

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY

Meaningful Experiences

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1. Introduction

The experience economy is about more than just offering a staged setting for an experience. The point of departure needs to be the individual's personal experience: his or her everyday world and societal context.

In linking personal, social, cultural and economic experiences and making them manageable in practice, *A New Perspective on the Experience Economy* takes the current state of knowledge in this field a step further. The authors approach the experience economy from the perspective of the individual and his or her potential program of giving meaning to his or her life. We are returning to a human scale in our thought and actions and shift the focus from 'the supplier' and 'the organisation' to 'the individual'. This article describes the foundations of meaningful experiences, the particular design principles that apply to them and how you can bring the whole concept—from the idea to the reality—into actual practice. The experience economy is more than just 'excite me', 'feed me' and 'entertain me'. Businesses and organisations can play a meaningful role in helping the individual to find his or her own way.

At the European Centre for the Experience Economy, as part of the PrimaVera Research Program of the University of Amsterdam we are developing new theories on the Experience Economy through research and collective learning in a community of practice. In this paper we wish to share our early notions of our new perspective on the Experience Economy, where human experience is the starting point of our inquiry.

The main questions we will discuss in the sections of this paper are: 1) What is the nature of human experience? 2) What is the process of creating meaning? 3) What are the characteristics of meaningful experiences? 4) What are the starting points in bringing about meaningful experiences? 5) What are the design principles of meaningful experiences? 6) What are the stages in designing and developing meaningful experiences?

2. Human Experiences

In this section we discuss the nature of personal, social/cultural and economic experiences and lay the foundation for the new perspective on the Experience Economy.

Experiences are personal

We asked over 300 people, participants in our executive training programs, which experiences actually changed their lives and will never forget. The answers are all in the personal sphere and are turning points in their lives. The answers deal with life

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and death issues, the loss of beloved ones, the celebration of birth, the first encounter with your great love, the success of your first job, deep friendships and the end of an intense relationship.

If we take a closer look and analyse these experiences, we can speak of very personal experiences which have to do with encountering yourself, seeing yourself in the mirror in the context of a love relationship, experiences that change your perspective on life considerably. These personal experiences determine the value that we attach to life. They determine which motives are relevant for us and give our life direction and meaning.

If we ask the same groups of participants the question; which experiences, in a context with other people, will you never forget in your life? The answers are like celebrating a sports championship, meeting people in an other culture, travel, concerts, cultural manifestations, extreme performance of a work team, the fall of the Berlin wall, 9/11, working and studying abroad. All these experiences are both personal and social. These are deep experiences and they have created substantial meaning in the lives of the people engaged.

If we ask the third question: which are experiences that you will never forget in your life where you actually paid for? We receive answers that have to do with the first time flying in an airplane, my first car, my first house, special holidays, sport games, wedding party. All these experiences are personal, some more or less social and cultural and have to do with discovery, adventures and new initiatives.

The common denominator in these experiences is that they have a high emotional impact, they have to do with letting go of old patterns, and discovering new frontiers, new directions and focus are determined and there is an increase of energy. Keleman (1974) states; excitement is what bonds us to the world.

3. The Process of creating meaning

Creating meaning can be described as a process, starting as perception through the senses (see, hear, smell, touch, taste) to emotions leading to an 'Erlebniss'. This 'Erlebniss' adds to 'Erfahrung' and subsequently to 'meaning'. 'Erlebniss' can be defined as a subset of 'Erfahrung'. Ronald Laing (1967) even defines humans as the sum total of 'Erfahrung'. It deals with issues like learning and consciousness and the question what an 'Erlebniss' means in a particular situation and context. The individual poses questions as: how and why do I end up in this situation? How do I deal with the situation? What does it say about me? Do I want this 'Erlebniss'? How do I want to change myself or the situation? To sum total of a series of 'Erlebniss', good or bad feed into 'Erfahrung', good or bad. Reflection on the cumulative experiences leads to personal insight and possibly the means to personal change or transformation.

We define human experience as follows (Boswijk et al, 2005): Experience in the sense of 'Erfahrung' is a continuous interactive process of doing and undergoing, of action and reflection, from cause to consequence, that provides meaning to the individual in several contexts of his life. Experience as 'Erfahrung' causes the individual to change the perspective on self and/or the world around him. This definition builds on theory from John Dewey (1938) and Anna Snel (2005).

4. Characteristics of meaningful experiences

What do we need to do in order to bring about a meaningful experience in a commercial setting? In answering this question, it is important that one recognise that experience is essentially a form of behaviour. It is a process in which feeling plays an important role. The logic of emotions determines how an individual deals with both his or her environment and the people in it, while looking for experiences that will give meaning to his or her life.

In other words, experiences are not static quantities like products. Experiences occur in a process in which interactions take place in a certain setting – whether or not a physical one – between the individual and other people, including perhaps the offering party, which can be an economic party. This makes experiences, just like services, intangible. We describe the characteristics of an experience based on an extensive literature study (Boswijk et al., 2005) from the perspective of the individual. To these characteristics, we add the characteristics of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This results in the following set of characteristics:

1. There is a heightened concentration and focus, involving all one’s senses.
2. One’s sense of time is altered.
3. One is touched emotionally.
4. The process is unique for the individual and has intrinsic value.
5. There is contact with the ‘raw stuff’, the real thing.
6. One does something and undergoes something.
7. There is a sense of playfulness
8. One has a feeling of having control of the situation.
9. There is a balance between the challenge and one’s own capacities.
10. There is a clear goal.

Every meaningful experience must satisfy all of these characteristics, and that is no easy task. The meeting between the individual – or group of individuals – and the company takes place in a particular experience setting, both physical and virtual. That is the environment in which the interaction can take place between the individual and the offering party (or parties). At this time we are in the completion stage of empirical research testing the above characteristics. The early results confirm their validity (Thijssen, Peelen and Bink, 2006).

5. Starting points in bringing about meaningful experiences

The new perspective on the experience economy has its point of departure in the individual’s desires, motives and hidden programme of learning. The fundamental principles for creating a meaningful experience are logically based on the following points of departure:

1. Think about things from the psychodynamic perspective of the individual and try to contribute to his or her possibilities. The individual experiences an *individualised treatment* that *means something* to him or her.
2. The individual can determine for him or herself how much control he or she wants in the process of co-creation. The offering party focuses on the process of *giving meaning* to the individual customer, despite the networks and mass character of other customers. This way, the value creation takes place in the individual.
3. Consider the customer as a ‘guest’ and create a culture of hospitality.
4. Break through any dogmas and pre-existing notions if necessary; change the paradigm. Solve any seemingly irresolvable dilemmas.

5. The creation of the meaningful-experience setting takes place in an interactive process between the individual and the offering party.
6. Show respect.

6. Stages in the process of developing and realising meaningful-experience concepts

The five stages in the co-creation of experience

The process of experience (co-) creation involves five essential stages that have to do with:

1. The creativity and the innovative capacity in creating a vision on moments of contact and meaningful-experience settings and the concepts that are developed as a result of these;
2. The actual specification of meaningful-experience settings and market propositions to interested target groups: propositions for bonding and entering into a relationship with customers and for distinguishing yourself in the market in doing so;
3. The information technology that is necessary to enable and support the meaningful-experience settings. Which architecture is required for this? Where does the value creation actually take place? Does the organisation possess the necessary core competencies for developing and maintaining the architecture?
4. Finding and training the people who need to do the work. Are the employees capable of developing the behaviour required for making the event a truly meaningful experience for visitors, guests, users, or customers? How do you train people? Do they have the right skills? Are they independent, flexible and capable of entrepreneurship? Are they able to make contact with people? People are the absolute critical factor in bringing about a meaningful experience.
5. Determining the economic perspective: What is the business model? What is going to be earning us the money? Brilliant concepts and ideas sometimes prove to be unfruitful.

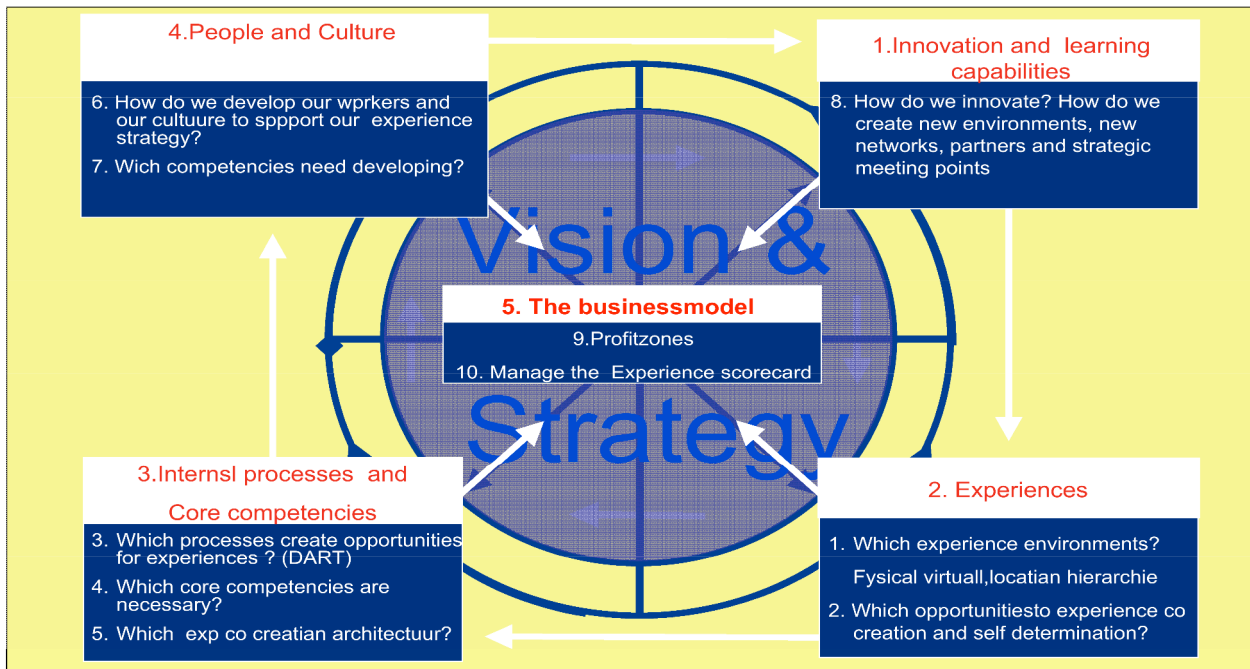


Figure 1. *The Stages of Experience (Co)-Creation*

It is advised to go through these stages every time. Is the concept that turned out to be successful in the recent past going to be successful in the future as well? How do we keep the experience proposition fresh and attractive? Which factors force us to develop new concepts together with customers and users and fellow suppliers? We will be discussing the first two stages in greater detail below. A number of things are made clear in Table 1.

Table 1.

Ten characteristics	Six starting points	Five stages of development
1. There is heightened concentration and focus. All five senses are engaged.	1. The individual experiences an individualised treatment of meaning.	1. Innovation and creativity in developing experience concepts
2. One's sense of time is altered.	2. Value creation takes place in the individual. The supplier focuses on this process of giving meaning.	2. Development of actual meaningful-experience propositions; these involve co-creation and self-direction.
3. One is touched emotionally.	3. The customer is considered a 'guest' within a culture of hospitality.	3. Internal processes and core competencies.
4. The process is unique for the individual.	4. Solve any seemingly irresolvable dilemmas.	4. The people and culture who have to put the chosen experience strategy into practice
5. There is contact with the 'raw stuff', the real thing.	5. The creation of an experience setting is an interactive process between the individual and the supplier.	5. The business model with which the money is earned.
6. One both does and undergoes something.	6. Respect	
7. There is an element of playfulness (flow).		
8. One has the feeling of being in control of the situation.		
9. There is a balance between the challenge and one's own capacities.		
10. There is a clear goal.		

Here we will highlight the first and second stage of experience co-creation:

The first stage: innovation, creative and learning capacity

The first stage of meaningful-experience creation is to conceive of and bring about new concepts in a creative way. Letting go of existing propositions and traditional ways of thinking is difficult in a business setting. At the same time, it is important to learn from earlier meaningful experiences. What didn't work, what did work and why?

Our own meaningful experiences, the logic that dominates our thinking, as well as that of people around us, can form an obstacle for our mental process when we face a problem or a challenge. By mentally distancing yourself and focusing your attention on something else for a while, you can give your unconscious thought processes free rein. Your intuition will then lead to creative solutions. Characteristic for this is that other contexts 'between which no connections had previously existed, are flashed together' (De Bruyn and De Bruyn, 1999). The invention of Velcro, for example, resulted from someone's observation of the way burs cling to the fabric of his clothes.

Ideas ultimately need to converge, to come together in the design of a meaningful experience. This is a generally cohesive description of the meaningful experience that is to be co-created, which will bring about a transformation in the way

one thinks, relates and acts. A shift takes place in the way people view certain things or people in life and in what we value. Their relationship with friends, family or acquaintances can change as a result. They will adjust their behaviour. A dinner prepared by the students of Jamie Oliver at Fifteen in London – and now in Amsterdam as well – can make you aware of how social motives could lead a well known chef to help disadvantaged young people to develop themselves into true masters in the kitchen and the restaurant. LEGO buffs who were able to indulge themselves for an entire day at a fair organised by a community of users, able to build all their designs, increased their self-respect and saw their dream come true. There is a brilliant architect hiding in them after all! Thanks to the dinner that ING Private Banking organised, the entrepreneurs who had to sell their business were emotionally better able to take leave of their ‘baby’ and became enthusiastic for the world that is now beckoning them.

The second stage: the creation of a meaningful-experience setting

First of all, any moments of contact that could take place between the offering party and the consumer need to be identified. These should also include the moments of contact among customers themselves and those between related offering parties.

Which meaningful-experience settings can we think of, where can possibilities for dialogue with the consumer be created, and where can access to the offering party be created for the consumer? How transparent is your company for the consumer? Where does this make sense, and where not? To what extent are guests and clients able to direct their own experience themselves? Do we know the living conditions and the fundamental needs of potentially interested customers? Which groups will appreciate which kinds of bonds and relationships?

Take notice: the concept of an experience setting can mean different things and be interpreted in different ways. For Pine and Gilmore (1999), it means a physical and/or virtual environment in which entertainment is important, but where educational, escapist, aesthetic and design aspects also play a role. Their perspective is one in which the experience of the environment is staged and directed as fully as possible. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) talk about an experience environment as a space that enables dialogue, access and transparency – in fact a process of co-creation – in which both parties are more or less in a balance at the helm. This is a radically different view, especially in terms of who is controlling the experience.

Despite this difference, both Pine and Gilmore (1999) and Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) focus on how to engage the customer and the consumer in a different way with the company. With them, the perspective of the company remains at the forefront. Later we will see that there are forms where the community of customers and fans will determine what the company has to do.

The physical setting

There are countless examples of physical settings that have made an enormous impact on the visitor or guest as a result of their design and architecture. An interesting book in this regard is Christopher Alexander’s *The Timeless Way of Building* (1979). The title says it all. We are all familiar with buildings that are impressive and special due to their architectural beauty. In ancient times, the Greeks and the Romans were aware of the impact of space and the three-dimensional effect on humans. The way they built temples illustrates that. Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw and La Scala in Milan also demonstrate the kind of effect a building or an environment can have on its visitors or the concerts held there.

The quality of the design, the reputation of the musicians performing there, the traditions – everything contributes towards making such a building a historical monument. In the retail world, advanced techniques are being used to influence the senses and, with them, the purchasing behaviour of the public. One trend is to place new retail concepts in historic buildings. Several examples of this can be found, like the Apple Store on Regent Street in London or in an old post office in New York's Soho and Nike Town on London's Oxford Circus. The Prada shops in New York are another example. Designed by the architect Rem Koolhaas, they are dominated by design, architecture and the experience of space. You literally need to look for the products.

Yet another example is the Lairesse Apotheek in Amsterdam. This pharmacy was designed by the chemist/owner herself, in collaboration with Concrete Architects. The design has already won three international prizes, although there has not been any recognition from the branch itself as yet. There is a story and a philosophy behind the design: allopathic medicines are presented on an equal basis with homeopathic medicines, all cabinets are transparent, the preparation room is transparent and the floor is made of a special material into which leaves from the 'tree of life' have been pressed. The trunk of this tree is positioned symbolically in the middle of the pharmacy: its sap stands for the capability of medicines to prolong one's life. The photo of the pharmacy is intriguing, but it is only by entering into the pharmacy itself that you can really experience this remarkable setting.

The virtual setting

Besides the physical setting, the virtual setting has also greatly increased in importance. For large stretches of time each day, people communicate with each other via the Internet. The Internet has made it possible for 'everyone' to communicate with 'everyone'. In their book *Blur* (1998), Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer describe ten criteria that a virtual environment and an offering on the Internet should take into account. These features are still valid today.

The third, fourth and fifth stages of experience co-creation follow from the first and second stage and include the design and the development of the internal processes and core competencies (stage 3) aligning with the experience concept developed, the engagement of the people in the organisation and the culture (stage 4) to put the chosen strategy into practice. And last but not least, address the business model and define how money is earned (stage 5). Any experience concept will fail if the business model is not considered beforehand and continuously adjusted as learning proceeds in time.

6. Design principles

In terms of the principles of design, we will start by looking at the first-generation experience economy. Second, we will be treating the principles of experience co-creation. After that, we will be briefly discussing communities that arise organically where there is little if any directing going on by an offering party. The degree of directing and thus of control by the offering party decreases the more things are designed spontaneously and organically.

In order to be able to determine the principles for designing meaningful experiences, we need to know how we can impact the individual in whatever moves him or her. Theatre science offers a number of good starting points in this regard.

Design principles for first-generation experience settings

Here we will be considering five simple principles for first-generation experience settings (Pine and Gilmore, 1999).

1. Theme

Does the concept have a theme? Does it have a story? Can the visitor clearly recognise what it is about? Does it have a history and a 'storyline'? Is there a philosophy behind it that visitors and customers can clearly recognise? How do we know this? During a recent tour of shop 'experiences' we asked participants if they could identify a theme for each shop. 'Crust and Crumbs' on Haarlemmerstraat in Amsterdam is all about authentic breads with a crispy crust. Manfred Meeuwig's 'Check Your Oil' is about olive oil from casks and the authenticity of oils and seasonings. The theme of the exclusive lingerie shop 'Marlies Dekkers' on Witte de Withstraat in Rotterdam is: 'In the future everybody will be famous for 15 minutes'. Other good examples are 'De Efteling', with the theme of fairytales, and 'Autostadt', with mobility and cars as its theme.

2. Harmony

Are all the impressions that a visitor gets harmonized by means of positive cues? At the Lairese Apotheek in Amsterdam, all impressions are in sync with each other. You can experience this pharmacy's vision through your senses as it were. Quite often, however, impressions are not in harmony with each other and cues may even have a negative impact.

3. Eliminate negative cues

Even an otherwise beautiful environment can often leave a negative impression on the visitor. It could be overfull ashtrays or boxes stacked up in a stunning lobby. If you start paying attention to them, you can discover distracting elements in practically any environment.

4. Memorabilia

Are there things that you would like to take home with you to remind you of your visit and commemorate the experience? We all know the little souvenir shops in tourist destinations, but also the museum shops where you can buy reproductions, cards and books that can be lasting keepsakes. Most museums and amusement parks, such as Disney, lead you past this kind of shop. Naturally this is also possible on a qualitatively higher level, whereby visitors are given (or can buy) meaningful souvenir that they will use for a long time. (Think of Pine and Gilmore's definition of a memorable experience.)

5. Engage all five senses

Many experience settings are based on visual impressions. The rest of the senses often remain unengaged. We have already discussed the importance of the sense of smell. Automobile manufacturers have special experts who make sure a new car smells just right. When Porsche switched from an air-cooled motor to a water-cooled one, they received a tremendous number of complaints. What was the matter? The familiar Porsche sound had disappeared. Porsche worked with might and man to develop a new exhaust system that sounded as much as possible like the familiar old one. These

five principles pertaining to the first-generation 'experience economy' offer simple instruments with which physical experience settings can be tested. From our experience with the second generation, we can add a sixth principle to this group:

6. Naturalness: one whole

The whole concept must make a natural and authentic impression. Some spaces seem as if they were merely thrown together and therefore feel uncomfortable. The entire concept should give you the feeling that you are welcome; all the various elements should feel right together.

We have given a lot of attention to the rational elements in terms of creating an experience setting. But what really counts is obviously the feeling we have about the whole.

Design principles for second-generation experience settings

In the case of second-generation experience settings, we can speak of experience co-creation.

The principle of co-creation

In all phases in the development and realisation the meaningful-experience concept, the customer's contribution is leading. The idea of co-creation not only needs to be evident within the experience setting ultimately created, but also during its conception and development. We've already abandoned the idea that it's the supplier who decides what the customer wants. The conviction that customers are unable to indicate what they want and are therefore of limited value in developing (breakthrough) innovations has been rejected.

People are the directors of their own lives and can to a certain extent say what they want. But it's too much to expect them to be able to make the translation for the 'producer' *in advance* by telling them what things they should initiate. Developing an innovation or an experience concept involves a process of thinking, doing and reflecting. Both parties can certainly work together in this process, and they will book more success through their collaboration than either one could do individually. Important in this regard are four building blocks that we find in the work of Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004). They speak of the DART principle:

1. Dialogue

Dialogue means interactivity, being engaged with each other and listening to each other. Both parties (supplier and customer) intend to accomplish something. It also means that attention is given to the interests of both parties. This requires both a location in which the dialogue can take place and a number of rules with which both parties must comply in order to be able to hold a useful dialogue. The principle of 'learning by sharing' holds here: the company learns through the dialogue with the customer and vice versa.

2. Access

The traditional focus for a company has been the transfer of ownership from the supplier to the customer. The supplier creates a valuable product and, by means of a transaction, the customer gets the product. The customer is increasingly interested in the experience of the product and not in owning it (see Rifkin's *The Age of Access* (2000), Chapter One). Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) argue for separating having access to a product or service from owning it. You can achieve reach and access by

making information available and by providing instruments that regulate the access to that information. At any given moment while the sailboat you ordered is being built, you can see how far along the builders are and even intervene if you would prefer to have things done differently (www.summersethouseboats.com).

Telebanking offers you a limited access to the bank – that is to say, to your own account. You could imagine that you can gain access to a certain lifestyle. You don't want to drive just one car of a certain brand, but rather a number of cars, from the most expensive to an MPV that you could drive on rugged terrain.

Access means that being able to get information that is relevant to you, simply and easily. You could easily and readily consult a doctor online or by telephone, for example. This could have a preventative effect: you adapt your behaviour before you become ill or unhealthy.

In India, farmers can show the results of their harvest via web cams and the Internet. Based on the images they show, they can then obtain the proper pesticides and won't simply have to experiment.

3. Risk assessment

Risk here means the risk that the consumer runs. We have become accustomed to marketing communication only presenting the advantages of products and services. It is not yet common that also the disadvantages are presented in all honesty. But that is something that belongs to the principle of co-creation. Risk assessment is an important theme in co-creation relationships.

Risk assessment also has to do with the risks that the company runs. Lego encountered the following problem. Communities of Lego consumers developed specific software for the operating system of Mind Storm Robotics. As it turned out, their software was better than the one Lego itself had developed. So the key question was, who was ultimately responsible for that product that was developed? And what about the patent? This presents a complicated legal dilemma.

4. Transparency

In the past, companies have profited from the disparity between what the company knows and what the consumer knows. This disparity has been melting away in recent years like snow in summer. Socially responsible entrepreneurship, openness and transparency are requirements of modern business. There are even symbolic examples of this. Volkswagen built a transparent factory in Dresden, where its Phaeton is manufactured. So-called 'genius bars' have been built in the new Apple Stores: the technicians help you to solve your problems; the back office turns into the front office and you can actually see just how the workplace works.

These building blocks must be seen in combination with each other. Value creation no longer takes place within the company: value is created in the individual.

Design principles for communities: A third generation?

With the advent of the Internet and the possibilities it offers we see a huge rise in the number of spontaneous communities of people who find each other according to an interest they have in common. That could be anything. Some communities revolve around the use of certain products others have to do with hobbies, while still others are concerned with learning settings. Communities are both physical and virtual. A Google search will turn up an overwhelming number of communities. A few examples from the many Lego communities: Club Bionicle, Lego Treinen Club, Lego

Star Wars Club, Michel's Lego Club, Southern California LEGO Train Club, De Bouwsteen Lego Club, Play On!

Lego World is an annual, four-day event in Zwolle organised by De Bouwsteen Lego Club, an independent organisation of Lego builders and collectors (see the film on the DVD). It is the largest Lego event in the world that is not organised by Lego itself. The promotion is done by Foxkids and Intertoys takes care of the ticket sales. In return, those companies are given a sales point at the event. The trade-fair venue De IJsselhallen is made available for a special price. The Dutch army takes care of the security and the general and technical support services. The catering is outsourced. Volunteers from 'De Bouwsteen' direct and implement the event. The Lego company itself plays only a modest role: it provides hundreds of thousands of Lego pieces and a truck with the newest models, along with the historical Lego models. The management also devotes time to the event.

Each year there are more than 40,000 visitors who pay an entrance fee of about €12.50 and buy food, beverages, and Lego products there. Traders (collectors) have stands on a limited scale, for which they pay a fee.

The interesting thing about Lego World is that this meaningful experience is the initiative of an independent club and that Lego merely plays a facilitating and supporting role, with clear agreements being made about the use of the Lego name.

Lego has its hands full (sometimes also legally) with such initiatives. In fact the communities do what Lego itself promotes. They learn, develop, discover and build things *themselves*, and then of course there are also initiatives that have to do with the identity of Lego itself. In the following section, we will be taking a closer look at the development of a community from a business perspective.

7. Conclusions

The development of meaningful-experience concepts cannot take place without the direct participation of the (potential) customer. Generally speaking, a very large percentage of new innovations will fail (Cooper, 1987). Much capital is destroyed because companies invest for too long in unsuccessful ideas and concepts. Such waste can be avoided if the potential customer is directly involved from the very beginning. Merely surveying these customers will not provide sufficient certainty. Time and again, the intentions of those surveyed turn out to be different from their actual behaviour. Measuring actual behaviour is therefore clearly preferable. If the experience is not meaningful upon a customer's first visit or after a number of repeat visits, the concept can be dropped at an early stage. That way, major investments in concept development and marketing can be avoided. If the concept is demonstrably appealing, a quick and profitable rollout is a feasible possibility – provided the company establishes itself at the right locations. Physical meaningful-experience concepts are bound to a location. The choice of location must therefore be made carefully.

In this paper, the emphasis lay on how we can develop and help bring about meaningful experiences and what this means for one's own organisation.

Just like individuals, organisations find themselves in an area of tension between the act of discovering – looking outside – and the act of organising and

bringing something about. Bringing about meaningful experiences requires that organisations renew themselves and set out to do something, but it also makes high demands in terms of reliability.

The creation of meaningful experiences begins with focusing on the meaning of human experiences. What are they? What do they involve? Ten characteristics of meaningful experiences were presented in order to provide clarity about what should be brought about. These characteristics are at present being tested in empirical settings.

We have seen that meaningful experiences take place in one or more settings. Organisations will need to create a single environment or an entire portfolio of settings in physical and/or virtual space. These settings should be connected with each other to ensure a 'flow' in the giving of meaning. One environment serves to inform people of the experience concept and to lead to the ultimate setting where the climax of the experience takes place.

We have presented principles with which settings in the physical and the virtual world must comply in order to ensure that a desired meaningful experience can come about. In addition, we have discussed the principles and the building blocks for experience co-creation. We have indicated that co-creation can only be successful if the customer and his or her values form the focus and a structured approach is followed, in which the customer functions as co-creator.

The concept of the experience economy is still in the pre-theory stage and lacks empirical evidence. The research we conduct at the University of Amsterdam aims at adding to theory from an integrative human perspective and by interpretative concept development we are now in the process of studying cases and developing propositions to be tested in practice. In this way we aim to contribute to both theory development and the design and development of innovative experience practices.

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