



The Meeting Architecture Manifesto

May 4, 2009

Preface

When I published the book 'Meeting Architecture – A Manifesto' less than a year ago, I thought it would take a few years to sell a thousand copies. But after seven months it was sold out. Not because my thoughts were so original, on the contrary, it was because so many people had similar thoughts and agreed with me, it was the 'zeitgeist', the time was ready for the concept of Meeting Architecture.

I am overwhelmed and honoured by what has happened since. I think the Meeting Architecture movement started during the dinner at MPI's conference in Las Vegas in August 2008. A dozen thought leaders from Europe and the US met to discuss what to do next and the idea of this Manifesto was launched. After that it just snowballed, with 39 of the most influential thought leaders in Europe and the US meeting for two half days in Copenhagen or Bal Harbour, Florida, to provide input to this document and reviewing it several times thereafter.

Meeting Architecture does not belong to me. I came up with a name for something that belongs to the entire community of meeting professionals and all those meeting owners who seek the highest possible value from their meetings. I am therefore happy to hand over the initiative and management of Meeting Architecture to the Meeting Architecture 2011 Project.

I would like to thank all those who have contributed to this Manifesto, in particular Elling Hamso who facilitated the Copenhagen and Bal Harbour conclaves and then undertook the arduous task of drafting and editing this document. I would also like to thank Rezidor Hotel Group and Regent Hotels for hosting the conclaves and Reed Travel Exhibitions for disseminating this Manifesto through their world-wide media network.

March, 2009
Turnhout, Belgium

Maarten Vanneste

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to define and explain the concept of Meeting Architecture and to outline the next steps which will create a new discipline or profession within the meetings industry and increase the value stakeholders obtain from their investments in meetings.

It is a manifesto, an expression of what we believe in, summarised in the seven statements on page 4.

The first part of this paper defines and explains the concept of Meeting Architecture and puts it in the context of Meeting Management in general.

The second part is concerned with how to develop and implement Meeting Architecture, initially by setting up an international project dedicated to the purpose, The Meeting Architecture 2011 Project.

In this paper we use the term 'meeting' throughout and mean by that any physical or virtual gathering of 10 or more people for at least one half day¹ and therefore includes what is otherwise referred to as events, conferences, incentives, exhibitions, conventions, seminars, etc.

Contributors

The people listed below have contributed to this paper through discussions or by providing their comments in different ways. Most of them participated in one of the conclaves in Copenhagen or Bal Harbour, which were organised for the purpose of developing the concept of Meeting Architecture and to make a plan for its implementation as an important element in the planning and execution of meetings.

The persons listed below represent only themselves, not the organisation for which they work or hold voluntary positions.

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¹ This is consistent with the recently agreed UNWTO definition

The Manifesto

We believe:

1. Meetings have the potential to create significantly greater value for stakeholders through better design of content and format.
2. Meetings provide value for stakeholders through the actions of the participants, and meetings are therefore designed to reinforce or change participant behaviour.
3. Meeting Architecture is the task of designing the meeting experience, its content, format and context, in order to facilitate the desired reinforcement or change in participant behaviour and thus provide greater value for stakeholders.
4. The Meeting Architect does not create the meeting on his/her own. Meetings logistics professionals are specialists who make sure that all aspects of operations and logistics are perfect and delivered at the lowest achievable cost. They are equally important and their professional skills need to be further developed.
5. In order to realise the full potential of Meeting Architecture, everyone involved in the industry need to work together, putting the common interest of the industry before the interests of individual associations or other stakeholders. Only by sharing and collaborating, can we create significant global impact.
6. We need recognised and consistent education at university level as well as professional development by industry organisations in order to realise the full potential of Meeting Architecture.
7. We believe it is necessary to set up a two-year industry-wide project with a mission to provide the conceptual, organisational and financial foundations for the long-term implementation of Meeting Architecture as a recognised meeting management discipline.

Meeting Management Roles and Responsibilities

In order to explain and put the concept of Meeting Architecture into its proper context, some key definitions are necessary.

Meeting Management

Meeting Management is the all-embracing task of planning, executing, and evaluating meetings. It consists of all the different disciplines and roles which need to be involved in order to deliver a successful meeting, such as project management, meeting architecture and participant logistics. The task of meeting management will in some cases be undertaken by just one person fulfilling all the different roles (for small and simple meetings) and in other cases by a team of specialists fulfilling different roles (for large or complex meetings).

The Meeting Owner

All meetings have a number of stakeholders, people or organisations who seek to gain value from a successful meeting. Stakeholder objectives are not always aligned, some times they are directly conflicting, and the meeting is designed to meet a compromise between different stakeholder needs. But there is often a main stakeholder who controls the budget and has the final say when decisions are made, we call him the Meeting Owner. When we refer to the meeting owner in this document, we mean all the stakeholders and the compromises made between their different needs.

Meeting Objectives

The ultimate objective of any meeting is to create value to its different stakeholders. For business meetings, the value is normally an increase in the net revenue from sales or a cost reduction, thus improving the profitability of the enterprise. For non-profit organisations, the ultimate value is the cause for which they exist, what they would write in their annual report when describing a successful year.

In order to achieve the ultimate objective, every meeting has subordinate objectives, creating a path towards the ultimate measure of success. Recognising that the only mechanism by which meetings create value is through the actions of the participants, setting detailed objectives for participant behaviour as a result of the meeting, is critically important.

Meeting Architecture

Meeting Architecture is the task of designing the content and format of meetings in order to achieve the desired participant behaviour.

The Meeting Architect can not start his work until behavioural objectives are clear and one of his most important contributions will probably be to help meeting owners define all the appropriate objectives for the meeting. He then uses a wide range of skills and tools, before, during and after the meeting, in order to provide participants with the Information, Networking opportunities and Motivation that will influence their behaviour accordingly.

The Meeting Architect also needs to be an expert in measuring the extent to which participants learned and remembered the information, developed relationships through networking and achieved the desired motivation. He must also be able to measure the extent to which these activities lead to the planned participant behaviour that stakeholders need in order to gain the greatest possible value from the meeting.

Meeting Logistics Management

Meetings Logistics Management is the task of managing participant logistics in the most cost-effective manner, including registration, transportation and accommodation. The meeting logistics professional also ensures the smooth and safe flow of participants in the meeting facility. Meeting Logistics Professionals are often referred to as Meeting Planners.

Meeting Project Management

Every meeting is a project, generally defined as a finite activity designed to fulfill a given and specific set of objectives. The meeting project manager ensures that all necessary objectives are defined and that all necessary tasks are performed within the constraints of available funds and other resources. The project manager has the overall responsibility for quality assurance and risk management and is ultimately responsible for the achievement of all meeting objectives.

Meetings Industry Trends

The meetings industry, (or more correctly the meeting management professions and the industry that serves them), is relatively young and its recognition does not reflect the importance of meetings to the success of many organisations.

Meetings as Tourism or Applied Behavioural Science

The meetings industry is generally considered to be a part of tourism and hospitality, probably because some of the major stakeholders, such as hotels, transportation companies and destinations, have a major interest in tourism, and then utilise some of the same assets to serve meetings. Meetings also have a significant economic impact on the destinations where they are held. But the purpose of meetings is not to transport participants to pleasant destinations and entertain them in comfortable hotels. The purpose of meetings is to create value to meeting owners and to this end the content and format of the meeting itself is most important. Meetings are investments, tourism is consumption.

A good meeting environment also contributes to the success of meetings, but the close association between meetings and tourism has probably detracted from a greater focus on content and format. This is the void that the concept of meeting architecture is designed to fill. As the focus of meeting management shifts from hospitality and logistics towards participant learning and behavioural change, those who plan the content and format of meetings will need to develop close professional relationships with experts in a wide range of behavioural sciences.

Globalisation and Structural Changes

As industries grow up, they undergo structural changes, in particular through concentration and specialisation. This is happening to the meetings industry at the moment. Large suppliers get larger through acquisition and organic growth, and smaller suppliers are either acquired by larger companies, or they specialise or die.

This trend is accelerated by globalisation whereby an increasing proportion of customers operate in global markets and look for providers of products and services who are present in the same geographical markets.

As organisations expand and proliferate across boundaries of nations, languages and cultures, the task of building effective and coherent teams becomes much more challenging. Meetings play an increasingly important role in aligning different parts of organisations, making the challenges of creating good meeting designs even greater.

The Millennium Generation

During the next 5-10 years, the Millennium generation will become a significant proportion of meeting participants. This is perhaps the largest generation gap in history and the consequences for meetings will be fundamental. If meetings for the older generations serve the purposes of information and networking, this means online communities, such as Facebook and MySpace to the younger generations, and they learn from Google, Wikipedia and online peers more than parents, teachers and conference speakers. They don't see the difference between virtual and real any more than they see why work and play should not happen at the same time.

There is no evidence to suggest that members of the Millennium generation have a lesser need to meet in the physical space, in fact they don't spend less time in physical interaction than earlier generations, their network just expands in the virtual space, adding large numbers of friends and colleagues who they would enjoy meeting in real life as well. The real challenge for designers of meetings will be to cater for old and new generations at the same time.

Experiential and Permission-Based Marketing

Experiential communication, touch and feel, is the current marketing buzz. Another trend is permission-based communication as customers, whether individual or corporate, increasingly take control over the dominant channels of communication. Meetings provide an important arena for customer experiences and they offer a platform for permission-based communication. As meetings become an increasingly important part of the marketing mix, the need to design meetings which deliver real value increases.

As the world is rapidly changing, meetings need to change with it. It is not only a matter of making meetings more valuable through Meeting Architecture, but also that the role of the Meeting Architect is becoming increasingly complex and challenging.

Meeting Architecture

Meeting architecture is not new, there are meeting planners in organisations and meeting planning agencies who are experts at designing meetings that deliver excellent value for stakeholders, but these are the self-taught exceptions and not the rule. The main focus of the industry today is on hospitality and logistics, rather than the value creation process that happens inside the meeting.

The Participant in Focus

Regardless of the kind of meeting and who the meeting stakeholders are, the meeting participant is always in the center of attention. For pay-to-attend meetings, such as educational seminars and association congresses, the participants often pay the largest portion of the total meeting costs, and the success of the meeting is to a large extent a question of whether the objectives of the participants as major stakeholders were met. Participants generally attend such meetings in order to gain information and skills, develop relationships with other participants and become inspired and motivated to provide more value to their own organisations.

For other kinds of meetings, where the meeting owner typically represents a corporation, the primary focus is on the participant because it is only through participant behaviour that the meeting can return value for the meeting owner, paying for his investment.

Information, Networking, and Motivation

With the participant in focus, the Meeting Architect seeks to provide him with Information, Networking opportunities and Motivation, before, during and after the meeting. These are the activities that will have an impact on the participant and lead him to take actions and change his work behaviour in a manner that creates value to the meeting stakeholders, which invariably also include the participant himself. Ultimately, this participant behaviour contributes to the bottom line of an organisation.

The meeting experience can usually be extended beyond the start and finish of the physical meeting itself. In particular, with the Millennium generation becoming more dominant, the meeting starts in the virtual space with blogs, wikis, online communities and other kinds of interactions, preparing for the physical meeting, making the meeting more effective and valuable. When the meeting is over, there are many opportunities to continue the learning processes, pursuing relationships with other participants, making sure that the information, networking and motivation generated at the meeting turn into permanent and valuable changes in behaviour. It is not a question of whether the meeting should be virtual or real, it will be both, and the Millennium generation hardly knows the difference.

Meeting Architecture Tools

At his disposal, the Meeting Architect has a range of tools that can be applied before, during and after the meeting. These tools can be classified as Conceptual, Human, Artistic, Technical and Technological:

Conceptual tools refer to the format, virtual or real, like presentations, open space, room layout, etc.

Human tools refer to individuals engaged as facilitators, speakers, actors, etc.

Artistic tools include the use of colour, music, decoration, light, design, text, lay-out, etc.

Technical tools are audio visual, stage construction, furniture, etc.

Technology tools are facilitation technology, webcast, networking tools, online applications such as wikis, blogs, chats and other internet or computer programs that can be used before, during or after the meeting.

The Meeting Support Matrix

The Meeting Support Matrix combines Information, Networking and Motivation with activities and tools that can be used before, during and after the meeting. In fig. 1 we can, for example, use an online brainstorming tool before a meeting to identify topics for an open space session, Pecha Kucha (20 slides 20 seconds each) as a presentation format during the meeting and webcasts of presentations after the meeting.

For connecting people, we can set up a pre-meeting online community before the meeting, use onsite networking technology during the meeting and provide participants with pictures and contact details in order to easier keep in touch after the meeting.

To motivate and inspire people, we can develop impactful images before the meeting, use motivational speakers during the meeting and provide everyone with videos and pictures after the meeting in order to maintain and communicate the excitement of the meeting experience.

The Meeting Support Matrix is a tool which can be used in the planning process, but it does not provide the meeting design solution. Every meeting has different objectives addressing different participants, the matrix will therefore be filled with different solutions every time.

	Before	During	After
Information			
Networking			
Motivation			

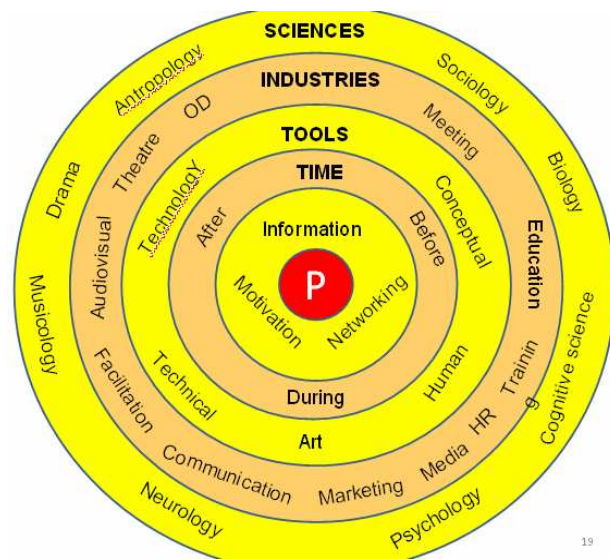
Fig.1 The Meeting Support Matrix

Industries and Professions

Many of the tools and the associated knowledge that the Meeting Architect can employ are developed by other industries and professions for different purposes. We need to invite and inspire them to share their knowledge with the meetings industry. Such professions and industries may include education, media, human resources, marketing, communication, facilitation, audiovisual, theatre, organisation development, etc.

Sciences

Meeting Architecture should base its body of knowledge on sciences such as sociology, biology, cognitive science, psychology, neurology, musicology, drama, anthropology, etc. For example, there is no book about the sociology of meetings. The great strides in applied neurological research in recent years are highly relevant to Meeting Architects who need to understand why people react and behave the way they do. We need many more books, papers, and seminars where different sciences are applied to meetings. We also need new research within many of these sciences in order to design more effective meetings.



The Meeting Architecture curriculum model

PART II

Making it Happen

We are proposing a significant change of direction for the meetings industry. Although there are meeting architects at work already, professionals who specialise in designing the content and format of meetings, they are relatively few, and the main focus of the industry today is on logistics and hospitality.

The Meeting Architecture 2011 Project

In order to bring about such a major change in industry focus, we believe that it will be necessary to establish the Meeting Architecture 2011 Project in order to plan for the longer term development and implementation of this new meeting management discipline. The Project will be duly registered as a non-profit organisation with the appropriate governance.

The Meeting Architecture 2011 Project is a first step towards the vision of transforming meetings into a much more effective means of achieving stakeholder objectives. Major project tasks include:

To perform an extensive needs analysis for Meeting Architecture skills, including an assessment of market maturity and estimate a demand curve for the services of Meeting Architecture professionals.

To investigate alternative pathways and make a plan for the implementation of Meeting Architecture skills through alliances with meeting industry associations, universities and other stakeholders, providing compelling value propositions for each of them to join in a significant and long-term collaborative effort.

To secure funding for the further development of Meeting Architecture, including a curriculum to be implemented through university and industry educational programmes.

To develop the concept of Meeting Architecture through conceptual models and practical case studies.

The Meeting Architecture 2011 Project will have an international steering committee and a broad Advisory Council. It will also have committees of volunteers supported by staff with responsibilities in major areas of activity.

Summary and Conclusions

This Meeting Architecture Manifesto aims to start a new era for the meetings industry, moving from a primary focus on hospitality and logistics towards designing, executing and measuring meeting contents and formats that has a purposeful impact on participants. By designing meetings to support Information, Networking and Motivation objectives, participant behaviour will as a consequence provide more value for stakeholders.

The need for developing the concepts and strategies of Meeting Architecture is clear, the engagement by a large number of thought leaders of both sides of the Atlantic in the writing of this document proves it. The need for a greater focus on meeting content and value is also driven by globalisation and the emergence of a new generation that will look to meetings to serve their purposes in very different ways.

Change is always a challenge, even if it is the order of the day. It is therefore necessary to establish the Meeting Architecture 2011 Project in order to move forward with focus and dedication. The intention of the Project is to support and serve existing industry organisations, to collaborate and not compete with them.

The new discipline of Meeting Architecture does not detract from the profession of Meeting Logistics Management. Without perfect logistics and a good learning environment, the Meeting Architect has no foundation for his work.

This document is also a call to action. If you look for a career in Meeting Architecture, if you are a meeting owner seeking a greater return on your investment, if you are a supplier of products or services to meetings, or if your profession is to educate and train young people as well as life long learners, please involve yourself in this new and exciting project called Meeting Architecture.

Go to www.meetingarchitecture.org to make a start.

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