MODULE 6

Part 1: Event design and décor

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Learning Outcomes:

LO1: Illustrate what design and décor mean from an events perspective.
LO2: Explain the role of design and décor within an event.

1. Introduction

Design is a fundamental part of event management. It is the expression of a concept and should be a consideration at every step of the event management process. Its involvement starts at the early stage of the proposal or pitch, right through to the design of the event programme for the day. All elements within an event are enhanced by design to create a memorable event experience. While the scope of the design is relative to the nature, size, and budget of the event, all types of events will involve design elements. Design may have a purely functional role in some events, while in others, it may provide both functionality and aesthetic appeal.

An event manager should always be thinking about the event with design and décor in mind, as each event is both a creative process and a creation in itself. The design and décor will influence the aesthetics and ambience of the event and the venue. It is for this reason that event managers with a creative eye are valuable. In this set of notes, you will learn about the concept and role of design and décor in an events context, the role of creativity in the design process, and how to create an event experience using elements of décor and design.

Imagine walking down the street and stopping into a restaurant or store you've never been to before. The atmosphere is your first impression; despite the products you have or the food you serve, people aren't going to embrace it if they aren't impressed by the overall character of your place. Take this into consideration when planning an event for your association. Every little detail matters!

Staging an event means bringing together all the elements of a theatrical production for its presentation on stage – be it a once-off event or a recurring festivity. As the theme is the decisive factor to distinguish specific events from each other, event organisers have to focus on "theming and design" as the central part of the event creation process.

2. What is design?

The very first question that has to be answered when considering event design is "what is design?" The term is frequently used in various fields and disciplines ranging from fashion and architecture to art and business, and it is easy to simply think of design and the creative arts as one concept. However, design applies to various disciplines and is first and foremost solution oriented; it is a set of fields that aim to place the user at the centre of an experience to understand their needs and develop solutions to solve problems related to those needs effectively (Getz, 2012:222). The purpose of good design is therefore to solve a user's problem effectively by coming up with creative solutions around the problem.

In an event context, design is therefore focused on finding solutions to problems around guest and attendee interaction with and experience of the event. According to Brown (2005 cited in Berridge, 2010:187), event design is "the creation, conceptual development and design of an event to maximise the positive and meaningful impact for the event's audience and/or participants". In other words, event design asks "how can we make this the best possible experience for the attendee?"

Design is what enables one event experience to be different from another. Each event has its own unique design, from concept and floor plans to décor choices and the event programme. The term "experiential" does not only apply to marketing, it applies to the design and décor styling of an event too. When event managers conceptualise the event they need to think about the experience they are creating, as guests need to truly experience the event with all their senses, and each part of the design needs to be carefully thought through to add to the overall experience.

2.1 How does design operate within an event?

Design is not isolated to one part of an event, and certainly extends beyond choosing colour schemes and accessories for the venue. Instead, it is about the choices that are made for every part of the event and how they interact with one another to create an event "feel" and experience.

It is important to remember that developing an event concept before thinking about the design elements is key, because the concept will inform the design, and the design will enhance the concept. The Event Management Body of Knowledge (EMBOK) recognises design as a knowledge domain within event management (the other domains are administration, operations, marketing, and risk), which highlights the importance of dedicating attention to design when putting an event together (Silvers, 2003). Berridge (2010:186-187) elaborates on the seven classes of design - catering design, content design, entertainment design, environmental design, production design, programme design, and theme design - that fall under the EMBOK design domain. His interpretation of each of these classes will now be considered in more detail.

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2.1.1 Catering design

Food and beverages are nearly always present at events and the production and service of food allows opportunities for creativity and innovative design. Areas where design can be implemented are as follows:

- **Food stations:** This includes the layout of the food itself as well as the stations (typically tables) it is displayed on. For example, food can be presented on different levels and props can be incorporated in the set up. Food stations could also be custom-made to fit in with the theme of the event.

Figure 1: A decadent chocolate mousse served in delicate glass (left). A crisp and fresh table setting, elegantly displaying the condiments (right). (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

- **Plating:** The actual presentation of the food and beverages is an important aesthetic aspect of the event. Using crockery of varying shapes and sizes can make for very interesting presentation. Glass bowls and plates offer a very effective way of presenting rich colours and textures of food. The plating of the food should always add to the appeal of the dish and make it more appetising.

Figure 2: A modern elegant presentation, using an unusual side plate. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

- **Menus:** These can be designed according to the theme of the event. Alternatively, there could be no menus and just a tasting plate of various dishes instead of one choice.

- **Seating arrangement:** There are various options available with regard to seating. The standard is round or rectangular tables with chairs, but there are other seating options, such as cushions on the floor or cocktail tables for finger foods. For more elaborate events perhaps even seating booths shaped according to the theme of the event could be used (for example, a booth in the shape of a Cadillac could be used for a 1960s style event).

- **Food service:** The way food is served doesn't always have to be traditional. Service staff could be themed (for example, if it's a French-style dinner, French-speaking waiters could be hired). The way in which the food is presented and the choice of crockery and plating can be imaginative and unique.

Figure 3: A unique approach to serving an appetiser: tuna tartare presented in a conical glass bowl within a rounded bowl, accompanied by a live goldfish. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

- **Selection of food and drinks:** This can tie in with the theme, the colour palette of the event, or just be contemporary and unique. For example, consider offering a welcome cocktail in the client's corporate colours or branded desserts.

- **Edible centrepieces:** For example, the centrepiece could be a chocolate statue and guests can then break off pieces of it as part of their dessert.

2.1.2 Content design

Creativity and out-of-the-box thinking regarding event content (albeit risky if catering to audiences with more conservative tastes and expectations who may not enjoy unexpected deviations from the norm) can challenge preconceptions and provide an opportunity to surprise and impress guests. For example, a wedding could include the traditional rituals presented in a different way, perhaps through live entertainment or guest interaction. Unique rituals could be used to break from tradition, but this will be largely dependent on the culture and religion of the bridal party.

2.1.3 Entertainment design

This could include elements such as surprise acts and roving performers. An eclectic mix of entertainment genres can create a unique experience. Dinner theatre is also a popular concept.

2.1.4 Environment design

This is the purposeful use of available space. An example of creative use of space is to first allow guests access to only a small part of the venue and then stage a "reveal" of the main section. For example, dinner guests could be served drinks in one section which is draped or sectioned off from the main dining area, and then when it is time to move through for dinner, the partitions can be removed for the guests to be "wowed" by the visual spectacle

of the dining and entertainment area. The use of multiple venues for an event also enhances excitement and anticipation. However, it can be costly.

2.1.5 Production design

Production design is an area that borrows heavily from theatre and performance production, and results when design principles are used to produce a spectacle or show. Examples include the use of multiple settings within an event, a stage in an unusual shape, such as a heart, or the use of two separately managed screens at a conference.

2.1.6 Programme design

Breaking away from (or even just slightly altering) a standard or traditional format or order of ceremony for an event can add a new dimension to the event and prevent a sense of monotony. For example, instead of simply letting wedding guests drink champagne and eat *hors d'oeuvres* while waiting for the bride and groom to arrive at the reception after the ceremony, putt-putt or croquet stations, or board and card games could be set up and guests can challenge each other to a game while they wait.

2.1.7 Theme design

Conceptualising an event theme is about creating a visual spectacle through the use of props, artefacts, and symbols. These items, when used imaginatively, can reinforce a specific theme and help to tell a story. For example, heart-shaped decorations, a red and pink colour scheme, a romantic outdoor setting with patio swing, a floral arched walkway, and outdoor candles could communicate a Valentine's Day theme. It is important to remember that venue selection plays an important role in theme design, as venues can either enhance or detract from a theme.

More on themes

Theming is the central element of the strategic implementation process for any event. Once a decision has been reached on the overall concept, it should be developed into a theme that shapes and unifies all aspects of the event. The theme determines the overall look, style, colours, sounds and atmosphere.

You must consider various elements when developing an event concept. The purpose of the event determines the theme. Being linked to the event purpose, it must meet the guests needs. Venue choice, target audience, available resources, event timing and the necessary team skills are then researched and appropriated to the theme.

An effective theme appeals to all the senses. Visual and auditory aspects are the basic feature of every event. This underlines the central importance of theming as the decisive factor of the overall shape, style and emotional atmosphere of any event. Once the theme of the event has been identified, you need to collaborate with all other managing forces and suppliers of the other contributing elements, which revolve around the theme.

As an example, a medieval corporate festival could be held in an old castle where the atmosphere is supported by gloomy, dimmed lighting effects. At the entrance, monks and fair ladies could welcome the guests, who enter the castle via an archway of gleaming swords. Creaking doors and cracking sound effects would be in line with knights serving medieval food and drinks (meats and pastries, bread and wine), while banners, posters and table cards could include famous poems and quotes from Shakespeare. Before dinner, a message from the king (CEO) could be read out and after dinner a presentation of a sword fight performed by knights could start the entertainment program. This could eventually lead to a (folkloric) dancing party including and involving all guests.

Different venues play out themes differently, some lend themselves more to certain themes than others. Theming is all about continuity (making sure the theme works on all levels of the event) and detail. A well-thought-out theme is always detailed and well researched.

(Adapted from: Schulenkorf 2005)

Figure 4: An elegant set up for an intimate luncheon wedding; the subtle use of colour works harmoniously with the garden setting. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

Figure 5: A contemporary dinner set up in an unusual venue - a wine cellar. The high ceilings allowed for the use of impressive candelabra that, due to the length of the tables, made for a dramatic aesthetic. Light boxes on the tables and good lighting throughout created a fantastic ambience. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

Figure 6: A simple yet effective dinner set up in a temporary structure. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

Figure 7: Brightly-coloured fruit and home décor furnishings such as lampshades can be used to add a unique and innovative aesthetic element to an event. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

> **Event design: What will the future event look like?**
>
> Design is not a static concept, and as much as it can influence culture and the environment, it too is influenced and shaped by culture. How an event manager chooses to design an event is influenced by tried and trusted design principles and practices as well as client preferences and current trends in the event and design industry.

2.2 The role of décor in design

Décor plays a vital role in event design, as it is really the visual interpretation of the proposed event concept. Décor can act on different levels within the event, from education (such as informative posters or storyboards) to visual stimulation (artworks, fish tanks, or images on a projector screen). An event with innovative, tasteful, and creatively-conceptualised décor can determine the impact on the guest experience and their memory of the event.

Décor options are extensive and range from items to hire to those that are custom made for an event. There are many companies that specialise in making or hiring these items, and how an event manager chooses to source the décor will be dependent on the client budget and the event objective. In order to assist event managers in conceptualising a theme and idea for an event, it is useful to compile a mood board to present to the client.

Figure 8: Crystal and white wedding with a transparent marquee, which highlights the beautiful setting. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

> **Marrying the practical and the aesthetic:**
>
> Always remember that décor functions within an event space. Event spaces need to be functional and aesthetically pleasing – an often a difficult task to achieve simultaneously. There is no point in having design elements that, for example, hinder the flow of people throughout the event or may cause congestion in certain areas. Function and form need to work together harmoniously to create successful event spaces.

3. Design principles

According to Berridge (2010:190), the main principles of design (based on a review of various sources highlighting different aspects of event design) can be summarised as follows:

- **Focus:** Any design needs to have a central focus and be in harmony with the event concept. This assists in creating a holistic event experience.

- **Space:** Design must always consider the use of space, and the available space has to have both a functional and aesthetic design in order to create a good event experience.

- **Flow of movement:** Good design will consider the flow of people through the venue. The movement of people through an event is a consequence of careful design planning. Additionally, the design should aid the safety and risk management of the event.

The aesthetics, technical applications, and expression of ideas will use these general principles and build on them to create a powerful experience for the guest. The fundamental elements of design are discussed in more detail below.

3.1 The core elements of design

Berridge (2010:190-191) identifies 11 core elements of design that play a part in shaping the event experience. Event managers need to ensure that careful attention is paid to each of these elements in order to create a cohesive design:

1. **Space:** An event deals in three-dimensional space that needs to enhance the event and provide for the number of guests or participants in attendance. Clever use of space can mean that smaller areas appear bigger and vice versa. The planned décor also needs to fit into the space.

Figure 9: Example of décor at an international transport exhibition in Polokwane. The décor is simple and rigid, keeping in line with the trucks that were being marketed at the event. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

2. **Colour:** Colour can provide meaning and association, due to its psychological effects. The choice of colour palette at an event can be critical. "Brand" colours are often used at corporate events with a marketing angle. Weddings tend to use softer colour palettes, however, there is currently a trend to move away from the pale colours and introduce splashes of bright colour and even black. Experimenting with colour at an event can either work or disappoint; some clients are traditional and prefer more muted colour palettes while others are adventurous and like something bold and different. However, the colours should always complement the nature of the event.

Figure 10: A circular bar set up in a marquee, with a splash of yellow for contrast. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

Figure 11: A dinner function held in a semi-permanent events venue at the V&A Waterfront. The venue showcases beautiful sea views, and an intimate, romantic, and elegant mood has been created through the use of ambient lighting and the warm colour palette and décor items. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

Figure 12: White on white, with a splash of blue and raised centrepieces. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

3. **Line:** Line is often used to draw attention to a section of the setting or to separate objects from one another. Line can also be seen in the furniture and infrastructure choices; some have clean sharp lines, while others have more rounded and softer

lines. The theme and décor composition of the event will influence which lines the event manager or décor specialist chooses. Line of sight is also important in event design, especially where there is a stage or central arena. The design should ensure that as many people as possible can view the stage or arena; one way of achieving this is through tiered seating or levels.

4. **Composition:** This refers to the placement and arrangement of objects in the venue. Composition is important, not only from an aesthetic point of view, but also to allow easy movement around the venue for the guests and staff. Composition should be considered both as a whole and in parts. For example, a room might be divided into different sections through the use of different compositions, such as cocktail tables and bar stools around the bar area, a lounge area in a corner, and a dining area in the centre of the room.

5. **Form:** This refers to the shape of objects and décor pieces. Interesting forms create a more textured look and can work well visually. For example, uniquely shaped furniture, mixed with tall vases standing on trunks instead of coffee tables can create an exciting look.
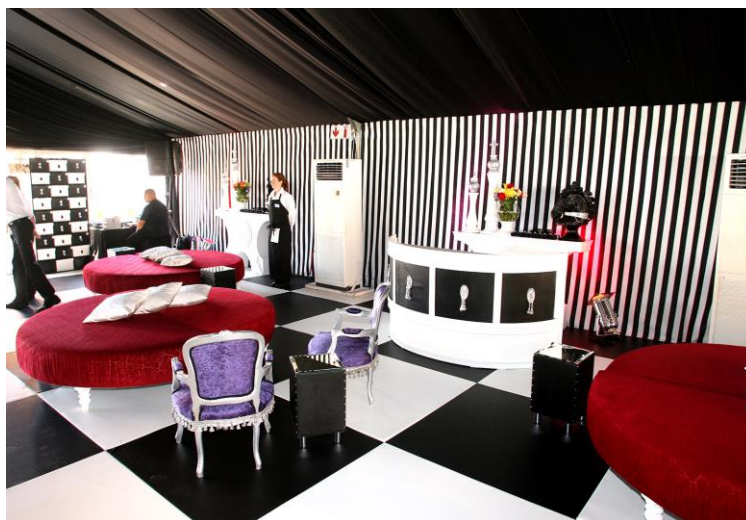

Figure 13: An example of creative use of line, form, and colour inside a marquee at the J&B Met.
(Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

6. **Texture:** This generally refers to the feel of materials used, such as fabrics and décor items. Different textures evoke different emotional responses and can determine the mood or atmosphere of a venue. For example, a dinner with a Baroque theme will have heavy, rich-coloured velvet-type draping and furniture coverings to create a dramatic, opulent feeling.

Figure 14: A colonial set up, with lots of detailed "layering" of décor items (left). A modern set up using white, crystal, and glass which work well together (right). (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Muder)

7. **Pattern:** This is the use of various shapes to create a setting (for example, a round dance floor or circular bar inside a rectangular marquee).

8. **Scale:** This refers to the size or proportion of the props or décor items. Scale is usually related to the theme or objectives of the event; some events lend themselves to large-scale props and infrastructure, while others require small, delicate décor elements.

9. **Rhythm:** In the simplest sense, this relates to the movement of words or music, but it can also refer to the arrangement of items in a space to create a rhythmic impact, either gradually or suddenly. For example, the positioning of flowers in a venue can create a sense of repetition and rhythm.

10. **Harmony:** This is about creating unity within a setting and reinforcing the ambience. All décor and infrastructure elements of the event should work together so that the experience is harmonious and pleasing to the guests' senses.

Figure 15: A crisp beautiful set up with lots of chandeliers for effect. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

11. **Placement:** Décor should always be in the right place and context to create a focal point or relay a message. For example, a large ice sculpture lit up on a plinth in the centre of the buffet area is an interesting focal point. However, if placed on the side of the main area, the ice sculpture would not be as eye-catching and would therefore be wasted.

Figure 16: An effective corporate set up that plays with height with unique centrepieces (left). A fairly traditional wedding set up in a marquee (right). (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

Figure 17: Fruit and flowers are a lovely vibrant combination and beautiful wooden boards make a lovely alternative to the traditional side plate. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

Additionally, when producing an event, the event manager also needs to give some thought to the issue of guest or participant interaction. The guests or participants need to connect with the event through some sort of activity or engagement with a product or service, for example, testing out a new product or food and wine sampling (Berridge, 2010:191).

Events: Sensory experiences

Guests are able to feel "connected" with the event through their senses (i.e. their experience of the ambience created by the event and the setting). The feeling a guest experiences at an event will forever be associated with the brand the event is marketing or with the actual event itself, and this is why events are such powerful forms of promotion and marketing.

The event environment is made up of different layers, be it textures, forms, shapes, or lines. These all need to complement each other and work together to create the desired effect. The nature of the event often determines the scope of design. In events that have a celebratory or entertainment objective, the design element tends to be more visible and appreciated. In this case, the design elements run throughout, from the décor and theme to the audio-visual production and the music (Berridge, 2010:191). By taking each one of the above elements into consideration, the event manager has a blueprint to work with in creating the event environment.

Presenting a design proposal to clients:

Before a client approves a design idea, the event manager will have to present the idea to the client. Because it is easier to get a sense of what the event manager envisions for the event when visual stimulation is provided, this presentation will most often have to be done using drawings, images, storyboards, and layout designs created on software programmes such as easyRAUM 3D CAD or Vivien.

4. Design and pitching for events

Event bidding and pitching was covered in more detail in Module 3, but for design purposes it is important for event managers to consider that event contracts are often won through the company presenting the event concept and design ideas directly to the client. By giving the client a verbal and visual interpretation of the experience they intend to create, it is easier for the client to visualise the end product and decide whether they like what the event company can offer them (Berridge, 2010:192).

The client has to be convinced that the concept will work, and as the saying goes, "seeing is believing". Human beings are "visual"; they like to see and even touch and taste choices before they make decisions. Therefore, it is best to always think from a sensory point of view when developing a pitch; event managers can take along fabrics that they may want to use, or even food linked to the theme. The aim is to give the client as much sensory information about the event concept as possible. To accomplish this goal, event managers will often make use of storyboards and mock-ups (such as a mock-up of a marquee structure or table setting) to present all the design elements and ideas (Berridge, 2010:192). Mock-ups can be costly to do, however, and should therefore only be considered if there is a very good chance of winning the contract.

When pitching for large or complex events such as a sporting event (which is potentially heavy on operational and logistics planning), it is important to have drawing software that allows for the accurate design of space. Architectural software such as AutoCAD allows the event manager or designer to design scale layouts for the clients. Space is essential in design and each element therefore needs to be represented to scale in the layouts. In the planning stages, these layouts also help to determine the viability of a venue from a space point of view. The planning team can place everything they want to use into the drawing and determine if it is going to fit into the venue before it is brought in and valuable time and resources are not wasted.

Lastly, a pitch should always give the client a clear image of the look and feel of the event. They should be able to picture it in their mind. If they are able to do this, they will feel comfortable with the delivery of the event.

5. The role of creativity in design

Creativity is "the mental process of generating new ideas or concepts" (Getz, 2012:225) and forms an essential part of event design. It is closely related to innovation, and ultimately, in an event context, assists in the creation of novel, exciting, and memorable event experiences. Creativity is also about attention to detail. It is usually the small details that make an event memorable and set it apart from another.

Get the creative juices flowing:

For some, coming up with unique and creative ideas may seem like a daunting task, especially if using an art-centric focus when defining creativity. It is important, however, to remember that creativity is not only limited to artistic endeavours, but rather that it permeates every facet of life, from business and economics to social interactions and practical domestic duties (Getz, 2012:225). As such, creativity can be seen as a way of thinking and approaching a problem to find an original solution.

Creativity is a skill that can be learnt, and as with most other skills, practice makes perfect. Here are some useful resources to assist you in your journey of developing your creative side:

- [Tips to boost creativity in 10 minutes, 30 minutes, and in the long-term](#)

- [Developing creativity in an event management context](#)

Thinking of a venue as a blank canvas is a good starting point. To those who are excited and energised by tasks that require creative solutions, a blank canvas is exciting; a chance for them to design and create. Others may feel slightly overwhelmed by this blank canvas. A creatively-inclined event manager will choose venues that offer a blank canvas, while others may choose venues where little needs to or can be done from a décor perspective. It is a personal choice, and an experienced event manager will know their strengths and weaknesses and acknowledge when it is better to outsource creative tasks to professionals and when it is in their own capacity to handle a design task.

Figure 18: An example of landscaping in décor and design at the A1 GP in Durban. This was built on a flat piece of ground where nothing existed – everything was brought in. (Source: Courtesy of Mandy Mulder)

5.1 Creativity and cost

Design and décor choices also come down to budget; elaborate set design and décor is pricey. However, event managers are constantly challenged to come up with creative ways to produce an event cost effectively, because most clients don't have large budgets. Module 7 will cover guidelines on drafting and keeping within an event budget. A good, experienced, and creative event manager can produce a magnificent event on very little money by shopping around and sourcing products from the hiring industry. In fact, some find that constraints lead to improved creativity.

5.2 Preparing to design an event

As tempting as it may be to dive straight into the creative design aspects of an event, it is very important to ensure that creativity is applied within the scope and purpose of the event. The following elements need to be considered when planning the event design:

- Purpose of the event

- Event theme

- Venue

- Needs of audience

- Available resources

- Timing of event

- Skills of management team

(Berridge, 2010:194)

The design elements (refer to section 3.1) can then be developed taking all the relevant factors of the event into consideration.

5.3 Creating ambience

All the design elements need to work together to create ambience in the venue. This is not always a straightforward process, because ambience is not a tangible product and is subject to external factors that the event manager cannot control, such as the mood that guests are in on any given event day. However, with some careful design and planning, the right environment for an event can be produced (Berridge, 2010:194).

A large part of ambience involves setting up the correct physical environment or space, and decisions regarding use of space and how attendees will interact with the space is essential for setting the tone of the event (Berridge, 2010:194). Most importantly, the needs of guests must always be taken into account and catered for when designing the environment (Berridge, 2010:194; Goldblatt, 2010:81).

In pursuit of ambience and creative design to create an environment that satisfies guests' needs, Goldblatt (2010:81-100) emphasises the importance of playing to the senses and taking the following factors into account when creating an environment:

- **Soundscaping:** This refers to how sound is used at an event, and takes factors such as distribution of sound and volume into account. Sound is an essential part of an event, whether it is speeches or music. Sound can affect ambience by creating suspense or excitement, drawing attention, or even providing distraction. The music should always help to create ambience. The music needs to suit the event type and the theme as well as the guest demographics. Music can really make or break an event. It creates an atmosphere and arouses emotions which makes it a powerful cue at events if used correctly.

- **Visual cues:** These cues assist in providing reference to the event theme or identifying certain elements of an event. As such, attention must be given to appropriate repetitive use of key design elements relevant to the event (such as the event organiser's logo and colours). For example, an American Idol themed event may include singing waiters and a bar that is designed to look like a stage.

- **Smell:** Olfactory sensations play a big role in enhancing an experience, and smells stimulate memory, thereby reinforcing positive (or in some cases, negative) connotations of an event and creating a memorable experience. For example, a garden themed event should have a flowery scent. An Indian themed event would have aromatic smells of incense and spices. Smells are one of the first things people remember about an event. Always be careful that the smells of the kitchen don't

waft through to the event venue, because these can often be overpowering and affect the ambience of the event. Also make sure that the toilets are far enough away as not to create an unpleasant smell in the event venue, and make sure that they are kept clean at all times.

- **Taste:** Taste is a very powerful sense and plays a central role in establishing a sensory feeling for an event. To engage guests' sense of taste, a creative mix of food and drinks, or innovative food choices can be used. Guests will always remember good food. Keeping the guests' palettes happy is an effective way of adding to their positive feelings about the event.

Tips for tasting

It can be quite difficult to design a menu suitable for all tastes and requirements. Keep on top of trends in the catering industry and ask the opinion of your catering supplier, who will likely know what is current and popular. Also use past event evaluation forms to identify popular dishes and drinks. This will sharpen your decision making when designing your menu.

On the event registration forms prior to the evening make sure a request for notification of any special dietary requirements is included. This can prevent vegetarians, vegans, and people with allergies from going hungry on the night. Provide water on every table and ensure adequate food, beverages, and seating is available for the expected number of guests. It is a good idea to have seating and food ready for unexpected guests that might arrive on the day or night of the event.

If the venue doesn't have a catering service, hire a professional catering team. This ensures the menu is good quality, the service is fast and efficient, and the bar will not be one enormous queue of people waiting to be served. Choose delectable dishes for the menu to impress guests and stock the bar with a wide range of soft and alcoholic drinks. Don't forget to ask your catering team for advice to avoid wines that are an acquired taste. All of this is to enable the guests to relax, socialise, and soak up the atmosphere.

It's always a good idea to get creative with food and beverages for events. Options like edible food displays are a good idea. These can be anything from centrepieces to flower arrangements and menus that guests can eat.

- **Blending:** This is achieved by mixing various elements of the event so that they complement each other and create a theme to support the event objective. No one element on its own is enough to create an impact, however, when combined, elements can work harmoniously together to create pure magic.

- **Amenities:** The experience created should also extend to the outer areas of the event, including the toilets and parking areas. Don't forget to add design and décor elements to these areas, as they also contribute to a guest's overall impression of an event. Most people dread going to the toilet at an event, as most toilet facilities are known to be unpleasant to the senses. Always make sure that these areas are kept in line with the overall image of the event, as it demonstrates attention to detail.

- **Reception areas:** First impressions are vital. The entry areas need to be memorable and have a "wow" factor. From a practical perspective, these areas also need to communicate important information to guests about things such as entrances and exits, meeting venues, toilets, parking areas, and the like in order to ensure a smooth arrival.

- **Function areas:** These could be designed to have a functional element to them. For example, create a games room in a section of the venue. The actual function area should also have a "wow" factor and should be in line with the image you are creating as a whole.

- **Innovative sites:** Creating an innovative site somewhere in the event venue can create a focal point. Some areas lend themselves to this type of feature. Examples of innovative sites include a display wall of memorabilia, a water feature, or an intimate coffee bar setting tucked into a corner of the venue.

- **Edible displays:** These could be anything from centrepieces to flower arrangements and menus that guests can eat.

- **Décor:** This is the use of props, colours and materials to create a setting. Interactive décor can also be used to excite and surprise guests.

- **Theme:** This is the unifying concept, which can be drawn from history or popular culture (Berridge, 2010:197). Themes do not have to be cheesy. For example, a South African street party, a theme combining the cultures and flavours of South Africa, or a theme inspired by the historical architecture of a city, would provide ample inspiration.

- **Timeline:** This should be designed to create anticipation for the main event or to lead up to an unveiling or reveal.

- **Security:** It is better to adopt a discreet security presence policy. However, some events require a visible presence, so this will be event dependent. Module 8 will provide more information about designing event security.

How do I create the perfect atmosphere at my event?

Event atmosphere is what gives life to the event. If the atmosphere is inappropriate, guests will feel uncomfortable and want to leave. That answers why atmosphere is essential to a successful event. But how do you create a fitting atmosphere for an event? Read through this article which covers ten steps for achieving the perfect atmosphere at an event.

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6. Creating the event experience

When people attend an event, they are looking for an experience; it may be educational, entertaining, or something unique and special. This applies across the board for all events. The event experience needs to be defined right at the start of the planning, as it is the core of the event and all subsequent planning needs to revolve around creating the experience (Berridge, 2010:198).

It is important to remember that experiences are not self-motivated; they need to be induced by the event. Experiences are about being emotionally, physically, and mentally involved in something. In the last 20 years, the corporate world has become more accustomed to creating experiences, and experiential marketing is becoming a popular marketing tool. Experiential marketing can be defined as "the art of creating an experience where the result is an emotional connection to a person, brand, product or idea" (Sollis, 2010:126). Through the use of experiential marketing techniques to engage the consumer and encourage interaction with the product in a created setting, many experiential marketing campaigns have become events in themselves. Event managers can also glean some valuable insights from experiential marketing strategies in order to better understand how to engage their guests at an event.

The social factor:

People don't attend events in isolation; other people are a significant factor in the experience of an event. Social interaction is therefore important to the guests' experience. Sometimes different people experience an event differently, as personality plays a role in experiences.

6.1 Creating meaningful experiences

Research conducted by Louis Cheskin, a marketing research and product design pioneer, found that people tend to value experiences that have meaning. The results, based on annual surveys conducted with over 100,000 individuals worldwide over several years, found that what people define as meaningful can be broken down into 15 universal core meanings:

1. Accomplishment

2. Beauty

3. Community

4. Creation

5. Duty

6. Enlightenment

7. Freedom

8. Harmony

9. Justice

10. Oneness

11. Redemption

12. Security

13. Truth

14. Validation

15. Wonder

(15 meanings Oslo, 2010)

These different meanings can inform an event manager's overall design, as aesthetic and experiential elements that give guests a sense of meaning will result in a richer and more memorable event experience. For example, good design can instil a sense of freedom and wonder in guests (think about how you feel when you are surrounded by grand structures, big open spaces, or creative and fun colour combinations and visual effects), provide a sense of validation (when guests connect and feel like they belong in the social group), and result in a pleasurable feeling inspired by beauty and oneness with the various elements of the event (Berridge, 2010:200).

An example of creating meaning through instilling a sense of awe and wonder through sensory, visual, and auditory experience is the German electro pop group Kraftwerk's 2009 performance of their song "Tour de France" at the Manchester Velodrome, an indoor cycling track. Accompanying the performance were four British Olympic cyclists, their bikes creating a hypnotic rhythm as they raced around the track (Alker, 2009). The result was an enjoyable sensory experience.

Smart tips for designing events:

Combine practical elements with creative ones; in this way, you know the event will work from an operational point of view and be aesthetically pleasing and unique too. In other words, when you feel that you have conceptualised a unique and innovative creative idea, always ask yourself, "Is this practical, can I actually deliver it, and will it work from an operational point of view?"

Always design the event with the client's objectives in mind.o a visual walk though of the different event spaces in your mind. By seeing each space in your mind, you can come up with creative solutions for each area and you can also anticipate what the guest will experience.

Do not be afraid to think outside of the box when it comes to design and décor elements. Clients are usually impressed when they are presented with something new and innovative. Play with colour, texture and form to design sensory events; people should be able to experience the event with all five of their senses. Use lighting creatively to create mood and ambience. It is also an effective way to create effect on a limited décor budget. Choose venues or sites that suit your theme and design for the event. This will help to enhance the overall look and feel of the event. Follow international décor trends and keep up to date with them. Do not simply deliver the same design every time.

Make the event interesting; design as though you were a guest, thinking about what you would like to see, hear, feel, and taste. Most of all, make sure that the client feels that they are included in the fun of the creative process. For example, small thoughtful gestures can make a lasting impression: send a few tasters of the food to the client's office a few days before the event, or take a few pictures of the build up if they are not on site. Gestures such as these will help the client feel involved in the process.

Be smart with space- Choose an event space that is attractive on its own, then create the right flow—that's the key to getting plenty of wow without plenty of money. Put your money where guests spend most of their time. For example, during cocktails, guests need a good bar and an attractive space.

Mix tables of varying shapes, then put linen on some of the tables and leave others bare except for candles. Create drama in the room by placing three or four huge vases filled with flowers—real or silk—off center. Use monochromatic masses of inexpensive blooms. Rent plants to fill the space and warm it up.

Never skimp on quality. "Don't compromise on the quality of products even if there are fewer flowers and such," "We will never skimp on the wow factor when a guest enters the event, if it sets the mood and the tone of the event."

7. Conclusion

Designing events is a creative process and (like all creative processes) it takes time, research, and passion to achieve successful results. Design and décor affect every stage of event planning. This is due to the fact that design forms the visual medium through which event managers plan events and bring the client's concept to life. Designing events requires specialised skills, and attention needs to be given to the objectives of the event, the spatial design of the venue, the theme of the event, and the general look and feel that is to be achieved. By taking into account EMBOK's seven classes of design when planning the event, understanding the role of décor in design, keeping the elements of design in mind, bringing creativity into each aspect of the design phase, and designing events as experiences by engaging guests in meaningful interactions with the event, the event manager can ensure that guests leave the event feeling inspired and excited about the fact that they were able to be a part of such a memorable and meaningful experience.

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