



IS THE MEETINGS INDUSTRY  
OF TODAY DOING ENOUGH  
TO INSPIRE THE BUSINESS  
LEADERS OF TOMORROW?



OVER 1.3 MILLION MEETINGS ARE HELD EVERY YEAR IN THE UK – AND THAT’S JUST THE ONES HELD OUTSIDE PEOPLE’S OFFICES.

ARE THEY PRODUCTIVE?

ARE THEY MOTIVATING OUR WORKFORCE?

ARE THEY DOING ENOUGH TO INSPIRE THE BUSINESS LEADERS OF TOMORROW?

## FOREWORD

Loughborough University's role is to educate and inspire those already in employment and those who will join the workforce following graduation. A high majority of them will take up employment in the UK and make a significant contribution to the economy and society in general.

imago Venues extend this function by providing the environment for continuing education, learning and communication for corporate and not for profit organisations.

“At Loughborough, we are continually developing our learning and teaching methods to take advantage of the latest developments in technology, including designing flexible spaces to foster learning and collaboration, preparing a new generation of students for the world of work. It is important for their future employers to recognise these different learning styles when delivering training to realise the full potential of their millennial talent, given that they were immersed in technology from an early age.”

Professor Rachel Thomson, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching), Loughborough University

“Loughborough University is known for offering life changing experiences. Academic excellence and renowned student experience sees Loughborough ranked 1st in the Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey and consistently ranked top 10 in all major league tables. This reflects not only the quality of education on offer but increased employability through world-class research and innovation which Imago, as the conferencing arm of the University, aims to extend to our clients.”

Emma Boynton, imago Venues, Head of Sales and Marketing

We decided to ask students, delegates and event organisers about their experiences of meetings and learning to find out if we are doing enough to inspire the leaders of tomorrow. In total, 430 responded, including students (average age 23), delegates (average age 38) and event organisers (for all types of training, meetings and seminars) from a series of focus groups, face-to-face interviews and an online survey.

The results reveal the reality of life in the workplace compared to students' expectations as they embark on their career.

They serve as a rallying cry to the meetings industry and British business to do more to encourage passion and enthusiasm for work and maintain motivation to promote increased productivity in the future.

### QUOTE KEY



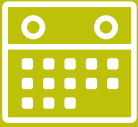
STUDENT  
QUOTE



DELEGATE  
QUOTE



ORGANISER  
QUOTE



## WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO ATTEND MEETINGS?

- ✓ The opportunity to learn first-hand from industry experts and gurus
- ✓ Feeling I could learn something valuable
- ✓ To develop relationships



## WHAT MAKES IT WORTHWHILE COMMITTING YOUR TIME TO A MEETING?

- ✓ Gaining knowledge that helps my future career
- ✓ Building relationships with and learning from peers/colleagues

## UNDERSTANDING WHY PEOPLE ATTEND MEETINGS

Millennial meeting attendees are looking for a more customised learning experience but they, like other generations before them, place great value on face-to-face meetings. While advances in technology have affected how young professionals communicate and conduct their business, they understand the importance of attending in-person events to expand their networks and nurture their professional development.

81% of students and 82% of delegates said one of the major motivations to attend meetings is for personal career development opportunities, yet this wasn't rated highly as a motivator by organisers.

Delegates and Student groups revealed that their meeting objective is to learn from inspirational experts and gurus first hand; to gain knowledge that will help their future development and build relationships with peers, colleagues and (for students) potential employers.

Our delegate cohort saw meetings as an opportunity for creative and innovative thinking, yet their feedback suggests this is often not achieved and that meeting organisers and facilitators could pay more attention to stimulating creative thought. Just 51% of delegates and 37% of students felt fully encouraged to take part in meetings. Delegates and Students want to feel recognised by their employers and to build confidence in their ability, helping them to progress their career. Students are looking for strategic thinking and guidance and want to learn how to use their strengths to their own advantage.

The underlying message from our results paints a telling picture. Millennials want to learn something valuable and develop relationships that will benefit them. A meeting has to be linked to what they want to achieve, not the organisation.



IF AN EVENT WAS TRENDING, IT WOULD ALERT ME TO IT BUT IT WON'T NECESSARILY MAKE ME WANT TO ATTEND, IT WOULD JUST TELL ME ABOUT IT.



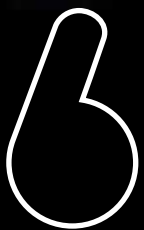
WE START OUT FULL OF ENTHUSIASM AND THE REAL WORLD SEEMS VERY DIFFERENT – IF WE WANT TO INSPIRE AND MAINTAIN ENTHUSIASM, MEETINGS HAVE A REAL ROLE TO PLAY.



IF I ATTEND A CONFERENCE, I EXPECT THAT ATTENDEES HAVE A SIMILAR PROFILE AS ME OR HAVE THINGS IN COMMON WITH ME.



# A MEETING HAS TO FOCUS ON WHAT THE DELEGATE WANTS TO ACHIEVE, NOT THE ORGANISATION



AN ORGANISATION'S VISION AND GOALS ARE HIGH PRIORITY FOR ORGANISERS BUT LOW PRIORITY FOR ATTENDEES WHO WANT TO BE RECOGNISED AND TO BUILD CONFIDENCE IN THEIR ABILITY. STUDENTS WANT TO LEARN HOW TO USE THEIR STRENGTHS TO THEIR OWN ADVANTAGE.



If it's a mandatory event, then I attend without having too many expectations, but for me to voluntarily attend, it has to be something that sounds interesting and helps my career.

## CREATE EXCITING INTERACTIVE, RELEVANT CONTENT AND FLAWLESS LOGISTICAL DELIVERY

It's clear that offsite locations are the preferred medium for relationship building with peers and colleagues to allow delegates to fully focus and avoid distraction. But this is coupled with high expectations that the content will be relevant, stimulating and will involve some form of interaction to avoid fatigue or a feeling of being short changed.

Delegates are looking for content that offers inspiration, passion and leadership before task-related content. They clearly place less value in prescriptive information sharing about the company's vision when compared to organisers.

People want shorter sessions that do not try and achieve too much but are effective and relevant. Delegates often prefer to interact more with their fellow delegates than with the speaker, so it is important that organisers and venues create enabling environments for this peer to peer interaction. Networking is considered a vital way to make contacts for their career development.



10 TO 15 MINUTES BREAK OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM IS THE MOMENT WHERE MORE OF THE LEARNING HAPPENS OUTSIDE THE COURSE OR THE MODULE. PEOPLE DISCUSS THE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND YOU TRY TO CONNECT IT WITH YOUR DIFFERENT VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES. EVERYBODY HAS A DIFFERENT BACKGROUND OR WORKING EXPERIENCE SO IT GOES THROUGH AS A PROCESS, IT GIVES MORE CLUES.



TOO LONG SESSIONS AND UNCOMFORTABLE SEATING ARE THE MAIN DISTRACTIONS (AND GRUMBLES), MUCH MORE THAN POOR FACILITIES AND SERVICE.

FOR ME THE SPACE HAS TO BE FLEXIBLE AND ARRANGED IN A WAY THAT PEOPLE CAN REACT.



RESPONDENTS ALL FEEL THEY ARE GAINING MORE VALUE FROM FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS THAN SOCIAL MEDIA OR OTHER FORMS OF COMMUNICATION

## TECHNOLOGY HAS TO BE USED CAREFULLY TO AVOID IT BECOMING A DISTRACTOR

There has been much talk about the use of technology and social communication to engage millennials. There have been research reports published that seem to suggest that “gamification” and interactivity is all that is required to enthuse attendees under the age of 25. But our results suggest a slightly more subtle subtext. Technology must have a strategic objective and not just be used for the sake of it.

Delegates and students made it clear that the purpose of technology is to be interactive and to give them a voice during the proceedings. They want fun, relevant ways of enjoying content via games and technology.

This was broadly recognised by our organisers but clearly is not being delivered often enough in practice. 77% students and 75% of delegates said they like meetings to use interactive games and new technology yet only 66% of organisers said they are making use of them. Perhaps this is motivated by costs or maybe a lack of knowledge about the possibilities technology can deliver?

Social media activity will not necessarily motivate people to attend meetings but 65% of students, 61% of delegates and 51% of organisers believe it is a good tool for creating awareness. However, the results show that organisers are not promoting the right kind of messages via this platform. Posting information for its own sake is not sufficient. Engagement is key and sharable content which raises awareness of key issues has a much wider impact with millennials.

It is important to recognise that demand is for a personalised approach with technology, so that attendees feel valued and personally targeted. They want to learn something valuable and develop relationships that will benefit them. Platforms that encourage creativity and innovation help retain their attention. After all it has been suggested that millennials have an attention span of 6 seconds!



TECHNOLOGY HAS GOT TO ENHANCE... AND WORK WELL.

IT HAS TO COMPLEMENT THE MEETING AND BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER.

I LIKE THE USE OF ELEMENTS THAT CAN PROVIDE POWERFUL IMAGES EG. VIDEOS AND OTHER VISUALS THAT CREATE A BETTER IMAGE IN THE MIND OF WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACHIEVE.



## WHAT MAKES AN INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKER?

- ✓ Passion and enthusiasm are more important than innovation or just being an expert
- ✓ Building a relationship with the audience
- ✓ Ability to focus on what really matters

- ✓ Keep sessions short and tightly focused
- ✓ Get the audience involved – remember it's all about them!
- ✓ Use powerful images and story telling
- ✓ Leave the social media to before and after the meeting
- ✓ Pour on the praise, use games that have winners, provide awards and certificates

## INSPIRE THE BUSINESS LEADERS OF TOMORROW WITH PASSION AND ENTHUSIASM

Choosing a speaker can be daunting for organisers. A big name may draw in attendees purely on their profile but they must deliver well and leave delegates inspired. When thinking of inspirational speakers, respondents were unanimous in what matters most to them:

- **Passion and enthusiasm:** Delegates 98%, Students 93% Organisers 98%
- **Relationship and interaction with audience:** Delegates 91%, Students 86%, Organisers 92%
- **Innovation and new ideas:** Delegates 91%, Students 86%, Organisers 87%
- **Relevancy:** Delegates 90%, Students 87% Organisers 88%
- **Storytelling to convey and engage:** Delegates 89%, Students 87% and Organisers 90%

However, a renowned expert in and of themselves is not enough to provide inspiration. The delivery and connection they create with the audience is more considered more important. Delegates are looking for the speaker to reinforce their passion and enthusiasm for their career but previous experiences of renowned experts were low – meaning poor quality of delivery that didn't meet pre-event expectations.

The required standards from a speaker are succinct delivery, simple, clear language and an opportunity to connect.



WHEN THE SPEAKER RELATES IT BACK TO THEIR OWN LIFE, THIS IS USEFUL BECAUSE IT MAKES THE DELEGATE FEEL PART OF IT.



IF YOU SEE THE SPEAKER'S EMOTION AND THE SINCERITY IN WHAT THEY ARE SAYING, THEN IT BECOMES MORE BELIEVABLE.



ONE EXAMPLE IS THE CHAIR OF THE SPECIAL OLYMPICS – WHEN HE WAS TALKING YOU COULD LITERALLY HEAR A PIN DROP – HE HAD EVERYONE SO CAPTIVATED – VERY EMOTIVE AND VERY PERSONAL – HE WAS ONE OF THE BEST SPEAKERS.



INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKERS ARE REALLY HARD TO COME BY. IN 20 YEARS I CAN COUNT ON ONE HAND THE NUMBER OF INSPIRATIONAL LEADERS I HAVE ENCOUNTERED.







As an intern, I attended a meeting at Rolls-Royce which was all about the business and the activities that we would perform. We had the opportunity to interact with managers and people who are actually working there which made it much more interesting and beneficial for me.

## HOW DO WE INSPIRE THE FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS OF TOMORROW AT OUR MEETINGS & EVENTS?

Feeling involved is very important to millennials. Taking something positive away from the session, by being a part of the content, strengthens the feeling that it has been about investing in them and their own personal development.

Group activities give delegates and students the feeling that they have a voice within their organisation. Surprisingly, however, few delegates think that their employer really invests in them with the meetings they organise.

“From an organiser’s perspective, venues will need to work harder. We need to be more flexible and think ahead to provide additional value to people who attend meetings. We also need to work harder in terms of marketing and the use of client’s data, being more flexible with the packages that we offer to make it worthwhile for people.”

Emma Boynton, imago



... IF I CAN WALK AWAY WITH ONE NEW SKILL OR ONE NEW CONTACT, I THINK THAT WOULD BE A SUCCESS.



(THE) EXPECTED OUTCOME FROM THE MEETING..(IS) THAT IT WILL REALLY HELP ME IN MY JOB OR WOULD HELP MY PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT. FOR EXAMPLE, IF I HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO MEET A CEO OR MANAGER AND HAVE A WORD WITH THEM... THAT WILL REALLY MOTIVATE ME.





There is no nirvana where everyone is skipping with joy to meetings every day.

But should there be!

## SUMMARY

In order to inspire the leaders of tomorrow, meetings need to deliver delegates' objectives and generate the enthusiasm and guidance they seek for their career, as well as meeting the organisation's own objectives. Tomorrow's leaders are far more discerning about how they use their time and want to be sure that time spent attending a meeting will be worth their while. Their expectations from meetings are understandably high!

**Delegates need to feel inspired and energised to focus on their work and their career following a meeting.**

Our respondents don't consider technological delivery of information as the most important driver of face-to-face meetings; that sort of information can be readily accessed by individuals online. They care far more about creating relationships and emotional connections that enable career progression and personal development.

Millennials seek knowledge and guidance on how to deploy their strengths and abilities within the labour force and see meetings as a good opportunity to get it. In that regard, organisers need to look beyond the content of the day and provide delegates with clear guidance on what they can achieve with what they have learned. Millennials gain less value from having company goals dictated to them. They want to take away clear actions, understand how they can best deliver them and how it will influence results.

**It appears that delegates and students are more focused on the return on objectives (albeit personal ones) than the organisers.**

There will always be a place for face-to-face meetings but everyone involved in organising them needs to ensure they are providing return on investment for each person attending, as well as for the organisation paying the bill.



NEUROSCIENCE RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT, AS HUMANS, WE ARE SOCIAL CREATURES AND WIRED TO WANT TO CONNECT, INTERACT AND COMMUNICATE WITH ONE ANOTHER. UNDERSTANDING THE PREFERENCES OF THOSE WHO ATTEND BUSINESS MEETINGS IS PARAMOUNT TO MAKING THEM MORE EFFECTIVE AND I ENCOURAGE THOSE CHARGED WITH DESIGNING AND DELIVERING THEM TO LEARN FROM THE VALUABLE INSIGHTS THIS REPORT DELIVERS.

JONATHAN BRADSHAW  
FOUNDER  
THE MEETOLOGY® LAB





The HBAA's objective is to drive good business practice and sound commercial judgement between agency and venue members, providing a respected mark of quality assurance for the sector. It is therefore important for both parties not to lose sight of the emerging needs of millennials attending events. Our industry contributes to their personal development far beyond the event itself. We are not just facilitators but creators of experiences that millennials can be inspired by long after the event. In that regard, this research suggests that both agents and venues can do more to engage with clients, share collective expertise and understand which facilities are the best fit for both the needs of the organiser and their delegates.

Leigh Cowlshaw, HBAA





Increasingly, millennials are making up a large percentage of the demographic attending our events. They have very specific needs that we as an agency must cater to in order to engage them. Some of the key areas include incorporating technology and ensuring the event is mobile friendly with integrated social media and gamification.

The agenda and content need to be carefully considered to suit the differing learning behaviours and preferences of millennials. The agenda should be interactive as millennials want to be involved in shaping the discussions, ideally from the pre-event stage by co-creating content. In addition, Organisers need to think about adopting practices that are aligned to their views and beliefs. EG millennials are concerned about carbon footprint and events should be planned and advertised as minimising the environmental impact. If you can create a social impact that helps benefit a local community to the event, that would be even better.

Ashfield Meetings and Events

## IT'S ALL ABOUT ME!

We asked if the meetings industry is doing enough to inspire our future business leaders and the answer is clearly not! There is a disconnect between what Organisers think are the most important factors and what millennials are actually inspired by.

We need to have a stronger collective approach, as an industry, to the objectives of meetings and events; to recognise both the objectives of the organiser and the delegate and whether the delivery achieves both in equal measure. Otherwise, we are simply facilitators of a product and not the creators of inspiring experiences that we can and should be.

As a venue group, Imago can provide an important role in creating more inspiring events. With our own in-house Event Management service, working closely with clients to understand their objectives and desired outcomes is inherent in what we do. We have venues that are flexible spaces and can be tailored to meet differing needs; understanding how to best deploy our facilities is key to the success of the event. We also actively tap into University resources where necessary to add new dimensions to an event, beyond just the venue itself. Whether that's through academic partnerships and expertise or access to world class sporting facilities, we have a wealth of possibilities to offer clients to add content that will not only meet their objectives but provide an inspiring environment...

## ...WHAT CAN YOU DO TO INSPIRE TOMORROW'S LEADERS?



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