outcome. While both online and retrospective evaluation methods in research tend to give similar conclusions, Ariely (1998) found that values of online evaluations decreased the impact of the sequences' pattern on the overall evaluation.

Segment location

The previous paragraph introduced the segmentation of an experience, being the cohesiveness of an experience as a whole. Most experiences are not considered as a whole, and are fragmented into segments. Studies indicated that retrospective evaluations of segmented experiences are influenced by the order of the experienced segments within the experience. The peak intensity and trend where the experience is divided has an influence on the retrospective ratings of the experience. A study by Ariely and Zauberman (2003) showed that if an experience is partitioned into segments, segmenting the experience at the peaks results in higher retrospective ratings of the experience than segmenting it at the troughs.

The concept of segmentation as it is proposed by Ariely and Zauberman (2000) is illustrated in box 1. The example of a DJ set illustrates the difference in the way a single experience and a multiple segmented experience are evaluated.

BOX 1: Segmentation – The DJ set

When the DJ plays a set of the records in his bag the songs can be rated 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Assuming that the average rating and the rating of the last song are the most important factors – Peak/End Rule – the overall rating of the set [3,4,5,6,7,8] would be 6,75. If the DJ would mix the same songs in a reverse order [8,7,6,5,4,3] the total set would be rated 4,25. This DJ mix set is an example of a single experience, where the individual does not clearly experience a difference between one part and the other, although the total experience is composed out of different segments. The experience will change when the same segments are experienced as distinct segments. Imagine that after an experience, the trend of the experience is no

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longer important. What remains is the evaluation of the complete experience. When the experience is constructed out of multiple segments, this will change how the music from the DJ is experienced. [{3,4}{5,6}{7,8}] would therefore be experienced as [{3,75}{5,75}{7,75}], resulting in final evaluation of 5,75. The set which plays the songs in reverse order [{8,7}{6,5}{4,3}] is experienced as [{7,25}{5,25}{3,25}], resulting in a final evaluation of 5,25. In the most extreme scenario of segmentation it does not matter in what order the DJ plays his records: [{3}{4}{5}{6}{7}{8}] and [{8}{7}{6}{5}{4}{3}] would both be evaluated as 5,5. As shown, increased partitioning reduces the effect of the overall trend. This results in a more equal weighting of the segments of the experience.

2.2.4 Other characteristics

Early studies on the Peak/End Rule do not consider the beginning intensity as a relevant influence on the experience evaluation. Ariely and Zauberman (2000) prove that the beginning trend of a pattern has a significant influence on the evaluation of the pattern. Their study showed that patterns which had single improving trends were experienced as more intense than multiple segmented trends. Their research results do not fully support the Peak/End rule as it was previously stated (Varey & Kahneman, 1992; Kahneman *et al.*, 1993). Zauberman, Diehl, and Ariely (2006) argue that the beginning of a sequence can be significant, depending on the differential effects of evaluation tasks. In their study, they employ various operationalizations of evaluation tasks: hedonic versus information tasks and descriptive versus predictive evaluations.

Studies indicated other factors that have shown to have a possible influence on temporal sequence evaluations. These factors, though, are not solely characteristics of the temporal sequence. Such factors include the moment of evaluation (i.e. online or retrospective) and the duration of the experience. The duration seems to only play a marginal significant role in predicting overall experience evaluations (Kahneman *et al.*, 1993, Varey & Kahneman, 1992).

2.3 Temporal sequence effects in events

This study aims at explaining the retrospective evaluation of an event experience by conducting a qualitative research. The data gathered from the interviews will contain key moments and factors that made certain events stand out from others. The rich data is analyzed for characteristics resembling the characteristics that are at play in temporal sequence effects.

2.4 Research question

The available body of literature provides sufficient ground to assume the existence of a basic underlying theory to predict what factors contribute to experiential experiences evaluations of planned events. None of the studies was executed within an event context. Qualitative research is needed to find and describe the characteristics which affect the event experience. This study will indicate whether the previously described characteristics influence the experience of events. Therefore, the following research question is proposed:

> *How do individuals retrospectively evaluate experiential events in relation to temporal sequences?*

In order to answer the proposed research question this study will focus on the experience characteristics that were previously studied: peak, end, and trend characteristics. These characteristics are included in the study. Based on the relevant literature a few things are to be expected concerning the influence of the peak, end, and trend intensities on the retrospective evaluation of the event experience.

Following Fredrickson and Kahneman (1993), Kahneman *et al.* (1993), Redelmeier and Kahneman (1996), and Kahneman, Wakker, and Sarin (1997), it is expected that the peak of momentary affective intensity should positively influence the remembered affect.

The intensity of the peak experience positively influences the retrospective evaluation of an event experience.

As suggested by Miller and Campbell (1959), Fredrickson and Kahneman, (1993), Kahneman *et al.* (1993, 1997), and Redelmeier and Kahneman (1996), it is expected that the last momentary affective intensity of an event should positively influence the retrospective evaluations of affect.

The intensity of end experience positively influences the retrospective evaluation of an event experience.

In line with findings from Hsee and Abelson (1991), Loewenstein and Prelec (1993), Baumgartner *et al.* (1997), and Ariely (1998), Soman (2003), it is expected that the trend of moment-to-moment intensity experience should be often mentioned as an influence of remembered intensity. A larger, more positive slope should translate into a better memory encoding.

A positive trend intensity has a positive influence on the retrospective evaluation of an event experience.

An answer to these research questions will be abstracted from the insights gained from interviews that will be taken from event experts. Experts are defined as people who frequently visit, organize or are otherwise related to events and therefore are expected to possess a rich understanding of what constitutes to a good event. Besides the insights gathered from characteristics that came from the studied literature, it is expected that more characteristics will be found from the interviews.

3. Method

This chapter outlines the research method used for the study. The first section presents the choices made concerning the research methodology. The second section describes the respondents used to gather data. The chapter closes with a section that details on the procedure followed in the process of gathering data and ends with a section that describes how the collected data is analyzed.

3.1 Research methodology and justification

The previous chapter described the focus of the research project by narrowing the scope of the study to medium sized, planned events with a program around a specific theme. It furthermore described characteristics from the Peak/End rule. These characteristics have proven to influence retrospective evaluations of experiences in various research domains. This study will investigate if these characteristics affect the retrospective evaluation of events too.

The domain of event study is generally focused on praxis, and therefore lacks a solid scientific foundation. Given that there is no developed, descriptive, theoretical framework that includes the fundamental characteristics that affect the retrospective evaluation of event experience, this study focuses on constructing a model with explanatory variables that provide an insight in the characteristics that influence the retrospective evaluation of event experiences.

Constructing such a model requires an exploratory research method. The exploratory research method provides tools for understanding new fundamental areas of knowledge, while it also allows the researcher to obtain details about considerations, experiences, processes, and feelings. These factors

enrich the collected data and therefore interpreting causes is made easier. It is very difficult to gain such a thorough understanding when traditional quantitative research methods are used (Hollis, 1994). Therefore, this study applies qualitative methods to investigate the characteristics affecting retrospective evaluations of event experience.

3.2 Fieldwork and interpretative methods

The study analyzes data gathered from in-depth interviews with experts. The interviewees were motivated to tell stories about their personal event experiences during the in-depth interviews, as stories usually reflect the personal meanings attached to the event experience.

In accordance to the principles of grounded theory, the interpretation of the data collected from the interviews takes place after the interviews were taken. The method of grounded theory is usually applied when the research topic has not been subject of study before and therefore lacks clearly defined theoretical models (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), as is the case with this study. This study sets out to develop a theory around the basic characteristics that affect the retrospective evaluation of an event experience.

Grounded theory is suitable for developing a theory from fieldwork such as it is described in this study. The method has been developed for sociological research by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a reaction to the traditional methods. According to Glaser and Strauss the traditional methods are concerned with theory verification and another approach is needed for theory generation. Their book "The Discovery of Grounded Theory" reasons theory should be discovered from data which is systematically obtained from social research, rather than logical deductive reasoning from previous theoretical frameworks. The data obtained from social research has to be systematically analyzed and compared to develop categories and concepts from the data. By use of the constant comparative method new concepts and categories emerge from the collected data, which form the base of new theories.

The constant comparative method as described by Pettigrew (2000) compares between incidents from the collected data and from the emerging theoretical concepts. The results of these comparisons lead to underlying themes within the retrospective evaluations. The identified themes can both be complementary and contradicting, which indicates the presence of deeper conceptual layers.

The constant comparing of differences and similarities leads to a new understanding that evolves from the rich data. Gradually properties of the emerging categories develop and the modifications become less. Glaser and Strauss (1967) call this process solidification. Solidification takes place when grounded theory emerges during the research process due to the constant interaction between the data collection and the analysis of data. The process results in concepts, categories or properties from these categories abstracted from recurring patterns within the cases provided by the interviewees.

The sampling for a study using grounded theory requires a different method than the method used for sampling in quantitative studies. While in quantitative studies a sample needs to be described before the process of data collection commences, sampling for a study using the grounded theory method cannot be defined beforehand (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). There also is a difference between the required sample size of a quantitative study and a study in grounded theory. Glaser & Strauss (1967) state that sampling should stop once the groups under a category face a point of saturation in the insights gained from more added data. This occurs when the addition of more cases does not lead to more information relevant to the generation of the theory.

Although grounded theory was developed within the field of sociology, the method has been successfully used in many other fields of study within the domain of social sciences (Goulding, 2002). Therefore, this study uses grounded theory with constant comparative analysis as a method.

As this research method largely depends on the interpretation of the collected data by the researcher, there is a threat to the reliability of the findings. Therefore a second researcher will rate a sample of the collected data, using the codes assigned by the main researcher. The degree of agreement among the raters, the inter-rater reliability, is calculated by using the Cohen's kappa (1960). Cohen's kappa, which works for two raters, indicates the proportion of chance that the joint level of agreement between the two raters relies on chance. The coefficient indicates the proportion of times the raters would agree by chance. As a rule of thumb, Kappa should not be less than 0.7. By measuring the inter-rater reliability, the study should be less prone to reliability threats. Within this study samples of the transcripts are rated by a second researcher, using the predefined codes when analyzing the transcript.

3.3 Data collection

The data is collected from experts in event experience. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews are conducted from actors active within the domain of events in the role of visitor, speaker, and (or) organizer to get an insight of the characteristics affecting event experience. Interviews are also done with experts related to events that are bordering the studied type of events in terms of scale, structure, programming, and theme. This secures the richness within the overview of the characteristics at play in event experience from various interpretive angles.

The first four people approached for interviews came from the network provided by the foundation funding the study and the personal network of the researcher. This first sample was chosen based on the various backgrounds of the interviewees and included respondents with an expertise with independently organized events, corporate events within multinationals, and events organized from a commercial perspective. To ensure the background of the other interviewees would be as diverse as possible this study applied the snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling relies on the network and expertise of the interviewees. Collecting data from a sample that grew organic ensured a rich diversity of incidents mentioned by the interviewees.

Interviewees were briefed about the interview by email. In the email the interviewee learned the background of the interview and what the interviewee could expect from the interview. The interviewee was asked to consider two cases for the interview. The cases should be selected, based on what he or she considered the best and the worst event experienced over the past year. This technique for selecting cases is called the Critical Incident Technique (CIT). CIT is based on research by Sir Francis Galton (1930) and was proven to be useful in the analysis of large scale tasks and activity analysis within processes. Applying CIT for the case selection ensured diversity in the cases described and increased the richness of the data collected. After mentioning that two cases should be selected for the interview, a brief description of the kind of cases that fit with the definition of type of events studied was provided to help the interviewee make the selection. Furthermore, the email informed the interviewee about the structure of the interview and the time the interview would approximately take.

The interviews were taken face to face at the office of the interviewee and recorded with the permission of the interviewee. The recording of the interview was later made into a transcript of the interview for further analysis. The structure of the interview was semi-structured. Before the interview commenced, the background of the study was once more explained to the interviewee. After the interviewee agreed to have the interview recorded the first case was evaluated. The process to evaluate the cases of the events started with general questions about the event before the interviewee was

asked to describe the event, as can be seen in table 2. The interviewer asked all the questions, and noted down the answers as they were given. To help the interviewer, categories were predefined. In case an answer given by the interviewee would not fit the defined categories, the answer was noted down and added to the categories of the future interviews.

Table 2

Basic subjects to describe the case

Subject	Category	Coding
Motivation to attend the event	Work related Study related Personal interest Other, …	Field coding
Expectation of what to get out of the event	Inspiration Networking Cooperation Contribute Learn Other, …	Field coding
Amount of people attending the event	(open)	Note number or estimated range
Date of the event	(open)	Note date or month
Location of the event	Local National Regional Global	Field coding

After asking the general questions concerning the case, the event experience was freely described by the interviewee. In case the interviewee seemed to have difficulties to remember the phase of the event, the researcher probed questions from a list of topics containing possible characteristics for each specific phase to help the interviewee. Table 3 shows the five chronological phases used to structure the description of the event. First, the respondent was asked to describe how he or she had learned about the event and what actions he or she took before making their entry at the event. Then, the interviewee was asked to tell what happened between the moment of entry and the start of the program, followed by explaining how the interviewee experienced the program. After the interviewee described the program the interviewee was asked to describe the end of the event, being the moment between the planned program stopped and the moment the interviewee left the venue. Finally, the interviewee was asked to tell what happened after the event in relation to the event.

Table 3

Description of the episodes per probable subject and possible categories belonging to the event experience

Episode	Subject	Category
Pre-event	Getting acquainted with the event	Via friends, email, internet, mail, advertising
	Registration	Process
	Contact	Organizers, visitors
	Search information	Location, program, speakers, organization, other visitors, date
	Preparations	Booking trip, paperwork
	Expectations	Speakers, visitors, visit
Event		
Pre-program	Registration	
	Location	Entrance, wardrobe, toilet, bar, conference room, meeting point
	Meeting people	
	Food or drinks	Coffee, tea, snacks
	Preparation	Planning or choosing speakers, tracks, ideal route on event terrain
Program	Room	Ambiance, decoration, power outlets, sound, light, temperature
	Audience	Familiarity, level of expertise
	Subject or theme	Familiarity, relevance, angle of presented material
	Speakers	Personal preferences, content, form, skills, best or worst speaker
	Organization	Time management, breaks, peak moments, trough moments, best or worst moment, ambiance
Post-program	Activities	Dinner, drinks, party
	Duration	
Post-event	Activities	Look up photos, videos, read reviews, stay in touch with people met.

After both event cases were fully evaluated demographic information concerning the interviewee was collected using a structured list of questions. Field coding was used to note down the answers as the interviewee answered to the questions. Table 4 sums up the questions regarding the demographic questions. To help the interviewer, most questions had categorized answer possibilities. It was not until after the interview, that the foundation that financed the study was revealed. This was done to limit the risk of receiving biased event descriptions.

Table 4
Demographic questions

Subject	Category	Coding
Gender	Male Female	Closed question, tick answer
Year of birth	(open)	Note year
Job or function	(open)	Note description
Work sector	(open)	Note sector
Role or relationship with events	Visitor Speaker Organizer Sponsor Other, …	Field coding
Frequency of event visits per month	(open)	Note frequency
Location of events visited in general	Local National Regional Global	
Subject or themes of visited in general	(open)	Note subjects or themes

3.4 Sample

The sample size has been determined in line with the ideas of Glaser and Strauss (1967). The judgment criterion to stop with adding cases to the study was the point of theoretical saturation. No more cases were sought after when the addition of one more cases did not add more relevant differences or similarities to the groups or categories already found in the study.

In total 18 interviews were conducted from experts, of which 16 could be used for analysis. The background of the interviewees contained a wide variety of backgrounds in their relation to events. 14 interviewees described the best and the worst event they attended in the past year. The last two interviewees described one event. These interviews specifically aimed to verify the assumptions around event experience that were gained by the data already collected. Table 5 shows the interviews that make up the data collected. In total 30 cases were collected from 16 interviews. 16 cases were described from a visitor point of view, and 14 interviewees described a case from an organizer perspective. Interviews were taken until the theoretical saturation criterion was reached. Table 5 describes the sample for this study.

Table 5
Data sample

	Usable		Not usable	Total
	Providing 2 cases	Providing 1 case		
Interviews	14	2	2	18
Cases	28	2	0	30

The cases collected from the interviews describe two kinds of event experiences; the visitor and the organizer experience. As it is expected that there is a difference between the experience of both groups the visitor experiences will be analyzed separately from the organizer experiences in chapters four and five respectively. The characteristics of the research sample are provided below in table 6.

Table 6
Sample characteristics per case

Visitor characteristics (n=16)	*n* Cases			Organizer characteristics (n=14)	*n* cases		
	Pos.	Neg.	Total		Pos.	Neg.	Total
Sex				**Sex**			
Male	10	5	15	Male	2	6	8
Female	0	1	1	Female	4	2	6
Event visit frequency (per month)				**Event visit frequency** (per month)			
Less – 2	8	5	13	Less – 2	2	3	5
3 – 5	1	0	1	3 – 5	1	4	4
6 – 8	-	-	0	6 – 8	2	2	2
9 – more	1	1	2	9 – more	1	0	3
Reason of event visit				**Reason of event visit**			
Personal interest	5	1	6	Personal interest	-	-	0
Work	4	5	9	Work	2	3	5
Speaker	1	0	1	Speaker	0	2	2
Organizer	-	-	0	Organizer	4	3	7
Goal of event visit				**Goal of event visit**			
Inspiration	4	0	6	Inspiration	1	0	1
Learn	2	3	3	Learn	-	-	0
Networking	1	1	2	Networking	0	2	2
Socializing	2	1	3	Socializing	1	0	1
Relaxation	1	0	1	Relaxation	-	-	0
Organizing	-	-	0	Organizing	4	4	8
Contribute	-	-	0	Contribute	0	2	2
Location of event				**Location of event**			
National	7	3	10	National	5	6	11
International	4	2	6	International	1	2	3

3.5 Data analysis and interpretation

The data gathered from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for similarities and differences. To improve the reliability of the analysis, a second rater coded a sample of the interviews. The results from this second rating were compared with the ratings using Cohen's kappa to calculate whether agreement between the raters exceeds chance levels, which resulted in an acceptable Cohen's kappa of 0.83. This ensured a high level of reliability from the findings. nVivo software greatly helped gaining insight over a large body of qualitative data by providing the ability to code, constantly compare findings, and provide functionality to calculate the Cohen's Kappa.

4. Results: Visitor experience

This study resulted in an emergent theoretical model for understanding the development of an event experience. All the events studied are middle sized planned events, with some degree of structure in their program, except for 3 events.

This chapter describes the results from the analysis of the collected cases described from a visitor point of view. The emergent model postulates an event journey for the typical experience of an event visitor. Figure 2 represents this core event journey, segmented in the various episodes experienced.
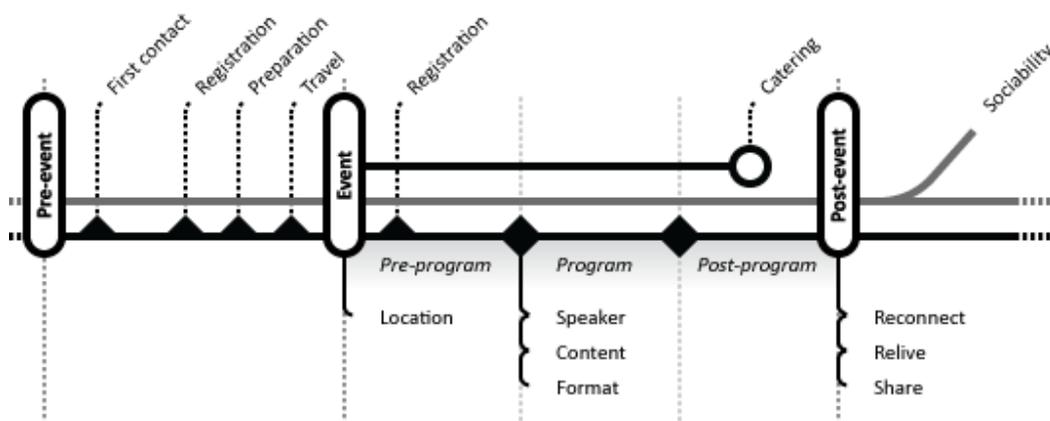
Figure 2. Total event sequence from the visitor point of view

This section describes the ideal event experience of a visitor. The description is based on the insight gained from the 16 cases that were described form a visitor point of view. The cases all describe events from a visitor perspective. This section draws the ideal visitor journey in a chronological way. The collected cases contain various kinds of events, ranging from highly structured scientific events to highly unstructured 'un-conferences'. Various kinds of events are described by the interviewees. The described cases are organized around specific themes or around recent corporate developments. Even though the events are very diverse, the experience characteristics and event journey can be compared to one another.

The following sections describe the event sequence divided in three episodes: the pre-event (§4.1), (§4.2) event, and the (§4.3) post-event. Per episode, most common acts are described and illustrated with quotes from the interviews. The quotes are placed separately, in the colored boxes.

4.1 Pre-event

The period of time between the moment the visitor learns about an upcoming event and the moment the visitor enters the event is described as the pre-event episode. The data indicates there are a few common acts within the experience episode of the pre-event: (1) the moment the visitor first learns about the event, (2) the moment the visitor registers for the event, (3) the preparation before departure to an event, and (4) the trip to the event. Figure 3 visually represents the acts taking place in the pre-event episode of the event experience.
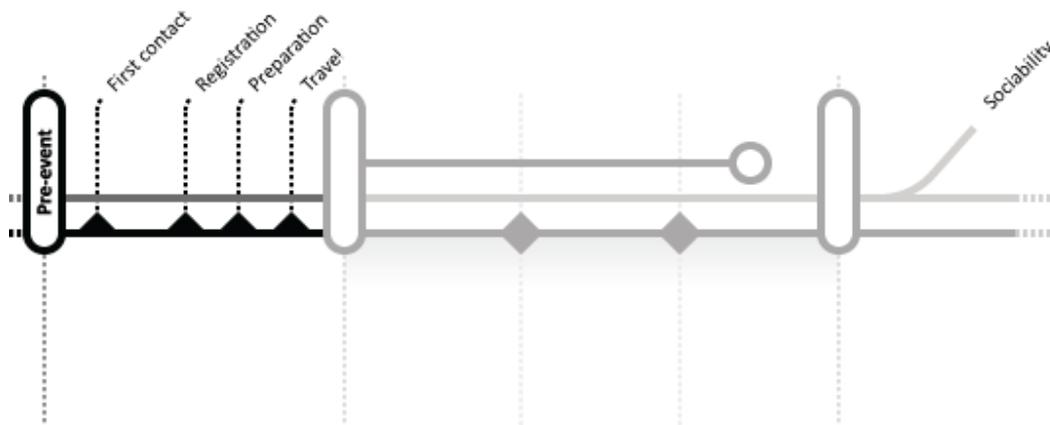
Figure 3. Pre-event episode from the visitor point of view

First Contact

At a certain moment in time the interviewee learns about the existence of the event. The interviewees mention various ways they are informed about the events they attended, ranging from a recommendation by a friend, a notification via work, via the traditional media, discovery on the internet (via a mailing list, conversations in some sort of chat room or by browsing), and learning about the event at the end of a previous event. Most interviewees indicated they were either told about the event by their social network, or learned about the event via a direct mail from the organizers.

BOX 2: First contact

V: "I had some friends going. I mean, that is how I heard about it. About a week or two before, I heard people say "Oh, I am going to BAWT", and I said "Oh, what is that?" and I got myself one of the last tickets."

I: "Your friends told you two weeks in advance?"

V: "Yes, around that. I read it on Jaiku [online communication tool]. Yeah […] Ehm, they were talking about it." [IT10-A]

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V: "I received an invitation via email. It mentioned all the keywords and organizations which made me think "Cool, I think I would like to go here!"" [IT07-B]

Registration

All the described events required some kind of registration ahead of the event. Usually participants register online by replying to an email, filling out an online form, or indicate they attend via the intranet in the cases which concerned internal corporate events. Some events require a payment in order to finalize the registration, which is usually done via the internet. In most of the cases described, the act of

registering is generic. The registration for an event which is paid by the company of the visitor is an exception. The registration process may require more effort, due to possible company procedures concerning the application for a budget. An example in box 3 illustrates this. None of the visitor cases described problematic registration processes though. The results do not indicate that the registration process affects to the total experience, unless problems occur during the registration.

BOX 3: Registration

V: "Last year, ehm, that was the first time for me to visit such an event from a work perspective, eh, things started to be clear about six weeks in advance. That came in handy at that time, because back then I still had the time to do this by the whole formal way, you know, past the financial department, like, you know "Guys, […] could you pay for my trip and hotel?"" [IT07-A]

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I: "[…] Ok. The registration opens. Does this happen online too?"

V: "Yes."

I: "How exactly does it continue from that point on?"

V: "Eh, you fill out a form, […] in this case you fill out your credit card information, [and then] you indicate if there are any additional workshops you would like to attend. At the EIA this was not the case, but at other conferences this often is the case. You also indicate whether you are a member of an organization that gives you the right to get a discount. Then you send it in and you get, in this case much later, a paper letter from America telling you a certain amount of dollars has been deducted from your bank account." [IT16-B]

Preparation

Most interviewees mention they prepare for an event. The reasons given by the interviewees who did not prepare for the event are mostly related to a lack of time. They note that they would have prepared for the event if they would have had the time to do so. Only one interviewee indicates he never prepares for events. The preparations taken are generally related to the (1) program, (2) attendees, or are (3) practical of nature. The motive for attending the event has an influence on some of the kind of preparations taken.

Program related preparations mentioned in the interviews consisted out of reading background information about the speakers on the program, and, in a lesser extent, searching for more information around the theme of the event. Some interviewees indicate they read more about the subject in advance of the event and prepare questions for specific speakers. One interviewee, describing an event visit motivated from a work perspective, went through the program with colleagues and asked for questions they had concerning the topics on the program.

About half of the interviewees indicated they would like to know more about the other attendees of the event. Most events described as the best event attended in the past year provided some information about who else would attend the event. Interviewees describing events which did not provide such information would like future events to do provide additional information about the other attendees. This need is mostly expressed by interviewees with motives for attending related to networking or fulfilling other social goals.

Some cases illustrate the need to prepare in a practical way before attending an event. Especially cases describing events in another country mention extra preparations ahead of the event such as getting permission to attend and receive budget for attending (in the case of a work related

event), arranging the trip, arranging a place to stay at are commonly mentioned. Less common, but still important, are a few remarks concerning preparations typical for the personal situation of an interviewee. A couple of interviewees mentioned they had to arrange things for their children, such as transport to and from the crèche, or a babysitter for their kids.

As the introduction of this chapter mentions, not all visitors prepare in advance of the event. While some interviewees indicated they did not think about preparing at all, some interviewees indicate they would prepare for each event if time would permit them to do so. The method used in this study does not permit to generalize whether visitors of events do prepare, only to describe the general kinds of preparation taken in advance.

BOX 4: Preparation

V: "I have made it a routine for every single event, whether an organizer facilitates it or not, to ask myself the following questions: Who is coming to this event? Who are those people? What do they write about? What do they find interesting? What do I think about that? Which themes will be on the program? Which questions do I have related to these themes? So it turned into a new routine with the passing of time, to prepare myself in such a way. [Prepare] Both on the people attending, as the subjects that will be spoken about, in order to get most out of the event once I am there. […]"

I: "Do you do this for all the events you attend?"

T: "By now I do this for all other events too. Sometimes this leads to the conclusion that I should not go […] simply because I came to the conclusion "There is nothing for me there" while preparing." [IT04-A]

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I: "Did you have contact with other people than the organization ahead of the event?"

V: "Yes, yeah... Yes absolutely, of course that is another dimension [of the experience]: who else will join? Well, for such an event, actually, in this case, it is a piece of cake, because you already know… I already knew from a lot of people I know that they would come. "Oh, you are going too? Great!", then I know one or two others also attending." [IT03-A]

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V: "In my case, I am a member of the local community, I received questions such as "What is a good hotel?" from participants and people who registered […]" [IT16-B]

4.2 Event

The episode of the event consists of the time between entering the event for the first time until leaving the event after it is over. The event journey describes this episode in three parts: entering the event (§4.2.1), the program (§4.2.2), and what ideally happens after the program (§4.2.3). A visual representation of the acts constituting to the event episode of the event experience is depicted in figure 4.
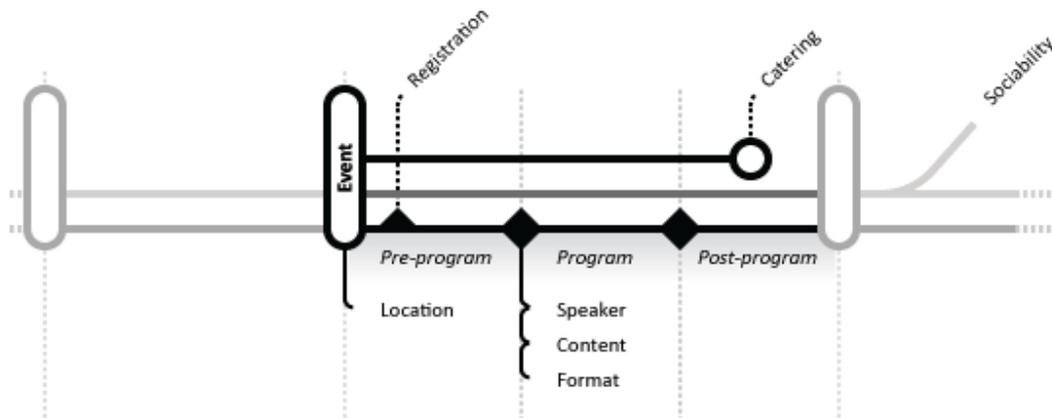
Figure 4. Event episode from the visitor point of view

4.2.1 Pre-program

Most descriptions of the acts which follow the moment of entry are similar. All cases mention some process of registrations. Often the events are paid for upfront and the visitor only needs to confirm they entered the event, in the other cases the visitor pays during the act of registering, or can attend the event for free. Contrary to the descriptions of the registration process in the pre-event period of the experience, the act of registering at the event is described by some as a negative experience. The reasons mentioned for most negative registration experiences by the interviewees are found in a longer than expected registration processes: the visitor had to wait longer than anticipated, before he or she can enter the event. This is often caused by a lack of capacity at the registration desk, or an unclear registration process. In one particular case the negative experience during the registration process was indicated to have largely contributed to the decision to leave from the event earlier than the visitor planned to do in advance.

After registering, visitors often have some time before the start of the event program. The majority of the cases indicate that visitors use this time to plan their event. This especially goes for events with a program containing multiple tracks. Most interviewees indicate they further use this time to meet with friends while having a drink and a snack. The time between registration and the start of the event is indicated to be a period suitable for fulfilling social needs of the visitor, such as meeting with friends and networking.

BOX 5: Pre-program experiences

S: "Ok, at a certain moment you enter the event, how does it go from there?"

F: "Well, first, I usually orient myself. In this particular case I went to the pressroom, because… You get all your stuff, your press folder, that kind of stuff. Maps. Well, next I take some time to plan my day. I roughly know where I want to go to, I prepared for that, but at that time I decide what I like to see, the logical route – you want to do this efficient, especially since some shows start at certain times, and then you want to have it fitting into your schedule, without needing to walk from the one side [of the terrain] to the other." [IT11-A]

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V: "[The event] starts with greeting each other and "Oh, hey, everybody is here already, great, and nice to see each other again." That leads to a pleasant atmosphere, and it leads to the first new contacts, because you get to know new people via the people you already know." [IT04-A]

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Although the general period leading to the start of the program is more or less similar in most cases, it is not the only thing which could affect the event experience. Most cases attribute an influence of the location to their experience. The locations which have a positive influence on the reported experience are congruent with the expected image of the event.

4.2.2 Program

The cases described varied programs designed for various goals. This section sums up the most common characteristics of the program characteristics which were described as important factors by the interviewees. The characteristics concerning the (a) speakers, (b) content, (c) format, and (d) interaction are described.

Speakers

The importance of the speakers programmed for an event is a general theme in the cases that describe the best events. The best memories of an event are almost always related to a speaker at the described event. From the cases, various characteristics concerning speakers are found including: authority, presentation skills, and the ability to connect to the audience and maintain their attention.

Content

The content of the presentation is interrelated with the speaker characteristics just described. The cases indicate that content should be relevant to the visitor. Relevant content could contain news, create insight, or trigger further thought or food for conversation. From the cases it even seems like relevancy of the content is valued higher than the speaker presenting it, meaning that a highly ranked official from a company important to the audience bringing a mediocre relevant story would be evaluated less positive than a highly relevant story brought an unknown speaker with an unfamiliar background. Furthermore nearly half of the interviewees indicate they highly value authentic stories, meaning that the content should be natural, prepared for that specific occasion and should not be intended to sell or impose. Two interviewees indicate concealed messages intended to sell within a presentation provide a negative experience, even if the speaker is otherwise well respected by the visitor. Surprise is also mentioned as a characteristic which can influence the experience as is illustrated in box 6. Positive

surprises, such as exceeding expectations have a strong positive effect on the experience. Positive surprises can be found in speakers presenting in an unexpectedly engaging way, or presentations about seemingly generic topics which are presented in an engaging way that exceeds a presumed standard. Negative surprises affect the evaluated experience in a negative way, and occur when expectations are not answered. Negative experiences include the sudden cancelation of a part of the program the visitor had looked forward to, or a speaker delivering a standard presentation.

Format

All cases but one described events which followed a structured program to a certain extend. The case which does not fit in this description is the description of a commercial communication campaign described from an organizer point of view. For the cases describing events with a program, the program served as a framework for the event, dividing the event into slots with various activities. Besides presentations and workshops detailed earlier, some of the described events also contained substantial parts of the program being unrelated with the theme of the event, such as a sports program or comedy workshop. The different types of slots are summed up in the next section. Overall, the kinds of slots seem to contain a more abstract characteristic which influences the experience. The type of slot can be used to attain a certain level of interaction. Most interviewees displayed a preference for some level of interaction during the event program. The kinds of interactive sessions retrieved from the cases comes down to the possibility to ask questions after a presentation, discussion sessions, (coffee) breaks, conversation sessions, workshops, activity sessions, cocktail sessions, and dinners.

BOX 7: Program

V: "It started with an opening keynote. That was in a large space which provided enough room to fit all the participants. It was an exciting opening speech by someone who can just tell stories extremely well. I did not… I cannot remember his name now, but anyways, he had a very interesting story about the cooperation within the Roman army, and how people could feel connected with one another, and stayed feeling that way. [And subjects like] what are the right numbers to form teams? I thought it was a very inspiring story. It was a very good start [of the event]." [IT07-A]

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V: "Look, in this domain there are a couple of important events. All these events focus on specific technologies, but A [the most important player in the domain] has the advantage they can send their product teams. That is basically very educative" [IT08-A]

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V: "The event ended, and this is something I liked, with someone from the Human Resource department, [telling] about the effect of the departure of baby-boomers from the company and the consequences this could have on communities [of the company], and how one could react on that. I thought that was a good closing [of the event], because it explained the connection between what you could do within such a community, and the higher strategic goals of the organization. During the whole event these subjects were not mentioned till then. They were mentioned implicitly, because the whole event was about substantive questions within the communities, […] in this case it was the departure of baby-boomers which provided a good metaphor to reconsider the own work area in a broader way." [IT04-B]

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V: "[After opening] it continues in all kinds of parallel tracks from which you will have to weave your own program. […] So you create your own path through the program, and sometimes, you decide to skip a certain time slot because you want to continue the conversation on an earlier presentation with someone, or you want to work out your notes, think a bit, or just because you are tired and you like to sit for a moment" [IT04-A]

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V: "I had the feeling that [the speakers] were invited as opening keynote for political reasons, rather than for their *ironic*

extraordinary visionary story. I always… That always gets me annoyed." [IT07-B]

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V: "I consider RG as a very interesting, captivating guy and I think it is beautiful what they have done with R. I went to a workshop of them the other day, that was a lot of fun, and I think it is very smart what they are doing with A, that they connect it to something commercial, but the story was just a sales pitch. And well… That is not something I am waiting for" [IT03-A]

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I: "So a bad start with two keynotes which…"

V: "… handled the theme from the usual point of view. It was not really inspiring; it was not really anything new… Ehm, it did not spark new energy." [IT07-B]

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I: "Was that a general negative experience, or did this occur on a specific moment during the program?"

S: "Well, yes, it all became clear, as I can express it like that, in the closing talk. One of their manager looked back at the past two days, and told us how great the conference had been, and how important it had been for the company that this had happened. He did this in such a monotone way that it didn't fit at all for me. I think this symbolized it [the low level of energy and the tight control on the program by the organizers] for me." [IT04-B]

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I: "What did you enjoy so much [about the story]?"

V: "Well, it was about qualitative research he did with children in the domain of physical tentative computing. That was just… It is just great when some works on something of which I– […] That's just amazing, I find that very interesting. And he approached the subject in a good way: he just had stunning videos of these children explaining their inventions. Well, that is just… great!"

I: "Why did you think he approached it in a good way?"

V: "I enjoyed the presentation a lot; it connected really well with my own perspective [on the subject]. I often sincerely enjoy a person telling his story passionately from an approach I did not think of myself, or did not know of before, while being very well supported [with arguments]. I also thought it was charming to see that such a person, even though he delivers such good work, […] is confident about how great his story is. His presentation was far from fancy, it was a very substantive presentation. That is just… It is just a gift. That is fun, actually that is the best, when you do not know beforehand what you are going to get, and then it turns out to be great. These are the best [presentations]. They are surprises. That makes me think: the presentations that have stuck with me throughout the years are the ones which were very authentic and new…" [IT03-A]

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V: "I sometimes attend conferences where I come to think "I could have watched this at Google Video." Eh, I did not have to come to this place for this, I think it is a waste of my […] time. I respect RB for not being like this." [IT04-A]

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S: "The commercial character of a lot of the presentations disappointed me very much." [IT03-B]

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S: "[After opening the program] we had what I have started to call a "wall-to-wall PowerPoint." This is a endless set of sheets, often presented by people who are not very talented at presenting yet, and therefore read out their sheets, instead of making their sheets supporting their story. This took all morning, so you can imagine that by the end of the sessions everybody was exhausted." [IT04-B]

I: "In short, what did you consider the troughs of the experience?"

S: "Well, the troughs. I considered the general level of energy within the group very low. That was caused by the chosen form of the program. [...] The visitors were not involved." [IT04-B]

One interviewee indicated that the program did not matter at all in the case described as best event attended. The interviewee described that the most important reason for this event to be the best event attended, was the crowd present, and the interaction he had with those people throughout the event. The interviewees' motivation for attending was solely to speak to other people present at the event. It should be noted that this person assumed that there was little he did not know about the specific domain the event was about.

4.2.3 Post-program

Most cases describe activities after the official program ends such as socializing, networking, having drinks, a dinner, or, usually during multiple day conferences, go out into town for dinner, drinks and touristic activities. Cases that describe corporate events often include a sports program after the speaker program. Most sports programs have the intention to provide a possibility for interaction. Some diner activities are enriched by entertainment in the form of theatre or a speaker. Although most enjoy such entertainment, one interviewee found this additional entertainment is not always appreciated.

BOX 8: Post-program experiences

V: "During the night I went out till about one o'clock with a few participants [...] In the café there were at least 20, 30 people from the conference, and we had dinner with 25 people. A group went out to make a boat trip, and returned afterwards. So we called and mailed one another, but found each other in the end for dinner." [IT16-B]

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V: "And in the evening you would go, in a group, looking for a restaurant. A group consisting of people I met throughout the day, and of whom I thought "Hey, this is fun." After the last session of the day finished we would look each other up and make an ad hoc appointment for having dinner in a specific restaurant. And, well, that was actually very nice again, but at the same time we would continue [talking] related to the event during dinner." [IT07-A]

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V: "After that, the dinner was planned, and during dinner… We were in the same hotel, sitting at very large round tables with about 10 people sitting at each table. And, well… Dinner was OK, although it took pretty long. But, they [the organizers] had also arranged something else; I don't know how to explain it to you. It was a theater group; all of them were dressed up to look older, a bit of a murder game, kind of, with actors. So, every time I was in a conversation with someone at my table to chat up, an annoying actor would come by to disturb us."[IT06-B]

4.3 Post-event

The post-event episode of the event consists of the executed acts that are related to the finished event experience. The event journey describes three common acts in this episode: (a) reliving the experience by looking up content related to the event, (b) connecting with people met at the event, and (c) sharing experiences related to the event. These acts are graphically represented in figure 5.
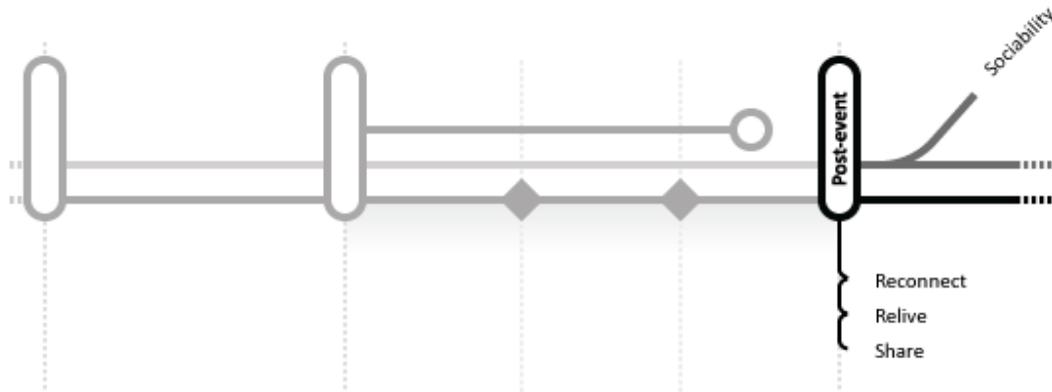
Figure 5. Post-event episode from the visitor point of view

Most interviewees admit that they are not triggered to do much related to the event after it is over. Some interviewees look up reviews of the event, and search for photos and videos made on spot. Some communicate about their experience by writing about how they have been inspired, what they learned, or how they enjoyed time with friends. This activity is only found back in events related to technology and new media, but not for events around corporate subjects. Others, often people who attended the event with work related motives, sometimes share their experience by presenting the things they learned to colleagues or friends. They too write reports, but usually this is a mandatory procedure needed to get a refund for the expenses made. A common activity found back in most case descriptions is the connecting with people met at the event by adding people to a social network, or following up on business leads gathered at the event.

BOX 9: Post-event activities

I: "Ok. What did you do in the days after the event?"

[…]

V: "Well, eh… It wasn't really in the days directly after the event, but in the weeks following after the event, that when I would be traveling by the train, I would get my laptop and try to write a report. That is also one of the things I promised my employer, eh, to do that. And in the week after [the event], during the department meeting, I told something about [the event]. There were also two colleagues who also attended the conference, and they also told a bit about their experiences. That was [...] let's call it the informal reporting."

I: "Ok, did you also have contact with people you met during the conference?"

V: "Yes… After an event I always receive some requests by people I met at the event. Requests for social networks, asking to connect. Eh, LinkedIn and Xing. And, eh, I usually accept these requests. They are usually by people I talked to, or exchanged business cards with." [IT16-b]

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S: "Afterwards people said "I got to know a lot of the people here" and they went home with lists of things they heard, examples of what other people did, and they expected that might work for their community too." [IT04-B]

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V: "[Something I also do during an event] is collecting business cards… Afterwards I put them all in LinkedIn [a social network]." [IT03-A]

Besides these activities there are also a few emotional processes to be recognized from a few interviewees. Some of the interviewees experience a feeling of longing back for the event, because of

the people that were present, or the atmosphere present at the event. Some interviewees indicate they are determined to attend the next event as well. Another feeling described by some interviewees, is a feeling of enlightenment, in a non-religious way, by the insights gained from the presentations attended and the conversations had. These feelings can be described as a personal transformation.

BOX 10: Transformation experience

V: "I now know that a presentation by an ecological farmer I attended in 2005, where he told how he farmed radish, but also how he did that, and continued by projecting his way of working on the development of technology, indicating parallels he saw. At that time I thought it was a strange story, but in the mean time it has become a significant part of how I think about technological development." [IT04-A]

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V: "On the moment [of the event] you don't think more of the story that you just heard, like "what a special story", [but when] you think about it for some more time, it will come to its full potential [insight]. It is that kind of element I search for in a conference." [IT04-A]

5 Results: Organizer experience

This section describes the steps an organizer ideally takes when organizing an event. The steps are abstracted from the 14 cases that described an organizer point of view. The activities of event organizers and, when provided, their motivations for these actions are described in the following sections. The collected cases are diverse in their nature; cases range from internal corporate events to conferences related to a specific subject. Although the cases are diverse, they do show similarities too. The diversity between the cases therefore provides a richer insight to how the organizer plans an event.

Most of the cases describing the organizer point of view were voluntarily to attend. More than half of the cases described from an organizers role are corporate events. Most of the corporate event cases are compulsory to attend for their visitors.

From the interviews it becomes clear that the majority of work needs to be done in the pre-event sequence. There are some factors that only play a role during specific moments of the event, such as the registration and the catering at the event. These factors are described per event episode. Two factors turned out to be important throughout the complete event sequence; communication and risk management. These two factors are treated separately in section 5.4

Figure 6 provides an overview of the organizer experience as it was abstracted from the interviews. While most of the factors require the organizer to prepare them in the pre-event episode, they are often important during a specific moment of the event. The factors are therefore described during the episode that is most important to the act.

Similar to the results of the visitor experience, the organizer experience is divided in five sections; the pre-event sequence, the event sequence consisting of the pre-program, program, and post-program subsequences, and the post-event sequence. Each sequence is described with the most common or important acts or factors specific for that particular sequence. The most common acts are described per paragraph and illustrated with quotes from the interviewees. These quotes are displayed in separate boxes.
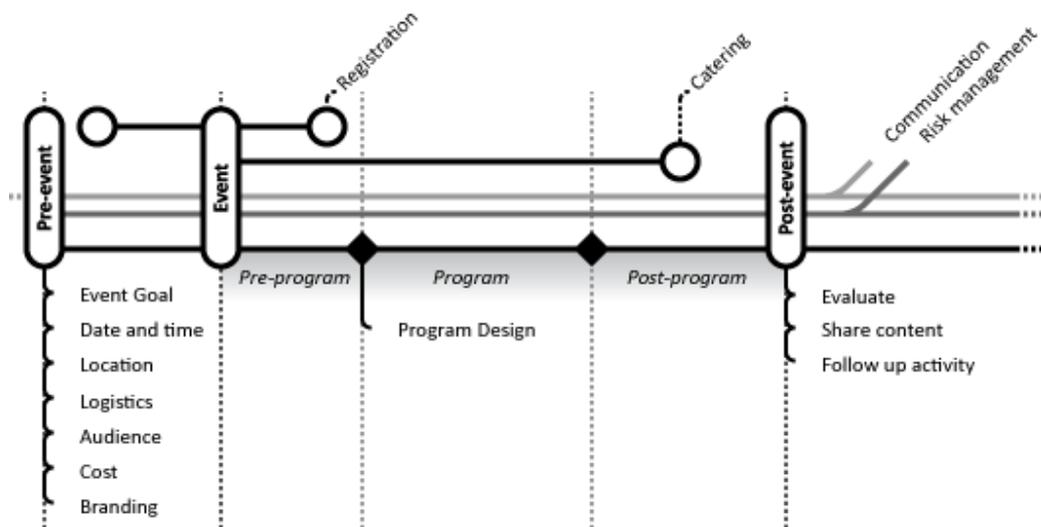
Figure 6. Full event sequence from the organizer point of view

5.1 Pre-Event

The pre-event sequence describes the moment from the initial idea of organizing an event until the actual event takes place. From the interviews it became clear that organizers spend most of the effort during this phase of the event sequence.

Subsequently the role of the event goal in the organizing decisions, the date and time of the event, the influence of the location, the relevance of logistics in relation to the location, the audience, cost, and branding of the event. This section closes with the results concerning the registration. The structure of this section is described in figure 7.
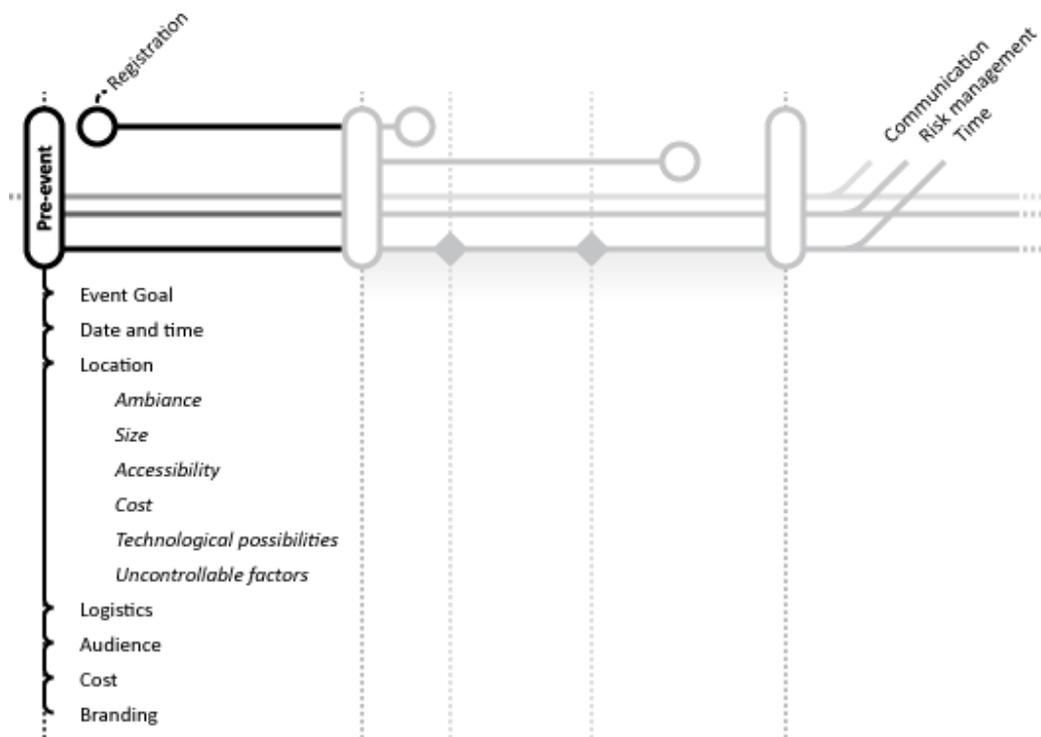
Figure 7. Pre-event episode from the organizer point of view

Event goal

From the cases it is clear that the planning an event starts with formulating the goals the organizer wants to fulfill. The goals mentioned in the interviews range from practical to highly strategic. Examples of practical goals are the amount of people attending, the amount of money earned with an event, or the level of media attention gained by organizing the event. Strategic goals include creating awareness about a certain topic, providing a place to meet others, share knowledge, or, commonly found in corporate events, communicate messages.

BOX 11: Event goals
O: "[…] It starts with a briefing: who is the target audience, what is the goal of the event, when do we consider the event a success, and when don't we think it's a success? Eh, next we select a program committee, from YTNT, they think about the themes. We, from the communication department, take care of the means. That generally goes for this company: marketing comes up with the goal, and we [communication] come up with the how." [IT18-A]

When the goal is set for the event, the organizers usually arrange the date and time, location, and theme for the event before communicating about the event. The theme strongly relates to the program design and therefore is described in section 5.2.2. The other subjects are further clarified in the following sections.

Date and time

The date and time for an event depends on the type of event organized. Several interviewees indicate the importance of choosing the right dates for the event. Factors such as the date, the duration, and the context of the event in relation to other events are mentioned as important factors to keep in mind.

When planning an event, the timing should be done while considering the needs and preferences of the target audience too.

Some events, such as internal corporate events, risk turning out into a failure when organized in public holidays, while other events are best planned during days most people are off. Interviewees who described events they organized as a part of their profession indicate that events meant to motivate or inspire employees are better to be planned on weekdays, early in the week, while events with a program continuing until late in the evening, such as events with a strong emphasis on celebration, can better be organized on a Friday.

The start and end of the event are important too. The interviewees who described their some of their experiences as a professional event organizer pointed at the fact that visitors should not be expected earlier than 10 o'clock in the morning to avoid rush hour. It was advised to plan to end an event later than 10, or preferably 9 o'clock in the evening. The time the visitor needs to get back home needs to be kept in mind, along with the planning of the visitor for the next day.

Other than paying attention to choosing the right date to organize their event by keeping in mind the day of the week or possible holidays, organizers should also keep other events that are relevant to the target audience in mind. This was described by one interviewee who told about an event where the organizers suddenly realized that the national football team would play during the evening of their multiple-day event. The organizers did not provide a possibility to follow the football match, which caused part of the visitors departing the location for the evening to see the match. The interviewee argued that the organizers should have provided a possibility to see the match at the event. The organizers did not do that, which resulted in half of the visitors taking off to see the match elsewhere in the city. This had a strong influence on the experience of the visitors left at the event.

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BOX 22: Time

O: "I think we started at 10 o'clock. That was convenient, because this way the attendees had the chance to avoid traffic jams. Last week I spoke with someone who often organizes events for us, she said "[Starting your event] before half past nine is too early, because people always get stuck in traffic jams around that time. " [IT05-A]

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O: "It's possible the boss will say "it's within work hours", that is the reason why it's best to organize [corporate] events during day time, "-so you have to be there." But in some companies it's not done to take the free time of people, unless you compensate them for the time taken. Then a lot of people will say "Until six? Fine, if it takes till six, but if it takes till six in Sittard [remote city], I'll leave at four to pick up my child."" [IT14-B]

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O: "To be honest, the second [final] day took too long. Half way home in the car I almost fell asleep. I had to put the car to the side of the road to buy energy drink. It is a remark I heard from more people: "To be honest, the location was just a bit too remote, and the program took just a bit too long, resulting in a ride home that took too long."" [IT05-A]

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Location

The location describes the place where the event is held. Over half of the interviewees mention the importance of the location. Most interviewees, describing events from an organizer point of view, indicated they pay attention to ambiance, size, accessibility, cost, and technical possibilities when selecting an appropriate location.

Ambiance

The ambiance of the location is reflected from the ambiance the surroundings provide to the location, such as the geographical area within which the event location is situated. One interviewee argued that Amsterdam is a great place for international events due to its location close to the airport, the rather small size of the city, which gives it a cozy ambiance, and the large amount of tourist attractions foreign visitors can visit in the city when they are not at the event. Another characteristic that was indicated to possibly influence the ambiance is the route to the location and the characteristics of the physical location, like driving up to a wine chateau surrounded by wine acres, or arriving at an old, remote hotel location. The ambiance of the physical location can be further enhanced by decoration of the location. Especially the cases describing corporate events mention using decorations to further enhance the location. Decorations are often chosen to be congruent with the corporate identity, or the brand identity designed for the event.

BOX 12: Ambiance

O: "Usually the guests are welcomed by hostesses. That is usual." [IT14-B]

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O: "The thing the moderator did right after the start was change the setting of the room. We started the program in a theatre setting, but the moderator decided to have everybody stand up and rotate their chairs 90 degrees. We had already planned to this before the program started, but while discussing it, we concluded it would be better to have them doing it themselves. It was a beautiful moment. We didn't make an arrangement for who had to sit where, and since people always tend to sit on a safe spot with people they are already familiar with, this switch changed the order. Suddenly everybody would sit next to someone else. It was a very simple, yet formal intervention, although the shuffling with chairs was kind of chaotic, it caused a good ambiance, taking off the serious and very formal tension. I think the content of the day was already serious enough." [IT14-B]

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O: "Something which did not work very well was the award ceremony during dinner. […] The award ceremony went fine, but something went wrong with the microphone, so not everybody could understand the speaker. The restaurant also had all kinds of niches, and little corners and holes, causing not everybody being able to see the person speaking." [IT05-A]

--

S: "I think the places for food and lunch are important, they should be close to the [presentation] rooms. [At PN] they were completely on opposite places of the terrain, you'll have to go off the GS [event terrain]. So unity of the event location is important." [IT02-B]

Size

From the cases it becomes clear that the size and flexibility of a location are important characteristics too. One interviewee indicated that the flexibility to book more rooms in the hotel, in case the amount of visitors would increase in the last moment, was an important subject for the organizers. The size of the location influences the ambiance. One interviewee, describing the event that was attended by the largest amount of visitors, indicated that during some presentations he did not feel comfortable to ask questions, because there were too many people in the large room. The same interviewee described an anecdote about an event which was set up too on a location being too large. During some sessions the interviewee would be listening to a speaker in a large, nearly empty conference room. This made him wonder if he had picked the right presentation, or that he was missing a better presentation elsewhere. This illustrates the importance of the relation and the balance between the amount of visitors and the size of the conference room.

Accessibility

The target audience should be able to easily reach the event location. What kind of accessibility is considered ideal depends on the target audience of the event: some interviewees, who described corporate events, indicate that most visitors own a company car, and therefore most likely will not use public transport to reach the event location, while other interviewees describe the importance of a location which can easily be reached by public transport, as most of the visitors are expected to use this type of transportation to reach the location.

BOX 13: Accessibility
O: "People could park at the hotel, and they received a confirmation letter with route instructions, etc. Most people came by […] car. Actually most people, especially in our target audience, come by car. […] People who chose to come by public transport had the opportunity to be picked up at the station, with taxis, but I believe nobody took advantage of that offer." [IT05-A]

Costs

The cost characteristics of a location were mentioned by two interviewees. Both these interviewees described their cases from an organizer perspective. Due to the current financial situation, the company organizing the event chose a cheaper location to host the event. One interviewee indicated that the price can also affect the experience by overspending on the location. He argued a location needs to be considered based on the needs of the visitor first, and then on costs and available budget, rather than overspending on a location.

Technical possibilities

Finally the technical possibilities a location can offers are said to be important by some organizers. For instance, one interviewee described an event where he attended as a speaker. The event was hosted within one of the big halls of the company. These halls were not optimized for events, and turned out to have bad sound characteristics, causing the speakers to be inaudible at certain points. This contributed to the negative experience of the visitors. Another example of the importance of technological possibilities offered by a location is the availability of Wi-Fi. Most of the technology related event cases mention the use of Wi-Fi internet by the visitors. Wi-Fi is used for browsing the internet, live blogging, and communicating. Not all locations can offer a good Wi-Fi connection. As more visitors rely on Wi-Fi for their way of experiencing the event, this is an important characteristic which has a negative impact on the experience when it does not fulfill the expectations of the visitor.

Uncontrollable factors

The characteristics just described are all controllable factors. Uncontrollable factors may also affect the choice of the location. Although these factors cannot be controlled, they can be anticipated on. For instance keeping in mind a factor such as the weather is important to keep in mind when planning an event. This was supported by one of the interviewee. She described a case that almost turned out to be a negative experience: unexpected bad weather almost spoiled the outdoor sport program. Keeping these uncontrollable factors in mind when planning an event may reduce the risk of a bad experience.

BOX 14: Uncontrollable factors
O: "They would arrive at the location, which is totally black. We have the colors black and orange. We put a banner at the entrance, so the first thing they would see was "Welcome," then their names, and "T". We put more banners around, and decorated the location with a few more orange accents." [IT18-A] -- O: "[The event] was held at July 8th, on the beach. The weather was supposed to be good, but it rained cats and dogs instead!

That was a disappointment. On the moment we would be outside, it was quite dry…" [IT14-B]

--

O: "Something which did not work very well was the award ceremony during dinner. […] The award ceremony went fine, but something went wrong with the microphone, so not everybody could understand the speaker. The restaurant also had all kinds of niches, and little corners and holes, causing not everybody being able to see the person speaking." [IT05-A]

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S: "I think the places for food and lunch are important, they should be close to the [presentation] rooms. [At PN] they were completely on opposite places of the terrain, you'll have to go off the GS [event terrain]. So unity of the event location is important." [IT02-B]

Other than the location there are various other actions taken in for the preparation the event, such as catering, transport, event branding, and arranging the program for the event. None of the cases described all these characteristics, but most interviewees mentioned at least a few of them in their case description.

Logistics

Two interviewees mentioned preparations regarding transportation for their event. Both cases described a corporate event. One case describes how transportation was arranged for visitors who would come by public transport. At the sign up phase, they could indicate whether they wanted to be picked up, as the event location was not well accessible by public transport. The other case described how public transport was arranged to get from one location to another location during the event. The interviewee described how miscommunication between the organizer and a third party, hired for transportation, led to a negative experience, as unexpected delays caused problems in the programmed schedule of the event.

Audience

One of the goals that should be determined in the planning phase of the event is the audience the organizer wants to reach with their event. A few interviewees advice to narrow down the scope on the target audience the event intends to serve. One interviewee described how a very broad target audience on a large international event caused some visitors to feel lost and how they found it hard to find people with similar interests. The same interviewee later described that narrowing down the target audience often improves the program, because the organizer can focuses on the specific wishes of the visitor. He reasons that when too many groups are targeted, nobody will be really satisfied, because of the different needs.

Costs

The cases contain various kinds of financial models: non-profit, commercial, and internal events. The financial model has implications for how the event is prepared. A result of the model, most clearly present for the visitor is the price paid to gain entrance to the event. Most of the described cases charged an entrance fee. In general little has been reported in the case descriptions about the price of the event. There were two things which were mentioned being a fee structure and the amount of money needed to pay for an event.

Besides one price for all entrance tickets, another fee structure was mentioned. Some events employ different prices to stimulate the sale of tickets. This price strategy is intended to motivate early registration by the visitor, and thereby give the organizer some early income before the actual event.

Interviews describing the visitor point of view, add the influence of the price on the expectations. Some interviewees indicated that very expensive events are expected to be very good, while events with a lower entrance fee call up fewer expectations. It is important to match the expectations set before the event, because not fulfilling expectations was indicated to have a negative impact on the retrospective evaluation of the event.

Branding

Most of the described professional events used visual branding for their event. In the most complete case, branding involved a graphic design and styling used in all the material published by the organizer of the event, including the announcement, the invitation, the website, the confirmation letter, reminders send out, the decor at the event, the clothing of staff, and giveaways. One interviewee argues that a consequent usage of event branded communication improves the experience of the visitor by enforcing the perception of the unity of the event. Furthermore the interviewee considers a consequent branding has a positive effect on the expectations of the visitor.

BOX 16: Branding
O: "People could register. They would get a badge on a lanyard, in the same style as the branding from the invitation, and flip flops. The flip flops were intended to 'close the gap', as that was the aim of the event. So, both the top management as well as the visitors walked around on flip flops. We were lucky to have good weather that day. Of course, by doing this we created less formality. The flip flops were made especially for this event and again had the same branding as the previous communication items plus a sticker with the logo of the company."[IT18-A]   --   O: "They would arrive at the location, which is totally black. We have the colors black and orange. We put a banner at the entrance, so the first thing they would see was "Welcome," then their names, and "T". We put more banners around, and decorated the location with a few more orange accents." [IT18-A]

Registration

The registration process is mentioned in all the interviews. While not all interviewees describe this phase as an important phase, some of the interviewees indicate that this phase is crucial in the preparation of the event. The following actions were connected to the registration process by the interviewees: collecting information, payment, sending a confirmation, informing about expected preparations, and providing the opportunity to see who else is going. Most of these acts are very basic, and are therefore not all acts described in detail.

The registration process is indicated to fulfill an important task in collecting information. Not only it enables the organizer to estimate the amount of visitors for their event, interviewees also indicate that this is the moment to collect more information concerning the visitor. Information can be collected about preferences, such as dietary wishes, subscription for side-events, and personal or corporate background information.

Some interviewees, describing their cases from a visitor perspective, indicate that they would like to know who else attends the event. These cases often describe network events attended for business reasons, and events attended from a more social community perspective. The interviewees with a business motive for attending indicate they like to prepare for possible encounters with prospects, while the interviewees attending an event from a more social or community perspective indicate that knowing who else will be there can be an argument in deciding whether or not they want to attend.

5.2 Event

The event episode describes the activities that take place from the moment the event starts until the event is over. Most of the activities take place before the event. The interviews that describe events from an organizer point of view indicate that most of the activities during the event are related to managing the event. The interviewees therefore described very specific situations from their experiences during the event. The relevant activities that take place at the event are depicted in three subsequent paragraphs. The first section describes the activities taking place pre-program (§5.2.1), then the activities concerning the program are detailed (§5.2.2), and finally the post-program activities are reported (§5.2.3). The structure for this section is illustrated in figure 8. Before describing results of the various phases of the event sequence, the results concerning the catering are treated in the following paragraph.
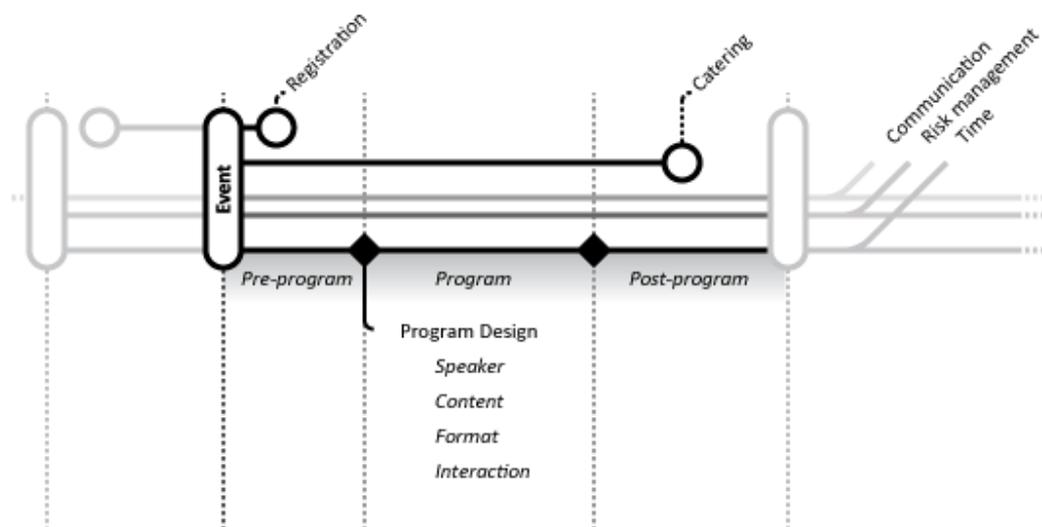
Figure 8. Event episode from the organizer point of view

Catering

Catering fulfills an important role during the event. Catering should be planned on availability, types of goods served, and quality. Although catering is considered a very basic factor in event organizing, the cases indicate that it exerts a significant influence on the event experience when done incorrectly.

Catering should be available during all breaks of the program. A few interviewees described the importance of making sure that catering was provided at all times. One interviewee described how a sudden change in the program led to an earlier break. Because the staff of the location had not been

notified, there were no drinks available when the visitors came out of the conference room. This led to a negative experience. The interviewee therefore noted that it is important to maintain a close contact with the staff at the location during the event. Not only should the staff be briefed before the event takes place, changes in the program should be communicated directly to the staff, to make sure that they are not noted by the visitor.

Events with a dinner program require the organizers to pay more attention to the catering, as there might be diet requirements for some visitors. Collecting dietary information must therefore be part of the preparation for such events. An alternative, mentioned in some case descriptions, is to explicitly inform visitors that food will not be provided at the location, but that visitor will be informed about alternative places to have a dinner at by, for instance, providing information about restaurants located near to the event venue. Although this might not be a suitable suggestion for every kind of event, it was reported to have a good impact on the visitor experience, especially during less formal and less structured events.

Serving poor quality catering has a negative effect on the event experience. A few interviewees indicated that poor catering contributed significantly to a negative experience. One interviewee indicated that organizers should only provide catering when they are aware of the importance of the quality. Otherwise he advised to outsource the catering to an external party, or, in line with what was suggested in the previous paragraph, inform the visitor where to go for, for instance, dinner.

BOX 15: Catering

S: "Very well organized. You notice it from everything. Everywhere there were volunteers. It turned out that I didn't even have to get breakfast at all: there were bagels and coffee. I could eat myself to death if I wanted to." [IT03-B]

S: "Another don't I would like to give has to do with the catering. Sometimes the coffee at events is just horrible. When at such an event, I always think "Why didn't you put a barista here?" I mean, for the money I paid, I might at least expect a good cup of coffee. The same goes for food by the way." [IT03-B]

5.2.1 Pre-program

The pre-program is defined as the period of time between the moment of entry and the moment the scheduled program starts is. From the descriptions of the interviewees it becomes clear that it is important to ease the visitor experience. After the visitor arrives, he or she should feel at ease quickly. A few interviewees mentioned they were received by a hostess or by staff. From the cases it becomes clear that the visitor will want to orientate on the location, knowing where to find the wardrobe, food and drinks, the toilet, the conference rooms, and a timetable after registering for the event. Some interviewees recommend that at larger events the visitor should be provided with a map of the location after the registration process. During the pre-program episode the main task of the organizer is to manage the final preparations before the event starts, such as rechecking the presentations, briefing the speakers or the moderators for a last time.

BOX 26: Pre-program

O: "When visitors entered, they would first come to the registration desk. Here they received the keys to their hotel room. People really appreciated that." [IT05-A]

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O: "We had arranged a special room for the luggage. We put signs there stating the letters of the last names of the visitor. That worked out very well, bags were not mixed up. Visitors received baggage labels at the registration desk, along with a welcoming letter describing in short what was expected of the visitor. It mentioned practical stuff like: "You already have the

5.2.2 Program

The program phase describes the whole planned program of the event. All the cases describe events with pre-planned programs, except for one case, which described a campaign. The most important characteristics of the program are managed within the design of the program. Although it is clear that the decisions regarding the program design are generally taken in advance of the event, the phase is described in this section. Besides the choices considering speaker, content, format and interaction, the interviewees also described activities such as managing the process by keeping an eye on the time during presentations, or being a host to the visitors during the program phase.

All, but one interviewees mention the importance of the program design for an event. All these interviewees followed a clearly structured program. The exception was a case that described a communication campaign without a structured program; it described a process, rather than a program. The design decisions abstracted from the interviews include choices concerning the (1) speaker, the (2) content, the (3) format, and the (4) level of interactivity. These themes are subsequently reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Speaker

Interviewees described several dimensions that played a role when making decisions about who would be programmed for their event. Decisions were made based on speaker characteristics like expertise with or authority within the domain of the subject, the relation of the speaker with the event theme, previous experiences with the speaker, the quality of the story the speaker would bring, and recommendations from others. The cases described by organizers of corporate events indicated that decisions for speakers were often based on the function and hierarchy of the person within the company of the speaker. From the interviews it became clear that there is a direct relation between this factor and the goal of the event. The strategic goal of corporate events, as it is abstracted from the cases, is often to unite, inform or motivate the visitors, usually being employees of the corporation organizing the event.

BOX 18: Speaker

O: "He [the master of ceremony] is a person who is well known with the organization, who knows the people in the audience, but who is not tied to the subject in his daily work, and therefore is considered as a neutral person." [IT05-A]

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O: "I can speak quite well, but a person who talks in chapters without slides, a person who picks up his notes in the end and walks away… I think that is fabulous." [IT02-B]

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I: "What were the worst moments throughout the event, and where were they located?"

O: "Well, the first thing I can think of… It was just the moderator. He just was very disappointing. […] The moderator, the person who should talk the program slots into a whole, really had no interaction with the audience. We did brief him on this. You see, the thing is that you are subjected to the presentation skills of the three lectures in between. Imagine someone standing up in between, muttering something in the room… Of course, it's not an official theatre setting where the visitors sit on chairs, so people are talking and having coffee. That is why you need a strong personality, someone who at least looks for interaction with the audience."[IT17-B]

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O: "We regularly receive feedback on the fact we 'solely' program American speakers. For our Dutch conferences, or the European conferences, we are often criticized for not putting effort in finding interesting European speakers, meaning more local speakers. For Dutch conferences this means that a Dutch keynote is very appreciated." [IT15-A]

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O: "We select speakers based on the abstract [proposal] they send in, and a bit on their reputation." [IT16-A]

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O: "It was important to have all the important people tell their thing on stage, so we had an extensive program, in the sense that… Well, all the stakeholders would have to be able to say something." [IT14-B]

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O: "I was very content with the closing keynote by CL. I believe he was the least known speaker on the program, but it worked out really well."[IT16-A]

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O: "Almost for commercial reasons, we invited [a few] companies to speak, of which we thought they would attract a lot of attention, to have big [well known] names on the program. That caused, well, at least in one case, damage to the overall quality of the event."[IT16-A]

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O: "We had a moderator, JJVG. We picked him, because he is young, fresh of mind, and very involved with sports. That last thing is very current for our company, because we closed a deal with foundation ST, a foundation founded by JU, who supports young talent to get the best from themselves, so they really have a nose for talent. We support them because we too have a nose for talent, and care for talent, especially if it is the talent of our own people. Of course they are all talents. That is what we also tried to make part of our program. JU comes to speak at our events, giving inspirational talks or talks about how to get the best out from oneself, or from others, or how to be noticed. He answers questions such as:"What makes you a winner, and what does not?"" [IT18-A]

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O: "We had a moderator; it's always nice to have one with groups of this size. For this event we arranged FvdL, I am not sure if you know him, he's a well known [person]. We had him as a moderator during the whole program, because we had many speakers. His job was to talk the different speaker slots to a whole. And especially, in this case, his function was to ask the questions nobody dared to ask. So he has been briefed thoroughly throughout the morning by the directors who would speak, asking "What is it you want to tell, and what is it that you don't want to tell?" and "What are the most likely questions to be asked?" You always have a group who will be very vocal, while another group will be a bit timid." [IT14-B]

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I: "You said you thought the announcement was poor. Can you tell me more about what you considered to be the announcement?"

S: "Well, their program is always constructed in a way that they announce who will come. I am talking about the people programmed to speak at the event. That doesn't work for me. EA and …, but I already heard this guy last year. There are always a couple of names, which do not ring a bell with me. I am not stupid, well maybe I am, I don't know. […] I receive a lot of invitations for events, wouldn't it be better if they would have a program of which I think "Wow! I put everything aside to see this!"?" [IT02-B]

Content

Two kinds of content can be abstracted from the cases. This divides the cases into two groups: corporate events and other kinds of events. Corporate events are characterized by a much more goal oriented kind of content than the other events. The corporate events are clearly used as an instrument in a strategy, contrary to the other events described. The deviating event goal often leads to another type of content presented at corporate events. The content of this kind of events is often intended to inform the visitor about current developments, to address perceived problems within the organization, to celebrate good results, to educate or train the visitor. The interviewees argued that it is important to clearly communicate the goal of corporate events to both the attendees and the speakers. One interviewee described a corporate event he attended as a speaker. At this event the organizers failed to explicate the aim of the event to both the speakers and the audience. This caused the speakers to tell similar stories. Due to the large similarity of the presentations the audience got bored. This resulted in a negative event experience.

From the cases that describe non-corporate events it becomes clear that relevant content is well appreciated. Organizers of successful events indicate that they pay attention to the content of the programmed speaker. The speaker should share a story that is prepared for that specific event, rather than telling a standard story. Some of the interviewees argue that they do not want to see someone tell a standard story that they "could have watched on Google Video." Therefore it is the task of the organizer to motivate the speaker to prepare a story, fit for the specific subject and audience of the

event. Content described as relevant by the cases from the visitor point of view is characterized by sharing new insights. This can be achieved by sharing relevant information in the form of lessons learned, or future plans. Also, describing a known subject with new metaphors, and thereby sparking new ways of thinking about the subject is highly appreciated by visitors.

BOX 19: Content

I: "What was the peak experience in the program?"

O: "Ehm, I would have to think about that. I think it would be the interactive parts of the program. But I think we could have improved the program further if we would have invited clients too. That is something we heard often in the feedback: "Great to have such a conference, we talked about customers for two days, but I didn't see any."" [IT05-A]

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S: "It [the program] was some kind of monotony. Mainly because it was some kind of reporting by the communities – there were over 50 of them – so you could fill a couple of days with those presentations. They also had guest speakers: I and two others, so it was a monotone program. The organization did not explicate the goal of the conference. Why did all these communities tell these stories? So everybody just listened a bit." [IT04-B]

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I: "Could you describe the peak moments in short? We will get to their details later on."

O: "I think that hearing what direction [the company] is heading [was the peak moment], you know, the message concerning the content. And of course the fact they were together." [IT14-B]

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O: "I think the presentations were highly informative for the attendees, but it usually isn't the most fun to do..." [IT05-A]

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O: "He [a speaker] brought a talent with him to back the idea of the team between the coach and his talent, which was in essence the theme of our event: management and the employee, they have the same relationship with each other. So we let the talent talk about what he expected from his coach, and vice versa to make the translation to the management and the employee." [IT18-A]

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S: "Regardless the event I speak at, usually I finish my presentation on the spot, meaning: in the conference room. Of course, the body of the story I will tell is already done, but [...] I always adjust the presentation during the event to make it fit with the context of the event, to adept it to the language used in other presentations and [the language] adopted by the audience, to, say, [...] to have the concepts which emerge as a shared language usage, to also include those in my presentation. That way the audience listening to the presentation can easier find the hooks in the story in order to make the link between the stories told and their own questions. Concluding: I always finish my story on the spot, because it has to fit the context." [IT04-A]

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O: "I hoped the speaker would be igniting the place [figurative], but he totally failed in doing that. His lecture was clearly rated as the worst out of the four keynotes. His lecture was very abstract; people did not handle that well at that moment." [IT16-A]

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I: "Can you describe that [previously described] line of development? Did you think about it in advance?"

O: "Yes. Yes, we meant too, especially on the second day – it was a two day event – we intended to inform on a general level during the morning of the first day, you know, the "Why are we here?" question. During the first afternoon we planned to discuss "What are we going to with this knowledge? What are our plans? How can we look at them in a more detailed way?" In the morning on the second day we had some kind of fair. At the fair people could see what was already done, [...] and what

Format

The timeslots programmed in the cases contained different formats: presentations, workshops, planning sessions, programming sessions, conversational sessions, discussion sessions, brainstorms, guided tours, games, sports, and dinners. One interviewee states that decisions regarding the format of a programmed slot should be done while keeping the time of the day in consideration. According to the interviewee the character of the slot should be considered when a slot is used best. The interviewee argues that for instance an entertainment slot can better be programmed later during the day, than in the morning.

Besides the various types of slots, the format of the content presented is mentioned by some of the interviewees. A few interviewees described how the use of metaphors in the presentations of speakers was well appreciated by the audience, and had helped to fulfill the communication goal of the organizer.

Interaction

The level of interaction describes the level of activity expected from the visitor. Some event organizers enable the target audience to participate in constructing the program during the pre-event sequence, or as a part of the event sequence. Organizers motivate the target audience to send in a proposal for a presentation, or suggest speakers to be programmed at the event. A few interviewees describe an event where the visitors were asked to actively propose subjects to talk about, and required the visitors to actively construct the program of the event beforehand by commenting and voting on the proposed

subjects. Another interviewee described how the received submissions are evaluated by a program committee. The committee than chooses who is invited to speak.

Organizers also vary the level of interaction during the event program. The format of program slots is closely intertwined with the level of interactivity. Examples from the interviewees contain discussions between the audience and the speakers, or a sports or game program.

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BOX 21: Interaction

O: "I thought the discussion was one of the peak moments throughout the event. We fired up the discussion by posing statements around three general themes. The audience and the directors voted using voting devices. Per theme we had two statements, so in total there were six statements where the people could chose 'yes' or 'no'. This made clear some controversy." [IT18-A]

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O: "We walked [to the diner location], in a long sting through Egmond aan Zee. During the walk, we past a little road next to the beach. It was quite dark on the road, but people seemed to like it. They just had conversations, in an informal way." [IT05-A]

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O: "We did not make a table planning in the restaurant we had dinner at. It was not really a restaurant, more a bar at the beach, but then a little bit more luxurious, but very informal. Not having the tables planned was very well received [by the visitors], people really enjoyed it. "[IT05-A]

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O: "In the hallway and in the different rooms we put idea notes. In the hallway we installed a mailbox; people could deposit their idea notes there. Every next block in the program, such as the next morning or the lunch, the mailbox would be emptied. Questions which could be directly answered by the management were answered on the spot. We calculated room for this in our program." [IT05-A]

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O: "We did not plan a party, and there was no band, the dinner was just the end. So we had to place the peak moment before the dinner, because everybody would still be together at that point of the event. In this particular case we made up a cocktail workshop, because there were two companies merging. […] We had the people sitting at long tables and the director would stand on a stage and make the first cocktail. You know, with a bit of orange juice, and then 'tjik-tjik', add some ice, it looked heartwarming. In the background we had a DJ playing, you know, the 'hippy-hippy shake'-kind of music. The director would show once more how to make a cocktail. After that the audience had to do it – together! There is always an idea behind the things you have to do; it's never without a goal." [IT14-B]

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O: "The good thing about an activity program with groups is that you always have a winner. This gives them [visitors] a drive to win such as "We have to do this well", because this way they can play themselves in the picture with the boss."[IT14-B]

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5.2.3 Post-program

Post-program activities describe the activities taking place after the planned program has finished. The cases describe three kinds of event endings; a cocktail party, a dinner, or no further activities. The internal corporate events often did not have further activities planned after the program finished, while most of the none-corporate events usually have a cocktail party planned. Activities taking place after the program usually fulfills a goal such as providing the possibility to network, or socialize. The organizer should make sure that the experience after the program is as eased as possible. One interviewee described the importance of optimizing small processes such as the wardrobe. She stated that the

wardrobe staff should be doubled at the end of an event as most people will want to leave quickly. The cases do not describe any other particular characteristics being significant for the visitor experience, except for one more thing. Some interviewees mentioned how they handed out souvenirs for the visitors of the event.

A few interviewees indicate that the visitor received an item as a souvenir as a reminder at the end of or after the event. The described souvenirs are often symbolic, or contain videos and photos of the event. One interviewee described an event organized to celebrate the merger of two companies. During the dinner at the end of the program, the group participated in a cocktail workshop. The cocktail shaker used during the workshop, being a symbol of the recent merger, was given to the visitors when they left the event as a souvenir of the event.

5.3 Post-event

The post-event activities incorporate all activities after the event is over. Half of the interviewees described actions taken after the event finished. These actions include evaluations, sharing content, collecting media coverage, and facilitating follow-up meetings.
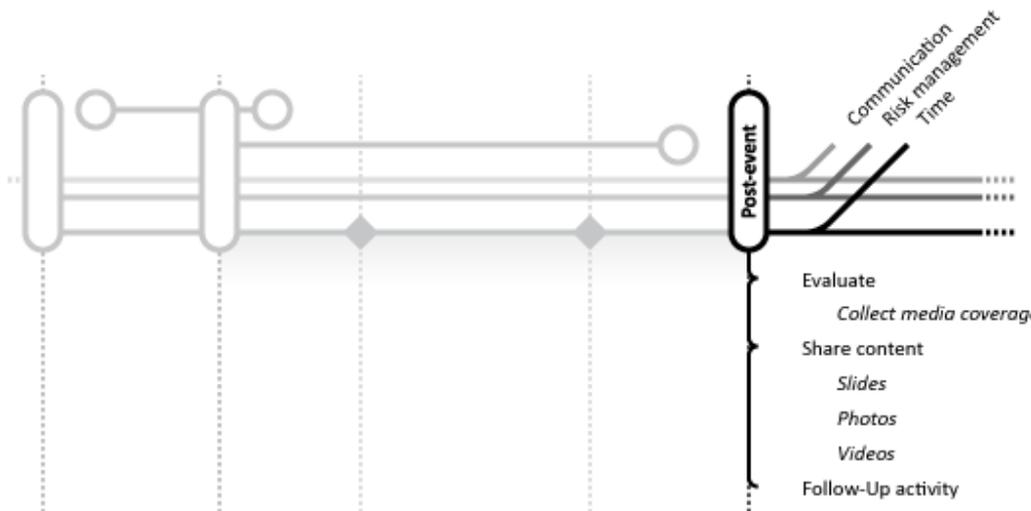
Figure 9. Post-event episode from the organizer point of view

Most interviewees described how they define goals in the preparations of an event. Some interviewees describe how evaluations are collected. Most often a questionnaire is send out by email to the visitors. One interviewee described how he was contacted by phone for an evaluation. Only interviewees that described corporate events mentioned what the results of the evaluation were used for. They indicated that the results of the evaluation were used for management purposes.

Some organizers indicated they tracked and collected the event related content published by the media. None of the interviewees described why they did so, except for the interviewee who described a communication campaign over a range of festivals: the level of press attention served as an indicator of the successfulness of the campaign.

Most of the non-corporate event cases described, shared photos and sometimes videos, shot at the event, on their website. One interviewee, describing an event from a visitor perspective, commented that the video content could only be seen after paying per view. This made him feel

agitated. He felt entitled to see back the video content as he paid the entrance fee for the event. All the other described events that shared photo and video content afterwards, did so for free. Most interviewees describing the visitor perspective indicated they look up this content after the event, and appreciate the service.

During a few of the described corporate events organizers made promises about follow-up activities after the event. These activities ranged from meetings to further discuss plans made at the event, or answering questions that could not be answered at the event. One interviewee indicated that it they, as an organizer, took a long time for the organizers to fulfill their promises after the event. This caused some negative experiences for those who were expecting to receive further information.

5.4 General factors

Two general factors were abstracted from the interviews. From the interviews it became clear that both communication and risk management are important factors throughout every episode of the event sequence. Because both factors comprise a broad spectrum of characteristics these two factors are treated in separate sections below. After describing the results the section closes with illustrative quotes taken from the interviews.

5.4.1 Communication

The communication involved in organizing an event is different for each phase of the event experience. This section describes the findings from the interviews. The communication moments described in the cases included the announcement, invitation, briefing, reminder notes, communication at the event, interaction between visitors, evaluation, the conference follow up, and publicity. The cases did not describe the communication on a concrete level. A few overall characteristics important for a successful communication were abstracted from the interviews such as communication style, channel, sender, and the receiver of the message.

The various forms of communication should be styled in a congruent style, being both visual, as textual. Some interviewees mentioned that they developed a style for their event. This is considered to be part of event branding. Event branding is described in earlier within this chapter (§5.1).

The type of communication channel that was used to communicate with the target audience was mentioned as an important factor by a few interviewees. It is important that the chosen channel is congruent with the channels the target audience is familiar with. One interviewee described a case of an event organized for government officials. The target audience was used to receive invitations per letter and registered by sending a reply-card by mail. The interviewee indicated it is important to pay attention to how much time a chosen communication channel needs, as the registration process chosen for this particular event consumed too much time.

By some interviewees the sender of the communication was regarded as an important factor. Cases that described corporate events often used a sender with authority in the perception of the receiver for their invitation. This authority over the receiver was often related to a higher hierarchy of the sender within the corporation. This phenomenon was not found back in the interviews describing non-corporate events.

Most important is the receiver of the communication. The communication should be tailored to the needs of the receiver and the moment the message is received. The needs vary over the course of the event. One interviewee described the flow of communication messages that the visitor received in the period leading to the event. The messages were tailored to the situation the visitor would be in at

the time of receiving the message, such as directions to the location the evening before the visitor would depart for the event, or a welcoming letter, describing where to store the luggage and what to expect of the event. Another interviewee described how she always places signs on the routes leading to the location for visitors attending the event.

Communication should ease the needs of the receiver. For instance, providing a map at the registration and signage at the location will ease the process of getting familiar with the venue. By communicating the program of the event, and the location of the conference rooms, the organizer helps the visitor to orientate. Not only visual aid to help orientated were mentioned, but also the use of sound was mentioned by one interviewee. The interviewee described how the location offered to sound a gong when the program would start or continue after a break, indicating the moment people had to get back to the rooms for the next presentation.

After the event the organizers should answer the needs expressed in the cases described from a visitor point of view. The organizer could provide summaries of the presentations, share photos and videos of the event, and facilitate ways to stay in touch with the people met at the event, depending of the kind of event. A few interviewees described how they, as an organizer, shared the slides of the presentations, photos and videos made at the event. Some organizers even indicated they compiled a DVD to send to the visitors of their event, while others shared this content online.

BOX 23: Communication

O: "[...] Next we went to the location of the event, discussed our idea, requested a quotation, talked through the decoration, eh, set up a website. The first moment of inviting the audience was at the moment everybody received a SMS… Eh, sent in the name of… By who was it again? By HV, HV is the person at T[well known person to the target audience]" [IT18-A]

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O: "When we secured our location, we send out a pre-announcement as fast as possible. This was a digital pre-announcement. The announcement was made in PowerPoint, but it really looked like a video when you would play it, people couldn't see it was made in PowerPoint. Ehm, in the pre-announcement the only thing really mentioned was the date: "keep your planner free. These days you won't be in the office." Oh, and: "Oh, by the way, you'll be staying at a hotel""[IT05-A]

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O: "If it [having people sign up for a corporate event] does not work, I can always contact the direct managers and say "Look, listen, in my report I see that only 20 out of your 100 employees signed up so far. That isn't a good sign…" and then [I] send a personal mail." [IT14-B]

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I: "Can you tell me more about the invitation you just mentioned?"

O: "Yes, that was via mail. Communication within this company goes mainly via email. We developed a registration website. In the mail a link led the people invited to the registration website where they can sign up for the event. That [the moment of signup] is also the moment we ask additional information, such as… Diet wishes and stuff" [IT14-B]

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O: "The thing that went wrong […] was the invitation: it was send out way too late. We first talked about this in May, but the invitation was send out the 7th, that was the first [communication about the event] which would be on the 18th. The invitation didn't arrive at the mailbox of the people until the 11th. Well that is way too short, of course, for something which is send by mail, and has to be replied with an answer by [traditional] mail too." [IT14-A]

5.4.2 Risk management

Various kinds of risk were abstracted from the cases. The mentioned risks include risks concerning the level of attendance, timing, speakers, location, weather, and technical issues. These factors can have a significant impact on the event experience of the visitor. They can be anticipated for in advance, and thereby reduce the actual risk during the event. Interviewees indicated that organizers should comprehend these risks by anticipating on them beforehand.

The level of attendance forms a risk for the event organizer for a few reasons. The organizers needs to be able to estimate how many people will attend the event, in order to arrange for example the amount of chairs in the conference room, lunch, dinner, or has implications for the planned activities. Interviewees indicated that anticipating on a certain percentage of people to not show up reduces the risk of overestimating the amount of visitors, and thereby the costs made on for instance catering.

Timing within the context of an event can form a risk, when it comes to travel (as is described previously), but also the program. Some interviewees indicated it is good to build slack time into the program. This prevents that slots located in the end of the program need to be rushed through. For example, one interviewee described an event that did not take into account the time needed to get from one session to another, as the event location was scattered over a wider area. When the interviewee arrived at the session, they rushed through the workshop. The interviewee wanted to get more out of this workshop, therefore the experience was not fulfilling his needs. This had a negative effect on the total event experience. This could have been prevented by choosing another location, briefing the person organizing the workshop to keep in mind the limited time for the workshop, or setting the right expectation for the visitor. Most organizers indicated they keep track of the time during the various slots and manage the speaker on stage by informing how much time is left to present. By strictly managing time, the visitor knows better what to expect.

Programming an unknown speaker can be a risk to the event experience. One interviewee recommended two things concerning reducing the risk around speakers. During the pre-event sequence the speaker should be screened to get an idea of how the speaker presents, by searching for previous occasions where he or she spoke. When little is known about the speaker, the interviewee recommends downplaying the risk by programming the speaker at a less prominent timeslot in the program, or limiting the stage time reserved for the speaker. The interviewee described the less prominent timeslot as a timeslot being not at the beginning or end of a block. Another hint by this interviewee was to have a backup speaker at hand when possible. The interviewee described how the backup speaker had prepared presentations for the various program slots.

Risks concerning the location can be managed by thoroughly briefing the people at the location of the event. Most interviewees, who described successful cases from the organizer point of view, indicate they had briefed the location about the program and the roles expected from the parties involved in organizing the event to avoid misunderstandings during the event.

Finally most interviewees indicated that it is important to run through the program in advance of the event and check whether everything has been accounted for. Such a general check ideally includes checking the presentations with the speakers, and when possible provides an occasion for the speakers to meet each other to tell about their presentations and make adjustments based on the presentations of others. By providing a moment for the speakers to meet each other, the organizer reduces the risk of overlap between the presentations, and enables the speakers to fill in gaps between the presentations, and thereby increasing the total value of the content shared by the speakers.

BOX 25: Risk management

O: "The person presenting on stage does not have his laptop with him. We also have no lectern on stage. We only have a screen to show the person presenting what slide he is on, so that he does not have to look backwards to the big screen. He does have a remote control; they [the speakers] do not like to give away control. The remote has two buttons: next and previous. Otherwise it is getting too complicated." [IT05-A]

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O: "Some directors can endlessly elaborate if they don't keep an eye on their time. [...] It depends a on the ego of the person *laughs*" [IT14-B]

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O: "I try to filter on quality, or at least on try to get an idea of how the person speaks, if he is a supreme speaker, whether he has got something to tell, and whether he has the ability to speak in a pleasurable way. There is big risk of things going wrong, especially when you try to make a good impression [with a big name], and it goes wrong, than it hurts double. In case a speaker unexpectedly gives an interesting lecture, it is much more fun than when a big name disappoints with his lecture. The damage is doubled then." [IT16-A]

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O: "Every now and then people come up with the idea to mentor speakers who aren't very secure, or whom we suspect to be a bit insecure, by proofreading their presentation and helping them improving it." [IT16-A]

5.5 Summary

The results in the previous chapter and this chapter clearly indicate that there is a difference between the way visitors and organizers experience their events. As the cases indicate, organizers have a clearly distinctive event experience. For the event organizer, most of the anecdotes in from the interviews described examples acts related to planning and managing. The peak moments of the organizer experience often described characteristics, instead of moments, while the visitor could often pinpoint their special moments of the event more precisely.

The observed difference in the experience is in line with what could be expected from the literature regarding event studies as it was described in chapter two: most studies within the domain of event studies focus on practice, rather than on theory. The results of the visitor cases indicate that there are still various needs to fulfill for the event organizers. As these needs are very specific and depend on personal preferences, it is better to continue by reflecting the results of this study to the peak/end theory characteristics. The theory concerning the influence of peak, end and trend characteristics on the retrospective evaluation of event experiences is reviewed in the following chapter.

6. Conclusion and discussion

This chapter concludes whether there is a relation between the theory as proposed in chapter two and the results of the study as described in chapters four and five. Then the used research method is discussed and finally the limitations of this study are summarized.

6.1 Theory

The results provide a practical insight related to how events are experienced. The previous two chapters described the experiences from the visitor and organizer point of view. There is more to this practical view upon events than is described in the previous chapters. Some of the interviewees referred to these as the 'do's' and 'don'ts' of good events. This section discusses whether Peak/End rule characteristics

had the expected impact on the retrospective evaluation of the event experience. The expected impact of the characteristic, as formulated in section 2.4, is therefore compared to the results of chapters four and five to conclude whether there are characteristics that can be retrieved from the interviews. First, the retrieved influence of the peak intensity from the case descriptions is discussed. Second, the influence of the end intensity, as it appeared in the results, is described. The third section describes the trend characteristics that were retrieved from the results. Other than these three sections two other characteristics appeared to influence the retrospective evaluation. Therefore the fourth section indicates how some descriptions indicate the importance of flow. The last section describes how the concept of 'communitas' can have a positive influence on the event experience.

6.1.1 Peak

From the theory, it is expected that the peak of the momentary affective intensity has a positive influence on the remembered affect (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Kahneman *et al.*, 1993; Redelmeier & Kahneman, 1996; and Kahneman, Wakker & Sarin, 1997). In chapter two the following expectation was formulated with regard to the influence of the peak experience on the event experience:

> *The intensity of the peak experience positively influences the retrospective evaluation of an event experience.*

A few cases describe an event with a clearly distinctive peak moment in time. Most organizers do not purposefully design a peak moment in their event, except for some of the interviewees who organize events as part of their profession.

From the results it is concluded that the peak experience plays an important role in the retrospective event evaluation of visitors. Most of the interviewees described peak experiences related to the presentations, gained insights, and the people present at the event. Most cases describing an organizer perspective tended to be based on practical characteristics. This difference is attributed to the different motives belonging to the perspective of the interviewee who described the event. One specific event was described by a few interviewees, both visitors and one organizer. This event backs up this conclusion. None of the visitors attributed the great experience explicitly to how well the event was organized, but by detailing their opinions about the speakers, the talks they had with friends, and the insight they gained from the presentations. Contrary, the organizer describing the same event stated that the compliments received for the great organization were part of his peak experience.

From the results it became clear that corporate events differ from the other kinds of events. This study initially assumed that similar rules would apply for the events studied within the set frame of medium sized planned events with a structure. Future research should provide better insight in the event experience of corporate events. Most corporate events in this sample are described from an organizer point of view. Further research should therefore indicate whether the visitor peak experiences resemble the goals of the events planned, like the organizers described in their cases, or whether other characteristics have greater influence on the event experience of the visitor.

6.1.2 End

Previous studies predict that the last momentary affective intensity of an event has a positive influence on the retrospective evaluation of the event experience (Miller & Campbell, 1959; Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Kahneman *et al.*, 1993; Kahneman *et al.*, 1997; Redelmeier & Kahneman, 1996). In chapter two the following expectation was formulated with regard to the influence of the end experience on the event experience:

The intensity of end experience positively influences the retrospective evaluation of an event experience.

The results of the visitor experiences indicate that this rule does apply to the retrospective evaluation of event experiences, although it does not seem to exert a strong influence on the retrospective evaluation of the complete experience. Many of the cases that described the worst event attended did not provide a positive end-intensity. Some of these negative end experiences can be attributed to an overall negative experience. The negative end experience could be influenced by the negative preceding experiences in the preceding episodes. The cause of some negative end experiences is attributed to the event design. Providing a good end experience is not mandatory for a positive retrospective evaluation. This is illustrated by an event described from a visitor perspective by a few interviewees. The interviewees criticized the organizers for not having a clear end "to celebrate the end of the event and being together", but nonetheless evaluated the event as the best event attended in the past year. As the results lack sufficient proof for the influence of the end characteristic, it is concluded that the end experience does not have a significant impact on the retrospective evaluation of the event experience.

More research needs to be conducted on whether there is a relation between the motivation of the visitor and the end experience. It would make sense that events attended from a mandatory motivation, as is the case with most corporate events organized for an in-company audience described, are different from the events attended from a personal motivation.

6.1.3 Trend

Based on previous studies it was predicted that the trend of a moment-to-moment intensity of an experience influences the retrospectively remembered intensity (Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Loewenstein & Prelec, 1993; Baumgartner *et al.*, 1997; Ariely, 1998; Soman, 2003). A steeper, more positive trend slope would translate into a better memory encoding. In chapter two the following expectation was formulated with regard to the influence of the trend intensity on the event experience:

A positive trend intensity has a positive influence on the retrospective evaluation of an event experience.

When designing the program for an event, it is important to keep the target audience in mind. The intensity of the program slots should not exceed the intensity the target audience can handle. A very practical occasion in one of the cases describes this. The event, described by one of the organizers, had a sport program for their visitors. The program was composed out of eight sport workshops varying in intensity. The variety of the intensity was done on purpose, as the audience differed in their physical ability to join the program. By providing various levels of intensity, the visitor could choose the activity that suited him most. According to the interviewee the sport program was very well received by the visitors.

Quite a few cases described events that opened with a peak intensity, often by programming a keynote speaker. As it turns out from the interviewees who described an event from an organizers perspective, the reason behind this program decision is practical. Most organizers argue that they programmed the speaker at the start of the program to ensure that everybody was inside the room, or to kick off the event with a powerful speaker.

One of the events named as the best event attended in the past year was described from both the perspective of an organizer and a visitor. The program of this event contained a few keynote speakers spread out over the day, all of which were indicated as peak experiences by the interviewees.

The interviewee who described the event form the organizer perspective explained that the various speakers had been purposefully programmed at their slots. These design decisions were based on the content the speaker would talk about, their way of presenting, and the anticipated reaction of the audience after the presentation.

Although many interviewees report peak experiences when describing their cases, the influence of the trend characteristic cannot be retrieved from the described events. The trend characteristic was mentioned by a few interviewees, but there does not seem to be a relation between the nature of the trend and the experience of the visitor. Very few cases indicate that a clear development towards a climax is needed to create a positive event experience. This result suggests that a model, such as the Freytag model, does not lead to a better event experience. However, it is argued whether this is really the case. It might be that visitors are not actively aware of a growing tension, or a designed development within the program. Designing a tension within a program works best when it is not obvious, like the tension that increases in a movie: the tension is more powerful when it is not predictable and subtly builds up, remaining below the threshold of the awareness of the individual.

Further research, using online measuring techniques, should indicate whether trend characteristics influence the retrospective evaluation on a more specific level. Furthermore, various general trends were described, including trends from concrete to abstract presentations, hierarchically distant speakers to hierarchically near speakers, and program slots that develop an increasing level of interactivity. Future research, using an experimental method to compare the influence of the various characteristics, should indicate whether these kinds of trends contribute to a better retrospective influence, and if there are differences between the impacts of the various kinds of trends.

The following paragraphs describe more specific trend characteristics. Subsequently, the impact of velocity, segmentation and segment location on the retrospective evaluation of event experiences are concluded.

Velocity

A positive effect on the retrospective evaluation is expected when the velocity improves towards the end of the experience (Soman & Shi, 2003). Various studies indicate that the velocity of the trend development has an influence on the retrospective evaluation of an experience (Hsee & Abelson, 1991; Hsee, Abelson, & Salovey, 1991; Hsee, Salovey, & Abelson, 1994; Baumgartner *et al.*, 1997).

From the results of this study little can be said about the influence of the velocity of the trend on the retrospective evaluations of the described cases. This is attributed to the chosen research method, as the qualitative approach focused on collecting an insight based on rich experiences, not statistical data from which a velocity could be abstracted.

An experimental setup that studies the influence of various velocity levels within the development of the event program should indicate whether velocity of the trend development impacts the overall event experience. This research should study the online evaluations of manipulated velocity patterns within different event programs.

Segmentation

Results from previous studies indicate that the retrospective evaluation of segmented experiences heavily depends on the mean intensity of each segment, rather than the pattern of the experiences (Ariely & Zauberman, 2000; Ariely & Zauberman, 2003).

Based on the results, it can be concluded that segmentation impacts the event experience. Although the interviewees describe various characteristics program slots, and they do not seem to attach value to the segmentation, it is believed that segmenting the experience can improve the experience. A few interviewees mentioned the negative effect of a segmented location on the event experience. One interviewee described the importance of what he called the 'unity of location', indicating that he preferred a location that was not scattered over a larger geographical area, but a location that is compact. Furthermore, the event described from both the organizer as well as the visitor perspective provides an example of how segmenting the experience at the peaks can improve the experience of the event. The interviewee, describing the event from the organizer perspective, indicated how he thoughtfully considered the programming of the speakers that would fill the slot before the breaks, while keeping in mind the expected effect of the presentation on the visitor. While this was not mentioned by the few interviewees who described the same event as their best event visited in the past year, it can be assumed that these decisions influenced the total experience unwarily.

Previous studies suggest that experiences should be segmented at the peak experiences to achieve a more intense experience. This theory is confirmed by the results. By considering the speaker, the content of the slot, and the format of the presentation, it is possible to influence the visitor experience. While no direct evidence was found that segmenting at the peak experience should allow for adjustments in the program design, it is believed that this could contribute to a better experience too.

Further research should provide evidence that extended slots cause an improved experience for the visitor. A study could be conducted in an experimental setting with a highly segmented event design, and a barely segmented event design. The barely segmented event design should test various ways of limited segmentation, such as limiting the amount of slots that fit within a block, or improving the transition from one slot to the next slot.

Segment location

Theory proposes that segmenting an experience at the peaks results in higher retrospective ratings of the experience, compared to experiences segmented at the troughs (Ariely & Zauberman, 2003).

From the collected cases it is clear that some programs were successfully designed to manage the experience of the visitor. One event, which succeeded in designing the visitor experience with the program design, was described by a few interviewees. These interviewees evaluated this event as the best event they attended. The program design decisions were based on the content of the story, the way the speaker was expected to present in, and the respective place within the program. Furthermore, the cases indicate that the various types of slots should not be programmed randomly. Every kind of slot requires a different level of activity and interactivity from the attendee.

Future research, using an experimental design to test the influence of segment order on the overall experience, should indicate the optimal settings of these for each slot. Interviewees suggested to program slots requiring some kind of activity at a later time during the day, one interviewee also indicated that entertainment slots are better received in the afternoon or evening.

6.1.4 Flow

Some interviewees describe the time needed to reach the location of an event could be improved, by keeping in mind external factors such as rush hour and distance to the event. Departing earlier to avoid the rush hour might be a solution, though for some corporate events it was said that it is not done to expect employees to depart earlier than their working hours commence. Organizers need to keep this in

mind when designing the event program, as a negative experience in advance of the event might influence the perception of the actual event.

When considering the cases at a higher level, there seems to be an overall preference for easing the experience of the visitor by answering the needs the visitor has on the various moments throughout the experience. The interviews illustrate this with many examples, ranging from providing information about the attendees ahead of the actual event, recommendations for places to have dinner near to the location, and even daycare for children brought to the event. Most suggestions enhance the unity of the experience by taking away barriers in the experience, and thereby enabling the visitor to fulfill his set goal at the event.

Easing the experience of the visitor by answering the specific needs provides an opportunity for the visitor to experience the event in a deeper way, which fits with what Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes in his theory of 'flow'. The theory suggests individuals seek the optimal arousal, leading to an experience of flow. Flow is characterized by a deep involvement, intense concentration, a lack of self consciousness and transcendence of the self. Csikszentmihalyi states that the state of flow is an intrinsically rewarding experience. A few cases report a state of mind which could be recognized as flow. The expressed feelings include exhilaration, a sense of accomplishment, or transformation through an intense emotional process. A state of flow cannot be reached with event design, although there is reason to believe that event design can improve the chances of reaching a state of flow. The design of the event program should keep in mind the motivations and needs of the visitors during the various moments in time. Fulfilling the needs and answering to the motives of the visitors, it is assumed that the visitor will more likely reach a state of optimal arousal, leading to the state of flow.

Organizers should take a look at the needs of visitors and consider how they can take away barriers in their experience pattern. A positive experience can be amplified by facilitating the enthusiasm of visitors.

Future research, using a qualitative research method to gain further insight, needs to provide clarity on whether flow influences the event experience. These studies should investigate whether there is a relation between the peak/end rule and the concept of flow in the context of events.

6.1.5 Communitas

When considering the general event experiences described by the interviewees, there is another characteristic that plays an important role in the event experience. All interviewees describe the social characteristics in their event descriptions. An event is a social happening, and therefore the value of social contact with others at the event has an important impact on the retrospective evaluation of the event experience.

The social characteristic has not been studied in advance of the research. The studies conducted on the peak/end rule do not account for the social aspect of the experience. Most of the studies focused on explaining less complex processes.

With this new insight regarding the impact of a social feature on the event experience, literature describing this characteristic is found. Hannam and Halewood (2006) studied festivals and found an experience characteristic they called 'communitas'. Communitas describes the sense of experiencing something together. Examples of communitas given by interviewees are the use of backchannels, a community feeling, and the appreciation of the interaction during coffee breaks and parties outside the event program.

Although the impact of communitas on an experience seems to have a logical fit in the experience of an event, further research needs to be conducted to gain a better understanding of how communitas influences the experience, and can be further enhanced in planned events to improve the experience of the event.

Summary

Not all the characteristics of the Peak/End Rule are confirmed to exert the expected influence on the retrospective evaluation of event experiences. The results indicate that the peak experience has a positive influence on the retrospective evaluation. The end intensity does influence the event experience, but does not exert a strong influence on the retrospective evaluations. Trend characteristics should be further studied with an experimental research method. This research should focus on the influence of velocity, segmentation, and segment location. The cases indicate that the level segmentation has an influence on the overall experience. Segmenting the experiences at the right moment has a positive influence on the event experience as well. Two other characteristics were found to influence the event experience, being the flow and the impact of perceived communitas. Future research should further study these two characteristics.

6.2 Method

The research method used in this study has provided a rich insight in the factors that influence the retrospective evaluation of events. Nonetheless, a few limitations of the method used are noted. This section subsequently describes the limitations of the qualitative research method on the type of data collected, evaluates the use of CIT as a method to select cases, and argues the reliability of the results.

The chosen research method is not suitable to measure the nature of trend, or draw conclusions about the influence of the trend characteristic on a general level. Due to the nature of the trend characteristic, being a characteristic that continuously changes in levels of intensity, the retrospective remembered affect cannot realistically describe the experienced trend for long, engaging experiences, such as events. As section 6.1.3 concludes, research that applies a method that allows the researcher to measure the experienced intensity online provides insight in the influence of the nature of trend on the event experience.

The data was collected from interviews with experts. CIT was used to help the expert pick two cases, being the best and worst event they experienced during the previous year. Reflecting on the purpose of CIT as a method to select critical incident, it did not serve that purpose. Most of the experts are very familiar with the events they attend. Experts are likely to naturally avoid events which lack quality, and therefore probably will not attend events that lead to a truly bad event. CIT thereby lost the purpose of selecting the best and the worst event, but rather provided criteria that helped the interviewee to select two events.

Qualitative research is often said to be flawed because of the dependency of the interpretation of the researcher. To increase the reliability of this study, the inter-rater reliability was tested. Samples of the interview transcripts were rated by a second rater. The results from both raters were compared to calculate the value of Cohen's kappa. This resulted in a high average inter-rater reliability of 0.83, where 0.7 is considered to be sufficient.

6.3 Limitations

This thesis concludes with a few limitations of the reported study. These limitations concern the type of events studied, the variety of events described within this study, and the nature of the experience studied in relation to the theory used within this study.

A possible limitation related to this study is the type of events studied. The interviewees were asked to describe both the best and the worst event attended, but since the interviewees were gathered from an expert group, in the sense that they often attend events and therefore have a broad experience with events, might have influenced the quality of the events chosen to attend. It is likely that the interviewees do not attend events that are less well organized as they most probably select only the good events. This is closely related to the critics on the use of CIT.

The cases collected for this study are very broad in the types of events they describe. It is reasonable to doubt whether the characteristics studied have a similar significance in the various kinds of events. The research method used during this study suits the goal of collecting rich insights very well, but a more narrowed sample of events should be studied to indicate whether the studied characteristics have a similar significance for the various kinds of events.

Another possible limitation is the nature of the experience studied. While the Peak/End rule has been replicated in both positive and negative experiences, the experiences studied within this research can be considered to be very different from, for example, the experience studied in the hospital studies by Redelmeier and Kahneman (1996). From the conclusions it becomes clear that not all the characteristics can be retrieved from the described experiences, and other factors influence the experience of events as well. The influence of the intensity trend has, for instance, not been replicated from the cases. This might be due to the suboptimal research method chosen for this study. Experimental research is needed to study the influence of trend characteristics on the event experience.

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Appendices

Pre-briefing email

Beste …,

Om je alvast voor te bereiden stuur ik je bij dezen alvast een klein overzichtje van wat ik van je wil leren tijdens het interview. Ik zal tijdens het interview zelf weinig aan het woord zijn, omdat ik hoop vooral veel van jouw ervaringen te leren.

Waar wil ik dan over horen? In ons interview (ongeveer 45 minuten a 1 uur) zal ik je vragen naar twee cases, namelijk het <u>beste evenement</u> dat je het afgelopen jaar hebt bezocht, en het <u>slechtste evenement</u> dat je het afgelopen jaar hebt bezocht.

Wat versta ik onder een evenement? Het zou makkelijk zijn geweest als er een duidelijke definitie van een evenement zou zijn, maar die is er niet... Daarom geef ik je een aantal kaders waarbinnen ik op zoek bent naar nieuwe inzichten - ik wil je daarbij niet beperken in het evenement dat je kiest. Het evenement waarover ik van je wil horen:

- heeft een thema

- is vooraf gepland

- heeft een programma dat bestaat uit verschillende onderdelen

- vindt plaats op een bepaalde locatie

- heeft een ervaring die kort genoeg duurt om als een geheel te worden ervaren

- wordt door meerdere mensen bezocht

- wordt bezocht met een bepaald doel

Voor de duidelijkheid: onder een evenement versta ik bijvoorbeeld niet het bezoek aan een pretpark, het volgen van een opleiding, een vakantie of het bezoek aan een braderie. Deze voldoen (deels) wel aan de omschrijving, maar vallen niet in mijn interesse gebied.

De twee cases zullen we een-voor-een bespreken aan de hand van:

- de aanloop naar het evenement

- het begin van het evenement

- het evenement zelf

- het einde van het evenement

- de nasleep van het evenement

Het kan zijn dat niet al deze onderdelen van het evenement dat we bespreken je even helder zijn bijgebleven. Mocht dit het geval zijn, dan zal ik je door het stellen van vragen helpen om het weer wat beter boven te krijgen.

Misschien kan je alvast nadenken over de mensen die ik na afloop kan benaderen voor een interview. Ik hoop zeer diverse visies te kunnen meenemen, want alleen interviews onder de bezoekers van een bepaald event zouden wellicht niet een compleet beeld opleveren.

Ik kijk er naar uit om je [datum] te interviewen.

Ik zie je [datum]!

Groeten,

Sam - 06 1586 5554

Transcripts

The interview transcripts are included in a separate volume.