



Beyond the 'Wow': Engineering Events for Lasting Change

Thank you to our speakers:

[Katrin Stefansdottir](#), Senior Lecturer, [Sheffield Hallam University](#)

[Lisa Schulteis](#), Founder, [ElectraLime Marketing](#)

Thank you to our moderator: [Rob Davidson](#), Managing Director, [MICE Knowledge](#)

What happens when the lights go down and attendees return to their day-to-day lives? That was the central question explored at MESA's latest Meeting Planner Forum, **"Beyond the 'Wow': Engineering Events for Lasting Change."**

Rather than measuring event success by immediate excitement, memorable production or the number of "wow" moments created, the discussion challenged planners to think more intentionally about **what attendees should understand, feel and ultimately do differently because of an event.**

Moderated by **Rob**, the session brought together **Katrin** and **Lisa** to explore the attendee journey, outcome-first event design, cognitive shifts, behaviour change and the role of technology in extending an event's impact beyond the venue. Drawing on research, neuroscience and practical event experience, the conversation offered a compelling reminder that the most valuable event moments may not always be the most spectacular ones - and that lasting impact requires thoughtful design before, during and after the event.

10 Key Takeaways

1. **Start with the outcome, not the event format** - Before thinking about the stage, speakers, sessions or production, ask the *Monday Morning Test*: **What should attendees do differently when they return to work?** Defining the desired outcome first provides a clear reference point for every subsequent design decision
2. **Think beyond the traditional attendee journey** - The conference experience begins well before someone walks through the doors and continues after they leave. Katrin's research highlighted the importance of understanding the full individual conference journey - from the motivations that drive the decision to attend, through engagement during the event, to reflection and application afterwards
3. **Understand why people choose to attend** - Not all attendees arrive with the same motivations. Some may be seeking information, others inspiration, networking, professional development, community or something more personally meaningful. Recognising these different motivations can help planners create experiences that feel more relevant and valuable
4. **There is a difference between a 'Wow' and an 'Aha!'** - A spectacular production moment may capture attention, but an **"Aha!" moment creates a cognitive shift** - a new understanding, perspective or connection. The challenge for planners is to create the conditions for those moments rather than simply filling the programme with content and spectacle
5. **Productive friction can be valuable** - Events do not always need to make attendees comfortable or simply confirm what they already believe. Carefully designed moments of challenge, questioning or different perspectives can stimulate learning and encourage people to reconsider existing assumptions - provided they do not create cognitive overload
6. **Design for behaviour change, not just knowledge transfer** - A useful question for planners is: **"What do we want attendees to do as a result of what they have experienced?"** Moving from insight to action requires making the desired behaviour explicit and creating opportunities for attendees to consider how they will apply what they have learned
7. **Impact may take time to appear** - An attendee does not necessarily leave an event with an immediate, recognisable **"Aha!"**. Some of the most valuable insights emerge through reflection and become meaningful days or weeks later. This means evaluation should look beyond immediate satisfaction and consider longer-term outcomes where possible
8. **Technology should extend the experience - not replace the human experience** - Technology can make communication, on-boarding, content sharing and follow-up more efficient, but its greatest value may be in **creating the conditions for better human interaction**. The goal is not to digitise every element of an event, but to use technology where it helps people connect, engage and continue the journey
9. **Small interventions can create meaningful change** - The discussion highlighted that transformation does not always require a huge production or radical intervention. Even relatively small, purposeful initiatives can influence behaviour when they are clearly connected to the event's intended outcome
10. **Personalisation and attention to detail still matter** - Particularly when working with demanding or high-value audiences, thoughtful personalisation can have a disproportionate impact. Understanding individuals, anticipating their needs and paying attention to the details can turn an efficient event experience into a genuinely meaningful one

The bigger question for planners

The discussion ultimately moved the conversation from “How do we make this event memorable?” to a more fundamental question: “How do we design an experience that continues to matter after the event is over?”

That shift - from spectacle to substance, from attendance to engagement, and from immediate reaction to lasting change - is at the heart of engineering events for greater impact.

We value your Feedback – Please help us with your thoughts – [Feedback Here](#)

Additional Information

Abstract for paper from [Katrin Stefansdottir](#) - *Holistic transformational experience of a conference: an attendee perspective*

– If you would like to read the full paper, there are a limited amount of free copies – [please contact Katrin](#)

Five generations, one conference: Designing events for multigenerational audiences – [Download report by Olympia](#)

Evidence Based Event Design – By Lisa Schulteis, ElectraLime Marketing, LLC – [Download Report](#)

If someone would like to participate in future research, they can let Lisa know – [Shape the Future participation](#)

Slides & Reports from the session – [ACCESS HERE](#)



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