



Purposeful Meetings:

How to plan with deeper
meaning, innovation and
insight in mind

Industry White Paper

Authors:

Janet Sperstad, CMP
Madison College
jsperstad@madisoncollege.edu

Amanda Cecil, PhD, CMP
Indiana University
akcecil@iupui.edu

**Sponsorship and support
provided by:**

IMEX Group
PSAV

[#purposefulmeetings](https://twitter.com/purposefulmeetings)

Contents

- 2 Introduction
- 5 **BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE:**
How we act, interact and think
- 7 **HEALTH & WELLBEING:**
Health and nutrition for mind + performance
- 10 **EVENT DESIGN:**
Building new experience and maximizing human performance
- 13 **CSR, LEGACY, AND POSITIVE IMPACT:**
Driving new levels of meaning and connectivity
- 15 **TECHNOLOGY:**
Turbo charging ideas, creativity and connections
- 18 Final thoughts
- 19 References

Introduction

To advance our professional field and discipline, meeting professionals must change the conversation and explore new perspectives in strategically planning and managing their events.

With 'great education comes great responsibility' and this paper makes a strong case to re-frame your thought process and join a new dialogue to design meetings with more purpose. This is not a systemic approach to designing events OR a definitive guide. Instead, the paper (and the model) are intended to shift the focus of the conversation from *outcomes* to human-centric *experiences*.

We define purposeful meetings as events that are strategically designed to move beyond financial return on investment (ROI) measurements and learner outcomes to *exploring the elements of a meeting experience that impact human behavior and leverage the experience to influence decision making, create moments of meaning and insight, and inspire creativity*. For whatever reason, most meeting professionals have forgotten, perhaps even abandoned, the human focus on attendee engagement, problem-solving and changing behavior. The conversation is typically centered on cost-saving, measuring ROI, and a variety of logistical considerations, and rarely on questions about how can we create meaningful, lasting experiences – and memories – for attendees.



"Purposeful meetings puts a fresh approach into planning events, now is the time to put 'humanity back into meetings'."

How can we as meeting professionals refocus our lens?

Can the conversation shift from the “business” of a meeting to the performance of its people? These areas won’t be a surprise to many who have been in the profession for years. However, a key difference is that all five aspects of our suggested model must thoughtfully be interwoven in this new interdisciplinary approach.

David Peckinpugh, President of Maritz Global Events, shared, “This Purposeful Meetings white paper hits the bullseye on where human gatherings are headed. We have built our experience design practice with a foundation in the deep understanding of neuroscience anchored in behavioral sciences. Our Chief Behavioral Officer, Charlotte Blank, would agree that purposeful meetings explores the elements of a meeting experience that impacts human behavior and performance. In fact, while good meetings have well thought out logistical execution, great meetings enrich the hearts and minds of our guests. Purposeful meetings puts a fresh approach into planning events, now is the time to put ‘humanity back into meetings.’”

Why this approach, and why now?

Event practitioners (modern-day event *strategists*) are looking for more ways to drive value and create meaningful, authentic experiences in a fast-paced, digital world. They also know their role is to use events to support and fulfill an organization’s long-term strategic goals. This topic has therefore gained interest because of its interdisciplinary approach, as well as, the application of cognitive-based research.

As Carina Bauer, CEO, IMEX Group sees it: “Purposeful meetings inspire people to do extraordinary things, allow individuals to be brilliant and inspire others, and maybe most importantly, deepen personal connections that broaden perspectives and spark innovation. Purposeful meetings are a catalyst – one that truly ignites fresh thinking and new behavior. They help our partners, attendees and exhibitors to understand more, and achieve more.”



“Purposeful meetings are a catalyst – one that truly ignites fresh thinking and new behavior.”

The purposeful meeting model proposed in this paper covers five key areas:

1. BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE

Exploring how the human brain works when we are in a social setting. Looking at how events are catalysts for creativity and an incubator of ideas

2. HEALTH & WELLBEING

Nutrition beyond food to nutrition for the mind, body, and performance

3. EVENT DESIGN

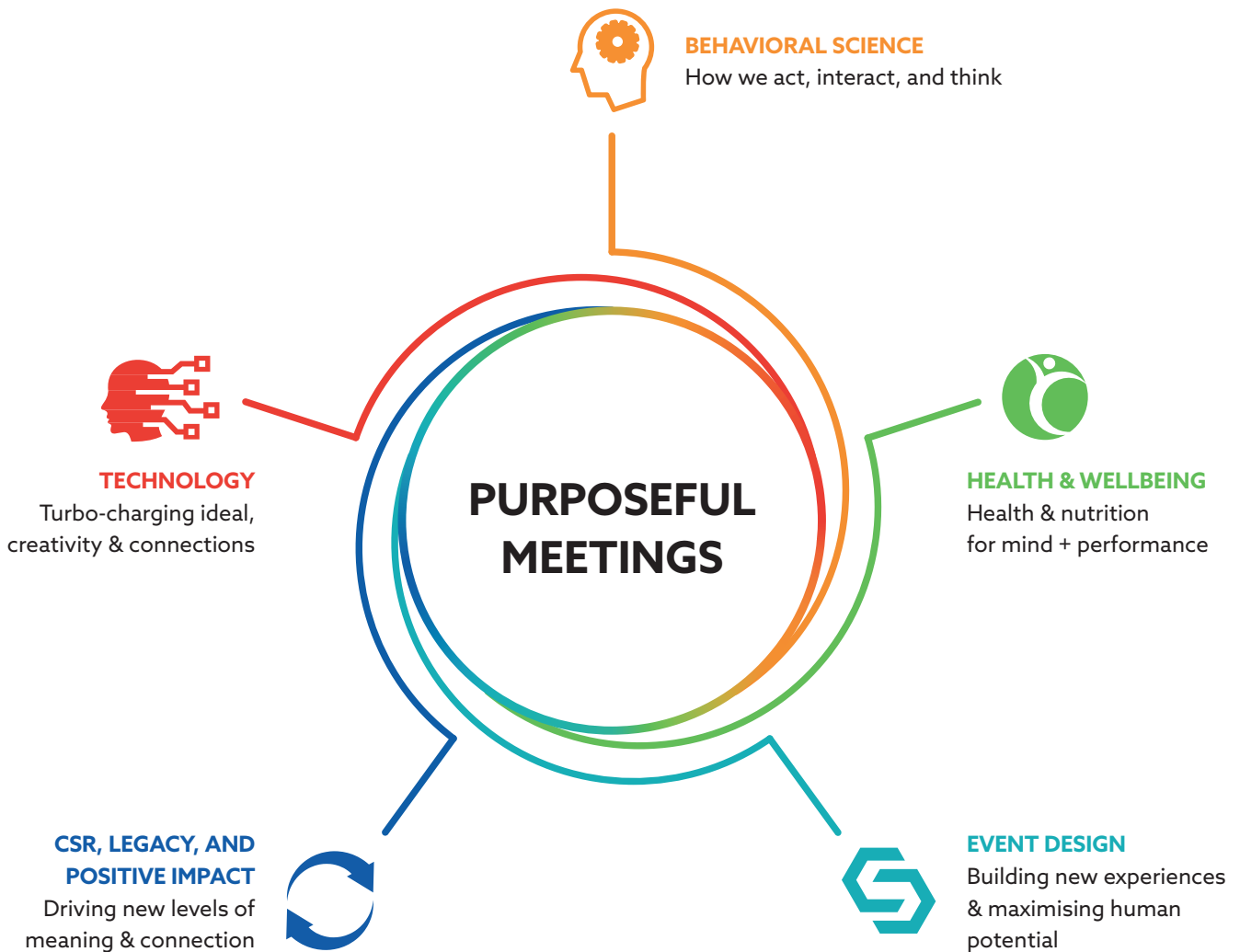
Discussing new research on how the brain processes information, the built and natural environment and the effect on human performance and the importance of 'white space'

4. CSR, LEGACY, AND POSITIVE IMPACT

How positive actions when intentionally woven into a meeting can provide new levels of meaning and connection

5. TECHNOLOGY

Technology as a tool, not a solution, to accelerating connection and trust between people, and as a way to turbo-charge ideation, creativity and creative problem solving



BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE:

How we act, interact and think

Meeting professionals do not need to be social psychologists, yet we must have an understanding of how the brain reacts and processes information. It is as important to understand *how* the brain operates as it is to understand *what* the brain processes. Our understanding of human brain research and of the workings of our own minds is greater than ever. Where the world was once fascinated by – and financially invested in – ‘cyberspace,’ the new frontier is ‘inner space.’

Neuroscientific breakthroughs have given us new insights into the workings of the conscious and non-conscious brain. When combined with knowledge of behavioral science, typical event outcomes focused on learning, networking and pleasure now can be repositioned to drive deeper meaning, creativity, and authentic connections. With this knowledge, meeting professionals can leverage the behavior, thinking, and feeling of their attendees.

Ben Moorsom, President & Chief Creative Officer of the DEBUT Group, has spent the past 20 years building an understanding and developing techniques to improve the effectiveness of event experiences through science-based approaches. In a recent interview, he commented, “I have always been fascinated with exactly what clients hope to accomplish when they host an event. I would argue that it is an uphill battle under traditional methods. We have this rare and wonderful captive audience and yet... this is often where the disconnect happens.

“From the perspective of behavioral science, most of how we have approached event design is flawed. When we architect experiences, we can better shape event design and flow in order to increase many areas of an event – including engagement, retention, restoration, understanding, energy and beyond. Neuroscience and psychology can play a significant role in the overall success of an event.”

Understanding the geography of thought

Ben continues, “As event designers, it is our responsibility to get our clients as close to the front of the line (in the mind) as possible in order to deliver messaging. The more an attendee absorbs and retains, the better equipped they are to act on behalf of the organization. Understanding of the brain and how it processes information is dramatically shaping the way in which we engineer experiences .”

Dr. Evian Gordon, an expert in integrative neuroscience, asserts that there is only one motivation of the brain: minimizing danger and maximizing rewards; and two brain modes of the brain, non-conscious and conscious (2000). David Rock’s work at the NeuroLeadership Institute in Australia offers additional perspective about the brain in human social experience. His model, referred to as SCARF (status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness) describes how we perceive danger when our status is threatened, we are unsure of whether we belong or not, or feel unimportant to others. (Rock and Cox, 2012).

As introduced above, there are two active systems working in the brain: the non-conscious and the conscious. The non-conscious processing is fast, automatic and responds to sensory and physical inputs. The conscious system is the center of a deeper way of thinking, intentional, slow and controlled. When we are tired, the conscious system lags and the individual faces a loss of will power (Lieberman, 2007). Ben concludes by saying, “the brain can only hold so much information and once full, information will begin to spill out – much like a cup of water. Therefore, the brain is like a dam and as event professionals, we need to relieve pressure and manage flow.”

“Understanding of the brain and how it processes information is dramatically shaping the way in which we engineer experiences.”

Social connections – as important as water?

Humans are profound social creatures; our need to be socially connected is more important than food and shelter debunking Maslow's Theory. Our brain uses its spare time to learn about our social world and connect to it. Did you know about 70% of the content in our conversations is social in nature (Dunbar, Marriott, & Duncan, 1997)?

Our brain is the social organ of our body and meetings are a social situation. Our social exchanges influence decision-making and our approach to a problem (Liebermann, 2013). Additionally, humans are constantly thinking about others and guessing what is going on in their minds. According to Rock and Cox (2012), "research has shown that humans have a fundamental need to belong, are sensitive to their social context and are strongly motivated to remain in good standing within their social group and avoid social exclusion" (p. 3). We take in information, then filter it based on how we think it will be useful to others and how it will make us appear. Having moments for attendees to amplify a message is therefore important for their social connection.

Additionally, there is a strong neural link between social and physical pain, and social pain is equal to physical pain. Our brains evolved to experience threats to our social connections the same way they experience physical pain (Eisenberger and Lieberman, 2009). Make no doubt about it; we are greatly influenced by seemingly innocuous cues. We are wired to interact with others; our success depends on it.

PRACTICAL TIPS:



Have you considered?

Using storytelling

Stories are so powerful because we have a mind meld; the same region of the storyteller and listeners' brain lights up. Data makes things believable, while stories make it meaningful.

(Speer, Reynolds, Swallow, & Zacks, 2009).

Decorating the room of your board members/ attendees with pictures of their loved ones, instead of the typical wine and cheese plate.

Separating from a social bond while traveling is tough!

Synchronizing the brainwaves of everyone in a space to be more positive and receptive.

Integrating frequencies into an audio-scape during walk-in, leveraging learnings with guided-meditation technology. If we can open the mind and improve comfort by even 1%, that is worth the investment.

(Moorsom interview, 2017)

Meetings and events create powerful and concentrated social experiences. Could they be the most influential and persuasive medium of today? Increasing social connections may also be the single easiest way to enhance our wellbeing. When we are socially connected we are happier, healthier, better people.

HEALTH & WELLBEING: Health and nutrition for mind + performance

Like training for a marathon, preparing for a meeting requires a thoughtful approach to one's health to ensure peak performance for the brain and the body.

There is a science to the correlation between food, sleep, exercise, and the ability to perform at cognitive and physical optimal levels. Much of our body is built from the food we eat; our brain is built from the experiences we have. Exercise is so important that many have coined the phrase "sitting is the new smoking." Equally, we are fast becoming a working population fixated by sleep.

For many planners, it is now common practice to purposefully incorporate healthy nutrition, hydration, relaxation and mindfulness into their events. Sleep is as important as serving healthy food (Brennan, 2015). What if planners send reminders to attendees to meditate, sleep 8+ hours, exercise and relax before traveling to a meeting, in addition to reminders to register for special events and download the app? Could this effort "power up" attendee performance?

Mindfulness, which requires one to be aware of present thoughts, emotions and actions and to pay attention to one's current surroundings, can increase focus. (Tang & Posner, 2008). Those who practice meditation and mindfulness have greater potential to increase their powers of insight, reduce stress, improve their mood, and help them in creative problem solving. Our brain is limited in its ability to process information; this is one of the reasons why meetings and events can be exhausting.

According to Janet Cheung, event wellness and mindful practice expert, "mindful practices like meditation, yoga, Qi Gong and breathing exercises help individuals to manage stress levels and to find a better work-life balance. These practices have been shown to not only help people manage anxiety, but also help them sleep better, feel better, be more peaceful and energized."

In May of 2017, Janet worked with the IMEX team and partners to co-design the IMEX Be Well Lounge at IMEX in Frankfurt. She led sessions focused on simple relaxation and meditation techniques to quiet the mind and relax the body. There were also areas for individual escape surrounded by plants and comfortable furniture, where participants could put on headphones, take off their shoes, and enjoy 10 minutes of downtime. The Be Well Lounge proved an inspiring area permitting and encouraging people to reset, refocus and reenergize.



Are planners the architects of exhausted people?

We need to offer more opportunities to power down – in order to allow attendees to power up. Can we reframe our view of breaks from food and beverage to recharging the brain? Attendees need comfort and cognitive breaks, in addition to, time for a social snack. Give attendees enough time to re-charge, just not grab a drink of water and run to the next session. Consider a new lens when designing your breaks and reimagine them as bio/comfort breaks, palette cleaners for the mind, and cognitive recharges.

PRACTICAL TIPS:



Have you considered?

Putting a post it note on the bathroom mirror saying: Did you know running warm water over your hands and taking three deep breaths reduces stress, helps you relax, and think better?

(Hanson & Mendius, 2009)

Offering areas for a quick power nap.

A short nap of less than 20 minutes has been proven beneficial, improving alertness and performance.

(Brooks & Lack, 2006)

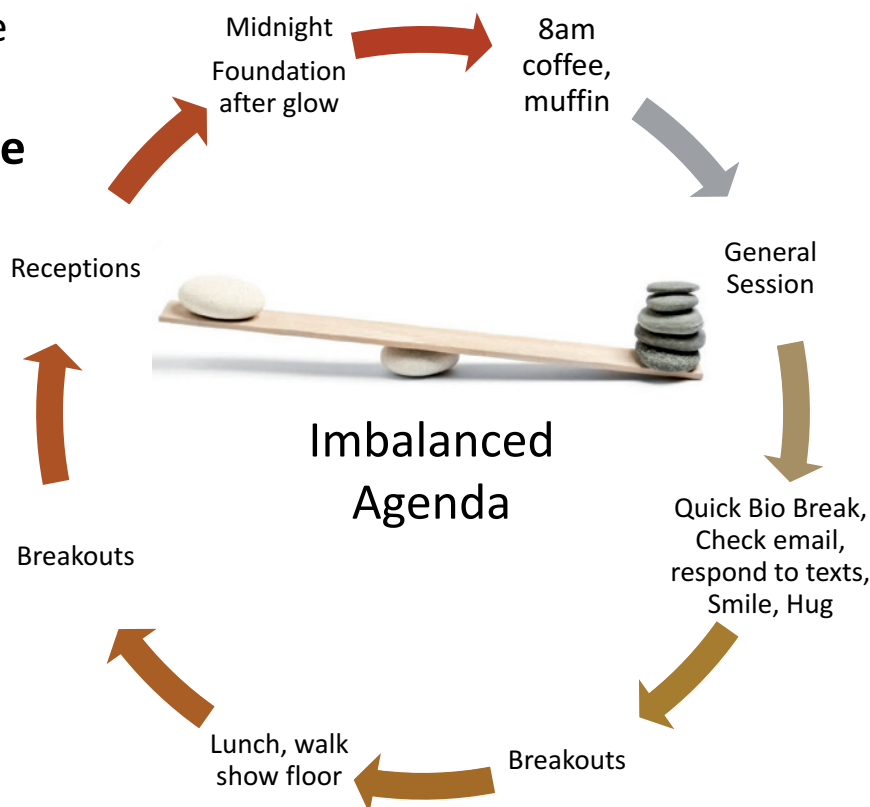
Creating small nooks in corners as “outlets to unplug” either alone or in small groups.

Individuals need to reboot, connect, chat, and think before the next activity.

Adding plants or pieces of art (real or fake) in common areas helps the mind wander and recharge.

(Davis, 2015)

We've become the Architects of Exhausted People



Nature is restorative and humans have an intimate connection to their surroundings. Gazing out a window, walking amongst trees, listening to the sound of water falling provides the opportunity to replenish attention and reclaim control. These opportunities allow for mind-wandering – also known as – the ‘new innovator’s mindset’!

Flanders Meeting and Convention Centre in Antwerp, Belgium

A ROOM WITH A ZOO at Flanders Meeting and Convention Centre Antwerp offers a unique natural experience that creates more pleasurable and effective meetings. According to Anja Stas, the Chief Commercial Officer, “Because nature nurtures and restores the cognitive abilities, we not only bring in daylight everywhere, but we have big windows and French doors opening up into the green gardens with flamingos – the entrance of the legendary Scientific Antwerp Zoo.

The proximity with the zoo opens up many possibilities to bring nature into your meeting for added value and legacy building.

“Mental breaks amidst the animals for more authentic connections, deepened conversations, restorative walks, guided tours, early morning jogging in a zoo that awakens, and social programs amidst wildlife are some of the many benefits of including nature *and* a zoo as part of your convention. And for more meaning and purpose, we offer instant CSR through conservation. Kinship with the ZOO means that all revenue from the event spaces goes to the zoo’s conservation work, leaving a lasting and positive footprint long after the actual event is gone. We believe in healthier, more nature-infused meetings with greater benefits for all.”



Copyright FMCCA

“Because nature nurtures and restores the cognitive abilities, we not only bring in daylight everywhere, but we have big windows and French doors opening up into the green gardens with flamingos – the entrance of the legendary Scientific Antwerp Zoo.”

EVENT DESIGN:

Building new experience and maximizing human performance

As humans, we have a multi-sensory response to the world around us. Understanding how we perceive and interpret the immediate environment and how it affects what we learn and how we collaborate with others, is another consideration for the purposeful meetings planner. Therefore, he or she consciously designs learning formats and chooses meeting spaces with experiential outcomes in mind. Light, air, sound, smell, touch can all be managed 'on purpose'. Instead of only thinking about event space and design in relation to room capacity, imagine designing the space with the performance of the people in mind.

Event design has been discussed in a variety of contexts lately. We would like to challenge planners to first think about how to use space to create moments that enhance attendee experience and focus on human peak performance... *then* start designing.

What constitutes a balanced agenda?

Morning general sessions, concurrent breakout sessions, break with coffee, more concurrent breakout sessions, invite-only receptions, evening activity...sound familiar? Have you lived through this kind of meeting before or even multiple times?

A balanced agenda considers active participation *and* down time, careful use of time and space, blended learning *and* laughter, content *and* connection *and* cadence, and igniting of the senses without overload. It is the mix of content, networking, free time, and reflection that is key.

Kelly Peacy, CAE, CMP, Founder & CEO of Insight Event Strategy, LLC adds additional perspective, "We often equate more sessions and a tightly-packed schedule with *value* for the participant. In an attempt to create an experience worth the registration fee, we end up doing our participants a disservice by turning them into exhausted people, where very little learning is retained.

"To combat this, we should aim to design program agendas that take into consideration the needs of actual human beings and how they interact with our content and with each other. Humans get tired, they get hungry and when those basic needs are not met, good learning doesn't take place.

We humans also thrive in natural light and have natural ebbs and flows of energy throughout the day. In order to help our event participants make the most of their experiences, we should stop designing agendas that work against these basic human elements and start creating agendas that work *with* them. We will then see the real value for our participants reflected in the knowledge retention and rich interaction that transpires, keeping them coming back for more."

"We humans also thrive in natural light and have natural ebbs and flows of energy throughout the day. In order to help our event participants make the most of their experiences, we should stop designing agendas that work against these basic human elements and start creating agendas that work with them."

Re-thinking the agenda



Balanced Programming

Kick off when brain is fresh!

9:00am – 11:00am

Interactive, Problem Solving Content



Free time reflection

Cognitive Breaks & Comfort Breaks

Macro and Micro Moments that allow the mind to wander



Appeal to senses

Lunch - To EAT - not listen to a speaker

Refuel and Recharge - both brain and the body



Building of new experiences

Sessions after lunch: rich reflection time

Peer-to-peer sharing and knowledge exchange



Play and Purpose

Space to Think and Collaborate

Natural daylight, corners, pods

Closing Session: Big Lights - Big Sound

Activate Emotions.
Recency Effect

PRACTICAL TIPS:



Have you considered?

Slotting a peer-to-peer and case study work session *after* lunch, when the brain is relaxed?

"Peerology" has a strong influence over us. It is critical to establish a sense of tribe, trust, camaraderie.

Placing highboys outside of educational session rooms, so participants can grab a few minutes to answer emails, but not linger and miss key sessions.

Inviting puppies or pigs to your event.

According to "*What Pets Bring to the Party*" published in *Time Magazine*, puppy cuddling and pig petting can lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

(Allen, 2002 in Song, 2005)

Right sizing and bite sizing

Our conscious brain processes things one at a time, one after another. Events can be sensory landmines, requiring an attendee to constantly switch focus, pay attention, and keep their senses on high alert. It creates a bottleneck in the brain's prefrontal cortex (PFC), resulting in a series of unfinished connections.

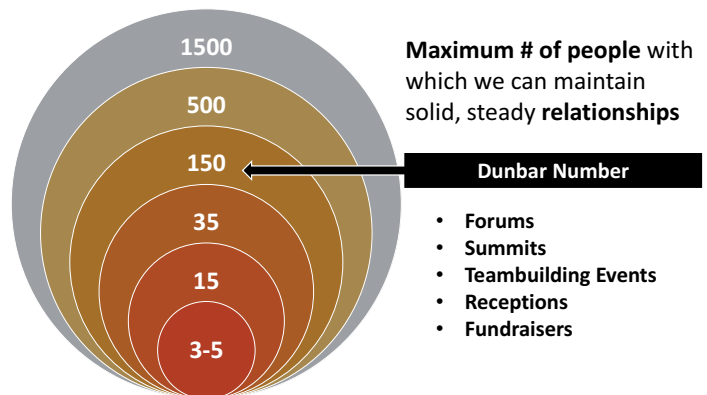
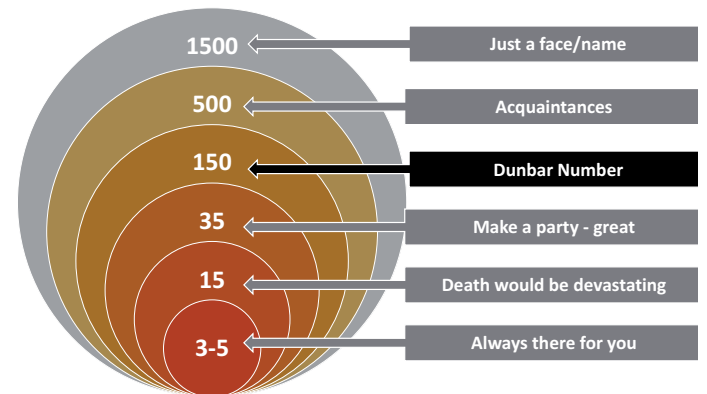
Respecting space limitations in the PFC requires us to simplify, chunk, and prioritize information for our attendees. David Rock (2009) encourages instructional designers to break down complex ideas into a few simple concepts and to group information in ways that make the most sense. Being intentional about the key points will assist with prioritizing the content.

In overloaded and poorly designed meeting formats, attendees quickly experience increased levels of cortisol (stress hormone) due to an inability to follow the presentations or maintain their attention for long spans of time. Instead of 90-minute sessions, consider 45-minute breakouts with defined topics and specific outcomes.

Notably, social circles also have a maximum number of people with whom we can maintain a stable relationship. Robin Dunbar (2009), who has studied this phenomenon found the maximum number of people with which we can maintain solid, steady relationships with is 150, see diagram.

This information makes us question: Are some meetings too big to make truly meaningful connections? Are meetings really not conducive to learning and meeting new people? Once the event grows larger than 150 people, do we start to erode connections?

Dunbar's Number



"In overloaded and poorly designed meeting formats, attendees quickly experience increased levels of cortisol (stress hormone) due to an inability to follow the presentations or maintain their attention for long spans of time."

CSR, LEGACY, AND POSITIVE IMPACT: Driving new levels of meaning and connectivity

Changes in the way we understand positive impact are also leading meetings professionals towards richer, stronger and more focused community engagement programs. It is increasingly rare for a large meeting or event to take place *without* an affiliation to a local, non-profit organization or cause.

This isn't old-fashioned philanthropy. It is positive action, woven into meetings to intentionally provide new levels of meaning and connection for participants. It is the Millennials – driven by an appreciation of experiences over owning things – who are leading this shift. Combine this change with a rising passion for conserving natural resources and protecting the environment, and event professionals are more likely than ever to rethink the importance of the traditional corporate social responsibility (CSR) experience.

Fiona Pelham, CEO of Positive Impact and Sustainable Events Ltd, makes the case, "The event industry has the potential to be a unique catalyst to achieving the United Nations 17 sustainable development goals. The event industry brings people together so they can collaborate, innovate and create solutions to meet these goals, which are a roadmap to creating a world that works for everyone. As an example, imagine if every event had a strategy to ensure it avoided food waste? This would be a step towards SDG2 Zero Hunger and as Meeting Professionals International (MPI) demonstrated with their innovative sponsorship with Montreal CVB, an opportunity for events to have a positive impact."



Creating a common, authentic experience

Event attendees crave authentic experiences that contribute to helping communities solve problems or address needs, not activities that are mere photo opportunities or mass-produced add-on ancillary functions.

If crafted well, the experience will naturally result in a “tribe,” individuals who come together for a common purpose. Binding people together from diverse generations, backgrounds, and worldviews, the experience can bridge differences and create new ways to understand others. It offers opportunities for individuals to include others, and to reshape their own perspectives, all of which are fundamental to the transformative power of events.



The IMEX Challenge team created a new Healing Garden for the Shade Tree Shelter before IMEX America.

Leave it with the locals

In reviewing a number of CSR projects over the years, it becomes clear that meeting professionals rarely begin by asking simple questions of the community, such as: What can we do to leave a lasting legacy? What does your community need? How can we minimize any negative impacts from our event? How can we involve local businesses and residents in our efforts? How can we invite the local community to be a part of this event?

Designing CSR experiences in partnership with the local community in order to leave money or other tangibles behind to benefit those living in the area is a powerful strategy. Attendees should not forget the social, cultural and environmental impacts that events have on a local community. Event design efforts should always take into consideration how to minimize these impacts (strain on public services, increased traffic, large amounts of trash and food waste) and consider ways to shift some of these negatives into positive impacts.

Guy Bigwood, Sustainability Director for MCI Group-Headquarter in Geneva, expands on this idea with a real-world example: “The knowledge of the event team can leave a positive legacy. As an example, we were organizing a conservation congress in Cartagena and we worked with the convention center to share the expertise of our team to help them develop and improve their waste management processes, their procurement approach to sourcing sustainable fish and their sustainability measurement systems. A few hours of our time made a long-term impact on how they run their business, which in turn benefits other clients, their local community and the local ecosystems.” In short, a small, concerted effort to ‘pay it forward’ can turn into a huge gift over time. The MCI team effectively made use of the compound effect.

TECHNOLOGY:

Turbo-charging ideas, creativity and connections

Technology has changed the way we do business, the way we connect, and the way we live. It is allowing us to be more collaborative and to explore deeper into data to help inform strategy. Artificial intelligence is empowering organizations to analyze, deduce and extrapolate, helping them to make better, more intelligent, real-time business decisions.

We are constantly discussing the functionality and benefits of social media, video streaming, gamification, apps, electronic certificates, exchange of information in web pages, iPads, beacons, and virtual reality technology as tools in planning and producing events. However, we rarely talk about the use of awesome event technology in terms of syncing our brain waves, creating moods, reducing anxiety or creating shared-thought experiences. Because of this evolution, purposeful meetings – and purposeful meetings professionals – become more relevant and valuable than ever.

Joe Woodard, President of Woodard Events, collaborated with PSAV to pull out all the stops on his 2017 Scaling New Heights® conference themed “Face the Yeti”. He challenged the creative team to transport his attendees – small business owners and advisors – into the mountains of Nepal and experience empowerment and courage. The project required historical research on the mythical Yeti and incorporated the challenges and significance of climbing Mt. Everest. This information inspired a storyboard connected to the conference’s mission and message.

Joe describes, “In working with PSAV, we did not simply discuss lighting or podium placement. The relationship is much bigger than those simple administrative elements. Together, we created an immersive visual and graphic four-day attendee experience of inspiration and testing one’s merits. We designed a backdrop of an Everest basecamp for the stage using CG imaging that merged brilliantly with physical (i.e. 4D) elements like tents, stone monuments and prayer flags. We also constructed a 40’x40’ Basecamp on the exhibit floor with campsites, a rock wall and even an indoor zip line!

The Exhibit Hall was a continuation of our immersive Nepalese experience with prayer flags, wraps on the columns to transform them into towering trees, and even some traces of the Yeti himself such as footprints and a straw nest.

“We engineered this incredible experience with PSAV so our attendees would feel they were in Nepal – on their own ascent up the daunting slopes of Everest – facing their own Yetis in their lives and businesses.” Not surprisingly, this was the highest rated conference ever for this group.

“The Exhibit Hall was a continuation of our immersive Nepalese experience with prayer flags, wraps on the columns to transform them into towering trees, and even some traces of the Yeti himself such as footprints and a straw nest.”



A new currency of magical moments

David Rich, Senior Vice President of George P. Johnson Experience Marketing, comments: "There's no question that being truly proficient in architecting the integration of technology into purposefully planned experiences is going to be the dividing line in the very near future between those who rise to the top and those who fall quickly to the bottom of our profession. Augmented reality, virtual reality, mixed reality, and artificial intelligence that inform all digital interactions (to name just four of the types of technologies to pay attention to), will soon be the norm, woven into the daily lives of citizens in the developed world in settings that range from retail to medicine.

"How then can these communication formats and tools be absent from event experiences without risking that they become unsatisfyingly and ineffectively anachronistic and irrelevant? How can these technologies *not* be used to purposefully enable specific human behaviors and outcomes in our events? And how can their use *not* be shaped and implemented in such a way that they throw off data that enables the producer to best understand the needs, changes in, and propensities of participants so that one knows what to do next to facilitate the building of even deeper bonds that glue all enterprises together, especially when this is happening in every other sphere of life? Being relevant now means being smartly, ***purposefully digital!***"

Five years ago, could we have imagined the design and tech world would produce a data-driven "cognitive dress" for the 2016 MET Gala? The LED lights embedded in the gown changed colors in real-time, based on the social media mood of Twitter users (McClellan, 2016). As Liz Kiehner, Global Design Practice Director of IBM, says, "we are architects of time and space... The currency of magical moments is to out-think the ordinary. Bring things to life in a new way" (EG Conference Presentation, 2016).


The 2016 IBM Cognitive Studio at South by Southwest in Austin, Texas used technology to create an experience beyond a traditional tradeshow exhibit or even hospitality/sales area. It was designed as an experience to ignite the senses through use of immersive technology. A playful environment, not technology, was the focus in the "Dev Playground." The IBM team was also able to gather real-time data throughout the event from over 9,000 visitors, allowing them to make real-time adjustments to the experience as needed throughout the week. (George P. Johnson video, 2016).

Creative disruption

The conversation around event technology must move away from equipment, platforms, and data to how using the best tools can accelerate communication and transform experience. Event technology includes logistical systems that support event organizers and attendees. It also supports human interactions that would not otherwise happen, for example, virtual attendance or by providing ways for introverts to more easily share in the conversation. The real power of event technology is to facilitate people meeting and exchanging ideas in ways that would not otherwise organically happen.

Rich Stone, CEO of ExpoCad, addresses the future of event technology: "In the near future high speed Internet everywhere will have the single largest impact on event technology. As the big tech companies push for global high-speed access, mobile phone technology moves to 5G (download a feature length 4k movie in minutes), speed and bandwidth will change how event technology behaves.

Real-time web based tools will provide a new experience as event tech takes advantage of 5G. Now that Apple and Android devices have Near Field Communication (NFC), the adoption of this technology will completely change how we do business at an event. Lead retrieval, business card exchange, payment systems, information retrieval and registration will take on a new streamlined mobile device method. Our lives as attendees and exhibitors will share an experience only limited by imagination - and data collection will be endless."



"Real-time web based tools will provide a new experience as event tech takes advantage of 5G. Now that Apple and Android devices have Near Field Communication (NFC), the adoption of this technology will completely change how we do business at an event."

Final thoughts

The intention behind this industry white paper was to reveal and describe a brand-new mindset, a new approach to planning meetings and events that we call 'Purposeful Meetings'. On behalf of meetings and event planners, clients and agencies everywhere we set out to explore, in detail, how to plan with deeper meaning, innovation and insight in mind.

The new future of event ROI

We asked some rhetorical questions. Can meetings raise the quotient of insights? Can people leave our meetings and events happier, healthier and more productive than when they arrived? We say **YES** through the Purposeful Meetings Model. The power behind purposeful meetings lies in the ability to weave five, key elements into a human-centric strategy. Focusing the success of the meeting on the ideas generated, the problems solved, the connections made, the impact realized, the memories created and, importantly the productivity and motivation of the participants once they return to work with is the new future of event ROI.

In the spring of 2017, the authors conducted a pilot research study that left us with more questions than answers. However, that is what is exciting about exploratory research and new "big" ideas. The study revealed that 54% of meeting professionals surveyed value or already use the five areas proposed in our model. This finding left us pondering: Is something missing in the model? Does the model not resonate? What is the risk of adopting this model? What is the cost of ignoring it? In addition, 43% of the respondents believed the model would be adopted in the early stage of planning a meeting or event with 26% indicating midway through the meeting, 12% toward the end, and 19% not even sure.

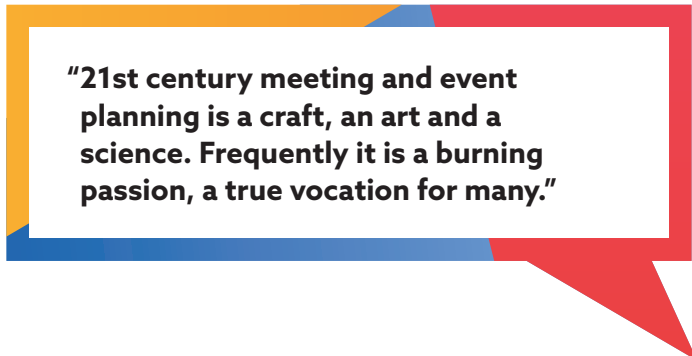
Ruud Janssen, author of the *Event Design Handbook* and Managing Partner of the Event Design Collective, brings it all together noting, "The purposeful meetings research rightfully seeks for the deep understanding of what drives people to behave in certain ways when it comes to events. When events are designed, it is imperative to have absolute clarity on these drivers and to trigger them consciously. The Purposeful Meeting Model is the periodic table for the alchemy of human centric experience."

Purposeful meetings are human-centric experiences

As we conclude, we ask you to shift your meeting strategy back to people, their cognitive and physical performance, their wellbeing at your event *and* in the work they do. *How* people think is as important as *what* they think. *How* people feel is as important as *what* they feel. **Purposeful Meetings are Human-Centric Experiences.** We invite you to join the conversation and add your perspectives, case studies, research and insights at #purposefulmeetings.

Finally, this initiative was inspired by a belief shared between this report's authors, the IMEX Group and PSAV. That belief is that 21st century meeting and event planning is a craft, an art *and* a science. Frequently it is a burning passion, a true vocation for many. We believe that meeting and event planners – many of whom now prefer the title 'event strategist' – are pivotal to the long-term health, growth and success of the organizations they serve, and the communities and countries in which they work. By our definition, a 'Purposeful Meeting Planner' is someone who thrives on human connection and focuses on improving human performance.

We honor, celebrate and encourage your imaginative and tireless efforts to make a purposeful difference – one meeting, one event, one participant at a time.



"21st century meeting and event planning is a craft, an art and a science. Frequently it is a burning passion, a true vocation for many."

References

- Brennan, M. (2015). How sleep affects attendee engagement. *Convene Magazine*, June 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.pcmacconvene.org/features/cmp-series/cmp-series-how-sleep-affects-attendee-engagement-3/>
- Brooks, A. & Lack, L. (2006). A brief afternoon nap following nocturnal sleep restriction: Which nap duration is more recuperative? *SLEEP*, 29(6), 831-840.
- Davis, J. (2015). *Two Awesome Hours: Science-based strategies to harness your best time and get your most important work done*. HarperCollins Publishing: New York, New York.
- Dunbar, R. (2009). The social brain hypothesis and its implications for social evolution. *Annals of Human Biology*, 36 (5), 562-72.
- Dunbar, R., Marriott, A., & Duncan, N. (1997). Human conversational behavior. *Human Nature*, 8(3), 231-246.
- Eisenberger, N. & Lieberman, M. (2009). The pains and pleasures of social life. *Science*, 323 (5916), 290-292.
- George P. Johnson (2016). The IBM Cognitive Studio at SXSW. Video found at <https://www.gpj.com/the-ibm-cognitive-studio-at-sxsw#/>
- Gordon, E. (2000). *Integrative neuroscience: Bringing together biological, psychological, and clinical model of the human brain*. Harwood Academic Publishers: Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Hanson, R. & Mendius, R. (2009). *Buddha's brain: The practical neuroscience of happiness, love & wisdom*. New Harbinger Publications: Oakland, California.
- Janssan, R. (2016). *Event design handbook: How to systematically design events for behaviour change*. Retrieved from <https://www.amazon.com/Event-Design-Handbook-Systematically-EventCanvas/dp/9063694342>
- Kiehner, E. (April 13, 2016). "Our conversations catalysts." EG Conference Presentation. Carmel, California.
- Lieberman, M. D. (2007). The X- and C-systems: The neural basis of automatic and controlled social cognition in E. Harmon-Jones & P. Winkelman (eds.), *Fundamentals of Social Neuroscience* (pp. 290-315). Elsevier Publishing: New York, New York.
- Lieberman, M. (2013). *Social: Why our brains are wired to connect*. Crown Publishing: New York, New York.
- McClellan, V. (October 2016). *Cognitive Marchesa dress lights up the night*. IBM: Internet of Things Blog. Received at <https://www.ibm.com/blogs/internet-of-things/cognitive-marchesa-dress/>
- Rock, D. (2009). *Your Brain at Work: strategies for overcoming distraction, regaining focus, and working smarter all day long*. HarperCollins: New York, New York.
- Rock, D. & Cox, C. (2012). SCARF in 2012: Updating the social neuroscience of collaborating with others. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, 4, 1-15.
- Song, S. (2005). What pets bring to the party. *Time Magazine*. Retrieved at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1015923,00.html>
- Speer, N., Reynolds, J., Swallow, K. & Zacks, J. (2010). Reading stories activates neural representations of visual and motor experiences. *Psychological Science*, 20 (8), 989-999.
- Tang, Y. & Posner, M. (2008). The neuroscience of mindfulness. *NeuroLeadership Journal*, 1, 1-5.
- Subject-Matter Experts Interviewed**
- Carina Bauer, CEO, IMEX Group
- Guy Bigwood, Sustainability Director, MCI Group
- Janet Cheung, Event Wellness and Mindful Practice Expert
- Ruud Janssen, Managing Partner, Event Design Collective
- Ben Moorsom, President & Chief Creative Officer, DEBUT Group
- Kelly Peacy, Founder & CEO, Insight Event Strategy, LLC
- David Peckinpugh, President, Maritz Global Events
- Fiona Pelham, CEO, Positive Impact and Sustainable Events Ltd.
- David Rich, Senior Vice President, George P. Johnson Experience Marketing
- Anja Stas, Chief Commercial Officer, Flanders Meeting and Convention Centre Antwerp
- Rich Stone, CEO, ExpoCad
- Joe Woodard, President, Woodard Events
- Author Bios**
- Janet Sperstad's** professional history reflects her lifelong vocation: driving excellence in meeting and event management execution and education. She has dedicated her career to defining the competencies and career pathways that articulate meeting planning as a design discipline requiring skills in the social sciences, executive leadership, and the cognitive sciences. Her contributions are global in scope and rooted in over 25 years as a meeting professional and executive leader in the corporate and non-profit sectors. She currently leads Madison College's Meeting and Event Management Associate degree program, which she founded in 2002 and recently been selected as Competency Model Champion from the U.S. Department of Labor. Ms. Sperstad has been honored by being inducted into the Events Industry Council Hall of Leaders in 2017.
- Dr. Amanda Cecil** is in her 15th year on the Indiana University's Tourism, Convention and Event Management faculty and 5th year as department chair. As an associate professor, she teaches several courses in event management and international tourism. Dr. Cecil's professional career started in association and corporate event planning prior to joining the IU faculty. Her research interest involves linking business travel and tourism trends to the convention/meeting market. Additionally, Dr. Cecil has scholarly interests in the development of competency-based curriculum models and the impact of experiential learning. Dr. Cecil has served as an associate editor for the *Journal of Convention & Event Tourism*. She was awarded the 2012 PCMA Foundation's Educator Honoree, 2012 "Member of the Year" RISE Award from MPI.
- About IMEX Group**
- The IMEX Group serves the constantly evolving business, education and networking needs of the global meetings, events and incentive travel industry with two high energy, annual trade shows (Frankfurt and Las Vegas). Our sole aim is to unite and advance the meetings industry - doing everything we can to educate, innovate and help our clients make powerful connections with the right people. IMEX: We are all connected.
- About PSAV**
- PSAV is a leading provider in the global event technology services industry delivering creative production, advanced technology and staging to help our customers deliver more dynamic and impactful experiences at their meetings, trade shows and special events. As the event technology provider of choice at nearly 1,500 leading hotels, resorts and convention centers throughout the U.S., Canada, the Caribbean, Mexico, Europe and the Middle East, PSAV's customers comprise event organizers, corporations, trade associations and meeting planners. PSAV is committed to providing thought leadership and education to meeting and event professionals to better prepare them for the future and further strengthen our industry.

