Nurturing Creativity Using Intentional Event Design

Tahira Endean
State University of New York College at Buffalo - Buffalo State College, endeant01@mail.buffalostate.edu

Nurturing Creativity Using Intentional Event Design
by

Tahira Endean

An Abstract of a Project in

Creativity and Change Leadership

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Science

April 24, 2023

Buffalo State University

State University of New York

Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

ABSTRACT OF PROJECT

Nurturing Creativity Using Intentional Event Design

The purpose of this project is to continue the research and strengthen the academic foundation that underlies the intersection where creativity and creative leadership are supported by intentional event design. This project will explore the tools that can help determine if an organization encourages bold creativity or limits the time or energy allowed for creative problem solving, and the many ways we can design experiences with the intention to allow creativity to enter the room. This will extend the practical applications and explore stories where leadership, creativity and experience design intersect that others can take lessons from. The information shared will be relevant across the events and experiences industry, not too long or dense so it is highly consumable and provides a body of work that is useful to others.

I have a unique position having supported messaging for a variety of leaders with creative, intentional event design using the mediums of both live and digital event experiences to educate, inform and inspire. This shared knowledge will provide tools that allow event designers to get closer to the decision makers to best understand the desired outcomes will ultimately ensure greater success in delivering events that meet and exceed organizational objectives.

This proposed book will be my second, the first being *Intentional Event Design, Our Professional Opportunity* (Endean, 2017). Ideally, the completed work would compel organizations to invite me to share this information and I can continue the work that encourages more events to include a rigorous and iterative design process.

Tahira Endean

April 24, 2023
Date

Buffalo State University
State University of New York
Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

Nurturing Creativity Using Intentional Event Design

A Project in
Creativity and Change Leadership

by

Tahira Endean

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

April 24, 2023

Buffalo State University
State University of New York
Department of Creativity and Change Leadership

Nurturing Creativity Using Intentional Event Design

A Project in
Creativity and Change Leadership

by

Tahira Endean

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science
April 24, 2023 (April 2023)

Dates of Approval:

April 24, 2023

Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
Associate Professor

April 24, 2023

Tahira Endean
Student

Acknowledgements

This is possible because of Richard Aaron and the late Dan Cormany. Richard's acknowledgement of my first book as a prescient resource for the event industry inspired me to pursue my Masters Degree and Dan wrote a reference letter that pushed me further and made me cry. I have deep respect for learning exhibited by both gentlemen who exemplify the power of pursuing and sharing knowledge.

My family who allowed me the extensive time and space required to complete this degree, the work that underlies the foundation which it is built upon and who applaud my successes. I share this with them.

The Tiger Dogs, initial and adopted members of our cohort who have been on the journey to our MSc in Creativity and Change Leadership have inspired, delighted, provoked and encouraged me to continue to look at the many ways we can use and apply creativity, and they have become friends.

The professors who are embedded in the deep study of creativity and leadership who make up the faculty at the Center for Applied Imagination and SUNY Buffalo State University are incredible. Their encouragement, kindness, thoughtfulness and sheer delight in learning have brought together a global community of creators and scientists who are making the world a better place one change at a time.

Table of Contents

SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Purpose and Description of Project

The purpose of this project is to continue the research and strengthen the academic foundation that underlies the intersection where creativity and creative leadership are supported by intentional event design. This project will be designed to offer tools and techniques for anyone building events that support business outcomes. Thoughtfully designed events allow for opportunities that come from the connections made, both to other people and ideas, to grow creativity as they set the stage for their organizations and leaders to are showcase their unique culture through the medium of live events. The degree of effectiveness when delivering content in context and bringing the culture to life, creating positive memories based on authentic connections to the brand and its leaders is the reason live events continue to flourish.

I have been designing meetings and events for decades and have seen the immense changes in the industry as events have become a strategic imperative for delivering messages from leadership to the talent, and in both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) events. I started as a Project Manager and over decades worked my way up to a Creative Director and most recently Head of Events for SITE, the Society for Incentive Travel Excellence. This role comes with the pressure of producing high-quality, sustainable-minded, purposeful events other global event planners participated in, creating dialogues that ensured they left with fresh ideas from the event, environment and peer discussions they could apply to their own events. Through these roles I have also been a podcast host, an author and frequent contributor of articles to industry magazines and a speaker, all the while practicing the craft of event design. I am currently the Head of Programme for the industry's largest twice-annual trade show and conference, IMEX, where I work to bring current research, exciting presenters and memorable activations to the 10,000+ participants.

In a close-to-the-finish course in fall 2022, CRS 625 *Current Issues in Creativity Studies* we were tasked with answering a question around creativity. My approach was to start the journey of considering the intersection between creativity, leadership and well-designed experiences that have the power to support organizational change. Each event has stakeholders, the leaders who set the direction and guide the culture for the organization and when event planners understand this direction, they can use their creativity and design skills to communicate the stakeholder visions widely.

The meeting and event industry globally has a structure of internal event teams and for many this extends to include agency partners who provide a range of services from creative content to logistics and experience design. Within organizations, event professionals have been known to face a challenge of not having direct access to their senior leadership, and without understanding the 'why' and the key challenges leaders are looking to solve with an event, their chances of creating and delivering an event the stakeholders see as successful can be limited. This same challenge exists also for those in the supporting agencies as they are not offered or provided direct access to these leaders to either hear their challenges or to present directly to them and receive feedback.

Creative Problem Solving (CPS) is a system that provides a simple and repeatable way to take on challenges (Firestien, 2020). One of the greatest challenges in event design is missing the first step in this process, Clarifying, necessary before moving on to the next steps in a CPS process, Ideation, Development and Implementation. Event departments or agencies are asked at the event level to move immediately to ideating, providing 'out-of-the-box' ideas without enough context. There is a significant gap at this stage, and resources that allow these planners the language and tools to create more meaningful connections and dialogue is one step in the process. Part of this process is for those building the creative – the environment and the content – to understand the natural constraints set by the leadership. Not all leaders are comfortable with testing or using use new formats or to create the time and spaces that can lead to

transformational thinking. This project will explore the tools that can help determine if an organization encourages bold creativity or limits the time or energy allowed for creative problem solving, and the many ways we can design experiences with the intention to allow creativity to enter the room.

My Personal Goals for this Project

- ✓ Going deeper into the extensive network I have across the key topic areas and creating dialogues that will grow this body of knowledge.
- ✓ Identify gaps in the marketplace and available resources related specifically to experience and event designers.
- ✓ To fill the gap with an easy-to-use and readily available resource.
- ✓ To take the research developed in this project as the foundation for a second book that will be compelling enough to lead to other opportunities in my field.
- ✓ **Provide tools that inspire the creation of People-Centric, Purpose-Driven Events**

Rationale for Selection

The major goal of this project is to build the basis for writing my second book that builds on the work done in my first book, *Intentional Event Design: Our Professional Opportunity* (Endean, 2017). This will extend the practical applications and explore stories where leadership, creativity and experience design intersect that others can take lessons from.

My focus on creating and delivering events that have a net positive impact is far-reaching and embedded in the events I choose to spend my time working on, and the teams I choose to spend time supporting. My ability to create events that make a difference comes from working collaboratively and understanding the bigger picture of the messages to be delivered. Sharing the ways in which this can be achieved by others is important as we continue to build strategic events. This is an approach I have been sharing for several years and can build upon in an industry that is ripe for learning.

We faced exponential and immediate impacts when the pandemic radically shut down live events and business travel. Many organizations shifted to virtual events, but for others the pandemic's duration and impacts on business forced many out of the meeting and event industry. Others were impacted in other ways and chose to leave the industry for jobs that are less demanding of their time and energy as they determined to use this unique circumstance to forge a different type of work-life balance.

These challenges are ongoing and have impacted every level of planning, design and ability to execute as much of the talent pool shifted and reevaluated their roles. We continue to rebuild an industry globally one person, one event at a time. This has the added challenge of the costs to create live events has increased well beyond the pace of inflation, requiring organizations and their planners and designers to adjust their designs to deliver impact with often lower budgets. Tools that will get designers closer to the decision makers to best understand the desired outcomes will ultimately ensure greater success in delivering events that meet and exceed objectives.

SECTION TWO: PERTINENT LITERATURE & RESOURCES

Introduction

The review of pertinent literature has led to my bookshelf becoming richer with literature across events and human nature. Naturally, it has doubled since the start of the Masters in Creativity and Change Leadership program with both required and recommended books and articles. An important goal of this project is to continue to review the current literature and provide an additional resource that is useful to those working in all areas of events and experience design. The following areas of research were investigated in the Big Question paper prepared for CRS 625 and will be explored in greater depth throughout this paper.

Exploring Creativity, Leadership and Experience Design

✓ Creativity and leadership are both teachable skills.

✓ Well-designed experiences increase remembering, critical when expecting participants to gain new thinking, attitudes, behaviors or skills.

✓ Organizations that value creativity and innovation can use experiences to create a safe space for prototyping and testing creativity.

✓ Our core human values have a relationship with our creative selves and organizational leaders must consider this in creating environments of psychological safety.

✓ Organizations that use experiences to ignite creativity and offer well designed customer journeys open the door to a more engaged customer base.

✓ Employees who feel their work is creative and productive are more likely to enjoy their jobs and will seek to provide more satisfying customer experiences.

Creativity and Leadership Are Both Teachable Skills

For several years preceding the Covid-19 pandemic, creativity was becoming widely recognized as an imperative and often required job skill. With the pandemic, the world had massive changes at one time globally and leaders had to step up and enable organizations to

adapt quickly to environmental changes to survive (Atthahira, et.al., 2021). These leaders first had to understand the need for change, then confirm the interdependencies among systems and rapidly develop and deploy the strategies required to adapt in a deeply uncertain environment. This also required knowing or learning the people who make up the systems to manage the dynamics (Mumford, et.al., 2000). Then leaders had to use all their skills to inspire workforces everywhere as they rapidly adapted to and accepted there would be a variety of new ways of working, all being immediately implemented. Events, nearly all virtually deployed, offered an expediency to bring teams together allowing leaders to provide consistent messaging.

Were these natural leaders or those who had learned the skills and behaved as leaders? There are two schools of thought, the first being that leadership is a trait, and the second that it is an iterative process (Northouse, 2022, p. 9) and is available to everyone. There is a body of research that supports the notion that creativity can be learned, and a second notion that the "use of assessment strategies to support student creativity remains underdeveloped" (Bolden, 2020, p. 346). There is potential that is untapped where many of us could learn problem solving skills and attitudes at school. When we can use well-designed events as a learning platform there is an opportunity to build skills for leaders and as a benefit, grow team members. There exists a great need for those with strong leadership skills to guide teams to the North Star in their organizations and for creative thinking to be encouraged and embraced as we develop the new processes required to do business in a changing global economy.

Increase Remembering with Well-Designed Experiences

Two selves anticipate, participate in and recall every event, our Experiencing Selves and our Remembering Selves (Szostek, 2020). Designing events to increase remembering is critical when the expectation is participants will gain new thinking or skills, or when we want to enable a shift in their attitude or behavior.

When we design events, by knowing this basic human trait we can design for the desired outcomes by building experiences that welcome the experiencing self and set the stage with an emotional, narrative arc and use peak moments to create the connections that build the memories for the Remembering self to take forward. There is a key opportunity to allow for learning and experimentation with creative thinking, practicing these skills in the safe environment of an event. This idea is expanded on in Designing Experiences speculating, "experiences likely to be memorable are those that occur in unique spaces and have special memorable engagement as part of their design that will facilitate future recall" (Rossman & Duerdan, 2019, p. 26). They further examine how to make an experience move from memorable to meaningful by implementing two key elements, first sharing the experience with others who are important to them plus allowing time for personal reflection.

We continue to gain knowledge about how humans learn. In the context of events being used as a catalyst for leaders to change behavior, two elements stand out as areas we can support with appropriate framing of content in the context of events. Recency is the amount of time our brains hold information for, and if learning is not contextualized, much of what is learned will diminish quickly - in the first hour or less. If information is delivered without meaning or applicability, the outcomes are unlikely to be met. In events, by allowing time for individual reflection or providing opportunities for processing the information by interacting with it through discussion or practical application it gains relevance. When we add emotion, it is a game changer. "Emotionally tagged information is stored in the brain without the need for repetition" (Zak, 2022, p. 129) and the research on creating connections is working to prove this.

Primacy is the effect of using tools such as rehearsal and practice to help commit items to longer-term memory. Speakers who have honed their expertise typically have strong oral presentations because they are familiar with their material and have combined good storytelling and strong imagery to ignite an emotional connection adding depth to the concept being learned. If you consider the example of the TED or TEDx talk, the speakers follow a strict

formula and hours, weeks or even months of practice to hone their story, and to nurture their excitement in delivering it with excellence. If the event design connects the right storyteller to bring the messages in a way the audience is moved and allows time for reflection or discussion that leads to application or action, we have a learning win and the opportunity for actionable takeaways by the participants.

When we look at the implications for leaders building creative cultures, we can design for a combination of specific training and higher, inspirational learning to achieve optimum results that are focused on outcomes and provide context, applicability and absorption of learning. When we design events with a narrative arc, anchored in storytelling and offer different types of shared learning suitable to both introverts and extroverts with time and space for reflection, we can move the needle on transformative learning because now emotions are involved (Zak, 2022). This allows us to overcome the 'forgetting curve', the natural human occurrence given all that we process daily into memories.

Designing an experience where we connect to an idea and make it relevant and applicable will deliver an experience useful to both individual and organization in the longer term as the new thinking or actions are taken forward.

Creating Safe Spaces for Prototyping

Organizations that value creativity and innovation can use experiences to their advantage. Events allow you focused time and space to prototype and test creativity and build the skills of collaboration and prototyping that support innovation. When leaders have "a desire to deliberately bring something new into existence" (Puccio et.al., 2011, p.28) events offer a useful way to bring people together to initiate transformational thinking. The entire book, Creative leadership: skills that drive change, walks the reader through how to develop leaders using a combination of skill development and simultaneously encourage their energy towards ideas and the processes involved in ideation. This approach supports positive outcomes both adaptive and innovative by understanding the problem to be solved and the action required to solve it.

If we consider the leaders of organizations the Social Architects, then the Event Designers are the Engineers supporting the goals of leadership to create environments that will enrich the participants. When new ideas need to be tested, an event provides the perfect laboratory for seeking responses to new ideas, services and products, and for testing innovations formally and informally. Next, we explore the true value of events.

Meetings are an investment. Key for organizations seeking ways to maximize their investment in meetings is to include activities that encourage collaboration, participation and deeper networking for a freer flow of ideas. Leadership is critical to creating the supportive environment for peer interaction to come to fruition. Some examples of activities might include a range from moderate to extreme. With support, boundaries may be pushed to encourage openness, from team rafting to meeting in focus groups of four flown in individual carnival swings 32' above the floor such as those tested at C2, a Montreal based annual event. There may be times where building smaller safe spaces for topics that require vulnerability can be built into the agenda, often supported by trained facilitators ready to create listening environments suitable for human-centered discussions.

There are many ways for leaders to use live experiences to bring important topics to the forefront, to review what is working and provide tools for what needs improvement. These environments allowing space for creative thinking may lead to more adaptive and innovative solutions to be developed by making a comfortable space where ideas that lead to novel and useful solutions are welcomed. Safe spaces at events can be translated into workspaces leading ultimately to organizations where innovation can be fostered.

Well Designed Customer Journeys Matter

"Experiences are the new branding." (Solis, 2015, p. 7). Brian Solis' work provided a basis for reimagining retail customer journeys with thinking that reinvigorates a passion for designing from a customer-centric business perspective. When leaders consider scaling or growth, it requires an openness to new influences and a mindset that is open to novel ways of being inimitable (Roussy-Parent, 2021). Designing novel experience journeys that are

9

responsive to customer needs that vary across cultures has great potential to deliver positive business results. When applied to events we must be focused on delivering customer journeys through these (often multi-day, cross-cultural) events that are consistent with the entire brand story for any organization. Understanding we are designing for humans who arrive with a myriad of needs and expectations and our journey begins with knowing how we can serve these needs is critical.

For brands, the most impactful way to connect with customers is taking them on a journey. If we consider an event's customers as its participants, and the brand any hosting organization, this same thinking applies. A successful journey includes anticipation, arrival, entry, and a robust experience with peaks and valleys that touch emotions and culminate in a strong exit. Also known as using Peak-End moments (Szostek, 2020), it is a method proven to reinforce positive experiences for the Remembering Self. To create memories, all the elements must make an impact.

There are many ways to deliver experiences that may be integrated between digital and live mediums and to achieve the desired outcomes these must be intentionally designed with empathy embedded throughout. Considering the whole human when designing an experience benefits all. Using tools including wellness activities encouraging kinetics and movement can benefit the overall creative thinking, allowing us to find freedom of expression. Examples of areas to be explored further include walking meetings to bring in natural contexts, changing scenery to inspire thinking and opportunities for discussions that may not arise in a static environment. Using mindfulness moments may offer some quiet time to contextualize information and can enhance a positive cognitive state. Environments based on what we know about the positive effects of biophilia, bringing nature to us, or taking events into nature are more popular than ever. Self-care is high on the list for most of the developed world and when we can create spaces that allow people to feel special – whatever that means to them – and cared for, we can create a more loyal customer or employee. Leaders who lead with policies

and practices that support the above thinking are setting the stage for a more creative and innovative organization.

Core Human Values and Creativity

Valuegraphics is a system offering a departure from the traditional demographic or psychographic data often applied when determining who will attend an event or how we should market to and design for the potential participants (Allison, 2022). In the Valuegraphics work they have identified fifty-six core human values. Creativity is noted as one of the core human values, but it does not rank as high as the values related to Togetherness (belonging, family, community) or Security (financial, personal) which show up consistently in the top ten human values no matter where in the world people live or work. There is much to be learned from this work with the key here to create an awareness that beginning with our marketing leading up to the event, we can trigger responses by tying our messaging to key values.

Knowing every person arrives with values that are baked in, we can design events and workspaces that foster creativity based on understanding what matters to our participants at their core. Knowing there will always be variances in levels of leaning into this we can begin to prototype elements and test what works.

To celebrate and support creativity we must go outside of the boundaries we know. Grossman notes "To accelerate Preparation, we must prove to ourselves that the old ideas and habitual pathways to solutions do not work" (Grossman, 2019, p. 2). Once leaders recognize the value of starting with questions, the organization and its team members are better positioned to begin ideation and unlock the door to novel solutions.

Humility is a leadership trait that has gained importance in recent years. In Think Again (Grant, 2021) the author explores the virtue of humility and its importance in leading teams effectively. If we are in an environment where we can embrace our own uncertainty and be led

to curiosity and discovery, we can develop this key skill and grow ourselves, organizations and our careers.

Most people are risk averse. We have been trained to follow rules and get things 'right' and when we go to work, we lean away from uncertainty and the risk of making any mistakes and avoid potential perceived failures. The reality of organizations and people is there will always be mistakes made, and sometimes epic failures provide our best lessons, or lead to the greatest discoveries. Courageous leaders provide an environment that embraces the opportunities that come from failure and allow for learning from these. Creating psychologically safe places where learning together and getting past mistakes, feeling secure in the decision to try things that might not be perfected is a critical step in building a creative culture. Events offer an excellent opportunity to prototype, test ideas, open space for deeper dialogues, use case studies and develop concepts such as learning laboratories as safe places for fostering creativity.

Diversity is another opportunity to create a richer experience, but it must be recognized that this and the challenges of equity and inclusion require a thoughtful understanding of the values your participants are bringing in (Bolden, 2020) to your experience. Communication, an openness to others' ideas while setting a stage that avoids discrimination and allows for authentic social identities is required for creative work to flourish. It has been recorded that bringing together participants with variety in value orientations fosters team creativity (Kirrane & Lasselben, 2020). This same group further hypothesized that separation in value orientation impairs team creativity.

One of the greatest joys for a team designing and delivering an event experience is seeing increased productivity and engagement when alignment is achieved. This does not preclude dialogue or even debate, in fact these often deliver the richest experience but must be managed or moderated to ensure the information and ideas come to a mutual understanding

and respect is maintained. Creating this respectful space is an area where leadership is key as their verbal and non-verbal communication will guide the group.

Building your Customer Service Ethos

Employees who feel their work is creative and productive are more likely to enjoy their jobs and will seek ways to provide more satisfying customer experiences. More satisfied customers equate to a stronger business. "People are more creative, productive, committed, and collegial in their jobs when they have positive inner work lives. But it's not just any sort of progress in work that matters. The first, and fundamental, requirement is that the work be meaningful to the people doing it." (Amabile & Kramer, 2012, p. 1).

Work that feels purposeful and where the employee feels some autonomy has been shown to create a happier inner work self, an alignment that allows them to bring more of their authentic selves and more positivity to work (Hunnicutt, 2020). In exploring team communication and its effect on creativity it was noted that organizations that support creativity are most likely to have more satisfied customers (Omilion-Hodges & Ackerman, 2018). Happier team members who feel productive are more able to create novel and useful work.

The focus on human-centered outcomes further lays out how organizational creativity has positive outcomes on job satisfaction, engagement, ability to cope with traumatic events and motivation while simultaneously decreasing absenteeism and intention to leave (Puccio & Schwarz, in progress). The conceptual framework that outlines the links between innovative work as an outcome when employees feel a sense of well-being (Huhtala & Parzefall, 2007) and the well-being associated with innovative work lays a foundation for organizations that leaders and team members benefit from on all levels. Further research into creativity as the hidden development factor (Bousinakis & Halkos, 2021) showed contributing creatively led to employees with higher satisfaction, new ideas, stronger teams and increasing innovation. I suggest leaders can apply this knowledge to create an environment where team members are empowered to deliver customer-centric experiences and through their work the team members

13

will find joy in productivity. A creative attitude and openness to supporting growth and positive impact offers direct and indirect benefits for the leaders, customers and team members.

Exploring the intersections

I have a unique position having supported Leader's messaging with creative, intentional event design using the mediums of both live and digital event experiences to educate, inform and inspire. The project will be informed by ongoing work in the event industry as we create and deliver projects on an ongoing basis. This project will be the base to bring these disciplines together in a meaningful way for the meeting, incentive, convention and exhibition (MICE) industry.

SECTION THREE: PROCESS PLAN

Plan to Achieve Goals and Outcomes

Major themes I will be investigating include the level of creativity that can be included in an experience relative to the natural constraint of the leadership's comfort with and appetite to test and use new formats that can lead to transformational thinking. When we begin to understand the level that an organization encourages bold creativity or limits the time or energy allowed for creative problem solving, we can design experiences with the intention to allow creativity to enter the room. When creativity is ignited in a safe space, it can become more comfortable for people at all levels within an organization to believe they can embed creative thinking into their every day. To be successful the experience must impact the participants and support the learning outcomes desired and driven by the message leadership delivers. The leaders must support the experience for it to have the desired impact.

Every event can benefit from a Creative Problem Solving (CPS) Process, first identifying the reason the event exists, what problem it is trying to solve, what outcomes are desired. Identification of stakeholders, both assisters and resisters, and understanding who your audience could be and creating an empathy map of the key participant types is a beneficial and I would argue necessary part of the process. Understanding who may use this tool from academic institutions to event planning teams and how to get a recognized process put into place is key.

In our first Masters of Science in Creativity and Change Leadership courses, we built out our own Foursight (Miller et.al., 2011) profiles and outlined our desires for how this course of study would impact our work. Referring to what I learned about myself provides the basis for the growth I am currently living. I was able to complete one project last fall and will complete a second this spring that have specifically used the CPS process to facilitate change that will come to fruition in organizations using live events as their medium. The impacts of this will become part of the exploration of the Why of the importance of intentional event design.

This proposal for a second book is one step in achieving my personal goal to provide a second tangible tool for other event designers and builds on the work of my first book, *Intentional Event Design, Our Professional Opportunity*. See Appendix A: Excerpt and Table of Contents. This book provided practical resources for designing events that consider the humans who will participate, and the design thinking required to create environments that will provide positive personal and professional results. Participants are not segmented by occupation or generation, culture or community. It is written to invite anyone designing a group event to consider that people arrive with all types of needs which include their wellness, their learning preferences, and their capacity for ongoing socialization. Building on needs for inclusion, it recognizes everyone arrives with different capacities and needs to consider and plan for. With events we have the opportunity every time to test ideas and see what is most suitable and works. We also need to understand it will be different every time and responses to experiences will vary.

There is nothing that brings me more joy than seeing someone with a dog-eared, post-it filled copy of my book near their desk, and I will be working to create information that is of this same usefulness. This next book will look more at how we can deliver environments that support leadership as they lead more creative and innovative organizations and build the skills of their team members leading to greater sustainability in a world that is more complex. The information should be compelling enough that organizations will bring me to speak at their events and I can continue my goals of creating a world where more events have a design process applied with stated outcomes defined and achieved.

Project Timeline

The table below indicates the key benchmarks. The research and particularly the literature review has been ongoing for thirty years. Many people come into meeting and event management without specific education, and I did the opposite. I earned my Event Management Diploma in 1993, and my degree in Hospitality Management in 2009. From 1999 until now I

have also been an instructor of Special Event Management and Sustainable Event Operations and we were always on the hunt for great resources for our own students. I have dozens of books on event management, event sustainability, experience design, storytelling, leadership and design. In the past two years, in addition to all the literature we have been given to read or have sourced as part of our own projects, I have continued to add to my library. I am genuinely curious about what others must contribute to these complicated and deeply human topics.

The timeline notes what has been done, what will happen in the immediate term of this CRS 690 Masters Project class. I propose additionally that my goal is to move this from an academic project into a first draft of a book that is useful. The planning started at the beginning of the Masters program and was built out through our Big Question paper and an online conference that invited our cohort and alumni of the Masters in Creativity and Change Leadership to hear from and contribute to the ideas presented on each student's unique view of creativity in Fall 2022. Now it is time to get cracking on the next steps.

Project Timeline

Activity	Date completed	Est Hours	Who
Proposal discussion	completed	1	Dr. Keller Mathers
Proposal development	Complete	4	Tahira
Concept paper submitted, first draft	Complete	3	Tahira
Proposal approved	Complete		Dr. Keller Mathers
Conduct research and collect information	Ongoing	Endless joy	Tahira
Identify gaps in current materials / resources	Ongoing	Ongoing	Tahira
Submit sections 1 – 3	March 21	60	Tahira
Develop sections 4 – 6	April 26	25	Tahira
Seek feedback on content developed to date from key knowledge experts in the field of event design, seeking resonance or dissonance with the approach	April 2023	6	Tahira
Modify content based on the feedback received ensuring relevant for intended audience	April 2023	30	Tahira
Content is prepared and ready to be included in a Digital Commons	April 21		
Prepare content for 690 presentation to submit	May 17	20	Tahira

Evaluation Plan

My key learning outcome is to continue to gain depth and breadth in designing and delivering people-centric, purpose-driven events. This project will look at what events can do to elevate the creativity and innovation possible in an organization by supporting the messaging and the social architecture leaders have created to reach the desired business outcomes. As an academic project any thinking that is sparked by the research of others will be properly credited and the ideas expanded upon based on my own experience of consistently creating and delivering events for a variety of organizations. The results of the designs we undertake to support the brand with appropriate messaging and the participants with relevant learning, inspiration that impacts their own lives either personally or professionally and connections are the true test of success. The examples from the tried and tested, the prototypes and the ensuing evaluations provide a natural synthesis to the material and its relevance and potential impact.

Dr. Keller-Mathers will evaluate the initial project as we move forward. I will have specific sections where those with expertise in an area will read and comment and ensure I stay on track to deliver something useful to our current industry and to those that come behind us in the live experience industry. With a shared goal of useful work being created and an understanding of what is otherwise available to industry the benchmarking will be their acceptance of or questioning of the content. By the nature of it being for this class, the timelines are nailed down for the initial work. I was asked when I wrote my first book how I knew when it was done, and the answer for any author is likely similar, in that it will rarely be considered finished or perfect in our own minds. I know I want to have a body of work that is useful and provides thinking beyond a checklist for the areas that are impacting our industry today. It needs to leave our pandemic trauma in the rear-view mirror and have an eye to the future of experiences that ignite joy and make people think. It cannot be too long or too dense because it won't be read, so making it highly consumable with enough information to be considered a body of work useful to others will

be the goal. Once the initial Masters project for this class is turned in, I will take some time to

continue to refine this with the goal of this being a book format that can be self-published in

2024.

SECTION FOUR: OUTCOMES

Explore the Uncomfortable

Funerals and celebrations of life. Tribal and indigenous ceremonies. Burning Man and Cirque du Soleil. Stepping back from a known role into a role with an organization based halfway around the world to work with a team I have long admired to help them disrupt their show experience and build their new ways of working. There are many types of experiences that shape us, and it is often the most uncomfortable that offers us the most growth. See Appendix B for sample notes from seminars attended that provoked this thinking.

To write about experience design requires understanding more about what people respond to in all different types of event situations. How we can push boundaries that will evoke emotion and create some level of transformation needs to be understood to create the moments that will make a difference. Without pain we cannot know comfort. Without sadness we cannot know joy. This is being human.

Belonging is a key reason we attend events, to connect to other humans. There are many books on building community, creating inclusive environments and belonging but few focus on the inherent challenges. Exploring the ideas of uncertainty in belonging and the reality that there will always be a time we feel like outsiders (Cohen, 2022) is important for organizations and events to understand there are many ways to build community and as many ways to create a sense of being outside. This toolkit to draw on can help ease these feelings.

When we return to the concept of the Experience Self and the Remembering Self it is critical that we design spaces for both. We need to wake up the attendee, create and maintain psychological safety, elevate the experience and allow time and space for memories to be embedded. This is an iterative process that requires knowledge, skills and instinct. The intuitive understanding that humans are attending your events with their own unique needs may be a more innate skill, but the knowledge and skills to design the space, flow and details that make

an event memorable and may lead to a transformation for the participants can be learned. I

begin with a tale of two events to illustrate this.

Sample Inclusions

Stories are the best tool for learning and presenters who want to create an emotional

connection to the content often use these to illustrate their points. In the samples below I

propose using stories from events to illustrate how we can create more productive meetings for

participants and better returns for organizers and the organizations they represent with lessons

learned and suggestions for alternatives to test.

Story 1: Missing Connection

An outcome of this project was finding my way to a variety of different events around the

world in an effort to both gain education and examine what elements make up a great event

experience. One of these took me to Lake Como for an event I had been anticipating for nearly

a year. The subject matter of wellbeing is of deep interest, the speaker program exceptional, the

location inspiring and the potential to meet people with shared interests very high. The theme of

the event was "Connection". The leader of the organization has a wonderful back story of life,

love and loss that led her to choose to focus on wellbeing and bring together people from

around the world who could together make a difference.

The event is in its fifth iteration, the first time in Lake Como. The venue is a gorgeous

centuries-old theater, with modern audio-visual amenities. The mobile app for the event was

actively used by the participants and set the stage for me for what was to come. I landed in Italy

from Canada, 24 hours from when I had left with the 9-hour time difference and needed to stay

awake. I found a dinner being organized in the app messages and RSVP'd and joined 15 others

for a pre-event dinner. At my wonderful table of five women, we had a young life coach from

Brazil practicing in Portugal, an Adjunct Professor teaching positive psychology and math in

Spain, a professor and author of a textbook on the ethics of corporate coaching and an organizational coach from the UK working in Abu Dhabi, a country with a new Happiness agenda. I never saw any of these women again once the event started.

The next afternoon I went to register and found the venue in the heart of the city with volunteers in pink shirts milling about, and other than a logo hung above the doors no other directional signage. I followed some people going in to register and found a desk. They asked if I had my QR code, and when I went to look, they offered to look it up by my name. Once they did, they immediately said. "Oh, you're not a VIP". It seemed I was at the wrong, although unmarked, desk. At this point there was no suggestion of where I should go, so I left, exiting the building to find another entrance. The same type of experience ensued at the next desk, only this time I received a wristband. There were no name badges at all, making it slightly harder to connect to anyone else.

It was time to go in, and with tickets on our phones we had to find our specific seats in the theatre. The sections were not marked so once I found a volunteer usher, I was able to find my seat, Section 3, row A, seat 16, and meet those who were sitting near me as they arrived. The sessions started on time, the MCs were warm, and the presenters were all experienced and full of excellent information, which we listened to in 25-minute increments without a break for 3 hours. I have pages and pages of notes that all offer valuable insights into wellness and happiness as agenda items for organizations and even for countries!

Music, movement and meditation were all elements used during the event, with a pianist presenting on the first evening and sharing a story of bringing music to his village in Guadalajara and the incredible richness this has added to the lives of the youth it touches sparking joy in the audience. Movement as simple as a stretch break or leaning in to meet someone you had not yet between talks opened our minds. Meditations that centered were a welcome addition to long periods of sitting. These tools were used throughout quite effectively.

At the end of the first day the MC's announced "Speakers and VIPs your special transfer is waiting outside, and everyone else, enjoy Lake Como. We hope you made a reservation as it can be quite busy. We will see you back in these seats at 8:40am". Some people left with friends or colleagues, some had set up meetups using the app but many just wandered out in ones and twos not having made any new connections.

We were guided to not one but two mobile apps as being necessary. One held the event information, and one was a community app that had just been completed. In the event app you could find all the information and ask questions of the organizers or use it to set up meetups with other participants or groups. This could have been very effective if the organizers had answered the questions that came up, including if there was alternate seating as the small theatre seats were not comfortable for anyone who was tall or had challenges sitting for any length of time. There were either long delays or no responses at all, which was clearly, by the comments, frustrating for people. Second, the community app is a great idea for building future forward and connecting people, but the main message was that you could waitlist yourself for a premium experience, once again creating a divide between the ordinary and the others. In an organization promoting wellbeing this feels very counterintuitive.

The next morning, I returned to the same seat, and heard how frustrated those around me were with the inability to connect easily with others. We once again settled in to learn about wellbeing and taking care of others. At the appropriate break time we were told there was no coffee, tea or water but we had twenty minutes to go find a café in the square to get our own refreshments. We returned after a foray into the village, some on time and some not, for more interesting presentations.

At lunch that day I had chosen with about 80 others to join a coaching lunch, to connect with others. Since this fee had not been included in our registration and payment could not be added online, when we walked to the venue, they had each individual line up to pay before they could go up to lunch. Once that was done, we found our table numbers and met the coaches.

With tables of two guests plus one coach, we had time to dive a little more deeply into the topic of organizational wellness with our tablemates. We returned late following lunch and returned to our set seats to repeat with more good sessions, followed again by a too short break with no refreshments. The day ended with the same call for the VIPs and speakers to join the organizers while everyone else fended for themselves. I went and tried to catch up on sleep from jet lag.

I felt like an outsider. The theme of 'connection' was a challenge for all I spoke to, and it was clear to most of us why there were so many first timers at this conference. It was not just the change of location as people came from 40 countries, but if the previous experiences had been similar there was not a great reason to return.

There was also a virtual event with access to join the live event in real time and o the recordings for two weeks following the event. This was one event where getting the information virtually and missing out on the live experience and the potential for deeper connections with other participants was not much of a miss. As noted, the content was excellent and the connections for anyone not a VIP were limited, so the virtual participants benefited from the programming. It was not always easy as we saw in the comments in the app for everyone to get in or know where to go to watch, but it did seem ultimately this did get sorted and those who attended virtually did get the excellent information.

We market conference attendance based on the education offered but we return for the connections made. When this is a miss, the organizers must spend more resources on marketing as they have lost their advocates. When we bring people together there are so many small ways we can connect and care for people, and so many ways to create cliques and shut people out and we must continue to take care to create psychologically safe and easy ways to connect people. When we do this well with groups of people with similar interests, in this case wellbeing, we have the power to create collaborations that far exceed the walls of our event and drive change.

The above story offers opportunities to illustrate possible improvements using the basic principles of intentional design to create a more collaborative, creative and welcoming environment leading to connections. Examples of what excelled and where there could be improvements include the following.

➢ **Program, Speakers and Content**. Build a strong program, take care of your speakers and deliver key learnings for your participants. This event did this very well from marketing through the event. They had their industry's heroes on stage, they had book signings for the key authors, they provided special experiences only available to the speakers and VIPs. They offered a virtual program and extended their audience around the globe and increased their revenue.

➢ **Volunteers**. Endemic to many events, volunteers tend to serve because they are interested in the topic but left to their own devices they tend to cluster and talk with each other. It is important to have both clearly defined roles and extra jobs to keep them busy and focused on the tasks at hand. A key role could be acting as welcoming concierges for the many participants that will have questions and support connecting people to the information and potentially to other participants.

➢ **Signage**. There are opportunities for branding which should not be missed, both for your own organization/event and sponsors. There are key opportunities for directional signs which are critical, think as someone who has never been to the destination or venue before, how will they know where to go? Consider putting signs in your volunteer's hands and let them help people get where they need to go.

➢ **Registration experience**. Every event will have the moment when you go to a registration experience. This is an area many take for granted and as one of the first touchpoints in a live experience, it must be thought through. In Designing Experiences (Rossman & Duerdan, 2019, pp. 117-120) break down each element of this experience laying out the many elements from the physical to the people, objects and simple

interactions that make this a thoughtful and experience elevating time in the event. It is critical to set the stage for feeling welcomed and comfortable with clear directions and friendly team members that create a transition into the next stage, the event itself.

➢ **VIP Access**. There are many events where VIP access is used, from sporting events and festivals to conferences, with good reason. There are benefits of prestige for the speakers and their role in the event can then be used in marketing to draw in a greater audience or to curate a group that adds prestige to your event. For VIPs it may be a 'pay-to-play', or it may be VIPs with complimentary access who add a level of 'look-who's here' from a performance or presentation standpoint. Easy access, gifts, concierge-level service, it may all be part of this experience. The challenge is to make everyone feel welcome while offering a level-above experience for your VIPs.

➢ **Don't forget the Ordinary**. The declaration from the stage that the VIPs and speakers had a special event and everyone else was wished good luck finding a reservation in Lake Como made those that were not part of this group feel either insignificant or ignored. Offering no evening networking for the average attendee was a huge miss and it was felt by the participants who did struggle to meet others they would have liked to connect with. There were no opportunities available for serendipitous meetings to happen as they often do in an organic, organized networking function.

➢ **Registration upselling**. Opportunities to upgrade registration, to add choices for tours, breakouts or workshops or add events and pay for them is an easy way to boost participation and revenue. This requires planning in building a registration system with some flexibility understanding it is very common to add programming and external activities like these after the initial registration is open. For example, pre-payment on the coaching lunches would have provided a more guaranteed attendance and alleviated the long lineup to pay the hotel before being able to join the lunch.

➤ **Name badges**. This is a key tool for people to recognize they are from the same event, to see other people's names and possibly their affiliations or even area of interest or a passion depending on what is included on the badge. Badge colors or lanyards can further help identify the type of delegate, ie. Participant, Speaker or media. Not having badges made it more difficult to connect.

➤ **Mobile app**. Having an app is now table stakes, an easy place to collect event information on a tool that the majority of the world now has in their hand, a mobile device. If this is going to be a core communication tool like it was at this event, with the MCs directing people there nearly every time they took the stage, then the organizer must have someone assigned throughout the event. This person will find themselves busy responding to requests, updating notifications and paying attention to the information that comes back, positive or someone needing assistance.

➤ **General wellbeing**. Having no access to water, no coffee or food at breaks and no lunches included is not the norm at a conference. Sending hundreds of people out to two or three nearby cafes created a challenge to get anything and return in less than twenty minutes. If anyone had a challenge with blood sugar and may have been expecting something to eat it had the potential to make at a minimum the participant uncomfortable and at its worst creating a health challenge. Not knowing this lack of hospitality ahead of time was a surprise for many. Simply letting people clearly know ahead of time would have eased this portion of the on-site experience and saying you cannot take food or beverage into the theater is very different than having nothing available outside that space.

➤ **Feed me, water me**. Imagine how different the basic wellbeing for the event participants would be just offering water stations, even outside. A place for those traveling with their reusable bottles would be grateful but so would other thirsty participants. If you cannot provide coffee at the venue, imagine how delighted participants would be to receive a

Gelato or cappuccino chit they could use at a nearby café. For 8 euros the organizers could have delighted guests each day and allowed nearby cafes where these would be accepted to better plan their staffing for this day and the specific times of the breaks.

Improving the Result

The leaders of this event used their extensive contacts in the global field of wellbeing to curate an excellent program while entirely missing delivering the feeling of wellbeing or the potential resulting positive emotions that participants would anticipate from attending an event. From listening to others there was a general sense that many had high anticipation in the weeks or months from purchasing to their registration. Expectation is recognized throughout all literature on experiences as key, because we tend to have a positive and upbeat attitude to what is to come, we look forward to and imagine ourselves having the best possible time (Szostek, 2020, p. 23).

The theme of Connection and to please connect using the app was mentioned many times from the stage, but the opportunities to meet others were limited and any chance to deeply connect was a challenge for the reasons outlined above. We were given direction between speakers while in our seats to meet the people around us and share a comment or a piece of information, but this was akin to an experience like you may have in church once a year when you attend a mass and greet those around you, sharing a smile but only the most fleeting sense of connection with no follow-through. For the speakers and VIPs whisked away to special evening events they likely had a very different experience, meeting peers and friends on the coaches and then enjoying luxurious hospitality in gorgeous venues in a destination, Lake Como, many would envy based on its publicly recognized location of prestige and beauty.

There is a fine line between feeling excited and feeling anxious and designing experiences that tip into the excited category and ease any feelings of anxiousness are the key to making people feel welcome and building community. Intentional design enhances the moments for the

Experiencing Self and increases positive memories for the Remembering Self. It makes people want to return when we take steps to consider the whole experience through a wellbeing lens. Like any customer-centric business, it is much easier and less expensive in terms of marketing dollars to have a pleased customer return, share their experience and bring someone else to join it than it is to recruit a new registrant (Solis, 2015, p. 14).

Story 2: Connecting for the Climate

It takes a village to create a must-attend event. There are many roles to fill from the presenters on the stage or leading engaging workshops and breakout sessions, the team in the front of house and those diligent behind the scenes with a conductor to oversee the elements that will bring it all to life. When it works, there is an undeniable energy that carries through the event and into solving the problems the event is addressing. This was the case at an event focused on climate change.

As with the above example, the program was excellent, bringing together thought leaders from across the country and beyond, plenary sessions brought divergent thinking to the forefront and opened lively discussions at the tables and in the hallways. CEOs, Government Ministers and Ambassadors, leaders from the United Nations, all joined the ranks leading roundtables, sharing announcements and embedding themselves and their teams into the discussions with corporate leaders and sustainability changemakers over three days.

What made two events of a similar size, both with general sessions and breakouts, both filled with thought leaders, both around important topics so different in their levels of engagement? There were many factors this team focused on in terms of experience that the team in the first example did not. They had set out desired outcomes with a clear ten-point action plan following another event in their portfolio the year before. They took this forward and strategically used the current event as a stepping-stone in furthering the discussions and action plans, setting the literal and figurative stage for this to happen.

The leaders of the organization are focused on what they want to accomplish, have identified key collaborators and invited them into the conversation and have a plan that includes live events in the overall strategy. They understand that people come to events based on the program and developed very strong content while also understanding they come to network, and to meet with those they can collaborate with, both old and new. I will outline below a comparison of some of the basic event design elements and how they differed.

➢ **Program, Speakers and Content**. A strong program on the stages and online with the online timing set to reach the greatest audience, 1pm ET, so into the morning work hours for those across the Midwest and West of North America. In addition to excellent presenters, there were several important announcements on policy that positively impacted many in the audience doing the work around climate change anticipated that both live and remote audiences were keen to tune in for.

➢ **Volunteers**. This event had a large enough staff team to manage the operations of the event and relied on volunteers for tasks such as directional and room monitors and pulled from a pool of event management students keen to learn about the work more than the specific topic. For roles including greeting the key presenters, the senior leaders from the umbrella organization acted as Ambassadors, greeting the speakers and putting a friendly face first, nurturing contacts.

➢ **Signage**. Both digital and traditional signage were used effectively to provide a brand presence, recognize the sponsors, provide direction and make it easy to navigate the space. In the main hotel lobby where event signage could not be used, volunteers were placed at key times to offer assistance.

➢ **Registration experience**. Virtual, standard and VIP delegates were all available and on-site each had their own ways to easily enter the event and feel welcome. The first morning naturally saw a line forming and the Ambassadors mentioned above worked

the line, greeting people and ensuring the time in line felt shorter because the experience of being recognized created an instantly warmer feeling for the event.

➢ **VIP Access**. The VIP track included a greeting lounge where VIPs could pick up their badges, charge their phones and take meetings with other VIP guests. A lunch by invitation only was available on the first full day for the VIPs and a reception that evening in an off-site location open to those with VIP passes, sponsors and special guests was another opportunity to meet in a smaller setting. The VIP communication about events was not announced from the stage but rather information was sent directly by email.

➢ **Don't forget the Ordinary**. Standard delegate registration clearly outlined what was included in the way of accessible programming and timings. Hospitality included coffee breaks morning and afternoon, a welcome reception on the first evening and an opening evening the second. Lunch was served immediately prior to the daily plenary sessions, and it could be enjoyed in the main room or in the very large and well-used networking lounge.

➢ **Prepared for launch.** Opportunities to upgrade registration, to add choices for tours, breakouts or workshops were built into the platform and mobile app and eased access through the event.

➢ **Name badges.** Recognized as a key tool for connecting people, this event used badge colors and lanyard colors to help identify the type of delegate, ie. Participant, Speaker or Media. As it is an environmental conference, badges were collected for recycling / upcycling at the close of the event.

➢ **Mobile app**. This contained all the information and ability to connect with other participants but was not relied on as the sole or best means of doing this. Simple and easy to use, it provided the participants with easy access to information.

- ➢ **General wellbeing**. Water, food, walking between sessions and having serendipitous hallway meetings, and finding coffee and tea easily throughout the event means peoples stay.

- ➢ **Feed me, water me**. Taking care of the basic needs of participants makes it easy to keep people on-site, to have them connect and ultimately to create a richer conference experience for all.

Comfort and Growth

The net effect of creating a comfortable, easy to navigate and friendly environment meant that people stayed, including the government Ministers and Ambassadors who stayed for the full three days, taking bi-lateral meetings in on-site offices, connecting with corporate leaders and youth and indigenous changemakers who had been invited to participate. Cross-pollinating the ideas, we need to move our climate change agenda forward actively and rapidly was clearly on the agenda and the conversations were focused. The intentional design of the spaces, a leadership team that understands dialogue is necessary for change and an ability to think creatively about how to use a traditional hotel meeting venue to its maximum capacity set the stage for success.

There are daily examples of events designed thoughtfully for impact, with a flow that allows for both planned and serendipitous meetings to draw from. The intersection of intentional design, leadership messaging and content design and allowing space for creativity to be born from dialogue, prototyping scenarios and, ultimately innovation to grow is a critical juncture leading to growth. To inspire transformation, we need to design for change.

We need to design for belonging to be experienced and for the participants to have moments that make them think and act differently and positively. We need to build communities, one person at a time adding strength to the foundation, and we need this across every industry, every sector to be moving forward in a way that respects the people and planet we inhabit. Live

events have the power to catalyze change and we must not take any of the elements for

granted or ignore the power that comes from eye contact, conversation and yes, coffee.

Building Blocks to this Book

The above are samples of the style of writing and content that would be included in a book. There are 30 years of examples, cases where technology is the star and where it takes a supporting role, events where food is the center plate and events where sparkling water from a fountain in the town square tells the story of the destination you are in. The world's greatest performers and the humblest of academics, the elder statesperson of an association and its young leaders all have a place in bringing our events and their stories to life. I will continue my quest to uncover the experiences that make us gasp, and those that make us think, and those that transport us back to our lives with a new perspective and to share these in ways that allow others looking to create impactful experiences can learn from and apply.

SECTION FIVE: KEY LEARNINGS AND CONCLUSION
It Takes Time

We live in a world where everything is instant, from noodles to writing anything with AI, and our expectations that we can have anything or produce anything without a lot of work has been exaggerated by social media where the end results are shown endlessly, without the background work being shared. Anyone who has had the satisfaction of both starting and finishing a project knows there is sweat – mental, physical or emotional – along the way. There is endless questioning if what you are doing is right or not quite enough. The act of turning it over, as we have done with our Masters projects for review from the experts, waiting with nervousness for what might come back in terms of evaluation is an example of this anticipation phase. It requires patience to go through each step, with our own selves and with others. It is rare we get to the place we feel it is finished and ready for public consumption, and signing the Digital Commons Approval for was one of the hardest pieces, knowing we are putting our work out there for public consumption.

I have published one book, hosted two podcasts and spoken at dozens of events. I know I can do any or all these things again. I have moved over the past two years from a job that took up a substantial amount of my time to one that gives me breathing space and encouragement to speak, host and write once again. This gift of time is not one to be taken lightly. Working through this project has reminded me how much I love writing and researching and sharing ideas and the discussions with peers around all aspects of creativity has reinvigorated me.

The leadership, encouragement, kindness and curiosity shown by every member of the faculty is a testament to what has been created in the Center for Imagination and their value in representing Buffalo State University cannot be overstated. Thank you for all you have given us.

What I Learned

No matter how much of an expert we may be in any one area, we can always learn more. The depth of research in creativity, innovation and experience design has evolved rapidly

over the past sixty years and there is more to be learned from past research and from the rich work being done today. We also have a lot to learn from each other, and this can take many forms. In our Masters program we had an astounding group of professors plus a unique cohort, with a wide range of backgrounds and a high degree of respect for the various opinions and ideas we all brought forward. We often did not agree but always took the time to learn from each other and with new ideas and opinions were able to have a richer experience. From engineers to experts in micro-dosing with psychedelics to artists and art teachers, event producers and industrial designers, we brought a variety of intellectual capital and a deep curiosity to learning.

An openness to new experiences and to people we would not typically have interactions with should be welcomed. Looking through the lens we have now that diversity in teams is a key part of accelerating innovation, it suggests making the effort to build and nurture diverse teams will benefit all organizations, one meeting or project at a time. Divergent thinking is a necessary step in innovation. Using tools including icebreakers and warmups, and divergent and convergent thinking allows us to build better ideas, faster.

The Future

Creativity is not a solo effort. Using the context of live events as the example, it is a team effort from the first idea to the final hurrah. Ideally the client sets the outcomes desired, from increased sales or service levels to improved teamwork or more innovative ways of working. A strategic team of designers then brainstorms the options including type and size of event, location and venue, and the potential formats to achieve the objectives. This basic process applies whether it is a 100-person training or a 10,000-person learning festival, a sales incentive trip or an educational conference for an association. From the initial plans, a team is built to develop and manage the many details required for the project, with the size of team and roles varied by the event's size and scope. Throughout this process, challenges will continue to arise, from a client changing their mind to a change in venue, a speaker program that evolves based on needs and availability, and design elements that will evolve based on delivering learning,

inspiration and networking opportunities throughout the time we have people together. As we move on-site for an event, it requires anywhere from dozens to hundreds of people in a variety of roles from venue to catering, audio visual to exhibits, security and a myriad of other roles to bring a vision to life. It is this process from beginning to end that I am passionate about and want to support the continued growth of the individuals who bring events to life.

The Immediate Future

What I see myself doing next is attending a wide variety of events that delve into wellbeing, creativity and innovation and using this to inform the work I do in live events. I will continue to build my knowledge and work on writing a book. I have let go of contracts to allow the time to focus on daily writing practice. I will reinvigorate my website with fresh blog and video content related to this topic that continues to fascinate me and where the fresh ideas support the work others are doing. I will continue to travel to a wide variety of destinations and share the messages of intentional event design and its power to build creativity and ultimately innovation. This will become an ongoing project that will evolve as the world continues to need more solutions and the next generation that needs inspiration.

REFERENCES

Allison, D. (2022). *The death of demographics.* Lioncrest Publishing.

Amabile, T. & Kramer, S. (2012). How leaders can kill meaning at work. *McKinsley Quarterly*, 1-
8. https://www.engageforsuccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/How-leaders-can-kill-
meaning-at-work.pdf

Atthahira, N. E., Aliyana, A., Nurzaliner, J., Sudarsono, Tarigan, B. & Ahmad, M.A. (2021,
January). Change management and creativity during Pandemic Covid-19. *Systematic
Reviews in Pharmacy, 12*(1), 953-959.

Bolden, B. D. (2020, June). Assessment of creativity in K-12 education. *Review of Education,
8*(2), 343-376. doi:10.1002/rev3.3188

Bousinakis, D. & Halkos, G. (2021, September). Creativity as the hidden factor for organizations
and employees. *Economic Analysis and Policy, 71*, 645-659.
doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eap.2021.07.003

Cohen, G. (2022). *Belonging.* W.W. Norton.

Endean, T. (2017) *Intentional event design, our professional opportunity.* Unpublished
manuscript.

Firestien, R. (2020). *Create in a flash.* Green Tractor Publishing.

Grant, A. (2021). *Think again: The power of knowing what you don't know.* Viking.

Grossman, S. R. (2019). The kinetics of inspiration: Accelerating your personal creative process
to solve persistent important problems. *Creativity and Human Development*, 1-7.

Huhtala, H. & Parzefall, M-R. (2007, August 17). A review of employee well-being and
innovativeness: An opportunity for mutual benefit. *Creativity and Innovation
Management, 16*(3), 299-306. doi:https://doi/10.1111/j.1467-8691.2007.00442.x

Hunnicutt, B. (2020). *The age of experiences. Harnessing happiness to build a new economy.*
Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kirrane M., Kramer. M. & Lasselben, H. (2020). Beyond the surface: exploring the relationship

    between value diversity and team creativity. *Creativity Research Journal, 32*(2), 113 -

    126.

Miller, B., Vehar, J., Firestien, R., Thurber, S. & Nielsen, D. (2011) Creativity unbound: An

    introduction to creative process. Foursight LLC.

Mumford, M. Z. , Zaccaro, S.J., Harding, F. D., Jacbobs, T.O. & Fleishman, E.A. (2000).

    Leadership for a changing world: solving complex social problems. *Leadership*

    Quarterly, 11(1), 11 - 35.

Northouse, P. G. (2022). *Leadership theory & practice. (9th Ed.).* Sage.

Omilion-Hodges, L. & Ackerman, C.D. (2018). From the technical know-how to the free flow of

    ideas: Exploring the effects of leader, peer and team communication on creativity.

    Communication Quarterly, 66(1), 38 - 57.

Puccio, G. J. & Schwartz, M. (in progress). Outcomes of creativity in organizations: From

    organizational to human-centered benefits. In R. Reiter-Palmon & S. Hunter (Eds.),

    Handbook of Organizational Creativity. Elsevier.

Puccio, G. M., Mance, M. & Murdock, M.C. (2011). *Creative leadership: Skills that drive change.*

    Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Rossman, J. & Duerdan, M. (2019). *Designing Experiences.* Columbia University Press.

Roussy-Parent, M. (2021, June). The correlation between internationalization and creativity: An

    exploratory study of Canadian SMEs;. *Journal of Technology Management &*

    Sustainable Development, 20(2), 175-195. doi:https://doi.org/10.1386/tmsd_00040_1

Solis, B. (2015). *X: The experience when business meets design.* John Wiley & Sons.

Szostek, A. (2020). *The umami strategy. Stand out by mixing business with experience design.*

    BIS Publishers.

Zak, P. J. (2022). *Immersion: The science of the extraordinary and the source of happiness.*

    Lioncrest Publications

Appendix A: Intentional Event Design, Our Professional Opportunity
Book Excerpt

I love events and everything about them. I like the sometimes-messy, always-complex process of design, overcoming the inevitable challenges presented and the collaboration required to make them successful. Our role as event professionals is to create experiences steeped in trust, where our audiences feel their participation in our event was the best use of their time and financial investment. This requires our event designs to bring out the best in human nature by making intentional decisions based on the knowledge available about our participants and their needs. Deeply understanding how human beings respond in live event environments is our new currency.

People-Centric Principles

1. Businesses invest in events because they provide a catalyst for behavior change leading to business growth.
2. Participants attend events because we crave face-to-face opportunities for learning and intelligent conversations with like-minded individuals.

Leadership Alignment

Our leaders build a vision for our collective future, and events offer a deeply effective method to communicate this widely. To deliver a vision requires clarity and alignment, from the message to the environment to the room set and all supporting materials. To inspire action across a group, whether an internal team, a room or zoom full of clients or association members takes design thinking and presentation skills. Taking time to ask the questions to understand objectives, then build a design framework, develop the content and its delivery to drive new thinking and transform behavior is a skill we must continue to hone.

Our Professional Opportunity

To fulfill the growing need in our society for human-to-human contact and to deliver measurable results for our organizations, we design events worth attending. We do this by using

our unique knowledge of human nature, strategy and logistics, strengthened by our partnerships with like-minded colleagues and vendor partners committed to delivering excellence. Events are judged one at a time, and each time we must show our value to stakeholders, sponsors and participants through measurement. This is the basis of intentional event design, where we consistently prove an event to be the best use of resources for all stakeholders.

Intentional Event Design, Our Professional Opportunity Table of Contents

Appendix B: Mind Mapping

My notes are often mind-maps, connecting the ideas being shared with experiences I have had or hope to create one day. These are samples of thinking I have been exposed to in the classroom and through the World Experience Organization. These are representative samples only to show some of the ways I take inspiration and will continue to collect information as I go through this next journey of participating in a wide array of conferences where I will be both gaining new information about this topic from expert presenters and colleagues, while also analyzing the design of the events for lessons and opportunities.
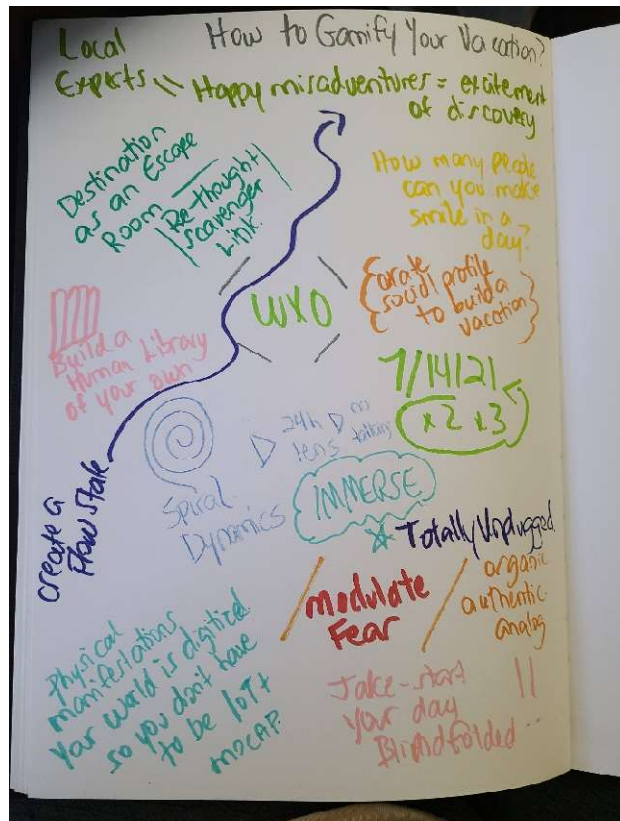
Permission to place this Project in the Digital Commons online

I hereby grant permission to the Department of Creativity and Change Leadership, Center for Applied Imagination at Buffalo State University permission to place a digital copy of this master's Project Developing a Book Proposal as an online resource.

<u>Tahira Endean</u>

Name

<u>April 24, 2023</u>

Date