

Participatory event design with EventExtra™ OpenSpace

There is nothing new about running topic-centered participatory workshops at internal conferences to gain delegate involvement. They are almost expected. But making the transfer from workshop proposal to ideas implementation requires a new set of rules.

The problem is that no matter how innovative the format and exciting the activity, one thing will never change. *If the inputs are lacking in conviction, so too will the outputs.*

By that we mean that if delegates arrive to participate ill-prepared and unbriefed, and they have not had the opportunity to gain inputs from their immediate colleagues or region and do not get to hear about the workshop topics until they get to the event, their contribution will be limited to what they 'think' they know at that moment in time.

In effect it devalues outcomes to merely *top of mind* recommendations and solutions. It also makes it harder to gain proper consensus amongst the work groups, which often results in 'majority' and 'minority' presentations.

It means that when the outcomes are presented *on stage* to senior management, they lack the total conviction you would get from workshop groups who were properly prepared and briefed and who had reached total agreement on their recommendations as a result.

And senior management knows it! Which is why in the vast majority of conference workshops the outcomes never go anywhere beyond the conference platform.

Another problem with workshops is that delegates only get to discuss from a pre-set agenda of topics. The issues that are really causing concern for them never get aired.

The EventExtra™ OpenSpace way to participatory event design – an example

EventExtra™ tackles the inherent problem of ineffectual conference workshops - **before**, **during** and after the **event**.

Before the event

In the perfect situation, your conference should have an online presence at least a month prior to your event. This communication platform opens up discussions and articles on the key topics, speakers and participants involved with the conference. For many events, this will also be open to people across the organisation who will not be attending. In doing so, you allow comments and contributions to flow from a far wider base.

The conference communication hub will also provide briefings and downloadable resources to help attending delegates discuss issues with their local teams.

The key attributes of a Conference Communication hub can be seen at www.eventextra.net



During the event

Not every workshop topic will be of value to every participant. And there will be some potential workshop topics that are of interest to a fair number of delegates but that never appear on the agenda.

One of the ways *EventExtra*[™] gains inclusiveness is by introducing 'voting with your feet' principles to allow delegates to initially select - and subsequently revolve around - which topics they wish to participate in. They select, say, from 5 topics by assigning their name under that topic heading. There are also a further two topic lists with out titles. This allows for the delegates themselves to decide the topic and for others to join those topics instead.

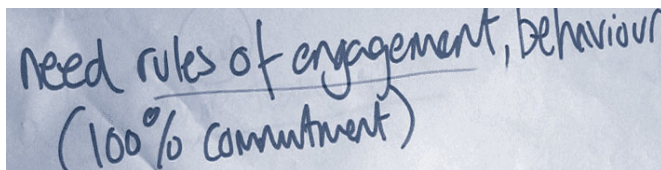
When the issues from this session have been voted on through participation, and their contents discussed and categorised, the groups are then ready to move to a more structured process.

100% buy-in to outcomes

If your participants were to reach full agreement on their proposals and ideas, their influence on management would be far greater and so would their contribution to the business or organisation.

EventExtra[™] provides the techniques and structures to workshops that help to guarantee full commitment to outcome from each group. The 100% buy-in principle.

That means that although there are numerous flip charts with countless lists and concepts as you'd expect, nothing can be 'put on the wall' as a recommendation until everyone is agreed. And as *silence* means *agreement*, even the naturally



reticent will need to voice their views.

A key rule to the 100% buy-in technique is that the *super boss* or senior management team who will eventually receive the presentation must be physically absent from any part of the workshops. They must be off-site, preferably engaged in some activity quite separate to the workshop tasks.

For further information please call

Matt O'Neill: matt@eventextra.net
Direct: +44 (0)20 7 193 0104 mobile: +44 (0)781 587 6904

David Paul : david@eventextra.net
Direct: +44 (0)20 7 043 6050 mobile: +44 (0)776 801 0162

EventExtra Limited, Siena Court, The Broadway, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 1NJ United Kingdom

www.eventextra.net

EventExtra reserves the right to change product descriptions, profiles and specifications without prior notice

Where there are parallel sessions on the same topic, the *EventExtra*[™] facilitators run the outcomes across all the assembled delegates to gain 100% from the total group. So some of the ideas may still be dropped or altered as a result of the ideas from the broader group.

When all is complete, the senior management team or *super boss* is invited back. These top managers will have been told that they will be listening to presentations where all of the delegates have reached TOTAL agreement on their recommendations. That makes for a truly powerful outcome and one that is taken seriously.

However, this is no threat to top management as it can never be 100% buy-in until they have also bought-in.

They are called to make one of three responses to each proposal:

1. 'Yes' we will do it/accept it'
2. 'We need to think about it. But we will come back within (two weeks) with a response/decision.'
3. 'We cannot accept it because....'

The result is a firm outcome from your event.

The delegates feel rewarded that they have been listened too and gained the immediate commitment of the *super boss* or senior management team who, in turn, are impressed by the quality and conviction of the outcomes, without feeling boxed-in by the results.

After the event

Recommendations are one thing, implementing them is quite something else.

After all the excitement and enthusiasm of the event, the danger is that when delegates return home they are again confronted with the same issues on their desks.

That is where the *EventExtra*[™] *Online* managed communication hub comes in. We set up workshop project areas on the hub so that the journey from recommendation can continue. By linking the workshop teams from the conference within its social media environment the work of implementation can be open to all subscribers and progress monitored and additional inputs received.