

**Executive Course ‘Value Creation through Experience’
By the European Centre for the Experience Economy
April 17-22, 2005, La Bisbal d’Empordà, Spain**

Short summary and some personal impressions

Sunday April 17

Around 8 pm Albert Boswijk welcomed everyone with cava at the wonderful Castell d’Empordà. After dinner people talked and discussed as if they knew each other for years already.

Monday April 18

We started the course with a real ‘Learning by Sharing’ experience as we were challenged to mention three different types of experiences in any of the categories of personal life shaping experiences, social experiences and experiences that you actually paid for. By sharing them with someone else of the group who you did not know yet, we got to know each other better and learned about the type of experiences mentioned in each category. Then each of us wrote our own definition of ‘experience’ which obviously resulted in as many definitions as participants... As all this was put into the computer, Thomas Thijssen presented us the output the next day.

After that, we listened to Joe Pine’s state of the Experience Economy in which he focused more than he ever did before on transformations. ‘You are what you charge for’: with experiences you charge the client for the time being with you and there are several ways to charge. He emphasized the need to refresh experiences to get repeat visitors. But how many (staged) experiences can people handle? Then he focused on authenticity, or better, render authenticity. This is a sort ‘as-if-authenticity’ (personal interpretation, eb). In other words, if you know well how to stage authenticity, the consumer will accept it as long as he perceives it as authentic. A lot of questions that the group asked him were put in the computers and were answered by Joe after the break. An interesting discussion emerged on the real versus the fake and I think that we were left with that question until the end as Joe finished with ‘You can’t render authenticity to all the people all the time’. So, how to find the right balance for today’s consumers?

Then each of us chose a coach to share our business case with him and some other participants. Interesting to see the overlap in the struggle that each of us had while the cases in itself were so different from each other. In my group participated Alie from the Haagse Hogeschool, Fred from Wessanen Nederland and the next day Kim from Warm with Senses. On Monday we only managed to discuss two business cases. On Tuesday we discussed them all and were able to really go in-depth. The basic point of discussion for all of us was ‘how can experiences be created and offered to our clients or to our own staff?’ Authenticity played an important role in all the four cases.

Intellectual input was given on Monday by Anna Snel’s presentation. She provided us with a review of the key literature to lay a fundament under what we are actually talking about this week. From people’s reactions it was clear that most of us did not know that there has been

written so much on this topic. Some were dazzled: how to deal with this all? How to apply it in business? Later on during the program, Albert Boswijk, Thomas Thijssen and Ed Peelen presented their new book with many practical examples as well as there were many presentations by 'real' cases throughout the course.

Tuesday April 19

The development of society was illustrated with a presentation of Jempi Moens of Fresh Forward in which he, with a lot of colourful images, illustrated how society moves on 'waves' of periods of approximately 50 years. Jempi started with telling us his self-steering personal development, a good example of how one can shape his own life! As (western) society now is in the rising phase characterized by self-confidence, freedom, self-expression and explorative behaviour, Jempi advised everyone to focus these days on these strong points regarding his or her own business case: it's time for the Experience Economy now!

Then we saw an interview with E. Köster on DVD about the psychology of the senses. He started with saying 'everything is an experience I don't think that one experience is more an experience than another experience'. Illustrated with many examples, he warned for staging experiences, rendering authenticity and the awareness that people today have about experiencing the experiences, etc. Help! How can people have such a different views on experiences. It's a pity that Joe Pine just left and that we could not have a discussion with both of them at that moment. Interesting was Köster's statement that many food product launches fail because of a lack of proper research methods.

We continued with the senses with Kim van der Leest. She argued that there is a world of senses like colours, odours, etc. that could help enhance experiences. But again, it should be done in a subtle manner. So, risk can be decreased by investigating the balance.

Our senses were really challenged in a 'taste and art' workshop by Angelique Schmeinck. It was really impressive how she managed to un-block us by toasting with a glass of Cava that did not taste like Cava at all. She re-connected us with ourselves by showing us how she actually detracted the 'Cava': transparent juice from red tomatoes! By using very creative top cuisine skills she pro-shaped (or transformed?) us into beginning taste experts. We had again a real 'learning by sharing' experience (is that the trick for real experiences?!)

As an appetizer of our trip to Barcelona, a presentation on the city of Gaudi was given by Yvonne Nieuwenhuijs. With authentic slides she explained how Gaudi managed to create the image of Barcelona. The next day, Yvonne shared her knowledge with a small group of people joining her on a cultural-historical tour through Barcelona.

Wednesday April 20

Mark Hanssen explained to us how LEGO creates experiences¹. LEGO constantly deals with the question 'how can you keep challenging kids?' LEGO is education, it is learning by playing. LEGO considers their customers, e.g. the kids, as the future designers of LEGO. The

¹ Unfortunately, I missed half of his presentation because I was preparing the first part of this log that was going to be distributed among the group on the bus ride to Barcelona.

knowledge is with the client, with the consumer. Their needs and their wishes tell you what you as a company have to do. To Mark it is clear: 'if you don't know who your customer is, you'd better stop. They define the experience so you have to identify them'. Therefore, they have 'kids-scanners' walking around the globe on a continuous basis to get all important information about kids into the LEGO company. The next step is to have those little LEGO consumers participate themselves into building their future experiences. Mark showed us the LEGO communities, their fundament for any experience innovation in which the Internet plays an increasingly important role. A very interesting case.

Fred Lingg told us about the ACHMEA health centres².

A two hour bus drive led us to the 'Vila Olimpica' of Barcelona where we arrived a little late and thus had a quick lunch at Bestial, a trendy restaurant at the beach. Then the group was split up in two: a few left with Yvonne for the Barcelona Gaudi experience and the majority of the group took off with Jerome Severin of Young Urbans and Ruud Tompot of Mindmovers on the Barcelona 'E-tour'. From Bestial we walked along the beach to the funicular that took us to the Mies van der Rohe Pavilion, an example of timeless architecture. From there we took the metro to El Raval and the Gothic district³. Both tours ended in a typical Catalan restaurant named El Racó de la Vila where we had authentic Catalan food. Around 00:30 we took a cab to Club 13 at Plaza Reial where we had a drink, a chat and some of us a real dancing experience. At 03 am our bus driver took us from Plaza de Catalunya back to the castle in La Bisbal d'Empordà. As loud and awake people entered the bus, as quiet and sleepy they got out at 05 am...

Thursday April 21

Bert Kranendonk told us how he managed to convince the Heineken board of his innovative plans to give new meaning and function to the former Heineken brewery in the city centre of Amsterdam. He ensured them that the 'bottle ride' in which each visitor experiences how a bottle entering the brewery becomes a Heineken bottle ending up at a party, would be a much better and more effective way to market Heineken than traditional marketing tools like advertising. Visitors feel how it is to be a Heineken bottle... Nice idea, but a difficult job to realise, as there were no reference projects, the designer was the realising body at the same time, he had a fixed budget, etc. But he managed: after 5 years of talking and 9 months of realizing plans, the Heineken Experience was a fact and Heineken is still more than happy with it. Here again, refreshment is important. Every now and then new innovations are satisfying the visitors. Bert taught Heineken how to do this and he continued creating new concepts and guiding innovation processes.

Duncan Stutterheim fascinated us with a presentation of his business ID&T. It was one of the two presentations in which I did not take any notes to not miss a word of what he was saying. Remarkable was that some parts of the company that started as fun, as a hobby, have been growing so fast and have become so big, that they reached a point at which, unfortunately according to Duncan, market research needs to be done now. Refreshment of innovations is

² See documentation. I could not attend because of some organizational tasks that needed to be done.

³ I can not present an objective summary of the tour as I was occupied with organizational tasks.

the order of the day at ID&T. Exclusiveness is one of the secrets here. And the slogan is ‘fuck it all’.

Brian Boswijk showed us how he with his company Interdit managed to get 100 to 120 people together at forbidden and hidden locations in Amsterdam to prepare them a semi- illegal dinner. Abandoned spaces were cleaned and equipped for the occasion and guests were invited by sms. The thrill of acting illegal and not knowing whether the police would show up was the kick for both the organization as well for the guests. Again, the keyword here is exclusiveness. Now, Brian runs Club 11, a restaurant/club on the 11th floor of the former post office next to Central Station in Amsterdam.

Rob Wagemans showed us how Concrete Architects provokes with its original and daring design⁴. In no time and in a very enthusiastic way, he dazzled us with many of their concepts, ideas, and most of all their ‘fuck-it-all-way’ of approaching the world around them as architects. Experience it yourself in the Lairesse pharmacy in Amsterdam, the supperclub restaurant in Amsterdam or Roma, the coffee company in Amsterdam, or in one of the many other places that Concrete Architects touched and transformed.

The Schiphol Experience ‘Dreamport Schiphol’ was explained to us by Marcel Goossens of DST Experience Communication⁵. Dreamport Schiphol consists in the transformation of the roof of Schiphol airport into a 70% entertainment/30% education area so that Schiphol airport becomes a destination in itself. The aim is to have people stay longer at Schiphol airport so that Schiphol Airport can make profit. He argued that they are anticipating the need for a memorable event. The audience was quite critical about this case.

Chip Conley told us about the development of his company Joie de Vivre Hospitality, with which he won the world’s ‘Experience Stager of the Year’ award in 2001. He creates niche boutique hotels dedicated to the adjectives described in a lifestyle representing magazine. Brands are mirrors! He is not only creating his hotels in that way, it is also ‘Yvette’ on the website that matches the client’s wishes. And, moreover, it is the whole corporate culture that he designs that way by working with, among others, ‘work climate surveys’ and an ‘open door policy’ for which he won the 6th ‘Best Company to Work for in California’ award.

Friday April 22

The course organizers asked us what more we would like to focus on. Some of the needs, remarks, comments and ideas of the course participants were the following:

- A focus on Experience Society instead of on the Experience Economy.
- What do the course participants consider the 3 success stories and the 3 failures out of all the experience examples that were presented this week?
- What are the future values? As a company, what to focus on in the future?
- Experiences and ethics.
- What kind of people/staff do you need behind the economics of experiences?
- Difference real fake and fake real.

⁴ The presentation was in Dutch so I was listening and translating for our non-Dutch participant(s).

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- Order of course content: short introduction on Experience Economy, then the practical cases and in the middle some fundamental lectures, a better mix.
- Create an experience exchange space on the website of the European Centre.

Albert Boswijk presented their new book that will be published in May 'Een nieuwe kijk op de Experience Economy. Belevissen van betekenis'. Furthermore he expressed the need for more research on the effectiveness of experiences and the hope for future collaborations with all of the course participants. An important research questions is, for example, where is the money going in traditional marketing and where is it going in the experience marketing?

Then Steven Olthof of KPMG Business Innovation handed out a white paper of a 'strategic experience journey', a tool developed to learn your way into the future. In his presentation he focused on different levels of perspectives from a reactive to a generative level with an increase effect of intervention.

Before having our final lunch together there was some time to spend on our own business cases. Instead, with two other participants we reflected on what we experienced this week. We left pen, paper and castle behind en had an interesting conversation while we discovered an antique store almost next door, green fields, flowers and birds and in the distance a beautiful castle...

During lunch we discussed the three questions that the course organizers asked us to reflect on: what did you learn, what did you experience and what are you going to do? After lunch everyone expressed his or her course experience in three words on top of the castle's tower: inspiring, sharing, friendship, relationships, diversity, de-blocking, etc., etc.

This is just a very short - and therefore incomplete - summary of all the presentations, workshops and tours that we experienced during the course. The input of information, knowledge, ideas, inspiration and more than that has been overwhelming. Digestion and reflection is needed to absorb, connect, link and select strategically what to do with this all. Please, join, complement, discuss and share your experiences in the future!

Thank you all,
Esther Binkhorst