The Holistic Conference Experience:

Understanding the Individual Attendee's Conference Journey

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Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.

2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.

4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.

5. The word count of the thesis is 89,160 words.

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Abstract

The overall aim of this research is to analyse and explain conference attendees' holistic journey over their career and to interpret the complexities of how they develop their outcomes from not only a single conference journey but their accumulated conference journeys. Conference research has traditionally concentrated on only a part of the conference journey, mostly elements within the decision-making process (G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Del Chiappa, 2012; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rompf, Breiter, & Severt, 2008; Yoo & Chon, 2008). Currently there is a shift from a management dominant paradigm towards a design dominant paradigm within event research which has contributed towards increased knowledge on the experience at the conference itself (Hahm, Breiter, Severt, Wang, & Fjelstul, 2016; Henn & Bathelt, 2015; Ryu & Lee, 2013; Wei, Lu, Miao, Cai, & Wang, 2017; Wei & Miao, 2017). These early studies focused greatly on the view of the conference host and organiser with the voice of the attendee receiving limited attention leading to calls for further research on them (J. Lee & Back, 2009b; Ramirez, Laing, & Mair, 2013; D. Severt, Wang, Chen, & Breiter, 2007). This research responds to this call by focusing on the attendee, specifically two types of attendees, academics and professionals. Supported by emerging event design thinking, it allows not only for a comparison of the similarities and differences of their journeys, but also provides opportunity for identification of the key influences affecting the conference attendees' outcomes.

To achieve this, an interpretivist position was adopted for this research, utilising a qualitative framework consisting of 18 semi-structured life-world interviews (Kvale, 2007). This approach responded to calls for further qualitative research within event studies (Getz 2012, Mair and Whitford 2013, Mair 2012, Brown 2014) as conventionally they have been carried out quantitatively (Crowther, Bostock and Perry, 2015). The data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis technique generating two conference journeys, for academics and professionals.

The research identifies the key influences within the holistic conference journey which support the development of outcomes. It reveals the influences to be both internal to the attendee as well as external. The internal influences relate to the conference attendee's multiple identities, which impact their ambitions, engagement and emotions which then influence the single conference journey and their holistic lifetime journey throughout their career. The career stage is also internal influence. The external influences are the attendee's workplace at each time of the journey and the conference designer of each attended conference. Fundamentally the research shows how there is an interaction between an individual's single conference journey and their lifetime career. When people attend conferences throughout their career and are actively engaged with their attendance during the conference journey influences their career.

These major influences of the single conference journeys, the multiple conference creators and workplaces over a career together are powerful. On their own, along with the attendee's reflections, they are however only a part of the overall puzzle contributing towards the development of outcomes from the conference journey. The research hence identifies that the conference creator can have a larger impact than previously suggested in the literature by shifting their mindset from focusing on their conference as an independent, all-important event, towards a piece in the holistic career of their attendees, designing for maximised outcomes which contribute towards career progression. This research makes a timely and justifiable contribution to the conference literature, under the emerging and growing umbrella of event design.

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Glossary of Technical Terms

TERM	DEFINITION
An Academic	Professionals working within academia, primarily within research and teaching.
A Professional	Professionals working in industries outside of academia.
Attendee / Delegate	Individual attending a conference.
Business Event	"A gathering of 10 or more participants for a minimum of four hours in a contracted venue" (Convention Industry Council, 2011)
Conference	The coming together of individuals in a defined space where they are given the opportunity for various activities concerning a particular subject, often aiming to transfer knowledge, to learn, to share ideas, to hold discussions and to socialise.
Conference - External	Event external to the organisation the attendee is employed by.
Conference - Internal	Event for employees of an organisations who are not charged to attend it.
Conference Host	Host/owner of the conference, often either an association or organisation from the corporate, public or third sector.
Conference Journey	A single holistic conference journey consists of three stages, 1) the decision-making process, 2) the experience, and 3) the outcome – therefore commences when the attendee begins considering attending a conference and is only completed following development of outcomes after the experience. Multiple single journeys make up a lifetime of a conference journey.
Conference schedule - 'Formal' element	Formally facilitated sessions such as verbal presentations, workshops and other organised learning opportunities.
Conference schedule - 'Informal' element	Informal session often aimed at socialising and involving food and drinks.
Decision-making process	The process where the consumer considers the attributes, value and consequences of the product or service (T. Hansen, 2005).
Destination	Geographic areas (various definitions and may include specific geographic boundaries) which have attributes, features, attractions and services that appeal to prospective users (Gartrell, 1988).
Event Creator / Event Designer	A creator/designer of 'planned events' who interprets attendee antecedents and shapes their experiences (Crowther, 2014).
Event Design	"The creation, conceptual development, and staging of an event using event design principles and techniques to capture and engage the audience with a positive and meaningful experience" (Brown, 2014, p. 20).
Event Organiser	The person or organisation who logistically organise an event.

Experience	An experience includes three dimensions: 1) 'Conative' which describes actual behaviour, 2) 'Cognitive' refers to awareness, perception, memory, learning, judgment, and understanding or making sense of the experience, 3) 'Affective' concerns feelings, emotions, preferences and values (Getz & Page, 2016).
Influences on the attendee's holistic conference journey	**Internal:** Attendee's multiple identities, career stage, and professional ambitions, engagement with their conference journey and emotions experienced in relation to them. **External:** Conference community, attendee's workplace, and conference creator.
Location	Holistic view of the interplay of destination and venue.
Motivation	"Factors that activate, direct, and sustain goal-directed behaviour" (Nevid, 2018, p. 280).
Outcome	Benefits from the striving of achieving expectations in terms of what the attendee takes away from their experience (Meretse, Mykletun, & Einarsen, 2015).
Rationale - 'Deep'	Attendee's motivation to attend which is connected to their professional development factors, including the outcomes they expect from their attendance.
Rationale - 'Shallow'	Attendee's motivation to attend which are straightforward and relate to logistics and to pragmatic reasons.
Tone of communication (attendees)	Behaviour and attitude reflected through tone of communication, for example persuasive or aggressive.
Tone of discussion (destination)	A tone of discussion originating from the destinations' customs and inhabitants' characteristics.
Venue	Facility where people come together for the event. For conferences these are most often physical buildings which are contracted to hire for the event.

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyse conference attendees' holistic journey over their career and to interpret the complexities of how they develop their outcomes from not only a single conference journey but their accumulated conference journeys. The experience is the core phenomenon of an event (Getz, 2007) and the outcomes are developed as a result of the experience of attending the event. The outcomes of conference attendance are influenced by so much more than the experience during the single conference. This focuses the context of this research and underpins the importance of analysing and interpreting the holistic journey of the attendees, specifically two types of attendees, academics and professionals, who attend various types of conferences.

The holistic event experience is a journey which commences when the attendee begins considering attending a conference and is only completed following development of outcomes after the experience. During the event itself it includes moments of interactions such as listening, mingling and speaking (Frissen, Janssen, & Luijer, 2016), and touchpoints which are designed by the event designer (Gerritsen & Van Olderen, 2015). The holistic event journey however has extended parameters which not only go beyond the space and time of the event itself but also beyond the formal aspects within the event. This research concentrates on developing knowledge on attendees' lifetime conference journey, and what influences their development of outcomes, supported by emerging event design thinking.

The focus therefore within this research is on the individual conference attendee and their holistic conference journey, which throughout the research has been hypothesised to consist of three stages, 1) the decision-making process, 2) the experience, and 3) the outcome. As will become evident throughout the review of the literature there is limited research available on the holistic journey, research has however been carried out on each of the stages independently. In addition, it is only recently that the attendee perspective has begun to receive deserved attention in research. This is emphasised by the statement that "attendees have been one of the most under-researched areas of investigation in scholarly journals and are worthy of examination" (Ramirez, Laing, & Mair, 2013, p. 166), echoing the sentiments of D. Severt, Wang, Chen, and Breiter (2007) and J. Lee and Back (2009b). Early literature within conference research focused on the stage prior to the conference experience and built knowledge on attendees' motivations to attend as well as on factors relating to conference location choices. These were viewed prominently from the viewpoint of the conference host, allowing the literature to progress on inputs, including costs, logistics and hospitality (Crowther, 2014; Orefice, 2014), needed to organise conferences with satisfied attendees, albeit a satisfied attendee may not have gained outcomes, which are the benefits from the striving in terms of what the attendee

takes away from their experience (Meretse, Mykletun, & Einarsen, 2015). The experience stage is currently gaining increased research attention with the latest research on it being introduced in section 1.2.2 and further reviewed in depth in section 2.3. The final stage, the outcome, has again been viewed from the host's viewpoint, including the host destination, with limited research on individual attendees' outcomes. This research views the conference journey holistically from the attendees' viewpoint allowing for increased knowledge in terms of the entire experience and the influences on the development of outcomes not only from a single journey but accumulated over a lifetime. In the following section the background and rationale for the attendee experience of the holistic conference journey as the focus of the research will be discussed in more depth, leading to the research aim and objectives. The approach to the research will be introduced before the chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis structure.

1.2. Research background and rationale

Conferences have in their simplest form the purpose of "interchanging ideas" (Shone & Parry, 2010, p. 8) which people have been coming together to achieve ever since humans developed permanent residences (Fenich, 2014). Following a development within the 18th and 19th century where disagreements began to be settled within conference halls instead of on the battlefield (Rogers, 2013), the evolution of the contemporary conference industry continued in the 19th and 20th century with facilities being built for the gatherings and trade organisations were formed from mid-20th century onwards. Since the 1990's there has been a rapid increase in investments in the infrastructure supporting the conference industry (Rogers, 2013). This increase in investment led to a proliferation of conferences, and this led in turn to a rise in interest from the academic field. Whilst there has been considerable academic interest in conference research since the early 1990s, there is a still scope for progression in understanding (Mair, 2014). It is this area in which this research will contribute.

In Britain alone, as shown in Table 1, all types of events contributed £39.1 billion to the economy in 2014 (Business Visits and Event Partnership, 2014) and rose to £70 billion in 2019 (Business Visits and Events Partnership, 2020). This hefty change is explained by an increase in the contribution by leisure events, rising from £5.8 billion to £38.8 billion. The underlying principles and assumptions for these increases in contributions to the economy by leisure events is not fundamental to this research and will therefore not be explored further. Of importance to this research is the extent of the business events segment, including its largest area of conferences and meetings, within the British event economy. This importance has traditionally not been reflected proportionally within event studies where mega events such as the Olympics, and other sporting and cultural events have received more attention than size indicates. For example, in the period from 2004 to 2016 over 76% of academic articles published about events related to other events than business events whereas only 16.5% of published academic articles related to business events (Draper, Young Thomas, & Fenich, 2017).

Event segment	Contribution 2014	Proportion	Contribution 2020	Proportion
Conferences and meetings	£19.9 billion	51%	£18.3 billion	26%
Exhibitions, trade fairs, incentive travel & corporate hospitality	£13.4 billion	34%	£12.9 billion	18%
Festivals and cultural events	£2.4 billion	6%	£29.2 billion	42%
Sporting events	£2.3 billion	6%	£9.6 billion	14%
Cultural and Sporting events hosted outdoors	£1.1 billion	3%		
Total Events	**£39.1 billion**		**£70.0 billion**	

Table 1 - Events contribution to UK economy in 2014 and 2020 (Business Visits and Event Partnership, 2014; Business Visits and Events Partnership, 2020)

Research on event experiences has been stated to be an area of study which needs to continue to be increased (Backman, 2018). It is therefore appropriate to contribute to continued development of research on conferences and respond to calls for further understanding of individual's experience of attending conferences and the process of how they create outcomes (Mair, 2012). This study on the attendees' holistic conference experience and the development of their accumulated outcomes over a lifetime, responds to calls for increased development of understanding of conferences and attendees' experiences of them. Before continuing the introduction to event studies and conference research it is necessary to explore further the terminology within business event studies which will be carried out in the following section.

1.2.1. Business events and conferences

Defining the term 'business events'

There is a consensus on the large size and importance of the conference industry to the global economy (Events Industry Council & Oxford Economics, 2018), however there is little agreement on terminology; it varies not only between academia and industry but also by countries and regions. Business events, a term currently well recognised particularly in the UK and Australia, has largely replaced the older term of MICE (meetings, incentives, conventions, exhibition) (Deery, Jago, Fredline, & Dwyer, 2005). In the US the term meetings is more frequently adopted when discussing the same group of events. The terms of business events and meetings are therefore interchangeable, albeit causing confusion. Because of the UK origin of the research this thesis will adopt the term business events.

Business events was defined by Deery et al. (2005, p. 5) as "any public or private activity consisting of a minimum of 15 persons with a common interest of vocation, held in a specific venue or venues, and hosted by an organisation (or organisations)".

Correspondingly the term meetings has been defined by the Convention Industry Council (Convention Industry Council, 2011) as "a gathering of 10 or more participants for a minimum of four hours in a contracted venue" but, as Mair (2014, p. 4) notes, they also use the term to cover "conventions, conferences, congresses, trade shows and exhibitions, incentive events, and corporate/business meetings", which encompasses more or less all business events. These two definitions of business events have great similarities, for example both emphasise these being gatherings or activities which include a certain number of participants in a particular venue. The main difference lies in that the Convention Industry Council (2011) dictates a minimum time frame of 4 hours whereas Deery, Jago, Fredline, & Dwyer (2005) do not specify a time frame. For their study on the value of the business events industry in the UK, S. Li et al. (2013) relied on the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) framework with four dimensions when measuring business events' economic importance; aim, venue, size and duration. In addition to defining the aim as: "to motivate participants, to conduct business, to share ideas, to learn, to socialise and to hold discussion" (S. Li et al., 2013, p. 4) they provided an overview of the numerous types of business events. Their overview along with Deery et al.'s (2005) overview is listed in Table 2.

Deery et al. (2005, p. 5)	S. Li et al. (2013, p. 5)
- Conferences - Conventions - Symposia - Congresses - Incentive meetings - Marketing events - Special celebrations - Seminars - Courses - Public or trade shows - Exhibitions - Company general meetings - Corporate retreats - Training programs	- Conventions/conferences/congresses - Trade shows/business exhibitions - Consumer shows/consumer exhibitions - Incentive events - Corporate/business meetings - Other meetings (which qualify under the defined criteria above)

Table 2 - Types of business events

Different business event types

The business event types listed in Table 2 have been grouped into four different categories in Table 3 using the same segmentation as Events and Partnership (2014) and displays the contribution each segment made to the UK in 2013. The smallest segment, incentive travel and corporate hospitality, have the main purpose of rewarding, motivating and training employees or entertaining clients and customers (Davidson, 2019). Exhibitions, each of them often very large events, focus on displaying and

demonstrating products, services and promotional material to attendees visiting the exhibition floor (Fenich, 2014).

Event segment	Contribution 2014	Event types included
Conferences and meetings	£19.9 billion	- Conferences - Conventions - Congresses - Symposia
Exhibitions and trade fairs	£11.0 billion	- Exhibitions - Public or trade shows - Consumer shows/consumer exhibitions
Incentive travel and performance improvement Corporate hospitality and corporate events	£2.4 billion	- Incentive meetings - Corporate retreats - Marketing events - Company general meetings - Special celebrations - Seminars - Courses - Training programs

Table 3 - Grouping of business event types

<u>Defining the term 'conference'</u>

Conferences are the type of event which contributes the most significantly to the UK economy, therefore being appropriate as the focus of this research which offers further insights to the multiple nuances of the delegates' experiences. Conferences incorporates meetings, conventions, congresses and symposia, events which include "educational programming, networking activities, and an exhibition" (D. Severt et al., 2007, p. 399). The term conference in this thesis therefore includes convention and congress even if there are subtle differences in their definitions. Fenich (2014) and Events Industry Council (EIC, previously Convention Industry Council) (Convention Industry Council, 2011) who are both writing from a North American viewpoint, and Rogers (2008) writing from a British viewpoint, have all provided a definition for these three terms which demonstrate their minor differences. All agree on the definition for conferences:

(1) Participatory meeting designed for discussion, fact-finding, problem solving and consultation.
(2) Event used by any organisation to meet and exchange views, convey a message, open a debate, or give publicity to some area of opinion on a specific issue. No tradition, continuity, or periodicity is required to convene a conference. Although

not generally limited in time, conferences are usually of short duration with specific objectives and are on a smaller scale than congresses.

When defining congresses, they agree on the following:

(1) The regular coming together of large groups of individuals, generally to discuss a particular subject. A congress will often last several days and have several simultaneous sessions.

(2) European term for convention.

The North Americans then continue by stating that congresses are generally hosted annually. Interestingly the two of them do not fully agree on their definitions on conventions, they both agree that they include educational sessions, meetings/discussions, and socialise. Fenich (2014) in addition states explicitly that there is no secondary exhibit component, whereas Event Industry Council (Convention Industry Council, 2011) do not refer to this element but discuss how the attendees are members of a membership or industry organisation and that these events recur with specific, established timing. The common primary purpose of conferences, conventions and congresses is therefore to transfer knowledge, disseminate information and to create a platform for collaboration. Their differences, as well as between the other business events displayed in Table 2, lies in their frequency, duration, size and host.

The conference host is commonly one of the two major players, the association sector and the corporate sector (Rogers, 2013); a third large player is the public sector (Mair, 2014). Organisations within the association sector are not for profit, for example professional associations, voluntary organisations and charities, who often host large conferences (Rogers, 2008). Organisations within the corporate sector are however run for profit and their owners expect a financial return on their business. Nevertheless this may not always be the case for the conferences they host as some of them are internal events for employees of the organisations, who are not charged to attend (Davidson, 2019). A distinction between association and corporate meetings is therefore that attendees have more freedom of choice of attending the former, whereas attendees at corporate meetings are expected to attend and generally have their expenses covered (Oppermann & Chon, 1997).

The attendees and host, in the form of the association, corporate or public-sector organisation, are however not the only stakeholders to a conference. These also include event organisers and other suppliers, sponsors and the host community, and many more interested parties (Reid, 2011). The initiator or owner for corporate and public-sector conferences is often the same individual or organisation as the one hosting it, whereas for association conferences these may be two different organisations (Fenich, 2014; Rogers, 2008) and the event organiser may be a third party to it. Conferences are aiming for different types of attendees and discussing various topics, a few examples of the types of conferences are sales conferences, technical conferences (Rogers, 2013), education conferences, and association conferences. The association conferences cover a wide range of subjects such as medical sciences, natural sciences, other academic, trade

organisations, professional bodies, and social groupings (ICCA, 2013). The association conferences are therefore aimed at and attended by professionals across industries.

The attendees are the focus within this thesis, in particular two types of attendees, academics and professionals. Within academia it is widely accepted and expected that academics attend conferences. This had led to academics being a conference attendee segment widely researched (J. Lee & Min, 2013b; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Ngamsom & Beck, 2000; Rittichainuwat, Beck, & Lalopa, 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008) whereas professionals in other sectors, hereinafter called professionals, have received less attention as conference attendees in research. The distinction between the two attendee types within this research is therefore based on their profession, academic and professional (in other sectors), as opposed to the type of conference they visit. It is thus acknowledged that conference attendees within this research are professionals within various professions. The distinction made between the two major professional conference attendee types are that professionals working within academia, primarily within research and teaching, are referred to as 'academics' and other attendees are referred to as professionals.

The above discussion demonstrates the lack of clarity within the literature of conferences. For transparency purposes, and drawing on the definitions used by Convention Industry Council (2011), Fenich (2014), Rogers (2008) and D. Severt et al. (2007), within this study conferences are defined as:

> *A conference is the coming together of individuals in a defined space where they are given the opportunity for various activities concerning a particular subject, often aiming to transfer knowledge, to learn, to share ideas, to hold discussions and to socialise.*

This definition of a conference concludes the overview and clarification of the terminology used globally on business events, both within industry as well as academia. In the following section an overview of the evolution of the broader event studies is provided.

1.2.2. Event studies

Planned events have been studied for a long time within various fields, such as anthropology and sociology, and more recently within tourism, hospitality and leisure studies (Getz, 2007). Since the late 1990's the dynamic research area event studies, which Getz and Page defined as "an interdisciplinary field that studies all planned events, and meanings attached to events and their experience" (2016, p. 4), has been developing and maturing as an independent field of study (Getz, 2012). The focus of event research is still however largely originating from other fields, such as tourism where the concentration has been on economic impact studies aiming at proving the value of the event for the destination and the tourism it generates, or socio-cultural studies exploring the impact of an event on the host society (Mair & Whitford, 2013).

Event studies was classified into three discourses by Getz (2012), the foundation based on humanities and social sciences, followed by event tourism and event management. He defined the latter two as instrumentalist and management focused, and as evidenced in the impact studies that is the direction most event research have taken (Mair & Whitford, 2013; Thomas & Bowdin, 2012). Event management has been defined as "an applied, professional field devoted to understanding and improving the management of planned events" (Getz & Page, 2016, p. 4). Therefore, the core of it is on planning and organisation of events and this focus is also evident within the events industry with job titles such as manager, coordinator, planner and producer (Getz & Page, 2016, p. 4) being prominent.

The diversity of job titles for similar roles is in keeping with the range in terminology within business events as well as within event studies. An attempt has been made to align the education of event management and knowledge in the industry, when scholars and event industry practitioners collaborated to produce the Event Management Body Of Knowledge (EMBOK). It was built around five domains: administration, design, marketing, operations and risk, generating a model with processes (Silvers, Bowdin, O'Toole, & Nelson, 2005) therefore leading to an emphasis on the management and event organiser perspective (Robson, 2008). The agreement in creation of this model demonstrates that the focus has been on how to plan and run events operationally (Barron & Leask, 2012), and emphasise the inputs needed to deliver an event smoothly which maximises attendance (Rogers, 2013), meets attendees' expectations, and makes them satisfied with their visit. Within event studies the event management and event tourism discourses therefore have been stressed, and collectively event industry practitioners have much expertise needed to manage successful events which deliver satisfied visitors and economic benefits to host communities.

Event studies have however been transforming, as there is in motion a slow shift from an event management-predominant paradigm to an event design-predominant paradigm (Brown, 2014). Event design as defined by Brown (2014, p. 20) is "the creation, conceptual development, and staging of an event using event design principles and techniques to capture and engage the audience with a positive and meaningful experience". The event designer therefore must be audience-centric in their entire approach to event design, aiming to influence and modify the behaviour of the attendees. This is also emphasised by practitioners Frissen et al. (2016, p. 195) as they state that event design is the "process of articulating change, setting the boundaries, and prototyping [the] event using design thinking and doing". Event design is therefore far from only about the event's aesthetic and theme; it is purposefully practiced and embraced to create desired perceptions, cognition and behaviour (Berridge, 2007). The design process is wider than the creation of experiences in terms of events, as they are often viewed as "catalysts, symbols, conduits and lenses that enable people to function within and reflect upon their own role in society" (Richards, Marques, & Mein, 2015b, p. 4). This leads to the ability of event design to be a strategy (Crowther, 2010) which has been demonstrated, for example, in

the movement of 'eventful cities' as discussed by Richards and Palmer (2010). The inclusion of event design leads to a different perspective of the attendee, in terms of what they feel and think, including beyond the event; therefore, expanding on the traditional satisfaction discussed above. The focus of this research is on the attendees' experience of the holistic journey which is, to a large degree, influenced by the event organisation and design – therefore it is necessary to review the evolution of event studies and conference research from early days focusing further upon outcomes, underpinned by a more strategic and design led approach.

1.2.3. Conference research

It was noted in the introduction that academic interest in conferences has grown over the last 30 years but still lacks depth. Conference research has been following the orthodox path of management and input focus in the same way as wider events studies. This focus has inevitably invited an emphasis on a limited number of stakeholders to conferences, mainly those who decide upon and/or manage the inputs such as the event host and organiser.

Three research areas were dominant within the early conference literature, firstly the attendee decision-making process, secondly the conference organisers' site selection process and thirdly the studies of economic impacts (Mair, 2014). The concentration within the attendee decision-making process has been on their motivations to attend, as organisers need to have knowledge on these to allow them to attract future attendees. Limited literature is available on the development of these motivations and how they are influenced, as they have not been explored holistically within the conference journey or over a career. Another major input when organising a conference is the destination and venue choice, since they frequently affect the event attendance (Baloglu & Love, 2005; G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Elston & Draper, 2012; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; Rompf, Breiter, & Severt, 2008; Yoo & Chon, 2008) and the large size of the market has reasonably also been included in the justification for conference site selection research (G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Del Chiappa, 2012; Rompf et al., 2008). In section 2.2 the existing literature on themes relating to the attendees' decision-making process will be explored further.

Quantifiable research, such as the economic impact of conferences, contributes towards the management perspective as they have the purpose of proving the worth of the conference and demonstrating the return on the investment. There are however further tangible and intangible outcomes developed from conferences, which can either be translated into an input or utilised to develop inputs. An example of this is how a good conference experience can generate satisfaction with the event which in return leads to intention to return to the event (Leach, Liu, & Winsor, 2008). For instance, it has been found that those who are happy with the educational benefits are most likely to return and speak positively about the conference (D. Severt et al., 2007). This perceived attendee satisfaction does however not express the nature of their experience and this has been

acknowledged since "very little is currently understood about the meanings that individuals attach to business events, or about the experience of attending an event" (Mair 2012, p. 139). The existent literature on experiences will be reviewed in section 2.3.

The outcomes which are most straightforwardly converted or applied to inputs are quantifiable tangible factors and they are conventionally the factors evaluations mainly capture (Carlsen, 1999; Foley, Schlenkar, Edwards, & Hayllar, 2010; Mair, 2012). Little has however been established about intangible outcomes and other stakeholders' outcomes although Foley, Schlenker, Edwards and Lewis-Smith (2013) have identified six core themes of legacies beyond tourism spend from business events as explored from the hosts' viewpoint. The themes are knowledge expansion, networking, relationship and collaboration, fundraising and future research capacity, raising awareness and profiling, and showcasing and destination reputation. Their study illustrates a slow shift in conference research towards a further attention on attendees' outcomes and further literature on outcomes will be reviewed in section 2.4.

Correspondingly to event studies, there is a movement within conference research, it is moving away from the strong focus on the first journey stage, which takes place before the conference itself, to the experience at the conference and subsequent outcomes achieved. This has been driven by factors such as conferences being hit hard in the economic downturn following the global financial crisis in 2008, developing a need for them to demonstrate validity and relevance (Sperstad & Cecil, 2011). Attendees also have more experience of attending conferences, leading to them being more sophisticated and with higher expectations of educational opportunities (J. Lee & Back, 2009b). This paradigm shift has also been influenced by industry movements such as Meeting Architecture (Vanneste, 2008), the ROI methodology (Phillips, Breining, & Phillips, 2008), Strategic Meetings Management (Iwamoto & Munro, 2011), and Event Design (Frissen et al., 2016). All these movements emphasise change in behaviour and outcomes, a shift from a one-way focus on inputs. They also consider further stakeholders to the conference other than the host, or in case of the economic impact, the host destination. In line with this shift in conference research and industry movement, within this thesis the term event organisers will not be widely referred to, but rather the more encompassing terms of event designers and event creators will be used (Crowther, 2014). This reflects how the role has developed into designing engaging experiences and away from only managing the logistics and operational aspects of the event (Orefice, 2018).

1.2.4. New perspectives on conferences

An understanding of the overall conference journey to "understand the continuing value of convention attendance beyond the event itself" (Mair, 2014, p. 29) is therefore needed, including the effects of multiple conference experiences on outcomes. This is in line with the expanded event design sphere in Figure 1 (Richards, Marques, & Mein, 2015a, p. 203) and the different stages of the relationship life cycle with perceptions changing depending on the stage in the value delivery process (Mitchell, Schlegelmilch, & Mone,

2016). The literature within multiple subjects of the separate stages requires to be viewed aggregated to interpret the holistic conference journey for attendees. Interestingly, although the focus has been moving towards the attendee, the profession of the studied attendees have, as discussed above, primarily been academics, leading to a gap in knowledge on attendees in other professions. To conclude, further research is needed on attendees' perceived and gained outcomes, including personal development from event participation (Getz & Page, 2015) and links to their day-to-day business (Henn & Bathelt, 2015).
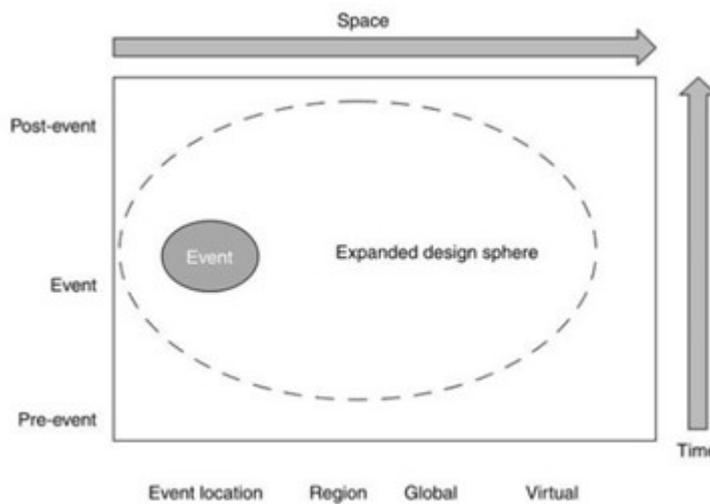
Figure 1 - The space-time expansion of events design by Richards, et al (2014, p. 203)

1.3. Research aim and objectives

The overall aim of the research is to analyse and explain attendees' holistic conference journey and how it contributes to the attendee's accumulated outcomes of a lifetime conference journey.

In setting out to achieve the aim of the thesis, three objectives were specified:

- To explore individuals' experiences of their conference journey.
- To compare and contrast academics' and professionals' conference journeys in the context of their perceived outcomes.
- To develop a framework to explain the key influences affecting the conference attendees' realised outcomes.

These objectives will be reviewed in chapter seven and their achievement ascertained, and the study's contribution to knowledge shall be judged against these objectives.

1.4. Research approach

Previous conference experiences influence decisions to attend future conferences, as found by Jung and Tanford (2017) establishing the effect of single conference journeys

on each other. It has also been determined that qualitative research is essential to be able to deepen the understanding of attendees' responses to a range of stimuli within the event environment (Berridge, 2007). The qualitative approach would in addition allow for further understanding of how attendees view value creation in the different stages of the relationship life cycle (Mitchell et al., 2016). For this research an interpretivist position was adopted utilising a qualitative framework consisting of 18 semi-structured life-world interviews (Kvale, 2007). This approach responded to calls for further qualitative research within event studies (Brown, 2014; Getz, 2012; Mair, 2012; Mair & Whitford, 2013) as conventionally they have been carried out quantitatively (Crowther, Bostock, & Perry, 2015). A further discussion on the methodological choices is provided in chapter three.

1.5. Contribution to knowledge

This research contributes towards key developments in contemporary conference literature, an area which is rapidly evolving whilst moving from a managerial approach from the conference creator to a design focus emphasising the experience of the attendee. The conference attendees' experience is explored both from the view of single conference experience, as well as their accumulated conference experiences over their career, contributing with an examination of the holistic conference journey. Previous conference research has neither examined conference experience holistically, nor examined the accumulated journey over a lifetime career. The research provides a further dimension by differentiating between academics and professionals, hence enabling similarities and differences to be examined. Therefore, in all senses, this research makes a timely and justifiable contribution, under the emerging and growing umbrella of event design.

The research identifies the key influences within the holistic conference journey which support the development of outcomes; the key findings are presented as a meta-framework in Figure 22. It reveals the influences to be both internal to the attendee as well as external. Those internal relate to the conference attendee's career stage as well as their multiple identities which impacts their ambitions, engagement and emotions within each single conference journey. The external influences are the attendee's workplace at each point in the journey and the conference designer of each attended conference.

Most significantly, the research contributes to knowledge on the interaction between an individual's single conference journey and their lifetime career. When people attend conferences throughout their career and are actively engaged with their attendance, the conference journey positively influences their career. This interaction between the single conference journeys, the many conference creators and workplaces over a career, underpinned by the attendee's continuous reflections are illustrated in the puzzle in Figure 27. It illuminates how these major influences are a part of the puzzle influencing the development of the attendee's outcomes from the conference experience.

Consequently, the conference creator can have a larger impact than previously discussed in the literature by shifting their mindset from focusing on their conference as an independent all important event towards a piece in the holistic career of their attendees, designing for maximised outcomes which contribute towards career progression. Further details on the contribution to knowledge are provided in section 7.4.

1.6. Structure of the thesis

This section provides an overview of all the chapters within the thesis highlighting the key elements within each.

Chapter 1, Introduction, has introduced the rationale for this study. The management approach has invited a focus on the host and organisers' perspective leaving great scope for the voice of the individual attendee to be heard. A holistic view, which combines the separate tracks of literature on all three stages within the conference journey, is needed, which contributes to knowledge on conference experiences and outcomes.

Chapter 2, Literature review, reviews current literature on the three separate stages, beginning with the decision-making process, followed by the experience, and is completed with the final stage, the outcome. Wide bodies of literature are reviewed to extend the view of the conference journey beyond the conference research within event studies. In addition to including early research, it acknowledges the emerging and dynamic research on experiences including event design, sense of community and engagement exploring aspects such as social identity and self-congruity. The third and final stage of the journey, the outcomes, reviews the concept of value and the role of evaluation. The chapter concludes with the presentation of a conceptual framework in Figure 9 guiding the research and overview of the gap in knowledge.

Chapter 3, Methodology, justifies the interpretivist approach adopted which allowed an understanding of the attendees' lived experiences throughout their holistic conference journey. A qualitative strategy was adopted, and in-depth semi-structured life-world interviews conducted; in line with calls for further qualitative research within conference research. The purposeful research sampling frame allowed a wide overview of conference experiences, as it reflected the broad experiences of the participants who all had attended at least one conference and were in different stages of their career. In total 18 conference attendees were interviewed for the research, half of them professionals and the other half academics with an equal distribution of their career stages. The data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach. This chapter differs in presentation from other chapters as it is written in first person since, because of the subjective ontological and interpretivist epistemological stance underpinning the qualitative methodologies applied within this research, the researcher was not detached from the research and its outcomes.

Chapters 4 and *5* illustrate the *Findings* on the *Academics* and *Professionals' Conference Journey*. Following the analysis of the data a second framework was developed demonstrating the stages within a single conference journey. Figure 16 shows it detailing each of the main stages: decision-making process, experience, and outcome. These two chapters are presented following the steps within this journey framework. Even though the academics and professionals have the same steps within their journey, they experience and perceive them differently, hence their journeys are presented separately.

Chapter 6, Discussion, begins with an analysis and comparison of the two journeys; identifying the two main differences, firstly expectations of attendance and secondly anticipations of contributions and sales. This section concludes by revealing that the key influences within the two journeys on the development of outcomes are the same: internal, workplace and conference creator, as is demonstrated in Figure 22. The remainder of the chapter focuses on those three influences, leading to the chapter having a different structure than previous chapters which focused on the three journey stages. This chapter is structured around the three identified influences on the conference journey highlighted above, firstly internal, secondly workplace and finally the conference creator. The effect of these influences on the development of the outcomes is discussed throughout the chapter, concluding with the framework in Figure 27 showing the interaction between the multiple journeys and the three influences on outcomes over a professional lifetime.

Chapter 7, the Conclusion, demonstrates how this study achieved its aim and objectives by analysing and explaining attendees' holistic conference journey. This was accomplished through viewing the three journey stages, 1) the decision-making process, 2) the on-site experience, and 3) the outcomes, as one journey as opposed to three separate entities as previous studies have. This new approach to viewing the conference journey, as presented in Figure 16 and argued in chapters four, and five, allowed for the construction of the frameworks presented in Figure 22 and Figure 27, which explain the influences on the development of outcomes from multiple journeys over the professional lifetime. This new knowledge in addition has practical implications for conference creators and employers funding employees' conference attendance. The chapter commences with my reflections upon my PhD study journey and concludes with recommendations for further research and discussion on the limitations to the study.

1.7. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has introduced the purpose of this research, explored the background for it and identified the value in its contribution to knowledge. The context of the research is within event studies and more specifically conference research. It has evidenced the rationale for the hypothesis of the three stages of conference journey, how they have been viewed separately and the need for examining the journey holistically from the attendee's view with the aim of identifying the process of developing outcomes from

conference attendance. Throughout the chapter it has been discussed how conference research has, in line with event studies, had a management dominant paradigm and built knowledge on inputs needed for a conference organiser to maximise attendance. A slow shift in conference research is however emerging towards a focus within the event design paradigm including conference attendees' experiences, a focus embraced within this research. This thesis will now continue with a review of the existing literature on the multiple aspects of the conference journey.

Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction

This research focuses on the holistic experience that delegates have of their conference attendance, therefore literature on the three stages of their conference experience journey, 1) the decision-making process, 2) the experience, and 3) the outcome, will be reviewed within this chapter. The first stage to be reviewed is the decision-making process, continuing with the experience during the conference, and finally reviewing conference outcomes. The streams of literature related to each phase have largely developed along separate tracks, however they will be contextualised against the wider literature as appropriate to the understanding of the journey. Given that this research contributes towards the broader contemporary events literature, the wider literature within multiple event types, including cultural and sporting events, as well as closely related fields such as tourism, leisure and hospitality, will be emphasised within the review. However, because of the interdisciplinary nature of conferences, as well as their presence within an extensive range of subject areas, the literature available on them reaches far beyond the inner circle of event studies and closely related areas, making it essential to review the wider literature. Adding to this is that studies outside the event literature have contributed to the shift away from focusing mainly on the management of events towards a wider focus on event design and event experiences. Specifically, the research will contribute towards conference studies which, as evidenced throughout chapter one, is a fairly new area of research.

The early conference literature concentrated on the first stage, the decision-making process, mainly focusing on motivations to attend and the organisers' choice of location (Comas & Moscardo, 2006; G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; G. I. Crouch & Louviere, 2004; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). The management view has therefore prevailed within this stage of the journey. Interestingly the recently emerging conference literature sits within the stage of the journey where the attendee experiences the conference itself. This literature has been moving from determining attendees' service experience (Breiter & Milman, 2006; Choi, 2005; Weber & Roehl, 2001) to exploring the sense of belonging to the community (Hahm, Breiter, Severt, Wang, & Fjelstul, 2016); a direction which is also evident within the broader events literature (Jaeger & Mykletun, 2013; Meretse et al., 2015). It is within this experience stage that event design has received the most attention; including the influence of event creators on the experience (Berridge, 2012). The final stage, outcomes, has mostly been viewed from the perspective of the host and organiser to determine attendees' intentions to return and satisfaction (Jung & Tanford, 2017; Tanford, Montgomery, & Nelson, 2012) however, that does not indicate their outcomes or explore the relationship of these to their motivations and experience.

The presentation of the literature review through these three sections demonstrates the essential importance of the holistic conference experience, which has thus far been neglected in empirical studies. It also connects research of the various stages illustrating the overall journey and impacts of decisions and occurrences happening on one stage on the other stages. The linear path of attendees' conference journey is therefore followed within this chapter, to not disrupt the experience of the journey, with the aim of understanding how these connect for development of the outcomes. The review will uncover how the area of the decision-making process is the largest within event studies, the limited emphasis on the outcomes, and that the most emerging and recent studies are on the experience at the conference.

2.2. The decision-making process: Why attend conferences?

2.2.1. Introduction

This section reviews literature on the decision-making process for the prospective attendee when they are in their first stage of the overall conference journey, considering why they should attend a conference. Literature on decision-making is vast, for example within psychology (Hastie & Dawes, 2009), consumer behaviour (Peter, Olson, & Grunert, 1999) and economics (Simon, 1959) to only mention a few. It is however not within the scope of this thesis to review and adapt it from all angles within all subject areas. The focus will be on decision-making processes within event studies, given that it is the stage of the event journey within event studies which was originally most developed (Getz, 2007). Firstly, the management perspective within the stage will be discussed, introducing how it has been heavily adapted with the purpose of attracting attendees to events, in particular through destination choice. Following the evaluation of the management perspective, the perspective of the attendees will be reviewed, introducing the difference between the general decision-making process and the one specific to conference attendees. For the purpose of understanding the specifics relating to conferences, a background will be given to motivations to attend other types of events such as festivals and sporting events. Before bringing the chapter section to an end motivation to attend conferences, which underpin the decision-making process, and the different segments of the conference attendee will be reviewed. Finally, the decision-making process section will be concluded to understand how it leads to an experience at the conference.

2.2.2. The management perspective: attracting conference attendees

The management view within conference research has largely developed from the influences of tourism research perspectives, as demonstrated through the phrase 'business tourism'. Another implication of this definition of the conference market is the focus on the supply side (Mair, 2010) further supporting the management perspective. Two major stakeholders to conferences, the host and the organisers, manage the supplies. In early research on conferences the aim often was to develop an understanding

of how these stakeholders could gain a competitive edge (Zhang, Leung, & Qu, 2007) as this would increase the business tourism. This was evident as the focus was on organisers and suppliers within 74% of academic journal articles on business events published in 2000-2009 (Mair, 2012). The choice of the destination which would host the conference was viewed as a considerable influencer on attendance (Baloglu & Love, 2005; G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Elston & Draper, 2012; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; Rompf et al., 2008; Yoo & Chon, 2008), originating again from 'business tourism'. These early studies confirmed the location of a conference to be an important contributor to the individuals' decision-making process prior to registering to attend the conference. Site selection literature therefore forms an important part of the overall conference journey and is included in the review here in order to provide a comprehensive view of the literature.

Various site selection factors have been identified. G.I. Crouch and Ritchie's (1998) early study identified eight: 1) Accessibility, 2) Local Support, 3) Extra-Conference Opportunities, 4) Accommodation Facilities, 5) Meeting Facilities, 6) Information, 7) Site Environment, and 8) Other Criteria. The local support factor is self-explanatory however the others need further explanation. Firstly, the accessibility included dimensions such as cost, both financial and time, frequency and convenience of the travelling schedule and barriers to reach the destination, such as visa restrictions. The extra-conference opportunities concerned not only leisure opportunities at the destinations but also professional opportunities in terms of doing business deals with local businesses. Information on the destination included their experience, reputation and marketing, whereas the site environment concerned its climate, infrastructure and hospitality. The dimensions within other criteria were risks, profitability, association promotion, and novelty. Prior to this study, Oppermann (1996) had empirically measured association conference organisers' perceived importance of factors contributing towards G.I. Crouch and Ritchie's (1998) categories. They concluded that dimensions included in the factors 'accommodation' and 'meeting facilities' were of most importance, whereas the 'leisure extra-conference opportunities' were found to be of least importance. In agreement with this is Leask and Spiller's (2002) conclusion that the future of the venue market lies in them being able to deliver on the organisers' expectations of the facilities and services.

A focus on association conferences was found within the Oppermann (1996) and G.I. Crouch and Ritchie (1998) studies with both arguing that association conference organisers had a greater flexibility in choosing their site compared to corporate conference organisers (Oppermann, 1996). A more varied range of conference type organisers was however included in Del Chiappa's (2012) survey sample, leading him to conclude that the six attributes listed on the right in Table 4 were equally important regardless of the business event type being organised. Rompf et al. (2008) however concluded that there were two main factors affecting business events organisers' site selection, Key Event Success Factors, and Star Status which are listed in Table 4. The attributes listed for the key event success factor are in line with G.I. Crouch and Ritchie (1998) and Oppermann's (1996) dimensions identified as most important to conference

organisers; the majority of the attributes within the star status factor are related to extra-conference opportunities and leisure.

Key Event Success Factor	Star Status		Site selection attributes
Perceived value	Accessibility by air		Overall Affordability
Overall cost	First class hotel rooms		Quality and efficiency of industry personnel
Reputation hosting events	Brand name hotels		Convention and Visitors Bureau assistance
Image desirable to visit	Choice of restaurants		Physical and sociocultural settings
Support services for events	Variety of nightlife		Local transport costs and travel time
Safety and security			Safety and security
Rompf et al. (2008, p. 36)			*Del Chiappa (2012, p. 165)*

Table 4 - Site selection attributes

The phrases used for the site selection attributes are various which is in line with the limited agreement on phraseology within business events. This becomes more obvious when adding further five groupings of attributes identified: restaurant/retail/accessibility, facilities, logistics, city image, and Convention and Visitors Bureau services (Baloglu & Love, 2005). Three important themes in terms of the site selection attributes have emerged from the studies which emphasise the management and organisation view. Firstly the cost in terms of finances and time (therefore including accessibility) is of high importance; secondly the settings in terms of facilities, services and surroundings are appreciated and considered; finally, the attention on safety and security increased over time (J. Lee & Min, 2013b). This also demonstrates how the research has evolved as society has developed and the emphasis within the research shifts.

It is therefore well established from multiple studies what attributes should be considered when choosing appropriate destination and venue for conferences. To organise a well-attended conference, it is however not enough to only choose the appropriate destination and venue, as people have various reasons for attending. Conference creators need to consider further elements when designing their conference, having their prospective audience in mind whilst taking into consideration that attendees will have a variety of reasons to attend. In an attempt to understand why delegates chose to attend conferences, research into visitor motivation increased considerably from the 1990's onwards (Mair, 2014). These reasons can be viewed from three different angles, facilitators, inhibitors (which have also been referred to as barriers (Mair, Lockstone-Binney, & Whitelaw, 2018)), and motivations to attend (Ngamsom & Beck, 2000; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001). They are not mutually exclusive as there may be reasons for them to fall into all categories. The destination for example can function as both a

facilitator and inhibitor. To increase the possibilities of it being a facilitator, many conference creators notably evaluate the choice of destination by taking into account the factors mentioned above.

The management emphasis has therefore led to considerable literature on conference locations being available. The understanding of choosing the correct location is of much importance when organising conferences, but the significance of it has shifted because of the economic climate which led to negative perception of fiscal spending on conferences (Sperstad & Cecil, 2011). However, since a face-to-face conference will not take place without a destination and venue, the destination selection continuous to be of importance. Therefore, the exploration of the effect it has on potential conference attendees' decision-making processes when considering attendance at a conference has been worthy. It has revealed how, although the discussion on the surface seemed to be about the attendee, the emphasis was on the organiser and destination. This is evident in Yoo and Chon's (2010, p. 103) statement on the purpose of their paper: "In today's competitive environment, marketers of associations and destinations make considerable efforts to increase the number of attendees". Their paper, however, at the same time contributed to the shift in research focus to study in further depth why people choose to attend conferences. This they achieved by going beyond viewing only facilitators and inhibitors such as overall financial and time cost, towards the holistic attendee viewpoint, through stating as their research purpose: "to examine whether factors that may affect potential attendees' convention participation decision change over time" (Yoo & Chon, 2010, p. 103). The following section will review in further depth the attendee perspective of their decision-making process.

2.2.3. The attendee perspective: their decision-making process

In order to understand choices when considering attendance at a conference it is essential to consider the attendees' entire decision-making process which leads to a decision on attendance. This is the process where the consumer considers the attributes, value and consequences of the product or service (T. Hansen, 2005). The decision-making process has been studied in various fields, most notably situated within consumer behaviour (Solomon, Bamossy, Askegaard, & Hogg, 2013) and marketing literature (Jobber & Ellis-Chadwick, 2016) which is logical given the sensibility to analyse in-depth consumers' behaviour to market the commodity effectively, whether a product or service. The fact that products are tangible, whilst services are intangible, contributes significantly to different elements considered within the decision-making process. The complexity increases when taking into account that the duration of experiencing the service is different to tangible products (Rushton & Carson, 1989). Because of the differences in the decision-making process concerning tangible products and intangible services, this review will focus on decision-making processes within the event literature, although the vast research available in other literature areas is recognised.

Five stages within the decision-making process were presented by Yoo and Zhao (2010) through their literature review on general models of cognitive consumer decision-making: 1) problem-recognition, 2) information search, 3) alternative evaluation, 4) purchase decision, 5) post-purchase behaviour. Stages which apply further to a decision on conference attendance were presented by Mair and Thompson (2009): 1) motivation, 2) information search, 3) evaluation of alternatives, 4) decision and 5) post-decision behaviour. The main difference in these two presentations of the decision-making stages lies in the definition of the first stage, problem-recognition versus motivation. Both have equal rights within the decision-making process, however there is subtle differences in their definitions. The following two sections will explore the motivations in further depth, beginning with motivations to attend other events than business events to develop an understanding of the differences, followed by exploration of motivations to attend conferences. This will be followed with a section reviewing decision-making models which have been developed specially for conference attendance to explore the influence of motivation on the decision-making process. The review of those models will begin to reveal that the major difference in problem-recognition and motivation is that the motivation is often developed from recognising a need as a consequence of wanting to solve a problem or challenge.

2.2.3.1. Motivations to attend events and for leisure/tourism activities

The type of the event under consideration to attend influences the attendance motivation and the studies discussed below have shown that these motivations are different depending upon the event type. It is important to understand the diverse motivations for different events because some attendees may complement the conference journey with leisure interests (Tretyakevich & Maggi, 2012) and the holistic view could create further angles to the motivations. This section will review motivations to attend festivals and sport events.

For festival attendees, including music and other cultural forms, there is an agreement that the motivations surround the socialisation, both general and with family and friends (Crompton & McKay, 1997; Faulkner, Fredline, Larson, & Tomljenovic, 1999; Formica & Uysal, 1996; Kitterlin & Yoo, 2014; Nicholson & Pearce, 2001; Tomljenović, Larsson, & Faulkner, 2001). It has been noted that festival visitors may even be attending simply because someone requested it of them (Bowen & Daniels, 2005), demonstrating the great attraction of socialisation within festivals and not solely of the content of the event. Research has also demonstrated that the novelty, excitement, and thrills they expect to experience attract them to a festival along with the notion of escape from day to day life (K. Kim, Uysal, & Chen, 2002).

The novelty, in particular in terms of experiencing new places and culture, is evident in local cultural events as demonstrated by Schofield and Thompson (2007) when surveying visitors to The Naadam Festival, an annual cultural and sporting festival held throughout Mongolia. They conclude that cultural exploration may be 'universal traits' relevant to

attendees for all festival and events. This is a strong statement given the many various types of events, but it can be expected that they are referring to events which are of cultural nature. Many of these motivations have great similarities with motivations to travel, such as social interaction, novelty, exploration, and enhancement of relationships (Crompton, 1979) which is reasonable considering that both are frequently made for personal and leisure reasons.

This led to the majority of early motivation studies being drawn upon the theoretical framework of tourism motivation research (X. Li & Petrick, 2006). These commonly identified motivations for attending festivals were critiqued by Maeng, Jang, and Li (2016) as they stated that no new motivation factors had been put forward despite continuous research. Through a meta-analysis of 46 articles on cultural, music, food, and other local and community type festivals, they determined the frequency of 70 motivational factors identified within these articles. As could be expected, the six most frequently identified motivational factors were: socialisation, family togetherness, escape, novelty, excitement, and cultural exploration, which Maeng et al. (2016) confirmed are inherited from studies on tourism motivational factors.

Both cultural and sport events can be attended as passive or active participants, however the distinction between these two types of attendees is frequently more evident when viewing sport event attendees, as they are often either passive viewers or active participants in the sport being practiced at the event. This means that for some sport event attendees their attendance means more to them than simply a leisure activity, which applies also for business event attendees; therefore it is highly relevant to include the sport event attendance motivations in addition to cultural events. Gibson (1998) identified two types of behaviour associated with sport tourism, firstly Event Sport Tourism and secondly Active Sport Tourism. She proposed a third category, Nostalgia Sport Tourism, where the attendee is "visiting and perhaps, paying homage" (Gibson, 1998, p. 49). Weed and Bull (2009) argue however that all sports tourists are active in their participation, albeit on a high or low scale depending upon the type of sports tourism. The importance of the sport to the participants is in addition on a positive-negative scale. Those attending an elite training camp for example, find the sport elements very positive and have a high participation rate, whereas those attending one-off sports events may be on a wide range on the positive negative importance scale, although all are low in participation.

The motivations of the participants at elite training camps relate to attributes such as competitiveness, a desire to win, as well as testing and development of one's abilities and skills (Weed & Bull, 2009). Those that are in the mid-range of the participation scale have motivations relating to health, fitness, and general wellbeing, in addition to leaning towards the more tourism related motivations such as relaxation and recuperation or even escaping everyday life. The nature of these attributes is visible in business event attendees as well, in terms of professional networking, education and leisure related motivations. Social interaction is evident in the professional networking, which has also

been determined as a motivation to attend sport events (Green & Chalip, 1998). In line with Schofield and Thompson's (2007) discussion, the ability to experience local culture is increasingly viewed as a motivation within sports tourism (Higham & Hinch, 2006) providing those on the low participation scale further opportunities to be engaged with.

Sports tourism research has also been identified to have a management-oriented view and foundations from concepts within the tourism subject (Weed, 2009), which is in line with broader events research including business events. In contrast to cultural events, there is an increasing emphasis on "the individual's characteristics such as interest, needs, goals and personality" (Weinberg and Gould, 1995, as quoted in Weed & Bull, 2009, p. 71) within research on motivations for sport participation. Therefore, the motivation is being viewed from the individual's perspective, without the actual activity, including its location. Since business events are not considered leisure events, the attributes within their decision-making process, such as motivations, do not obey all of the same principles as for attendees at cultural and sports events or for tourists. External factors, such as the image of the trip, affect the choice to travel to the business event destination. This is influenced by the global economic climate, where when in decline organisations seek opportunities to cut cost with business travel and budgets are often being first to be cut (Mair & Jago, 2010), emphasising the need to view further individual attendees' motivations, as opposed to emphasising site selections.

2.2.3.2. Motivations to attend conferences

The early business event motivation studies were, similarly to the site selection studies, conducted from a management point of view, still profoundly influenced by tourism and hospitality studies, and often focusing on association conferences. The influence of tourism and hospitality are evident in Yoo and Weber's (2005) study applying content analysis to determine the progress in business tourism research, as their study is grounded within these areas of research. They conclude that the research focus has been the suppliers' viewpoint, including marketing together with consumer behaviour. Leisure tourism and hospitality consumers´ behaviour differs from business tourism consumers, resulting in the inevitable departure of conference research from heavy dependence on tourism and hospitality towards becoming an independent study area. The difference will be explored further in this section, and when viewing how events, hospitality and tourism have progressed to date there are clear indications of similar paths of interests, although their fundamentals remain different, leading to distinct areas of interests within all three fields.

A conference is primarily attended for business purposes, and this is the major difference to cultural events, tourism, and many sporting events. One of the projections of this difference lies in that conference attendees are aiming not only for an experience during the conference, but also information of various sorts as outcomes from their experience. This leads to many of the previously discussed motivations such as socialisation, cultural exploration, and togetherness not being as prominent when viewing conference

motivations, as they emphasise the experience during the event. Viewing the motivations as "factors that activate, direct, and sustain goal-directed behaviour" (Nevid, 2018, p. 280) is therefore highly appropriate when exploring potential conference attendees' decision-making process.

Networking and professional development are widely recognised as the two main motivations for attending conferences and are well covered in the literature (Bauer, Law, Tse, & Weber, 2008; Grant & Weaver, 1996; Jago & Deery, 2005; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; D. Severt et al., 2007; Tanford et al., 2012; Yoo & Chon, 2008), both of which are visibly connected to expected outcomes. The attractions of networking mainly lie in face-to-face opportunities provided by conferences where attendees can interact with each other to build relationships and expand their knowledge (Foley et al., 2013). These opportunities to network face-to-face with a certain group of people who have shared interests attending the same conference may not be available to the attendee through other channels and, since networks are recognised as influential within peoples' careers (Mair & Frew, 2016), it is evident why networking is one of the greatest motivation to attend a conference. Conferences offer the time-poor modern attendee confined space to extend their networks rapidly through organised activities (Jago & Deery, 2005) where they are aspiring to achieve amongst other objectives: new professional contacts, job opportunities (J. Lee & Back, 2009b), future collaborations, resource sharing, and innovations (Mackellar, 2006). Professional and personal development, including education, has repeatedly been recognised as a strong motivation to attend conferences; although they may be split into three different factors, they are all closely linked and it is reasonable to view them as one overall motivation (Mair, 2014), frequently referred to as learning. The foundations for learning as a motivation are grounded in the attendee's needs and desire to expand their knowledge, gain new skills, and improve professional practices (Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011).

Motivations to attend to achieve networking and learning are closely linked as ultimately there are expectations of them to deliver outcomes. These outcomes frequently are expected to change behaviour such as career enhancement (Rittichainuwat et al., 2001), self-esteem enhancement and leadership (Grant & Weaver, 1996; Price, 1993). The presentation of these, however, is not always introduced and delivered consistently by the conference organiser. The learning is frequently presented as formal activities during the conference, whereas the networking is expected to occur during the informal and social activities. These activities are announced through a conference programme which has an overarching theme or main topic (Zhang et al., 2007), in accordance with the dynamics within the area at the time of the conference (Henn & Bathelt, 2015). The programme has been verified as a motivation in its own right (Rittichainuwat et al., 2001) as it indicates how well it fits with the attendees' expectations to achieve the outcomes expected. The programme may also reveal the attendance of high-profile people, which has been determined to be a facilitator (Oppermann & Chon, 1997) and it has been stated that advertised speakers, experts in their field, good at presenting their ideas in addition

to presenting in general, lead to attendees being more likely to attend (Zhang et al., 2007).

2.2.4. Conference attendance decision-making models

Networking and education opportunities have been established as the main motivations to attend conferences, with location and overall cost functioning as both facilitators and inhibitors depending upon the individual attendee and their circumstances. All of these play a large role within the individuals' decision-making process when considering conference attendance and they are interrelated, albeit to different degrees. Models of these interrelationships have been presented alongside the identification of the attributes within the decision-making process (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Var, Cesario, & Mauser, 1985; Yoo & Chon, 2008; Yoo & Chon, 2010; Zhang et al., 2007). The early work by Var et al. (1985) only modelled how attendees choose between conferences at different locations, whereas Oppermann and Chon (1997) viewed the decision-making process more holistically, introducing the relationships between Association/Conference factors, Personal/Business factors, Locational factors, and Intervening opportunities in the conceptual model presented in Figure 2.
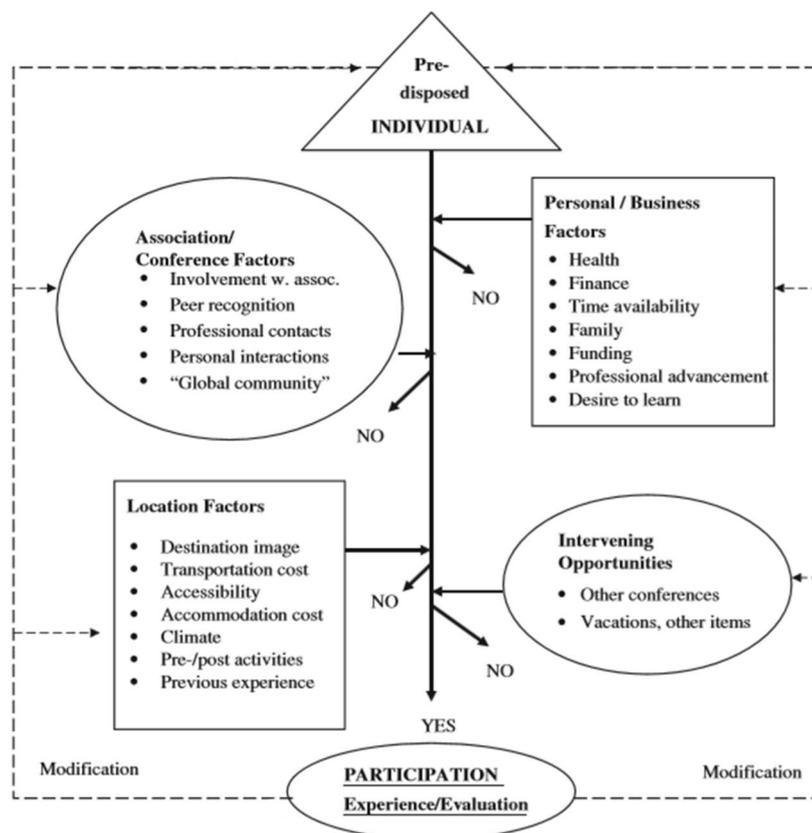
Figure 2 - Conference participation decision-making process (Oppermann and Chon, 1997, p. 186)

The model by Oppermann and Chon (1997) presents firstly in the triangle the pre-disposed individual which is in line with the problem-recognition stage of the decision-making process (Yoo & Zhao, 2010). It then presents the four above mentioned factors

on each side of the decision-making line. The model does not recognise in which order these are considered or their significance, although it indicates that the individual considers them all. A modified conceptual version of the model was introduced by Zhang et al. (2007) with the Association/Conference factors and Personal/Business factors unaltered, the Intervening Opportunities replaced with Total Cost factors to emphasise these as they previously were included within the Location factors. Further attributes were introduced within the Location and Total Cost factors as illustrated in Figure 3. Interestingly the attributes concentrate on short-term facilitators and inhibitors to attend the conference and there is less focus on what outcomes the delegate may realise from the attendance, which is in line with viewing the journey stages separately. The prospective outcomes are mostly notable in the association/conference factors relating to networking, as well as education attributes which are visible within the personal/business factors. The model therefore reflects the attention the cost and location factors have received through the managerial focus and emphasis on the conference organiser and suppliers. The modified model also shows how the literature recognises the interplay between the location and cost, both in terms of money and time.
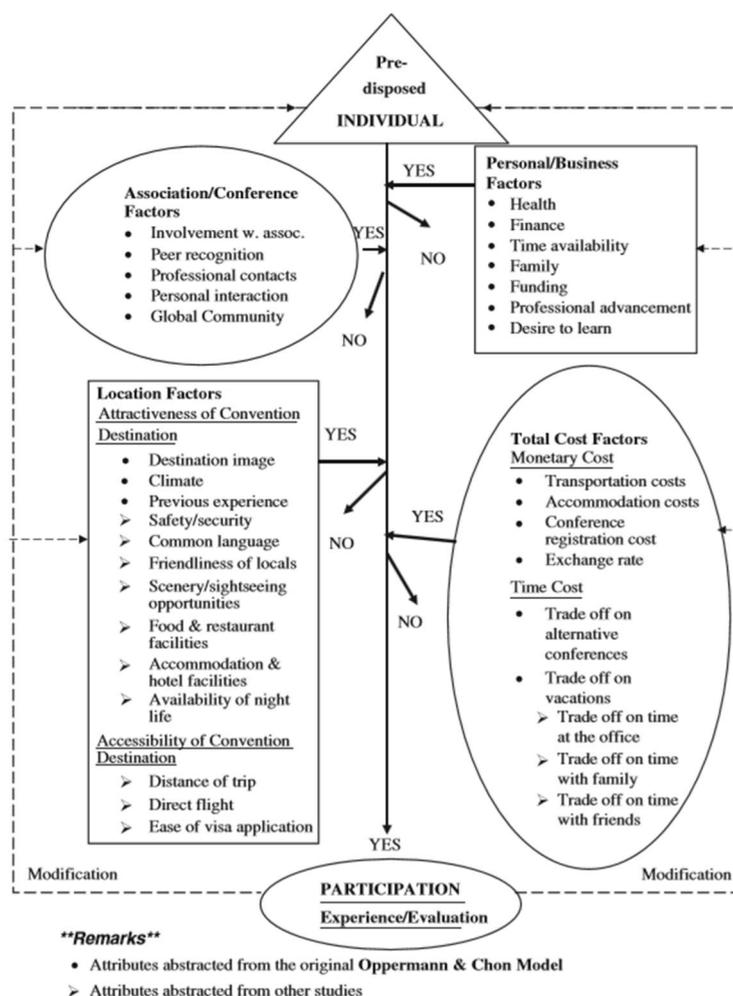
Figure 3 - Modified model of the conference participation decision-making process (Zhang et al., 2007, p. 1126)

In addition to inclusion of the factors considered by the prospective attendee during the decision-making process, the modified model recognises the pre-disposed individual, connecting them to their previous conference experience and evaluation. Neither Oppermann and Chon (1997) nor Zhang et al. (2007) develop the discussion on the pre-disposed individual and limited in-depth research has been identified on how and why the potential conference attendee enters the decision-making process. It has been acknowledged within the wider literature that consumers have various inputs to the decision-making process, including availability of products and their prices, socio-cultural influences, and communication sources both from the provider and external to the product but internal to the consumer such as colleagues, family and friends (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015). Frequently an interplay is in place between these factors when the need is created, for example the providers can communicate how the commodity will enhance the consumer's life as well as steer the supply of their offerings (Solomon et al., 2013).

The role of expected outcomes takes a more prominent place in M. J. Lee and Back's (2007a) model based on the Theory of Reasoned Action when explaining the influences within the prospective attendee's decision-making process, as presented in Figure 4. Through empirical testing of the model, the statistical analysis validated the destination factor being of least importance when deciding upon conference attendance. Cost, including time, was defined as "perceived behavioural control" (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a, p. 22) on behalf of the attendee, again with the short-term view towards the ability to attend. The priority of time is often visible in that many professionals in various industries are time poor albeit they could be money rich (Jago & Deery, 2005). This cost of time links closely to the accessibility to the destination, the simpler to reach the destination the less cost of time. Long-haul travelling may bring with them more exciting locations, but their cost of time is higher. Early research demonstrated exciting locations to be of higher importance as a motivation for some attendees (Oppermann, 1996) however, this altered towards a more pragmatic approach of proximity following the change in the global financial climate beginning in 2008 (Meeting Professional International, 2010). The excitement needs to outweigh the more negative aspects of higher financial and time cost.

The consequences of attending are considered in the 'attitude toward participation' factor suggested by M. J. Lee and Back (2007a), therefore taking a longer-term view assessing the outcomes. It however also includes attributes such as fulfilling job requirements and getting away from the ordinary, which contributes much less to behavioural change following the attendance, but is in line with the previously discussed origins from the tourism research. Their 'subjective norm' factor, the second most important influencer, represented perceived social pressure to perform, which is in line with the inputs to the need recognition. Interestingly, their research determined that past experience was the factor which influenced the decision to attend the most, which

Oppermann and Chon's (1997) model as well as the updated version by Zhang et al. (2007) only listed as a location factor.
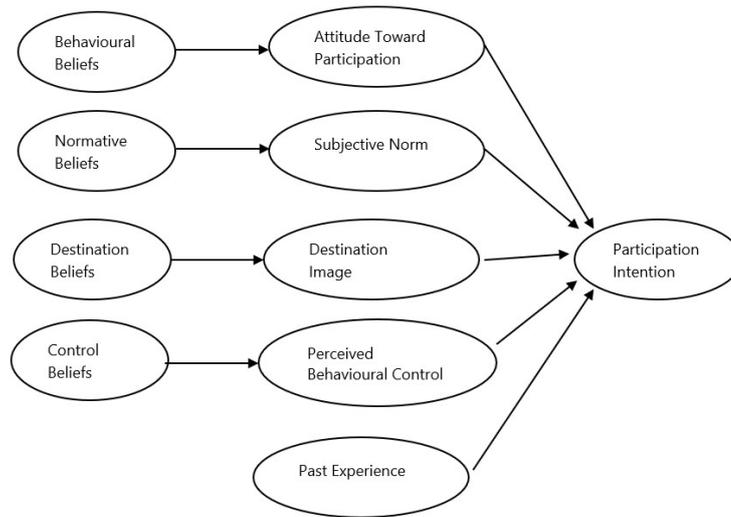
Figure 4 - Meeting participation model (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a, p. 21)

A model on the conference attendee's decision-making process presented by Mair and Thompson (2009) has two major differences compared to Oppermann and Chon's (1997) and M. J. Lee and Back's (2007a) models. Firstly, it presents the stage of awareness and information search which precedes the attendee's considerations of motivations and logistical factors; secondly it adds networking opportunities as a factor in its own right, as can be seen in Figure 5. This model therefore considers additional steps to the evaluation of the attendee's inhibitors, facilitators, and motivations. It however neither considers how attendees evaluate the consequences of attending nor distinguishes between short-term and long-term factors, despite it being more longitudinal than cross-sectional (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a).
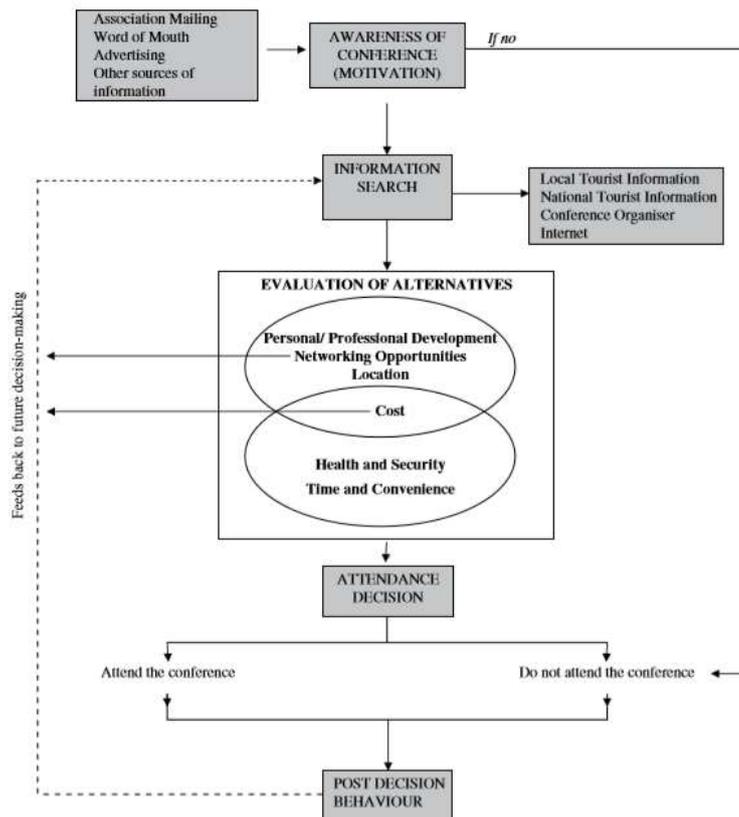
Figure 5 - Model of the UK association conference attendance decision-making process (Mair and Thompson, 2009, p. 407)

These three models show how the attendance can be carefully planned by the individual attendee, nevertheless the consequences of the attendance are not greatly considered, suggesting that short-term logistical factors have been deemed of higher importance in the decision-making process. This trend of viewing motivations as expectations of experiences during the business event, without exploring their relationship with the realised outcomes has continued within the literature. A model proposed by Lu (2017) evidences this, since it is based on expectancy motivation linked with satisfaction at the event and likelihood of recommending it to their organisation following attendance. It should be noted that the type of the attendee or the nature of the conference may influence the key motivations (M. J. Lee & Back, 2005b). Considering that the first three mentioned models were based on attendees at association conferences and the final one only sampling Chinese attendees at exhibitions, it is essential to explore further types of attendees.

2.2.5. Profiling conference attendees and recognition of their needs

A major reason contributing towards the sampling emphasis of association conference delegates is that it has been acknowledged that association attendees share an interest in a certain subject and have a "freedom of choice" of attending the conference (Oppermann & Chon, 1997, p. 179). This indicates that they must feel a need to attend in order to commence the decision-making process, as opposed to certain corporate attendees, who are obliged to attend on behalf of their organisation. Because association

attendees has been the segment to receive the most interest in conference research, there is a developed understanding of the influence of the association on the need (Mair & Thompson, 2009; Ngamsom & Beck, 2000). In line with consumers' involvement with a certain brand because of their attachment to it (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2006), conference attendees are likely to feel a need to attend because of their attachment and engagement with the association hosting the conference. Individual attendees may however have multiple other needs for attending conferences, for example motivations for networking and professional development are different, all depending upon the individual attendee. There is, however, only a relatively small body of literature which has explored in detail the relationship between the attendee's profile and their specific motivations.

One of the first studies to examine the influence of attendees' profiles on their motivations was carried out by Price (1993) examining the influence of individuals' career stage and age utilising a sample from a specific association conference. She identified four motivational attributes for attending conferences: leadership, networking, education, and professional 'savvy'. The older attendees preferred leadership attributes and the youngest preferred the professional 'savvy' as they were getting to know the opportunities available and building a name for themselves within the industry and association. Fewer differences were notable between the groups when viewing the education and networking attributes, only that the networkers were older. These differences were also evident in that those emphasising leadership had been with their employer the longest and earned the most, whereas the savvy group earned the least. The study therefore established a difference in main motivations to attend conferences, earlier in the career the key interest was learning, not only about the topic but also how to behave and progress professionally, whereas later in the career they were demonstrating leadership and focusing on networking. These results were confirmed by Grant and Weaver (1996) where they utilised the same questionnaire as Price (1993), with their cluster analysis identifying three similar clusters of attendees, those who enjoyed conferences for 1) networking, 2) educational or 3) leadership opportunities with a fourth cluster of destination/recreation/social appeal. The attendees in each category were of same nature as Price (1993) had identified and the fourth cluster was evident in all types of attendees.

Attendees' profiles relating to their motivations was not, knowingly to the researcher, explored in this detail again until K. Severt, Fjelstul, and Breiter (2009) compared three generations' motivations and inhibitors to attend conferences. They concluded that there was limited statistically significant difference between the motivations and inhibitors for the three generations, all were striving for career enhancement and overall cost was an influencer. They proposed that the reason for this stems from changes within society, where learning had become essential for all because of technological advancements and a worsening economic situation kept everyone on their toes. In another analysis off the same data Fjelstul, Severt, and Breiter (2009) brought to attention that although the

leading motivators were the same, there was a slight variation of them in order of influence. The younger generation found career enhancement of most importance, whereas for the older generation it was the overall cost. They also identified a difference in personal benefits, the older and more experienced generation was more critical towards location and the conference programme, with Fjelstul et al. (2009) arguing that they did not want to experience too many repetitions.

Gender difference was not found to be statistically significant within any of the above-mentioned studies (Fjelstul et al., 2009; Grant & Weaver, 1996; Price, 1993; K. Severt et al., 2009) whereas Mair (2010) found that females rated their personal safety at destinations higher than males. In addition, she identified level of education to be a factor in the degree of education and networking as influencer, as well as on the funding, since less education brought with it more junior positions within organisations with less opportunities for funding. These studies all employed a quantitative approach utilising a questionnaire to survey association conference attendees, apart from Mair (2010) who had no criteria for type of conference attended, with the authors providing assumptions on underlying reasons for the findings. This leaves a gap in understanding the fundamental reasons as experienced and perceived by the individual attendees. Ramirez et al. (2013) have contributed to this gap when exploring gender differences for motivations to attend conferences. They concluded that prospects of educational benefits was the main motivation irrespective of gender and although networking was of importance to both genders, the women were more likely to attend again if they perceived the networking positively at the conference at which they were interviewed. The greatest difference they identified was that the males were more driven towards career enhancement and although both genders perceived the destination in terms of travelability similarly the females emphasised their safety and security in line with Mair (2010).

2.2.6. Decision-making process leading to an experience

This chapter section, 2.2, has established the main elements of the "extremely complex" (Draper et al., 2017, p. 3) conference attendance decision-making process by demonstrating how studies on it have developed from a narrow focus on the management view towards including more widely the holistic view of the individual attendees. It has demonstrated how the attendees not only consider short-term inhibitors and facilitators to their attendance, but also take into account motivations which are linked to their long-term outcomes hoped to achieve from the attendance. By reviewing the literature on motivations to attend other types of events than business events, it has been established that there are connections between the various attendance motivations; for festivals and sport events they are more focused on the experience at the event, as opposed to prospective outcomes, as is the case for many business events. Surprisingly there has been limited attention paid to what the two main motivations to attend conferences, networking and professional development, mean to

the individual conference attendee and how they are translated into valuable experiences delivering changed behaviour. The high frequency of quantitative research methods in motivation studies (e.g. Fjelstul et al., 2009; Grant & Weaver, 1996; Mair, 2010; Price, 1993; K. Severt et al., 2009) have contributed to the limited understanding of the meanings of networking and professional developments as motivations and what the attendees are hoping to achieve from their attendance. The impact of experiences on future motivations have been studied in the form of 'intentions to return'; but not so much on how or if the motivations to attend were fulfilled during the experience.

This section has demonstrated the wealth of research within conferences and how it evolved from being virtually non-existing research (Mair, 2012) to a rich understanding of the attributes considered within the decision-making process. This area of studies has however progressed in line with tourism and research of other event types towards developing a further understanding of the experience the attendees have during the event (Getz & Page, 2015; Mair, 2014). When the decision-making process leads to attendance at the event it is because the consumer has concluded that the experience will be worth-while, however limited research has determined the relationship, and will this be further explored within the following section.

2.3. The conference experience

2.3.1. Introduction

Throughout the section on the decision-making process it became clear that the origin of the conference literature lies within the tourism subject, as was evident from the heavy management emphasis and research on how to attract attendees to destinations hosting the conferences. It also was demonstrated that the motivations are linked to expected outcomes on different levels and dependent upon the event type, which leads to a need for reviewing the experience further. Experiences have been studied in various subject areas with pioneering work by Alderson within marketing in the late 1950's when he referred to hedonomics as filling time with satisfaction (Brown, 2002) and Turner (1969; 1974; 1979) discussing and developing theories on liminality. The state of liminality occurs when having extraordinary experiences as they are transformative and able to transfer the individual from the everyday to a sense of another state (Robertson, Yeoman, Smith, & McMahon-Beattie, 2015).

It was recognised in section 2.2.3.1 that excitement and thrills were among motivations to attend festivals and therefore it is likely that attendees are expecting the state of liminality. Experiencing novelty has been identified as an experiential dimension of the event experiences, although defined not as liminality but as 'liminoid' which is the stage of leisure, a moment of differentiation from the everyday life (de Geus, Richards, & Toepoel, 2015). The main difference in these spaces lies in the commercialisation within the liminoid spaces, whereas liminal spaces are more sacred and ritual. Further discussion

on liminal and liminoid spaces are outside of the boundaries of this thesis since although attending conferences are often expected to be different to everyday office life, they are not expected to be extraordinary.

The theory of consumer experience was introduced within the academic literature by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) when they argued that consumer behaviour research should go beyond viewing, through positivistic measures, the consumer as an 'information processor' and towards inclusion of the consumption experience. This proposal was well received and research advanced leading to the development of a new economy, the fourth economy called the 'Experience Economy' (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Their model of the experience economy, which fundamentally highlights that the experience should be about engaging the attendee and not only entertain them, includes four 'realms' on two axes, the horizontal participation axis ranging from passive to active participation and the vertical axis, connection ranging from absorption to immersion as demonstrated in Figure 6.
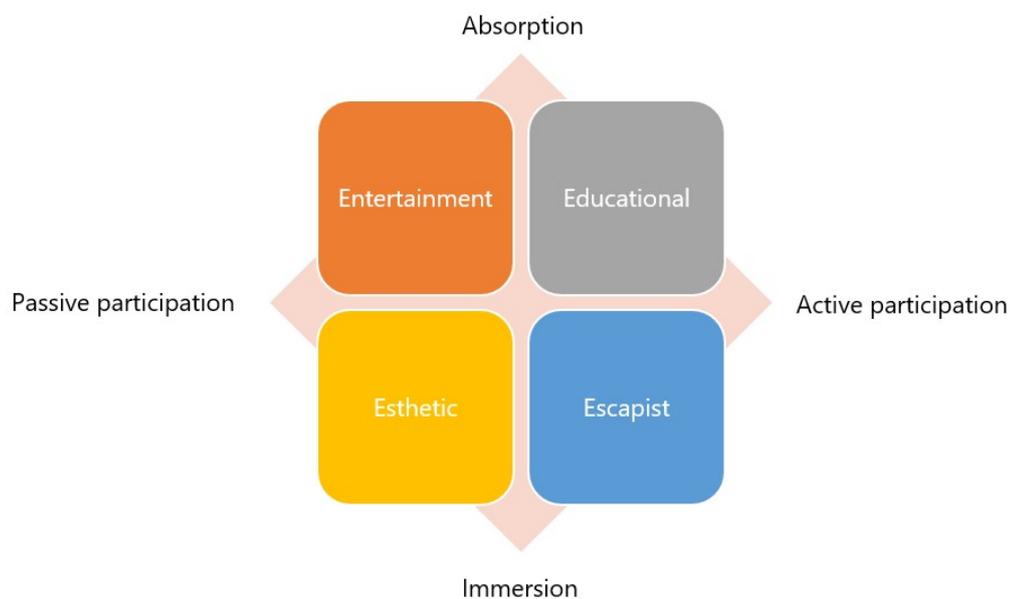
Figure 6 - The model of experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999)

The entertainment and educational realms have no hidden meaning, the escapist realm is where the consumer escapes everyday life such as through theme parks, virtual reality headsets, or active participation in sports; the esthetic realm is reached by immersion in environment without affecting it, for example by viewing the natural environment such as the Grand Canyon or visiting a museum (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Experience research has profoundly grown since Holbrook and Hirschman began publishing, for example within areas such as retail (Arnold, Reynolds, Ponder, & Lueg, 2005), tourism (J. B. Ritchie, Tung, & Ritchie, 2011) and marketing and consumers (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007; Tynan & McKechnie, 2009). The purpose of this literature review chapter is to provide the holistic view of the conference journey. To keep within those boundaries the following

section on events experiences is limited to relevant literature, viewing different types of experiences within retail events, running and cycling events, and long-haul tourism experience.

2.3.2. Event experiences

The model of the experience economy did not include a definition of the experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1999); however, Poulsson and Kale (2004) suggested that it generally is the offerings provided by the leisure industry such as a day in a theme park, play at a theatre, helicopter rides or river rafting. Whilst they argue that these are typical examples, they also reflect upon further examples such as extravagant tourism including space experiences, and changes in retail experiences where shopping centres are creating experiences to attract people. Recent research has demonstrated that this trend has continued and with ever growing online shopping the need for diverse interactive experiences has increased at shopping centres to give customers further reasons to visit them. Events can achieve this by strategically integrating an event as an interactive experience within a shopping centre. The Gruffalo experience, a three week pop-up experiential children's activation was demonstrated by Strafford, Crowther, and Schofield (2018) to accomplish this. The visitors found the event authenticity and customer service experience to be most important, along with the children's excitement.

The Gruffalo experience is a good example to illustrate Poulsson and Kale's (2004, p. 270) definition of the commercial experience: "an engaging act of co-creation between a provider and a consumer wherein the consumer perceives value in the encounter and in the subsequent memory of that encounter". Those who experienced the Gruffalo event were able to co-create the experience to a degree, as the children had the opportunity to meet Gruffalo and have a photo taken with them and the value was demonstrated through high likelihoods of revisits and those who travelled the furthest to the event perceived the most value (Strafford et al., 2018). Poulsson and Kale (2004) continue by emphasising that the consumption of the experience is different from consumption of goods and services since the consumption itself is the main product of the experience. However, to be able to co-create the experience both the consumer and the provider bring something with them. The consumer's antecedents were considered in section 2.2, The decision-making process. The provider brings with them the design of the experience to participate in the creation of the consumers' feelings and sensations.

The attendees' behaviour, feelings and sensations can be explored through social identity theory as identified by Shipway and Jones (2007, p. 375):

> *"Social identities are important for a number of reasons. They provide the individual with a sense of belonging, a valued place within their social environment, a means to connect to others and the opportunity to use valued identities to enhance self-worth and self-esteem".*

The social identity of participants at a running event were investigated through an ethnographic study by Shipway and Jones (2007), an event which they labelled as 'serious sport tourism' where the participants are high on the previously discussed participation and importance scale (Weed & Bull, 2009). By actively participating within the event and carrying out an observation of it, Shipway and Jones (2007) found that the participants approached their preparations for the event professionally and mostly in isolation. However, at the event they experienced an environment which offered opportunities of extended interactions with like-minded people. They concluded that active sport tourism could provide a clear social identity, as was presented visibly through their clothing and continuous discussions of previous running event experiences. Interestingly however their running identity was exchanged for other identities as soon as the experience ended. In addition, they argued that research which aimed at understanding the social world of sport tourism needed a qualitative approach, as reporting on variables and their relationships have limitations in deeper understanding of their meaning.

A tourism experience which involves more leisure aspects can also provide opportunities for self-identity recognition and identification. This was recognised by Desforges (2000) when he identified, through the qualitative approach of interpreting life stories, that long-haul tourists were utilising their experiences to answer questions on their self-identity and representation of it. Coghlan (2012) also identified this through an autoethnographic account of participation in a cycling fundraising event where she identified nine themes of private meanings of participating in the event, (1) escapism, (2) socialising, (3) adventure, (4) achievement, (5) entitlement/recognition, (6) companion-ship, (7) special interest, (8) creativity and (9) fear/anxiety. These themes demonstrate how her experience was a combination of leisure, as shown with escapism and adventure, and serious sport tourism, demonstrated through achievement. Her social identity was documented through the themes socialising and recognition within the event community. In addition to the social identity perceived when attending events, there is great social interaction occurring which can result in a positive experience of feelings of belonging or negative happenings when confronted with unpleasant participants, contributing to insecurity and fears (Nordvall, Pettersson, Svensson, & Brown, 2014). Experiences created as tourists or participants in serious sport tourism, with the examples discussed above being events, are all extraordinary experiences as opposed to the everyday experiences.

The conference experience, in terms of the meanings the attendees attached to it, where the social and emotional world of the delegates was researched (Holloway, Brown, & Shipway, 2010) is not considered an extraordinary experience and did not receive much attention in early conference research. The management view was dominant when researching this stage of the journey, the experience during the conference, focusing on elements such as satisfaction with the conference, including the venue and its services (D. Severt et al., 2007; Sung & Lee, 2015), loyalty to particular conferences and attendee-based brand equity (J. Lee & Back, 2009b; M. J. Lee & Back, 2008), and intentions to return

(M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b). There is however a shift evident within the literature considering conference experiences and these will be reviewed within the following sections commencing with wider literature perspectives on the subject.

2.3.3. Wider perspectives of the conference experience

This section will explore how the social and emotional world of conference attendees has been explored within the wider literature, despite views that academic tourism conference experiences are simply a "mundane parts of our life as tourism academics" (Edelheim, Thomas, Åberg, & Phi, 2018, p. 97). This indicates that they hardly find them worthy of examination. Contradicting this view are self-ethnographic studies of conference experiences by academics attending conferences in other subject areas. The earliest example the author located was published as the novel Small World (Lodge, 1984) loosely based on the author's own conference experiences as an academic (Thompson, 1989). Within the novel, conference experiences are portrayed as glamourous and fun with limited work related to it. As an academic early in her career Egri (1992) found through ethnographic observation of two conferences, each hosted by an association within the organisational behaviour subject area in the US, that work was presented differently in conferences depending upon who was hosting it. The structural and process differences she identified related to not only the venue and catering choices, but also to language used within the conference setting, understood dress code and approaches to welcoming first timers.

Through their reflexive ethnographic study Ford and Harding (2008), as academics attending an industry conference, concluded that not only is conference attendance work, but also a means to exert control over academic and professional employees. Their research lens was far from the management view orthodox in conference research within event studies, as they were drawing upon Freudian-informed interpretations of the Hegelian master/slave theory, along with the work of Henry Lefebvre on space and place. The depth of their philosophical underpinning detracts somewhat from the understanding of the experience, which is also the case for Bell and King's (2010) autoethnographic analysis on conferences as a site of body pedagogics. Henderson (2015) interestingly argued, again through an autoethnographic philosophical study, that conferences are sites for higher education research and that there are emotional and social processes within conferences. She continued by stating that "where the importance of identities, hierarchies and personal rapport may be hidden and denied in the everyday life of academia (Gill, 2010), conferences are openly recognised as bearing the interwoven threads of both 'the realm of rationality' and the affective realm of 'elation and disappointment' (Leathwood & Hey, 2009, p. 431)" (Henderson, 2015, p. 917). This suggests that the conference may not be the mundane parts of academic lives as argued by Edelheim et al. (2018) and echoed by Ford and Harding (2008) but worthy of studying in depth.

A concentration on the process of the conference experience, as opposed to substantial philosophical underpinnings, have been identified within other studies. For example a professor and an undergraduate student reflected upon a conference experience where they presented a paper together (Garaffa & Brians, 2011); interestingly the piece is more about the preparation before the conference than the conference itself. The student concludes that his main learning was the insight into academic conferences and difference in scholarly work, whereas the professor observed the benefits of working with an undergraduate student on a conference paper and establishing a willingness to repeat it. In a reflection paper Cherrstrom (2012) discusses her experiences of attending two events within a conference series and the outcomes she gained from the connections made at the conference. She presented a model aimed at post-graduate students on why and with whom they should aim for making connections at conferences as well as providing best practice tips to achieve this. A similar approach was taken by Salzmann-Erikson (2014) with the addition of simple tips for the pre- and post-conference stages.

A conference journey of three conferences attended over a four year period was reflected upon by Garud (2008) when studying conferences' influence on the configuration of emerging organizational fields. The conference experiences he reflected upon demonstrated how not only he was able to learn about the emerging field, but also to listen to the 'off the record' conversations on possible collaborations and promotions, as well as experience the competition within the field. Following on from his first experience he was able to prepare more substantially for his second attendance, having conversations which provided him with information enhancing his experience. For his third experience he had gained further knowledge within the field and was able to reflect upon what was not spoken of within the conferences revealing this as the most interesting aspect of the experience. These studies (Bell & King, 2010; Egri, 1992; Ford & Harding, 2008; Garaffa & Brians, 2011; Garud, 2008; Henderson, 2015; Salzmann-Erikson, 2014) on conference experiences were undertaken in various study areas, none of which are within events studies. These were therefore theoretically focusing on other aspects than the conference itself albeit it was the vehicle for the study. They do however demonstrate that conference experiences have been explored and are worthy of further studying including viewing them as a conference journey constituting of multiple single experiences. Before moving on to exploring conference experience studies focused within event studies, it is worth reviewing literature on event design in more depth to investigate their effect on the conference experiences.

2.3.4. Creation and design of event experiences

The conference experience does not come about independent of the role of the event creators and one way of facilitating it is through the application of event design, where the creators design the inputs of the conference with an intentionality linked to its outcomes (Brown & James, 2004; Crowther, 2014). Event design therefore goes beyond only considering the inputs to an event since it aims to enhance the experience which

contributes towards outcomes. Getz (2012) argued that the core phenomenon of event studies is the planned event experience and its meanings - therefore a study like this cannot ignore the planned event experience, but it will exceed planning by including design.

Event design, as an independent subject, is young and still emergent with its development being evident when reading Brown and James' (2004) early text on Event design where they state five event design principles: scale, shape, focus, timing, and build. By considering the scale of the event, the attendees' needs for sense of enclosure is met as the psychological impact has been respected. This applies also for the shape as they recommend removal of all clutter and distractions within the event. They propose that through a designed focus the event creator ensures the attendees are concentrating on the purpose within the event and this can be enhanced through accurate timings of a well-designed programme. Their final point of build relates to the touchpoints (Bitner, 1992; Gerritsen & Van Olderen, 2015) within the event as they need to be designed to maximise the impact on the attendes (Brown & James, 2004).

These design principles demonstrate how event design in its early days was still focusing on how they could be realised within the feel and appearance of the event, the inputs, rather than full integration to expected outcomes. Brown subsequently presented a conference paper less than two years after the book was published, demonstrating how quickly his ideas and the field evolved as he put forward the following definition: "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" (Brown, 2005, p. 151). He continued to refine his definition with subtle additions including the importance of event design principles and techniques in his later definition of event design discussed in section 1.2.2. The outcome should therefore be at the forefront when designing the event as the experience should be engaging and meaningful.

The principles of event design have developed from various authors and disciplines, however with no agreed approach to what they constitute of. The following review aims to provide an understanding of what elements have been considered within event design by drawing upon experiential design literature. Pine and Gilmore (1999) suggested five experience design principles: (1) theming the experience, (2) harmonising impressions with positive cues, (3) eliminating negative cues, (4) mixing in memorabilia and (5) engaging all five senses. These principles coexist with their previously discussed experience realms of entertainment, educational, esthetic, and escapist. These aim at considering not only the inputs and feel of the event space, but also requires the event creator to reflect upon the outcomes of the attendee, for example by enhancing the positive cues with memorabilia and similar. Five further elements of a successful experience were proposed by Poulsson and Kale (2004): (1) personal relevance, (2) novelty, (3) surprise, (4) learning, and (5) engagement. These elements not only align with those suggested by Pine and Gilmore (1999), but also demonstrate the importance of

the event creator knowing their attendees through detailed consideration of the market segmentation and profiling of future attendees as reviewed in section 2.2.5.

The experience happens within a context (Gupta & Vajic, 2000), with the conference being the context within this thesis. There are two primary components to context: physical and relational, with the latter referring to two types of interaction, 1) between the attendee and event creator and 2) between the attendees. The physical components relate to the tangible aspects of the design (Pullman & Gross, 2004), i.e. more traditional thoughts on aesthetics and décor. Following a mixed methods case study of an event, Pullman and Gross (2004) established that the experience design was able to create connections between attendees through active, as opposed to passive, participation and it also evoked emotions. Interestingly the sensory experience evoked through supplied food and drinks proved to be of limited importance, as they did not significantly contribute towards basic emotions. Social interactions were viewed as more powerful which is in line of them having opportunities to signalling their social identity (Benckendorff & Pearce, 2012). The seating available was found to be negative in terms of experience because there were more available than needed, contributing towards a feeling of empty venue and therefore less excitement, confirming Brown and James' (2004) design principle of event scale, since it was not correctly matched to the venue. The overall atmosphere however does matter, as Kitterlin and Yoo (2014) found when measuring it, defined as festivalscape, identifying that it had an impact on the attendees' motivation and loyalty behaviour. The success of the experience and its likelihood to provide a quality positive contribution to the attendees' lives therefore relies much upon their opportunities to being active participants at the event and attending voluntarily (Whelan & Wohlfeil, 2006).

Fundamentally the event design is applied holistically on the entire event where the event creator designs and considers the entire attendee experience, considerably beyond creativity, décor and entertainment, with little left for chance although allowing for interactions and co-creations (Berridge, 2012). The co-creation opportunities need to be designed by the event creator otherwise the co-creation may not be able to take place. This can be achieved through elements such as an experience environment where dialogues can occur, and the attendee can shape their own experience, for example through exposure to a variety of activities which allow for co-creation of individual experiences (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Not only are events ripe for co-creation of individual experiences, but it has been argued that they are 'value-creation spaces' where the event creator is designing interactions which are facilitated and influence the process of the value creation (Crowther & Donlan, 2011). It has therefore been suggested that an implication of the event as 'value-creation space' facilitated through co-creation is that the event programme should not be designed with formal sessions of learning and informal sessions of social activities, but as an "continuum of activities that involve participants on a rational, emotional and social level" (Crowther & Orefice, 2014, p. 133).

Event design principles are applied by the event creator to create a 'value-creation space' and they aim to stimulate various senses for example through co-creation as discussed. The sensory experience (sense) was suggested by Schmitt (1999, p. 60) in addition to four other elements which he identified as Strategic Experiential Modules; "affective experiences (feel); creative cognitive experiences (think); physical experiences, behaviours and lifestyle (act); and social-identity experiences that result from relating to a reference group or culture (relate)". On a similar note Zarantonello and Schmitt (2013) suggested four event design principles; rich sensorial stimulation, trigger positive emotions, intellectually stimulating, social interactions, and bodily experiences. Many of these elements can also be identified in Wood and Masterman's (2008) approach which they named the 7 I's and are presented in below table 5.

Involvement	an emotional involvement with the brand, the event, the experience
Interaction	with brand ambassadors, with other attendees, with exhibits, with the brand
Immersion	of all senses, isolated from other messages
Intensity	memorable, high impact
Individuality	unique, one-to-one opportunities, customization. Each experience is different
Innovation	creative in content, location, timing, audience, for example
Integrity	seen as genuine and authentic and providing real benefits and value to the consumer

Table 5 – The 7 I's which enhance the event experience (Wood & Masterman, 2008)

Many of the above mentioned event design principles are emphasised within the following definition of customer experience as stated by Gentile et al. (2007, p. 397):

> *"The Customer Experience originates from a set of interactions between a customer and a product, a company, or part of its organization, which provoke a reaction (LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Shaw and Ivens, 2005). This experience is strictly personal and implies the customer's involvement at different levels (rational, emotional, sensorial physical and spiritual) (LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Schmitt, 1999). Its evaluation depends on the comparison between a customer's expectations and the stimuli coming from the interaction with the company and its offering in correspondence of the different moments of contact or touch-points (LaSalle and Britton, 2003; Shaw and Ivens, 2005)."*

This means that the event design principles, which the event creator has an opportunity to apply when creating an experience for the attendee, that brings with it outcomes of value to them, are not only the décor and elements which immerses and stimulates the senses. They are also those that involve and embrace the individuals' identities through

intellectual stimulation, interaction and co-creation, introduces novelty (Tafesse, 2016) and opportunities for co-creation. This may be challenging to achieve within conferences which have multiple and diverse aims to achieve, for instance in terms of learning, networking and social objectives. This applies in particular when there are those that believe that for education events sensory design is to be considered on a lower level, whereas entertainment events should integrate less cognitive stimulation (Altschwager, Goodman, Conduit, & Habel, 2015). However, a conference is an event which Nelson (2009) recommends should use design as a tool to construct the relationship between the individuals and their physical setting on different levels as they create the experience and emotional connection.

2.3.5. Creation and design of conference experiences

A prevalent focus within the event design literature is on events staged for marketing purposes, which provide the attendee with an experiential event where they can interact with the product; frequently to develop a deeper relationship between the brand and the attendee (Berridge, 2012; Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2006). Event design is however not only relevant to experiential marketing events, as Jacoby Hansen (2010) demonstrated when she applied Goffman's dramaturgy principles to a selection of conferences in line with Nelson's (2009) recommendations. The dramaturgy principles within event design were taken forward by Ziakas and Costa (2012, p. 32) as they defined event dramaturgy as "the extraction of shared meanings enabled by the projection and/or performance of symbolic representations in an event's activities". By applying this, the event creator could achieve the two principles of event design as defined by Frissen et al. (2016); firstly that the event changes behaviour and secondly that it is designed for more than one stakeholder. When bearing in mind that one of the two main motivations to attend a conference is learning, which most attendees presumably are aiming to achieve in order to change their behaviour following the conference, event design is highly applicable to conferences. There are further event design considerations to be made specifically to conferences in addition to the previously discussed event design principles. These event design elements relating specifically to conferences will now be reviewed and noted that they are mostly relevant to the learning outcomes they aim to deliver upon.

The learning within conferences generally does not occur without the facilitation of the event creator (Ravn & Elsborg, 2011). Conventionally however, many conference creators overload their programmes with speakers, therefore limiting opportunities for interaction and learning which ultimately leads to missed opportunities for realisation of meaningful outcomes and value creation (Crowther & Donlan, 2011). Innovation in conference design is therefore needed to prevent the limitations to attendees developing meaningful outcomes. An innovative approach named The New Learning was applied to a conference "as a way of organizing the conference so knowledge construction and learning were focal points" (Wiessner, Hatcher, Chapman, & Storberg-Walker, 2008, p. 368) going beyond the knowledge sharing and towards knowledge generation

(Chapman, Wiessner, Storberg-Walker, & Hatcher, 2007). This innovative approach to event design was aimed at demonstrating the outcomes from the event through robust evaluation practices, as the attendees did not evaluate the sessions in terms of presenters or logistical matters but submitted new learning forms focusing on what they had learnt and how it would be utilised (Hatcher, Wiessner, Storberg-Walker, & Chapman, 2006). The research design was underpinned by theories on learning organisations, communities of practice, and knowledge generation which were applied to the conference design. Data was collected through the qualitative learning forms submitted in addition to interviews with the attendees and observations within the case study event (Chapman et al., 2007). Through application of the event design approach it was identified firstly that the two communities, practitioners and researchers, questioned the status quo and own assumptions and secondly that the communities of practice generated knowledge creation whereby social participation enhanced the learning (Wiessner et al., 2008).

The researchers acknowledged that the New Learning approach may not always be the most suitable event design approach, the anticipated outcome of the conference should guide the event design. The New Learning principles are most appropriate for conferences where learning is the primary goal, whereas other conferences aim for relationship building and outcomes related to collaborations (Wiessner et al., 2008). The case study conference included sessions such as forums, keynote presentations, 'Food 'n Thought' gatherings, innovative sessions, poster sessions and research symposia (Wiessner et al., 2008). They did not define the layout or content of these sessions, as the primary purpose of their articles was to inform on the new learning achieved and the practice as an evaluation approach (Chapman et al., 2007; Hatcher et al., 2006; Wiessner et al., 2008). The findings however indicate that discussions or dialogue in smaller settings, such as the symposia and informal settings, were the sessions most likely to stimulate learning. Interestingly however the act of reflecting upon their learning through the forms made the attendees more aware of their learning resulting in acknowledgement that time for reflection is lacking within conference settings (Hatcher et al., 2006).

The traditional conference format, often emphasising one way communication from the speaker to the audience, challenges not only the achievement of new learning and inspirations, which the attendee take away and apply to their job practices, but also the forging of connections and discussions between like-minded people (Ravn, 2007). To increase the possibilities of the attendee's aim being achieved Ravn (2007) suggested that a learning conference should be viewed as a forum for human co-flourishing; designed with the view that all aspects of the event are relevant to the attendee and they inspired and empowered to become more successful following the attendance. He proposed inspiration being the key which is in line with Duffy and McEuen's (2010, p. 9) argument for face-to-face business events: since attendees "switch off their autopilot" they have further attention, they are inspired and they build human networks.

Based on human co-flourishing and inspiration Ravn (2007) argued four design principles for a meaningful conference: 1) Expert input must be concise and provocative, 2) Input should be relevant to each delegate, 3) Delegates are to be active and discuss their projects, and 4) Delegates must meet and inspire each other. Through various activities Ravn and Elsborg (2011) applied these design principles concluding that through only small steps such as allowing the attendees to greet each other they enhanced the experience for the delegates. Finally they argued for a fifth conference design principle, 5) Competent facilitation, as they identified that without it the attendees did not participate as actively because of limited knowledge of the process of the activities (Ravn & Elsborg, 2011). In agreement with Hatcher et al. (2006) the application of these design principles identified the importance of attendees' reflections throughout the event (Louw & Zuber-Skerritt, 2011; Ravn & Elsborg, 2011).

The reflections were in addition identified by Jacoby Hansen (2010) when she applied dramaturgy principles to a conference design underpinned with the three design principles of reflection, involvement, and interaction. The reflection principle was not identified through the review in section 2.3.4 whereas the involvement and interaction principles were frequently mentioned. Reflexivity however was also identified by Ziakas and Boukas (2013) when studying the meaning of the individual carnival attendee's experience. It was achieved through a phenomenological research, underpinned with event dramaturgy principles, along with sociability, sense of community, and perceived community identity. This reflexivity was not given sufficient time in Rinallo, Borghini, and Golfetto's (2010) study when they found that exhibition attendees reported being sensorially overwhelmed, information over-loaded, and physically fatigued at the end of the experience. Further time for reflection perhaps could have provided the researchers with other thoughts on the attendees' experience and outcomes related to their motivations to attend.

The focus on the attendee and the principle of designing the content and format of the conference to achieve the desired attendee behaviour is also at the heart of the framework Meeting Architecture as introduced by Vanneste (2008). It states that the design process should always commence with clear definition of objectives, in particular those relating to behaviour. The focus is on the attendee and three terrains of actions should be considered: Learning, Networking and Motivation, which includes sense of community, to provide a holistic approach to the design. He recommends five different tools to achieve the event design: 1) conceptual, referring to the format; 2) human tools, such as the facilitators and speakers; 3) artistic, referring to use of various décor including music and light; 4) technical, such as the staging ; and 5) technology, which can facilitate the discussions; most of which are in line with Ravn and Elsborg's (2011) recommendations. Vanneste's work has been endorsed by industry, in particular the association Meeting Professionals International (MPI) who have contributed towards conference design through frameworks such as Strategic Meeting Management (Kitchen, 2019) and Business Value of Meetings (MPI, 2011) both of which however emphasise the

organiser and host. A further industry framework introduced for utilisation when creating valuable meetings Meetovation, builds on five elements: 1) Active Involvement, 2) Responsible Thinking, 3) Local Inspiration, 4) Creative Setups, and 5) Return on Investment (Dolce Hotels and Resorts, 2018). These five elements are in line with other discussed frameworks with the addition of Corporate Social Responsibility thinking on behalf of the meeting owner.

All of these frameworks for conference design have some principles in common. Firstly, they are underpinned with desired outcomes relating to changed behaviour, therefore they are underpinned with clear definitions of conference objectives. The changed behaviour is greatly related to new learning, which needs structured facilitation to be achieved, both in terms of people facilitating the learning, as well as the setup of the environment. These are then supporting the attendees' involvement and interaction within a community of practice which encourages reflection. All of these are in line with Richards' (2019) recent identification of four approaches to understanding and designing experience: shared meanings, personal constructs, designed contexts, and temporal ordering where it is considered that the event is a temporary construct.

2.3.6.   The Experience at the Conference

The previous two sections have reviewed the literature on event design including conference design and established multiple design principles event creators can apply whilst creating and designing the conditions for the conference experience. Limited research has been carried out on the implications of the application of these design principles on attendees' conference experience. The body of literature on conference experience is growing, albeit still in its infancy, demonstrating the importance of developing the understanding of how conference delegates experience and perceive their attendance. The main event design principles identified in the previous section surrounded how the conference needed to be relative to the attendee, which should lead to them being engaged and involved with like-minded people and able to co-create their experience within provided opportunities for learning and networking. This section will review literature on delegates' conference attendance experiences; inevitably it covers to a degree the attendees' outcomes from these experiences, however they will be analysed further in section 2.4.

2.3.6.1. The conference community

The experiences for the delegates of meaningful learning and networking generally do not come about solely through organising a venue and manage the people in a space where they are offered a general programme and food and drinks. Meaney, Trinick, and Fairhall (2009) identified through a qualitative study how mathematics teachers, teaching in the Māori language in New Zealand, experienced the conference topic as relevant to them but at the same time they felt as outsiders since the material was not adopted to their language needs during the English speaking nationwide conference. Overall their

experience was positive as opportunities were provided for them to be engaged and involved, not only through various workshops where they could gain support in understanding the material, but also at social sessions where they networked with other attendees who were mostly mathematics teachers from other schools in the country. Meaney et al. (2009) argued that these attendees belonged to the community of practice of the conference attendees because of the perception of belonging through Wenger's (2000) three modes of belonging; firstly engagement, secondly imagination of, for example how they would utilise their new learning, and thirdly alignment of their energy to the conference. The community of practice as defined by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015, p. 1) are "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" and belonging to it is in line with previous discussion the New Learning research (Hatcher et al., 2006; Wiessner et al., 2008).

Attendees' perception of belonging as part of their conference experience was examined through the role of Self-Image Congruence (SIC), defined as "the congruence between product/brand user image and self-image construed from multiple self-concepts" (J. Lee & Back, 2009b, p. 257). The self-concepts relate to how individuals see themselves, both in reality and relating to ideal selves, and perceptions of how others see them, hence the multiple self-images. They established that when the attendee perceived other attendees' image to be socially and ideally congruent with their own self-image, they were more likely to report satisfaction with the networking at the conference. Conference attendees therefore reflect a social identity during their experience in line with the review on sport event participants in section 2.3.2. This study was followed up by another quantitative study where Ryu and Lee (2013) confirmed these findings through a cluster analysis identifying three groups of low-, mid-, and high-tiered SC (self-congruity) attendees. Those who were identified as low-tiered SC attendees were attendees who did not fit neatly into the general profile of other attendees, mainly the case for industry practitioners at academic conferences. Since both of these studies were aimed at exploring links between the attendee's self-image during the conference and their satisfaction and intentions to revisit the conference, they failed to study in depth the attendees' experiences during the conference. Interestingly J. Lee and Back (2009b) argue that with high SIC attendees the event creator should emphasise the learning within their programme, however with low SIC attendees the focus is on social activities providing networking opportunities. This may however be questionable in terms of the event design since this could not be achieved as the attendee experiences a lack of belonging and therefore may be even more estranged within the social activities.

The sense of belonging, and feeling part of the conference community, was the main focus of Hahm et al.'s (2016) study, demonstrating the recent shift in conference research from a management dominant perspective towards further explorations of the attendees' experiences and event design. They identified four factors within the sense of community amongst the attendees: social bonding, sense of belonging, emotional connection, and

relationship; all of which relate to the event design principles discussed, as well as the hopes for networking which motivate delegates to attend (Hahm et al., 2016). In line with these findings it has been suggested that positive customer to customer relationships within a conference, that is the attendees have a sense of identification with the conference group, enhances the attendees' self-esteem and improves upon their conference experience (Wei, Lu, Miao, Cai, & Wang, 2017).

In contrast to the other community and identity studies (Hahm et al., 2016; J. Lee & Back, 2009b; Ryu & Lee, 2013), Wei et al.'s (2017) quantitative data was collected by requesting research participants to view their experiences over the last five years as opposed to collecting the data during the conference experience. They were therefore able to identify that the transcendent conference experience was further related to the attendees' sense of connectedness with other attendees than with learning and superficial networking (Wei et al., 2017). They conclude by suggesting that through facilitation of quality interactions among the attendees the formation of a conference community can be realised. This corresponds with Hahm et al.'s (2016) findings of significantly stronger relationship between intentions to revisit and sense of community, rather than overall satisfaction. Interestingly this community has also the ability to be a temporary cluster where the "attendees can efficiently exchange and interpret knowledge, learn across industrial/sectoral contexts, and create new knowledge" (Henn & Bathelt, 2015, p. 112) hence delivering on the knowledge motivation for attending.

2.3.6.2. The identity of the individual conference attendee

The significant link between the sense of belonging and positive conference experiences demonstrates the importance of going beyond measuring satisfaction towards understanding the experience, which contributes towards the sense of community. To further this understanding Wei and Miao (2017) carried out a qualitative study, analysing 26 interviews with the majority of the participants being aged between 18 and 34. They identified three positive and three negative peak experiences during customer to customer interaction at conferences, along with three interpersonal factors which negatively affects the customer to customer interactions. The positive peak experiences were emotion-laden interactions, or those which had sparks or surprises within them, whereas the negative experiences related to perceptions of other attendees; disappointed with them, feeling of them being inauthentic or a perception of them being socially inappropriate. The interpersonal factors which negatively affected the interactions related to social exclusion, interpersonal stress and interpersonal conflict (Wei & Miao, 2017). Further factors were identified by Mair and Frew (2016) through a duo-ethnographic research from a female perspective in a study focusing on meaning, reflection, and interpretation of conference experiences. In total they identified nine key themes which individuals relate to them as presented in Table 6.

Main themes	Sub-themes
Networking	Research contacts; career contacts
Personal development	Self-confidence/esteem; promotions; responsibility; supervision
Venues/location	Glamour; privileged access; culture and history
The academic persona	Recognition; image/profile; appearances; being seen; being strategic
Fun	Enjoyment; the conference 'feel'; laughter
Alcohol	Positives/negatives; risks
Friends	Lifelong friendships; meeting old friends; in-group socialisation; meeting like-minded people
Emotions	Nervous/anxious; sadness; happiness; excitement; jealousy; anger
Women in academia	Strong women; harassment; safety/risk perceptions; family/carer responsibilities; sharing experiences

Table 6 - Key themes from conference experiences (Mair and Frew, 2016, p. 2161)

The experiences identified in the two above mentioned studies are related to the two main motivations to attend, learning and networking, as demonstrated through themes such as making contacts, outcomes from learning, and emotions during the experience. They also demonstrate how much of the reflected experience is from social sessions, for example fun and alcohol, which could lead to inappropriate behaviour. The value of the social events, such as dinners, award-ceremonies, and entertainment, have, however, been questioned because they may be poorly attended (Jago & Deery, 2005) although they are providing opportunities for networking; therefore creating scope for understanding further if and how networking is achieved and with what outcomes.

The interpersonal factors discussed by Wei and Miao (2017) and Mair and Frew's (2016) 'the academic persona' and 'women in academia' present the idea of social identity which attendees take on during their experience. Interestingly a similar argument has recently been made by Edelheim et al. (2018) when they concluded that attendees' individually construct their academic identity through their decisions at the conference, choice of sessions attended, questions asked or not, connections developed, and reflections on research carried out. The experience however should ideally be developed into outcomes which will be further explored in the following section.

2.3.7. Experience developed into outcomes

The event experience as defined by de Geus et al. (2015, p. 277) joins the aspects of the attendee's conference journey as discussed within this literature review:

> *"The event experience is an interaction between an individual and the event environment (both physical and social), modified by the level of engagement or involvement, involving multiple experiential elements and outputs (such as satisfaction, emotions, behaviours, cognition, memories and learning), that can happen at any point in the event journey."*

The argument is therefore that the event experience is designed by the event creator, not only through the décor and entertainment, but fundamentally through the creation of opportunities for engagement and involvement. The definition states that the experience generates outputs throughout the event journey, the customer's journey through a series of touchpoints (Zomerdijk & Voss, 2010) and was this definition presented through their conceptual model demonstrated in Figure 7.
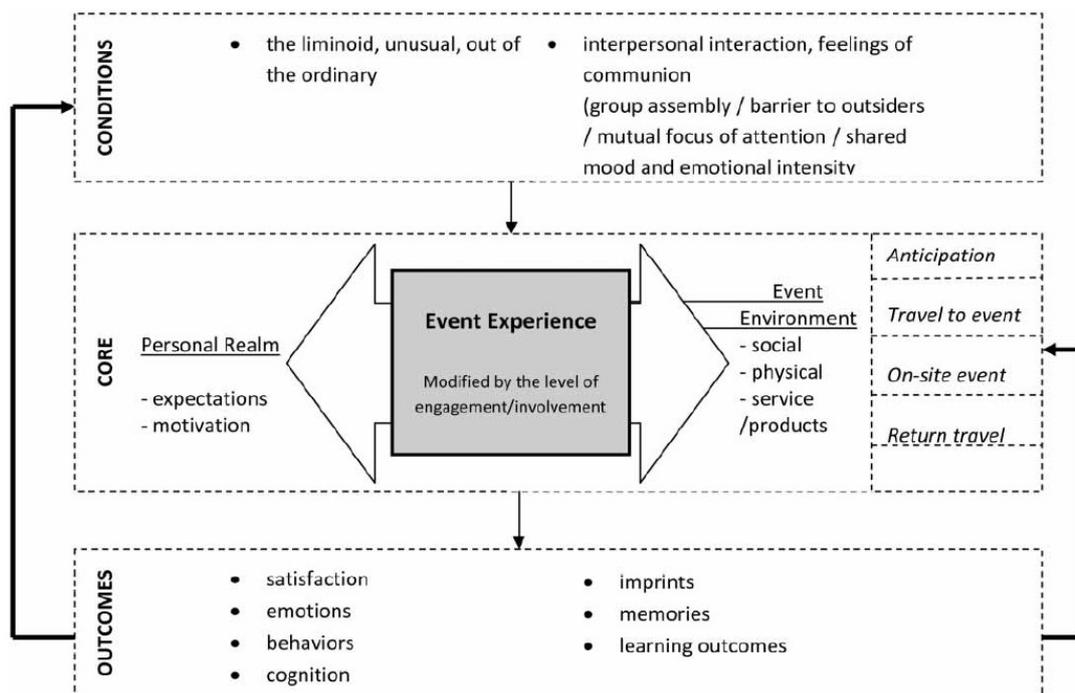
Figure 7 - A conceptual model of the event experience (de Geus et al., 2015, p. 277)

The model demonstrates how there are pre-conditions for the event experience related to the liminoid space where there are opportunities for sense of belonging to a community. The core of the event experience relates to it being relevant to the attendee and underpinnings of previously discussed event design principles, which will contribute to outcomes perceived from the attendance. Figure 8 demonstrates the creation of the customer event experience at a food and wine show developed by Liu, Sparks and Coghlan (2017) using empirical data obtained by a mixed methods approach. It demonstrates how the event design principles are achieved through the interaction of the event creator's multiple diverse inputs in co-creation with the personal factors of the attendee. It also illustrates the various outcomes the individual attendee may perceive from the attendance in terms of cognitive outcomes, feelings and changed behaviour.
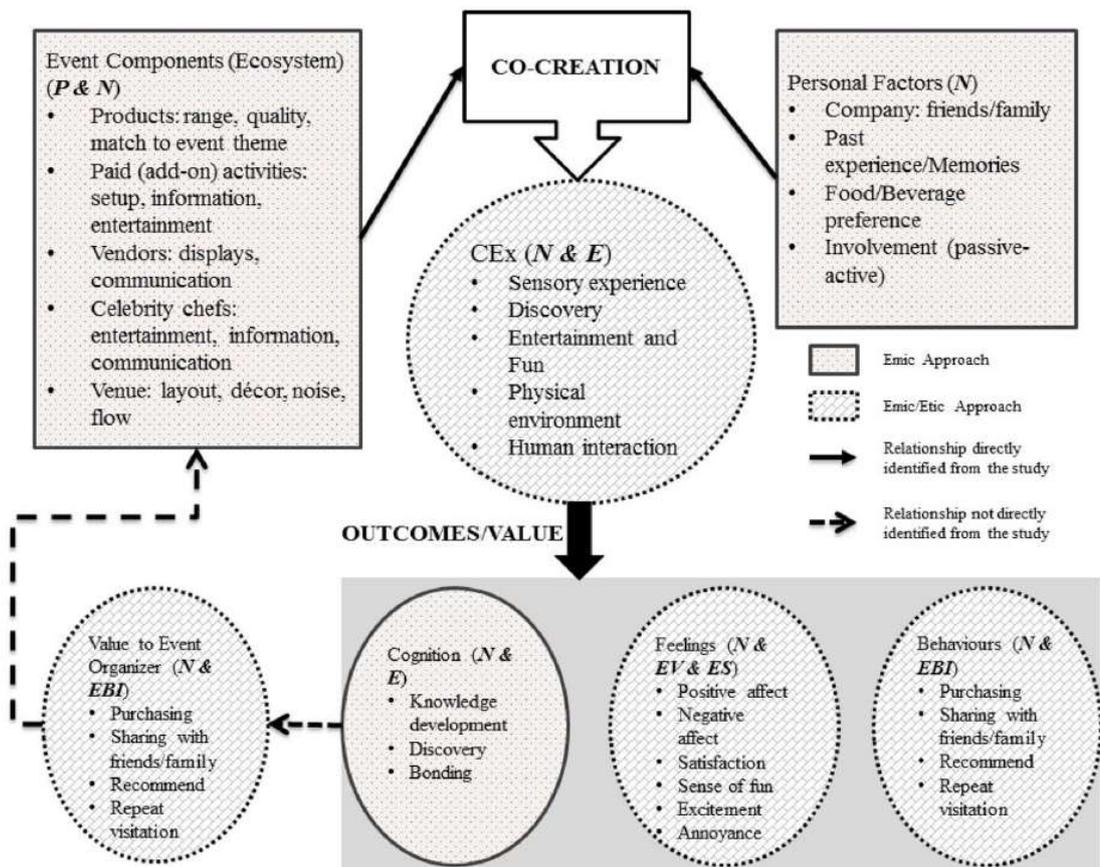
Figure 2. A conceptual model of customer experience creation at a food and wine show. P = photo; N = narratives; E = elements; EV = evaluation of valence; ES = evaluation of satisfaction; EBI = evaluation of behavior intentions.

Figure 8 – A conceptual model of customer experience creation (Liu et al., 2017, p. 475)

The first model by de Geus et al. (2015) represents all types of event experiences, therefore the outcomes within it are presented with the general terms of: satisfaction, emotion, behaviours, cognition, imprints, memories and learning outcomes; with some of these being closely related such as cognition and learning outcomes. When viewing these in conjunction with Liu et al.'s (2017) model of the outcomes from an exhibition, a business event, it is apparent that they all occur within their four more business event focused outcomes. Some are only implied, such as memories related to the sharing and imprints with the discovery. Their three types of outcomes relating to the attendees themselves, cognition, feelings and behaviours, are greatly connected to the conference design principles. These were discussed previously relating to development of new learning and changed behaviour, underpinned with structured facilitation and attendees' involvement and interaction within a strong community, which attendees feel a sense of belonging to. This demonstrates how, when the event design principles are considered and applied, the likelihood of the development of meaningful outcomes is increased. In the following section these outcomes will be reviewed for an individual conference attendee in further detail.

Many of these outcomes demonstrate how business events differentiate themselves from most other types of events as they are designed for the purpose of attendees demonstrating changed behaviour following attendance. This may not always be the case

for experiences in other events, such as many forms of cultural and sport events, where the design may emphasise the leisure and tourism aspect such as the socialisation which as discussed in section 2.2.3.1 was motivating people to attend.

2.4. Outcomes for the individual conference attendee

2.4.1. Introduction

Throughout the previous two sections, 2.2 and 2.3 within this chapter, it has been established how conference attendance commences with the prospective attendee recognising a need. When the need is developed into a motivation to attend, it is followed by an experience which may or may not deliver on the expectations, influenced by the motivations. These expectations are significantly linked to outcomes the attendee anticipates as a result of attending, which goes considerably beyond the attendance itself. The motivation is therefore the driving and directing force while the outcomes, as previously discussed, are the benefits from the striving in terms of what the attendee takes away from their experience (Meretse et al., 2015). In line with the motivations being different for the various event types, the outcomes are also various with the greatest difference being that the experience itself is often the outcome for other event types than business events where the experience is expected to lead to changed behaviour, often on a professional level (Jago & Deery, 2010). This is evident in motivations such as excitement, socialisation, novelty, thrills, and the notion of escaping day to day life as discussed in section 2.2.3.1, where cultural event attendees expected a good experience during the event with limited post-event outcomes.

Networking and learning, the two major motivations to attend conferences, indicate that the attendee is expecting not only an experience, but an experience which brings with it outcomes following the event. Despite not only the early recognition of these two main motivations to attend, but also Getz' (2007) recognition of the concentration the event creator should have on facilitating the outcome, there has been limited research on how the experience has contributed and developed to become a long-term outcome post conference. The previous experience section, 2.3, illustrated the recent shift in research from the management dominant paradigm towards the design dominant paradigm, which has inevitably led to further studies on the outcomes, as the design is aimed at the delivery of outcomes and change in behaviour as will be further explored in this section.

2.4.2. The influence of design on conference outcomes

The co-creation, engagement and involvement principles were demonstrated in section 2.3.6 to be related to the formation of communities, which in positive experiences, the attendees sensed that they belonged to. This again relates back to the formation of friendships, which Foley, Edwards, and Schlenker (2014) in agreement with Mair and Frew (2016) found to be an outcome from conference attendance. They argued that generally

the conditions needed for this to occur are, in addition to the attendees being repeat delegates at the same conference series, that there is a built in social programme at the event which provides the attendee with the notion that they have taken time out from the day to day programme and received time to foster relationships. The benefits of these friendships are reaped over time through support and continued professional opportunities, as Hickson (2006) reflected upon from almost four decades of conference attendance. Other elements recommended to consider in the design are play, through innovation and creativity, and sociability which "exists in those rare moments between people when conversation is gripping, lively, and playful, and has no motive other than the enjoyment that each receives from the interaction" (Foley et al., 2014, p. 59). The importance of the design element interaction is therefore reinforced. They conclude with recommendations on how to design event spaces, focusing on physical elements, with inputs on how to reduce the space to be work-like and the encouragement of smaller group interactions, as they are more likely to result in 'livelier discussions' than within larger groups (Foley et al., 2014, p. 62).

The recommendations are in line with I. R. Cook and Ward's (2012) findings that the food and drink sessions served a greater purpose than 'fuelling' the attendees, they offered the relaxed settings needed for reflecting upon their learning and opportunities to discuss and debate it with other attendees. The overall programme of the conference they examined was designed with formal sessions and informal social sessions, therefore not in accordance to Crowther and Orefice's (2014) previously discussed recommendations of continuum of activities facilitated through co-creation. The conclusion was, however, that knowledge exchange took place and a 'buzz' generated which led to the attendees' thoughts and approach to the overall topic being altered following the conference (I. R. Cook & Ward, 2012), i.e. changed their behaviour, therefore confirming the importance of social sessions which, as previously discussed, have been questioned by Jago and Deery (2005). This was also emphasised by Pine and Gilmore (2011, p. 48) as they stated that "to truly inform people and increase their knowledge or skills, educational events must actively engage the mind" resulting in that when the attendees are engaged and involved, they are more able to leave with increased knowledge and skills which will change their behaviour.

2.4.3. Understanding value in the conference context

By considering design principles event creators have utilised co-creation opportunities as "strategic options for creating value" (Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008, p. 88). Meaney et al. (2009, p. 457) identified this as they recognised that "participating in conferences requires engagement, imagination and alignment, but the value of participation is in what it contributes to [professional practices]". They concluded that "attending conferences is not an end unto itself" (Meaney et al., 2009, p. 457) since the learning and networking needed to be developed further to become long-term outcomes. The value created can be various and multiple and, in this context, the intangible value of the

attendance to the consumer is being explored, not the financial value. Within this thesis Holbrook and Corfman's (1985, p. 40) definition of customer value is therefore relevant: "an interactive relativistic preference experience characterizing a subject's experience of interacting with some object. The object may be any thing or event" with the even simpler version stated by Holbrook (1986) that experiences are an outcome of consumption experiences in general. The interaction between the object or service and the customer is relativistic in three senses: firstly a comparison, secondly it is personal and therefore varies between people, and thirdly depending upon the situation where the evaluation of the experience is taking place (Holbrook, 2006). The value is therefore intangible and subjective to each experience and person.

The emphasis on financial cost and price, within a value definition such as "value is low price", which Zeithaml (1988, p. 13) identified was of most important for some consumers, is hence rejected for the purpose of this thesis as the emphasis is on the experience. Her definition of value based on the accumulated responses within the qualitative study applies further to experiences, albeit she refers to products: "perceived value is the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given" (Zeithaml, 1988, p. 14). The differences in value definitions where some emphasise experiences and others price were recognised through Tasci's (2016) literature review on consumer value. She identified 40 different studies which propose consumer value dimensions, ranging from one to 13 with the majority being 2-5 dimensions, demonstrating the multiplicity and variety of consumer value perspectives.

Distinct professional and personal consumer value dimensions relating to attendance at networking events were identified by Mitchell, Schlegelmilch, and Mone (2016) through analysing interviews with both attendees and providers. The professional value included learning value, innovation value, and reputational value, with the personal value containing social value, which could develop into relationship value, emotional value and hedonic value. The main difference in their analysis of value from networking events, as opposed to conferences, is the reputational value. They defined it in terms of the employer brand and interestingly, when detailing innovation value, they refer to access to new markets and skills for the organisation, however, with the emphasis that this occurs through networking. Kitchen (2017) added to this when identifying that attendees emphasised networking with new contacts at trade shows as they perceived higher value from this than networking with existing contacts. Table 7 demonstrates Mitchell et al.'s (2016) interpretation of how attendees accessed and perceived the other four value dimensions.

Event organizer	Speaker / trainer / facilitator	Other attendees	Value-in-use (Attendees)
Event concept (breaks; dedicated sections for networking; introductions); communication (before the event; follow-up)	Method of the speaker / trainer / facilitator / moderator (propensity to interact with and encourage interactions among attendees)	Attendees' composition and propensity to interact	**Social value** Interact with peers Gain new friends and consolidate existing relations
"Servicescape" (technology; site arrangement; ambiance); communication (before the event; follow-up)	Knowledge, method and performance of the speaker/trainer/facilitator/moderator	Attendees' contribution with questions, debates, knowledge from own experience shared	**Learning value** Acquire knowledge Be able to apply and generate improvement
Courtesy of customer service; "Servicescape" (site arrangement)	Empathy and method of the speaker/trainer/facilitator/moderator	Meeting special attendees who they 'connected' with sharing of woes and successes.	**Emotional value** Just meet with people, not for commercial gain Activate feelings and emotions
Extra conference activities, Quality of hotel, spa, bedrooms etc.	Humour of speaker/trainer/facilitator/moderator	Enjoying being with other attendees and interactions being humourous.	**Hedonic value** Pleasure, enjoyment, feeling good,

Table 7 - Examples of some personal value drivers for individuals within networking events (Mitchell et al., 2016, p. 103)

The table illustrates how they are applying event design principles, mainly interaction and engagement, to maximise the value perceived from the attendance. These types of value are in agreement with Mair and Frew's (2016) outcomes presented in Table 6, such as contacts gained from networking, and personal development in form of promotions and further responsibility, resulting from their experiences. In addition to emotional value and social value J. Lee and Min (2013a) included functional value, where value for money was determined, when exploring quantitatively attendees' multi-dimensional value of attending conferences. Overall, they found that emotional and social value were more likely to determine their satisfaction and intentions to revisit, as attendees were motivated to attend for learning and networking purposes. Therefore, if these expectations were met and/or exceeded they demonstrated higher value. This, however, was not the case for first time attendees, they were more likely to view their functional value greater as they had less experience to fall back upon in terms of conference attendance. The event creators thus should emphasise the experience of professional development and networking which deliver on emotional and social value, as opposed to focusing on choosing sites which greatly exceeds expectations as they provide less functional value (J. Lee & Min, 2013a).

Further outcomes which have been determined as perceived by attendees following business event attendance are amongst others: increased confidence (Meaney et al., 2009), knowledge sharing (De Vries & Pieters, 2007), formation of new collaborative relationships (Ihm & Castillo, 2017), and idea generation (Kitchen, 2017). Six core themes of legacies beyond tourism spend from business events were identified by Foley et al. (2013) through a qualitative study: 1) knowledge expansion, 2) networking, 3) relationship and collaboration, 4) fundraising and future research capacity, 5) raising awareness and profiling, and 6) showcasing and destination reputation. The focus of

these pieces of research has been on the host and destination although they also illustrate some outcomes relevant to the individual attendee.

2.4.4. Failure of evaluation to capture individual outcomes

The above-mentioned types of outcomes have not been captured in the traditional conference evaluation. Considering that event evaluation has been defined as "the process of critically observing, measuring and monitoring the implementation of an event in order to assess its outcomes accurately" (Allen, O'Toole, Harris, & McDonnell, 2011, p. 492), a definition in line with various scholars' texts on evaluations (Bowdin, Allen, O'Toole, & Harris, 2011; Carlsen, 2004; Masterman, 2004; Shone & Parry, 2010), there are highly visible reasons for the lack of evaluations capturing the types of outcomes above. The interpretation stresses the view that an evaluation is made for the purpose of justifying the cost of the event, demonstrating attendees' satisfaction with the event and its organisation, as well as for the purpose of improving future events. Mallen and Adams (2008) discuss in their definition that evaluations should make judgements on a particular view of the event. This is often made by measuring the factors which can be quantified, mainly the tangibles, such as expenditure, number of attendees, and the satisfaction with the food, speaker, entertainment and comfort of the venue (Carlsen, 1999; Foley et al., 2010; Mair, 2012). The majority of the outcomes judged are therefore concerning whether the host's objectives, some matching the attendees' motivations to attend, have been met, and frequently with the purpose of demonstrating for the wider community the positives of hosting an event (Getz, 2007). The traditional conference evaluation approaches are therefore narrow, focusing on tangible factors such as economic impact and unable to capture the intangible outcomes. They emphasise measuring how well the hosts' objectives have been achieved, however these objectives may be unworthy to credit (Stufflebeam, 2001) or the objectives may be of "limited importance to many potential users" (T. D. Cook & Gruder, 1978, p. 15) of the evaluation results.

Included in the traditional evaluations are often attendees' satisfaction with the event and their intentions to return, which has also been a common approach to studies on conferences (Y. Kim, Lee, & Love, 2009; J. Lee & Back, 2009a; J. Lee & Min, 2013a; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; D. Severt et al., 2007; Sung & Lee, 2015; Tanford et al., 2012; Yoo & Zhao, 2010). The downside to these studies is, however, that satisfaction is not an outcome in terms of changed behaviour and intentions to return do not indicate if they have achieved any outcomes. Interestingly, through a meta-analysis of the conference and exhibition literature, Jung and Tanford (2017) established that learning was a strong contributor to attendee satisfaction, whereas the overall physical environment contributed the most to attendees' loyalty and intentions to return. They therefore concluded that "the factors important for satisfaction do not necessarily create loyalty in the form of repeat attendance" (Jung & Tanford, 2017, p. 130) signifying that since the connections between the experience and satisfaction and intentions to return have revealed contradicting messages the relationship between experience and outcomes

needs to be studied in further depth. The need for studying this relationship is confirmed when viewing the findings from W. Kim and Malek's (2017) research on medical conference attendees which determined a significant relationship between their satisfaction and loyalty. They note that personal/professional development and location have significant impact on the experience which they then interpret as positive effect on both satisfaction and intentions to return and do not differentiate between them like Jung and Tanford (2017) did.

In addition it has been found that attendees' perceived value of event attendance leads to increased trust and loyalty towards the hosting association (S. H. Lee & Fenich, 2018). The researchers did not discuss in detail how value was defined, it was, however, indicated that it was based on financial perceptions. Previously it was discussed how J. Lee and Min (2013a) found that perceived emotional and social value led to increased intentions to attend, however since first time attendees cannot base the decision on previous attendance, for them the functional value is most important (S. Kim, Lee, & Kim, 2012). Again, none of these findings are able to determine what the outcomes for the individual attendee are, as satisfaction and intentions to return do not display changed behaviour. A different approach was taken by Andersen and Wahlgren (2015) as they studied the connection between the satisfaction with the conference and the attendees' perception of relevance to them and how much they had learnt: determining a significant relationship between satisfaction, relevance and learning. In addition, they were able to determine that respondents were more likely to find the content relevant to them than being able to identify their learning. Even less attendees were able to apply the learning, suggesting potential barriers for transfer of the knowledge. Changed behaviour, including the knowledge transfer, should be evaluated to demonstrate long-term individual attendees' outcomes (Wood, 2009), as opposed to solely view subjective satisfaction and intentions to return. Consequently from determining the professional and personal value Mitchell et al. (2016) proposed a changed approach to evaluation as they suggest two types of measures to evaluate, when viewing individual value from attending a networking event, attitudinal and behavioural.

2.4.5. The event creators' effect on conference outcomes

The event creator thus has a significant role to play in developing the outcomes. It begins during the decision-making process through the segmentation, i.e. them knowing their prospective attendees (Tkaczynski & Rundle-Thiele, 2011). This is followed by the event creators considering the event design principles as discussed in section 2.3. Ideally the event creation is not complete by this point as they also should be active in facilitating the outcomes for the attendees, for example by allowing for reflections (Ravn & Elsborg, 2011). The Facilitator model (Nebrig, Munafo, Goddard, & Tierney, 2015) was trialled by an organisation in the U.S.A., with the aim of maximising the value of conference attendance for both the attendee and the organisation. The results demonstrated that by providing each attendee a facilitator who supported them pre-, during and post-

conference, as well as assisting them with structured tasks for knowledge transfer following their experience, they were much more likely to achieve outcomes in terms of changed behaviour.

A limited number of studies have been carried out on the role of event creators in the post conference period where the experience is further developed into outcomes. With the development of social media there are potential opportunities for event creators to enhance attendees' outcomes through the use of social media, expanding upon the current main use of transmission of information. Not much research has been conducted on this, however, Wei, Lu, and Hua (2017) demonstrated how the attendees themselves have begun to continue the community discussions on various channels of social media which are not connected with the event or its creators. It has been previously discussed however the role event creators have to play in creating these outcomes during the event design, whereas further research is needed to explore how they influence the creation of outcomes.

2.5. Chapter conclusion with presentation of the conceptual framework

This review has shown how the academic conference literature has evolved greatly since the early studies when beginning to develop as an independent area in the 1980's. Despite being a study area in its own right, it is closely connected to wider event studies and has close relations to tourism and hospitality studies and more recently also in areas of marketing and consumer behaviour. The origins of the business tourism area contributed to the early research emphasising the decision-making process, in particular from a management view determining the main site selection criteria including cost and settings in terms of facilities, services and surroundings. Research on the attendee perspective of the decision-making process concluded that their main motivations to attend a conference concerned networking and professional development opportunities, however, as the decision-making models on pages 25-49 demonstrated, the decision was based upon multiple other factors such as personal, location and cost factors. The literature has, however, failed to adequately illustrate what outcomes the prospective attendees are expecting from their attendance and how they anticipate they will realise those outcomes, as the focus has been more on the short-term availability rather than long-term outcomes.

In line with the wider event studies, conference literature has evolved towards including further experience and design research as opposed to solely focus on the management view. This has led to greater understanding of the design elements event creators benefit from, including to deliver on the attendees' expectations of the experience and even heighten it. Included are not only co-creation opportunities where attendees' social identity has been shown to influence the experience but also opportunities for intellectual stimulation and interaction through novelty. For conferences specifically the

design emphasis should in particular be on contributing towards changing the behaviour of the attendees following the conference, which is achieved with a focus on structured facilitation, achieved through the attendees' involvement and interaction within a community of practice which encourages reflection.

The sense of belonging to a community is an emerging area within conference research, which has been connected to successful event design principles and realisation of outcomes such as friendships. Capturing further outcomes, in particular those which are long-term and intangible, has proven to be challenging with current approaches to evaluations. There is a need for a further encompassing evaluation approach to capture these, however the challenge lies in the limited understanding of what should be evaluated, what the details of the outcomes are and how they are developed.

The conceptual framework in Figure 9 demonstrates the single conference journey for an attendee, as discussed throughout this chapter. It begins with a motivation, followed by an experience and then the outcome, before it leads to motivation for the following conference journey. This conceptual framework was developed early within this research, following the initial review of the literature. In line with the interpretivist methodological stance of the researcher, it supported the design of the research and guided the data collection and analysis. The framework is simple, as the complexities of the conference journey were unknown, therefore underlining the worthiness of this research. The cyclical nature of the conference journeys shown in the framework emphasise the lifetime holistic experience focus of this research. This conceptual framework is developed throughout this thesis and appendix A presents the frameworks in order of development demonstrating further detail and knowledge. The details and increased knowledge are discussed in the chapters after the following chapter three which will detail the approach to the research methodology.
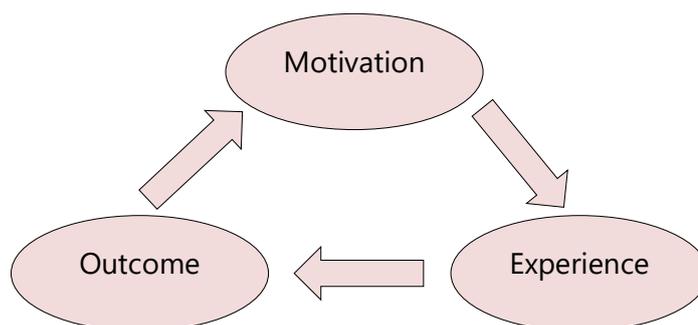
Figure 9 - Conceptual framework

Chapter 3 METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter argues the interpretative qualitative research strategy underpinning this research and demonstrates how the semi-structured life-world interview research method and thematic data analysis technique taken was applied. The introduction and literature review chapters have revealed how research on conferences have matured and developed since the initial research as an independent study in the early 1990s. In the beginning, whilst studying how to decide upon the destinations and venues to host conferences, the influence of the tourism research origins was prominent. The management perspective was heavy and continued to be as the research developed towards viewing the attendees' decision-making process to attend. This phase within the conference journey, the decision-making period prior to attending, is the area which has developed the furthest, understandably given that it has received attention for the longest although a strong quantitative focus remains within it. The shift from a management dominant paradigm towards a design dominant paradigm has however contributed towards increased knowledge on the experience at the conference itself.

The attention has primarily been on the event creators and hosts which means that there is a gap in understanding the holistic conference journey experience individual attendees have throughout their professional life. Previous research, when focusing on attendees, has often been of a certain type, most prominently academics attending association conferences, providing an opportunity to explore the conference experiences of further types of attendees; an opportunity this research embraces as will be discussed in section 3.4. In addition, much research has been through quantitative approaches developing a broad understanding of the first phases of the conference journey. Through the qualitative approach, discussed in section 3.3, this research develops a deeper understanding of the influences on the journey towards developing outcomes from the conference experiences with a further exploration needed on what the outcomes are. This chapter presents and discusses the methodological approach taken within the research to address these gaps in knowledge and achieve the aim and objectives of the thesis.

The subjective ontological and interpretivist epistemological stance underpinning the qualitative methodologies applied within this research mean that I, as the researcher, recognise that I was not detached from the research and its outcomes. This chapter is therefore presented in first person, illustrating, arguing and justifying the methodological decisions I took within my research journey which concludes with this document. It has been suggested that qualitative research reports should be written completely in first person (Ellingson, 2011; Lainson, Braun, & Clarke, 2019) – however this is rejected for the purpose of this research. It was important for me to preserve the voices of my participants; therefore, I did not want to interfere their voices with mine by writing the

entire thesis in first person. In addition, the vast event and conference literature is written in the passive 3rd person voice, therefore the reading of it has influenced my approach to writing. The final chapter, the conclusion, begins with a personal reflection on my research journey which is written in first person as it is my voice and experience the section focuses on.

This chapter will now begin with an account of my underpinning research philosophy followed by justification for the qualitative research strategy and inductive approach. Details on the conference attendee research population along with a discussion on the sampling technique applied are then provided along with an introduction to the research participants. The research method utilised was in-depth semi-structured life-world interviews (Kvale, 2007), as I will discuss in section 3.5, followed by a review of how I analysed the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis technique including a discussion on the research rigour, trustworthiness and ethics. The chapter concludes with an introduction on firstly how the conference journey will be presented within the following two chapters and secondly the research question which emerged and developed throughout the research journey.

3.2.   Research philosophy

The aim of this research is to analyse and explain attendees' holistic conference journey and how it contributes to the attendee's accumulated outcomes of a lifetime conference journey. To achieve this, I took a subjective ontological stance, an interpretivist epistemological position and adopted methodologies which are interpretivist in nature. The subjective ontology is appropriate for this research as it embraces a socially constructed reality, not one which is objectively determined, therefore inviting the existence of multiple realities which are holistic and contextual in character (Cova & Elliott, 2008; McAuley, Duberley, & Johnson, 2007; Tadajewski, 2006). The multiple realities derive from the experiential nature of an event which each has many actors associated to it (Getz & Page, 2016). In agreement with Crowther et al. (2015) I believed that aiming for a singular knowable reality would have been problematic and inappropriate for this research which needed rich responses to be able through interpretation to provide a deep and diverse picture of the conference journey. To reveal the holistic and richer picture of the multiple realities I adopted a design which embraced the liberation of the participants' views of their conference journey (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). In order to analyse and explain the social phenomenon of the conference journey the participants' view needed to be understood and a subjective meaning of individuals' experiences developed without seeking a causal explanation (Creswell, 2007).

Stating my philosophical stance for this research is necessary as it explains what supported me in my choices when carrying out this enquiry into the nature of the world, the ontology relating to the nature of reality and epistemology relating to the theory of knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Jackson, 2015). The subjective ontological stance

is greatly linked to an interpretivist epistemological position since I, as the researcher, have entered the social world of the conference journey being examined in this study, including the motivations and social interactions of the participants (Wilson, 2014). The belief therefore was that knowledge was not gained from an external, objective position but was subjectively composed and approached from the lived experiences of the participants (Tadajewski, 2006). This allowed me to develop a meaning as a result of my interpretation and understanding. My meanings, sensemaking and knowledge are relative to both my participants, as well as my own time, place and experiences, and our overall relationship with the world (Cunliffe, 2011). Through the social realities and knowledge interpreted within this research I am therefore offering a contextualised understanding and not aiming for generalisability as stated by Cunliffe (2011).

The review of the literature in chapter two demonstrated how the emphasis in conference studies has been on studying attendees' motivations for attendance. To achieve my understanding of the holistic conference journey I clearly included studying motivations within this research. The interpretivist methodological approach is highly applicable and supported in motivation studies as it allows for the multiple realities and the idiographic view. A comparison of these approaches, as well as positivism and critical theory, is available in Table 8 as presented by Tadajewski (2006). Overall, the table illustrates how it was appropriate for me to adopt an interpretivist epistemological position within this research, as I was aiming for developing an understanding of the conference journey. The journey experiences were provided through the accounts of participants' multiple realities without attempting to prove a hypothesis or generalising the interpretation. Their experiences were brought into focus through language which enabled them to be shared and made tangible (May & Perry, 2017) with my interpretations and will the qualitative research strategy be reasoned in the following section.

Table 1

A summary of positivism, interpretivism, critical theory and motivation research

	Positivism	Interpretivism	Critical theory	Motivation research
Ontological assumptions (nature of reality)	Objective; tangible; ahistorical; fragmentable; divisible	Socially constructed; multiple; holistic; contextual	'Force-field' between subject and object; dynamic; historical totality	Historically and socially constructed; multiple; contextual
Nature of social being	Deterministic; reactive	Voluntaristic; proactive	Suspend judgment; emphasize human potential	Historically influenced, but voluntaristic emphasis
Axiological assumptions (overriding goal)	'Explanation' via subsumption under general laws; prediction	'Understanding' via interpretation but not necessarily in order to confirm hypotheses	'Emancipation' via social organization that facilitates reason, justice and freedom	Understanding via interpretation; understanding as prerequisite to explanation and prediction
Epistemological assumptions (knowledge generated)	Nomothetic; time-free; context-independent; value-free	Idiographic; time-bound; context-dependent; value-laden;	Forward looking; imaginative; critical/ unmasking; practical	Largely idiographic time-bound; value-laden; forward-looking; critical (re: Russia; see note 3)
View of causality	Real causes exist	Multiple; simultaneous; shaping	Reflection; exposure of constraints through dialogue; reconstruction	Multiple; shaping; exposure of potential constraints
Research relationship metaphor	Dualism; separation; detached observer	Interactive; co-operative; translator	Continuing dialogue; liberator	Interactive; co-operative but tempered with suspicion; Dichter as liberator (see note 3)

Table 8 - Comparison of interpretivism and motivation research by Tadajewski (2006, p. 438)

3.3. Research strategy and approach

The aim of this research is to analyse and explain attendees' holistic conference journey an aim which was appropriately achieved by using words as data (Braun & Clarke, 2013) – words which were interpreted and supported the achievement of the research aim and objectives. Supported by my interpretivist stance I therefore adopted a qualitative research strategy which allowed me to create a deeper understanding of people's experience of conferences, linked to their other experiences in professional life. The collection of their words provided me with the opportunity to gather and interpret a holistic view of the conference journey over a career, where differences and outcomes

were captured and explained. It also allowed for a contribution towards further understanding of individual attendees' meaning of business events and the experience of attending them, responding to Mair's (2012) statement in section 1.2.3 that not much is known about this.

The qualitative research strategy also gave me the depth of understanding the event experience needed to achieve the research aim and contributes to the call to deepen the study area with further qualitative research (Brown, 2014; Getz, 2012; Mair, 2012; Mair & Whitford, 2013). Event studies have historically concentrated on quantitative research, for example Crowther et al. (2015) evidenced that 64% of relevant articles published in journals during 1997-2013 were utilising survey methods underpinned by quantitative methodologies. A similar pattern was evidenced for articles on business events when viewing journals published from 2004 to 2016 (Draper et al., 2017). Interestingly both of these studies illustrated a slow shift from the dominance of quantitative research to a more balance in the event research methodological approaches, including mixed methods applied. The shift is also demonstrated in their approach to compare articles based on quantitative and qualitative approach as opposed to Yoo and Weber's (2005) classification of conceptual articles and empirical articles. The articles classified as empirical were then viewed based on their statistical approach demonstrating the great emphasis on quantitative approaches. This was simultaneously demonstrated in M.J. Lee and Back's (2005a) subtitle of their article reviewing conference research 1990-2003: Identification of <u>Statistical</u> Methods and Subject Areas. Throughout the introduction and review of the literature in chapters one and two this shift from emphasising quantitative methodologies to a further balance was shown to be the case also for conference research.

Early research on conferences were mainly based within business tourism emphasising economic impact, decision-making process and destination choices (Mair & Whitford, 2013) carried out using quantitative methodologies. Suggestions on how to forecast conference attendance (Var et al., 1985; Witt, Sykes, & Dartus, 1995) and evaluate the economic impact of events, including conferences (Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis, & Mules, 2000a; Dwyer, Mellor, Mistilis, & Mules, 2000b) were provided, emphasising measurements underpinned with quantitative methodologies. In these early days research focusing on the destination selection factors were emerging rapidly, supporting the forecasting studies undertaken with quantitative methodologies (G. I. Crouch & Ritchie, 1998; Oppermann, 1996) – a trend which continued throughout the first decade of the 20th century (Baloglu & Love, 2005; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; M. J. Lee & Back, 2008; Yoo & Chon, 2008; Yoo & Zhao, 2010; Yoo & Chon, 2010). Over these two decades many of the conference attendance motivation and decision-making studies were also undertaken, again utilising quantitative studies (Grant & Weaver, 1996; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Oppermann, 1998; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; K. Severt et al., 2009).

A review of the outcomes of these studies was provided in section 2.2, illustrating the growth of the conference research field at this time. This included the advancement on knowledge elements to emphasise when choosing conference destination, and the breadth of knowledge of what motivates delegates to attend conferences. This breadth is one of the advantages of quantitative studies (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009); however, it has more limited opportunities to capture the depth which qualitative studies are further able to do (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As discussed above, calls for further qualitative studies were made at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century. Qualitative studies had however been carried out earlier, for example the simple open-ended question, "Why did you come to this event?" implemented in Nicholson and Pearce's (2001, p. 457) research, provided richer data resulting in an opportunity to report more complex and diverse motivation pattern across different events (M. J. Lee & Back, 2005a), an opportunity this research aims to build on through the qualitative research strategy. The qualitative approach invited the possibility of discovering attributes which have not been covered within the traditional quantitative approach in conference studies, as the qualitative strategy increases the likelihood of developing empirically supported new ideas and theories (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000).

The growth in experience studies came with a growth in qualitative studies, as it provided opportunities to explore in depth people's meanings of their experiences, including behaviour and feelings. Qualitative studies were therefore appropriate at the beginning of the development of the understanding of this emerging study area (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Throughout sections 2.3.3 to 2.3.7 the experiences were discussed and when reviewing the conference literature the importance of qualitative methodologies was significant in many areas. For example the importance of application of event design on the experience (Jacoby Hansen, 2010; Nelson, 2009), relationships between learning and meaningful outcomes (Chapman et al., 2007; Crowther & Donlan, 2011; Hatcher et al., 2006; Ravn, 2007; Ravn & Elsborg, 2011; Storberg-Walker, Wiessner, & Chapman, 2005; Wiessner et al., 2008) and most recently identification of the importance of the conference community (Henn & Bathelt, 2015; Mair & Frew, 2016; Wei & Miao, 2017). These qualitative studies were growing following the shift from the event management-predominant paradigm to an event design-predominant paradigm (Brown, 2014) as discussed in section 1.2.2.

Previous research has therefore concentrated on quantitative methodologies focusing on single conferences and measurements based on a set of criteria and although qualitative studies have grown, in particular when viewing experiences, few entirely qualitative studies have been carried out on the conference journey. This has led to a lack of a deeper understanding of what is meant by personal and professional development as well as networking and motivations to attend and what outcomes they develop. The value has been considered during the conference itself (S. Kim et al., 2012) leading to a better awareness of the short-term outcomes but less on the long-term outcomes. Towards the end of section 2.4.3 the six outcomes gained by the host destination from a

business event beyond the economic impact as found by Foley et al. (2013) were listed. These emerged through their longitudinal grounded theory mixed-method study, demonstrating how business studies are widening their methodological approaches beyond the orthodox quantitative approach. The above-mentioned recent studies, in particular studying the conference community adapting qualitative methodological approaches have contributed to the deeper understanding of the meaning of attending conferences.

The qualitative strategy is however not without limitations, the depth frequently gained from a small sample often leads to less opportunities for generalisability onto large populations (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The aim and objectives for this research are not intending to generalise the findings to the population at large, rather to provide an insight into the participants' conference journeys and explore the various influences and outcomes. The research strategy should be the one which is most appropriate to what is trying to be found (Shipway, Jago, & Deery, 2012; Silverman, 2013) and for this research the qualitative strategy is most appropriate as it offers opportunities to capture emergent concepts with potentials to original thoughts to be developed since it is not overly prescriptive (J. Ritchie & Ormston, 2014). Another potential limitation to a qualitative research strategy has been perceived as the research bias (Brunt, Horner, & Semley, 2017). Throughout this chapter it is argued that the underpinning epistemological stance is interpretivism, therefore I am part of the research and the thematic data analysis approach supports that as the interpretations are "produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). In addition it is argued that I have reflected upon the interpretations and moderated my influence, for example by writing in 3rd person and therefore not interfering with the voice of the participants which is shown throughout, for example with quotations.

To reveal the holistic conference journey and the influences on the development of outcomes generated from the conference attendance, and therefore achieve the research aim, I needed to generate the knowledge from the data. The most appropriate research approach to accomplish this was an inductive approach which focuses on meanings, ideas and practices (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). It is commonly associated with a qualitative strategy which is driven by the data as opposed to a deductive quantitative study which is driven by testing a pre-set hypothesis (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2019). Following the initial literature review the data led the way in the interpretation and mapping of the attendees' conference journey, which then guided me towards further literature following the collection of data (Gill & Johnson, 2010) as is discussed in section 3.6.3.

The qualitative research strategy allowed me to explore the holistic conference journey as it provided access to the research participants' thoughts and perceived values on individual journeys (Bryman & Bell, 2011). It also offered the necessary depth and flexibility I had found during my dissertation research was needed to reveal the journey influences and outcomes leading to achievement of the research objectives. This strategy

and the inductive approach was therefore the most appropriate to achieve the research aim which is what the decision on the strategy should be based upon (Flick, 2014). In accordance to research best practice I have now discussed my philosophical stance which inherently shapes this research (Johnson & Duberley, 2000) and argued the qualitative and inductive research strategy and approach. I will now continue by determining the research population and justify the approach to sampling research participants.

3.4. Research population and sampling

The introduction and literature review chapters provided an in-depth analysis of the business events environment and its main stakeholders. It was revealed how the orthodox research focus has been on the hosts and organisers, leading to the conclusion that attendees are under-researched and therefore worthy of examination (J. Lee & Back, 2009b; Ramirez et al., 2013; D. Severt et al., 2007). Within this section I will define the research target population, outline the sampling technique and finally introduce the research participants.

3.4.1. Research target population

The inclusion of all business events' attendees in the research target population was unrealistic and would not have contributed towards achieving the research aim. The research aim itself states one of the boundaries to the target population, the business event type participants have attended should be conferences as defined on page 7. Further boundaries to the target population, defined following the initial review of the literature, were applied to generate richer data, including their career stage and variety of experiences, will be outlined within this section.

The three main types of hosts: associations, corporate and public sectors, were introduced in section 1.2.1, demonstrating the wide reach association conferences have across a range of professionals within diverse industries. The division of the population in accordance to these three hosts has been frequently applied in conference research leading to Mair (2010, p. 179) concluding that "most research has focused on association delegates and not on corporate delegates" leaving a gap in research as these two groups are different. In addition, the association sampling has focused on academic association conferences, in particular within the subject areas of hospitality, tourism and events (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008) resulting in similar samples. The limitations of this sampling has been discussed by M.J. Lee and Back (2005b) as they stated that association members' meeting participation behaviour is extremely complex therefore all motivational and inhibiting factors cannot be explained by a few types of respondents who are attending conferences of similar nature.

The target population for this research were attendees at both association and corporate conferences to capture the diverse voices and contribute towards the gap in knowledge

on the corporate conference attendees. It was discussed in section 1.2.1 how conference attendance is widely accepted within academia, which has contributed toward academics being a conference attendee segment widely researched, although mostly within the boundaries of association conferences. To increase the knowledge of a wide range of academic conference experiences and not only within academic association conferences, this research targets the broader academic population who attends conferences. Academics within this research are those who work within higher education institutions and their day-to-day work concerns mainly teaching and researching (Nixon, 1996). The varied range of association conferences leads to a diverse range of attendees at these conferences, one segment is identified as academics, another is professionals who also attend corporate conferences. These professionals are the other main target population for this research, defined as professionals who work outside of academia. These two types of attendees, academics and professionals, provided the opportunity to explore a more varied journey, and generate a variety of voices.

To capture the holistic conference journey over a lifetime, the population was required to not only have a wide range of experiences, but be situated at different stages within their career. Therefore, the population was defined as being at one of three following career stages: early, mid or late. The purpose of this division was to capture the lifetime conference journey and allowing for identification of distinctions at different stages of attendees' career. This could have been achieved by including only a population who was late in their career as they could have provided their lifetime conference journey. However, as discussed in chapters one and two, conferences have evolved over the last decades and by including a population who has recently begun attending conferences these changes are captured in the holistic conference journey. In addition, the research method utilised, in-depth semi-structured life-world interviews (Kvale, 2007), which will be discussed in section 3.5, requested the participants to reflect upon their various conference experiences which could mean recalling long-term memories. The inclusion of a population who were early in their career and have recently begun attending conferences mitigated the reliance on long-term memories. In line with my interpretivist paradigm it was nonetheless what they remembered and the narratives of these memories which were of interest and not a perfect recollection of the experiences, which is more associated to a positivist paradigm. Figure 10 summarises the characteristics of the target population.
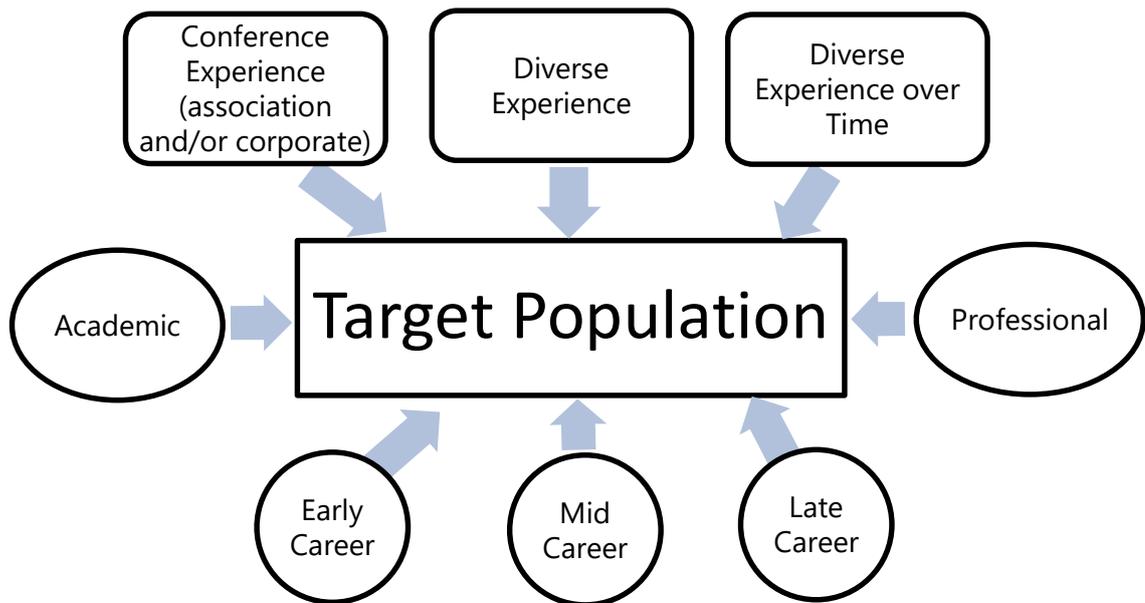
Figure 10 - Target population

3.4.2. Sampling technique

The sampling frame for this study was defined in accordance to the above discussed target population as demonstrated in Figure 10. To achieve the research aim of exploring holistically the individual conference attendee journey, which for the mid- and late career participants included multiple experiences, the sample was not connected to specific conferences or organisations. It was the individual experiences which were of interest and supported in achieving the research aim. This also meant that there were no timeframe boundaries regarding as to when the experiences took place, taking a longitudinal aspect to the research. This condition was important to add to knowledge on the holistic journey as in many previous research the data has predominantly been collected during, or in the weeks following, the conference (Bauer et al., 2008; J. Lee & Min, 2013b; Mair & Thompson, 2009) and focusing on a single conference experience (Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; D. Severt et al., 2007). The sample for this research therefore responds to Mair's (2010, p. 180) call for exploring delegates which are not "reasonably like-minded" and therefore developing "a broader understanding of conference delegates".

A theoretical sampling approach as defined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was applied in line with the inductive approach. This meant that the sample was not random, as the research participants were required to have a level of insights for the purposes of developing theory. Therefore, a non-probability sampling technique was applied as the research aim and underpinning interpretivist epistemological position did not require the research outcome to be generalisable but to develop a deeper understanding of the topic by understanding the experiences of the research sample (Uprichard, 2013). The alternative choice would have been to have a probability sample where each population

member has a known probability to be selected. However, this was not needed because of the methodological approach and therefore with the adoption of a non-probability sampling technique, the probabilities of selection were unknown. The definition of the target population was necessary because there were theoretically unlimited possibilities of integrating further participants (Flick, 2014) and the sampling frame in Table 9 was developed based on the target population as a starting point for the theoretical sampling.

	Early Career	Mid-Career	Late Career
Academics	√√√	√√√√	√√
Professionals	√√	√√√√	√√√

Table 9 - Sampling frame

The above sampling frame illustrates the final number of research participants. The initial starting point was the purposive sample generated from a number of potential contacts suggested by professional colleagues which in turn led to snowballing provided contacts until a minimum of 2 for each cell of Table 9 were reached. In accordance to Glaser and Strauss' (1967) definition of theoretical sampling the remainder of the participants were identified based on the analysis and interpretation of the data initially collected. The initial analysis therefore guided towards decision of what data to collect next.

The analysis of the initial data collected demonstrated the importance within the academic career to attend conferences from an early stage which led to a greater population of early academics with conference experience. The opposite scenario was found for the professionals, they had further challenges in gaining conference experiences early in their career. It was therefore decided to include less early career professionals and more late career professionals, which was opposite to the academic sample. This decision was also supported by the finding that more academics had conference experiences, in many cases much further and of a wide range. This inevitably led to challenges in identifying appropriate research participants who were professional as opposed to academics. The final identification of the sample from the initial data analysis was the importance of having the sample diverse also in terms of the area the participants were working within, as it provided further depth to the interpretation. This was achieved as is demonstrated in Table 11 where each participant's occupation, area and background are presented. It shall also be noted that although the target population was required to have a range of conference experiences over time this did not apply to all research participants. For example, I deemed it necessary to include the extreme case of only having one conference experience to capture fresh memories of attending a first conference. In the following section I introduce the research participants.

3.4.3. Introducing the research participants

A purposive sample (J. Ritchie, Lewis, Elam, Tennant, & Rahim, 2014) of 18 participants with a story to tell was recruited. Their stories depended upon career stage, ranging from

a single conference journey to multiple journeys per year over a lifetime career. Of the total 18 conference attendees who participated in the research, 9 were academics and 9 were professionals as introduced in the sampling frame in Table 9. Table 10 displays their pseudonyms and their position within the sampling frame, with more detail about each participant available in Table 11. It is ethical best practice to protect the anonymity of the research participants (Bell et al., 2019) and therefore they were given pseudonyms (Silverman, 2013) which they are referred to as opposed to their real names. I chose them purposefully; academics received pseudonyms after influential past scientists and professionals after influential contemporary business people.

	Early Career	**Mid-Career**	**Late Career**
Academics	Johannes Ronald Marjorie	Anita Karen Alfred Rosalind	Henrietta Daniel
Professionals	Anne Steve	Laura Sam Warren Eliza	Sheila Carly Alexander

Table 10 - The research participants (pseudonyms)

The mid-career participants group was larger than the other two, as evident in Table 9, originating from the mid-career spanning a longer period than early and late career. The participants were not grouped in accordance to their age but through a combination of their current career stage and the amount of conferences they had attended. The participants' age ranged from late 20's to early 70's which allowed for the development of a rich interpretation of the overall conference journey ranging from a fresh perspective of recently attending their first external conference, to a full career of attending conferences. Many of the participants were into their second career, with Sheila even into her third career, which allowed the participants to draw upon different experiences, their similarities and differences, and how they had developed over time.

An overview of the 18 participants' background is available in Table 11 including their current occupation and their previous occupation. It was important to be familiar with the past as throughout their interviews the participants referred to experiences during previous careers which had influenced and affected the overall conference journey. The table demonstrates not only the wide variety of occupational roles of the participants but also the inclusion of natural and social science academics. The participating academics were all research active which could contribute to a bias within the data, as the sampling frame captures those who attends conferences and omits those who do not. Academics who are research active are more likely to attend conferences and therefore a bias was inevitable built into the sampling strategy (Bell et al., 2019) in terms of the nature of the research participants (Saunders et al., 2009). The same applies for the professionals as employees who attend conferences often have enhanced employment and education levels. The academics' research activeness could also be an underlying factor for them

participating in my research because they have an understanding and willingness to support a fellow academic with their research.

		Pseudonym	Current Occupation	Area	Previous occupation
A C A D E M I C S	**Early Career**	**Johannes**	Lecturer	Business management	Business management
		Ronald	PhD Student	Medicine	
		Marjorie	Lecturer undertaking a PhD	Business management	Sales
	Mid-Career	**Karen**	Postdoctoral Researcher	Geoscience	
		Alfred	Postdoctoral Researcher	Medicine	
		Rosalind	Senior academic undertaking a PhD	Education	Teaching
		Anita	Lecturer undertaking a PhD	Business management	
	Late Career	**Henrietta**	Professor	Education	School teacher
		Daniel	Professor	Engineering	
P R O F E S S I O N A L S	**Early Career**	**Anne**	Consultant	Built environment	PhD researcher
		Steve	IT	IT	
	Mid-Career	**Laura**	Lawyer	Law	
		Sam	Chartered Engineer	Energy Industry	
		Warren	Finance Director	Wealth management	
		Eliza	Finance Manager	Third sector	
	Late Career	**Sheila**	Consultant	Compliance	IT and Pharma-ceutical sector
		Carly	IT Manager	Health sector	
		Alexander	Medical clinician and professor	Medicine	

Table 11 - Research participants' background

In chapters four and five when quotes from the interviews are presented, I introduce them in the following manner:

Anita [MC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]:

The MC stands for Mid-Career (with EC being Early Career and LC Late Career) and it is important for the interpretation of the quote to recognise that she is both a lecturer and a PhD researcher as it affects her experiences and conference journey. This applies for

Marjorie and Rosalind as well. It shall also be noted again that Sheila is into her third career as it has influenced her overall conference journey which will be evident in chapter five. Overall the characteristics of the research participants are not as clear cut as the introduction of them in Table 10 suggests and this will become evident within the following chapters. This is most apparent for two of the research participants. Alexander holds positions both as a practicing medical clinician and a professor at a university; and Anne has very recently completed her PhD and is now working within an organisation as a consultant whilst concentrating on a research project to enhance the organisation's offerings. Anne is therefore transitioning from a pure academic role into a more professional based one, whilst Alexander is simultaneously upholding both his roles and attends conferences for dual purposes. He expressed a different approach to them depending on which hat he had on, as a professional or academic:

> **Alexander [LC - Medical clinician and professor]:** *Just different focus, different way of thinking about things. Clinicians are not really interested in cells so much and mitochondria and pathways and you know, they are not interested in what happens in mice ((laughs)) and rats, so it is a different, it is a different focus. […] . When I go there [to professional based conferences], it is… I have to sort of change my, the way I am thinking about things.*

This demonstrates the complex and dynamic sample participating in this research which is in line with the research target population and was achieved through the theoretical sampling based on the sampling frame. The sample responds to M.J. Lee and Back's (2005b) critique that factors within a conference journey cannot be explained by a few types of delegates who attend conferences of similar nature since the research participants had varied backgrounds and attended diverse conferences. At the same time the sample allowed for a comparison of the academic conference journey with the professional conference journey, adding to knowledge on these given the previous strong focus on academics. The comparison will be discussed at the beginning of chapter six providing an underpinning for the discussion within the chapter.

The research participants were recruited in accordance to the sampling frame and the data gained from them supported in achieving the research aim without leaving gaps. My interpretivist position for this research along with the qualitative research strategy meant that it did not intend to generalise the findings on a large population, rather develop an understanding of the phenomenon which the holistic conference journey is. Therefore a small sample was acceptable as Gaskell (2000) argues that an upper limit for in-depth interviews for a single researcher is 15-25. This corresponds to M. Crouch and McKenzie's (2006) argument that for an interview-based qualitative research a sample of less than 20 participants enhances the validity of the research as it allows for closer association with participants and more in-depth inquiry. The small sample size is supported by emerging qualitative research within conference studies such as Mair and Frew (2016) who had a sample size of 2 participants. The following section will introduce the research method I utilised to collect the research data.

3.5. Research method

3.5.1. In-depth semi-structured life-world Interview

The research method I adopted for the research was in-depth semi-structured interviews. This interview method was highly applicable within the research methodology argued thus far because it generated information with different meanings and perceptions which was appropriate for me to interpret (Cunliffe, 2011) and is valid within a qualitative inductive research framework setting. In addition interviewing was an appropriate research method to employ when collecting data for this research as the interviews allowed me to explore in-depth the participants' holistic conference journey. The participants were enabled to express their experiences within the journey as well as their perceptions and thoughts on the outcomes developed and the various influences on the journey and outcomes. "Experiences are memorable" stated Pine and Gilmore (2011, p. 17) supporting me verbally interviewing the research participants as a suitable research method since they should remember their conference journeys and be able to share them.

The interview technique I applied was the in-depth semi-structured life-world interview with the purpose of understanding themes of the interviewee's lived everyday world from their own perspectives (Kvale, 2007). It allowed the research participants as interviewees to provide information and perspectives with respect to the phenomena under exploration within this research, their individual conference journey. This approach as suggested by Kvale (2007, p. 51) has a "sequence of themes to be covered, as well as some suggested questions" and encourages "openness to change of sequence and forms of questions in order to follow up the specific answers given and the stories told" by the participants. The interviewees were all informed at the beginning of the interview that there were no correct or wrong answers, this was about their experience and they had full freedom to structure their story the way they wanted to tell it. They were therefore providing a personal experience story (Denzin, 1989) of attending conferences, from when they first began contemplating attending, what motivated them to attend, their experience during the conference, and through to the long-term outcomes they perceived gained. The stories did not appear in this order, however the information gained in each interview allowed me to gain the longitudinal information of the participant's overall journey.

The unstructured approach of a life story interview was considered by inspiration of the work by Desforges (2000) who adopted it when exploring the connections between tourism and self-identity. He argued a need for tourists' stories to understand what tourism meant to them instead of a traditional approach of focusing on representatives of the host destination who often misrepresented the tourists. I trialled this unstructured approach in my first interview for this research, where the participant was aware that they were the first interviewee. The participant´s feedback following the interview was that

further structure was needed as they felt unsure how to begin and how to structure their story. I therefore found that the life story interview in its purest form was not suitable as the phenomenon under research was well defined with boundaries within the participants' lives. Throughout the interview process I however continued to be influenced by Desforges (2000) and Atkinson (1998) in the way I approached the interviews. This can be seen for example in the closure questions which were provided by Atkinson (1998) and are illustrated in the interview questions in appendix B.

During the period of the data collection I therefore evolved the adopted interview approach. The unstructured approach was considered and attempted, however rejected as the research participants found it challenging to structure the story of their conference experiences. In addition the purpose of the interview was not to "understand the language and culture of the respondents" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 654) but to learn about their conference experiences as they perceived them. The focus was on their words and choice of topics which was guided by my themes and questions; however as the interviewee chose the path of discussing their experiences, which questions I asked and the order of them varied between interviews in accordance to the flow of the conversation (Saunders et al., 2009).

3.5.2. Reflections on the interview process

Throughout the study I kept a research diary, a practice which encouraged my methodological awareness (Seale, 2002) and supported me when writing to understand the impact of critical decisions made along the way (Kohler Riessman, 2008). The research diary was kept both electronically, mainly for structured text, as well as on paper which for me was more suitable for mind mapping and recording of thoughts in the form of colourful drawings including text (see examples in appendix C). The documents making up the research diary formed an audit trail of reflections as recommended for a research of interpretivist nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The most structured audit was kept during the data collection period as detailed notes were taken following each interview. The interview notes were observational, theoretical and methodological as advised by Groenewald (2004), therefore able to provide me with a detailed synopsis of the advantages and disadvantages of the interview data and process. An overview of the difference of these three different types of notes is available in below Table 12.

Observational notes	´What happened notes´
Theoretical notes	´Attempts to derive meaning´ as the researcher thinks or reflects on experiences
Methodological notes	´Reminders, instructions or critique´ to oneself on the process

Table 12 - Three types of interview notes (Groenewald, 2004, p. 48-49)

The research diary played a vital role in refining the process of the data collection as well as reflecting upon the data and interpretations made. Consequently, the research diary aided in evolving and continuously developing and improving the process of the study

and this section will illustrate the evolving research process. The outline begins with the interview questions, followed by the interview process and concludes on connections with the findings and discussion within this study.

<u>Interview questions</u>

The strength of the interviews rested in allowing the interviewees to lead the conversation which led to them demonstrating indirectly the various factors and influences within their journey. This included an illustration of which were of most importance and the interview approach allowed for their individual voices to be apparent and strong. I argued above however that structure was needed within the interviews and I achieved this with the preparation of themes and interview questions. These were constructed under influence from the initial literature review, guidance from Kvale (2007) and Atkinson (1998) and developed throughout the data collection as discussed below; early and final versions are available in appendix B.

The observational notes demonstrated that the questions which I had prepared prior to the first interview provided me not only with an overview of themes desirable to discuss, but also discussion points for interviewees when they were hesitant of how to continue their discussion. These questions were themed in accordance to the three stages of the journey, pre-conference, experience during conference and post conference - in line with the literature review. I followed Kvale's (2007) advice to be open for their sequence and the forms in which they were asked, all based on how the interviewee was structuring their interview. This approach was particularly important in the first interview when a more unstructured approach was attempted. The questions remained fluid throughout the entire interview process; based on interviewees' stories, additions were made to them, in particular when a theme developed which had not been discussed in the literature. The interview notes demonstrated this clearly when Sheila (5th interview) discussed her different careers. Both Anne (2nd interview) and Eliza (4th interview) had made implications of a career shift affecting their journey, therefore this theme was added to interview questions. Another occasion was when Carly (8th interview) discussed the future, which had also been voiced by Sheila, and therefore this was added to questions.

The interview notes following the first interview also demonstrated that a firm structure was needed when commencing the interviews in order to warm up the interviewees. Within the remaining interviews I therefore began by requesting the interviewees to tell me about themselves in terms of their professional background and education. Following this I asked an open question inviting an extensive respond which often allowed for an easier continued narration. Especially effective questions were along the lines of '*tell me about your most recent/memorable/boring conference experience*'.

Interview process

Following the participants' agreement to participate in the research, which was confirmed through signing a participation consent form, I contacted them to organise a meeting place chosen at their convenience. In the correspondence I proposed that a café or other eating place would be an ideal location. Responding to participants' requests and needs this was adapted and the interviews took place in cafés of the participants' choice, my office, the participants' offices, and through Skype. The locations for the face to face interviews were considered appropriate for my safety as a researcher and it was a comfortable setting for the participants with limited disturbances (Saunders et al., 2009). Whilst reflecting upon practical matters concerning the interview approach using the methodological notes it became evident nonetheless that in future interviews it was not recommended to sit next to the coffee machine in a café. The noise they produced was not noticed during the interview, nonetheless it interfered with the recording causing challenges during transcription. In addition, the participants should have been allowed to eat as soon as their food arrived, so it would not become cold and they lose their attention.

The face-to-face setting created the rapport needed for the research participants to feel more free to share their personal experience story during the in-depth interview. Another sign of the established rapport was evident in a limited number of interviews where the participant went off topic and discussed various other issues and ideas they had. This did not last for long as I steered them back into the appropriate discussion, it however demonstrated the rapport I established with the interviewees as they felt secure to open up to me. Whilst listening to the recordings of the first three interviews and reading the methodological notes I realised that I had the tendency of becoming too excited during the interviews leading to me interrupting the interviewee with a follow-up question before they had finished their sentence. For the remaining interviews I was aware of this habit and when listening to the recordings of them I observed that my interview technique had improved as I was controlling myself and manging the pull of conversation to keep the push of inquiry in focus (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011).

Four of the interviews were conducted through the telecommunications application Skype, a decision based on availability and convenience of the participants. The Skype interviews achieved the purpose of the interviews as they all delivered the story of the participants' conference journey and a good rapport was established. On reflection it was interesting that all of the four participants who were interviewed through Skype were professionals. A possible explanation for this is that they are accustomed to using this approach in their daily work and were therefore comfortable with it which Saunders et al. (2016) recommend as a prerequisite for telephone interviews. The main disadvantage to the Skype interviews was the occasional unstable connection, however I resolved this by either repeating myself or request the interviewee to repeat or clarify their dialogue which they responded well to.

In my correspondence to the participants prior to the interviews I invited them to bring any material which they believed would help illustrate their conference experience and trigger their memory recall. Two of the participants brought with them the conference programmes and books of abstracts. A third participant brought with them a folder containing all the material concerning their conference attendance such as invitations, email correspondence, programme, and list of delegates. It was therefore only three participants who utilised this opportunity. In addition, I suggested some topics which could be discussed within the interview and one participant wanted further clarification on this and requested specific questions. The design of the interviews did not invite a clear response to this request as the approach was that the interviewee led the discussion and the questions were mainly to prompt. I responded by indicating broadly a few questions, mainly by detailing somewhat further the topics already given, which the participant was satisfied with. This participant arrived at the interview most prepared of them all with many handwritten notes on their experiences.

The interviews lasted from 43 minutes to 90 minutes, depending on the amount of experiences the participants had to discuss from their conference journey. The participants gave verbal and written consent to record the interviews and the transcription of the 1,061 minutes of interviews generated close to 170,000 words. The following section, 3.6, will discuss how this data was analysed. The transcripts and initial analysis demonstrated that the interviews had provided the depth of data required and the participants' story of their conference journey was developing with numerous themes generated, confirming the number of participants as guided by the sampling frame to be sufficient to achieve the research aim. This is evident in chapters four and five where the academics' and professionals' conference journeys are illustrated with subsequent discussion in chapter six.

<u>Connections with findings and discussion</u>

Following the first three interviews with Anita, Anne and Warren, who are in three different cells of the sampling frame, I took a break from data collection to reflect upon the initial approach of unstructured life story interviews. In my research diary I have noted how the break was utilised to engage further with research methods literature on interviewing to evolve and develop the research method utilised for this study. It has been argued above how the adopted interview technique of in-depth semi-structured life-world interview (Kvale, 2007) was successful in achieving data in line with my interpretivist philosophical stance and supported in achieving the research aim. My reflections demonstrated how the majority of the participants were relying on their memory within the interview. The lack of memory on some points and vivid memory on others proved a valuable finding as it demonstrated what was of importance to the participants when identifying influences on development of conference outcomes. This was possible despite many occasions where the participants' latest conference experience was on top of their mind providing the most recollections as I was supported

through the semi-structured approach with interview questions and hence able to support memory recalls.

In addition to the memories emphasised within the interviews it was surprisingly the last interview question which contributed the greatest towards my reflections and interpretation of the data. The final question of the interview was in line with Atkinson's (1998) suggestions for closure question as I asked: *'What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?'* From their reflections of the interview I identified three themes. The first theme concerned them seeking confirmation of their interview being of use to me with the research, along with many of them expressing enjoyment in participating and interested in the final research outcome. Secondly, there were those who responded factually like Daniel and Alexander who both only felt they had answered questions asked. The third and final theme was how the interview had shed a new light on how they could perceive their conference experiences. The combination of these three themes contributed to one of the major findings of this research: a new insight to the attendees' internal influence on their conference journey, including their multiple identities, career stage, ambitions and engagement which will be discussed in-depth in section 6.4.

To achieve the research aim I needed to adopt a research method which was able to capture the holistic conference journey over a career. The in-depth semi-structured life-world interviews, influenced by the unstructured life stories method, allowed me to achieve this in combination with the research sample where participants' experience ranged from one conference journey to journeys over a period of 40 years or thereabout. The adopted method was realistic because of the structure the participants' needed to be able to tell their story, my role was to facilitate the storytelling and continuously keep them engaged which is in agreement with Hermanns' (2004) view that the interviewer's task is to facilitate the evolution of the drama within the interview interaction. Through this method I was able to capture the richness, depth, diversity and complexity of the conference journeys which other interview approaches such as focused interviews, problem-cantered interviews, or elite interviews (Flick, 2014) would not have accomplished to achieve the research aim. In the following section I discuss the data analysis technique I adopted to interpret the data, thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This technique complimented the data collection method as it was able to enhance the interpretation of the meaning of the 'messy' data and conceptualise the themes within the broader story (Clarke & Braun, 2019).

3.6. Data analysis technique: Thematic data analysis

The data analysis technique I applied was thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which was appropriate given the interpretivist stance. Through the thematic data analysis technique themes were derived from all the interviews conducted. Together they composed the data set, with themes related to the aim and objectives of the research.

The thematic data analysis approach not only allowed for the achievement of the ability to contribute to the explanation of the individual's stories and experiences of the conference journey as a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) but also in understanding the meaning of smaller parts by relating them to the whole (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2017). The thematic analysis approach in addition allowed for the analysis of each story individually with regard to the social or organisational context of the research participants in addition to developing themes generated from all the stories (Kvale, 2007). This was possible because although each story reflected the individual telling it they were able to provide an understanding beyond the individual and into the wider society since lives moves through history and structure (Musson, 2004).

To provide a transparent structure to the data analysis process I followed Braun and Clarke's (2013) six phases: *(1) data familiarisation; (2) coding; (3) 'searching' for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming of themes; and (6) writing the report.* Thematic analysis is an iterative and recursive process which encouraged me to move back and forth between each step, to ensure that the themes are accurate reflections of the data. Braun and Clarke (2019) have since the publication of their initial article on the technique (Braun & Clarke, 2006) reflected upon the approach and now prefer the term reflexive thematic analysis, within this text it will however be referred to as thematic analysis for ease of language. Their work has greatly influenced my thinking, as is evidenced throughout this section with extensive reference to them, although I have also engaged with other scholars' work on the area of data analysis. In the following section I discuss the process adhered to within each phase and an overview is shown in Figure 11.

Data familiarisation

- Researcher conducted interviews
- Verbatim transcription
- Multiple listening to interviews
- Multiple reading of transcripts
- Interview notes reviewed
- Ideas and concepts emerging from data noted

Coding

- 1. Mapping individual stories - feeling for narratives
- 2. Underlining & writing notes in transcripts
- 3. Coding in NVivo

'Searching' for themes

- Initial mapping of framework

Writing the report

- Narrative of the research communicated in writing
- Previous stages revisited contionously

Defining and naming of themes

- Detailed frameworks

Reviewing themes

- Recoding in NVivo
- Continued work in mapping of framework
- Second framework mapped

Figure 11 - Application of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis

3.6.1. Data familiarisation

The initial step in the data analysis process was for me to become familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through conducting all the interviews myself this process began already at data collection stage, especially as each interview was feeding into the next one through improving and adapting the interview themes and questions. This was corresponding to the inductive approach to the research as the data led the way. The familiarisation continued following the completion of the interviews through the verbatim transcribing as can be seen in Figure 12 which demonstrates the process of data familiarisation and how it led into and merged with the coding phase.

Upon completion of all the interviews being transcribed I listened to the audio recordings again whilst reading for accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and if the transcripts needed correcting I did so. This process was repeated three times to ensure consistency between not only the audio recordings and transcripts but also between the 18 transcripts in terms of style and presentation. The reading of each transcript was however not limited to only three times but repeated more often.
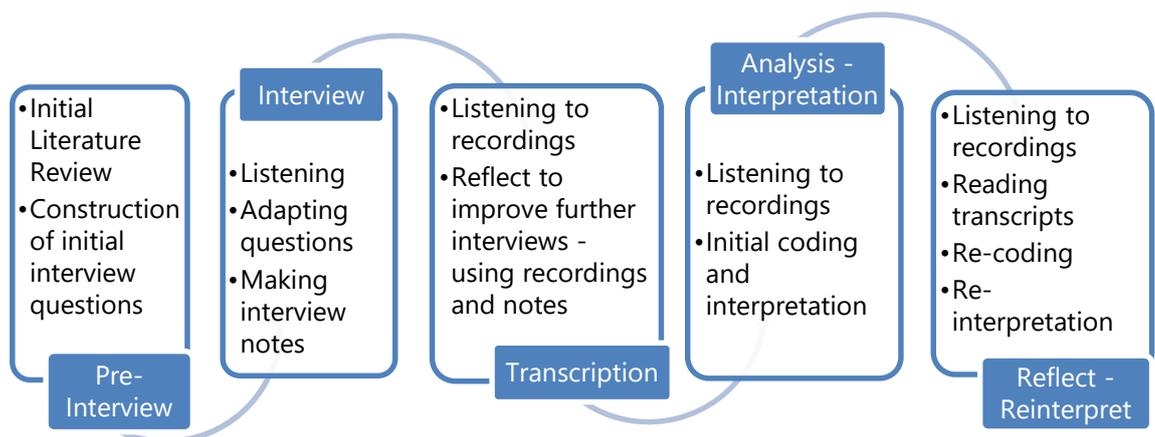
Figure 12 - Data familiarisation process

During the familiarisation I made notes regarding ideas and concepts developing from the data which were revisited during the entire analysis process. I also continuously returned to the audio recordings and transcripts to ensure the themes were generated from the data. The listening process was paramount to the analysis and interpretation of the data as it provided opportunities for me to hear everything which was said, as during the interviews themselves the emphasis may have been more towards what the interviewee focused on. The repeated listening provided rich opportunities for me to generate, check and refine the analytic hunches (Rapley, 2004). In addition the deepening engagement with the data allowed for my evolvement and a deeper understanding of the data through reflection and ability to contextualise it further, not only within each interview but the overall data set and it situated within the literature (Clarke & Braun, 2019). Exactly how many times the transcripts should be listened to and read could not

be dictated, I continued until the point where no significant new codes were being generated (Walters, 2016).

3.6.2. Coding

The generation of the initial codes was made through three rounds, where a code was viewed as "conceptual tools in the developing analysis" (Clarke & Braun, 2019, p. 7). Throughout the data analysis process, I was conscious to preserve the different voices and ensuring that they would be heard as individual voices as well as an interpretation of the collective data. This is in line with Miles and Huberman's (1994) understanding of codes, essentially they are labels – not necessarily in terms of the words but their meaning. The first cycle involved mapping a picture of four individual stories to get a feeling for the narratives. Figure 13 below demonstrates an example of this, the text is not intended to be read, it is an illustration of a stage in the data analysis process. The four chosen interviews were not the ones conducted first, but in the middle and towards the end when the interviewing approach had been refined and questions close to finalised, which is in accordance to Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommendations. Through this process I developed a further interpretation of the meanings of the participants' various experiences and insights.

Figure 13 - Example of initial mapping of the interviews

The second round served the same purpose as the first however as I by this time had a better understanding of the data and further awareness of codes to generate, the time-consuming process of drawing each transcript was considered excessive. This led to me coding by underlining in the transcripts and writing by hand in the margins as displayed

in Figure 14. These two rounds completed the first stage of coding the entire data set. Both of the rounds were completed solely by me using manual approaches to ensure the interpretivist underpinning of the research. This also supported to preserve the individual voices and stories within the data set. The importance of this and the interpretation of the individual stories is discussed in section 6.4.1 on the attendees multiple identities which I identified through analysing the individual stories and understanding of their similarities and differences.

Q: Yes ((laughs)) because at one point about I don't know, because I am 70 ok so when I was shortly after I was 60 I thought ok well I will begin to, I won't kind of retire straight away but I will reduce my contract and I will you know withdraw from, so I stopped I reduced my contract, and I thought I am not going to go anymore international conferences and kind of I stopped going for 2 or 3 years, erm… and then I thought actually I am not ready to retire yet ((laughs)) and I wanted to kind of you know get things going again erm… and one way to do that of course, a really good way is to commit yourself to doing a paper at a conference because then you have a deadline to meet and you meet the deadline and so it kind of really acts as an impetus for you to get writing erm… and yes and to begin kind of looking for new opportunities and more networking. So erm… yes so I know for sure that is definitely why I keep going because of having that two or three years where I didn't, when I thought I was withdrawing and erm… and then when I wanted to get going again it was kind of the key part of it so.

Conf. played a key part for her when she decided to stop trying to retire and come back again

KS: **is there any key moments in your conferences, in your academic career that you can remember? That can be a bad experience as well.**

Q: Oh I had one bad experience. I had one bad experience erm… which was again pretty early on, when I hadn't been here very long I went to ▇ and erm… now I don't know whether I have changed or ▇ has changed or I was just unlucky or it has been a bit of both, erm… because I wouldn't, I will just say a little bit more about ▇ when I have told you about the first experience. I went to this thing, and I had a paper in and it was, I was very, very new it was probably my first proper academic paper. I had presented other things before, but you know now I was given an ok time, so the audience was constructive and erm… kind of all the rest of it. But I saw some other new researchers really being kind of savaged, and I thought I don't want to be part of this community I really, really don't like this because the maths education community erm… in England is a very, I think is a very supportive one. I have always found it very supportive from when I was very first going to day conferences, because I got to the ▇ I was telling you that I am now Chair of, they have 3 day conferences a year and really you know, really inclusive. If there is a very new researcher, even if they do something that is pretty hopeless people look for the positives in it, they offer really useful feedback, it is a very supportive and inclusive community. So when I went to this ▇ I thought oh my goodness me ((laughs)) I am not coming here again and also, it felt very cliquey. It felt like you know if you didn't already, if you weren't already in with an in-crowd now that could be you see, that is difficult for me because now number 1 I am almost certainly being with lots of in-crowds but also I don't really care if I am not. Erm… so if I just sit having coffee on my own it doesn't bother me in the least, whereas then I thought oh… I [42.56] poor [name] no mates, sitting here don't know anybody. So erm… so I thought oh I am not going there again even though as I say I wasn't badly treated I saw other people being badly treated. Erm… so I didn't go to ▇ for about 10 years, and then just by chance there was an underspend erm… here, at ▇ and they said kind of like on September 1ˢᵗ, we have got this underspend anybody can spend the money in the next kind of month, so I thought I could go to ▇ I wasn't presenting or anything but I thought well I was free, I will go to ▇. So I went to ▇ without a paper, it is the only time I have ever

Remember a bad experience quickly

Her first academic paper → she had a good experience w/ constructive feedback

The community should be supportive and inclusive

As she gets older and more mature she has not stopped being bothered about drinking coffee on her own

10 yrs later she went again because of an opportunity in funding and she was available + didn't present

Interview Q   Page 11 of 18

Figure 14 - Example of initial handwritten coding on transcripts

The third round was to complete a second stage of coding the entire data set in accordance to Braun and Clarke's (2013) recommendations. This was carried out using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA) software NVivo. The use of NVivo was appropriate because it supported with the data management of the vast volume of data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'Connor, & Barnard, 2014). Fundamentally it was me who managed the coding, not the software. It allowed me to generate tables within Microsoft Excel providing me with a easily navigating mapping of the codes (see example in appendix D). I was also able to transfer this information to Microsoft Word to simplify the process of utilising quotes within this thesis. Overall these practices supported with the writing of the thesis as throughout the process it was developed in accordance to the themes developing. The mapping of the codes supported the three theme generation phases discussed in the following section.

3.6.3. Three recursive phases to generate themes

The thematic analysis approach includes three phases of theme generation, firstly 'searching' for themes, secondly reviewing the themes, and finally defining and naming of themes. This section discusses these three phases jointly because as presented in Figure 11 the application of the thematic analysis approach is not a linear process but a "recursive process, where movement is back and forth as needed, throughout the phases" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 86).

'Searching' for themes did not mean a search for something that existed but a phase where I was analysing the codes and beginning the formation of themes by creating a plausible and coherent thematic mapping of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In more recent publications by Braun and Clarke they argue the shift from naming this phase 'searching' to a the more appropriate term of 'generating initial themes' (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 593) which illustrates clearer the approach I have used for this research. Following the initial literature review the conceptual framework was developed as presented in Figure 9. This framework supported the achievement of the research aim and underpinned the generation of the themes.

The three stages of the journey provided the framework needed for the literature review structure however as it was an inductive analysis I was not "trying to fit in to a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconception" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83) which meant that the thematic analysis was data-driven. The journey stages presented in chapter two and again in chapters four and five illustrate however how I could not free myself of my "theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data [was] not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This is consistent with Hammersley and Atkinson's (2017) argument that the data collected and interpreted for social research are influenced by the researchers' biases which are recognised throughout the research.

The two findings chapters are presented through the journey stages whereas the discussion chapter six offers my interpretation of the underlying meaning of the data and together these three chapters illustrate how the analytic process progressed from semantic level to latent level. The initial coding involved identification of the explicit meaning of the stories the participants told, leading to the data being organised to show patterns within the journeys. This was necessary because of the amount of data as it enabled me to create one common journey, albeit ensuring the individual voices throughout. It was at this stage that the foundation for the framework in Figure 16 was developed which supported the remainder of the theming process. It was supported by the second research objective which guided the study and, as detailed in chapter seven, was achieved.

The first phase of the theme generation began to take place during the data collection as I "began to notice and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86) and although the findings chapters are presented through a descriptive approach, the latent level of analysis was developing at an early stage in the analytical process. It was also at this stage where I began to develop a research question in addition to the guidance from the research aim and objectives. The question was developed responding to Braun and Clarke's (2006, p. 85) statement that research projects should be guided by research questions however it stayed greatly linked to the research aim and objectives. They also stated that development of a research question at this stage of the research as appropriate because of the inductive approach. The research question is stated in section 3.8, which also introduces the presentation structure of the findings and discussion.

The initial theme generation therefore surrounded the journey stage thinking whereas it continued to develop towards becoming a more analytical approach moving away from the semantic level to the latent level, that is from the explicit or surface meaning to the interpretative level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Throughout this study I engaged extensively with writing different types of informal texts relating to the data - the analysis and interpretation of it. This is in line with Braun and Clarke's (2006) advise that the writing is to be viewed as an integral part of the analysis for a qualitative research as opposed to a quantitative research where the writing is carried out following the statistical analysis. It was however not only writing which supported the generation of the themes but also further review of the literature which enabled an enhancement of the analysis through further understanding of the subtle features of the data (Tuckett, 2005).

The review stage concerns making sure that both individual themes as well as the entire analysis fully capture key meanings and patterns in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Within this phase I therefore recoded the entire data set in accordance to the codes which originated from the first round of coding and provided the foundation for the framework in Figure 16. New codes were still however being generated as there was a developed understanding of the data because of the engagement with the data analysis as well as the continuous engagement with the review of the literature. In particular it

was the latent analysis which was developing; I had a deeper understanding of the data, which allowed me to examine the underlying ideas and conceptualisation further and therefore shape and inform the analysis and interpretation in more depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third phase of theme generation was to define and name the themes; when carried out for the first time, the structure of the two findings chapters four and five was developed. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 9 provided simultaneously a foundation and limitations for the initial analysis. It provided a description for the journey, however, as the analysis continued recursively in accordance to Figure 11, it became evident that the data had a deeper story to tell than the journey description. This story became increasingly evident through interpretation after the writing of the thesis had begun. The repeated engagement with the data and continuous analysis of it during writing provided the foundation for exposure to the underlying factors. These were identified as the influences leading to the generation of the framework in Figure 22, which provided the structure of chapter six. All the frameworks in sequence of creation can be viewed in appendix A. The key phase for me within the analysis was therefore the writing phase, which although it was the last, it was only when I was presenting the interpretation through structured text that the meaning became clear and I realised the importance of the recursive approach within the thematic analysis. Throughout the writing I was mindful to ensure that the themes delivered on their 'essence' by not doing too much or be too diverse and complex (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

3.6.4. Writing the report

The boundaries between the stages of the analysis were very fluid, including the three theme generation phases and the writing phase which is how Braun and Clarke intended the thematic analysis approach to be approached (Braun, Clarke, & Hayfield, 2019; Lainson et al., 2019). Throughout the process the research diary proved useful as it supported with development of ideas and synthesising of the interpretation. The entire study was carried out over an extended period because of my personal and professional circumstances and the research diary helped in maintaining the structure of the research, including the writing of the thesis. The data management approach of using NVivo and the framework analysis approach was essential to the writing as it maintained control over the quotes employed throughout this thesis to illustrate the findings and interpretation.

Contributing to the extended period was the approach to presentation and writing of the findings and interpretation of the data. The vast amount of data and its complexity created obstacles in how to deliver the depth of the interpretation through written words. The final structure came about following numerous iterations of the thematic analysis approach, in particular different trials and refinements within the last phase, the writing of the report whilst structuring thesis. This was to be expected within an inductive, qualitative and interpretative study where the iterative analysis process does not have a

pre-defined conclusive ending point. It also supports Cunliffe's (2011) suggestion that a qualitative research is a craft, as opposed to purely a scientific method and technique, where I as the researcher needed to be careful how I noticed, brought to attention and shaped knowledge of the phenomenon studied, the conference journey. To do justice to the data and analysis, depth was needed with the interpretation which was time consuming and with the sheer amount of data to interpret and present this process was not hurried but given plenty of time (Lainson et al., 2019).

The flexibility invited by the thematic data analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was of utmost importance throughout the analysis stage of the research, as it allowed me to go back and forth between stages numerous times and apply them in diverse ways. For example, the recursive thematic analysis approach allowed for the development of the final framework, presented in Figure 27, towards the end of writing the thesis. This was because it synthesised the meaning of the research data which had now been fully interpreted. Before concluding this chapter with the presentation of the research question and introduction to the structure of the conference journey in the following two chapters, the following section will discuss the ethics relating to the study as well as its quality evaluation.

3.7.   Research rigour, trustworthiness and ethics

The quality of a qualitative research is assessed by the researcher's approach to their research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015) which I have in relation to this research presented and argued throughout this chapter. This section addresses further the rigour and trustworthiness of this research as well as presenting the ethics procedures followed. The qualitative strategy of this research rejects the quality measures of the common quantitative standards of reliability and validity because, in agreement with Lincoln and Guba (1985), they suppose that one truth is valid for social reality. This stance is not adapted for this research as I have outlined throughout this chapter, for example within the account of the data analysis technique which is grounded in my interpretation of the accumulated account of the life-world interviews with the participants.

The rigour of the research is evaluated on the basis of the appropriateness of the data, concepts and methods used for the study (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Chapter one, the introduction, argued the need and concepts providing the foundation for this research and it was further supported throughout the review of the literature in chapter two. These chapters responded to two questions recommended by Hammersley (1992) to ask when judging the quality of the research, as interpreted by Seale (2004): 1) how important or relevant the study is to the relevant community and 2) are the claims made plausible given the existing knowledge on the subject. The community this study belongs within is event studies, in particular focusing on conferences. The interpretivist epistemological position I argued at the beginning of this chapter grounds the qualitative strategy utilised to gain insights into the conference attendees' experiences, the phenomena studied

within this research. In addition an appropriate criterion for a qualitative study is Hammersley's (1990, p. 57) definition of validity: "the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers". This resonates with the criterion for trustworthiness adopted for qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Supporting the trustworthiness of this study is the extensive presentation of research participants´ voices with their quotes throughout chapters four and five, providing an authentic representation of them within my interpretation (Brewer, 2000; Fetterman, 2010). This responds to the final question recommended by Hammersley (1992) to ask (Seale, 2004) regarding whether the credibility of the claims are supported by sufficient evidence. The findings and discussion presented within this thesis is my interpretation of the participants' life-world, meanings and experience and are made within my context as the researcher (Altheide & Johnson, 2011) as detailed throughout these first three chapters. I have therefore used my participants' own words to build and develop the analysis, introducing their features of how they experienced their conference journeys (Lainson et al., 2019) and presented an interpretation of their reality. The research shall therefore be evaluated on this and not anticipate one truth since it is impossible for me as the interpreter to step outside of my own experience (Maxwell, 2002) and there are other conference attendees with further experiences. Because the analysis is my interpretation of the participants' stories and not the only version of truth member checking was not undertaken. This approach is in agreement with Braun and Clarke's (2013) suggestions for thematic analysis as they argue that the researcher views the participants' experiences from different angles than the participants themselves. The researcher identifies and interprets aspects which they may not be fully aware of and most importantly, I go beyond representing their voices with my interpretations informed by my own values and assumptions. Throughout the interviews I however sought to verify my understanding of the individual stories by asking the interviewees clarification questions to determine whether the interpretation matched their personal experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Table 13 below summarises the rigour and trustworthiness of this research by providing an overview of how this study fulfils the 15 points recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a criteria for a good thematic analysis.

Process	No.	Criteria	This research
Tran-scription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.	See section 3.6.1.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.	See section 3.6.2.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.	See section 3.6.3.
	4	All relevant extracts for each theme have been collated.	See section 3.6.3.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.	See section 3.6.3.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.	See section 3.6.3.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed - interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described.	See section 3.6.4.
	8	Analysis and data match each other - the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.	See chapters 4 – 6.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organized story about the data and topic.	
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.	
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.	See section 3.6.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.	See section 3.6.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done, i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.	See chapters 4 and 5.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.	Epistemological position argued in section 3.2.
	15	The researcher is positioned as active in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.	Argued throughout this chapter 3.

Table 13 - A 15-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96)

It is essential to adopt good ethical practices when undertaking a research, not only for the purposes of the trustworthiness of the research but also to maintain moral values such as social responsibility and human rights (Webster, Lewis, & Brown, 2014). This research addressed to key principles in research ethics as per below Table 14.

1	Ensuring that **no harm** comes to participants
2	Respecting the **dignity** of research participants
3	Ensuring a fully **informed** consent of research participants
4	Protecting the **privacy** of research participants
5	Ensuring the **confidentiality** of research data
6	Protecting the **anonymity** of individuals or organisations
7	**Avoiding** deception about the nature or aims of the research
8	Declaration of affiliations, funding sources and **conflicts** of interests
9	Honesty and **transparency** in communication about the research
10	Avoidance of any **misleading** or false reporting of research findings

Table 14 - Key principles in research ethics (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015, p. 122)

Adhering to the principles above in Table 14 all potential participants, when identified, were contacted through email providing information about the research to confirm their eligibility and willingness to share their conference journey and experiences by participating in the research. Detailed information was provided within the 'Participant Information Sheet' (see appendix E) which outlined the purpose of the research. Before the interview began the participants gave their formal consent verbally and by signing the 'Participant Consent Form' (see appendix F). Providing an information sheet and gaining formal consent form are good practice when carrying out research with human participants (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015) and in line with SHU ethics processes which were followed throughout the research.

In addition, none of the participants raised ethical concerns and by allowing the participants to choose interview location of their own choice in accordance to recommendations it was ensured that neither the participants nor myself were in danger of being harmed physically. The research was not exploring sensitive issues therefore ensuring extremely limited possible psychological harm to participants (Fox, Gouthro, Morakabati, & Brackstone, 2014) and everyone's dignity was respected as well as avoiding deception about the nature of the research through transparent communication. The privacy and anonymity of the research participants were ensured as all participants were given pseudonyms as detailed in section 3.4.3. This ensured the confidentiality of information given as individuals or organisations were not identifiable and not shared with others.

3.8. Presentation of The Conference Journey and the research question asked

The life-world interview method applied within the research was influenced by life story approach, a narrative method, which Kohler Riessman (2008) recommended that when applied its trustworthiness is discussed. Throughout this thesis you, the reader, are brought along with me on the journey I have taken during the study as it uncovers "a trail of evidence" (Kohler Riessman, 2008, p. 188) of the sources used for analysis and interpretation of both empirical data and existing literature, leading to this document which presents a construct of the interpretative account of the findings. The data analysis technique of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) allowed me to interpret the varied individual journeys as one accumulated journey whilst preserving the individual voices. The research methodology, methods and data analysis technique along with my research diary allowed the insight I have achieved from ongoing reflection and engagement with the recursive process. Throughout it I continuously engaged with the data and literature leading to an iterative process of developing the concepts presented in the following three chapters.

The research question emerged following the initial review of the literature and continued to develop throughout the data collection and initial coding. The conceptual framework as presented at the end of the literature review chapter contributed towards the question as it emerged that limited knowledge was available on the stage between the experience and outcome as illustrated in Figure 15 with the research question introduced in Table 15.
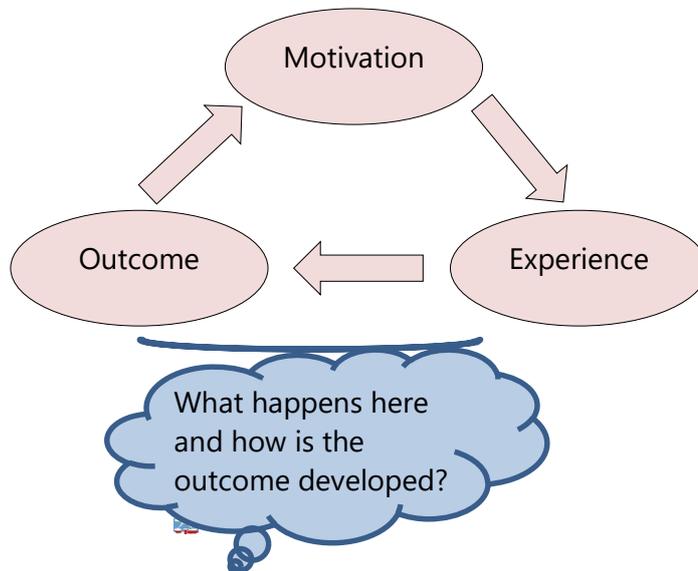
Figure 15 - Conceptual framework updated with elements of the research question

What influences the development of outcomes gained from conference experience?

Table 15 - The research question

The following two chapters four and five introduce the conference journey, first for the academics and then for the professionals. They follow the same structure the conference journey, as presented in Figure 16 on page 92, which I developed from the overall data including the literature. This framework not only depicts the conference journey but also highlights important touchpoints towards the development of outcomes from the journey. It shows how the journey begins with the recognition of a need to attend a conference followed by consideration of the motivations to attend. If a decision is made to attend, the prospective attendee engages with preparations, some more intensely than others. Thereafter is the experience at the conference itself, a ladder which will be developed further in section 5.3 and Figure 20. The final steps of the attendee's single conference journey involve the development of the outcomes which some gain more of than others. The conceptual framework as presented in Figure 9 has therefore been developed with further details following the analysis of the empirical data. The initial three steps of motivation, experience and outcome have been advanced into seven more detailed steps.

Throughout the chapters the semantics, of the overall single conference journey the two groups of research participants, academics and professionals, is narrated. To aid clarity the chapters are presented rather descriptively, since I have made the 'messy' data more linear than the way in which the stories were presented. Together they set the ground for the latent analysis in chapter six, the discussion. The approach to the presentation also means that these two chapters may appear at first glance to be duplicated since they are following the same principles presented in the conference journey in Figure 16, which is shown below. The overlap is inevitable between the two contexts, academics in chapter four and professionals in chapter five, however there are also nuances and more significant differences. The focus throughout chapters four and five is on the voice of the attendee and the role of the event creator within their journeys will be discussed in section 6.6 of the discussion chapter.

The discussion in chapter six begins with an examination of the two journeys where I compare the academics and professionals to reveal the identification of the main differences within their journeys. This comparison along with the in-depth analysis of the overall data led to the development of framework in Figure 22 which guides the structure of the chapter. The development of this and other frameworks was underpinned by my interpretative epistemological stance and accomplished through much time spent on analysing the data, conversations with my PhD community and supervisors, and engagement with the research diary. Not least it was supported by reflections on my own conference attendance including presentations and conversations I was having there.
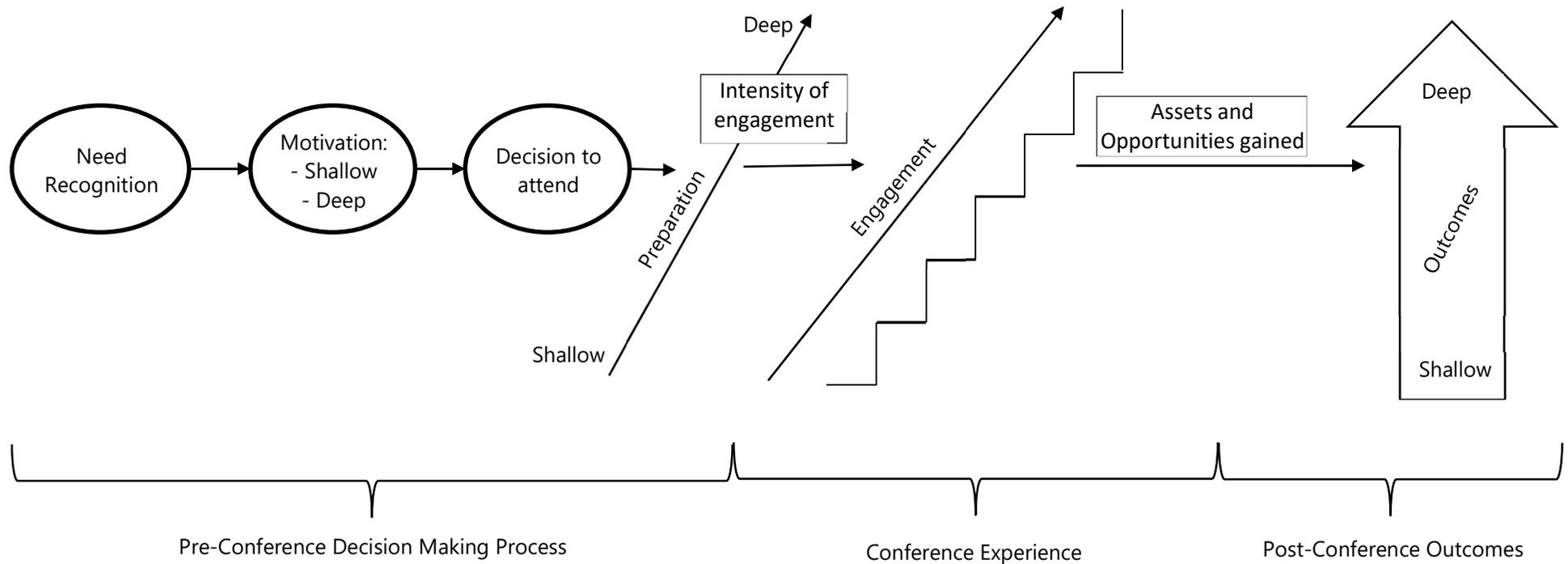
Figure 16 - The overall single conference journey

3.9.   Chapter conclusion

This chapter has argued my underpinning research philosophy of subjective ontology and interpretivist epistemological stance which supports the qualitative research strategy and inductive approach to achieve the aim of this research; to analyse and explain attendees' holistic conference journey. It has argued the research population and the approach to sampling the nine academics and nine professionals. The in-depth semi-structured life-world interviews were justified and reflections from the research diary supported decisions made during the research journey. This reflection was supported through the use of the thematic data analysis technique. This thesis will now continue with a presentation of the findings of the two conference journeys, the academics in chapter four and the professionals in chapter five.

Chapter 4 FINDINGS: THE CONFERENCE JOURNEY - THE ACADEMICS' EXPERIENCE

4.1. Introduction

This chapter will present the academics' conference journey which emerged from the analysis of the data. The findings are detailed within this chapter illustrated with quotes from the research participants. To allow for a comprehensive representation of the conference journey through the academic life, the career stages of the participants are considered and discussed throughout.

Academics			
Early Career	**Johannes**	EC – Lecturer	Business management
	Ronald	EC – PhD Student	Medicine
	Marjorie	EC – Lecturer undertaking a PhD	Business management
Mid-Career	**Anita**	MC – Lecturer undertaking a PhD	Business management
	Karen	MC – Postdoctoral Researcher	Geoscience
	Alfred	MC – Postdoctoral Researcher	Medicine
	Rosalind	MC – Senior academic undertaking a PhD	Education
Late Career	**Henrietta**	LC – Professor	Education
	Daniel	LC – Professor	Engineering

Table 16 below is presented to remind the reader of the academic participants' identity and career stage. In order to achieve the second objective for this research of comparing academics' and professionals' conference journey this chapter will explore the academics' journey and the professionals' journey will be explored through the same approach in chapter five and then compared in section 6.2. Further complexities, nuances, and underpinning elements of these journeys will be explored in more depth and also compared with the literature in chapter six. The presentation of this chapter is aligned with the structure of the review of the literature in chapter two, that is three sections beginning with their decision-making process, leading to their experience during the conference and concluding with their outcomes developed from the attendance.

Academics			
Early Career	**Johannes**	EC – Lecturer	Business management
	Ronald	EC – PhD Student	Medicine
	Marjorie	EC – Lecturer undertaking a PhD	Business management
Mid-Career	**Anita**	MC – Lecturer undertaking a PhD	Business management
	Karen	MC – Postdoctoral Researcher	Geoscience
	Alfred	MC – Postdoctoral Researcher	Medicine
	Rosalind	MC – Senior academic undertaking a PhD	Education
	Henrietta	LC – Professor	Education

Late Career	Daniel	LC – Professor		Engineering

Table 16 - The academic participants

4.2. Decision-making process

The review of the literature demonstrated how the beginning of the journey involved engagement with a decision-making process; however limited research was available on why and how the attendees get involved with the decision-making process. The academics participating in this research demonstrated that the involvement commenced with the recognition of a need for the attendance followed by two further stages. One was based on 'shallow' rationale for attending and the other demonstrated 'deep' rationale for attending, including expectations of outcomes and the factors affecting them. These two concepts of 'shallow' and 'deep' rationale came through strongly within this research for both academic and professional participants – adding to the literature on conference attendance decision-making process. In essence the 'shallow' rationale were linked to pragmatic factors concerning the reality of the delegate attending, such as cost, time and location, and the 'deep' rationale concerned factors relating to the expectations of outcomes from their attendance, such as gaining specific knowledge or collaboration opportunities. The following sections will discuss the three different stages of the decision-making process, firstly need recognition, secondly the rationale for attending a conference and concluding with an overview of preparations made if the decision was taken to attend.

4.2.1. Need recognition

The academics attended conferences largely for professional purposes, to enhance their knowledge and network with other people as thoroughly discussed through the review of the literature in chapter two. The need to attend therefore largely originated from their various professional demands and depended upon their career stage.

Influence of career stage

Early in their academic career the participants had limited, if any, previous experience to utilise when determining a need to attend. They had entered a junior academic role, or were still at PhD student stage, and soon they began to understand the substantial role conferences have within academia, for example Johannes mentioned that '*it's part of the job kind of thing*' and Ronald followed this up by remarking that '*the idea is that you present results which haven't been published yet*'. Knowing which conference to attend or when, provided a challenge for the early career academics.

A few approaches were mentioned; one of them being to rely on senior academics to inform of suitable opportunities as demonstrated by Alfred, '*I've been told to go to conferences before, "this would be good for you"*' or they have been informed that '*the university needs to have a presence there [...] and then [conference name] is, you know,*

one of the big conferences in our area'. Timing was another as Johannes explained the reason for the choice of his first attended conference, '*I'd got that sort of qualification out of the way and it was the right time to start pushing the academic output*'. He found that there was one theme within the conference where he could '*sort of shoehorn my work into, it wasn't a perfect fit, but it was close enough*'. Senior colleagues had informed him of this particular conference.

The final main source of information was the event creators themselves via generic communication on their conferences to the prospective attendees, mostly through mailing lists they subscribed to from relevant associations, professional bodies and organisations. This information was able to generate a perceived need to attend and the communication from the event creator was more important when the conference was unfamiliar to the prospective attendee as the decision to attend would rely heavier on it.

At this early career stage, the academics had therefore begun to develop their understanding of the importance of presenting research at conferences, a need which evolved and developed throughout the academic career. The academics earlier in their career emphasised this perception in slightly different ways than the more experienced academics, referring often to their doctoral research. The need to present was for example often dependant on the stage of the research; it was not always the right time to be presenting it:

> **Anita [MC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *some years I'll present in it and some years I don't [...] It will depend on what stage I am in my research, like sometimes it's just no... Like one year I didn't present at it because I was in between, I've done my conceptual model which I presented and I was just about to go and collect my data so I just didn't need to present. I had nothing to present.*

Rosalind, a lecturer recently appointed to a senior position within her university faculty, had a different perception of conferences to the other academic participants. In the beginning of her interview she stated that she had not been to a '*proper*' academic conference. Throughout the conversation it however became clear that she had attended many conferences related to her job. These mostly had either been aimed at higher education level teaching professionals rather than academics presenting research, or been internal conferences within her university, which led to her perception of not having attended a *'proper'* academic conference.

Requirement to present research or represent workplace

The general agreement was however that academics had a need to attend conferences, especially in terms of presenting research and even Rosalind agreed with the perception that attending conferences is part of the requirements and reality of being an academic:

> **Rosalind [MC – Senior academic undertaking a PhD]**: *I can see that conferences are something that I should do, this is my understanding. Yes, I*

think I should go to conferences, I am an academic, I work for a university, it seems to be one of the things that you are meant to do as an academic.

This reality for many academics originated from the requirements for them to introduce their research to a wider audience for which conferences provided a large and focused opportunity to do so. The need to attend conferences was often greater earlier in the academics' career as they were gaining ideas and introducing their research, but ironically the opportunities to attend conferences grew for most participants when they progressed within their career. This was evident when participants in senior positions and later in their career like Daniel discussed attendance because of invitations '*I gave a talk, invited talk*' which then meant their presence was paid for. The practice was confirmed and challenged by Johannes:

> **Johannes [EC - Lecturer]**: *I kind of went as her [his line manager] representation, I wouldn't be able to go to it otherwise, again it would come down to a financial thing, I think she had been given a place to her profile.*

This demonstrated that Johannes was only able to attend as he was representing the workplace utilising a senior managers' invitation, and he was pessimistic of other opportunities for a funded attendance. A need to represent their workplace was a reoccurring theme, however not underpinned with further reasons beyond subjective opinions of the organisation and senior managers as Karen refers to, '*we have like certain conferences in the group that we always go to that are approved of by our boss and we go to them*'. The final theme contributing to the need to attend conferences for all academics, unrelated of their career stage, was a need for an update on a specific topic area related to their job:

> **Daniel [LC - Professor]**: *if you are isolated from other[s], the rest of the community when you sit down to write a paper you always have a question mark, am I up-to-date...? Right. Is my material erm... outdated? You know that question is there. So because of that, you need to go to conferences, to update, to listen to people.*

<u>Section summary</u>

The professional demands contributing to the need to attend conferences were as discussed, significant and various. It was recognised that these greatly originated from the need to present research, to represent the workplace, and a need for a topic update. As summarised in Table 17 not only did the needs develop through their career stages, for example evolving from gaining ideas to presenting research at carefully planned timings, but the sources of information on the conference had also increased and expanded as they gained further experience.

- Influence of Career Stage
  - Knowledge when to attend
    - Information from senior colleagues

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- Communication from Event Creators through various channels
- Need to present research
- Experience
- Requirement to present research
- Requirement to represent workplace
  o Invitations to attend
- Topic update

Table 17 – Academics' need recognition for attending conferences

4.2.2. Rationale for attending a specific conference

Following the delegates' recognition of a need for attending a conference a decision-making process was initiated. In some instances, the decision-making process was straightforward however in others it was a complex process. The following section, discussing the research findings of the decision-making process, is divided in two parts. It begins with the 'shallow' rationales which are straightforward and relate to logistics and to pragmatic reasons. This is followed by 'deep' rationales - they contributed to the more complex process, as participants connected them further to their professional development factors, including the outcomes they expected from their attendance.

4.2.2.1. 'Shallow' rationale for attending and factors affecting ability to attend

The communicated inputs to the conferences, such as topic, programme and other attendees in presence, was of importance for the participants in their decision-making process as it gave them indications of the prospects they had to achieve the outcomes they were anticipating from the attendance. These inputs influenced the participants' decision to attend or not, and for many it was the tipping point whether to begin considering 'deep' rationale, given that they had the ultimate power of the decision. This was confirmed by academic participants at all career stages; their motivation to attend was influenced by the design of the event in terms of opportunities brought to them through the environment.

Conference design factors

The topic must be relevant was emphasised, for example Anita discussed how she only attended conferences which had '*a direct impact on my job or direct impact on my research*'. In section 4.3.2 on experiences at the conference it becomes apparent that although the intention was to attend a conference with a relevant topic, this was not always achieved as the attendee's interpretation of the event creator's communication could be either misinterpreted or there was a failure in delivery. In addition this could originate from inexperience with the topic areas covered at the conferences which was especially the case for the early career academics as discussed by Anne '*I was so new as*

a PhD student that I was trying to figure out where to put myself so that I would be feeling like a finger clicking'.

The programme was deemed important as it was able to communicate the opportunities for learning, networking and promotion available at the conference as well as giving indications to who would be in attendance. The learning was often to be obtained not only from the official programme but also from other attendees and the sphere the attendees were in during the conference. This was possible since conferences provide alternative learning opportunities compared to many more formal education offerings. This was confirmed by all types of participants, their motivation to attend based on the design of the event in terms of opportunities brought to them through the environment.

Other prospective attendees played a major part, interlinked with the opportunities for learning and networking and in line with the topic being of utmost importance during the decision-making process. The programme communicated from the event creator promoted who would be speaking at the event and this frequently proved useful when determining who might be attending. The programme, however, would generally not indicate exactly who the attendees would be, and there was a consensus that delegate lists were generally not published prior to the conference leading to limited possibilities of knowing who would be attending. Johannes revealed that for him in his early career it was about assumptions on who the prospective attendees would be, '*if this is an annual conference, and it is a particular you know quite a big sort of event in our calendar, that you'd expect there to be [certain attendees]*'. Karen, who was further along in her career, was able to use her own experience from attending a substantial amount of conferences as this was expected within her role and subject area. The previous conference experiences, along with the reputation of conferences, played a role in her motivations to attend as they provided her with a good notion of who would be in presence, especially at an annual conference she attended regularly:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *it's just brilliant, everyone goes [...] and everyone puts more effort in historically [...] it's just that's the one that everyone goes to and you see people and you talk to people*

<u>Influence of location</u>

The importance of the location in the management of conferences, grounded in a belief by published academic research that it is of utmost significance, was emphasised in the review of the literature in chapter two. The participants for this research did not share this view on the significance of the location; however, an agreement was that it did influence, albeit to a lesser extent than previously indicated. In addition, it was identified that the career stage was a minor influence on the effect of the location within the decision-making process, in line with the influence of career stage on previously discussed inputs to the conference. Experiencing a new destination was one of the few mentioned incentive influences the location had. Karen, for example, explicitly discussed how she found that the conferences she was interested in attending generally were in

nice places and when prompted on what that meant she explained this to be somewhere she would like to have a holiday. She had therefore occasionally extended her duration at the event location to enjoy either the conference destination or one nearby; this was also mentioned by Daniel:

> **Daniel [LC - Professor]**: *academics and researchers, the only perk we have is going to a new country for a conference, we have to openly say that. Yes. Not any other perks in our job. I love to go and see the world, meet other people, other cultures; you know taste other food, so that is also part of our job. So, when I select... if I have been to China twice for conferences, if my selection, the China one I will cross it, I will go somewhere else, somewhere new.*

He however emphasised that it was not a holiday, '*during the sessions I am there all the time*'. The location forms part of the overall conference design and despite this research demonstrating that it does not play as significant role as the literature has emphasised, it should not be ignored as Anita emphasised: '*the facilities that you are in, it kind of adds to the feel of the day*'. The final major 'shallow' rationale for attending was the cost. It played a large part for all participants in their decision-making process as was discussed in section 2.2.3 within the literature review, both in terms of financial and time cost.

Financial and time cost

The financial cost for the academics was funded by either the university they were working for or by funding bodies such as relevant associations or research funds. The main difference in the funding approach was surprisingly not by the academics' career stage but in their area of research, most notably between social and natural scientists. There was also an evident variance between the participants based on their subject group colleagues and line manager. The social scientists discussed how funding was requested through a discussion with the line manager whereas the natural scientists discussed a more rigorous funding process. This was explicitly discussed by academics earlier in their career, such as Alfred, who was encouraged by his manager to apply for external funding; '*he will have expected me to, you know, put like two or three applications in to the relevant funding body*'. If it fell through however, they were willing to fund, especially when they, as discussed previously, were expecting him to attend on behalf of the workplace, '*I did apply for things, didn't get anything, so my boss paid*'. Karen, also a postdoctoral researcher within natural sciences, likewise commented on external funding, especially in relation to bodies funding projects she was working on at each time. The variance between the funding opportunities within subject groups was clear when Anita commented that '*I don't doubt that I can go to several, because the budget is there*' whereas Johannes, who works in the same department but within a different subject group, commented:

> **Johannes [EC - Lecturer]**: *there was another conference happening this summer which I almost felt like going to because I thought I could sort of get*

*two strikes in a fairly quick succession, but it was going to be a financial
thing and I know full well there wouldn't be any budget in the subject group
to go to another one.*

Anita continued her discussion by stating that '*it's whether I want to spend the time doing it*', therefore emphasising that the cost of time is a more significant restriction than the financial cost, as opposed to Johannes' doubts on his opportunities to receive funding despite having identified a need to attend. The participants did not explicitly mention trade off on time with family and friends as was listed in models discussed in section 2.2.4; it was however implied when discussing holidays. This was especially apparent amongst academics referring to conferences during Easter, a common conference period for them as it is outside of the standard teaching weeks. Henrietta mentioned that '*I have never been to the [name] conference every year, the only reason for that is that it is at Easter and certainly when our daughter was young, we often used to like to take a holiday at Easter*' and Marjorie said: '*didn't go this year because it clashed with a holiday*'. Rosalind was the only participant who explicitly discussed how she was not willing to give up precious time with family and friends to socialise with '*strangers*':

> **Rosalind [MC – Senior academic undertaking a PhD]**: *I quite like to keep work and life separate, and I don't really like it if work interferes with life too much. Erm... so, unless there was a really good reason like I really wanted to go, I prefer to be at home. Erm... and that is a thing about you know the post conference dinner and all the rest of it, these aren't people that I would socialise with normally, you know they are not my friends and they are not going to be my friends.*

Cost awareness

Daniel's comment on visiting countries through attending conferences being the only perk for academics was not repeated by other participants. They however did not turn down an opportunity, like Alfred stated: '*I was much more happy putting in a travel grant when I got to go to Vancouver*' as opposed to '*Basingstoke or Birmingham or something*'. An awareness of the cost of the conferences was evident, discussed explicitly by those later in their career. Daniel mentioned that some conferences were '*a money-making exercise*' which he did not want to support and Henrietta linked the cost of attending with the benefits expected from the attendance '*I don't think I could have justified that amount of money for the benefits that I would have got from that conference*'. The cost therefore was a more significant factor in the decision-making process than the location although the location could have influenced it. The extreme where it did not influence was for example when Anita mentioned she would '*religiously go*' no matter where it was or the opposite for Rosalind '*if it is international because I love travel*' it would serve as a '*motivating factor*' for her to actually write a paper for a conference and attend.

The external conferences which were financially and time expensive were frequently the focus of the academics within the interviews and this discussion demonstrated the cost

awareness. When prompted it however became clear that they also attended low cost internal conferences, but they were perceived differently as discussed by Rosalind '*I just forget about that because it is here. I don't have to travel you know; I literally just walk across campus*'. These were often free financially but did carry with them a time cost although not perceived as significant because of limited travel time.

<u>Section summary</u>

The 'shallow' rationale for attending involved considering the topic ensuring that it aligned with needs for learning and networking which led to reviewing potential attendees which could maximise opportunities for the learning and networking. Information for this was often to be gained from the conference programme. The factors affecting their ability to attend were often related to the location as it determined the financial and time cost which the research participants demonstrated great awareness of and discussed challenges in achieving funding for attendance. Table 18 summarises the main 'shallow' rationales considered by academics as well as factors affecting their ability to attend including limited influence of career stage.

- Conference Design Factors
    o Topic
    o Other Attendees
    o Programme
    o Location
- Previous Experience
- Total Cost
    o Money
    o Time
    o Awareness

Table 18 – Academics' 'shallow' rationale for attending and factors affecting ability to attend

4.2.2.2. 'Deep' rationale - outcomes expected and factors affecting them

The 'deep' rationale for attending related to expectations of outcomes from the attendance with previous conference experience influencing these motivations greater than the more 'shallow' ones. These motivations required a deeper understanding of the outcomes of attending and the data demonstrated that these changed over time, as the early career academics did not emphasise the same motivations as those later in their career. During early career, the motivations were geared towards gaining ideas, building confidence in their own ability, as well as increasing their network and creating a name for themselves. Through career progression the emphasis shifted towards not only gaining and evolving ideas for projects, both new and emerging, but also developing opportunities for collaborations whilst contributing to the conference. Participants in senior roles also emphasised the importance of visibility, their role required them to be seen at conferences supporting colleagues.

Influence of career stage

The need recognition discussion in section 4.2.1 acknowledged the requirements within academia to attend and contribute to conferences. The early career academics recognised that it was about *'developing your professional profile'* as stated by Anita and Karen advanced on this by detailing *'if you're not there you're not known, hence... it is part of the job, it's like publishing papers'*. This purpose was achieved through the networking which the review of the literature in chapter two demonstrated as being one of the two most consistently discussed major motivations to attend a conference, the other being learning. This research also concluded this with the data demonstrating a more in-depth insight into how it contributed regarding the type of learning and the purpose of it. Early in the career this learning was often about gaining ideas and becoming more familiar with the field:

> **Alfred [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *my boss told me to go, it was just to kind of get an idea of the field and meet some people who were working on similar things in different labs, kind of seeing what people were doing, get an interest of the field.*

As the academics progressed in their career, they had accumulated good general knowledge of their field and were less motivated to attend only to gain an overview and ideas for their work. They were becoming more targeted at specific knowledge which would enhance their professional productivity. Marjorie demonstrated this shift as she early in her PhD studies *'wanted to go to more conferences [...] and present and hear people's questions and answer them and learn and sort of focus my ideas through discussing them with people'*. As she progressed with her studies her conference attendance approach developed towards: *'my strategy is if there is a conference that I can see might lead to publication in a journal then I would definitely consider going'*. The curiosity and positive attitude towards learning was frequently continuous throughout the academics' career. Henrietta commented for example that *'you also think of new approaches to the subject'* and Alexander had over the years been able to reflect upon the new knowledge and became acutely aware of the importance of conferences in terms of providing outcomes and benefits to his practice:

> **Alexander [LC - Medical clinician and professor]**: *I don't go to as many conferences as I should and because I think: "well, we need to do more, we need to make more progress in our research before we go to erm... before we go and talk about our work" and I think that is a mistake. I think the more you go to, the more you see what other people are doing, the more you can keep up with, you know, advances and I think that my research has been hindered by the fact that I don't go to as many conferences as I should.*

Contribution and visibility

Daniel who is also a professor echoes Alexander when stating that *'as a researcher you need to do things in the lab with your team, you need to go out and listen to people and*

learn from them'. He continued by commenting that *'you have to contribute to the conference, you have to, you have to present what you are doing'.* The essence of Daniel's comment relates to the contribution, a factor which grew in significance as participants progressed within their career. Anne, when coming to the end of her PhD studies and after having experienced a few conferences with a poor topic fit for her, had developed an understanding of this importance as she stated that she felt like *'having something to contribute when you go and learning is really important not to just go like a sponge or, you know, a wallflower'.* Daniel also had a strong view of this as he discussed the connection between the contribution and the importance of the topic when he stated the conference *'must be in my area, so that I can contribute and also I can learn. Otherwise no point. Yes, that is number 1 [reason for which conference to choose to attend]'.* The contribution is not only in terms of academics revealing their research results but also an opportunity to '*share that sort of good practice*' as discussed by Rosalind related to teaching and other scholarly approaches. The contribution and sharing led to opportunities for seeking collaborations.

The outcomes expected and desired therefore often surrounded improving knowledge, by gaining and sharing ideas, leading to collaborations of different levels depending upon the career stage. Another distinct expected outcome to emerge when viewing the academics in senior positions was increased visibility, as discussed by Rosalind:

> **Rosalind [MC – Senior academic undertaking a PhD]**: *I think it is important to be seen at those events, especially if you are in the sort of role that I am in […] I also think that, you know, it is giving respect to colleagues in the university who are working on projects, they have good practice that they want to share you know so I think there is a level of that about being respectful to colleagues and benefitting from their ideas as well and sharing their practice.*

<u>Preferred conference topic areas</u>

Throughout the interviews it became clear amongst the academics that they were more interested in the research conferences than those related to their teaching or other responsibilities as academics. This was explicitly stated by Anita '*I find that the ones to do with my research are more interesting*'. Henrietta backed up this view: '*my research really has been in [area] so that's why my focus on my conferences has nearly all been [same area] research*'. Numerous research conferences were available to the participants however the supply within their niche research areas was much less than within general areas. Ronald who had recently attended his first external conference as a PhD student mentioned that '*it was a very specific conference, especially compared to a lot of ones in science which are quite general*' and for him this meant that '*I really had to go, I could not not go*'. This demonstrates the consensus of the importance of the topic irrelevant of the academics' career stage. Henrietta verbalised this mindset when assessing other prospective attendees by connecting the importance of the topic and attendees '*these*

are people who are not only interested in [the topic] they also really love [the topic]. And basically, I spend my time doing [the topic]. Erm... which I love'. Despite the academics' general preference of specific research conferences, one participant disagreed with this view:

> **Rosalind [MC – Senior academic undertaking a PhD]**: *I want to make a difference, I want to make a positive difference and, so I suppose part of my reluctance maybe to go to more academic conferences is that sense well how is it going to help me in my practical... how is it going to help me be a better teacher and how is it going to help me actually with my courses, to develop better courses.*

She continued her argument by stating that *'it would take up too much head space for me because I would feel like I needed to go there knowing a bit about what I was talking about and I think I might not feel quite secure enough to do that, bizarrely'*. This relates to her having to engage more in depth with the preparations which will be further discussed in the following section.

Section summary

The 'deep' rationale for attending was influenced by the academics' career stage, much more so than the more 'shallow' rationales and it was evidenced that continuous curiosity and positive attitude towards learning was important. The need for contribution was very influential on the decision. Likewise, was the essential visibility perceived both by those later in their careers, because of seniority, as well as those earlier in their careers, who need to get their names out there. Finally, it was evident that the academics had a preferred topic area, the one which was closest to their heart and often greatly related to their research area. Overall, these 'deep' rationale for attending were greatly connected to the outcomes the research participant anticipated from their attendance. Table 19 summarises the main 'deep' rationales considered by academics; most of which relate to motivations for either learning or networking with anticipations of outcomes.

- Influence of career stage
  - Earlier:
    - Gain ideas
    - Become familiar with the topic area
  - Later:
    - Gain specific knowledge
    - Enhance productivity
  - Continuous curiosity and positive attitude towards learning
- Contribution and Visibility leading to outcomes:
  - Improved knowledge
  - Collaboration
  - Increased visibility
- Preferred Conference Topic Area

o Topics close to research areas perceived more interesting and/or useful

Table 19 – Academics' 'deep' rationale considered for attending conferences

This concludes the overview of the rationale the academics discussed for attending the conferences. The following section will discuss their preparation for the attendance.

4.2.3. Decision to attend - preparation for attendance

The conclusion to the decision-making process was with a decision on attendance. If it was positive it meant for many engagements with preparations for the attendance, albeit on different levels. It ranged from simple necessary actions like making sure that travel and accommodation arrangement were made, through to complex and time-consuming activities such as preparing presentations. A difference in the preparations emerged when viewing the early career to late career academics, the noticeable difference being how their confidence grew as they presented more frequently and became more pragmatic along with being less nervous about their presentations. In the following two quotes this difference is portrayed by Johannes through the early career outlook and Daniel in his late career emphasising the more pragmatic approach, although both highlighting thorough preparation:

> **Johannes [EC - Lecturer]**: *Yeah, I did get quite wound up in the weeks before it I was... because I wanted to do a good job, you know I spent loads of time mulling over and trying to work out how I was going to do the presentation and things like that, much more than I normally would.*

> **Daniel [LC - Professor]**: *You have to prepare with your travel first, then you have to prepare with your presentation plan. I never go without preparing because some people come and just do presentations, if you don't do a good presentation; it is a waste of everybody's time. You have to take that responsibility. When I go to a conference, if I have half an hour talk, I must give everything possible to the participants. So, to do that, you have to prepare very well.*

The consensus among the academics was that the main preparations they engaged with concerned their presentations. Not many decided in advance of the conference which sessions to attend which is surprising considering that a common format at academic conferences is to have parallel sessions. It is not always as simple as for Ronald: '*you had to attend everything; there was no choice in that*'. The lack of preparation led to the choice of sessions to attend often being based on previous experience as expressed by Anita, '*if you've seen a presenter before so you know whether to avoid them or you know whether you want to go and see them*'. Another approach available was to read the proceedings including the abstracts beforehand, however not many academics referred to reading them albeit not all were as explicit like Anita, '*I never ever look at the book of abstracts, the conference proceedings, I never bother*'. Those with less experience demonstrated

more enthusiasm towards reading them, as discussed by Ronald, '*to see what I might find interesting or not*'. The conference attendance commitment as described by Henrietta could also function as a catalyst: '*commit yourself to doing a paper at a conference because then you have a deadline to meet and you meet the deadline and so it kind of really acts as an impetus for you to get writing*'.

In summary their most 'shallow' preparation related to deciding what to attend and this was generally done at last minute; second was arranging travel and accommodation arrangements, however they were carried out much earlier in the process. Writing an abstract or paper for the conference came with rather deep engagement, although the greatest engagement was preparing the presentation as demonstrated in Figure 17.
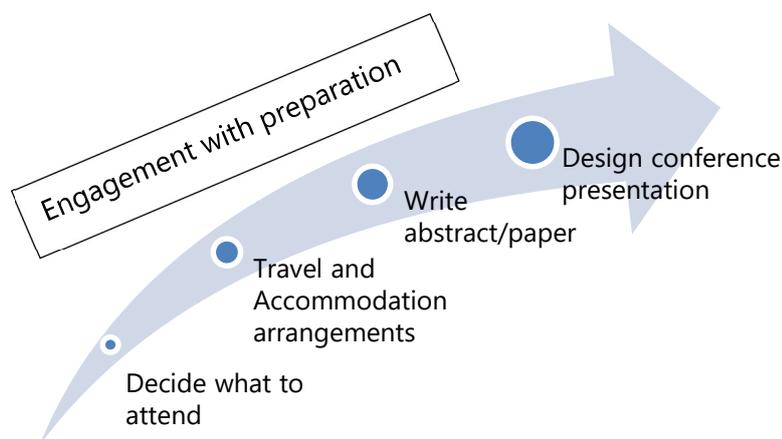
Figure 17 - Academics' engagement with preparations for conference attendance

The next step in their conference journey, as indicated previously in Figure 16 on page 92, was their experience during the conference itself. It will be discussed in the following section.

4.3. Experiences

The academics constructed the stories of their experiences differently, emphasising diverse involvements. Following the analysis of the accumulated journeys a pattern emerged in how they travelled through their experiences during the conferences to reach the most heightened experience. This section will present the identified six steps within the experience as outlined in Figure 18. In accordance to the review of the literature in chapter two, the participants found the inputs by the conference host, such as location, venue and food and beverage, to be important however, if they were all in order, they on their own did not provide the most heightened experience. It was experienced through the conference community, which was not always present. The academics connected the lack of community to the perception that event creators had not delivered their conference in accordance to the marketing material. This resulted in the academics' feeling that they did not belong there, as will be further discussed in section 6.6.3. This section is structured from their least engagement with the experience to the most engagement as per Figure 18 below.
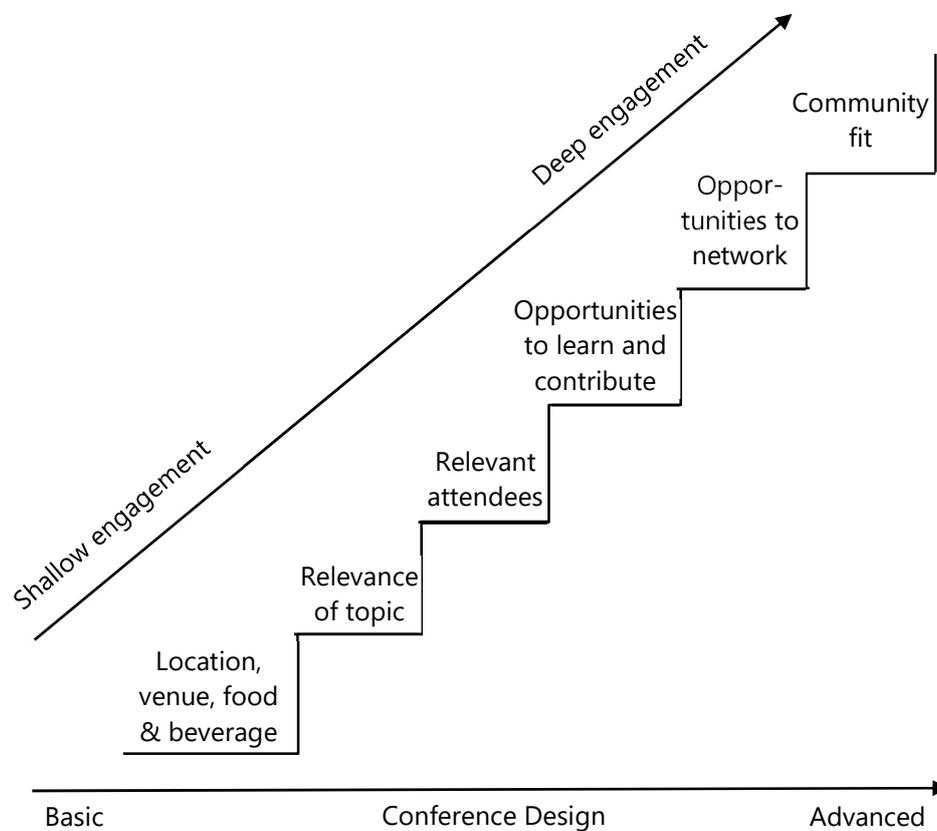
Figure 18 - Conference experience

4.3.1. Location, venue, food and beverage (F&B)

The environment and setting of the conference did influence the experience during the conference. The location was considered during the attendance decision-making process, as discussed in section 4.2.2.1, and it continued to influence the journey albeit on a smaller scale during the conference experience than prior to it. The venue had more influence than the destination during the on-site experience and the food and beverage was also referred to as an influence. The career stage did not make a significant difference on the experience relating to the environment and setting, it was the overall importance of it as discussed by Anita:

> **Anita [MC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *It was in Florence, the food was epic, the hotel was ropey, but like, you know, the arrival, you are in Italy, it was warm and the staff at the venue were really nice, and the food you got was just mega, and the wine, you know, it was all part of the Italian culture.*

This positive influence of the location was made at a conference which did not have an exciting topic for her, and the attendees were of limited interest. This meant that during

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her interview she did not have much else to comment on regarding this particular conference demonstrating when the location influences more heavily. For Karen the location and venue of a reoccurring conference she has attended was so poor that she struggled to experience the appropriate content positively.

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *I don't like that conference; a lot of people don't like it. It's not that the science is bad it's just that it's a really bad conference centre, so the rooms are really small and pokey, and I think, I don't... I'm not such a fan of Vienna, I mean it has nice cakes, but I think that the location and the venue are actually really important to the conference. The one in Prague was brilliant, I think the conference centre was just perfect for what we needed. The Vienna one is bad because the space is bad, which is a bit silly really but...*

The influence of the location, venue and food and beverages on the experience during the conference hence increased when they were either wrong or another factor, such as the content and other attendees, did not meet expectations. Another influence from the destination emerged from the data, a factor which has not been covered in the literature, the impact of the tone of the discussions within the conference. Karen mentioned this when she travelled from Europe to North America for conferences:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *I think in some respects the Americans do more interesting, they just do different styles and it's, maybe it's more interesting because they are a bit different. [...] I think they are a bit more business-like.*

A key finding has been that no matter the career stage of the academics the actual experience of the location, venue and food and beverage was similar. In addition, interestingly they found the venue to be more influential than the destination during the conference; it however emerged that the destination influenced the tone within the conference as summarised in Table 20. The overall influence of these factors strengthened when other factors were experienced poorly or negatively during the conference.

- Limited influence from career stage
- Venue more influential than destination
- Heavier influence when other conference factors deliver poor experience
- Destination influences tone

Table 20 - Academics' experience with the location, venue, food and beverage

A positive experience made them more likely to have a deeper engagement and more constructive experience at the next step within the experience, the relevance of topic, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.3.2. Relevance of topic

The discussion on the importance of the topic during the decision-making process revealed that many of the participants attended various conferences with diverse topics for different purposes. The experience was more positive for many of the academics when the topic was close to their heart. This was not achieved when the delivered conference inputs did not match the communicated topic as it led to the material being irrelevant to attendees and them being unable to be actively involved in the conference.

> **Marjorie [EC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]:** *I thought there would be some content there that might be useful in erm... teaching, actually you know, sort of keeping up-to-date with, what was happening in the industry, and you know up-to-date changes, and stuff like that.*

This misleadingly communicated topic and emphasis within the conferences may have contributed to why the academics were more interested in attending conferences within their research area than generally on teaching. Ronald elaborates on this feeling:

> **Ronald [EC - PhD Student]:** *It was nice to feel like everything was relevant, I think. Because even though we are all in one field, erm... there are still different aspects [within the area]. [...] people are looking at different angles, so it was nice to get a broader view of everything but still relevant.*

For academics their scholarly conference experiences often commenced with internal research communication events, where they as PhD students were expected to attend. The participants found these experiences useful, albeit they did not refer to them as heightened experiences. They commonly were referred to as beneficial exercises to practice presentation skills and receive information on colleagues' research presented formally, as described by Anita '*having the lecturers and the supervisors there has been really helpful in hearing their thoughts and it's nice to see how people's journeys, you know, develop'.* The networking however was on a lower level, as many of the attendees knew and interacted with each other on a regular basis. Since they were often hosted by the overall department the researchers were based in, it often meant that the topic was very wide which participants perceived less useful, emphasised by both Anita: '*I just wish there were more presentations within my area'*, and Ronald:

> **Ronald [EC - PhD Student]:** *a medical school research day [...] but it was not just [his specific area] it was general everything [...] rather than specific to me. [...] I wouldn't say boring but just, yes, not relevant.*

In summary, as outlined in Table 21, this section has demonstrated the importance for academics that the topic corresponds with the event creators' earlier communications. It also found their experience to be enhanced when the topic was on their preferred area, most often their research area.

- Topic needs to be in accordance to communication from event creator

- Enhanced experience when topic is on attendee's preferred area
- Internal conferences cover too wide topics

Table 21 - Academics' experience with the relevance of topic

A positive experience made them more likely to have a deeper engagement and more constructive experience at the next step within the experience, relevant attendees, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.3.3. Relevant attendees

The relevant conference topic for the academics brought with it in many cases the relevant attendees seen from various perspectives. Anita for example has previously been quoted saying that she found the conferences which had to do with her research more interesting, originating from the perception of relevant attendees as *'you tend to meet people there who are more a bit more in line with you really'*. This was confirmed by Karen who debated with herself why she recently had a good conference experience:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *I don't know why it was so good at [the conference] this year it was just, it just was, I think it's just one of those things, I don't think historically... I have been to a few of these, so these conferences run every three years I think and historically they have not been that amazing but this one... it just was. I think the right people were there or maybe they've got the right projects running at the minute or the right people encouraged the correct people or maybe it was just better organised.*

Karen was later asked to consider how she knew whether the 'right attendees' for her would be attending the conference and she replied, *'there are certain conferences that always happen every year, yes happens every year, you just know'*. This thought indicates that previous experience of attending conferences, as well as general professional experience, brought with them knowledge of which conferences were relevant. The irrelevant attendees could lead to a poor conference experience, Karen experienced this at a conference unrelated to the one mentioned above:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *people had been forced to go to and it was all sorts from like really different fields so... the thing that happened, because everybody went and realised that they weren't going to get anything out of it so they didn't bother to give a good talk because it was like "wow, there is nobody there to give feedback or have a discussion with" so.... And I think the aims... the aims, like "why are we here, what's the point in this? Are we just here to tick some box"*

In summary, as outlined in Table 22 below, this section demonstrated two main points concerning the relevant attendees which enhanced the academics' experience. Firstly, the relevant topic provided the relevant attendees and secondly previous experience and/or the conference reputation indicated who would be in attendance.

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- Relevant topic provided relevant attendees - Reputation and/or previous experience indicated who attends which conferences

Table 22 - Academics' experience with the relevant attendees

A positive experience made them more likely to have a deeper engagement and more constructive experience at the next step within the experience, opportunities to learn and contribute, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.3.4. Opportunities to learn and contribute

Opportunities to learn were for most academics of major importance to the experience including subsequent outcomes - for many this included not only a chance to learn but also the opportunity to engage and contribute. Three types of session formats were discussed which all delivered opportunities for learning and contribution; firstly, exhibitions providing the least engagement prospects, secondly poster presentations and finally verbal presentations which brought the greatest opportunities for engagement and contributions.

Exhibitions and Posters

The exhibitions were experienced differently depending considerably more upon the participants' academic area than their career stage. The insight into industry was what made the exhibition important for academics within social sciences; for example, interest in learning about emerging technology as well as exhibiters' other available services and products which could prove useful in their teaching practices. The natural scientists found the exhibitions more significant and emphasised the importance to attend them. This was stemming from the opportunities they provided to not only discuss the products with the exhibitors, the experts on them, but also to experience them:

> **Daniel [LC - Professor]**: *it allows you to see everything coming out of all the machines, huge machines [...] how they manufacture [...] So they all come to one place, and it is an opportunity to see them. Otherwise we do our research in the labs, these are on a smaller scale, but it is good to see that what is the real size.*

Poster sessions are included in many academic conferences, and these were of varied importance to the academics. Many of them discussed how they presented posters early in their career, especially the natural scientists during their PhD studies. Karen discussed how she used to present them during her PhD studies and '*found them brilliant and really really enjoyed it*'. They provided an opportunity for in-depth discussions with other conference attendees at a stage in the research where ideas were needed for it to be

further developed. Alfred agreed on this: '*I think it was quite a good thing to do at the time [...] actually presenting to people, random strangers that come up and kind of asks questions from all sorts of sides [...] it was a good opportunity to kind of talk about my work for the first time...*'. The experience also brought with it various emotions as Alfred continues: '[it was] *quite daunting, nerve-wracking, especially when I was putting the poster up and being quizzed on things*'.

Verbal presentations

The verbal presentations were persistently mentioned as the main opportunity to formally learn and contribute, being the primary element on the programme although the exhibition and poster display frequently were available throughout the duration of the conference. The conventional approach within the programme at academic conferences discussed by the participants was to have parallel sessions, which many found brought with it negative experiences, irrelevant of their career stage and area of interest. Anita found this '*frustrating*' as '*you always end up missing out on stuff*' and '*you don't want to disrupt the room*'. Daniel explained this further: '*you have to rush from one to another and you miss important lectures'*. The overall attendance was affected by this as the running and unease about arriving late to sessions caused the participants to rather have a coffee and wait until the next session. Daniel perceived this behaviour not acceptable as it could cause poor attendance and connected his seniority to it: '*during the sessions I was there all the time that is why I came to this level*'. When the programme did not have parallel sessions, it was less likely that the attendance would be poor as Karen had experienced:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *the nice thing about [conference name] is that they have been in places that are kind of out of town, so they've been on like a ranch, so everyone is in together and there's no escaping so it's really good for chatting to people and getting to know people and there is no parallel session so you just go to one session and it's all relevant.*

When the attendees were passive listeners at verbal presentations there were two factors which frequently impacted the experience, the quality of the speakers and participants' own attention span. The academics generally were patient towards speakers with poor presentation skills and did not express much dissatisfaction with this. They however, in line with expectations of attendance, expected fellow academics to demonstrate respect to the audience by preparing their presentations properly. Sitting and listening to presentations, weak and strong ones, for a prolonged period demanded much concentration and this proved challenging as discussed by Ronald:

> **Ronald [EC - PhD Student]**: *It is quite hard to concentrate for extended periods. [...] each session was like an hour or so long [...] if it was any longer you would just stop concentrating because you are just sitting in a warm room, quietly watching people present and after a while your brain just becomes a bit saturated and you can't really pay attention.*

The research participants' experiences of presenting at conferences visibly evolved as they progressed from their early career stage through to their later career stages. For the natural scientists this involved going from presenting posters to delivering verbal presentations as they progressed in their career. It was viewed as more prestigious to present verbally as commented by Alfred '*I got talks, which was quite prestigious*'. Karen also pointed out that verbal presentations are '*a really good way of showcasing your results*' and they work better than posters '*when you're at the end of a project when you want to tell people what you found*'. The social scientists did not discuss presentation of posters, their discussed first experiences of presenting were verbal, and they were generally more inclined to verbally present research ideas from early on. Anita defined this as using the conference as a '*springboard to test ideas*' whilst discussing an early experience of an academic conference.

> **Anita [MC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *When I, as my first year as a PhD student, the first presentation I did, [...] I just basically said this is the literature I have reviewed and these are my findings and I've developed this conceptual model and I'm just about to go and do a pilot study. What do you think? And I just put the question out there.*

Johannes had experienced whilst listening to presentations that he found it '*interesting to see people at different stages of their research presenting*'. The need to test ideas was however not shared by Rosalind as she believed she had enough support and guidance from her own close network.

> **Rosalind [MC – Senior academic undertaking a PhD]**: *I have never really thought of using them in that way to be honest and that's, that's quite interesting because yes I suppose that is what they are good for. I guess I have got, I feel like I have got really good supervision [...] I also have got like my [partner] [...] I have some key colleagues as well that I talk to and bounce ideas from.*

The first academic presentations for many participants were challenging experiences, not because they were presenting in front of people but because like Marjorie said it was about '*putting your research out on the line, ((laughs)) was a whole different experience'*. The first-time experience was made even more challenging as she '*presented right on the last afternoon*' resulting in a wait which '*was a bit gruesome*'. Anita had also experienced this wait:

> **Anita [MC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *the first day I was fine, but the second when I was presenting I was bricking it because all day I was thinking, oh my God and kept looking at my notes and at lunch I didn't really network I went back to my room and kept looking through my stuff again. [...] I feel more confident talking in front of industry than I do in front of academics.*

Johannes experienced similar feelings with his first presentation '*it does seem to be a different dynamic when its education*'. He minimised the effect by presenting with a senior colleague:

> **Johannes [EC - Lecturer]**: *I wasn't precious about my research to the point where I didn't want anyone to be involved in it so for me, you know, in the grander scheme of things I'd rather have a better first experience and have someone who, you know, I can sort of I guess learn from, sounds a bit cheeky but yeah, I guess show me the ropes kind of thing.*

The early career academics, when discussing their presentations, repeatedly referred to the number and characteristics of other people in attendance. The reason for this was that they had feared and anticipated that they would be presenting in front of a room full of high-level academics who '*categorically knew more than they did*' as discussed by Johannes. This left them also with a range of emotions within their experience as reflected by Anita: '*I was really really nervous and slightly overwhelmed because a lot of the people who were there were like people that I have cited or read work of and I kind of felt like I was a bit out of my depth felt a bit sort of naive and stupid*'. The reality for many of them however, because of parallel sessions, was that they had only a handful of people in the room as explained by Marjorie '*it wasn't because people weren't interested, it was because you physically couldn't split yourself up in enough pieces to go and see everything*'. Her disappointment reverted to excitement with a larger audience '*it just makes you feel a bit like oh actually you are interested in what I have got to say rather than you know you are talking to like 3 people*'. Following the presentation the emotions changed from nervous to relief and happiness: '*it is over, but I have done it and it went well, you know and it was quite, you felt quite elated actually kind of high on it*'. As the participants progressed in their career, they discuss how their confidence developed:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *it gets a lot easier and a lot less nerve wracking and I think part of that is because when you first start giving talks at conferences nobody knows you and it's like you don't have… if you give a bad talk that's all someone knows of you but now it's like "well, if I give a bad talk", I mean I know it's still important but people know who I am, I've got a reputation and they will not hold it against me, they will just think ohhh it was a bad day. But yeah if you do that at the start of your career, it's just feels much more important it's a bigger deal. And also, at the start of your career you are probably not sure what is interesting work whereas now it's more interesting, I've got more confident in my work, I'm a better scientist, it's just different for lots of reasons…*

Not all participants found that it became much easier and therefore had a strategy like Alexander who always requested to '*give it early so then I can enjoy the rest of the conference, otherwise I can't enjoy ((laughs)), I am thinking about my talk.*' This was echoed

by Henrietta as she reflected: *'you have done your duty, you have got rid of all any kind of erm... anxiety or worry or whatever, and then you are just free to enjoy'*.

Question and answer (Q&A) session

An integral part of the verbal presentations was the accompanying Questions and Answers time. This space provided a learning curve for the audience, not only in terms of the topic being discussed but also on the behaviour and attitude of other attendees as discussed by Ronald:

> **Ronald [EC - PhD Student]**: *it is interesting to hear how they [senior academics] would critique research or erm... questions that they would ask about why haven't you done this or have you thought about doing this, and things, so I learnt a lot actually. [...] you found the people that liked to ask tricky questions and the people that liked to ask nice questions. There are always people that will put their hand up for everything and say what about this, what about that.*

This experience was echoed by many participants, commonly from a negative perspective. Marjorie observed presenters which had been '*absolutely pulled apart*' through comments which were not *'constructive'*. Johannes describes this view as well '*his reputation precedes of him as, you know, being known to destroy people in the Q&A session*' which Anita agreed with when commenting that '*some academics can be a bit up their own bum and they can ask questions to make... to trip you up rather than be supportive*'. None of the participants demonstrated these traits; it was referred to as behaviour by the minority of the delegates however it was very influential on attendees' experiences. If they discussed their own questions asked, they mentioned always trying to have them positive or at least constructive. As the participants progressed in their careers, they became more seasoned presenters although they continued to feel nervous about them.

Section Summary

In summary this section has demonstrated how the academics increased their engagement within the conference as they progressed in their career and a key finding was how this engagement was different between natural and social scientists. Parallel sessions were not always perceived positively and there was an influence of not only the quality of the speakers but also attendees' own attention span. The active engagement, for example through presentations, brought with them a wide range of emotions including increase in confidence and disappointment with the behaviour of a limited but influential number of attendees in the Q&A sessions. Further factors are outlined in Table 23 below.

- Increasing engagement through the career ranging from:
  - ○ Exhibitions
  - ○ Posters
  - ○ Verbal presentations
- Different engagement for natural and social scientists
- Parallel sessions often perceived negatively:
  - ○ Attendees miss out on sessions
  - ○ Leads to poor attendance
- Quality of the speakers influence
- Limited attention span of the attendees
- Opportunity to 'test ideas'
- Brings out much emotions
- Increase in confidence
- Question and Answers sessions:
  - ○ Influence of other attendees' behaviour and attitude

Table 23 - Academics' experience with the opportunities to contribute and learn

A positive experience made them more likely to have a deeper engagement and more constructive experience at the next step within the experience, the relevant opportunities to network, which will be discussed in the following section.

4.3.5. Opportunities to network

An opportunity to network was demonstrated through Ronald's recent experience of attending his first external academic conference where he presented a poster. In his case it was with '*academics from different universities around Europe or around the world who I had never spoke to before*' who came to him and began the conversation along the lines of: '*oh I am interested in this, what you are doing and tell me...*'. For Ronald this space felt like '*a good way of meeting people as well, networking*'. The networking was for many participants the activity which took the learning to the next level and laid the foundations for developing greater outcomes. These opportunities were provided by the event creators, like in Alfred's case when he had delivered a five minutes verbal presentation:

> **Alfred [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *then afterwards each talk had a poster as well and you stood by it for an hour and then people would come. So, people who had seen the talk came over and went: "so that is how you said you did this, can you explain that a bit more?". You know, they obviously*

were interested in things so... I think it did definitely force discussion because
you only had five minutes which is not enough time [to explain details].

The opportunities provided by the event creators were not only through poster sessions but also with formal social sessions such as evening dinners and facilitated networking sessions as well as with informal food and drinks break between the formal learning sessions. Karen described this as '*it's all about food and drink, yeah, makes sense, if you don't provide it it's not going to happen*'. Many of the participants found the evening social sessions very enjoyable, like Alfred points out '*I probably prefer the more informal side of the things, the evening bits, the wine sessions*'. He argues that this is because '*you can actually sort of sit down and talk about whatever*' and it is '*the more friendly side of*' the conference. Daniel also argues this point, demonstrating how important these sessions are for him: '*Of course, I don't miss them because that is the opportunity to meet other people. [...] that is the time you can go to anybody, you can talk to anybody, in a very, very causal way.*' It is however not sufficient for the event creators to provide the space and food and beverage; these need to be carefully designed because if not they can lead to a poor experience with limited outcomes like Marjorie learnt:

> **Marjorie [EC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *sometimes it has been that the conference has just been too hot, and that is when you find yourself disconnecting from what is going on because you are literally... things like erm... in Dubai they decided to have the welcome drinks outside on the terrace, and you know that was ok but it is very humid and it is like 85 degrees and you know you just don't, you know you are trying to network with people but you are also trying not to move too much because if you do you sweat.*

Not everyone makes an effort to attend these sessions as discussed by Karen '*we organise dinners in groups and it's just like friendship groups in the end I suppose*'. In addition it is not possible for all to attend them for reasons such as lack of time or financial funding for accommodation as discussed in section 4.2.2.1. This occurred for Marjorie and she deduced that '*sometimes maybe you miss out if you don't stay on and do the dinner*' because '*that is where some of that networking would have happened*'. Not all conferences provide an evening programme, in particular if they are one day conferences, which for Henrietta are '*a very different experience*'. She argued this view by painting a picture of the hurried day with quick hot drinks and a sandwich lunch. Anita agreed on this by commenting how there was no time to '*reflect*' and '*speak to other people there to sort of compare experiences, practices, to hear how they've interpreted what was presented and what they're going to do with, and sort of just digest it*'. They however found benefits in attending single day conferences despite the restricted networking opportunities because as Henrietta remarked she could '*connect with the community, have an opportunity to present your research, and just keep yourself up to date with other things that are going on research wise*'.

Anita and Henrietta have portrayed well the importance of networking and the outcomes they may bring for the delegate, but at the same time they have demonstrated that it is time consuming to gain the most benefits from it. Throughout the conversations with the academics it also became clear that even if they had time for the networking it did not happen by itself and most of them did not find it easy, in particular it was difficult early in their academic career:

> **Marjorie [EC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *I think I was a bit in awe of people, you know like I had read so many articles from when I started my degree to when I first went to my first presentation and I remember seeing people, [...] I think I built them up to be this kind of like ((laughs)) I don't know famous untouchable person who wouldn't be, wouldn't like be a human being [...] when I met them and I saw them present I thought, well actually you know you are quite normal, [...], they are talking to me about my research and I couldn't quite get my head around that. I think that has probably dissipated over time you realise these people are just, normal people but very experienced, and have written a lot and stuff.*

Attending individually or with colleagues

The conference where Marjorie had the above experience was her first large academic one and she attended it on her own. Many of the academics however had experiences of attending with colleagues which they experienced differently than when they were on their own. Not only did the group they attended with bring about a comfort zone and offerings of openings to be introduced but also opportunities to get to know their colleagues on a different level. Alfred had experienced both and below he discusses them, firstly the benefits of attending unaccompanied and secondly benefits of attending with colleagues:

> **Alfred [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *It forces me to go and speak to people more which is good, either you're sitting on your own for lunch or you go and talk to someone. [...] Yeah, it forces me to interact a lot more whereas if I'd probably been with lab members I would have done some but it would have been easy to go and chat to your friend or chat to your colleague than it would to go and find a stranger and say hello.*

> **Alfred [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *I actually got to know my boss [...] getting to see him outside of work, he wasn't just this monster who expected me to be in at 7 to do things, it was, you know, he actually was a human.*

Participants who had progressed in their career demonstrated how the networking changed over time with increased confidence and greater knowledge. Henrietta points out that she '*used to mind going on [her] own*' however that has developed and '*that*

doesn't bother me now, actually I don't care if I don't know anybody'. She sums up the importance of networking:

> **Henrietta [LC - Professor]***: there are people who you knew before you went to the conference but you don't know very well and that gives you an opportunity to get to know them a great deal better, so that you are more likely then to keep contact and maybe look for erm... solidify networks and feel that you might approach them for things in the future.*

Section Summary

In summary this section has demonstrated how the academics found conferences an opportunity to network outside of their daily network and how it took their learning to the next level. One of the key findings is that the event creators have a key role in strategically creating the environment for the networking opportunities, for example research participants found the one day conferences providing less opportunities for networking as there was limited time for reflection and discussions because of the busy programme. Many participants had experienced challenges in networking and felt a wide range of emotions, however attending with a colleague could provide a comfort zone although individual attendance could lead to wider networking. Further factors are outlined in Table 24 below.

- Opportunity to:
o interact outside of existing network
o maintaining and enhancing existing network
- The networking takes learning to the next level
- Event creators have a responsibility to provide strategically created environment for networking opportunities
- Less formal conversations perceived positively as often this leads to more personal acquaintance
- One day conferences give less opportunities for networking:
o Less time for reflection
o But an opportunity to keep in touch and stay updated
- Challenges in networking
o Wide range of emotions
- Attending individually:
o Forced to network
- Attending with colleagues:
o Comfort zone provided

Table 24 - Academics' experience with the opportunities to network

A positive experience made them more likely to have a deeper engagement and more constructive experience at the next step within the experience, community fit, which will be discussed in the final section of the experience ladder.

4.3.6. Community fit

Community fit was perceived the highest level of experience during the conference. Attendees feeling part of the community created within the conference demonstrated the highest level of involvement. They were learning and connecting with the fellow delegates because the topic and attendees were in accordance to their expectations. Anita was attending her first academic conference and she had a good experience with valuable outcomes because '*the people were really friendly and they made me feel really welcome and you know you're sort of at ease [...] they are really supportive*'. The importance of this welcoming was acknowledged by Henrietta as she had experienced this at a reoccurring conference she attended which '*is a very supportive and inclusive community*' demonstrated through: '*if there is a very new researcher, even if they do something that is pretty hopeless people look for the positives in it, they offer really useful feedback*'. This greeting made a difference at an early career stage, in particular for PhD students finding their way in academia. Anne, who completed her PhD studies before becoming a professional, encountered challenges when attending conferences during her multidisciplinary studies:

> **Anne [EC - Consultant]**: *But for all intents and purposes I was like "this is weird, I don't even know, I don't know how to relate to any of these people, this is definitely not where I'm supposed to be, there's got to be somewhere else". But I was so new as a PhD student that I'm trying to figure out where to put myself so that I am feeling like a finger clicking.*

During this experience she did not feel part of the community as the topic and attendees did not meet her expectations. This could occur also later in the career when academics were progressing and they changed roles, for example Rosalind moved from a teaching role to a management role leaving her to '*feel less inclined to go to conferences because you don't know where you fit anymore*'.

The feeling of not fitting in was greatly discussed by academics when referring to their experiences of attending industry conferences. Marjorie explains that '*I didn't feel I was very welcome. I felt like, you know unless you erm... were there and could buy*' which led to her experiencing '*I just felt a bit on the outside of it all the time, it was a bit unpleasant at times*'. The industry delegates did not express an interest in her because she did not have buying power and Anita shared a similar experience:

> **Anita [MC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *I felt like a bit of the odd one out at lunchtime. I sat there as an academic in the corner just not really having anyone to talk to. And every time I spoke to someone and I said, "I'm a lecturer" and they said "oh all right" and then kind of looked the other way. Not in a rude way, just because I'm not of interest to them because the people they want to speak to are the other people who are in industry.*

The community feel experience, or the lack thereof, did not always originate from industry conference attendance. Henrietta with her substantial conference experiences had not only experienced thinking at an academic conference: '*it has felt like a really good space*' but also: '*oh my goodness me ((laughs)) I am not coming here again [...] it felt very cliquey*'. The cliquey feeling could stem from the competition within the research area. Alfred, as well as other natural scientists, mentioned this competition especially within the '*established fields*' leading to them being '*more closed off*' and '*it's competitive, you know it's getting the money and things*' as opposed to emerging areas where '*people are much more happy to kind of share*'. This was also shared by Ronald who when attending a conference within an emerging field remarked that:

> **Ronald [EC - PhD Student]**: *everyone was very friendly, very open erm... there wasn't necessarily a sense of hierarchy between the kind of higher academics and the students, like they were happy to talk to the students and it was good actually... it was nice.*

This lack of hierarchy amongst the attending academics was also emphasised by the social scientists as they often referred to a supportive environment. The supportiveness surfaced greatly in the Question & Answer sessions but that was also where a malicious environment could be created as Henrietta had experienced; '*I saw some other new researchers really being kind of savaged, and I thought I don't want to be part of this community I really, really don't like this*'. This one experience of lack of community feel led to her not returning to this particular conference until more than a decade later and then only by coincidence. She however repeatedly returned to the conference series on her preferred topic which were attended by people likeminded to herself as quoted on page 104 because within it she was able to experience positively all steps of the experience ladder displayed in Figure 18:

> **Henrietta [LC - Professor]**: *Thoroughly I really, really enjoy [the topic] and of course, alongside that you pick up, you deepen your own subject knowledge which supports my teaching at [the University], erm... you make connections with people, and erm... you also as well as deepening your subject knowledge, you also think of new approaches to the subject and so on and so, it has been very much, it is very much been, it has very much fed into my networking with professionals, and my teaching [the subject] at [the University].*

In summary this section has demonstrated the importance the academics place on the welcoming and support of other attendees on their experience. A positive and supportive environment could reduce the difficulties they experience and emotions early in their career or when they change careers. The feeling of being out of place at industry conferences emerged strongly, as well as in exclusive and clique communities, for example in established natural science research areas where competitiveness was

influential. Less hierarchy and more supportive communities were perceived within social science and emerging science communities. Further factors are outlined in Table 25.

- Highest level of engagement when feeling part of the conference community
- Importance of welcoming and support
- Difficulties to feel a community belonging:
  o During early career
  o After changing roles
  o At industry conferences
  o In inclusive and clique communities
- Influence of competitiveness
- More supportive communities at:
  o Social science conferences
  o Emerging science conferences
- Hierarchy perceived

Table 25 - Academics' experience with the community fit

This concludes the experience during the conference. It is followed by a post-conference experience which could involve developing outcomes, the main topic of the following section.

4.4. Outcome

Following the conference experience attendees had an opportunity to develop outcomes. The academics had different experiences and views on the developments of their outcomes depending on the heightened level of their experience at the conference as well as their approach to working towards the outcomes. For some of the participants not much happened straight after the conference as Karen discussed when asked what happened in the days and weeks following a conference experience.

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *Not a lot to be honest. Like, there's barely much follow up to a conference, occasionally I'll follow up on people I've met or if I've had a conversation with someone but generally there is not a lot of fall-back from conferences. It's all about the run up more than the aftermath.*

Her response demonstrated the importance for the academics to present their research and focus on writing papers or abstracts for the conferences as Karen continued to clarify when asked why she continued going to conferences:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *Because it's always new work, it's always new things to be encountered, it's always new people to meet, it's never, you're never standing still, your work evolves, you need to present, you go there to present.*

The academics did not express putting a great effort into the conference papers which are published in the proceedings as they found it more important to convert them into papers which would be published in peer-reviewed journals as mentioned by Henrietta: '*I try always to take my conference paper and work it up to a journal publication*'. This was however not emphasised by all, for example Rosalind felt that if she '*was a proper academic, I probably would have got a paper out of that or you know I probably could have done*' but she did not because she did not '*prioritise thinking: how can I get a paper out of this?*'. These were tangible outcomes achievable from the conference attendance; however as discussed regarding the decision-making process and the experience, the participants were not always aiming for neither tangible nor short-term outcomes. Through analysis of the data it became evident that the participants had gained assets and opportunities from their attendance with many of them of intangible nature which could be developed further into tangible long-term outcomes.

Experiential assets

The experiential assets led to opportunities often with complex connections. The early career academics were more likely to gain assets than opportunities; these would often be in the form of increased knowledge leading to ideas and the networking leading to contact information. Alfred attended a conference shortly before completing his PhD thesis which provided him with the asset '*a lot of ideas*' which led to the outcome of bringing '*up to date stuff to the front of my mind and helped it to give me ideas right towards the end when I was writing it up so it really helped kind of bring things together*'. Anita was also able to gain an asset when attending the industry conference previously discussed where she felt not being able to fit into the community since she could translate the learning into '*what I personally can do every day in my teaching*' and Marjorie discussed this as: '*it is about sharing stories with students*'. The early career academics not only discussed gaining ideas for their research or teaching practises but also about developing an understanding about academics in their area as Karen termed it '*you see what someone is about at a conference*'. Marjorie expands on this:

> **Marjorie [EC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *when you have read a body of work from somebody, I think it is really nice to then meet them and understand, you know, where their thoughts are coming from. Erm... and their ideas are coming from and why, they have developed into researching that particular area and what their background is.*

Not only had the early career academics developed an understanding of senior academics' work and underlying thoughts but following encounters at a conference they also found it easier to contact academics in their field. Ronald explains that he '*could have always e-mailed [academic] regardless*' but he found it '*easier*' to contact them after having met them at a conference and received permission through requesting: '*do you mind if I contact you and they said yes that's fine*'. Academic participants also referred to keeping in contact through mediums such as the professional social media platform LinkedIn. The observations and networking made at an early conference, such as in Johannes' case, were assets for research and knowledge within their area because '*we all work in our own little silos*' but the conference provides '*a good way of finding out a little bit more about what's going on*'.

Opportunities

Through progression the early career academics developed and continued '*building those relationships*' which led for Marjorie to increased '*confidence and a stronger network*'. This often resulted in them being able to change their approach within conferences, like Karen mentioned that she was aiming for '*future collaborations*'. Alfred discussed a specific example where following a conference researchers he had networked with '*actually gave us a protocol, they emailed us over a protocol*' which led to him achieving a better output from an ongoing research and the collaboration '*saved us maybe 6 months of work and it's an expensive thing to do, it's like £50 an hour to use the [equipment]*'. He therefore had tangible results subsequent from the conference networking in terms of research output, and saved time and money. It is therefore evident that conference attendance could give many assets which could be developed into opportunities.

Participants had different approaches to the development, however it required them to digest and reflect upon their overall experience including the assets they had gained. Johannes mentioned that he was going to do a mini presentation on the experience for his colleagues and Marjorie also found sharing important:

> **Marjorie [EC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]**: *in order for your employer, my employer, to keep funding people to go I think they need to see the return on investment and the ability for people to be sharing and it is not just about you, and your career and your development, it is about sharing knowledge.*

Reflection was another approach utilised to digest the experience and learning. Alfred had received funding to attend a conference in return for writing for the conference's social media channels. When looking back he realised his personal outcomes from writing these as '*they are quite good for you just to sit down and go "well, what did you get from this?" you know "What was the benefit of going to that meeting?" [...] "Right what did you achieve?" and even think "well, next time I need to do more of this and things"*'. The reflection not only made him think more in depth about his outcomes but also his approach to behaviour during the conference:

Alfred [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]: *the tweeting and writing the blog was useful in terms of kind of really you thought about your sessions and which ones you were going to write about and it made you kind of read the abstracts a bit and things so kind of chose one that you were interested in and really focused on that so it was useful in that respect.*

Tangible outcomes

Further research participants discussed tangible outcomes developed from conference attendance. Table 26 lists examples from three participants, Anita in her mid-career and Henrietta late in hers both discussing outcomes from a conference series; and finally, Daniel, also late in his career, mentioning outcomes from different conference experiences.

Anita [MC - Lecturer undertaking a PhD]:	- She participated in developing a research association originating from the conference. She told the following sequence of events how one of their one-day seminars contributed to great research outcomes: • [Name] was invited to come and present • This connection provided her with an opportunity to attend [an event organised event by them] for data collection purposes • They offered a workshop at the conference series • From the back of that they promoted a survey she was involved in • On top of that she explored options of other research that would involve them as well
Henrietta [LC - Professor]:	- She contributed to a special edition of a highly relevant journal - She was invited to be on the editorial board, because of attendance at the conference - She was invited to do a seminar at a foreign university - which led to a stipendiary fellowship for 3 months at this University - That gave her an opportunity to write a book with a professor at the same University - She was scheduled to do a symposium with a fellow attendee at another conference after meeting them at this conference series
Daniel [LC - Professor]:	- A person from a publishing company approached: '*you can write a book, there is the subject, shall you write one?*' - he followed the advice and had a book published with them - On the second day of a conference he was invited along with other high-profile attendees to go on the national television to discuss the conference topic - which he accepted - Twice he has been headhunted

Table 26 - The development of outcomes by academics

Table 26 demonstrates the range of tangible outcomes for academics attending conferences. These outcomes came about over a long time period often spanning years. However, there were cases with no tangible outcomes and both Daniel and Henrietta emphasised this. For example Henrietta illustrated awareness that a specific conference she attended on a regular basis did not bring with it tangible outcomes but she nonetheless continued to attend because they were '*a really important way of keeping in touch with the [research area] community. So that has a knock-on effect in all kinds of other ways really*'. Daniel, in line with Johannes and Marjorie's discussion on sharing, emphasised the importance of contribution:

> **Daniel [LC - Professor]**: *by listening to other people you learn something. You gradually build up as a competent researcher, so from every conference I learnt something, if I don't learn I will be very frustrated. Sometimes even if you don't have to learn things, I mean as you mature, sometimes you think I didn't learn much, but at least you contributed to discussions. And, at my stage I have to give more than learn.*

The outcomes discussed above have all been of positive nature, which is in line with expectations within the decision-making process. Outcomes could however be negative as well, for example Marjorie's attendance at an industry conference where she felt she '*didn't really learn anything that [she] didn't already know*' led to her letting the membership lapse as the conference '*made me think, [I] don't get a lot from the society as a whole*'. More often than not the participants did mention positive outcomes ranging from 'shallow' to 'deep' as discussed. Amongst the 'deep' ones were strengthening of relationships, not only with future external possible collaborators, but also with colleagues who attended the conference with them. Alfred found that in '*the ones where I've gone with the labs*' he had been able to '*get to know your lab friends, lab colleagues outside of work as well*', hence achieving the outcome of deeper working relationships and friendships. The ultimate friendship had been established by Karen as she '*met [her] partner at conferences*'. In addition to gaining friendships the conferences could also serve as energy boosters as Henrietta mentions: '*a place for me, so I would get my batteries recharged, and so on rather than a place where I specifically made an overt contribution*'.

Coming back to Karen's remarks at the beginning of this section where she said that she did little following a conference, she also remarked that she returned because there is always new knowledge to be gained. In addition, Karen mentioned the feeling that conferences had become more important to her, and when asked why she reflected upon her outcomes and reasons for continued attendance with changed behaviour during each new conference journey:

> **Karen [MC - Postdoctoral Researcher]**: *I think because I know more as well, I will go and I know what I'll want to listen to and I'll learn more and because I listen to talks differently now, like I was just listening before to*

learn and now I listen to learn what people are doing and... obviously I will learn from these things too but I will learn, I will be wanting to learn about techniques and I know how talks... the new way of slotting in to the field that is already there whereas before you don't really know the field that is already there, so you don't know the context to that talk, and why it's new and why it's important. And it's interesting now as well, [...] you go along and you listen and you see how someone presents and you learn how to present so that would be like "ohhh that's a bad talk" or the next one "now that's a really good talk", "I'll do that in my next talk". Yeah, so, and meeting people as well, I know more people in the field now.

Her reflection demonstrates not only the intangible outcomes from her individual conference journeys but also how they built on each other and the interactions between them and her job.

<u>Section summary</u>

In summary this section has revealed how the academic participants develop tangible and intangible experiential assets, opportunities and longer-term outcomes from their conference attendance. A key finding is that this is achieved through effort both on the attendee's behalf as well as the event creator. The factors for the different categories are summarised in Table 27.

Experiential Assets

Preparations

Community's awareness of research

Ideas

Contact information

Stories to share with students

Understanding of other academics

Confidence in contacting people met a conferences

Wider awareness of the research area

Confidence

Opportunities

Complete drafts of papers

Future collaborations

Share new knowledge with colleagues

Reflections on learning and networking

Outcomes

Paper published in peer-reviewed journal

Confidence

Stronger and wider network

Material for research

Table 27 - Academics' experiential assets, opportunities and outcomes developed from the conference attendance

4.5. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has narrated the academics' conference journey, revealing the key findings of how it changes over the course of their career by studying in depth the details of each phase within the journey. These details were listed in Table 17 to Table 27 and they are available for an accumulated overview in appendix G. One of the strongest results from the analysis of the academics' decision-process was that their recognition of a need to attend a conference very much originated from the professional requirements of being an academic, to present their research. Their career stage influenced this heavily, as early in their career they had limited experiences to fall back upon and relied more heavily on senior colleagues and marketing material from the event creator. However, as they developed in their career this changed with experience as well as with increased expectations from the need to attend a conference. The rationale to attend was identified to be twofold, 'shallow' in terms of pragmatic elements and 'deep' in terms of greater considerations of outcomes expected from the attendance.

The experiences they had at the conference itself were analysed in section 4.3 beginning with the experience of the basic elements of the conference, the location, venue and food and beverage. These were proven to be important however on their own they did not lead to achievement of outcomes. The career stage of the attendee was shown not to affect this aspect of the conference experience, although the following stages were identified to be affected by it. Early in their career the academics were still finding their feet which meant that they were more likely than those later in the career to have poorer experiences in terms of weak fit with the relevance of the topic and attendees. They were also less likely to have the most heightened experience as they did not always reach a sense of belonging to the community. This in turn meant less outcomes developed, however at the same time they were not expecting the same degree of outcomes. It was identified that their outcomes were more experiential assets and opportunities than tangible outcomes which were more achievable as they progressed within their career.

The conference journey analysed within this chapter has focused on the attendee as it is their individual journey being explored. Throughout the analysis the role of the event creator has however been identified as significant, their design decisions were able to support or weaken the development of the outcomes. This role of the event creator has not been analysed explicitly within this chapter however it will be discussed in detail in section 6.6 as it was identified to be one of three main influences on the attendee's developments of outcomes. The other two main influences were firstly internal to the attendee, not only their career stage but also their multiple identities, ambitions, engagement and emotions, and secondly their workplace. These influences will be discussed further in sections 6.4 and 6.5. The following chapter will narrate the conference journey the professionals experienced, and the two journeys will be compared in depth in section 6.2.

Chapter 5 FINDINGS: THE CONFERENCE JOURNEY - THE PROFESSIONALS' EXPERIENCE

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will present the professionals' conference journey which emerged from the analysis of the data. The findings are illustrated with quotes from the research participants. In line with chapter four, which presented the academic journey, this chapter has three sections; starting with their decision-making process, leading to their experience during the conference and concluding with their outcomes developed from their attendance. Consistent with the layout of chapter four the findings will be presented and discussed considering the career stages of the participants allowing a comprehensive representation of the conference journey through the professional's life.

Professionals			
Early Career	**Anne**	EC – Consultant	Built environment
	Steve	EC – IT	IT
Mid-Career	**Laura**	MC – Lawyer	Law
	Sam	MC – Chartered Engineer	Energy Industry
	Warren	MC – Finance Director	Wealth management
	Eliza	MC – Finance Manager	Third sector
Late Career	**Sheila**	LC – Consultant	Compliance
	Carly	LC – IT Manager	Health sector
	Alexander	LC – Medical clinician and professor	Medicine

Table 28 below is presented to remind the reader of the professional participants' identity and career stage. Following this chapter, chapter six will explore more in depth the complexities, nuances, and underpinning elements of both the journeys underpinned with available literature.

Professionals			
Early Career	**Anne**	EC – Consultant	Built environment
	Steve	EC – IT	IT
Mid-Career	**Laura**	MC – Lawyer	Law
	Sam	MC – Chartered Engineer	Energy Industry
	Warren	MC – Finance Director	Wealth management
	Eliza	MC – Finance Manager	Third sector
Late Career	**Sheila**	LC – Consultant	Compliance
	Carly	LC – IT Manager	Health sector
	Alexander	LC – Medical clinician and professor	Medicine

Table 28 - The professional participants

5.2. Decision-making process

This section will present the professionals' thoughts and views on the decision-making process within their conference journey. Their decision-making process, similar to the academics', was initiated by a need recognition followed by 'shallow' and sometimes also a 'deep' rationale for attending. Both the needs identified and the rationale for attending for the professionals were related to their profession and role within their organisations or as self-employed. The following sections will present the stages within their decision-making process in further detail.

5.2.1. Need recognition

The professionals' need to attend a conference originated from their role in their workplace and these depended upon their profession and seniority. The need early in their career surrounded the requirement to explore the field they worked in as well as building a profile and visibility as expressed by Sam:

> **Sam [MC – Chartered Engineer]**: *in the early parts of my career I did definitely benefit from, you know, meeting senior people or meeting people in a similar role, taking that away and being able to talk to them or contact them on a personal level at a later date [...] or knowing whom to speak to. That's probably faded a little bit now as I perhaps... I don't know how to put it... I'm probably a little less ambitious then when I was a bit younger, you settle down a little bit as you get older, have children, slow down a bit.*

His changing role and professional status influenced his perceived duty of attending conferences because as he moved into a more senior technical role, he had less necessity to network. The individual participants' profession also significantly affected their need to attend conferences when their qualifications meant that in order to uphold their certified status, they had accreditation requirements. This therefore provided a straightforward need regardless of their role as discussed by Warren, a chartered accountant, '*technical training to do with accountancy and finance will be relevant to me via virtue of professional qualification regardless of where I was working'.*

At an early stage in their career there was a more perceived imminent need to receive a relevant topic update. Steve explained that at a conference he experienced '*a wider stance and a wider range of issues*' than at the workplace and therefore he would be able to '*take away the practical learning and try and use that and implement that at work*'. The need to be aware of the developments did not fade away as the participants progressed in their career, as Alexander discussed that he still had a need to *'keep in touch with what is happening, what my colleagues are doing'.* Fortunately for him and others later in their career, the opportunities to attend conferences grew for most of the participants when they progressed within their career, whereas the need to attend them was no less earlier in their career, if anything it was greater. The growing opportunities were evident when participants in senior positions and later in their career discussed invites to attend:

> **Carly [LC - IT Manager]**: *in my job believe it or not, I could spend my entire life doing nothing but going for breakfast, lunch, dinner, staying overnight in hotels and going to conferences. I get invited to America and Europe and all over the place.*

The role people held at each time influenced their needs to attend with the need changing in accordance to their altering role. A common denominator for this was visibility; it was however reflected in different ways. An entry level role carried with them the previously discussed need to build a profile within the industry whereas for participants in senior roles the visibility often concerned being seen at conferences within the industry or their organisation because of their seniority. Visibility was also needed for those who were expected to generate sales but for them the career stage was not influential. The terminology used to express this type of visibility was in terms of demonstrating individual attributes and organisational abilities. Sheila, self-employed consultant, mentioned she could '*showcase my talents*' and Laura the lawyer identified the practice with the same terminology '*showcase our legal expertise [...], showcase [...] technical expertise and breadth of expertise within the firm*'.

The need was affected by the role and the associate tasks and responsibilities. Steve discussed this influence of roles within the IT industry's conferences as he had recently changed jobs:

> **Steve [EC - IT]**: *I moved from a partner to an end user and the end user felt it was more valuable that I went. When I was at a partner the salespeople or the solution architects or the solution consultants went because they felt it would be more beneficial to them because they are learning the systems and using it day in day out where I wasn't.*

Career transition also affected the needs recognised to attend conferences as it initiated a change in the topic area of attended conferences as well as participants' behaviour and purpose within the conference setting. This was most evident in Sheila's journey as she had enjoyed three different careers, each a building block in her overall experience.

> **Sheila [LC - Consultant]**: *I've been to conferences as a software house company, person from the company, I've been to conferences as a client of software houses, have been to conferences [...] as a member of membership organisations and I've also been to conferences as a participant number within that sphere, [...] but then also as a consultant. So I've seen pretty much every side of conferences.*

A further identified source for recognising the need to attend a conference was generic communication from the event creators; mostly in form of the prospective attendees subscribing to mailing lists from relevant associations, professional bodies and organisations as recognised by Eliza, '*the CPD information comes regularly, about 6 times a year I get sent some things*'.

A key finding has been how the career stage influences the professionals' need to attend conferences ranging from exploring the field and building a profile early on, to being visible within their own organisation or industry as they progress. The influence of the role they hold at each time is significant as their needs for attending altered when changing roles as is outlined in Table 29 below.

- Influence of Career Stage:
  - o Early
    - ▪ Explore field
    - ▪ Building a profile
  - o Later
    - ▪ Visibility in organisation and/or industry
    - ▪ Invitations to attend
  - o Always
    - ▪ Receive relevant topic update
- Influence of role:
  - o Accreditation requirements
  - o Different roles require different attendance
  - o Expectancy of sales
- Communication from event creator

Table 29 – Professionals' need recognition for attending conferences

5.2.2. Rationale for attending a specific conference

Following the research participants' recognition of a need for attending a conference a decision-making process was initiated. The succeeding section follows a similar path to the academics' decision-making process in section 4.2 by first discussing the 'shallow' rationale to attend followed by 'deep' rationale.

5.2.2.1. 'Shallow' rationale for attending and factors affecting ability to attend

The 'shallow' rationale for attending related largely to the event creator's communicated inputs to the conferences and in this section the professionals' views on what they perceived as the most influential inputs; programme, other present conference attendees, and location is presented. The communication of these inputs assisted the participants in not only determining the prospective benefits to be achieved but also their ability to attend the conference. Following the discussion on the inputs their approach and views regarding cost, both in terms of finance and time, will be presented. These factors influenced the participants' decision whether to attend as well as their

thought process in terms of taking the decision-making process to the next level involving contemplation of 'deep' rationale for attending.

Conference design factors

The early career professionals did not have much choice in practice in which conferences to attend as their role and profession guided this greatly, however the freedom was much more apparent when they had moved further along in their career. Sheila explains below how her first point of information was the programme, or at least components of it:

> **Sheila [LC - Consultant]**: *I tend to pick and choose those because they are either on a particular topic or because they are going to be in a particular area that I want to get into. So, I might know that somebody is going to be there as a speaker for example and so I attend because I want to hear what they have got to say.*

The detailed programme was however not always available during the decision-making process, leading to the delegates having to rely on incomplete information. Steve discussed an instance where he decided to attend a conference based on its communicated topic. In hindsight the communication was '*light*' as it was announced that the conference would be concentrating on a specific software programme. When it got closer to the conference, the release of the programme was delayed with subsequent changes to the main topic. This left Steve the options to adhere to the decision of attending or incur great cost:

> **Steve [EC - IT]**: *they didn't give an agenda for the sessions until quite close to the time, but as it was quite close we had already spent all of the money on the hotels, on the airfare and the registration so it was just easier just to go and see what it was like. [...] the event should have been the, the release of the new version of [a particular software] but there were delays behind that so, I am not blaming [the host company] for it they had to fill the agenda somehow and it was just more [focus on another software than the one initially announced].*

Warren however had experienced that the communicated agenda was clear enough to base a decision not to attend '*the latest one I've decided not to go to because I looked at what was on the agenda and I thought that it's probably not that... quite as relevant to me.*' Knowledge of the programme and topic could be enhanced by previous conference experience; this was however not always present as the professionals did not put a great emphasis on attending conference series. This was largely influenced by the area they were working within, as Carly explains: '*things don't tend to radically change that much year on year but if you could go to something like that every 5 years then yes, I think you would probably get a lot out of it'.* The programme provided a chance to gain information, not only on the opportunities to learn, but also which audience would be there to network with. Anne found this crucial when deciding to attend a specific conference:

> **Anne [EC - Post Doc Researcher/Consultant]**: *I recognise a lot of the names, a lot of the speakers. And a lot of them are from [last attended conference] so it becomes like building relationships actually because there is some continuity going on there.*

Eliza assumed that people would be at a conference which she '*wanted to speak to, that I wouldn't get an opportunity to speak to because they are in other parts of the country*'. When asked to elaborate on this assumption she stated that '*it was a key conference for the sector, it was one of those that everybody came to, that if you wanted to know, you know, the updates for the sector, and it was being well promoted.*' Within the decision-making process the programme and knowledge of other attendees in presence, which could provide valuable networking opportunities, was stated to by the participants to be of great importance as the strong views on this element demonstrate.

Location and cost

Eliza's statement contains a key to another factor which is of importance within the decision-making process, albeit not as great as the others, the location. She wanted to utilise the opportunity to speak with people from other parts of the country because she explicitly mentioned that she mainly aimed to attend local events where she did not have to spend the night. There were however occasions when she found it worth to travel, albeit still within a reasonable driving distance:

> **Eliza [MC - Finance Manager]**: *sometimes I would push myself to travel, if it was a really good speaker, it was really worthwhile, and the potential for people to be there, might be useful [....] For me to go somewhere a bit more distant it has to meet some really high needs, something I really need to know about.*

The essence of the influence of the location was captured by Alexander: '*it does come into it but not, it is more what I can get from it academically, professionally, than it is the location*'. This view was irrelevant of the participants' profession or career stage with Warren explaining the common attitude: '*it's not like being on holiday; you do spend quite a lot of time sat inside a conference room*'. The location should however not be ignored because in the big scheme the overall conference design is connected, as Warren continues:

> **Warren [MC - Finance Director]**: *But it does help if it is, if it's... if you know it was going to be well-run and you are going to be well looked after, there will be nice food and it's a nice location then you are more amenable to go to... location is a factor. [...] you are more inclined to think "I'd like to go somewhere if it is somewhere... in the Indian Ocean rather than in Scunthorpe", but it wouldn't necessarily... it wouldn't be the difference between going and not going.*

In addition, Warren mentioned that it needed to be considered '*how easy is it to get there?*' This relates to the final factor to be discussed as a 'shallow' rationale, cost. The ease of getting there not only relates to financial cost but also time cost and both elements will be covered in this section. The cost factor was greatly influenced by the participants' career stage, contrary to the previously discussed 'shallow' rationale to attend: programme, other attendees, and location. Contradicting influences of financial and time cost were visible among the participants in their early career as opposed to those later in theirs, which is in line with previous discussion on opportunities to attend. Professionals in senior roles were more likely to receive invitations to attend or being told by their organisation that they should attend, however they were also less likely to have time to utilise for the attendance. The junior employees had to fight more for their funding, whilst having more time available for attending conferences. Warren, when looking back at the beginning of his career mentioned that '*you have to get... persuade someone to do that, to think it's worth paying money for you to go*'. In the following quote he begins with reminiscing back to his early career and ends with reflecting upon it from his current busy senior role's perspective:

> **Warren [MC - Finance Director]**: *if you're sensible yourself any way, then they think "actually this is something, as a business, we need to know about", I'm willing to go and often you find people are quite happy that you... you know, thankful that you're going so I don't then have to go. [...] It is really about weighing up the time, it is a day out of the office, and you think "well actually is that the best use of my time compared to whatever else I've got to do?"*

The pressure of workload was a significant factor mentioned by participants, meaning that even if financial funding was available the time might not. Laura confirmed Warren's view on the need to stay at the office to not fall behind with tasks when stating that '*people struggle to get to as many conferences because of workload pressures*'. In her case it however was not only time cost hindering her in attending but also financial restrictions and when asked if she needed to argue her case for a budget to attend, she replied:

> **Laura [MC - Lawyer]**: *More so than when I first started yes because we have more restrictive budgets. So, you would have to demonstrate what the reason is for you going. So, you would have to say is it an education purpose, is it a networking purpose, is it a combination of the two, is it about assessing competitor activity, you have to have a reason.*

A simple straightforward rationale for attending was introduced by Sheila, a self-employed consultant later in her career, as she tended '*to only go to conferences where I am either a speaker or it's free to attend [...] I don't put proposal forward for speaking, I get invited to speak so it is... which is a very nice position to be in.*' This privileged position contributed also to her views on the location of the conference as she stated that '*where it is really doesn't play a part in whether or not I attend any of them; it's really based on*

whether or not they got the right topic and speakers, and whether it's something that I'm interested in'. This position is not available for all as demonstrated by Laura above; it however demonstrated the limited effect location may have within the decision-making process.

Section summary

A key finding is that the conference design factors, inputs such as programme, prospective conference attendees in attendance and location had an influence on the professionals' decision-making process but surprisingly was not strongly influenced by the career stage. The influence of it became more apparent when viewing the total cost in terms of money and time as summarised in Table 30 below.

```
- Conference Design Factors
  o Programme
  o Other attendees
  o Location
- Total cost
  o Money
  o Time
    ▪ Workload pressure
```

Table 30 - Professionals' 'shallow' rationale for attending and factors affecting ability to attend

5.2.2.2. 'Deep' rationale - outcomes expected and factors affecting them

Once the 'shallow' rationale for attending resulted in a positive view towards the attendance the participants began to evaluate their decision based on 'deep' rationale, factors which related further to their expectations of outcomes from their attendance. These factors visibly altered over time as the early career participants did not emphasise the same factors as those later in their careers. These factors will be discussed in this section.

Influence of career stage

In the needs recognition section 5.2.1 Sam reflected upon how he had a need early in his career for networking with senior professionals in his area. Steve also reflected upon this when considering motivations to attend. At this early stage in their career the opportunity to build their profile and demonstrate ability early was viewed as an important feature of conference networking:

> **Steve [EC - IT]**: *Networking is the biggest, is the biggest event for me, having a look at different partners, what is out there and from a personal point of view, it is an easier way to go and speak to companies that you are also interested in going to see and speak to as well so, if you get your name well known within the companies then the next time that you are looking for a job...*

Another key in his statement was the motivation to experiencing *'what is out there'* as he continued explaining that it involved having *'a look at the emerging technology and what we could use moving forward'*. At this early career stage, in addition to profile building and gaining knowledge and ideas, it was also about building confidence in own ability as a professional. Sam discussed how this was the *'main driver'* for him to attend a large conference early on. He wanted to demonstrate that he could present in front of *'a large group of international peers and talk about my subject matter, you know, be it competently and confidently, and it was a little bit of a test of my own skills'*. The motivation of building or gaining confidence continued through the career, although it presented itself differently. Warren discussed how the learning could represent itself as a motivation to receive confirmation that his knowledge was up to date, providing a confidence boost:

> **Warren [MC - Finance Director]**: *a motivation for going to do that sort of thing is, you know, that you are probably going to get a good overview of what are the key issues in the industry, so you get a bit of comfort from the fact that you know if, if I've been to that, there probably isn't anything lurking that has passed me by.*

As people progressed in their career the motivations of learning and gaining knowledge continued and in Alexander's case it often arose from his curiosity and attitude towards learning:

> **Alexander [LC - Medical clinician and professor]**: *one of the things that I have been trying to do recently is to try to go to conferences where I don't have any background in that area, you know to learn new things, new area of research.*

He was using the conferences to expand his expertise and enhance professional productivity, going beyond gaining an overview and ideas for his work as he was becoming more targeted at specific knowledge. Through career progression it also became more important to the participants to actively utilise the networking opportunities to develop opportunities for collaboration. The participants who were working within the IT industry, or had done so, emphasised this more than other professionals. Sheila explained this as an opportunity to *'forge alliances with other users so that we could keep in touch with each other and make sure that we can bounce together'*. Steve recognised this by commenting that they wanted to *'liaise with people'* when they wanted to *'see if there are any resolutions that are out there'* when they were having a *'technology that is causing us problems at this moment in time'*. The view for them was therefore about providing and gaining support at the conferences.

Visibility

Many of the rationale mentioned which was influenced by the career stage involved being visible, such as building profile, demonstration of ability and reaching out for collaboration. Given that the participants argued further reasons for being visible it

became apparent that this rationale contributed in-depth during their decision-making process. Laura, the lawyer, viewed the networking as a means for her to be visible whilst communicating and selling her services; in addition, the visibility of others allowed her to observe the competition:

> **Laura [MC - Lawyer]**: *opportunity individually and I suppose collectively to create, establish new contacts and build on existing contacts and strengthen those relationships. [...] business development really with the professionals who would be our target audience who may potentially be work referrers for us [...] if there were other law firms likely to be at a conference I would want to go to see who is there, erm... if there are stands you know what kind of marketing, advertising tools are they using so, just to monitor that activity in the marketplace [...] to be there to make sure if other competitors are there that we are there profiling our expertise.*

The increased visibility as a distinct expected outcome emerged intensively when viewing the consultants, lawyer and participants in senior positions. Eliza viewed her attendance when working as a consultant as '*soft promotion activity*' and explained that when working freelance '*you've got to, got to wear your shoe leather out in terms of being seen, knowing people*'. The benefits expected were projects coming her way; this selling point of view was also noticeable in Laura's case:

> **Laura [MC - Lawyer]**: *profile raising of the firm, to help to build our brand in the marketplace, and as a [manager] we are leaders of the business, so we try to be visible in the marketplace, so people can see that we are leading and profiling the firm out there.*

The view of the manager not only being seen, but also projecting an image of being supportive and available, was important for the participants in senior roles. Carly was practicing this at a later stage in her career '*I'll go to some local ones if they are doing a topic that I've got of interest or if it's a peer that is doing something, so I go to support them*'. Warren commented that it was '*hard to get round all the offices*' therefore attending conferences was '*a chance to, just to meet people, and to you know, so that they know you and you know them*'.

There were also negative aspects to the visibility which could contribute to a decision not to attend a conference. In section 5.2.1 Carly mentioned the numerous invites she received to attend various paid for conferences which she considered from an ethical perspective:

> **Carly [LC - IT Manager]**: *Most of them I don't go to for the very simple reason you can compromise your personal integrity, so if you are seen to take a lot of freebies off suppliers like, you know, meals and drinks and then you buy their services it doesn't reflect well so I tend not to go to... I tend not go to that many.*

Section summary

A key finding within this section is that the outcomes expected and desired were often surrounding improved knowledge by gaining and sharing ideas leading to collaborations of different levels depending upon the profession and career stage. The 'deep' rationale emerged as intangible and largely related to long-term outcomes as is evident in Table 31 below.

- Influence of career stage
  - Earlier:
    - Build profile
    - Demonstrate ability
    - Gain ideas and knowledge
  - Later:
    - Gain specific knowledge
    - Expand expertise
    - Enhance productivity
    - Develop opportunities for collaborations
    - Providing and gaining support
  - Gain up to date knowledge
- Visibility leading to outcomes:
  - Sales
  - Collaboration
  - Increased visibility
  - Managers seen as supportive and available
  - Possible negative perceptions of attendees' integrity

Table 31 - Professionals' 'deep' rationale considered for attending conferences

Following the contemplation of the various factors within the decision-making process a decision was made at this point whether to attend or not. The following section outlines the professionals' behaviour towards the preparation for attending a conference.

5.2.3. Decision to attend - preparation for attendance

The participants all engaged with some form of preparations although their level of preparation varied. The minimum preparation involved the travel and accommodation arrangements. Most of the professionals however demonstrated a deeper level of involvement in line with their expected outcomes, often related to potential collaborations, problem-solving and showcasing of expertise with the aim of future sales.

This meant that they familiarised themselves in-depth with the programme, speakers, and delegates, if there was a delegate list available before the conference. Sheila discussed her reasons for this:

> **Sheila [LC - Consultant]**: *I do look at the speakers and I look at the topics that they are going to speak on and I look up the speakers in advance so if I don't know who they are I'll look them up on the Internet and find out something about them that will tell me whether or not they are going to be interesting to me and whether I'm going to learn anything from them.*

For Sheila it therefore was about learning whereas Carly emphasised that she *'will arrange before I go there to meet at certain times for coffee'* and to be able to do so she would *'do my research before I go so I know exactly who is there and I know who I wanna go and see'*. This demonstrates how she organised to increase the likelihood of beneficial outcomes from the attendance and this was emphasised by Laura and Eliza who both were using them to gain business. Laura mentioned that *'we would try and have a think about who is it we want to engage with, what is it that we want out of that conversation?'*. Eliza emphasised that this was carried out because they wanted to use the *'time to best effect, so if you could target people in the room that you wanted to speak'*.

Figure 19 demonstrates their actions during the preparation ranging from arranging logistics concerning the travel to arrange meetings during the conference. The next step in their conference journey is their experience during the conference itself, which will be discussed in the following section.

Engagement with preparation

Arrange meetings

Familiarisation with programme, speaker and attendees

Travel and Accommodation Arrangements

Decide what to attend
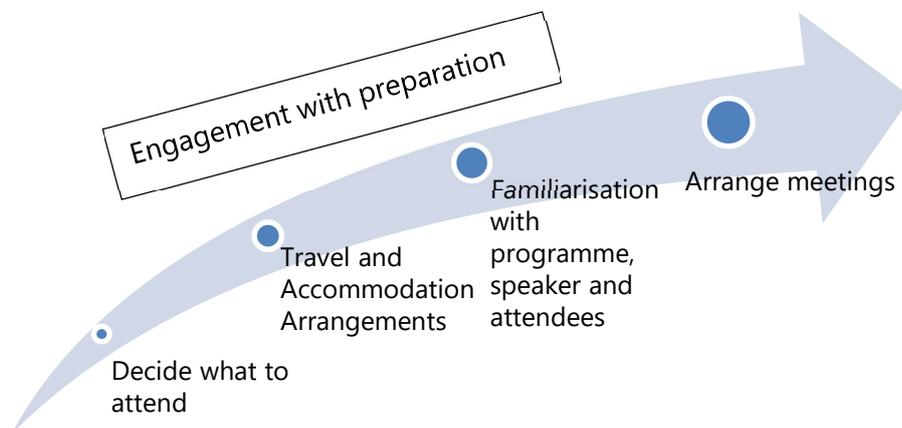
Figure 19 - Professionals' engagement with preparations for conference attendance

5.3. Experiences

The overall experiences during the individual conferences followed the same path for the professionals as for the academics demonstrated in Figure 18 and repeated below in Figure 20. The framework was developed based on the findings presented in this chapter as well as in chapter four. This section will outline the professionals' experiences within the identified six experience steps. Despite the steps within the experience being the

same six steps and in the same order for professionals and academics they were experienced differently. The professionals' story will be told within this chapter beginning with their experience of the location, venue, and food and beverages followed by the five further steps. The two journeys will be compared and discussed in the beginning of chapter six.
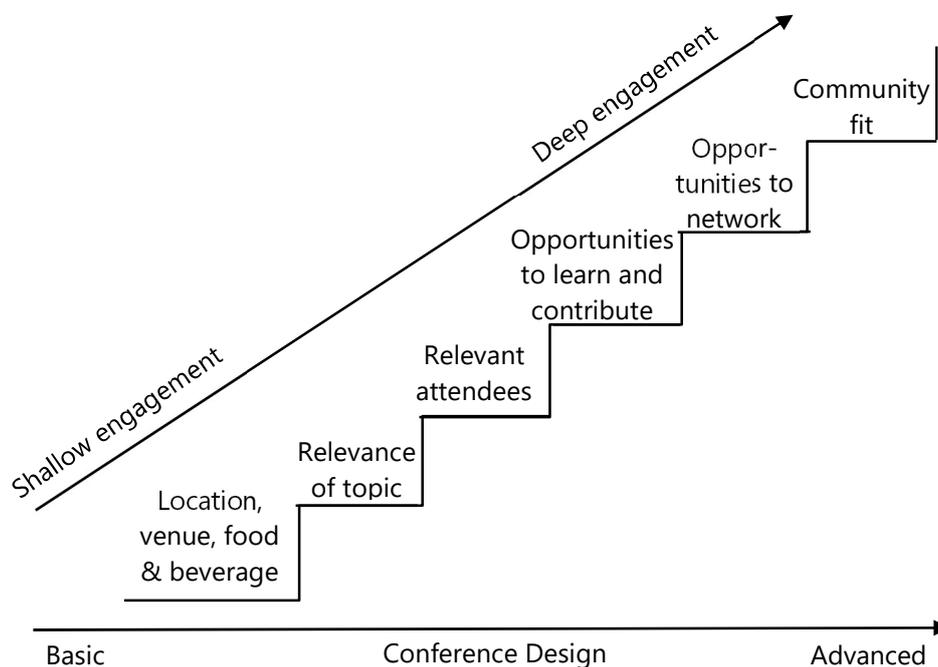
Figure 20 - Conference experience

5.3.1. Location, venue, food and beverage (F&B)

The location of the conference did influence the experience albeit on a limited scale when the other factors of the experience were in accordance or beyond expectations. The career stage and profession were identified to not contribute a significant difference to the experience relating to the environment and setting. When the *'best thing'* about the conference was found to be the location, like for Anne in one of her experiences, it often indicated that other elements of the experience were disappointing. Anne did make the most of it by walking *'around urban street and looked at everything and had a good time'* although she was *'disappointed'* that her expected networking did not materialise despite her *'level of visibility as a speaker'*.

The main influence of the destination on the experience was the tone of the discussion; the professionals who had experienced conferences in two or more continents underpinned this. Sheila explained that this was because '*the topics are different because the different regions have their different focuses*' even for the case she referred to - a conference series with the same host. She continued by remarking that in the region where her professional area was emerging the need for conferences was greater because the profession was still evolving. A common view amongst the participants was that the conferences they had experienced in North America generally were on a larger scale and the conversations were more honest and less conservative than in Europe. Carly discussed why she had a positive experience of a conference hosted in North America:

> **Carly [LC - IT Manager]**: *That was an amazing conference I have to say, because the Americans know how to do it. […] the Chief Exec of the organisation speaks, you get to have lots of best practice clinics, there are loads of things you can drop in, you can go and meet lots of other organisations that use the IT system from around the world, so you're getting really different perspectives. […] And they know how to celebrate, they have a party on the last night which is part of the unbelief […] it was fantastic to hear how people from different parts of the world were approaching things.*

An interesting spin to her appraisal of this conference was that she struggled to remember exactly in which location it was. When asked about the location she replied: '*in, errrrmmm Kentucky, not Kentucky, where is it? Can't remember where it was now… it was in the States, errrmmm, so I went to the conference, Kansas, that's it! Kansas*' – demonstrating one of the key findings that the destination region was more influential than the exact location. The other main findings regarding this step, as outlined in Table 32, were how the location influenced the tone within the conference, the limited influence of career stage and if other experience factors were experienced poorly the location, venue and food and beverage influenced stronger.

- Limited influence from career stage
- Heavier influence when other conference factors deliver poor experience
- Destination continent influences tone

Table 32 - Professionals' experience with the location, venue, food and beverage

5.3.2. Relevance of topic

The professionals did not emphasise the conference topic much whilst narrating their experiences during the conferences which was in line with their discourse of the decision-making process. This did not mean that it was of limited importance; rather it was an indication that they did not experience a feeling of being out of place. The industry conferences' programmes were generally clear on their overall topic and the participants knew what topic area they were aiming for. Their extensive research prior to attending

also contributed to this view. There were however examples of the topic being so specific that the participants were not interested enough to pay attention, or they just found it challenging to keep up like in Sam's case:

> **Sam [MC – Chartered Engineer]**: *sometimes about as technical as it gets really in terms of [his area of] science. So, you know, you just about cling on to your fingertips trying to follow what they are saying and understand what they're talking about and I've got a fairly technical background, but you know sometimes you do get a bit lost ((laughs)).*

The short length of this thesis section demonstrates how the professionals in general attended conferences where the topic was of relevance to them, greatly supported by research during the decision-making process. The key factors experienced are demonstrated in Table 33 below.

- Topic generally experienced as very relevant
- The topic could be very specific

Table 33 - Professionals' experience with the relevance of topic

The generally positive experience of the relevance of the topic allowed them to be more receptive and engage in more depth with the next step, relevant attendees, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.3. Relevant attendees

The 'deep' rationale for the professionals to attend conferences emphasised the networking opportunities and these brought with them the greatest outcomes, given that the fellow conference attendees were appropriate and relevant for this purpose. The relevance of the fellow attendees could be from various perspectives, for example for Sheila this could be because of their ability to provide her with business. Another element referred to in relation to them being appropriate was likeminded-ness as discussed by Steve when stating a reason for his continuous positive experience of a reoccurring conference he attended, *'purely for the fact that you are with like-minded people with problems and issues that you have had'*. He continued to discuss how the relevant attendees brought more benefits to his experience.

> **Steve [EC - IT]**: *I get a lot more out of those sessions because they are real world end users experiences that people are having and people have had issues with and are... are wanting to get to the bottom of it and that one was really good, it was really useful.*

It was an external conference Steve was reviewing and the professionals were unified in this view. In relation to internal organisation conferences there was less agreement depending upon their career stage and even more on their profession and role. Warren, a director within his organisation, found for example internal conferences of great

importance because as previously discussed they gave him the opportunity to be visible and meet colleagues from other offices, whereas Sam who held a technical role found them less important:

> **Sam [MC – Chartered Engineer]**: *That loses, I think, some of the real key benefits of what I call proper conferences which aren't just limited to one company because you know I find that industry conferences and academic conferences tend to provide the opportunity to mix in with some other people that you just don't get in your day to day professional life where you just work with the same kind of people in the same environment in the same company.*

This demonstrates the effect of the profession as Sam aimed to gain external new knowledge to improve his practices as a chartered engineer whereas Warren sought those opportunities through other channels. The internal conferences were opportunities for him to be visible within his organisation and to network with colleagues based in other offices.

The mix in attendees was identified not only in terms of internal and external but also in terms of responsibilities and seniority. Carly reflected upon a poor experience regarding this:

> **Carly [LC - IT Manager]**: *this particular conference was a mixture of all levels and it didn't work well. Because they were trying to inform and communicate to all different levels and so it just got too broad and too high level [...], I just didn't think it worked well because it was just such a mix of people there, of different levels of responsibility.*

The event creators in this case therefore had marketed this conference to professionals too broadly and were not able to deliver content in accordance to promises. The professionals hence were not in agreement on who the appropriate attendees were, but corresponding to them experiencing the relevant topic they agreed that they mostly experienced relevant attendees considering their expectations as is summarised in Table 34.

- Could provide business
- Like-minded
- External conferences in general had relevant attendees
- Internal conferences had more relevant attendees to managers
- The message needed to be adapted to the attendees to make them relevant

Table 34 - Professionals' experience with the relevant attendees

The generally positive experience of the relevance of the attendees allowed them to be more receptive and engage in more depth with the next step, opportunities to learn, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.4. Opportunities to learn

The variety of the professions of the professionals participating in the research allowed for an interpretation of a wide range of opportunities to learn at conferences. These various approaches to learning will be detailed within this section following a synopsis of the professionals' common experiences concerning opportunities to learn. An attribute frequently mentioned as a strong influencer towards the experience during the conference was speakers' presentation skills. Given that the speakers were often paid large sums of money for their contribution to the conference attended by professionals, expectations of their presentations were generally high. Warren spoke of two contrasting experiences of speakers – firstly a speaker had been highly spoken of and '*on paper was excellent*'; the experience was however not in accordance to expectations: '*she was the worst presenter I have ever seen […] she just picked up a sheet of paper and literally read it in front of hundreds of people*'. This then led to limited learning for the audience:

> **Warren [MC - Finance Director]**: *you are almost so distracted by how appalling the presentation was that you didn't really listen to what they had to say. […] instead of it provoking lots of questions, which actually can add an awful lot to something, that in itself… but because of people were just sort of stunned out so there were one or two polite questions afterwards, that was it.*

Sheila had a similar experience where the speaker '*didn't engage with us at all he just stood there at the podium, behind the podium and talked at us for half an hour*' which led to her '*just zone him out and just look at the slides*'. Her inability to focus on his spoken words because of poor presentation style affected her opportunity to learn which she was not prepared to forego. She therefore '*decided that actually this guy was an expert in his field and so I needed to make an effort*' and this did pay off as '*when I was able to force myself to concentrate on what he was saying, it was useful information that I did need*'. Warren's contrasting experience was when the speaker did not '*just impart information*' meaning that he '*really did get you to think*'. The outcomes from that particular presentation were then also opposites to the previous as Warren spoke of '*certain takeaways from that, that really sort of have stuck with*' him and his mindset was different as he thought '*brilliant I must do something*' and engaged on it. Although the speakers were engaging and with good presentation skills, the professionals agreed that their overall attention span was limited as articulated by Steve:

> **Steve [EC - IT]**: *you can't concentrate that long over that short a period of time, just to start at 8 o'clock in the morning and finish at 6 o'clock at night*

and have 15 different sessions, throughout the day, and try... information overload.

He mentioned this whilst referring to his first large conference experience where he made an effort to attend everything, but he learnt that it was not feasible and productive in the long run. This led him to '*be selective as what you what you want to go and have a look at*' because he experienced that he needed to '*have that time to reflect and make the notes while they are in your mind*'. At this early stage in their career they were not only learning the ropes at the conference but also gaining ideas and new knowledge for their day to day work which developed like Warren mentioned: '*as you get more experienced, you are more... you are more likely to not worry about... you can see more of what you are hearing... you can set it in context'*. The more experienced conference attendees were also more likely to discuss different conference designs when reflecting upon their opportunities to learn.

Warren has already given two examples of speeches, one where the speaker did not interact with the audience and another where the speaker interacted greatly and made the audience think about their own practices. Carly in addition mentioned a good learning experience as speakers had been brought in *'from abroad'* where the expertise was further developed since the conference was about *'best practice, errmm, leading the way, so it is learning from exemplar sites about what's the art of the possible and the challenges that they had along the way'*. It was important to the professionals to be able to learn from best practice – it was also important to learn directly from the key professionals within their field. In Eliza's case this concerned often interpretations of legislations to *'have the horse's mouth'* which was able to *'give you a really good interpretation of some of the documents that, sometimes written in language that is not great to explain exactly what is going on'*. With the limited concentration the participants found it useful to have alternatives to listening to speakers as Carly discusses:

> **Carly [LC - IT Manager]**: *Some of those workshops, I think they just do it to break up the presentations and stop people getting bored, so... I quite liked doing those... if you're going to come out with an action plan at the end of it, somebody is going to do something useful with it so you're actually able to learn by talking to somebody who has done something you are particular interested in. I kind of quite like those.*

Another alternative was attending the exhibitions. Alexander explained the importance of them for him as in the exhibition hall he could learn about and experience '*new products that [he] could use for [his] patients*'. Sam explained his view on the exhibitions: *'people are paying to get together and talk and learn and in return they [the exhibitors] provide an advert, you know of the company services they are providing'* allowing for new learning.

The learning might however not always come from the spoken words but through the attendees' interpretation. Eliza referred to this as '*being able to listen and absorb the*

opinion in the room and the feeling of "is this going to work?", "Is it not?", kind of'. Conversations with fellow attendees as well as with speakers following presentations could also prove rich in learning opportunities and Sheila had positive accumulated experience of this.

> **Sheila [LC - Consultant]**: *I find that people are incredibly generous with their time, particularly when you are talking about a topic that is close to their heart and something that they know a lot about it is a good opportunity to give them an opportunity to show off what they know.*

The key findings regarding the opportunities professionals perceived to learn frequently from all originated within the delivery of the conference design as summarised in Table 35 below.

- Influence of career stage:
  - o The more experienced attendees can more easily set learning in context
- Influence of conference design:
  - o Influence of speakers´ skills
  - o Varied sessions enhanced learning
  - o Must have space to reflect to maximise learning
- Limited attention span

Table 35 - Professionals' experience with the opportunities to learn

A positive experience made them more likely to have a deeper engagement and more constructive experience at the next step within the experience, the relevant opportunities to network, which will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.5. Opportunities to network

The networking at the conference was for many professionals the element which enhanced the learning the most and brought with it prospects for collaborations. The networking opportunities were however provided and accessed differently. They depended not only upon the participants' career stage but many times also on if they were attending on their own or with colleagues. Attending with colleagues brought a certain degree of a comfort zone as well as opportunities to get to know colleagues and the projects they are working on better. In addition to providing information, and a comfort zone when attending with colleagues, it gave an opportunity for introductions which Anne discussed she did not have when attending a particular conference on her own:

> **Anne [EC - Consultant]**: *I didn't know anyone, and I didn't even know where to begin a conversation, I didn't know who the people were, and... I mean usually when you go, you would go with, you know, another colleague or something or somebody who knew somebody who was speaking or something like that, but I had just no direct connections or even really secondary connections to anyone.*

Anne had this experience early in her career following completion of her PhD studies, however even for experienced conference attendees this feeling could occur. Sheila attended a conference early in her second career and felt that it was '*quite intimidating actually the first time*'. Various reasons lay behind this, most originating from inexperience within the area; '*everybody did seem to know everybody else and I was a new [role], so I didn't know the topic, I didn't know the people, I was in [the city] for the first time, didn't know anybody*'. This led to the experience being '*really really scary*'. Through career development the conference networking advanced as their confidence increased, and they had more knowledge within their field as well as being more widely known. Sheila demonstrated this matured outlook on her networking at similar conferences to the one discussed above:

> **Sheila [LC - Consultant]**: *it's a great opportunity to meet people, to meet up with old friends and also to meet new people. So, what I tend to do with these things is I look out for people who look timid, lonely, quiet on their own and I just go talk to them. Because it's not easy if you're not an outgoing person it's not easy to attend these things so I go and deliberately look for those people who look uncomfortable and go and try and put them at their ease. And I've met some really interesting people by doing that, some of whom have become friends and some who haven't, but probably because they are timid and boring people ((laughs)).*

This demonstrates that she at this later career stage made an effort to take the burden off the newcomer to initiate the conversation. Alexander mentioned a similar approach as he had gained '*the confidence to go and you know meet people*'. Further participants discussed the difficulties in initiating conversations but when they had a purpose for the conversation this was eased. This purpose was often not only provided through their rationale for attending but also through event creators' efforts to enhance networking. Anne emphasised this facilitation when stating that '*I am by myself all the time, so if there isn't some sort of facilitation for like getting people out of their little clicks to network, then it's not going to happen*'. Laura often perceived this as well and discussed a positive experience of facilitation:

> **Laura [MC - Lawyer]**: *they split people up into groups and they just gave you 10 minutes to talk within your groups about who you were, introduce yourself, try and explore areas of common ground, and then you kind of move on, it was almost like speed dating or speed networking, and I think*

they are quite valuable because it exposes you to more people than you would ever have been able to kind of get around on your own I think. [...] it gives you that reason to be asking questions in a small group and you know just over a course of 5 or 10 minutes and if you identified somebody that you think you have got common ground with [...] So that is quite good just as a really quick touch point to see who you might want to engage with at another time on a kind of deeper level.

The benefits she gained from this facilitation were a conversation starter and the introduction needed. Another less facilitated opportunity provided by the event creators which many participants found useful was the networking within the social programme, in particular dinner and drinks opportunities. Laura mentioned that '*dinner is a great opportunity because you have got a longer period of time in which to engage with people*'. It was not only the additional time for networking which provided the networking opportunities but for many did the served alcohol provide help. Sheila discussed how a glass of wine could function as an ice breaker, '*you hold a glass of wine and go around and talk to people, you don't have to drink it, it's all social convention*'. The alcohol during the social sessions could change the tone in the conversations, for the professionals this surrounded the conversations becoming more honest as discussed by Steve:

> **Steve [EC - IT]**: *so obviously the wine had been flowing so there were a lot more open and honest conversations [...] unfortunately through alcohol it is, people can have those honest conversations whereas before they are probably always a little bit erm... guarded of what is being said and done. [...] I think there was a lot of people that were saying lots of things that they probably wouldn't have said otherwise.*

The alcohol therefore could provide both positive effects in terms of easier and more relaxed networking but also negative effects such as words said, which perhaps should have been unsaid, and it could also result in poorer attendance the day after. Warren discussed how the event creators needed to get the '*balance right*' because otherwise people '*get carried away and are still in bed at 10 o'clock the following morning*'. Overall the networking intensified the experience. Carly emphasised this when discussing a reoccurring conference, she attended because '*the best thing about that [conference] is the networking that we do because we meet with colleagues from the other end of the country and normally we wouldn't get that opportunity*'. The networking then led to her being able to '*touch base with people who might be doing similar things or have similar challenges and you or they've done things that you would like to try*'.

The key finding within this section is that the professionals perceived the networking as an important element of the experience during the conference as it could take the learning to a higher level and invite prospects for collaboration. It however did not come easy for many and there were different experiences depending upon if they were attending with colleagues or on their own as summarised in Table 36. It also illustrates

the influence of alcohol on the networking and how event creators played a large role in strategically providing networking opportunities.

- The networking takes learning to the next level
- Invites opportunities for collaborations
- Attending individually:
    o Can be scary and intimidating
    o Previous experience leads to supporting behaviour and effort to initiate conversations to those attending individually
- Attending with colleagues:
    o Comfort zone provided
    o Opportunity for introductions
	- Event creators have a responsibility to provide strategically created environment for networking opportunities
	- Influence of alcohol
	    o Conversation starter
	    o Conversations could be more honest
	    o Can have a negative influence on attendance

Table 36 - Professionals' experience with the opportunities to network

A positive experience made them more likely to have a deeper engagement and more constructive experience at the next step within the experience, fitting into the conference community, which will be discussed in the following and final section of the professionals' experience at the conference.

5.3.6. Community fit

Having positively experienced all the steps within the experience ladder, the participants were more receptive to experiencing a community fit. Sheila previously discussed how she had gained friends at conferences, in particular at conference series, and it was during these instances when she felt part of the community. The community did not always have to solely be formed at the conference it could be initiated because of a need. That kind of community could however be strengthened by coming together at a conference. Steve experienced this as he noticed that *'there is a strong community that wants to help out each other'*. He found that *'bringing them all [the frustrated people] together with different subsets is, is proving to be useful'*. When attending conferences, he experienced the community and the benefits of building the community.

> **Steve [EC - IT]**: *it is always good to be able to say right well we have had this issue, well how did you resolve it, well we resolved it like this, or we resolved it like that and there is a lot of people going about and wanting to help each other and the networking and everything else is really good at these events where there are open and honest conversations that go on between erm... the people that have had the problems.*

Internal conferences for the staff members of a certain organisation may also serve the same purpose as Warren had experienced:

Warren [MC - Finance Director]: *the most I get from that [the internal conference] is that intangible feeling like, it gives the business a bit of a boost. Because people come away from that sort of energised thinking "I'm part of something and I understand what it is that we're trying to do". And you know there is always a good... a good vibe comes out of it, and just, it is a great way to meet as many people around the business as you can. So even if you didn't do as much of the what did I learn from it, that... the networking, the introductory side and the intangible, feeling part of something, I think it's the... it's probably right up there in terms of the key benefits of doing it.*

Warren therefore experienced a strong community feel within the conference which he interpreted as an intangible outcome from the attendance and he continued to feel part of the community within the organisation. Not all research participants however felt the conference community feel, Laura for example mentioned that: *'sometimes what I find with these conferences is, people just kind of huddle in groups of people that they know, and it is quite difficult to break into those groups if you are not known to them'*. Anne narrated at length the story of a conference experience she had as an early professional following the completion of her PhD studies. She began her story by stating that certain behaviour was expected of her within these types of conference *'you wear certain things to certain events, you know this is what you do when you go to this kind of place'*. Her overall experience story of this conference is presented in Table 37.

Anne [EC - Consultant]: *I had picked out an outfit to wear that I thought would be appropriate, because I thought "oh, you know this looks like maybe more of a dressie uppie thing", you know in general, what do I know. And my boots broke, like you know the heel of my boot just kind of broke because I had been walking so much and so I had to wear just some street clothes to go because I didn't have anything else packed and it ended up being like everyone has like matching purses and boots and like seriously fancy, all this make up and I'm just like, oh my gosh. You know, but I'm like, oh well, you know what, I paid, this was expensive, it's a day thing, I'm going to be here and I'm just going to listen and I'm going to eat the food, you know, and there is a really cool speaker.*

The keynote speaker was the reason I wanted to go [...]. And the coolest thing, it was like serendipitous, I was just deflated by the second break because they have speaker, speaker, speaker, break, you know "have some coffee, have some tea". And, errmmm... I was by myself, so I didn't know anybody, I didn't really have any avenue to introduce myself without being super awkward and so I was feeling really like, wow.

But anyway, they had a lunch break and I was... I was just feeling like, urgh I just want to leave but I'm going to stay, and the food looks nice but they didn't have any places for people to really sit except for outside and it was really cold and crappy outside and I was like, "oh well I'll go" and there was like an empty table so I just went and sat and

> *the keynote speaker Mr [...] he came and he was like "may I sit here?" And I was like "yeah, yeah", you know, like super awkward. But ermm... he sat down, and I ended up having lunch with him and I got to talk to him for like half an hour. So, he gave me his card and, you know, we did the whole card exchange thing which I had never done before, to be honest never, and said, "wow you know that sounds so cool what you're doing". [...] So, I was talking to this guy about it [her work] and he ermm was like "ohh, wow that sounds cool, yeah, let's..." and so yeah we have been emailing and we are setting up a Skype date, it hasn't happened yet but... So, **in terms of a conference going from epic fail to extremely awesome in a very short amount of time, that was a good example**. Because I was like wow, [...] I feel at this point in my career that I should be more interactive, and if I'm going to a conference I want to be participating on a level above just sitting there listening you know, especially if it is expensive. And that was not happening that day.*
>
> *[...] by the end of the day I was like, "everybody's jealous because I am hanging out with that guy, in my sneakers and you can be all fancy with your Gucci or whatever". And he, [name] speaker, there were two main speakers, and the [other] speaker came and sat down next to him so we all had lunch towards the end and I was just like, you know, talk about you know keep up your confidence. **It was pretty amazing.***

Table 37 - Anne's conference experience within a specific single journey

Anne's story demonstrated all the steps within the experience ladder, from good food, relevant topic, learning and networking opportunities, to the community which she did not fit into as she struggled to access the networking opportunities leading to a community fit. Through chance at lunchtime she, however, managed to convert a poor experience into a strong positive experience with outcomes, which will be discussed further within the following section. An experience Carly had sums up how limited relevance of topic, poor delivery, irrelevant attendees, few opportunities to learn and network, led to the emotion boring and limited outcomes:

> **Carly [LC - IT Manager]**: *I had to go to a national conference and it was the most boring conference I've ever been to in my life, people talking at you, there wasn't any two-way stuff, it was just... and actually everything they taught, talked about with us I already knew so... I was just sitting there thinking "well, this is a long way to come..." and to be honest we didn't have any real networking opportunities. And it was quite a mixed audience.*

In summary this section has demonstrated how when the attendees felt part of the conference community, they were more likely to develop friendships. Communities coming together at conferences, such as during internal conferences for organisations or supporting communities, can be strengthened during the experience. For those attendees however who have not been part of the community before the conference they may experience being outsiders to the conference community and therefore

experience it negatively. Further findings on the community fit are summarised in Table 38.

- Highest level of engagement when feeling part of the conference community
- Increased likelihood to develop friendships
- Communities can be strengthened at conferences
- Internal conferences could provide a feeling of belonging to the organisation
- Difficulties to feel belonging when not able to enter groups
- Influence of 'unspecified dress code'
- Influence of conference design

Table 38 - Professionals' experience with the community fit

This concludes the experiences during the conference. The following section will discuss the attendees' post-conference experience which could involve developing outcomes.

5.4. Outcome

Following the conference experience, the professionals demonstrated a high degree of proactiveness in terms of developing their outcomes, which was in line with their involvement with preparations before their conference attendance. This was also in accordance to the expectations they had from their attendance, often surrounding expanding their network and improving their practices, for many including increased sales or gaining new projects. The proactiveness became more apparent as the professionals progressed in their career which will be demonstrated later in this section. The remainder of this section is structured like section 4.4 beginning with experiential assets, followed by opportunities and concluded with tangible outcomes as the professionals demonstrated alike patterns in outcome development as the academics.

Experiential assets

Early in their career the outcomes sought were often '*just simple things of knowledge and insights really*' as explained by Eliza when looking back. More complex assets emphasised a larger network as previously discussed in Sam's case. The building of relationship achieved at conferences led to benefits of a larger network in terms of enhancing the career build at this early stage, as Steve discussed contacts he kept from a conference experience which was about seeing '*if there is anything that they can do for us, in relation to moving forward or doing some work for them either now or in the future*'. His expectations were in line with previous discussion on getting his name out there for the next time he looks for a job. However, during the early career stage expectations may sometimes prove too high as was the case for Anne:

> **Anne [EC - Consultant]**: *that [conference experience] didn't end up being that great. You know, I thought it would be networking and once I'd spoke*

people will be like "wow" and then maybe there would be someone interested in talking about a job and they never really turned up.

In addition to gaining knowledge and insight within their area of expertise, conference experiences could also assist in providing deeper understanding of workplaces when attending with new colleagues. Steve found this vital for him during a conference experience early in his employment with a new organisation as it became a *'key, to getting a background as to what had happened, when and with who'*. This new insight did not *'really help [him] in [his] role, but it certainly helped [him] understand the politics and the issues that had been undertaken'* – demonstrating the importance of the experiential assets of the conference attendance. Warren also strongly emphasised the intangible benefits of attending conferences, in particular those internal to the organisation he was working for – *'it's not just what you hear when you there, it's just part of, feeling like you are part of the organisation'*. In addition to gaining the impression of inclusion it also gave access to a deeper level of understanding of the various activities and responsibilities within the global organisation.

> **Warren [MC - Finance Director]**: *you don't really understand the nuts and bolts of what goes on elsewhere and you certainly don't know, you know if you got a client query or something like that, someone else might be able to help with it, who would you pick up the phone to? So just to broaden your knowledge of other areas of the business and be able to put names to faces and things like that there is a definite benefit from that.*

Opportunities

Having met someone at the conference simplified the process of contacting them following the conference. For those professionals who were aiming to further sales following their attendance this opportunity was crucial and Laura took active steps towards this through '*debrief with our sales and marketing representative'* in order to '*agree who is going to follow up with whom'*. This was achievable as through their conference attendance the contacts could be *'seeing you as a credible person'* as a consequence of *'meeting you face-to-face and that builds trust'* as interpreted by Eliza. They both agreed that this trust and credibility could lead to them being more likely to recommend their services to their extended network. This was also backed up by Alexander when discussing outcomes; *'what can come from it is knowing that person, and that opens up doors for you in so many other areas as well'*. Eliza, however, commented on the long timeframe to realise these outcomes:

> **Eliza [MC - Finance Manager]**: *say if you have won a client, you don't get them next week, you get them six months / a year down the line, so the outcome is framed in a long period of time not necessarily instantly.*

These assets in form of intangible knowledge and enlarged networks could lead to opportunities in terms of new projects or jobs; they, however, did not happen by

themselves. Those further along their career were extremely aware of this and proactively made an effort to gain assets and develop them into opportunities. Carly mentioned that attendees needed to *'make the effort to go and talk to the right people'* although she was conscious that this ability *'comes with practice and experiences and not being afraid to push yourself forward'*. Alexander also demonstrated this proactivity through his approach to attending conferences and his approach following the attendance:

> **Alexander [LC - Medical clinician and professor]**: *I have a policy, that every time I go to a conference, I have to come back with a new piece of knowledge that is going to change what I do. You know try, sometimes it doesn't work but I try to do that. [...] And act on it really quickly because give it another week and it has gone. [...] if you procrastinate you keep saying "well, I don't know whether we should do this", and you know because then you lose the enthusiasm so you have got to take action pretty quickly and so if I don't take action quickly, then I erm... then it doesn't happen because then you, you lose a little bit of interest and after a while and then it is less exciting, doesn't appear so exciting and you think oh I have got lots of other things to do [...] then you have taken the first step that is sometimes the hardest. And then you move forward.*

Tangible outcomes

Carly and Alexander's approaches have provided many tangible outcomes, some of which are demonstrated in Table 39. They had as leaders within their organisations encouraged early career employees to utilise these practices and demonstrate outcomes through presentations when returning from conferences.

Alexander [LC - Medical clinician and professor]:	- Following learning about a current research on an innovative medical approach at a conference he introduced this at the hospital he was working at. This approach was adopted, one of the first hospitals in the world doing so, and this is still practiced at the hospital and on a world-wide base. - He initiated a MSc project following gaining new knowledge at a conference.
Carly [LC - IT Manager]:	- At a conference she sat next to the MD of one of her major suppliers which led to her organisation being the first in the country to adopt a particular IT system. The major outcome from the encounter was that they received it for very little money; everybody else paid *'probably 30, 40 times'* what they paid for it. - She met an expert within the field who she invited to her organisation resulting in them carrying out work together. This included having a workshop day where the contact brought in their products and further specialist expert.

Table 39 - The development of outcomes by professionals

Sheila with her vast conference experience over three different careers listed her three main outcomes from attending conferences as being 1) *'opportunities to network and meet new friends as well as old ones'*, 2) *'a showcase to enable people to understand the variety of things that I can do for them',* and 3) *'it brings work in directly'.* For her, as for Alexander and Carly, this did not happen automatically without inputs on her behalf, in fact she meticulously outlined a rigorous chain of action she followed when returning from a conference which is illustrated in Figure 21.
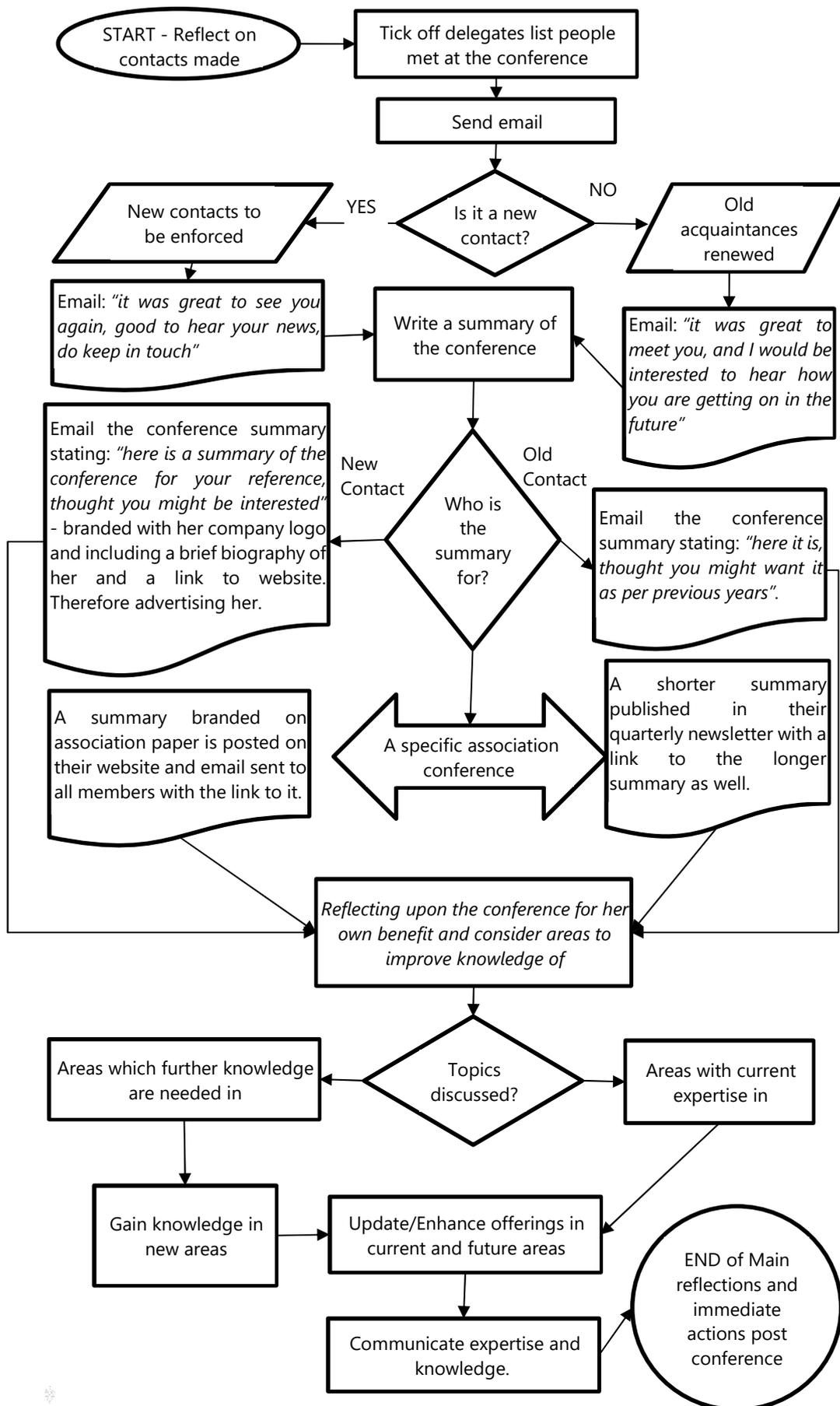
Figure 21 - Flowchart of Sheila's actions following conference attendance

These extensive actions Sheila engaged with contributed to her gaining *'some really good friendships over the years from those and we definitely stay in touch on a regular basis'*. Her attendances at conference have also contributed to her ability to '*understand my own work better*'.

Section summary

This section is completed with a summary provided by Carly on benefits and outcomes from attending conferences:

> **Carly [LC - IT Manager]:** *I find [conferences] very valuable, something to go out and reflect, [..] I find... on the whole they are a very very positive experience and I do find that I get an awful lot out of [them ...] you don't get a chance to do what I call "Horizon scanning and thinking" quite often you are just "Reacting and Dealing". So one of the advantages of doing the conferences it makes me thinking of things in a different way, you know, how people have approached things so I come away quite often invigorated and enthusiastic to carry on and do some more innovative things; not just to get bogged down in the day to day stuff.*

Throughout this section it has been revealed how the professional participants develop tangible and intangible experiential assets, opportunities and longer-term outcomes from their conference attendance. This is achieved through effort both on the attendee's behalf as well as the event creator. The factors for the different categories are demonstrated in Table 40.

Experiential Assets

Increased knowledge
New insights
Larger network
Visibility
Deeper understanding of own workplace
Feeling part of own organisation

Opportunities

Confidence to follow up with new contacts
Credible image and trust established - increased likelihood of recommendations
Sales / Projects in the future
Ability to act on new knowledge

Outcomes

New projects
New clients
Increased sales
Friendship

Table 40 - Professionals' experiential assets, opportunities and outcomes developed from the conference attendance

5.5. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has narrated the professionals' conference journey, revealing the key findings of how their career changes their journey depending upon the role and seniority they hold during the single conference journey. Throughout the chapter the journey has analysed in depth the details of each phase within it and an overview of them provided in Table 29 through to Table 40 and are they all presented together in appendix H. One of the strongest results from the analysis of the professionals' decision-process was that they found it a rather straight-forward process; contributing to this were the limited complications in identifying relevant conferences to attend. In addition, their conference attendance preparations were found to be considerably beyond logistical organising, for example they included preparing networking opportunities. These were therefore based heavily around their 'deep' rationale to attend concerning the outcomes expected from the attendance as opposed to the 'shallow' attendance rationale.

A key finding from their experience at the conference itself related to influence on the tone of the communication from the destination. Their relatively straight-forward choice of which conference to attend had implications on their experience as they felt they were experiencing the relevant topic and attendees which led to opportunities for learning and networking. Noteworthy for the professionals the quality of the speaker was of great importance and when they did not meet expectations the attendees' expressed that the development of their outcomes was influenced. Strong emotions were found to be ever present throughout their career during conference journeys, albeit lessening as they progressed, for example with familiarisation and development of friendships when feeling a sense of belonging to the community. The outcomes in terms of experiential assets were achieved more frequently in their early career as well as at internal conferences in terms of sense of belonging to the organisation. Opportunities for tangible outcomes were often achieved, for example a possible contact for future business, and as they progressed and developed these were more likely to turn into tangible outcomes of achieved business.

The conference journey analysed within this chapter has, in line with chapter four, focused on the attendee as it is the professionals' individual journey being explored. Throughout the analysis the role of the event creator has however been identified as significant, their design decisions were able to support or weaken the development of the outcomes although, as with chapter four, the role of the event creator has not been analysed explicitly within this chapter. The following chapter will begin by comparing the academics' and professionals' conference journeys with the discussion focusing on their differences in expectations of attendance and comparison of the academics' 'contribution' with professionals' 'sales and marketing' which will be discussed in-depth in section 6.2.2. The main attention within the discussion chapter will then be on the identified similarities of these two journeys which resulted in the key finding of the three main influences on the conference journey being identified, firstly those internal to the attendee, secondly the workplace and finally the conference creator. Throughout this

findings chapter and the one before it, the attendees strongly emphasised the role of reflection when developing outcomes from a conference journey and will this be discussed within the final section of the discussion chapter before concluding it.

Chapter 6 DISCUSSION

6.1. Introduction

The aim of this research, as stated on page 11, was to analyse and explain attendees' holistic conference journey and how it contributes to the attendee's accumulated outcomes of a lifetime conference journey. This chapter discusses this analysis by synthesising and drawing upon existing knowledge as well as presentation of extensive data, and associated analysis, provided in previous chapters. Chapter one provided an overview of the conference environment, also focussed upon event studies which is an important evolution in event thinking, and a departure from the event management-predominant paradigm to an event design-predominant paradigm. Throughout chapter two the review of the literature illustrated clearly this shift in emphasis. It also showed how the focus has predominantly been on the pre-conference stage of the decision-making process highlighting a gap in knowledge regarding the attendees' holistic conference journey. The qualitative research approach to exploring individuals' experiences of their conference journey was argued and justified in chapter three and the sampling of academics and professionals at different stages in their career discussed. The approach to the sampling to include academics and professionals at different stages in their professional lives allowed for a deep understanding of the influences within attendees' conference journeys on their outcomes.

To contribute towards and develop this understanding, academics' and professionals' separate conference journeys were presented in chapters four and five. The presentation of those chapters is in line with the orthodox view of the stages within a conference journey: pre-conference including the decision-making process, experience during the conference and post-conference development of outcomes. An evaluation of these two journeys, as discussed in this chapter, however reveals considerable nuance and complexity to them than the path introduced in the framework in Figure 16 - The overall single conference journey on page 92. This chapter discusses the conference experiences as one journey throughout an individual's career. It will begin with a comparison of the academic and professional journeys and continue with an analysis of the conference journeys' influences on the attendees' outcomes and their career.

This research has identified that there is an important and evolving relationship between an individual's career and their conference experiences; as their career progresses, their involvement in conference experiences changes and their outcomes from the conference journeys grow. This significant research finding emerged through unfolding the three major influences on an individual attendee's conference journey throughout their career. Firstly there are the influences internal to them, their multiple identities, career stage, ambitions, engagement and emotions which will be discussed in section 6.4.3. Secondly their workplace has considerable influence through its culture, expectations and support, as discussed in section 6.5. Finally, the conference creator has a more significant influence

than has been recognised and conceptualised in the literature. Section 6.6 discusses how they can influence beyond simple, single, and often straightforward, conference inputs by implementing holistic and progressive event design elements whilst considering multiple journeys. The section commences with a discussion of the conference creators' management of expectations. It is followed by a discussion on firstly the influences of pragmatic design elements on ´shallow´ motivations like the influence of discussion approaches within the continent hosting the conference. Secondly, the influences of holistic programme design elements on ´deep´ motivations including formal and informal sessions, and quality of speakers and community building is discussed. The final two sections within the chapter focus on the attendee, commencing with a discussion on attendees' conference outcomes, focusing on the importance of reflection, which have developed whilst impacted by the three identified influences. Finally, this chapter six concludes by bringing it all together viewing the holistic conference journey. This discussion chapter therefore inevitably diverts from following the journey stages, as has been done in previous chapters, because it is essential to discuss the underlying influences on the development of the conference outcomes.

6.2. The conference journey examined – a comparison of academics and professionals

Chapters four and five illustrated conference journeys made by academics and professionals. The various interrelationships and complexities in the journeys are acknowledged, although the journeys were presented identically following the framework presented on page 92 which was constructed based on this research's data. This section will compare these journeys, focusing on identifying the main differences. The academic journey, for example, had more nuances, leading to it being more intricate than the professional journey. A dominant reason for the more complex academic journey was the multifaceted roles and responsibilities academics had in terms of a wide range of research and teaching commitments, with an added need to keep up with advances in industry. This led to them being pulled in various directions, causing challenges in understanding which pathway within the conference journey was most appropriate at each point of time.

Previous studies on motivations to attend conferences often concentrated on the academic journey (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007b; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008) previously discussed. By including both academics and professionals as participants within this research, the opportunity was created to examine in depth these two different groups' conference journey experience. This research therefore goes beyond studying a homogenous group as many of the previously mentioned studies do, hence allowing for the identification of the differences, including the nuances of the academic journey. The methodological approach to this research of conducting life-world interviews invited the participants to emphasise within their stories

the elements they found of most importance, contributing to the identification of the differences.

Two major differences have been identified within the academic and professional journeys – firstly expectations of attendance, and secondly 'contributions' versus 'sales and marketing'. In terms of the expectations it was identified that these were external to the attendee as they were expectations from their professional environment. These external expectations contributed to the participants' identified aim regarding their behaviour during their attendance, which is the other major difference discussed in this section, as academics aspired to contribute to the conference, whereas the professionals aspired to sell and market their products, service and/or skills through a wide range of forms. These differences in behaviour will be discussed in relation to their 'deep' motivations and the effects these have on the conference design and the tone of communication in terms of their behavioural reflection. Finally, it will be revealed that the underlying meaning of 'contribution' and 'sales and marketing' is the same, which is to showcase abilities and progress.

6.2.1. The differences in expectations of attendance

The external expectations of attendance will be discussed within this section, examining the findings in chapters four and five and building on the literature reviewed in chapter two. This interpretation of these external expectations adds to the body of literature on the attendees' decision-making process. This research clearly identified in section 4.2.1 how academics by nature of their profession were expected to attend conferences on a regular basis, an expectation which proved to be not so strong for professionals. To date, literature has focussed primarily on delegates' motivations to attend, responding to conference creator's need to understand what attracts the delegates to attend a conference. This has resulted in a significant gap in understanding the underlying needs attendees identify to begin engagement with motivations to attend (Mair, 2014), and this study has therefore provided an expanded focus of the decision-making process as it explores in further depth the need recognition process and development.

Contributing to the academics perceiving it being a key aspect of their profession to attend conferences was their understanding of the need to present research and how their academic workplaces required a presence at certain conferences. These needs were not identified in the conference participation decision-making models in Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5 (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Zhang et al., 2007) discussed in section 2.2.4. Because of the focus on providing conference creators with information on how to attract attendees, the models did not capture the diversity and different factors individual attendees have and their diverse focus. The models also did not take into account this early recognition of a need for attending as they began with motivations or awareness of the conference.

This research did confirm many of the motivations identified in other studies under the umbrella of networking and learning (Mair & Thompson, 2009; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Tanford et al., 2012; Zhang et al., 2007). Many of these recognised motivations have been named as professional development (W. Kim & Malek, 2017) which this research has identified as partially originating from the external expectations of attendance. For the professionals these came through the profession and with seniority. This was identified for the academics as well, in addition to the recently discussed nature of being an academic and a need for topic updates, often from industry to inform the academics' teaching. There, however, was one type of professionals who had explicit requirements on external expectation leading to a need for attending conferences, those who needed continuous professional development (CPD) hours to uphold their certified status, such as accountants. This finding of the current study is consistent with W. Kim and Malek's (2017) finding, although theirs was implicit. Their sample was doctors and nurse professionals who responded to their survey, which was included in the post conference survey attendees had to respond to in order to receive their CPD hours to keep their certifications current.

The profession itself, in terms of academic or professional, therefore contributed greatly towards the expectations of attendance as well as different professions for professionals. In terms of the roles, it was identified that with changes to them over time the demands for conference attendance changed, mainly as the research participants took on more senior roles and further visibility was expected of them. These roles became more available to them as they progressed within their career, which was evident for both professionals and academics, although surprisingly some professionals who progressed into more specialised roles experienced a reduced need for attending conferences. It was also clear that because of the general expectations of academics attending conferences they were more likely to attend conferences from early on in their career as opposed to professionals who had yet to take on roles where conference attendance was expected. This research therefore confirms that the career stage influences the conference attendance as discussed by Fjelstul et al. (2009), Grant & Weaver (1996), Price (1993) and K. Severt et al. (2009). In addition it has been identified that the career stage not only influences through the external expectations by developing different needs at different stages, but also through internal influences affecting their overall conference journey as will be discussed in section 6.4.2.

Surprisingly, despite the expectations of academics attending conferences regularly, it was not always evident for them which to attend. When professionals were expected to attend a conference, they felt it was evident which conference they should be attending. The academics however experienced a complex process of identifying relevant conferences to attend. Analysis showed that the underlying cause for this was the multiple demands the academics faced in terms of research, teaching and industry awareness, as has been recently established in a study by Mair et al. (2018). In addition, their area could be of multidisciplinary nature and therefore causing even greater

challenges in identifying conferences with relevant topics. The effect of this complexity in choosing conferences was that the attendee could feel out of place at the conference and have an overall poor experience with limited outcomes. This is an area which the conference creator can have a large role in, for example through marketing material as will be further discussed in section 6.6.1. The external expectations of attendance were therefore affecting the academics' and professionals' need to attend conferences in different ways. They, however, had in common that their decision-making process began with a need recognition which then influenced their motivations to attend, as was emphasised in the framework in Figure 16 - The overall single conference journey on page 92.

The key identification of 'shallow' and 'deep' rationale to attend conferences was made when analysing the decision-making process of the conference journey; most importantly by including the in-depth analysis of the need recognition, followed by behaviour, when determining whether to attend the conference or not. It unfolded that there was a differentiation in the depth of the rationale made for the attendance, hence the 'shallow' and 'deep' – an empirical finding within this research which adds a new insight to motivation literature. The 'shallow' motivations relate mostly to tangible conference design factors such as location and total cost and the 'deep' motivations are connected to the attendees' behaviour before and during the conference as well as their expectations of outcomes following the attendance. The following sections will discuss this in further detail, beginning by examining the difference between academics and professionals and effects of these on their behaviour.

6.2.2. Comparing academics' 'contribution' with professionals' 'sales and marketing'

A significant difference in the external expectations which influence the two groups motivations to attend was found to be concerning the identified concepts of academics' perception of 'contribution' and the professionals' perception of 'sales and marketing'. This is a further empirical finding from this research, enabled through the sampling frame, which provides new insights to the motivation literature. The meaning of these concepts will be analysed within this section, including their origin and effects on the conference design and experience. It will begin by exploring the 'deep' motivations and preparations made before the conference attendance, followed by the effects it has on conference design including formal and informal elements and experiences of the tone of communication within the conference. It will be completed with a conclusion on the meaning of these external expectations.

Differences in 'deep' motivations and preparations

The 'deep' motivations presented in Table 19 and Table 31 are revisited in Table 41 below for comparison purposes using different colours. When comparing the motivations, the main similarities lie in the influence of the career stage and the desire for visibility. The

interesting difference lies in how the academics are aiming for a contribution to the conference, leading to increased knowledge within the subject area, whereas the professionals' motivations relate to sales and marketing. For the academics, their preferred conference topic area relates to their research area, which links closely to their motivations to contribute, as the opportunity to contribute increases within their expert area.

Academics' 'Deep' Motivations	Professionals' 'Deep' Motivations

- Influence of career stage
  ○ Earlier:
    ▪ Gain ideas
    ▪ Become familiar with the topic area
  ○ Later:
    ▪ Gain specific knowledge
    ▪ Enhance productivity
  ○ Continuous curiosity and positive attitude towards learning
- Contribution and Visibility leading to outcomes:
  ○ Improved knowledge
  ○ Collaboration
  ○ Increased visibility
- Preferred Conference Topic Area
  ○ Topics close to research areas perceived more interesting
	- Influence of career stage
	  ○ Earlier:
	    ▪ Build profile
	    ▪ Demonstrate ability
	    ▪ Gain ideas and knowledge
	  ○ Later:
	    ▪ Gain specific knowledge
	    ▪ Expand expertise
	    ▪ Enhance productivity
	    ▪ Develop opportunities for collaborations
	    ▪ Providing and gaining support
	  ○ Gain up to date knowledge
	- Visibility leading to outcomes:
	  ○ Sales and marketing
	  ○ Collaboration
	  ○ Increased visibility
	- Managers seen as supportive and available

Table 41 - Comparing academics' and professionals' 'deep' motivations

This difference in motivations to attend had influences on the preparations made by academics and professionals before attending a conference. Preparations have received limited attention in the literature, which could be originating from the view of the expectations that academics should attend conferences and present research which needs preparations. Since the academics themselves are carrying out the research, this may be why this has not been explored further; it has been perceived that conference attendance is a 'mundane part' of academic life (Edelheim et al., 2018). Consistent with this view, this research identified that professionals engaged further with preparations regarding networking than the academics, which links to the motivations of 'sales and marketing'. Interestingly and conflictingly Kitchen (2017) identified limited preparations on behalf of event professionals attending a business event within their industry. Her sample was therefore in one sense more homogeneous than for this research, as all participants were professionals within the same industry but, in another sense, it was more diverse as she had additional participants for her quantitative study representing a

wide range of roles and seniority. The academics in this research emphasised much more their presentations linked to their motivation of contributing to the conferences whereas both groups engaged with the logistical preparations of the conference attendance. This research has therefore provided new insights to preparations before attending a conference and how they can make a difference long-term, an area which requires further studies.

Academics' need for formal elements and professionals' preferences for informal elements and their effects on the conference design

The consequences of the difference in the 'deep' motivations was reflected in the experiences of the conference design, with the academics having had their contribution needs accommodated through opportunities for various forms of presentations, as well as a high degree of space for networking. The professionals also demonstrated the experience and need for networking spaces, as they were required to showcase their professional skills. It was therefore not only the physical products or services they were showcasing and selling, opportunities they found through for example exhibitions amongst others, but to project an image of what their professional skills were through networking. The co-creation element, therefore, was identified to be highly desirable within the conference design by both the academics and professionals, although for the different outcomes of contribution, and selling and marketing. The approach of a conference which did not include a programme with formal and informal sessions but a 'continuum of activities' (Crowther & Orefice, 2014, p. 133) had not been experienced by the participants and they did not refer to this as preferable, although they had multiple negative and positive speculations on the formal and informal elements.

The formal programme elements were mostly experienced in the form of presentations and, interestingly, distinct differences were identified in the expectations of the quality of the speakers. The professionals' expectations of high-quality presentations from speakers could be expected to be linked to assumptions of large payments to them for their input. The academics, however, were not as preoccupied or surprised about poor speaker skills, likely originating from themselves often being amongst the speakers at the conferences. A study by Borghans, Romans, and Sauermann (2010) has however indicated that academics in the area of labour economics are motivated to attend when key notes by Nobel prize winners at economics research conference are offered. Interestingly they were not able to determine if this was because of the quality of those speakers, curiosity to see them, or if it was perceived that they would attract a higher quality of attendees.

The academics in this current research did not indicate whether they would be more motivated to attend if high achieving academics within their field were presenting. They did however articulate expectations of respect from each other, for example by demonstrating that effort had been put into the presentation preparations. The research participants' feedback on inadequate presentations from poor presenters indicates that

recommendations of competent facilitation with coached speakers (Ravn & Elsborg, 2011; Vanneste, 2008; Wiessner et al., 2008) is still not the experience attendees have at all conferences. Commonly they found the formal elements to be one-way communication, often mainly information giving, whereas the informal elements were more about sharing.

Noteworthily, it was during the sharing within the informal elements where the development of the outcomes was really beginning to take place. The networking was not only about getting to know each other and make contacts, it was also about sharing the newly gained information and knowledge and interpret it further in collaboration, which is achievable through their shared language (Zhong & Luo, 2018). This analysis of the data therefore adds further insights to what networking means for conference attendees, the importance lies in the sharing within the interactions, therefore confirming and adding to Kitchen's (2017) suggestions regarding networking being interactions leading to transformations of resources. Interestingly she found in her empirical research on networking within trade shows that attendees were focusing on networking with new contacts, whereas the conference attendees within this research often emphasised the sharing of what they had learnt within the conference.

The informal sessions were found by both academics and professionals to be of much value for the purposes of networking as they enhanced the development of outcomes. This is in agreement with Kitchen's (2017) finding, however further studies on this were not located discussing this explicitly, although it has been referred to by, for example, Mair and Frew (2016) in terms of fun and alcohol. It was also found that social sessions were found to be more enjoyable when attending with colleagues, providing opportunities to develop deeper working relationship with them. These relationship developments will be discussed in more detail in section 6.5.

There were however signs that that this could also lead to attendees staying within the comfort zone of their previous relationships. Opportunities, provided through networking, to develop new relationships at conferences were therefore not utilised which could lead to missed outcomes developed from friendships gained at conferences (Foley et al., 2014). More professionals discussed difficulties in networking during social sessions than academics because of them experiencing difficulties in entering the perceived closed groups. The academics were more likely to attend reoccurring conferences leading to them perceiving having further opportunities for building friendships.

Contrary experiences were identified regarding internal and external conferences, an area which has not been explored in literature. The internal conferences were found to be more informal, although still formal, and there was an agreement that they were good first-time conference experiences. Most participants, regardless of them being academics or professionals, found, however, that they had less purpose as they perceived that they were hosted for community building purposes, but this was not always achieved. It was

experienced that there were limited networking opportunities because most other attendees were already known to them and the topic was broad to suit everyone, leading to it being thin and not really suitable for anyone. They, however, gave good opportunities for people in senior roles to be visible and show support, which for them was perceived as positive outcome. The participants' discussion on internal conferences in conjunction with the motivations of 'contribution' and 'sales and marketing' began to reveal an interesting aspect of conferences which again have received limited attention in the literature, which is the tone of communication as discussed in the following section.

Differences in tone of communication and resulting effects

The tone of the communication, in terms of other attendees reflecting their behaviour and attitude through their tone of communication, was found to be significant in the participants' conference experience. In line with their 'sales and marketing' motivation the tone was persuasive for professionals. The academics however had experienced other attendees using an aggressive tone, mainly within the Q&A sessions, contradicting the 'contribution' motivation. Although the Q&A session was acknowledged to be an integral part of many academics' experience, it was not always a positive one because of the aggressive tone in the remarks given portrayed as a question. The narratives in section 4.3.4 demonstrated how this could influence the experience, not only for the person being asked, but also for the audience. This is an element of the academic conference experience which has received limited attention in the literature, but these findings demonstrate that it is worthy of further exploration.

The professionals did not comment about this aggressive tone in communication, but they did refer to how some attendees were being economical about the truth and not always giving the full story, which syncs with the persuasive tone of communication used for sales and marketing purposes. The tone of communication however sometimes changed towards a more straightforward one during the informal evening social sessions when alcohol was frequently served, often providing a refreshing view on matters. This was discussed in section 5.3.5 and has been referred to in previous research, for example by Mair and Frew (2016), as discussed above, regarding fun and alcohol. There is therefore a scope to explore further in terms of the tone of communication, not only between the academic and professional conferences, but also comparing the formal and informal sessions.

Interestingly, there was a professional view that the general tone of communication within academic conferences, of reporting true research results with constructive and purposeful feedback, was easier to navigate and understand than the persuasive communication generally underpinned with sales and marketing attempts undermining its truthfulness. One academic individual voiced a contrary viewpoint regarding that the professional communication was refreshing as the organisations were promoting their products and services, as opposed to more abstract research discussions. This view of the communication was therefore from an applied point of view, how it could be applied

to research, as opposed to the professional viewing them as sales pitches where the features of the pitched product or service were often overstated. These views were in a minority as most participants discussed mostly conference experiences aimed at the group they belonged to. They, therefore, conversed mostly with alike attendees, or even, as discussed above, their colleagues, which is in line with de Vries and Peters (2007) findings that attendees have the tendency to contact attendees from their own category and even from their own organisation first.

'Contribution' and 'sales and marketing' are ultimately seeking same outcome

On the surface these 'deep' motivations for attending, 'contribution' and 'sales and marketing', appear largely unrelated, however, in-depth scrutiny with these disclose connecting logic, just like the examination of the effects from them on the conference design and tone of communication. The data demonstrated how the demand and need to present research related in parts to selling the image of the presenting academic's knowledge, for example when stating that it was largely through conference presentations that they became known and built up reputations as found in section 4.3.4. The presentation of research and the accreditation requirements were found to be originating from similar demands for broadcasting the attendee's progress, abilities and willingness to keep up to date within their field of practice. Through utilisation of these broadcasting opportunities they have the opportunity to show their communities who they are and what they stand for, which contributes to creating future outcomes.

6.2.3. The examination of the conference journey summarised

Superficially the expectations of attendance, and 'contribution' and 'sales and marketing' motivations show distinct differences between the two conference journeys but at a conceptual level there are strong similarities. The external expectations, when present, are that when attending conferences, the delegate should be aiming for communication of abilities, in regard to many different areas such as research, collaboration opportunities, skills, or product features. The external expectations were expected to be ever present for academics to attend and less so for professionals, although it was recognised that for the more senior participants there were higher expectations of their presence at conferences. The absence of further major differences demonstrates how conceptually the progression within the conference journeys is the same for both academics and professionals, although it was identified that the details and practices had a higher degree of differences as was discussed in the findings chapters. This section has discussed the two major differences within the academic and professional individual conference journey, the expectations of attendance and the primary aim of either contributing or selling and marketing, and their multiple implications such as choosing which conference to attend, preparations, conference setup and tone of communication.

The analysis of the academics and professionals' conference journeys has, in addition, identified multiple findings which have not been covered in the academic literature to

the researcher's knowledge. This was recognised in the discussion above on the need recognition, differences in preparations, different purpose and outcomes of informal and formal sessions, as well as internal and external conferences, and finally tone of communication. These specific findings will not be covered in further depth within this research as they emerged during the data analysis and were therefore not explored in great depth during the life-world interviews. These findings are minor to this research and the researcher acknowledges these findings, however, they are not the main focus within this research, although it is recommended that they are studied further in future research. The remainder of this chapter will concentrate on how essentially the two journeys are the same, and focus on the underlying concepts of the conference journey, moving away from individual linear journeys.

6.3. Three main influences on the conference journey identified

This research has identified three major influences on the attendee's holistic conference journey: firstly internal to the attendee, secondly their workplace and thirdly the conference creator. The various internal influences will be discussed in the following section, beginning with the attendees' multiple identities. Interestingly it was their professional identity, from the viewpoint of broadly social or natural scientists, which influenced more significantly than the identity in terms of academics or professionals. Their career stage was also identified as an internal influence, but more surprisingly they were clearly influenced by their professional ambitions, engagement with their conference journey and emotions experienced in relation to them. The power of these influences was, however, not always the same for each conference experience within their overall conference journey.

The meta-framework, illustrated in Figure 22 on page 173 summarises the key findings from the primary data, showing the conference journey throughout a career, over a lifetime, building on the single conference journey as presented in Figure 16 - The overall single conference journey on page 92. The large boxes show the steps taken within each individual journey; in accordance with framework in Figure 16 they begin with a need recognition and rationale for attendance underpinned by their motivations. After a decision to attend, they engage with preparations followed by the experience at the conference and concluding by outcomes achieved as presented in the large arrow. Surrounding this single journey are the internal and external influences, external below and internal above, and do they alter throughout their career. The conference creator influences all of the steps within the journey whereas the workplace has limited influence on the experience at the conference itself. The internal influences of ambitions and engagement are shown above feeding into the entire journey. The influence of the career is demonstrated within the journey as the path develops from early career to late career, the experiences enhance, and outcomes increase as they progress within their career. This key framework has the same underpinning concepts as the initial conceptual framework presented in Figure 9 on page 57, however, the analysis of the empirical data

has allowed for the development of the details and integration of the range of influences on the development of outcomes.

The attendees' internal influences will be discussed in the following section, commencing with a discussion on their multiple identities, followed by an analysis of how the career stage as well as their ambitions, engagement and emotions influences differently at different times. The influence of the workplace will then be explored and with this being an emerging finding which has not been explored much in the literature, this section is short. Section 6.6 concludes the discussion on the three identified influences by discussing the various influences of the conference creator, including management of attendees' expectations, the influences from 'shallow' and 'deep' motivations on the pragmatic design elements such as location on the one hand and programme design on the other hand.

Internal Influences: Ambitions - Engagement

External Influences: Workplace - Conference Community - Event Creator

Tangible Outcomes

Opportunities

Experiential Assets

Experience

Need Recog-nition

Moti-vation:
- Shallow
- Deep

Preparation

LC

EC
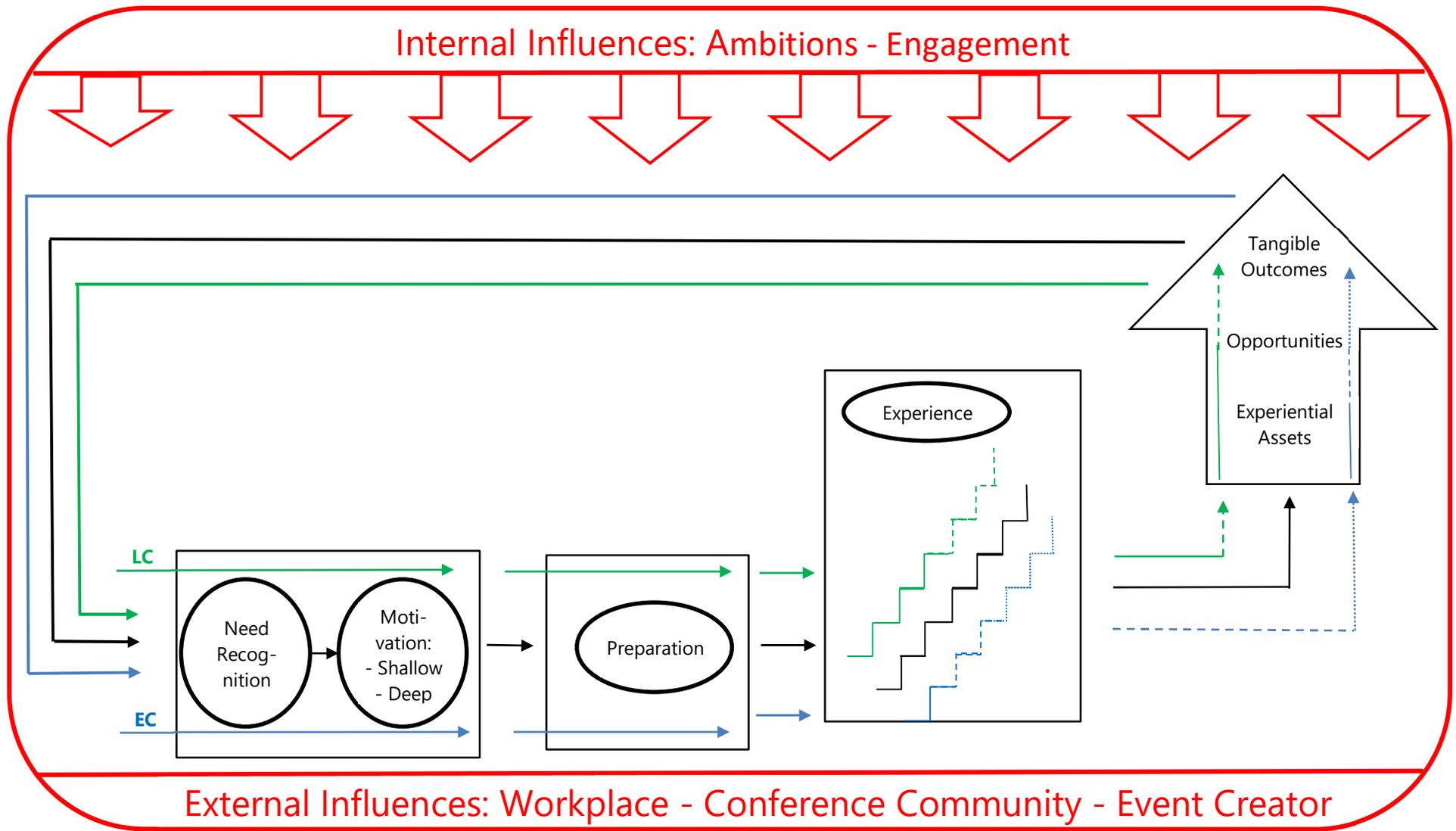
Boxes and black arrows in the middle represent multiple single conference journeys building on figure 16 on page 92.
EC blue arrows represent the journey for Early Career attendees and LC green arrows represent the journey for Late Career attendees.
The top red internal influences impact the holistic journey throughout; the bottom external influences impact at different points within each single conference journey.

Figure 22 - Influences on an attendee's holistic lifetime conference journey

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6.4. Attendees' internal influences on the conference journey

The framework in Figure 22 above illustrates the demonstration in chapters four and five of how the academic and professional conference journeys essentially are the same although the details are different. This division of the sample into academics and professionals was discussed in section 3.4, following chapter two where it was revealed that the existing literature provided vast knowledge of the academic conference journey however less information was available on professionals. Chapter five contributed towards this gap in knowledge and the examination of the two journeys in above section 6.2 disclosed the two major differences, on the one hand external expectations and on the other 'contributions' and 'sales and marketing' motivations. Excitingly this study also identified that when conference attendees are viewed, based on other identities than academics or professionals, there are further significant factors impacting their conference journey(s).

The interview question which highlighted this exciting finding, the influence of multiple identities, was the identical final question to all research participants: *'What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?'* The individual responses varied, however when viewing them in total a pattern of great similarities emerged between those who were professionals or academics within a natural science-based area and those in a social science area including humanities. The similarities were found to be in their approach to the question, the natural scientists did not have much to say about it, they felt they were asked questions which they answered. The social scientists were more likely to engage with this question, discussing their feelings and views on the interview topic and approach as well as what had emerged throughout the conversation. This emerging from the analysis of the interviews invited a review of the data set where the focus was on identifying how the participants' professional identity, in terms of natural or social scientist, impacted their narrative within the interview and approaches to their conference journey(s).

Participants' further identities to academic and professional were not specifically defined in the sampling frame, as the conference literature had not indicated this. The recursive data analysis approach, as discussed in section 3.6, invited further review of the findings. It was made through a manual analysis of the data, where the researcher was able to reflect upon these results and review the data, to develop and interpret the meaning of the participants' multiple identities. When carrying out the interviews the focus was on the individuals and they viewed in accordance to the sampling frame, in terms of academics and professionals at different career stages. However, with the review of the data, and the reflective notes which were made by the researcher following each interview (see appendix I), the opportunity to strengthen the key concept of social and self-identities arose.

The analysis demonstrated a great influence of further identities on their conference journey(s), in particular in terms of their natural or social science background. The natural scientists demonstrated a more structured approach to their overall experience, ranging from in-depth preparations to systematic approaches to developing outcomes, whereas the social scientists had a more relaxed approach. This was also evident within the life-world interviews as the natural scientists were considerably more likely to need a firm structure to the questions, whereas the social scientists constructed their narrative more independently and explored the discourse within the interview from various angles. For the former group it was about a task which needed to be completed to a good standard, whereas for the latter, it was an opportunity to explore the topic. This actualisation was only realised through the manual analysis of the data and the researcher's continuous reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process. This has not only implications on the conference journey findings within this study but also on approaches to interviews, research participants' background influences their approach to responding to questions leaving the interviewers to consider the degree of structure applied to their interview.

6.4.1. All attendees' have multiple identities

Identities can be viewed through identity theory emphasising the role of the individual including their self-identity, and social identity theory, focusing on the membership of various social groups. Both theories emphasise 'a multifaceted and dynamic self that mediates the relationship between social structure and individual behaviour' (Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995, p. 255). A great difference in these theories is their disciplinary origin, identity theory is a sociological theory and self-identity theory is a psychological theory which Hogg et al. (1995) conclude leads to a difference in the depth of their sociocognitive processes underpinning identity. The findings of this research have identified that both self-identity and social identity influence an attendee's conference journey therefore adopting Stets and Burke's (2000) view that these two theories can be linked together. Considering also that the internal influence of multiple identities is only one of many elements within the holistic journey this study is exploring, an in-depth exploration of the two theories will not be undertaken in this thesis, although it is necessary to review relevant events literature.

The initial literature review for this study revealed limited conference research underpinned by identity theory and social identity theory and the initial scope of this study did not include it. The approach to the sampling frame of including academics and professionals was determined based on previous research foci on academics as conference attendees. The noteworthy finding of the influence of further identities on the conference journey invited the researcher to review the literature and develop further understanding of these concepts, in line with the inductive nature of the study and the recursive data analysis approach. The additional review identified studies underpinned

by social identity theory within other events types, as discussed in section 2.3.2 of the literature review.

Sports events is a field within the larger events research area which has a longer history of exploring attendees' identities. Shipway and Jones' (2007) study on the experience and behaviour of participants at a four-day running event was underpinned by social identity and provided this research a backdrop to understand the finding of the influence of the multiple identities. They identified the importance of the participants identifying themselves as runners, an identity which was salient during the event whereas their other identities were less relevant because they were distanced from them at that point of time. The runners presented their running identity through clothes and language used, an approach the conference attendees also referred to. In a later study Shipway, Holloway and Jones (2012) further explored the social identity of runners, identifying how communities of practice can be created within running events and this has been recognised for cycling events as well (Shipway, King, Lee, & Brown, 2016) supporting the findings of this research.

The insights provided by sports events research provided new understandings in the interpretation of business events research and highlights how in future research on motivations to attend conferences there are potentials for cross fertilisation much beyond the tourism and hospitality literature. This is largely where the conference motivation literature originates from and in section 2.3.2 it was discussed how motivations within these areas are principally based on escapism, novelty and experiencing new culture. Having origins in the tourism and hospitality literature is also the case for events other than business events, such as cultural events including festivals (X. Li & Petrick, 2006). The business events attendees are however different as they are 'at work' - as demonstrated throughout the results shown in chapters four and five - resulting in the inclusion of the review of the sport events participation literature which includes active participation from athletes. Weed and Bull identified that "the motives behind sports participation involves individual characteristics – interests, needs, goals and personality" (2009, p. 71) as well as the motives to attend were a mix of sport related and tourism related. Those identified with sport related elements were for example competitiveness, testing of own abilities and development of skills. These elements were all identified within this research as 'deep' motivations to attend conferences.

The additional review of literature supported the design of the sampling frame, which was based on two types of social identity groups, firstly academics and professionals and secondly three phases of career stages. The research findings identified two further identities, the self-identity of natural and social scientists and the professional role people held at each time, which is both an identity and a social identity group. The findings show that these do not always align neatly, which can cause conflicts in terms of the conference design for the conference creator regarding considerations of which identity to consider for primary focus when designing the experience.

Overall, this research has found that the social identity and self-identity are more significant to the conference experience than conference literature has identified and there is much scope for further research on this. The literature which has to a degree identified this connection is the conference congruence literature. For example, Wei et al. (2017, p. 165) identified that a conference attendee's identification with the conference attendance group has 'the greatest power in leveraging one's transcendent conference experience'. They interpreted this finding as an indication that the impact of attendee interaction on conference experience was predominantly explained by attendees' sense of connectedness with other attendees. This is in line with the findings of this study of the influence of social identity theory; attendees feel further sense of belonging whilst interacting with people who define themselves of the same social identity.

This was evidenced strongly when the academics in section 4.3.6 spoke about not fitting in with the professionals. Interestingly Mair and Frew (2016) also identified the attendees' different identities as they found that academic attendees perceive a need to take on an academic persona during the conference. Their interpretation was not underpinned with identity theories, however they identified factors such as raising profile and being seen and recognised, leading to outcomes from the experience. They therefore recognised that delegates adapt their identity during their attendance in line with their 'deep' motivations to attend.

6.4.2. The attendees' career stage influences the conference journey differently

The sampling frame defined the participants by three stages of their career, early, mid and late contributing to the findings demonstrating that the career stage has a significant influence on the conference experiences which is in agreement with other studies (W. Kim & Malek, 2017; Price, 1993). This research develops a further understanding of the influence from the career stage. Early in their career there were increased obstacles to attendance, in particular for professionals as for many of them conference attendance came with further seniority. For the early career academics receiving the funding to attend proved challenging; since they were expected to attend the funding was available however it was a more difficult process to access it. For those later in their career the funding was generally easy to obtain, however they were struggling more with finding time to attend.

The path taken by attendees at different career stages is illustrated in the framework in Figure 22, demonstrating how it impacted throughout the entire journey. In their early career and initial conference journey(s), the experience concentrated on familiarising themselves with the professional area and culture of conferences often with the aim of generating ideas and building networks. This led them to being less successful in entering the conference community, although as will be discussed in section 6.6, the conference creator can have considerable influence on the success of this. The development of outcomes is the stage of the journey where the career stage influenced the most, as

overall professional inexperience often prevented the participants in developing and achieving the deepest outcomes. The influences from the career stage are therefore impacting cost, expectations and outcomes. For academics this has been recognised by Mair et al. (2018) where they discussed the changes in the funding environment for academics. The cost nature is constantly developing – not only externally, as discussed by Mair et al. (2018), but also linked with seniority. Funding is easier to obtain as people progress in their career; however, the expectations of attendance and outcomes are also increasing.

A finding from this study, which has not been explicitly discussed in the literature, is the impact of attendees' career shifts on their conference experience. An attendee who has progressed to seniority within their career is likely to have multiple experiences within the same conference community. If they, however, have a shift in their career, such as Sheila's experience discussed in section 5.2.1, the implications are that they enter a new conference community. Upon entering this new community, they are likely to have experiences similar to those early in their career, because they are new to the profession and community. The main effect of the career shift on their individual conference journey concerns how their network is not available to them to the same degree since they are entering this new community and professional network. A consequence is also that the conversations during the conference may prove more challenging as they both have less experience of the subject and familiarity with the community. However, as they have been on conference journeys before and have considerable accumulated experiences, they are familiar with the fundamental behavioural expectations and are more likely to gain further outcomes more immediately than those at the beginning of their conference journeys.

Their mid or later career stage therefore supports them in developing the outcomes from the experience, going beyond the experience assets and opportunities. They have new challenges in their new career and single conference journeys as they are unfamiliar with the newly entered profession community, however their previous experiences support them with preparations as they understand the value of these and understanding of how to behave. This planned behaviour will be discussed further in the following section.

6.4.3. Ambitions, engagement and emotions influence the conference journey at all times but in different forms

The multiple aspects of an individual's self and professional social identities contributes to their behaviour. Terry, Hogg and White (1999) suggested that Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour in conjunction with identity and social identity theories should be considered when developing an understanding of individuals' behaviour. This was adopted in a recent study by Reysen, Chadborn and Plante (2018) on the non-mainstream business event, a fan convention, where they determined that the theory of planned behaviour, social identity theory, and self-categorisation theory predict intentions to attend the fan convention. For this research the above discussion on the

influences of the career stage and career shift demonstrates the evident changes in attendees' behaviour dependent upon their experiences, and Mair and Frew's (2016) identification of the academic persona supports this.

Their identity influences their planned behaviour and together they impact upon the attendees' ambitions and engagement throughout their conference journeys, affecting their enthusiasm towards development of outcomes as shown in the framework in Figure 22. The most obvious illustration of this was in the case of the academics attending their niche research area conferences, as they demonstrated plenty of eagerness in participation and development of further knowledge and network expansion. Contributing to this was their improved integration into the conference community at these conferences as their similar identities increased their sense of belonging and increased social-emotional support (Wei et al., 2017). Another example was when the delegate was attending because of an identified internal need, as opposed to being told to attend, leading to increased ambitions in treating the conference journey as an opportunity to gain outcomes. The increased engagement did not end there as they were also more likely to develop those outcomes and have a positive experience at the conference which supports Kitchen's (2017) interpretation that engagement can influence outcomes gained.

The engagement post-conference was most notable when participants discussed a conference experience where they were able to reach the higher steps of the ladder in Figure 18. They felt the most inspired and enthusiastic to act on their gains at this point. There was, however, also a noticeable difference for natural scientists who demonstrated the same traits in terms of structured approach to engagement following the conference in developing outcomes, as they did within the other stages of the journey. The engagement with the development of the outcomes was also found to be linked to career stage; the further participants had progressed within their career the more likely they were to advance their development of outcomes. This was not always linked to lack of interest in engaging with the process by those early in their career but rather their limited experience and confidence.

A delegate's attitude towards their attendance therefore had great implications and this was connected with their ambitions in their professional life. Ambitions to progress in their career often were reflected within their conference journeys. The ambitions were connected evidently to their level of engagement within the conference journey from pre-conference through to post-conference. In the pre-conference stage this was reflected within their preparations. During the conference their engagement level was demonstrated through various modes not only tangible in terms of, for example, delivering a presentation but often intangible, such as with targeted networking to increase their own networks. The natural scientists demonstrated highest visibility of ambitions in terms of a structured approach to developing the deepest outcomes from their conference journey(s). This ambition could also have contributed to them progressing within their career and reaching seniority. However, not everything was

perceived to be positive with the natural scientists' ambitions. Greater competition within their topic areas was identified as well as an implied hierarchy amongst the attendees. With certain roles and seniority there seemed to be attached certain power as well, as was implied in section 4.3.6. This negative perception of hierarchy is not to be connected with the positive jittery emotion of meeting 'famous academics' which many of the early career academics referred to. They also came to the conclusion that essentially the 'famous academics' were not out of reach and appreciate recognition for their work (Salzmann-Erikson, 2014) which they were mostly genuinely happy to discuss.

The jittery feeling when meeting well known people was not the only emotion attendees experienced during the conference. Multiple other emotions were illustrated, for example nervousness, excitement and inspiration, supporting Mair and Frew's (2016) findings who also discussed happy and sad emotions as well as the importance of friends and fun during the conference. The emotion of nervousness was very common for the participants of this research. For the academics, the emotion of nervousness was frequently related to delivering presentations, which often increased when academics they perceived as 'famous' were in presence. Interestingly, the emotion of feeling nervous before a presentation did not seem to disappear completely throughout their career despite increased experiences. It only reduced, but attendees felt better prepared to manage their nervousness. Both academics and professionals referred to feeling nervous in regard to their networking. They felt insecure, in particular early in their career, however as they progressed within their career and conference journeys their confidence developed further reducing their nervousness regarding networking. High ambitions and engagement were strongly linked to the nervousness emotion, as well as excitement and inspiration emotions.

Many participants in this research expressed that as the conference unfolded, they began to experience tiredness and exhaustion, often leading to less attention and ability to absorb the learning at the conference. The opportunity to focus and concentrate, away from the day to day responsibilities, was therefore lost to a degree. This is linked to the brief and temporary nature of a conference where there is no time to be 'down' only 'on' (Egri, 1992, p. 94). Conflictingly although many were experiencing this exhaustion, they also found the conference as a recharger, as they left the conference feeling inspired. In their early work on consumer consumption, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) discussed the importance of emotions, demonstrating the significant effect these have on the overall experience. To underpin this, Pullman and Gross (2004) found that emotions within the event contributed further to outcomes than the setting of the conference. The findings of this research not only supports this, but agrees with Henderson (2015, p. 915) that when analysing a conference experience the sole focus cannot be on the intellectual and rational aspects but also the emotions, as they are 'constructed as sites of social, emotional and intellectual activity'. The two emotions which carried on beyond the space of the conference related to confidence, and sense of belonging to the conference community.

6.4.4. Conclusion on attendees' internal influences

The attendees' internal influence on their conference journey, which developed and altered over their career and included their multiple identities throughout, was found through interpretation of the data and re-examination of participants' unique approach to the narration of their conference experience or experiences. It is a major finding, however, because of time and size limitations, it was not explored in substantial depth in this research. It is recommended that in further research these are explored from the outset based on, for example, social identity theory, planned behaviour and self-identity. This would give an opportunity to further study attendees' professional identity in terms of the foundation of their area of expertise, natural or social science, as well as the participants' career stage, which emerged as a consistent impact throughout attendees' career, although in different aspects. The professional identity and the career stage combined were identified to influence the participants' ambitions and engagement with the individual conference journey. This was not only impacting individual journeys, but also creating the interaction between career progression and conference attendance as will be discussed at the end of this chapter when bringing it all together and providing a platform for further research.

6.5. Attendees' workplaces' influence on the conference journey

The individual attendee's workplace was found to be an influence on how attendees approached and engaged with their conference journey, and development of outcomes, as is illustrated in Figure 22. The extent of this relationship has not been recognised within the literature, apart from when discussing organisations funding their employees to attend conferences (Carvalho, Márquez, & Díaz-Méndez, 2018; Jones & Li, 2015). This research identified further impacts of the workplace culture on attendees' conference outcomes, with the most significant finding being that when their workplace explicitly expected outcomes and supported employees in developing them, they were more likely to achieve them. However, if the culture was to leave the employees to it, they were less likely to achieve outcomes. This has been recognised to a degree in the literature as Liu et al. (2017) identified that attendees were more active and engaged when having learning experiences stimulated by their own needs, supporting Yoo and Choon (2008) who found that people were more likely to choose a conference to attend which offered them relevant outcomes, as opposed to one which was required by their employer.

These previous study findings only partially recognise the influence of the workplace; however, they certainly confirm the influence of the identity of the attendee. The workplace nevertheless has employed the person based on their identity as well as their experiences (Tomkins & Eatough, 2013), inviting the interpretation that, in theory, the workplace is in agreement with their employees' choice of conferences. Examples of when the culture reinforced outcomes, and supported their development, included when the prospective attendee was made to justify the funding for their attendance. This justification required them to engage with the process of attendance from a very early

stage and they established clearer aims and objectives for their attendance. During the conference the attendee was more likely to engage, for example through delivering a presentation, actively seeking out products or services applicable for their workplace, or targeted networking.

Following the conference, the attendees working in these workplaces often were required to present their experiences and outcomes to colleagues for them to gain from the journey as well. This presentation was not only physical but also through electronic means such as newsletters and social media. The colleagues were not always only their immediate workplace colleagues, but also within their wider professional community such as their research area or collaborators. The people who attended without this support or expectations from their workplace were more likely to fall back into the day to day job as soon as they returned from the conference and not engage with developing their outcomes further. They had limited incentive to do so, for example, they did not have to demonstrate outcomes justifying the funding. This demonstrates how attendees who work in a culture of encouragement and support are more likely to develop outcomes from their conference attendance.

Attending a conference with colleagues was common for many participants and it was discussed how this provided a certain comfort, in particular with easing the networking nervousness. At the same time, it could however lead to less effort being made in terms of networking with other attendees as discussed in section 4.3.5. A study by Meaney et al. (2009) found that social relationships contributed to colleagues being comfortable with each other supporting their professional relationships, which were strengthened during conferences. This research also identified this, as the participants spoke of conference attendance being good opportunities to get to know their colleagues on a more personal level. For some workplaces this intangible outcome may be their ultimate return on investment, therefore they provide less structure to the development of other outcomes. Further research is however needed to determine this, considering that it was not the focus of this study. This is in addition to the research needed on internal and external conferences and workplaces' aim of these. This study identified contradicting views on the purposes of internal conferences; a participant identified it in section 5.3.3 as ineffective as everyone already knew each other and their projects. Other participants, in particular those more senior, however found them very useful for networking and to show support as discussed in section 5.2.2.2.

In line with the findings of the influence of attendees' identities, the influence of the workplace was identified when analysing the data. The review of the literature had not indicated the noteworthy influence the workplace could have, therefore this was not a focus within the interviews. However, the interpretivist epistemological position underpinning the methodological approach with the in-depth semi-structured life-world interviews and the thematic data analysis allowed for the identification of the influence of the workplace. Because the interviewees structured their stories in accordance to what they perceived of most importance within their conference journeys, the influence of

their workplace came through strongly, despite it not being explicitly asked about. The richness of this data was further advanced through the interpretivist thematic approach to the data analysis. Further research, where the role of the workplace is explicitly explored, is recommended to develop a deeper understanding of their influence on attendees' conference journeys. The participants in this research greatly emphasised the importance of attending only when funded, and research focusing on the workplace could support in understanding if employers perceive they are gaining sufficient return on their investment, irrelevant of their extent of support in achieving outcomes.

6.6. The conference creators' influence on the attendee's conference journey

The literature to date has traditionally emphasised the role of the conference creator as being most important prior to the conference and then primarily to decide on the location and venue as reviewed in section 2.2.2. The subsequent sections, however, demonstrated how this view has been slowly changing over recent years. The focus is shifting from viewing the inputs as most important towards including the intended outcomes when designing the overall conference experience. This has led to the conference design being enhanced to allow for the outcomes to be realised. This research has established that the conference creator has a considerably greater influence on the entire journey than previously perceived. Currently, however, the opportunities available to them, to influence further development of outcomes, are often not being used utilised to their full potential. The following sections will discuss the identified opportunities, and areas to consider, when designing a holistic conference experience which reflects the extensive influence the conference creators can have on the development of conference outcomes. It will begin with exploring the connection between the conference creators' management of expectations and attendees' experiences. This is followed by an analysis of the possible consequences of the identified 'shallow' and 'deep' attendee motivations on programme design and concluded with an evaluation of conference creators' engagement with attendees throughout the entire journey, to facilitate and support the creation of a community.

6.6.1. Conference creators' need to manage attendees' expectations

Fundamentally the research findings demonstrate that there is a significant connection between attendees' expectations of the conference journey and their developed outcomes. The negative experiences were evident when participants discussed feeling out of place at the conference, with their expectations frequently being built on the conference creators' marketing communications. Surprisingly this is an area which has not been studied in much depth, despite the focus on attendance having been a key influence on the role of the conference creator, related to their need to maximise attendance (Rogers, 2013).

Hosting a conference is in many cases a significant financial commitment and for associations this is often their major fundraising event (Toh, Peterson, & Foster, 2007). The analysis demonstrated how conferences were often marketed very broadly to several types of attendees as to attract as many attendees as possible. The attendance of the wrong attendee, in the sense of themselves feeling out of place, could have further consequences than limited outcomes for the attendee, such as decreased repeat attendance, damaging word of mouth, and loss in association members. The long-term loss could therefore outweigh the short-term gain for the conference host. There is also the above-mentioned lack of outcome for the attendee, which leads to not only a loss for them in terms of time and energy, but also a financial loss for the workplace who has funded the conference attendance. The marketing material therefore plays a significant role in the management of expectations and long-term outcomes for all stakeholders.

Segmentation of the market, by viewing the heterogeneous market as a number of smaller, more homogenous markets (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2010), has been practiced widely to profile attendees for marketing purposes (Allen et al., 2011; Bowdin et al., 2011; Getz & Page, 2016; Van Der Wagen & Carlos, 2005). Tkaczynski, Rundle-Thiele, and Beaumont (2009) concluded from a review of the tourism based academic literature that Kotler's (1980) four bases of segmentation: (1) demographic, (2) geographic, (3) psychographic, and (4) behavioural, were frequently used to profile tourists. In a follow up study, focusing on event research, it was concluded that most event attendees are profiled through a combination of these segmentation bases (Tkaczynski & Rundle-Thiele, 2011). This research has also concluded this, supported by the interpretivist stance underpinning the research design and approach to the sampling frame. It has found that the most important segment categories to consider are career stage, area of profession, role, and ambitions both for career as well as the conference attendance; categories which include all but geographic of the above-mentioned bases.

The research participants' experiences strongly indicated that conference creators did not practice in-depth attendee profiling through segmentation, which led to the marketing messages increasing their expectations but were not delivered on. It is extremely challenging to deliver a fully customised individual design, however, as discussed in section 6.4, attendees found their most rewarding experiences to be when other attendee groups were aligned with their own identities. This empirical research therefore confirms J. Lee and Back's (2009b) suggestions to design meetings in accordance to attendees' social and ideal self-images, a recommendation which has not been studied in depth. Without the attendee profiling, the conference creator may on the one hand be missing out on opportunities to meet the expectations, however, on the other hand, when commencing the conference design through the analysis of the segments, and aligning the marketing messages, they are increasing the success of delivering on expectations. This is in line with emerging literature as Kitchen (2017, p. 201) determined in her study that organisers "could consider the profile of attendees to a greater degree" to close the gap between the intended outcomes of organisers and

attendees. This, in addition, underlines the tension between conference creators attempting to maximise their attendance for income purposes and delegates' attendance purposes in terms of developing meaningful outcomes.

There are, however, further communication channels in addition to the official marketing material which build up the attendees' expectations. It was discussed in section 4.2.1 how attendees depended upon their own or colleagues' previous experience when choosing which conference to attend and less on formal communication. The conference creators can utilise these experiences, to a degree, in their marketing material, but the power of word-of-mouth was established to be stronger than marketing material. The attendees who base their decision to attend on word-of-mouth therefore have a wider view of how expectations were managed. The conference creators who are active in profiling and listening to the word-of-mouth are further able to understand if they are meeting expectations or not and therefore have increased prospects of adapting the experience toward the expectations.

This research therefore suggests that a more holistic review of the entire design process, including the crucial initial design stages, is needed, commencing with the attendee profiling and marketing material where management of expectations is built into the design. Included in this stage is the decision of the main conference topic, as it was demonstrated throughout sections 4.3.2 and 5.3.2 how much it influences the attendee experience and the subsequent outcomes. The framework on page 108 demonstrates the correlation between the conference topic and delegates in attendance, linking this to previous discussion on attendees' identity and ambitions. The topic area is therefore much more influential than previous studies have suggested as reviewed in section 2.3.5.

The topic area of the conference is easily one of the most influential design areas concerning the likelihood of the attendee developing relevant outcomes and underpinning all other decisions. The conference creator faces, therefore, the challenging task of balancing the act of having the topic broad enough to attract attendees, but also not so broad that the potential attendee cannot find their niche within it. The topic should be allowing the attendee to perceive that they can both, learn within it, because if it is irrelevant to them the information is not easily picked up (Ravn & Elsborg, 2011) and, in addition, it should indicate to them that the other attendees will be of value to them. The relationship of the topic to the attendees' intended outcomes is highlighted by Ravn and Elsborg (2011) as they state that if the attendees are unable to relate to the material, in relation to their professional life, their learning is suboptimal. In addition, W. Kim and Malek (2017) found through their quantitative study on medical conferences that motivations for professional development had a significant impact on perceived experience. Their study also determined that the programme was not found to be significant, however the results from this research suggests that there is a direct link between the professional development outcomes, topic and programme. The programme will be discussed in further depth in section 6.6.3, where design elements concerning the 'deep' motivations will be discussed.

The professional development was one of two factors which W. Kim and Malek (2017) determined to have a significant impact on perceived experience, the other one being location. This research did not confirm the location to have a significant impact on the experience; however, it did have an influence within the decision-making process. Jago and Deery (2005) suggested, from their qualitative research on the decision-making process interviewing associations, conference creators and attendees, that the venue could be regarded as a 'hygiene' factor, meaning that the venue only becomes an issue when there are problems with it. The findings from this research indicate that the research participants perceive the location similarly. It has an influence during the decision-making process, but much less during the conference itself, and limited influence towards the developments of outcomes. Managing the expectations of the tangible aspects of destination and venue is more straightforward than with the, above discussed, intangible aspects of content linked to targeting the marketing material at the most appropriate prospective attendee segments. The following section will discuss the main pragmatic design elements which are responding to attendees' 'shallow' motivations.

6.6.2. Influences of pragmatic design elements on the 'shallow' motivations

The 'shallow' motivations identified in sections 4.2.2.1 and 5.2.2.1 were acknowledged to be important during the attendees' decision-making process. It was often considered on a pragmatic level in terms of, firstly, if the prospective attendee had time to attend considering their schedule and travel distance, and, secondly, if they would be able to obtain funding for the attendance. These link to the two main 'shallow' motivations of location and cost, which will be considered within this section. The third 'shallow' motivation of conference design factors, in particular the programme, will be discussed in the following section, since it is greatly connected to the 'deep' motivations in terms of its ability to develop outcomes based on the topic and conference design being appropriate for the purposes of attending. By recognising the 'shallow' and 'deep' motivations throughout the design process, and understanding the attendees' needs, the conference creators are taking a major step towards managing the future attendees' expectations before the detailed organisation begins.

For participants, in most cases, the conference location was not the ultimate deal breaker whether they would be attending the conference or not; the decision was made based on the overall evaluation of the 'shallow' and 'deep' motivations. The review of the literature in section 2.2.2 discussed the choice of location in depth, however, sections 4.2.2.1 and 5.2.2.1 demonstrated the limited importance this has on the prospective attendee within their decision-process. The main influence it had during this stage was in terms of time and cost to reach the location, and in the above section on management of expectations it was discussed as a 'hygiene' matter; it began to matter when something went wrong. This research unexpectedly identified how the location in terms of the destinations' tone of the discussion influenced the experience in terms of the discussion

within the conference, as evidenced in sections 4.3.1 and 5.3.1, an impact which has not been recognised in the academic literature. This tone of discussion originated from the destinations' customs and inhabitants' characteristics and is different from the aggressive tone of communication discussed in section 6.2.2.

The influence of the tone of communication originating from the destination became evident when analysing the narration of the research participants, as many had attended conferences worldwide from their base in England. Irrelevant of their profession and identity, they spoke about the influences of the continent the conference was hosted in on the communication within it. The exact location of the conference, in terms of the destination and the country it was hosted within, were not the main influencers on the tone; it was the continent. The most common example given were conferences in North America, which the participants agreed on were larger in most aspects and the conversations were more honest and straightforward, compared to the conservative conversation experiences in Europe. This finding was unexpected and requires further research outside of the boundaries of this study.

The choice of the location, as well as the venue, has a direct impact on the cost of the conference attendance, which sections 4.2.2.1 and 5.2.2.1 demonstrated to have an effect on the decision to attend. This research has identified multiple aspects to the cost to be considered by the conference creator in line with the prospective attendees' identity and underpinned by the attendee segments the conference creators are aiming for. Recent research by Kitchen (2019) positively indicated that there is a shifting trend amongst forward thinking event creators utilising Strategic Meetings Management (SMM) to increase consideration of the attendee experience, whilst business managing the event and delivering value. The financial support available by prospective delegates' workplaces is one of the greatest elements, as research participants emphasised that they were not willing to personally pay for their attendance. This also applied largely to self-employed participants, who emphasised attending conferences which were free, within short travelling distance, or they were invited to attend. There was also a distinct cultural difference identified for academics in social or natural sciences, as the latter group had more opportunities available to apply for grants to attend conferences. The interplay with the workplace culture was also evident when it came to the funding, as different approaches were narrated regarding the funding approaches and opportunities. This research has therefore found that considerations of conference attendance cost are complex and multi layered.

6.6.3.   Influences of programme design on 'deep' motivations

The 'deep' motivations to attend a conference, as identified in sections 4.2.2.2 and 5.2.2.2, relate not only to the multiple identities of the prospective attendee as discussed in section 6.4.1 but also to the outcomes they are seeking from their attendance. The consideration of these is therefore of utmost importance when designing the overall conference experience, whilst also taking into account the management of prospective

expectations so that the design delivers on them. Figure 18 and subsequent discussions in sections 4.3, 4.4, and again in sections 5.3 and 5.4, illustrated how attendees were most likely to achieve the most outcomes when reaching the highest steps of the experience ladder and it was also at this step where the attendees were most engaged and the most advanced conference design was implemented. This section will discuss elements within the conference design which are available to the conference creator to influence on the impact of the conference experience and consequent outcomes.

The importance and relevance of Figure 18, the conference experience ladder, is supported by Orefice's (2018) recent Event Design Ladder, as displayed in Figure 23 below. The comparison of the two ladders identifies that both recognise the significance of a strategic approach. It considers and includes major stakeholders, such as the attendee, when designing an experience which aims to develop meaningful attendee long-term outcomes from the attendance. The bottom steps relate to more conventional approaches of emphasising the location, theming and décor. The top steps represent the ultimate goal of creating community, which can be achieved when expectations have been met and the attendee feel that they are in the right place, with multiple opportunities to develop outcomes from their attendance. These two ladders therefore support the shift in conference literature towards a more strategic design approach, as discussed in the introduction chapter and the review of the literature showed.

VIEW OF STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders as co-creators and co-designers of value systems

STEP 4 – DESIGN AS STRATEGY
Long term perspective. Events as catalysts of dynamic networks integrating people, objects and resources

Stakeholders as resources for experience creation

STEP 3 – DESIGN AS PROBLEM SOLVING
Problem solving activity (wicked problems). Events as experiences. Touchpoints, journey mapping

Stakeholders as consumers

STEP 2 – DESIGN AS FORM GIVING
Event theme, décor, styling. Process, concept, project management

Stakeholders not considered

STEP 1 – NON-DESIGN

Sources: Adapted from Danish Design Centre (2007); Ramirez and Mannervik (2008)

Figure 23 - The event design ladder by Orefice (2018, p. 25)

The design of the conference concerns more than the programme written in the agenda, although it is often the vehicle to present the design to the attendee. The first section of

this chapter identified the importance of 'contribution' and 'sales and marketing' to attendees of two different identities: academics and professionals. The recognition of these crucial elements for these groups of people, establishes the importance for the conference creator to design opportunities within the academic conferences for contributions, and for sales and marketing within conferences aimed at professionals. The latter is, however, often more complex, as the sales and marketing were defined in multiple ways, ranging from demonstration of skills to direct sales of services and products. However, a clear vision of the attendee segment contributes to provision of the appropriate opportunities, which then deliver on expectations. Essentially this means that the conference setup varies for different attendee identities, albeit they are underpinned by a focused topic. If the topic is too broad, the conference setup struggles to deliver outcomes, as recognised by Henn and Bathelt (2015, p. 109) when studying a conference aimed at professionals. They recommended the inclusion of 'narrow focus on specific sub-fields to deliver opportunities for product-specific knowledge exchanges'. These opportunities for contribution, learning, selling, and networking, within narrow topics, can be designed into the programme through various approaches, and the participants had diverse experiences of these approaches, as discussed in relation to opportunities to learn and network.

The greatest division within the approaches concerned the formal sessions of the programme, as well as those more informal, such as social activities and refreshment breaks. These were discussed in depth in section 6.2.2, recognising that attendees were on the one hand mostly passively listening to presentations during the formal sessions, whereas on the other hand they were more interactive during the informal sessions. The informal sessions were, therefore, richer opportunities for the attendees to participate in the co-creation of their conference experience, a co-creation through interaction with other attendees (Rihova, Buhalis, Moital, & Gouthro, 2015). Interestingly, recently Andersson, Armbrecht, & Lundberg (2019) suggested that when plotting different types of events on a continuum ranging from high to low co-creation, interaction and activeness, conferences are to be placed in the middle. This research however suggests that conferences are more complex than to be classified as one type of an event because it contains programme elements which are high co-creation, interaction and activeness opportunities for the attendees, and others which are low in nature on the co-creation scale. Many of the participants found the informal sessions, where they were proactive, more likely to lead to outcomes, resulting in the conclusion that conference creators have a difficult task of creating a more proactive environment for attendees. The higher level of conversations the participants experienced during the informal sessions supported the enhanced outcomes. This depth was spoken of in terms of all types of informal sessions, ranging from coffee breaks to organised social events.

This is partially contradicting de Vries and Peter's (2007) finding of coffee breaks being the most preferred social events, with other social events not even in the top three occasions to network within. These findings also do not support Henn and Bathelt's

(2015) statement that networking happens randomly outside of the facilitated formal sessions, the conference as a combined space is providing the networking opportunities therefore they are not random. The difference in the duration of the conference on outcomes was however recognised, one day conferences offered less networking opportunities than multiple days' conferences. The findings of this research are therefore in agreement with Gillooly, Crowther, and Medway (2017) who concluded that a business event which has a multifaceted event design can provide an experience which not only offers intellectual stimulation but also excites them on a social level, also confirmed by Crowther, Orefice, and Beard (2018). This again counters Altschwager et al.'s (2015) statement as discussed in section 2.3.4 that education events should integrate lower level of sensory design, and entertainment events less cognitive stimulation.

The identity of the attendees, however, does not always invite too much of an active environment. For example, those early in their career have a greater focus on familiarisation and idea development, whereas the focus shifts towards more applied outcomes of specific knowledge and collaborations, as well as visibility, for those later in their career. The perceived need, at the beginning of a career, to increase knowledge may invite a desire for a more passive participation, whereas the driver to showcase later in the career invites the more proactive participation. Nevertheless for all attendees there are opportunities for enhancement of the experience through effective facilitation within the conference as well as improved guidance for the speakers, considering that content could not be fulfilling its potential without effective presentation skills (Wiessner et al., 2008). Enhanced quality of the speakers could also lead to the attendees experiencing the relevance of the presentation to them, as opposed to losing concentration because of poor presentation skills, as was illustrated in the Opportunities to learn section beginning on page 146 where Sheila discusses that she had '*to force myself to concentrate'*. This is important as it has been found that relevance is more strongly linked to learning outcomes than satisfaction with the conference experience (Andersen & Wahlgren, 2015).

This research has found that the greatest influence from the on-site experience, on the successful development of meaningful outcomes, was when attendees felt they were part of the community. This was more likely to occur when they felt a connection to other attendees, as discussed throughout this chapter, for example through identifying with the same identity group. In section 4.3 the academics spoke of conference experiences when they felt that they did not belong within the conference, supporting de Vries and Peters' (2007) findings that interaction was less supported at conferences visited by both researchers and professionals. Henn and Bathelt (2015), on the other hand, identified within a conference which brought together potential investors and those hoping to attract an investment - two groups with different expected outcomes - positive interactions as they had similar natural science backgrounds. If the marketing material has reflected the true picture of the conference design then likelihood of attendees

feeling part of the conference community increased significantly, illustrating the importance of the management of expectations.

The creation of the community is not confined to the duration of the conference. The conference creators have opportunities pre- and post-conference for community development. These are periods which have received limited discussion within the literature, although social media usage is being explored, for example, by Wei et al. (2017) who found that it has great potential to enhance the community building. The pre-conference engagement is not only the publication of the marketing material but also the opportunity to begin developing the outcomes through, for example, opportunities for co-creation of the programme and facilitation of networking, and opportunities for sales and contribution. During this period, they also have opportunities to support speakers in becoming more effective within their presentations. Through a clever facilitation during this period, a conference community can begin to form which allows for a deeper learning and relationship building during the conference. The post conference period has great potential to prolong the life of the conference which the conference creator can significantly impact upon through designing the continuing of the conversation, for example by creating dedicated channels of communications. They also have the opportunities to participate in the facilitation of the development of attendees' reflections, which will be discussed further in the following section.

6.6.4. Conclusion on conference creator's influence

The conference creators' design, influences differently on attendees throughout their conference journey albeit overall, they have a significant impact. They have multiple aspects to consider, beginning with the management of the expectations, as ultimately the attendee develops the most significant outcomes when feeling part of the community, and the conference creator plays a major role in this happening. Their research and strategy of targeting the most relevant attendee segments will lead to the marketing material being more accurate, and has greater ability to attract the relevant delegates most likely to gain outcomes from their attendance. During the conference the setup is influenced by the identity of those in attendance, with the complexity increased through multiple layers of identities. Greater outcomes are achieved when the conference creator has identified and considered these different identity layers, along with the 'shallow' and 'deep' motivations for attending. These attendee outcomes will be further discussed in the following section.

6.7. The individual attendees' conference outcomes and the significance of reflection to enhance them

Event design, according to Frissen et al. (2016), has two basic principles, that the event changes behaviour and that it is designed for more than one stakeholder. However, Henn and Bathelt (2015, p. 112) found that a 'conference usually do not trigger disruptive

changes of a particular field'. This research has found that attendees are likely to have outcomes which change their behaviour when they have experienced fitting in to the conference community. In sections 4.4 and 5.4 three different types of outcomes were discussed: experiential assets, opportunities, and tangible outcomes, all of which change behaviour eventually although within different time frames. These may not trigger disruptive changes to an entire subject area, however, they are likely to have long-lasting impact on the individual attendee.

The outcomes, which were recognised in Table 26 and Table 39, are supported by recent work by Edwards, Foley and Malone (2017) as they identified similar outcomes through analysing stories collected from ten high achievers in their respective field at later points in their careers. Their approach to data collection was therefore similar to the methodological approach of this research, and the data collection for these studies took place at similar points of time. The main difference is that this study included stories from attendees at different points in their career, whereas their participants were all late in their careers. Figure 24 below shows the outcome findings by Edwards et al. (2017), divided by on one hand outcomes as different points in their journey and on second hand the intrinsic and professional practice outcomes.

Figure 24 - Benefit and outcome legacies arising from business events (Edwards et al., 2017, p. 134)

One of the common threads in the outcomes identified in this research, by Edwards et al. (2017) and by Henn and Bathelt (2015) are the development of ideas which lead to changed behaviour. The conference experiences have allowed attendees to gain new

angles on their knowledge which have supported new approaches. Liu et al. (2017) found this occurring when attendees reported on how they gained knowledge or learnt new techniques and, as they were extraordinary moments, they had stronger outcomes leading to changed behaviour, supporting the findings of this research. Another common thread of outcomes is that the networking does not always have an immediate impact following the conference, but have great long-term opportunities for impact as the relationship develops over time (Kitchen, 2017). This was illustrated throughout chapters four and five when participants discussed meeting the same people at multiple conferences developing friendships, confirming Foley et al.'s (2014) findings.

The long-term aspect has been supported by demonstrating that attendees do not only follow up on contacts made through networking at trade fairs (Luo & Zhong, 2016), but that 'events can transform acquaintance relationships into collaborative relationships' (Ihm & Castillo, 2017, p. 217). Essentially the networking is about attendees creating value for each other (Mitchell et al., 2016) and when the conference creator has succeeded with their design, there are multiple opportunities for the attendees to engage with this co-creation of value. A recent study by T. T. Hansen, Pedersen, and Foley (2020) support these findings, as they developed the cycle of credibility framework, illustrated below in Figure 25 showing the impact and recognition academics gain from conference attendance. It highlights many of the same outcomes this research has discussed in section 4.4. Both studies also support their concept of the 'Visible College', academics who network at conferences which have an impact within their field, for example through collaborations, as conceptualised in their earlier literature review (T. T. Hansen & Pedersen, 2018).
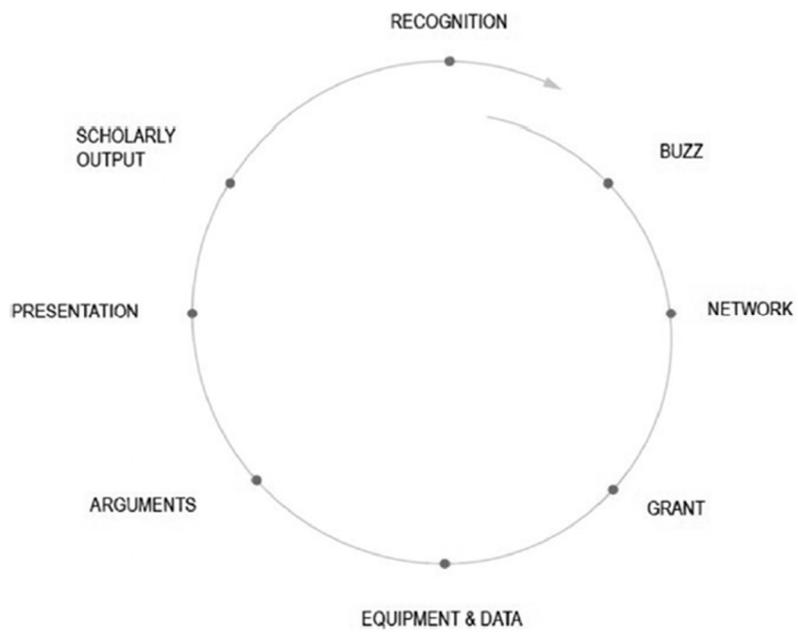

Figure 25 - Conversions at academic events (T. T. Hansen et al., 2020, p. 485)

Each individual journey has a range of levels of outcomes for the attendee, as discussed in sections 4.4 and 5.4, which were developed dependent upon the experience within this individual journey. The framework in Figure 22 on page 173 in addition demonstrated how the development of outcomes are also dependent upon influences internally from the attendee themselves, and externally from their workplace and the conference creator. This adds on to the complexity of the development of the outcomes as they change over time and there is a significant interplay with the individual's career progression, as demonstrated through different paths within the framework taken by those early in their career and those later.

Of particular interest is how attendees later in their career were more likely to be developing tangible outcomes, as opposed to those earlier in their career, who were much more likely to only be developing assets and opportunities. Interestingly this applied for both academics and professionals, and limited difference was identified in the details of the outcomes for the attendee segments. The importance of fitting into the conference community, and having expectations met, was demonstrated on page 111 when discussing the limitations for opportunities to develop outcomes when experiencing a conference which was not attended by relevant attendees. This interpretation of the empirical data supports Hixson's (2012) conceptual framework as shown in Figure 26.
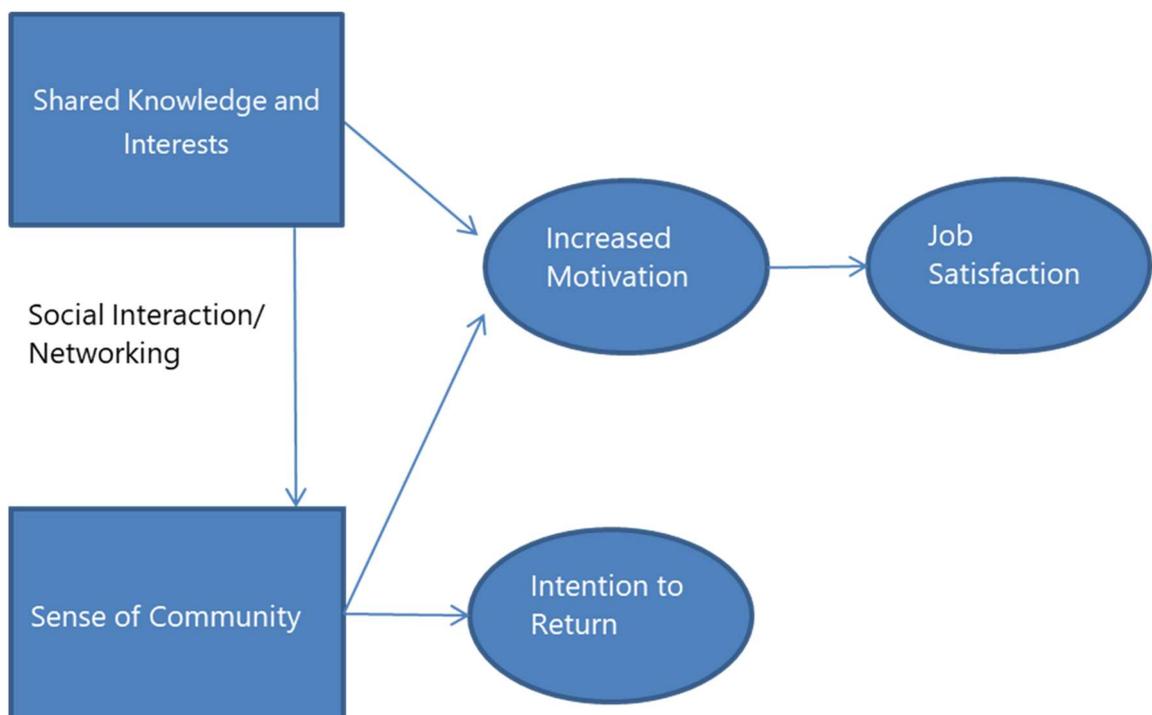
Figure 26 - Model of proposed conference outcomes (Hixson, 2012, p. 18)

An interesting contradiction in terms of outcomes emerged for the academics, in particular natural scientists. They discussed, in section 4.3.4, on the one hand how they felt they gained more learning from presenting posters, than delivering verbal presentations, in terms of having in-depth discussion and gaining new ideas. On the other hand, the verbal presentations were more prestigious and increased their presence

and reputation, leading to other outcomes such as future collaborations. As they progressed in their career, they therefore shifted their focus from the assets relating to ideas and knowledge towards the asset of being known. The outcomes they gained were opportunities of collaborations and wider audience for their research; however, the conflict laid in them not being able to develop as many outcomes relating to gained topic knowledge. Kitchen and Filep (2019) published recently, following the data collection and well into the writing of this research, four key areas regarding attendees psychological well-being outcomes from events: self-identity, sense of belonging, positive emotions and flourishing; areas which have noteworthily all been identified within this research, in relation to conferences. Flourishing they define as 'including both hedonic elements of well-being (such as positive emotions) and eudaimonic elements (such as meaning and achievement)' (Kitchen & Filep, 2019, p. 73). These, however, did not come about on their own, the co-creation supported this. However, more importantly, to develop these psychological elements into tangible outcomes, the importance of attendees' engagement with reflections was identified.

The importance of reflection on the conference journey for both academics and professionals

The importance of reflection when developing outcomes was a significant finding from the participants' stories, as well as how the reflection process can be influenced by themselves, their workplace and the conference creator. Interestingly this reflection could begin as early as during the decision-making process, since ultimately that is when the prospective attendee is reflecting upon what outcome they are expecting and desiring to achieve. This reflection takes into account their previous conference experiences as they are aware of what they can achieve, as well as their current career situation and progression. During the conference the reflections, again, have a substantial influence, for those later in their career it is an opportunity provided to do some 'horizon scanning' (Sheila) away from the pressures of the office, and for the early career attendees it can provide perspectives on approaches and procedures within their professional area. To maximise the development of outcomes the reflection attendees engage with, are therefore not solely dependent upon reflecting on the experience within the conference, but also their working environment and responsibilities. Following the conference experience, the reflection should continue to ensure maximised outcomes, as was demonstrated in sections 4.4 and 5.4, where the most proactive participants were able to demonstrate the greatest outcomes. The attendees who continuously reflected throughout the entire conference journey were creating and developing a collection of attributes which fed into their career progression. A key finding is how simultaneously their career progression is feeding back into the attributes they have and will gain from their individual and accumulated conference journeys.

The engagement with the reflection process was identified to be influenced by the attendees' identity and depth of experience during the conference journey, supporting the discussion in section 6.4 on the internal influences. The workplace also has an

influence on the reflection process, as those who were engaged with the development of outcomes were more likely to provide opportunities for reflection, and the same applied to conference creators. This emphasis on reflection is supported in section 2.3.5 of the review of the literature, showing that previous studies have focused on the reflection within the event itself. This research has identified that ideally the attendee engages with the reflection throughout the entire journey to support development of outcomes. This applies to the influence of the workplace and conference creators can have on the reflection process as well. For example, prior to the conference, the workplace encourages reflection on possible outcomes through justification for attendance, and the conference creator is influencing through their management of expectations. Following the conference, the workplace influences when supporting an active discussion or presentation of the experience, and the conference creator through, for example, sharing of material and contacts.

The significance of the reflection process to the development of outcomes was identified when analysing the interviews as it was not emphasised within the interview questions, however this significance is worth studying further in future research, through various approaches, as reflections have been focused on within multiple areas of study. Theories in three broad areas were stated by Høyrup (2004, p. 445) to focus on reflection at an individual level: 1) the thinking of John Dewey, 2) the field of adult education, and 3) the domain of problem solving. The second two areas are strongly related to conference attendance, adult education is obvious and a need for problem solving has been referred to throughout this thesis as one of the main motivations for conference attendance and resulting outcome towards it. The thinking of John Dewey relates to people's learning not coming from the learning itself but from the reflection on the learning. His seminal work still has a strong influence on theories on reflection as is evidenced by, for example, Høyrup (2004) and in Ashwin's (2015) book on teaching reflections. The three areas Høyrup (2004) defines as underpinning for reflection are all suitable to provide theoretical underpinning for further research on reflections within conference journeys.

6.8. Bringing it all together – the holistic view of the conference journey

Significantly, this research has demonstrated that a conference creator which takes notice of the individual attendee's career and progression when designing the experience will be better equipped to optimise the development of their conference outcomes. This means that the conference they are creating at each point of time is exactly that, one conference journey at a specific time with outcomes which are connected with the attendee's multiple conference journeys, as well as their career and progression. The single journey detail regarding outcomes are therefore less significant, it is about the overall outcome and the more effective the individual is at reflecting throughout and between the multiple journeys, the greater opportunities they have at developing the various outcomes.

The continuum of the attendee's overall conference experience and its relationship with individual conference journeys, designed by individual conference creators, as well as their workplace at each time, is illustrated in the framework in Figure 27. It reflects how the outcomes are developed over time and depend upon multiple experiences and influences. The attendees are subconsciously developing a continuum of the conference experience through their reflections on past single journeys and career, supported by their workplaces whilst planning for the future. This final empirical framework presented as the continuum puzzle of the conference journey in Figure 27, was developed towards the very end of this research and principally represents the outcome of this research journey. It is a result of the interpretivist epistemological stance and made possible with the data collected through the life-world interviews and most importantly the recursive approach to the thematic data analysis where the researcher continuously engaged with reflection on the research journey and data.

This study has most significantly shown that each single conference journey is not a standalone event, like the literature has traditionally viewed it; essentially each conference is a smaller piece in a much larger puzzle for the individual attendee as visualised in Figure 27. The same therefore goes for the individual attendee as for the topic field being discussed at the conference, which was previously discussed through Henn and Bathelt's (2015) statement that a single conference does not 'trigger disruptive changes'. This confirms Garud's (2008, p. 1084) reflection that conferences are 'not independent entities, but rather are embedded events within a larger flow of field unfolding activities'.
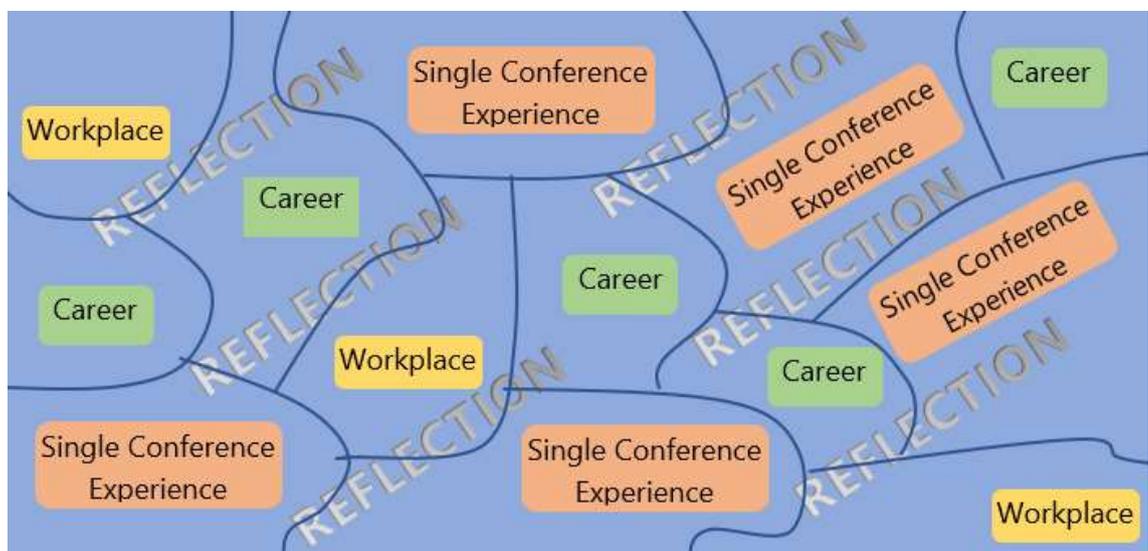
Figure 27 - The continuum puzzle of the conference journey

Chapters four and five illustrated the two conference journeys academics and professionals have. The first section of this chapter discussed how essentially these journeys are very similar although the details are different. The following sections, 6.3 to 6.6, discussed the three main influences on the conference journey in the development of outcomes: 1) internal influences including their identities, career stage, ambitions,

engagement and emotions, 2) the workplace as an external influence and finally 3) the conference creator also as an external influence. This supports the event experience frameworks illustrated for music, sports, cultural and art events in Figure 7 by de Geus et al. (2015) and a food and wine show in Figure 8 by Liu et al. (2017). The research outcomes from this study also confirm this understanding for conference experiences for professional purposes. In addition Figure 28 demonstrates Weinberg and Gould's (2019) Participant-by-situation interactional model of motivation for sports event participation, illustrating the similarities between not only their personal factors to the internal influences identified in this research, but also their situational factors to the two main external influences of workplace and conference creator. Weinberg and Gould (2019) stated that the underpinning for their model was to examine how these two factors, personal and situational, interact. This research has now identified the three main influences, internal, workplace, and conference creator on conference experiences, and future research is recommended to explore from the outset how these interact and contribute towards attendees' outcomes.
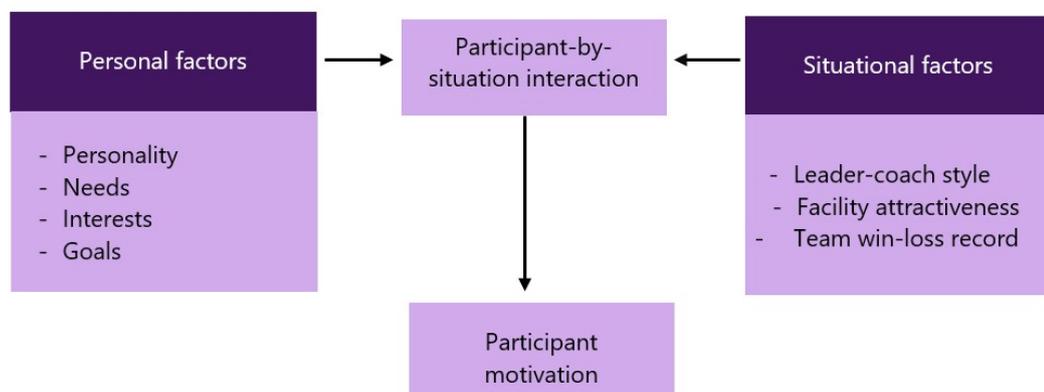
Figure 28 - Participant-by-situation interactional model of motivation (Weinberg & Gould, 2019, p. 55)

The most beneficial experience within a single conference journey came from when attendees felt part of the community, and this research has found that this can be further supported when conference creators have a strong awareness and consideration of the attendees' career and progression. This adds to recent research on the topic which have found that positive networking experiences are highly influenced by the sense of community (Hahm et al., 2016) and the self-congruity attendees feel within the conference (Ryu & Lee, 2013; Wei et al., 2017). This supports the co-creation of a community of practice (Wiessner et al., 2008) and the conference community as an integral part of the experience which shapes the value by co-creating learning, social, emotional and hedonic value (Mitchell et al., 2016).

The community is more significant than conference literature has indicated, although it has received increased notice recently (Hahm et al., 2016). It has even been found statistically significant that attendees at a music festival were more likely to return when they experienced sense of community during the event (Jahn, Cornwell, Drengner, &

Gaus, 2018). The strong connections between the internal factors, including attendees' multiple identities, conference creators, communities, and workplace were evidenced throughout this chapter. Finally, it was suggested that those attendees who were more reflective gained further outcomes over their career. In section 3.4.3 it was recognised that these research participants have enhanced employment and education levels which may well contribute to their identity traits, supporting development of further outcomes. The conference creator cannot assume that all of their attendees will have these traits, increasing the importance of understanding their attendee segment and how they can design the reflections into their conference. A reflective environment for the attendee is important, and not only the one created by the conference creator, but also one which is integrated into the workplace practices and culture is therefore recommended to contribute towards maximised outcomes.

This chapter has discussed how essentially the holistic conference journey is a co-creation from the three main influences, those internal to the attendee including their multiple identities, their workplace and the conference creator. The principles of the single conference journey were demonstrated in Figure 16 and in Figure 22, these were incorporated to explain the effect of the three main influences throughout the holistic conference journey through the career. The internal influences were influential throughout the entire journey, however, in different ways at different points in time, whereas the workplace and conference creator were most influential at different points of the journey. The workplace influenced mostly before and after the experience at the single conference experience whereas the conference creator was most influential during the single conference experience – both contributing towards the reflection supporting the development of meaningful outcomes. Fundamentally they all are individual puzzles in the holistic conference journey influencing and supporting each other.

Chapter 7 CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

7.1. Introduction

The focus of this research has been on the attendee's holistic conference journey throughout their career, to reveal what influences the development of outcomes from their conference experiences. The identification of these multiple influences, both internal and external to the attendee, has been achieved and discussed in chapter six following the illustration of the academics' journey in chapter four and professionals' journey in chapter five. This research is contributing towards and informing key developments in contemporary conference literature, an area which is rapidly evolving whilst moving from a managerial approach from the conference creator to a design focus emphasising the experience of the attendee.

The holistic conference journey of two key attendee segments, academics and professionals, has been uncovered throughout this research. The analysis of it revealed the main influences within the journey which contribute to the outcomes attendees perceive from their individual journeys. The research outcome was most comprehensively illustrated in the frameworks in Figure 22 and Figure 27. Together they reveal the complex and multi-layered relationships between single conference journeys, attendees' internal influences, influences externally from their workplaces and the multiple conference creators they encounter. This knowledge contributes to the development of understanding how to increase outcomes and perceived value from conference attendance. The attendee focus, as manifested in the sampling frame, supported and contributed towards providing incremental knowledge within contemporary conference research, and the emerging event design thinking. The sampling frame had an equal division between academics and professionals at three stages in their career: early, mid and late; the different career stages contributed towards capturing the longitudinal aspect of the conference journey. The longitudinal aspect and the interpretivist epistemological position, which underpinned the thematic analysis of the 18 in-depth semi-structured life-world interviews, led the explanation of the conference journey and augmented the revelation of the influences on the development of the outcomes.

Following a personal reflection on the doctoral research journey including the progress, growth as a researcher, accomplishments and challenges, is a discussion on the achievements of the research. This includes how it has achieved its aim of analysing and explaining attendees' holistic conference journey and the journeys' contribution to the attendee's accumulated outcomes of a lifetime conference journey. The key findings and contributions to knowledge will be discussed in section 7.4 followed by recommendations for future research and limitations to the study before closing with the final conclusions.

7.2. Personal reflections on the doctoral research training journey

I developed a great interest and passion for business events' research whilst studying an MSc degree which concluded with my dissertation on evaluation methods within events. Specifically, I was exploring healthcare congresses, assessing if the ROI evaluation methodology (Phillips et al., 2008) adapted for healthcare congresses was suitable to evaluate them. The research identified that stakeholders found it challenging to set themselves clear and measurable objectives in line with company strategy when participating in an event. The stakeholders, however, were more likely to blame the evaluation framework for being unable to demonstrate the value in conference participation. This left me curious and eager to know more, which led me to carry out this PhD research. At the outset, the focus was on conference evaluations and determining how they should be performed to successfully demonstrate the value to all main stakeholders. Early in the research process it, however, became clear that the underlying knowledge which was needed to enable the construction of an effective evaluation framework was insufficient. What attendees perceived as value gained from attending conferences and how these outcomes were developed was relatively unknown. This realisation paved the way for the research discussed within this thesis, leading to the qualitative approach focusing on attendees as opposed to the originally proposed mixed method approach including multiple stakeholders.

The original mixed method research approach was developed from not only my dissertation but also my previous experience and skill set. Very early in the process I however realised that my then, rather quantitative based skill set, should not be guiding the research. Instead the current understanding of the topic, and the potentials the study had to make contributions to knowledge enhancing the subject area, should guide the research. At this point I also realised the opportunity the doctoral study was providing me to enhance and increase my skill set. Before I began my postgraduate studies, I was working within finances and budgeting, following completing a degree in economics. This led to the quantitative natured skillset where I enjoyed spreadsheets and numbers whilst working in pragmatic areas. I have achieved my aim of growing my overall skill set and not least my research skills, it has however not been a straightforward or easy process.

My philosophical stance adapted within this research, the subjective ontological stance, an interpretivist epistemological position with interpretivist methodologies adopted, were appropriate not only for the study aim and objectives but also for me as a developing researcher. Following the early change of direction within the study towards a qualitative study, which I reflected greatly on within my research diary, the emphasis of the subject underpinnings also changed with a shift from evaluation literature to design and experience literature. The methodological approach also shifted from a quantitative focus within mixed methods to a qualitative approach. The pure life-story telling approach which developed in an unexpected way as discussed in section 3.5 was a major learning point for me, the realisation how research does not always go to plan. The

philosophical stance allowed me to continuously develop and adapt as the research progressed in conjunction with research participants and the data. It was also interesting to reflect upon how people of similar background to myself reacted to the unstructured approach as opposed to those with a different background. My ongoing reflection via the mechanism of the research diary encouraged me to constantly review the research process, resulting in some fine tuning during the interviews to meet the needs of the participants and enable them to fully engage with their storytelling. The outcome of this change in research method provided extensive quality data resulting in the achievement of the contributions to knowledge.

Experiencing the entire research cycle was very rewarding, but it also demonstrated at an early stage where additional training was required. As a result of this identification I engaged with a postgraduate module on qualitative research methodologies which gave me much appreciated learning and met my training needs. The initial period, whilst establishing the focus of the research and the most appropriate methodological approach, was challenging and provided numerous learning opportunities. The data collection was, in hindsight, the most enjoyable period of the research, experiencing the data emerge and engaging with initial interpretations of it, followed by a productive satisfying period of data analysis. The thematic data analysis approach provided me with the structure needed, based on my background and it was appropriate for the data as discussed in the methodology chapter.

Writing the thesis was my greatest challenge during the research. I experienced that I had insufficient previous training in writing and the data was complex, leading to challenges in presenting the thesis. My writing has greatly evolved and developed and the writing style I have adopted within this thesis has allowed me to best tell the story of the research and its outcomes. It has also provided me with increased confidence in writing, an invaluable asset for me from the doctoral research training. The interpretivist epistemological stance and the thematic data analysis approach allowed me the continuous improvement of my writing as I was developing the analysis through the recursive approach with continuous engagement with the data. The crafting of my writing was very important to not only the research but also to my personal development as a researcher.

Now at the end of my doctoral journey I have a better understanding of myself, my appreciation for the crafting of a well written piece has grown and my enjoyment of developing a purposeful spreadsheet has a new meaning. Dewey has been cited saying that 'we don't learn from experience, we learn from reflecting upon experience' and during the data analysis this statement provided an increased meaning of not only the data but also of me as a researcher. Firstly, it gave meaning to the lifetime conference experience and outcome, providing the foundation of the research outcome, and secondly it provided an understanding for the process of interpretation of the research data. I have increased my skill set as a researcher, and in future research I will build on these, as well as continuing the practice of keeping a research diary. I have also learnt

that I would appreciate when carrying out future research, in line with recommendations given later in this chapter, collaborations with researchers who have a more extensive background than me in social sciences and writing which would support the research. The following section will outline how this research has achieved its aim and objectives through an overview of each chapter and their contribution towards the accomplishment of responding to the research question. It is followed by a section on the key research findings and its contribution to knowledge.

7.3. Achieving the research aim, objectives & question

The introduction chapter provided an overview of conference research and illustrated how conferences are one event type within a diverse and vast category of business events. Traditionally conference research has, in line with broader event studies, focused on the input, logistical and pragmatic elements, hence the long-lived emphasis on organisers and other stakeholders which influence the input. Substantial literature is therefore available on the first stage of the attendees' conference journey, the decision-making process (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Mair & Thompson, 2009; Oppermann & Chon, 1997; Zhang et al., 2007), as this information and its relation to inputs has been deemed most important for the conference creator to design a conference which attracts delegates. More recently a deeper understanding of the attendees' experiences during the conference has been developed within the literature; however, still with a predominant focus on the conference creators as they are viewing loyalty and intentions to return (Hahm et al., 2016; W. Kim & Malek, 2017).

The literature on the development of individual attendee's outcomes following their conference attendance is still undeveloped as reviewed in chapter two. The origins of this area come from the research focus within the post conference stage; to prove the worth of the conference through quantitative measurements for the organisers and other major stakeholders such as host, venue and destination (Jones & Li, 2015). This current research contributes to the emerging literature on development of individual attendee's outcomes following their conference attendance. It is achieved by adding knowledge on the integrated range of internal and external influences throughout their holistic conference journey. This section and in particular the following section 7.4 will discuss this claim in depth.

The existing literature on the decision-making process, event design and experiences as well as outcomes, value and evaluation were explored in depth through the extensive review in chapter two. It revealed how conference research is not isolated to the studies of events but draws upon multiple different subject areas including critical management studies (Bell & King, 2010), organisation research (Ford & Harding, 2008), political science (Garaffa & Brians, 2011), education (Henderson, 2015) and nursing (Salzmann-Erikson, 2014). In addition, section 2.4 demonstrated the shift from the input focus towards a further focus on the design of the experience and how the development of outcomes

need to have a ground in the conference experience design. The chapter provided the researcher with existing and underpinning knowledge for the data collection, therefore it contributed towards the achievement of the first of three objectives for this research, which was:

- *To explore individuals' experiences of their conference journey.*

The research methodology was detailed and justified in chapter three. Based on the literature review it provided not only the rationale for the individual attendee focus and the need for exploring the holistic conference journey, but also an argument for the interpretivist qualitative approach. To complete the achievement of the first research objective, 18 research participants provided their conference journey experiences through an in-depth semi-structured life-world interview, totalling 1,061 minutes which when transcribed provided close to 170,000 words of primary data. The interviewees had the freedom to construct their stories in the way they perceived the most appropriate, therefore the researcher was able to extract the elements within the participants' experiences which were of most importance to them. On reflection, the role of the interviewer was to be a facilitator for the participants to tell their story with the facilitation fine-tuned for each interview to meet each individual's needs. The interviews were analysed through a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) allowing the researcher to interpret them.

Chapter four described the conference journey of the academics and chapter five described the journey for the professionals to provide a foundation to meet the second objective which was to:

- *Compare and contrast academics' and professionals' conference journeys in the context of their perceived outcomes.*

The literature review demonstrated how previous research has focused on association conferences and in particular academics as the population for attending them (M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008). The voice of the professionals attending conferences was largely non-existent, a gap in knowledge this research contributes to. The analysis of the data demonstrated that the main steps within the journeys of the two groups were identical as was demonstrated in the framework in Figure 16 on page 92 leading to the identical structure of the chapters. Throughout the chapters it, however, became clear that the details within journey steps were different, albeit the main influences on the development were the same as discussed in chapter six, the discussion.

To complete the achievement of the second objective the major differences and similarities of the two journeys were discussed in section 6.2. The major difference identified related to variations in expectations of attendance and the academics desire to 'contribute' to the conference whereas professionals were seeking 'sales and marketing' opportunities. Most importantly the comparison of the journeys led to the

conclusion that ultimately the influences on the development of outcomes were shared for all participants. The typology of internal and external influences illustrated this key finding from this research. The internal influences were from attendees' multiple identities, their career stage at each time as well as differing ambitions, engagement and emotions. The external influences identified were two, the workplace and the conference creator. The framework in Figure 22 on page 173, which shows the relationship between the lifetime conference journey and the internal and external influences, completes the third and final research objective which was:

- *To develop a framework to explain the key influences affecting the conference attendees' realised outcomes.*

Those key influences demonstrated within the framework provided the final answer to the research question:

- *What influences the development of outcomes gained from conference experience?*

The achievement of the research aim and objectives and answer to the research question delivered findings which advance current knowledge or reinforce it. The main findings which reinforce knowledge, firstly confirmed networking and learning to be major motivations to attend conferences and secondly, they confirm that attendees' career stage influences their conference journey.

The findings most significant to advancing knowledge relate firstly to the influence of attendees' multiple identities and other internal factors; secondly to the identification of 'shallow' and 'deep' motivations, from the very similar academic and professional attendee conference journey. Thirdly was the influence of their workplace and how the conference creator can influence more effectively by responding to the 'shallow' and 'deep' motivations through carefully considering and applying event design. Ultimately these significant findings, as illustrated in the meta-framework in Figure 22 on page 173, led to the development of the puzzle in Figure 27, on page 197, which shows how single conference journeys, workplaces, conference creators, and attendees' reflections are all a piece in the larger picture of the individual's career. The following section will discuss in more depth these key research findings and the contributions to knowledge this study makes.

7.4. Key research findings and contributions

The context of this research, the shift in thinking in event research from an operational and input oriented lens toward an event design perspective, has been comprehensively argued throughout this thesis. This shift has resulted in a move from an organisational view to a longer term and more strategic view, preoccupied with outcomes for the multiple stakeholders who co-produce an event. This trend is acknowledged in industry as it has recently been identified that event industry practitioners indicate "a shifting

trend towards a focus on attendee experience and engagement management" (Kitchen, 2019, p. 9). Given this tightly positioned context, the attendees' conference experience has been thoroughly examined on two levels. Firstly, taking an overarching view of an individual's single conference experience, going beyond the time and space parameters of the events and examining the totality of their conference journey inclusive of pre- and post-conference and all related influences. Secondly, the research examines the accumulated conference experiences, over a person's career, therefore drawing upon multiple conference experiences as a lens through which to examine the influences on the holistic conference journey. Previous conference research has neither examined conference experience holistically, nor examined the accumulated journey over a lifetime career. As a further dimension the research differentiates between academics and professionals, thus enabling similarities and differences to be examined. Therefore, in all senses this research makes a timely and justifiable contribution, under the emerging and growing umbrella of event design.

The fundamental framework in Figure 22 is presented as a meta-framework to summarise the key findings from the primary data. This framework demonstrates the integrated range of influences which encircle an individual's accumulated conference experience, reflections and perceptions, encapsulating the key contributions of this research. Therefore, further to the above, and as a direct implication of the above contribution, the research has identified integral influences upon an individual's conference experiences and journey - each of which has limited and relatively scant coverage in existing literature. These influences are each presented as significant ingredients in the integral linkage between an individual's conference decisions, attendance, reflection and outcomes. Below is a list of the categories of the internal and external influences followed by a discussion on each.

– Conference Attendee Multiple Identities
– Career stage
– Workplace related
– Event Creator related

Conference attendee multiple identities

It was found that all attendees have multiple identities which influence variously at different times in their journey. Section 2.3.2 explored social identity and self-identity, as studied within the wider events literature, whilst in section 2.3.6 it was reviewed within the conference literature. Previous studies have found that event attendees' social identity affects their event experience, for example within running events (Shipway & Jones, 2007) and cycling events (Coghlan, 2012) a finding which this study confirms for conference experiences. Fundamentally this study contributes to knowledge on how the influence of the multiple identities is greater and more wide reaching than previously indicated in research (J. Lee & Back, 2009b; Mair & Frew, 2016; Ryu & Lee, 2013; Wei & Miao, 2017; Wei et al., 2017). It provides advanced knowledge on how academics' and

professionals' underlying identity of natural or social scientist influenced their journey greatly as discussed in section 6.4.1. In addition it enhances knowledge on how attendee's identity impacts their ambitions, engagement and emotions which influence the single conference journey and their holistic lifetime journey as discussed in section 6.4.3.

Career stage

The findings reinforce the knowledge, discussed in section 2.2.5, that career stage influences the conference journey, a finding which was made possible by including within the sampling frame participants at three different stages in their career. More significantly, their inclusion allowed for an analysis of how the career stage influences differently over time at different stages in the journey. Price (1993) and Grant and Weaver's (1996) findings were confirmed, including that earlier in the career the key interest regarding conference attendance was learning, searching for ideas and contacts, and finding their feet at conferences; whilst later in their career they aimed to demonstrate leadership and focus on networking.

In addition to this reinforcement of knowledge that career stages influences the conference journey, this study advances knowledge on how they link through the profession and role identity and its affect at different single conference experiences within their holistic conference journey. When attendees progress within their career the expectations from their attendance increased, including expectations of academics' 'contributions' or professionals' 'sales and marketing'. At this stage they were also likely to have more senior roles leading to increased expectations of being seen at conferences. In addition, they were not only looking to develop new ideas, but more importantly determining how to take their projects further, including establishing collaboration opportunities and fostering friendships. At this later stage in their career they experienced more depth of what started in their early career, whereas overall, they were somewhat more relaxed towards their attendance as they had established themselves within their fields.

Workplace related

The various, and developing, identities of the attendee was linked with their workplace, which did not always stay the same. This research has added to knowledge the extensive influence the workplace, including their culture and support, can have on the conference journey – an area with scant current research as discussed in section 6.5. The participants who were at workplaces which were visibly proactive in supporting their employees both pre- and post the conference experience, reported greatest outcomes. This was achieved because they were requested to justify their attendance beforehand and present their experience and developing outcomes afterwards, leading to their increased engagement with reflections.

Event creator related

This research contributes to knowledge with a different angle on the growing body of event design literature concerning the influence of the conference creator. It was found that the conference creator can influence the attendees' conference journey and support the achievement of outcomes by responding to the attendees' 'shallow' and 'deep' motivations, therefore challenging the orthodox view that conference creators' are to emphasise 'shallow' motivations like choice of location.

This study provides advanced knowledge on how conference creators' responses to 'deep' motivations, relating to the attendees' desired outcomes from the attendance, contributes to creating increased outcomes as discussed in section 6.6.3. It was found that the value of the attendance is advanced when the delegate attends the most appropriate conference for their relevant current identities – demonstrating the importance of the increased knowledge on the holistic conference journey. The resulting sense of belonging to the community, which the conference creators considers throughout their design often with a starting point in their management of the attendees' expectations, was found and advances recent findings by Hahm et al. (2016). The great importance of the topic discussed at the conference which guides the most relevant attendees to attend, was also identified and again adding to knowledge on conference design. Noteworthily, it was established that the conference creators influence the journey by contributing towards co-creating the conference community through supporting the most relevant identities coming together. This is facilitated with a balanced programme of formal and informal sessions, which is purposefully designed by the conference creator to underpin the community.

Key contributions of the meta-framework and the puzzle

By viewing the holistic conference journey, and the above contributions, the final primary contribution of this research, and of utmost significance, is the increased knowledge on the interaction between an individual's single conference journey and their career. When people attend conferences throughout their career and are actively engaged with their attendance during the conference journey, this positively influences their career. This was demonstrated in Figure 27, showing that single conference journeys, their conference creators, the attendees' identities and workplaces, all are only a piece in the larger puzzle of the career which is constantly influenced by the attendee's reflections on these contributing pieces.

This means that the conference creator can have a more significant influence than previously discussed in the literature. However, as they are only part of the puzzle, the implications are that conference creators have an opportunity to shift their mindset from focusing on their conference as an independent all important event towards a piece in the holistic career of their attendees. Consequently, they have an opportunity to design for maximised outcomes which contribute towards career progression.

Secondary contributions

Broadly within the above areas of contribution, and as a direct result of the research design and analysis, an intriguing range of more specific outcomes have clearly developed from the data gathered. In the context of this research each of these is secondary to the primary purpose, and contribution, but are ripe for further exploration after emerging inductively from this extensive empirical study.

Academics' 'contribution' and professionals' 'sales and marketing'

The sampling frame included two different types of attendees, academics and professionals. The review of the literature showed how many previous studies had focused on the academics (J. Lee & Min, 2013b; M. J. Lee & Back, 2007a; Ngamsom & Beck, 2000; Rittichainuwat et al., 2001; Yoo & Chon, 2008), however less attention has been paid to professionals' conference experiences. Chapters four and five therefore not only provided a description of the conference journey, but also the foundation for the analysis of the differences and similarities of these journeys. These findings have enhanced the understanding that on the surface the journeys are very similar, however, the underlying principles are different and in particular academics experience higher expectations of attendance at conferences throughout their career, whereas the expectations were different for professionals depending upon their role and seniority. Throughout, the academics were seeking opportunities to 'contribute' to conference, for example with poster or verbal presentations, whereas the professionals were after 'sales and marketing' opportunities. Closer scrutiny of these demonstrated that effectively all types of attendees were seeking opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and progress to their community of practice in the field.

The communication tone influenced by destinations' continent

The noteworthy finding that the conference creator's choice of location is a 'shallow' motivation is discussed above. In addition this research adds to knowledge regarding the influence from the location, which has not been fully recognised in literature, despite the great emphasis of destination choice as discussed in sections 2.2.2 and 6.6.2. This influence needs further empirical research but essentially the data showed that there was an influence from the hosting continent's customs and inhabitants' characteristics on the tone of the communication within the conference.

Increased opportunities for conference hosts

The empirical findings in this study provide a new understanding of how conferences can support attendees' careers as it showed that those who gained the most from the conference journey exhibited not only active and positive engagement with the single conference journeys but also constant reflection on them. The implications of this is that there are wider opportunities for the conference host to gain further outcomes from their regular conferences in terms of their community, such as an association, to build on between conferences.

Summary of the secondary contributions

The common denominator underlying the secondary contributions relates to the design elements for the conference creator and host to consider. This research has therefore contributed to practice through suggestions on conference creators' approach to designing the overall single conference journey including experience pre, during and post the conference, considering the attendee's holistic conference journey and career.

7.5.   Recommendations for future research and research limitations

The interpretivist stance of the researcher encouraged her to focus on the key insights of the data which are the underpinnings of the significant findings and contribution of the study. The recommendations for future research as well as the limitations of the study reflect this, including a need for further data to answer key questions which emerged from the research. The following three areas are the main recommendations for further research, in addition to the areas suggested in chapter six for further investigation.

Firstly, it is recommended to carry out in-depth research to study the impact of the conference journey on the attendee's career. This study has the opportunity to test the single conference journey framework (as presented in Figure 16) and develop a further understanding of the relationship between the pieces of the puzzle in Figure 27. The research has good potential to be further underpinned in areas such as education and coaching, to study the influence of reflection within the conference journey.

Secondly, it is recommended to validate the single conference framework and the outcomes developed by different routes, by applying it on attendees of multiple different conferences. Included in this validation are opportunities to explore the impact of formal and informal session on different samples of attendees as well as the impact of internal and external conferences. In addition, the research has good opportunities to explore the insight on the impact of the tone within the conference, viewing it from the two originators, the destination and the attendees.

The third and final main recommendation for future research is to include a larger sample to determine how different identities approach their conference journey. This includes exploring in further depth the social and natural scientist background as well as the influence from the workplace.

The main limitation to this study, the in-depth approach with its necessarily limited sample, is recognised in the recommendations for further research. The recommended further studies invite a larger sample, in particular multiple larger homogenous groups which can be compared. The larger sample again invites a quantitative approach in particular for validation of frameworks, however, a qualitative approach is appropriate for longitudinal studies investigating the relationship between the conference journey and career.

Being an interpretative and qualitative study, this research is, of course, limited in its generalisability. However, given the dearth of existing research examining conference attendees, from an event design perspective, it makes an early and entirely worthwhile contribution to furthering this important research context. The utility of such research is manifold and particularity enabling a more refined view of how conference experiences are influenced and specifically the shared and overlapping influences of multiple identities, including career stage, workplaces, and event creators. Pivotal to the event design view is that events are investments by a multiplicity of stakeholders, and therefore enhanced understanding of conference experience resulting in new conceptual theory, and the proliferation of such theory, is positive for the enhancement of future conference outcomes - and return on investment.

7.6. Chapter conclusion

This final chapter began with a personal reflection on the research journey including the process and progress which resulted in achieving the research aim and objectives. The key findings and contributions to knowledge were identified, in particular in relation to the interaction between the attendee's holistic conference journey and their career. Further research on this area was suggested as well, continuing the investigation of the three identified influences on the journey, internal, workplace and conference creator. This included validation of the two main frameworks introduced in this research as presented in Figure 16 and Figure 22.

Throughout this research journey my interest and passion for conferences has continuously increased. Whilst working on the PhD research I experienced the conference attendance expectation of academics which has been referred to throughout this thesis. Going on my own conference journeys during the research process has given me an invaluable insight into my research participants' stories providing me with opportunities to evaluate the findings throughout. My own conference journey has supported me in developing my ideas, enhanced the research journey and made me understand further what I learnt during the interviews.

Whilst attending a conference during the writing up period, I began to realise more clearly the influence of my research on my own conference experiences during a conversation with another attendee. They reflected from our conversation how my conference experience, now following carrying out this research, was at a different level than for most other attendees. It was at this point that I realised the importance of my research and the significance of presenting and publishing the findings. Karen, one of my research participants mentioned during her interview what a valuable part of the job conference attendance is and my journeys have shown me that she is right in terms of me being less productive without them. Disseminating the message of this research in terms of the three main influences on the development of outcomes and importance of

reflections is important, so more conference attendees can experience an enhanced holistic conference journey and further development of outcomes.

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APPENDICES

A) Empirical frameworks presented within this research
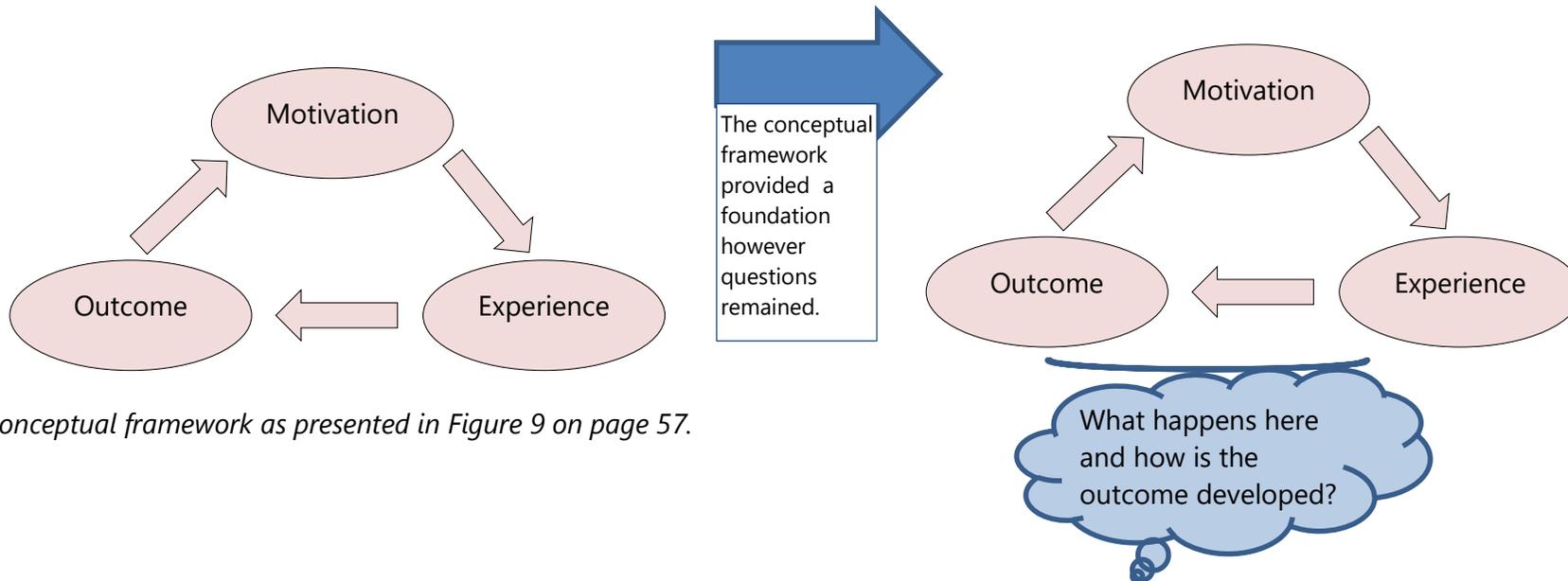

*Conceptual framework as presented in Figure 9 on page 57.*

Conceptual framework updated with elements of the research question as presented in Figure 15 on page 90.
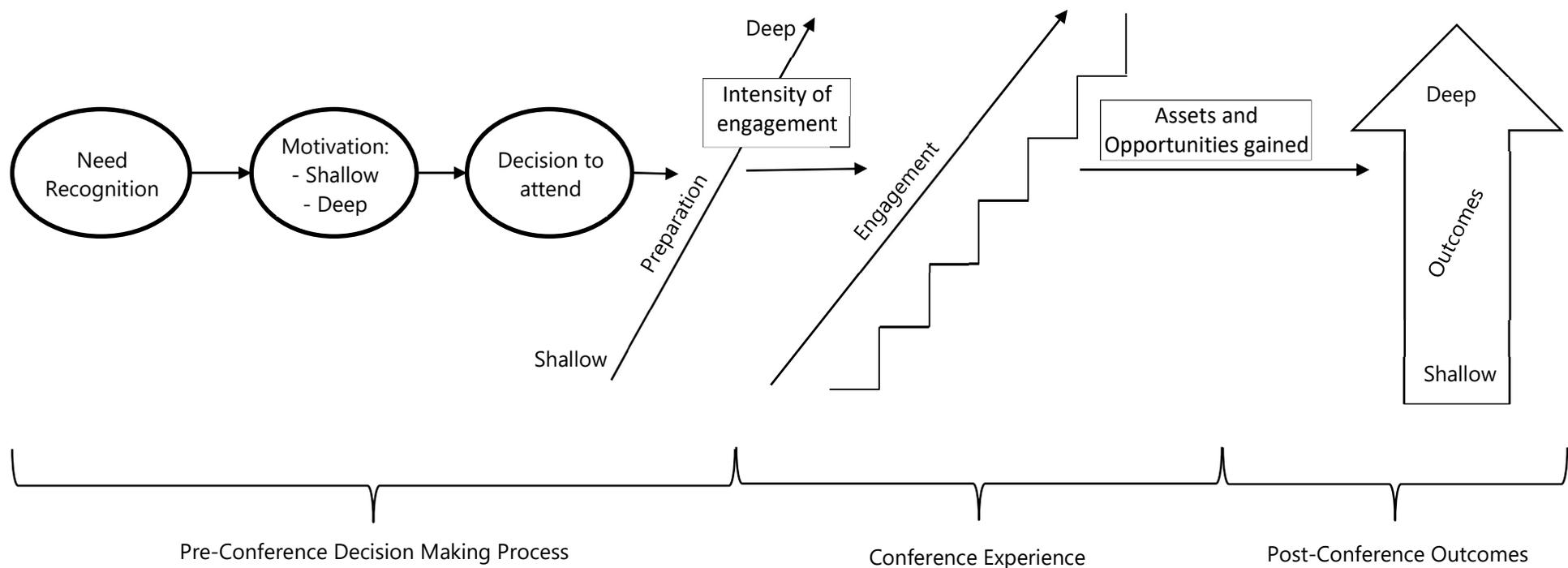
The overall single conference journey as presented in Figure 16 on page 92.

These are the steps within the single journey with the following page demonstrating the detailed steps of the experience ladder.
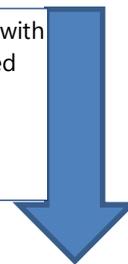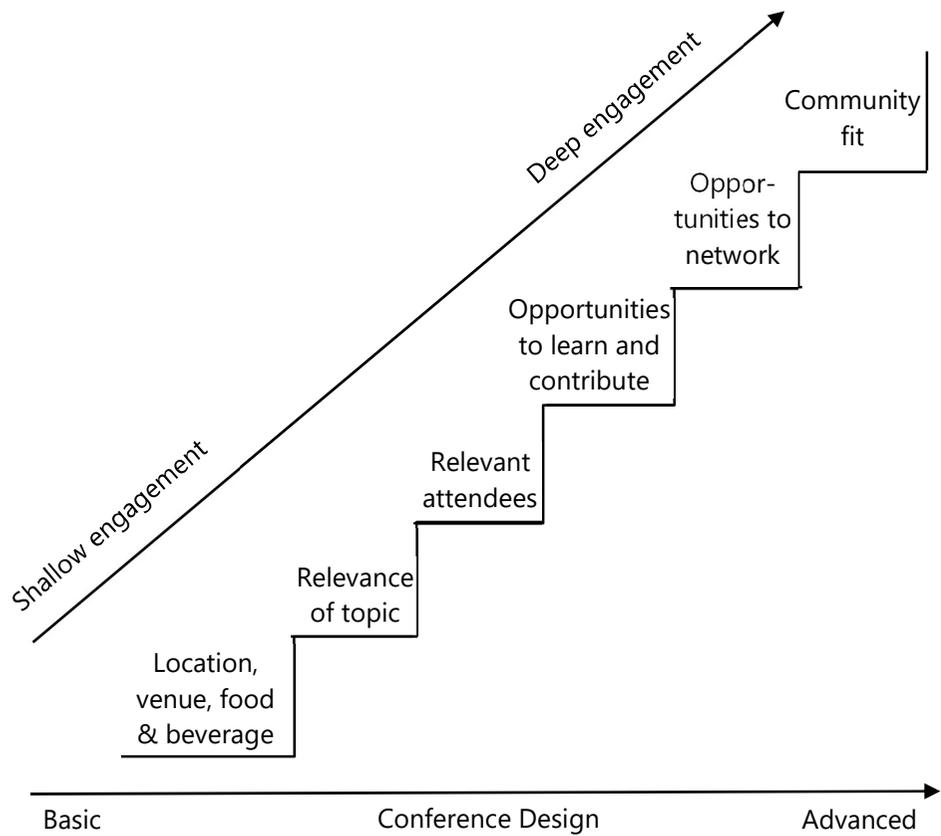
*Conference Experience as presented in Figure 18 on page 108.*

With the details and different nuances of the single conference journey recognised the internal and external influences on the holistic conference journey over a career were identified and shown in the following meta framework to summarise the key findings from the primary data.
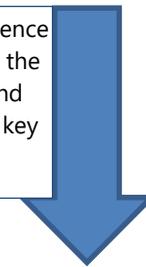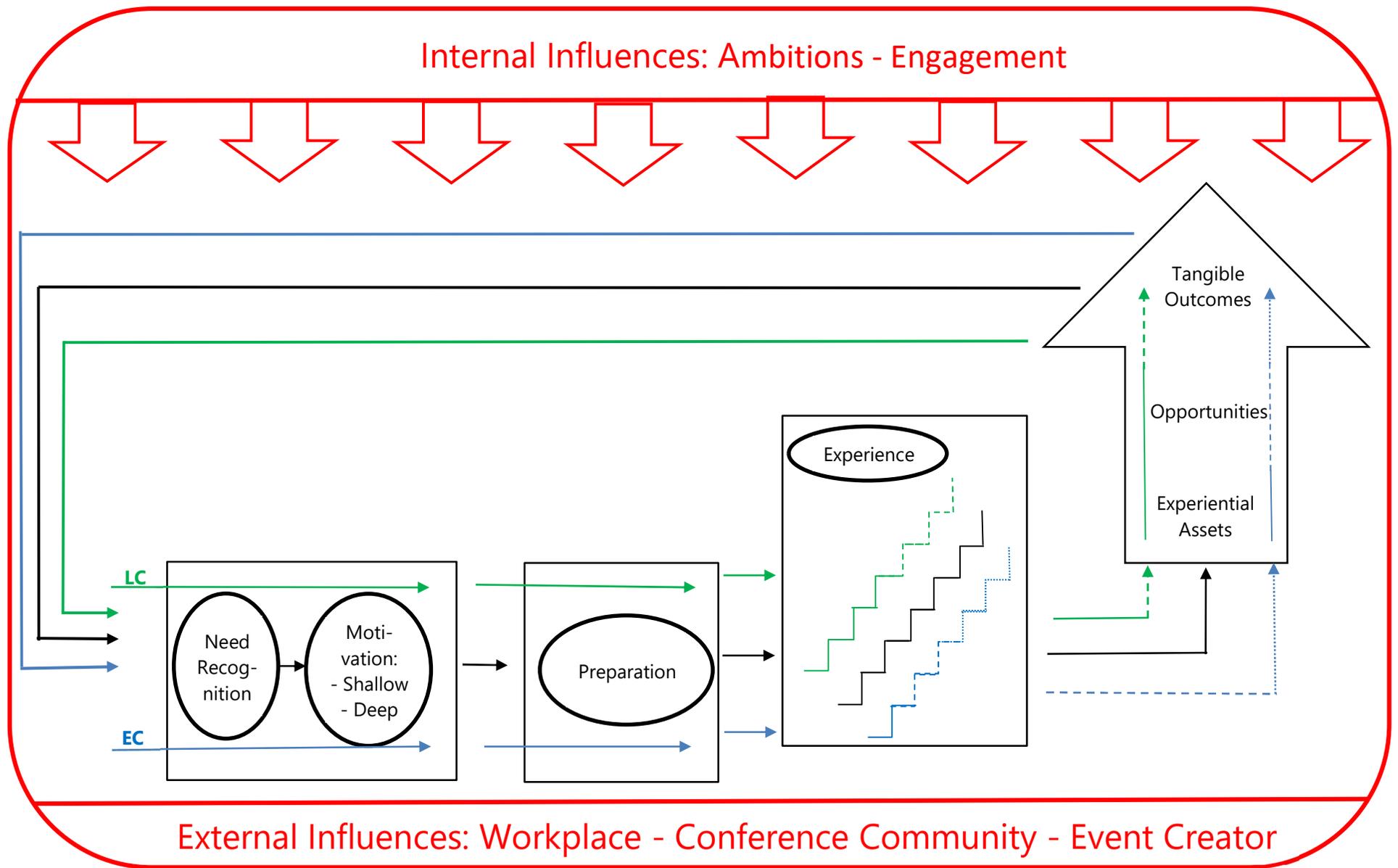
Internal Influences: Ambitions - Engagement

Tangible Outcomes

Opportunities

Experiential Assets

Experience

LC

Need Recog-nition

Moti-vation:
- Shallow
- Deep

Preparation

EC

External Influences: Workplace - Conference Community - Event Creator

Influences on an attendee's holistic lifetime conference journey as presented in Figure 22 on page 174.

The above framework demonstrates how the single conference journey is just one piece in the development of the career and overall outcomes are developed over time and depending upon multiple experiences and influences. The below puzzle shows how the attendees are developing a continuum of the conference experience through their reflections on past single journeys and career, supported by their workplaces whilst planning for the future.
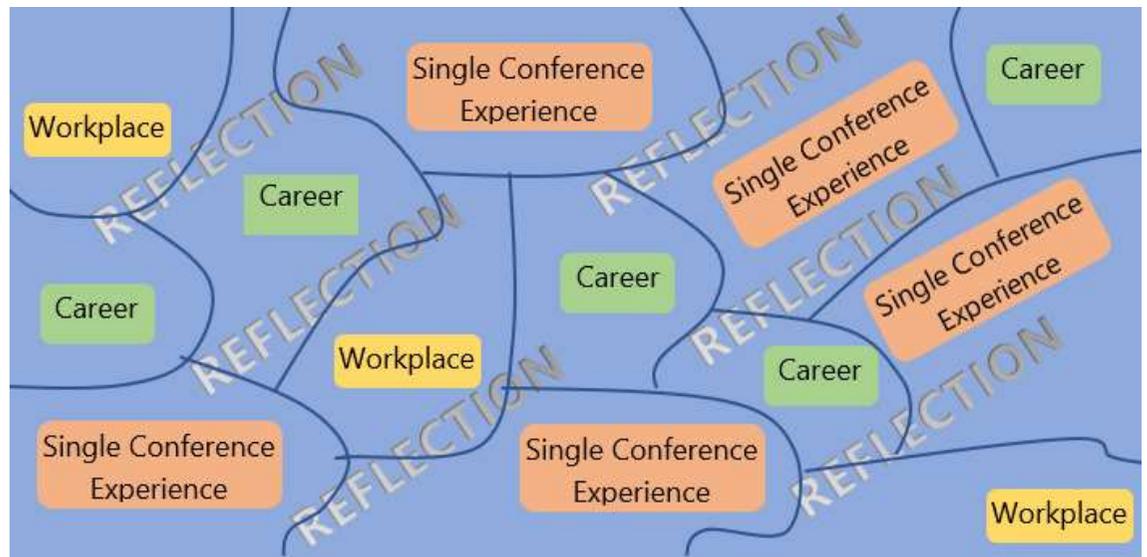
The continuum puzzle of the conference journey as presented in Figure 27 on page 198.

B) Interview questions

i.　First version of Interview questions- 18.01.16

1. Introduction on the interview and expectations from it
2. The interview
3. Debrief (wrapup) - comments and questions

BACKGROUND	FOLLOW UP
– Tell me about your education and professional/academic life? – How many events do you attend? You can tell me about as many as you like. – Tell me about the type of the event - what was the purpose of it? – Try to include conferences you may have forgotten about/are less memorable.	– What happened and how did it happen? – How did you feel then? – What did you experience? – How did you experience it? – Repeat what they are saying – You said " -- -- " Are you able to describe it? – That's really interesting, can you tell me more? – Can you give me a more detailed description of what happened? – Tell me why – What did you think of it? – Do you have further examples of this? – You haven't said anything about "-----" – I would now like to introduce a new topic... – Silence - pauses in the conversation *Clarification* – What do you mean? – What did you do? – How do you remember it? – What is your opinion of what happened? – You mean that.... – Is it correct that you feel that... – Does the expression ---- cover what you have just expressed?
PRE-CONFERENCE	**DURING CONFERENCE**
– What were the incentives / motivations to go the conferences? – The funding of the attendance. 　○ By whom? 　○ Did you have to apply for participation/attendance? How? To whom? – Did your partner/family attend? Colleagues? – How did you prepare yourself for the conference? – Reputation of the conference - feedback on in	– Discuss the experience of the conference. – What was most memorable about it? – Did you form any new relationships/contacts? Reinforce old ones? – Opportunity for networking? Were you able to network? How? If not, why? Any gains from the networking? – Do you feel you managed to achieve what you were after by attending the conference? 　○ Meet someone? 　○ Learn something?

	− What did you enjoy the most/least?
	− Looking back, what would you have liked to be done differently at the conference?
	−
POST CONFERENCE	**OTHER**
− How did you use the information/contacts/other shortly afterwards?	− Discuss the communication with/from the conference host?
− What was most memorable about it?	− Discuss the design of the conference - the sessions - networking opportunities - education - social...
− How did you use the information/contacts/other in the long term?	− What is the attitude in your workplace towards conference attendance?
− What do you feel is your value from the attendance? (What is your definition of value?)	− Has your experience changed over time?
− Was there a type of evaluation performed of the conference? Was it useful/waste of time?	
− Did you or your funder encourage you to do something following the conference? E.g. give a presentation, write a report, etc.	
− Looking back, would you have done something differently today?	
OVERVIEW QUESTIONS	**CLOSURE QUESTIONS**
− Why was this particular conference the best (learning) experience for you?	− Is there anything that we've left out of the story?
− Of all the conferences you've been to what do they have in common that are more memorable?	− Do you feel you have given a fair picture of your life story as a conference attendee?
− Do you feel your conference attendance has changed over time?	− What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?

ii.   Second version of Interview questions - 18.05.16

1.   Introduction on the interview and expectations from it + May I record? - 2. The interview - 3. Debrief (wrapup) - comments and questions

BACKGROUND	
− Tell me about your education and professional/academic life? − How many events do you attend? You can tell me about as many as you like.	− Tell me about the type of the event - what was the purpose of it? − Try to include conferences you may have forgotten about/are less memorable.
PRE-CONFERENCE	
− What were the **incentives / motivations** to go the conferences? − If time is a motivation, do you mean in terms of you giving up your time for it (opportunity cost) or the timing of the conference? − How do the **motivations influence each other**? I.e. you first base on something and do you then consider other attributes. − How do you source the conferences you consider going to? − Reputation of the conference - feedback on it	− How did you **prepare** yourself for the conference? Read the programme, abstracts? Research the presenters?... − The funding of the attendance. By whom? o Did you have to apply for participation/attendance? How? To whom? − Did your partner/family attend? Colleagues? − Have you considered a conference attendance as a holiday?
DURING CONFERENCE	
− Discuss the experience of the conference. − What was **most&least memorable** about it? − What did you enjoy the most/least? − Did you form any new relationships/contacts? Reinforce old ones? − Opportunity for networking built into the programme? Were you able to network? How? If not, why? Any gains from the networking? − If you have a really memorable presentation from this conference, how did the presenter make it so **memorable**?	− What makes a boring session? − Looking back, what would you have liked to be done differently at the conference? − If you have been presenting at a conference do you feel it affects your overall conference experience? If yes, how? − Discuss the design of the conference - the sessions - networking opportunities - education - social... − Can the conference be designed different to eliminate the less good attributes of it?
POST CONFERENCE	
− You had **aspirations** for the conference before you attended, how do you feel they were achieved in **reality**? − What do you believe **contributed to you achieving these outcomes** from attending the conference? − Following the conference how did you **utilise the information/contacts/other shortly afterwards? And in the long term?** − Do you feel that the **discussion/learning at the conference has led to new ways of thinking about problems or issues?** If so, by whom? Yourself, colleagues, the community within the conference? − Do you feel that your conference attendance has played a role in building self-esteem, and act as a motivational trigger for delegates to further your career?	− In the **long term looking back at your conference attendance how much do you feel that the conference setting contributed to your value of attending?** − Was there a type of **evaluation** performed of the conference? Was it **useful**/waste of time? − Did you or your funder encourage you to do something following the conference? E.g. give a presentation, write a report, etc. − **Do you deliberately sit down and reflect upon your conference experience and your gain/value from attending?** − Do you look back at why you went and reflect upon if this was achieved? − What do you feel is your value from the attendance? (What is your definition of value?) − Looking back, would you have done something differently today?

− Has your **conference attendance linked to improved enthusiasm and creativity at work?**	
OTHER	
− Discuss the **communication with/from the conference host**? − What is the **attitude in your workplace** towards conference attendance?	− Do you regularly **attend the social elements** of the conferences? What is the value in attending them? − Do you attend the social elements because of what they are or because of who is attending them?
OVERVIEW QUESTIONS	
− Do you remember your **first conference**? − What was your **best** conference experience? Why? − Have you attended conferences where you just thought, **"Why did I go?"** − Why was this particular conference the best (learning) experience for you?	− Of all the conferences you've been to what do they have in common that are more memorable? − Have there been occasion when you've gone to a conference and the **content has not been in accordance to the title?** − Do you feel your **conference attendance has changed over time**?
CLOSURE QUESTIONS	
− Is there anything that we've left out of the story? − Do you feel you have given a fair picture of your life story as a conference attendee? − What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?	
FOLLOW UP	
− What happened and how did it happen? − How did you feel then? − What did you experience? − How did you experience it? − Repeat what they are saying − You said " -- -- " Are you able to describe it? − That's really interesting, can you tell me more? − Can you give me a more detailed description of what happened? − Tell me why − What did you think of it? − Do you have further examples of this?	− You haven't said anything about "-----" − I would now like to introduce a new topic… − Silence - pauses in the conversation *Clarification* − What do you mean? − What did you do? − How do you remember it? − What is your opinion of what happened? − You mean that…. − Is it correct that you feel that… − Does the expression ---- cover what you have just expressed?

iii.   Final version of Interview questions- 01.08.16

1. Introduction on the interview and expectations from it + May I record? - 2. The interview - 3. Debrief (wrapup) - comments and questions

BACKGROUND	
− Tell me about your education and professional/academic life? − How many events do you attend? You can tell me about as many as you like.	− Tell me about the type of the event - what was the purpose of it? − Try to include conferences you may have forgotten about/are less memorable.
PRE-CONFERENCE	
− What were the **incentives / motivations** to go the conferences? − If time is a motivation, do you mean in terms of you giving up your time for it (opportunity cost) or the timing of the conference? − How do the **motivations influence each other**? I.e. you first base on something and do you then consider other attributes. − How do you source the conferences you consider going to? − Reputation of the conference - feedback on it	− How did you **prepare** yourself for the conference? Read the programme, abstracts? Research the presenters?... − The funding of the attendance. By whom? o Did you have to apply for participation/attendance? How? To whom? − Did your partner/family attend? Colleagues? − Have you considered a conference attendance as a holiday? − Dress code?
DURING CONFERENCE	
− Discuss the experience of the conference. − What was **most&least memorable** about it? − What did you enjoy the most/least? − Did you form any new relationships/contacts? Reinforce old ones? − Opportunity for networking built into the programme? Were you able to network? How? If not, why? Any gains from the networking? − If you have a really memorable presentation from this conference, how did the presenter make it so **memorable**?	− What makes a boring session? − Looking back, what would you have liked to be done differently at the conference? − If you have been presenting at a conference do you feel it affects your overall conference experience? If yes, how? − Discuss the design of the conference - the sessions - networking opportunities - education - social... − Can the conference be designed different to eliminate the less good attributes of it?
POST CONFERENCE	
− You had **aspirations** for the conference before you attended, how do you feel they were achieved in **reality**? − What do you believe **contributed to you achieving these outcomes** from attending the conference? − Following the conference how did you **utilise the information/contacts/other shortly afterwards? And in the long term?** − Do you feel that the **discussion/learning at the conference has led to new ways of thinking about problems or issues?** If so, by whom? Yourself, colleagues, the community within the conference? − Do you feel that your conference attendance has played a role in building self-esteem, and act as a motivational trigger for delegates to further your career?	− In the **long term looking back at your conference attendance how much do you feel that the conference setting contributed to your value of attending?** − Was there a type of **evaluation** performed of the conference? Was it **useful**/waste of time? − Did you or your funder encourage you to do something following the conference? E.g. give a presentation, write a report, etc. − **Do you deliberately sit down and reflect upon your conference experience and your gain/value from attending?** − Do you look back at why you went and reflect upon if this was achieved? − What do you feel is your value from the attendance? (What is your definition of value?) − Looking back, would you have done something differently today?

− Has your **conference attendance linked to improved enthusiasm and creativity at work?**	
OTHER	
− Discuss the **communication with/from the conference host**? − What is the **attitude in your workplace** towards conference attendance? Are people interested? − Is there anything stopping you from gaining full value from your conference attendance? How do you ensure that you are **maximising your benefit from the attendance**?	− Do you regularly **attend the social elements** of the conferences? What is the value in attending them? − Do you attend the social elements because of what they are or because of who is attending them?
OVERVIEW QUESTIONS	
− Do you remember your **first conference**? − What was your **best** conference experience? Why? − Have you attended conferences where you just thought, **"Why did I go?"** − Why was this particular conference the best (learning) experience for you? − Why do **continue attending** conferences?	− Of all the conferences you've been to what do they have in common that are more memorable? − What could have happened differently which would have made that conference more beneficial? − Have there been occasion when you've gone to a conference and the **content has not been in accordance to the title?** − Do you feel your **conference attendance has changed over time**?
CLOSURE QUESTIONS	
− Is there anything that we've left out of the story? − Do you feel you have given a fair picture of your experience as a conference attendee? − What are your feelings about this interview and all that we have covered?	
FOLLOW UP	
− What happened and how did it happen? − How did you feel then? − What did you experience? − How did you experience it? − Repeat what they are saying − You said " -- -- " Are you able to describe it? − That's really interesting, can you tell me more? − Can you give me a more detailed description of what happened? − Tell me why − What did you think of it? − Do you have further examples of this?	− You haven't said anything about "-----" − I would now like to introduce a new topic... − Silence - pauses in the conversation *Clarification* − What do you mean? − What did you do? − How do you remember it? − What is your opinion of what happened? − You mean that.... − Is it correct that you feel that... − Does the expression ---- cover what you have just expressed?

C) Examples from Research Diary

The research diary was kept both electronically, mainly for structured text, as well as on paper which for me was more suitable for mind mapping and recording of thoughts in the form of colourful drawings including text – as can be seen from the examples in this appendix. The documents making up the research diary formed an audit trail of reflections as recommended for a research of interpretivist nature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

i.   **Reflections May 2013 – before first PhD supervision meeting**
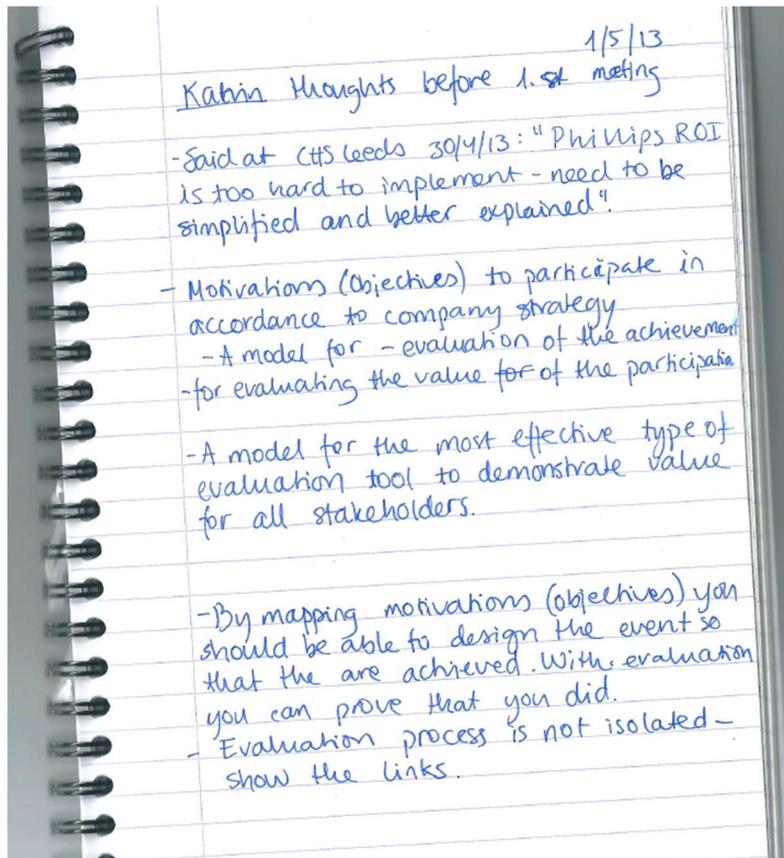
ii.   PhD confirmation report submitted 020414

Conference attendees' long-term value of
the conference experience and its
evaluation

RF2 REPORT

Katrin Stefansdottir

Student no. 20039568

Director of studies: Dave Egan

Supervisors: Peter Whalley and Phil Crowther

Date: 2nd May 2014

iii. Reflections December 2015 – before data collection

i. This research aims to listen to the conference attendee in an exploratory attempt to gain an understanding of the relationship between motivations to attend a conference, the experience of it and the value gained from it. This will be made through in-depth interviews using life stories as the methodology. The life story suits the purpose of the research as they give the attendee freedom to narrate the total journey of conference attending in own words and illustrate the connections between motivation, experience and value. This methodology gives the opportunity to identify motivations not captured by previous studies and illustrate the overall picture of the conference experience including what affect the design of it has on the motivation to attend and the experience and value.

### iv. Reflections February 2016 – following first two interviews
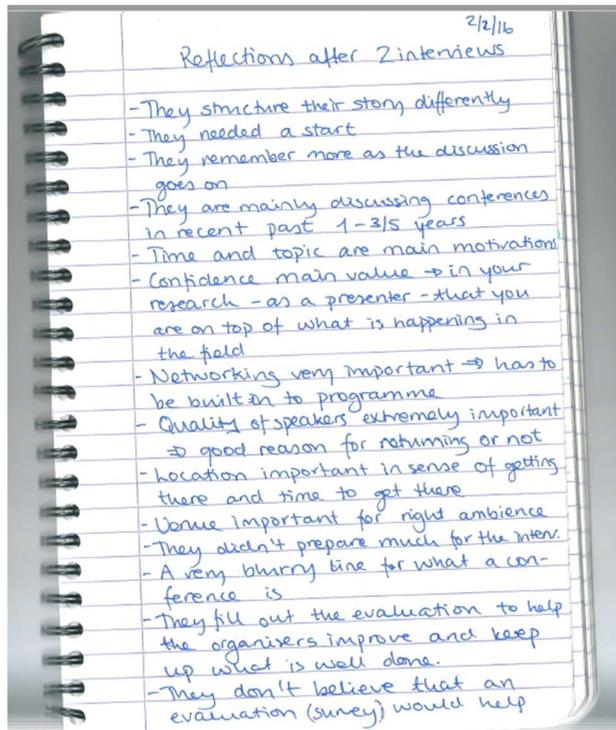
v.   **Reflections March 2016 – Why the life stories data collection method did not succeed**

The life story approach in the interviews did not work as expected. The main reason for this is that people forget and the interviewees mainly recalled their latest conference experiences. People did not know (understand) the purpose and therefore it didn't work to just ask them in the beginning "so tell me about your life as a conference attendee". They really need prompting and they didn't loose up until asked specific questions, especially effective was the question "tell me about your most memorable conference experience". The letters I sent them before were either not read at all or not read thoroughly which was evident in that they didn't seem prepared, they didn't bring any of the props suggested and they didn't really know what to discuss. They were however really keen on talking to me and wanted the interview to be successful. I therefore ended up asking them many more questions than I had anticipated asking. I had the questions written down and they are more directive than when I actually asked them. I really tried to avoid looking at them during the interview as I wanted it to flow really freely and I manage to succeed in it. I however used them at times when the discussion came to a halt as well as in the end as a checklist. In the third interview I forgot to ask about what she does with the information that she receives. I didn't really get the opportunity to ask all the questions as she had lost interest in the interview and was eating her food which had gotten really cold by this time. I need to give people an opportunity to eat their food as soon as it arrives by not making them talk at this time. But I actually believe (will know this further after I've transcribed the interview) that she told me this implicitly in the stories.

The topic that I feel that is one of the most interesting is what do they actually do with the information that they receive in the conferences and a different approach in the interviews will allow me much better to follow up on this topic. This also fits perfectly with the evaluation angle which I began my research with. The increased confidence is also really exciting, and this fits with what Nicoline found in her thesis.

vii.   Reflections June 2016 – initial work on framework
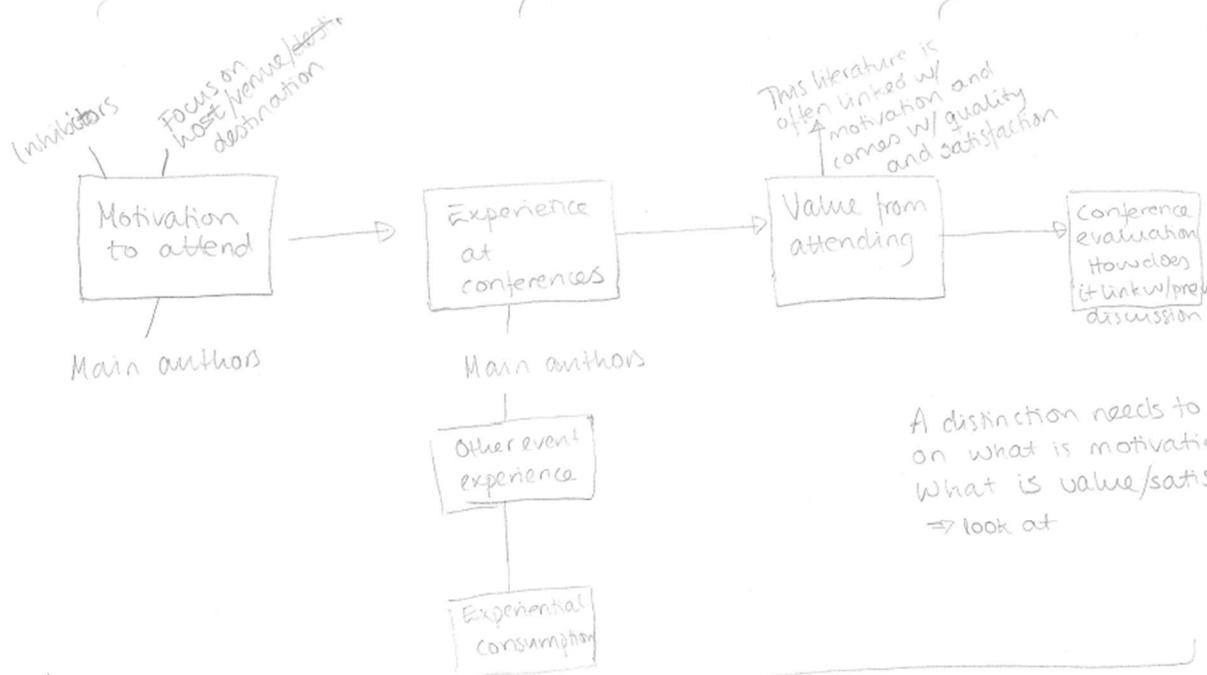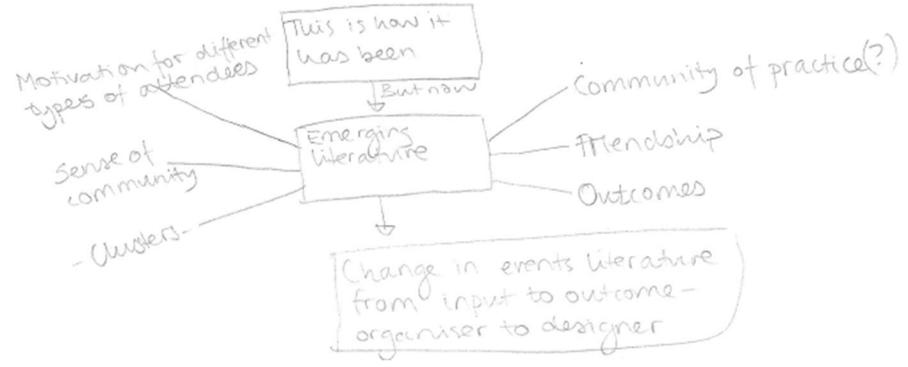
viii. Reflections June 2016 – initial work on themes

CONFERENCE ATTENDEES' JOURNEY

MOTIVATION
- Decision making process — Literature
- Motivation — Literature + Data
- Opportunity cost — Literature + Data
- Inhibitors — Literature

VALUE
- Value + Outcome — Data
- Evaluation - Suggestions to what (and how?) should be capture and demonstrated — Discussion
- Self-Efficacy — Literature + Data
- Value - Multidimensional value — Literature
- Friendship — Literature + Data
- Intentions to return — Literature
- Evaluation — Literature
- Why do they attend again? — Data
- Outcome focused event literature — Literature
- What do attendees perceive as long-term value? — Data

EXPERIENCE
- Experience — Data
- Networking - Make new contacts, reinforce old ones — Literature + Data
- Self-congruence — Literature + Data
- Satisfaction — Literature
- Identity — Literature
- Knowledge exchange — Literature + Data
- Sense of community — Literature + Data
- Experiential consumption — Literature
- Community of practice — Literature + Data

POST CONFERENCE
- Contacts. How are they used? — Data
- What do attendees do following the conference? — Data
- Knowledge transfer. How? Are they? — Data
- Effect of culture — Data
- How is the experience developed into value? — Data

- What is the relationship between motivation and value? — Data
- How does the journey change over time? — First-timers in literature
- Conference design. Suggestions for what they need to consider in order to develop value. — First-timers in literature
- What is a conference? Academic conference Professional / Industry conference — Literature

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ix. Reflections February 2017 – early work on framework

Chat w/ Jonathan 4/2/17

Draw together →articulate
    Conceptual framework
Broad theories – ideas and approaches
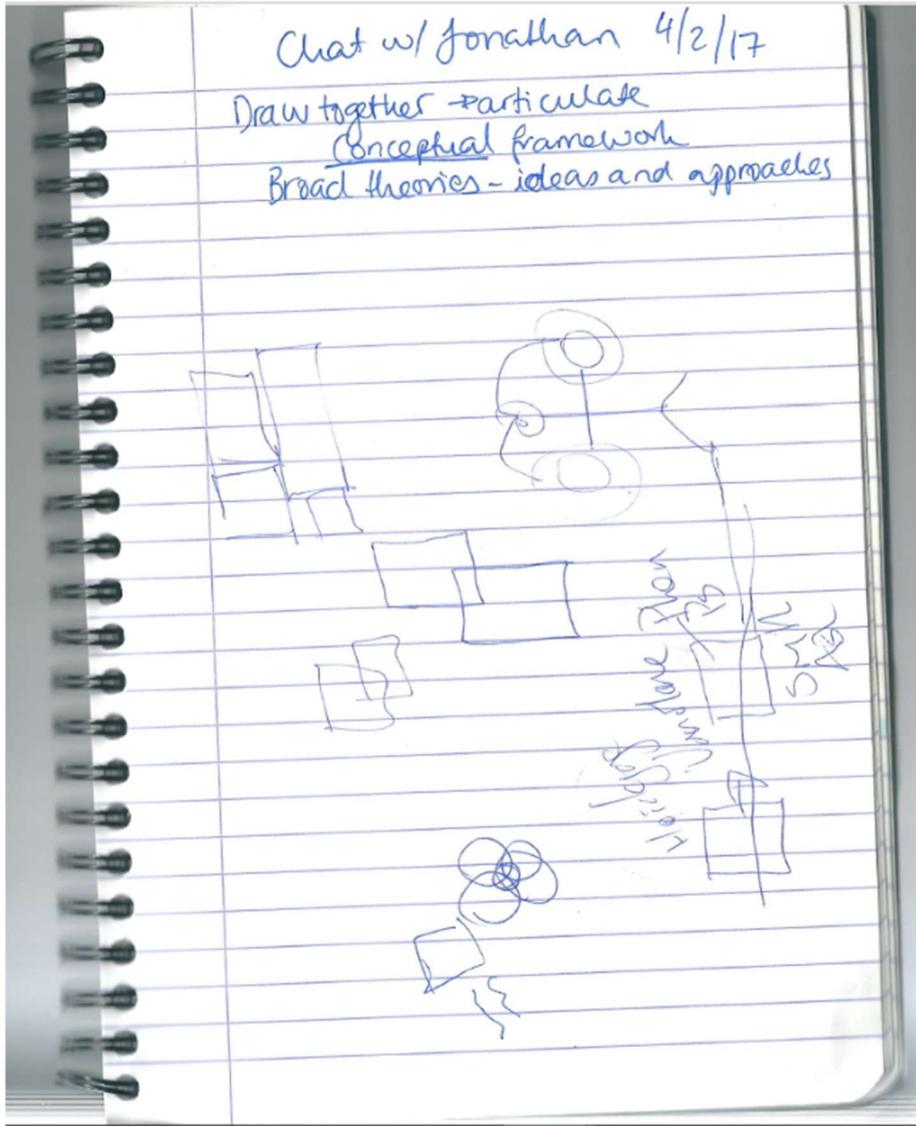
### x.	Reflections in April 2017 – early data analysis

April 2017 - I'm now finishing to re-listen to all recordings and going through the transcripts. I can by now listen to the recordings on 1.1 - 1.2 speed as I've heard them so many times and I've read through the transcripts a few times (once with mini coding) so that I know what is coming. It's much easier to pick up what they're saying.

### xi.	Reflections April 2017 – early data analysis and coding

Reflections whilst coding

1st round Mid-April 2017

- The codes came really quickly in the first two interviews as I had them all kind of in my head following having read the transcripts so many times
- But it is interesting to see how much Role and Changes over time are prominent, as well as of course Networking
- I'm also starting to see that I have way too many codes - many are too detailed and I'm coding much in really many places
- I definitely need to find the main themes and then make new codes following that and code again

### xii.	Reflections in May 2017 – research overview

My research is on the holistic long-term experience of attending a conference. The main contribution to knowledge is demonstrating how an experience does not inherently lead to value and satisfaction with the attendance does not lead to much. It is about how all the factors which play a part in the decision making process to attend also have a major part to play when developing the value from the attendance. This value cannot be developed only based on having a good experience or being satisfied but through interplay with the attendee's identity, opportunities gained during the conference many of which are set in motion through the event design, and expectations and support from work environment.

The research began with an intention to develop a framework which could be followed when evaluating the conference value. Early on it however became evident that it is difficult to demonstrate the value as it was not known what constituted the value. The research therefore was aiming to capture all the nuances that together make up the value. The interviews give a picture of why delegates attend, what they experience but most importantly what they do following the attendance which leads to some type of perceived value developed from the attendance.

xiii.   **Reflections May 2017 – Preliminary framework**

## Progression of conference delegates' valuable and relevant outcomes - a preliminary theoretical framework

A conceptualisation of the progression of conference delegates' valuable and relevant outcomes following attendance - a preliminary framework
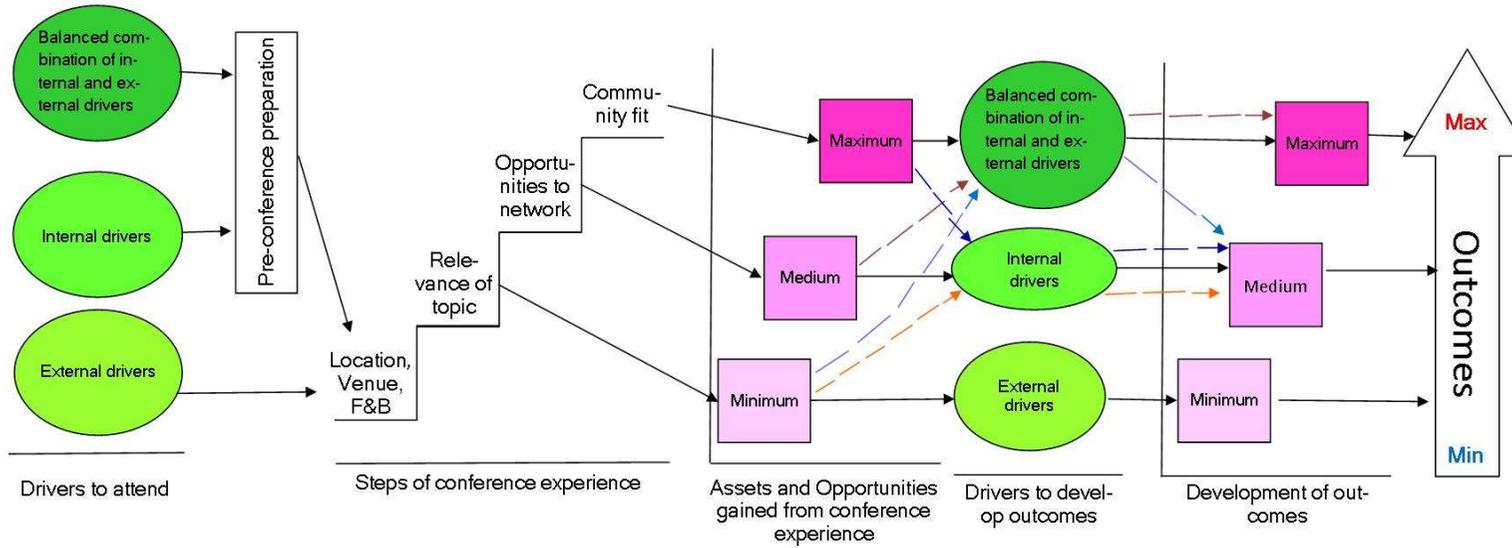
xv.   Reflections May 2018 – improvements on framework
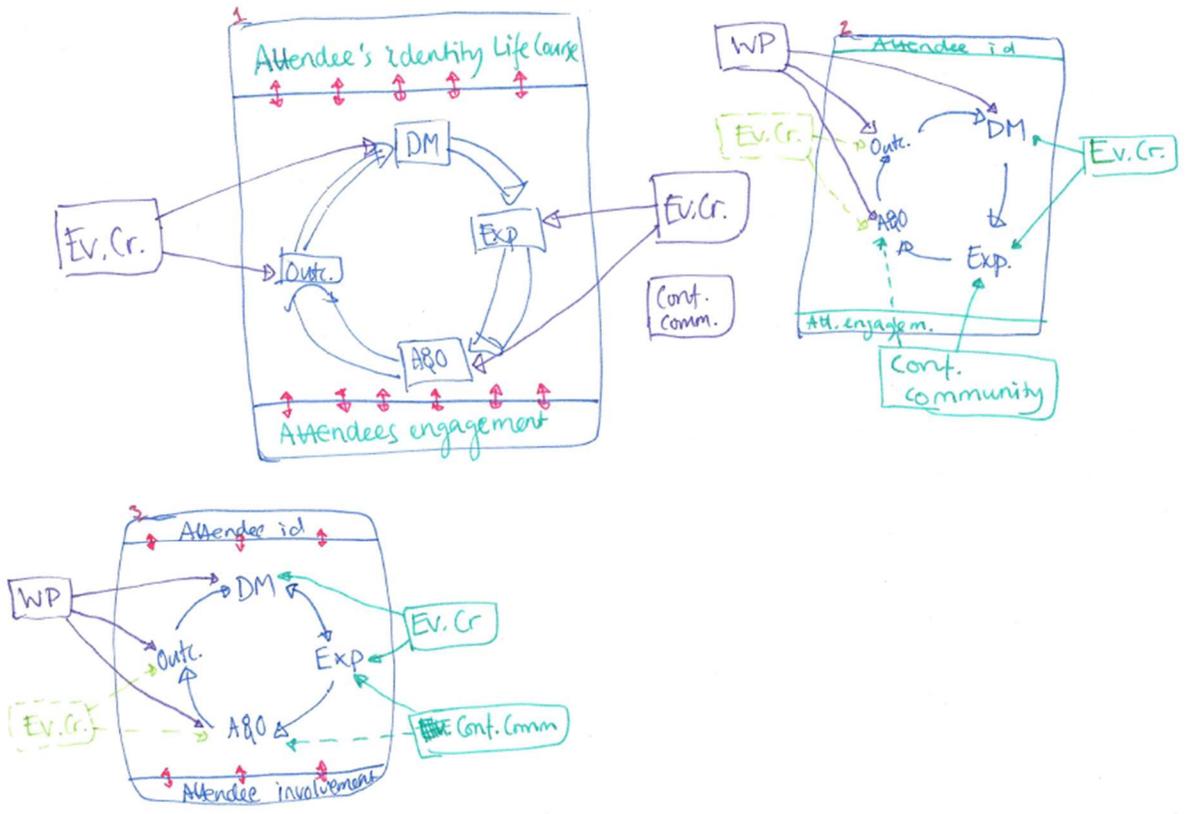
xvi. Reflections June 2018 – brainstorming for thesis writing

Peak District – 15 minutes thinking 25/6/18

For those individuals w/ less aspirations – i.e. internal influences the external influences need to be stronger. The WP and EC need to step in to enhance the outcomes.

The individual conference journey is not an individual matter – is is affected by external influences

How to do the literature + discussion
1/7/18

- Continue w with my
- Go through see where
- Go through I'm McIn
→ print u

The literature review is setting the scene to why your research is important.
- What is known?
  - in a widespread area
- What is not known – in the context of your area?

xviii. Reflections January 2019 – Structuring Findings chapter

4-5.01.19 Academics

D=M PC

Rationale for attending

Need Recogn. → Motiv -Shallow -Deep → Decision to attend → Prep → ADO → Outcomes

Combine this

Outcomes
Tangible outc. | Deep
Intang. Opport.
Shallow
Confidence Friendship → not really tangible
Long-term intangible & tangible outcomes

- Comm. from E.C.
- Invit. to attend.
- Prof. demands
- Role
- Repr. workpl.
- Topic update needed
- Present res.

Shallow
- Prev. conf. exp.
- Total cost
- Money
- Time
- Cont. factors - comm w/ E.C
- Location
- Topic
- Design
- Other attendees

Deeper
- Personal factors
- Professional factors
- Benefits expected

Preparation
Design, present, write paper, travel & accom. arrangem. Decide what to attend

DEEP
Write neatly

Topic, Attendees and Programme

DEEP

Influence of career stage
Knowledge
- Motiv. When to attend
- Seniors inform
- Comm. from E.C.
- channels di various channels
- Need to present research
- Experience
Req to
Requirement to present research or represent workpl.
- Invitations to attend
- Topic update

NEED RECOGNITION

Learning Netw.
- Infl. of career stage
- Early: Gain ideas
- Become familiar w/ area
- Experienced:
- Gain specific knowl.
- Enhance productivity
- Continuous curiosity and point. attit. towl. learning
- Contribution and Visibility:
- Expected outcomes:
- Improved knowledge
- collaboration - Increased visibility

SHALLOW
- Preferred Conf. Topic Areas
- Topics close to research area more interesting

- Influence of career stage in knowing when to attend colleagues
- Seniors inform
- Communication from E.C. through various channels
- Need to present research
- Experience
- Requirement to present research
- Requirement to represent workplace
- Invitations to attend

- Conf. design
- Topic
- Other attendees
- Programme
- Location
- Previous exp.
- Total cost
- Money
- Time
- Awareness

xix.　　　Reflections August 2019 – Structuring Discussion chapter

Discussion chapter

1) The Conference Journey Examined - Academic & Practitioners   30.5.19
- Expectations of attendance - Choosing conference - Preparations
- Contributing & Selling ⇒ Conference Setup & Communication
   Summary w/ the identified internal & external ~~life~~ influences

2) Individual attendee's internal influences on the conf. to life course

‑ Career stage   }
‑ Professional identity (& social) } ⇒ Aspirations

- Engagement ⇒ links to above → displayed w/ emotions & activities

3) Individual attendee's ~~external~~ workplace's influences on the conf. life course

   - Expectations - Support - Culture

4) The Conference Creators' influence on the individual attendee's life course
   - Marketing pre conference
   - Implementations of Event Design - programme - topic - location -
                                       - training of speakers - etc

   - Creation of Conference Community
        - Topic Area - Competition - Hierarchy -
        - Congruence (when does it occur)
        - Community fit & emotions
   - Post - conference facilitation opportunities

5) Outcome
   - Reflection - upon learning & job practices - Horizon scanning - Recharging
   - What are the outcomes? Categorise them
   - Why was it worth attending?

D) Coding examples

i. Extracts from NVivo into MS Excel

A	B 13: Interview	C 5: Interview	D 1: Interview	E 10: Interview	F 11: Interview	G 12: Interview	H 14: Interview	I 15: Interview	J 16: Interview	K 17: Interview	L 18: Interview	M 19: Interview	N 2: Interview	O 3: Interview	P 4: Interview	Q 6: Interview	R 7: Interview	S 8: Interview	T 9: Interview
AK : Ideas for current and future projects	Why do I go to conferences? So they've all kind of been different reasons. KS:OK … M:Initially it was kind of just to get a feel for the… so they've all had quite…	as an employee of the user, the software user, the way that I approached it was twofold, it was firstly to go and find out what was coming in the future, to see if our…	my professio nal conferen ces that I go to, my main motivati on generally is to look at, they tend to have to do with teaching in higher educatio n, so it is looking…	I don't have a backgrou nd in that erm… in that area. But you know so that is why I went I thought well see what people are doing you know is this an area for opportun…			I have returned because I like seeing people, it is networki ng, erm… it helps to keep me in touch with practice in my field, I think and to be aware you…	The role that I do when I go out is just have a look at, it was two-fold, one to have a look at the emerging technolo gy and what we could use moving forward, and also…		these are people who are not only intereste d in mathema tics educatio n, they also really love mathema tics. And, basically I spend my time doing maths…	as a research er you need to do things in the lab with your team, you need to go out and listen to people and learn from them. And also you have to contribut…				it wasn't quite so much a plan as a strategy to look out for particula r types of events that would fit with things I was doing at the time or things that I was intereste…	it was quite relevant to some of the modules that I taught on so I was trying to go down and sort of trying to find out what's going on within the industry so we…			What was it that made you go? I:I thought that… I thought there would be some content there that might be useful in erm… teaching, actually, you…

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iii. Extracting from NVivo into MS Word

1.9. **AK : Ideas for current and future projects**

	AK : Ideas for current and future projects
13 : Interview M	Why do I go to conferences? So they've all kind of been different reasons. KS: OK... M: Initially it was kind of just to get a feel for the... so they've all had quite different focuses. So kind of a selfish level to accelerate our project to get our stuff known, but also to find out, I wouldn't say what the opposition is up to but what other labs are up to. Develop collaboration But it is a bit of everything just to see what is going on in the field and and to kind of develop... as I've got more senior and met more people and know a bit more, develop kind of collaborations and teamwork with other labs. my kind of new boss is a clinician so he is very about "I've got to get this out, I've got to let people know what we're doing" and it's true but that's why I think this time I'll go to the fish meeting and present there because I think it is less.... For me personally, for him it's a lot more kind of basic clinical trials, new drug treatments and what has kind of been seen in patients where the fish is quite far a remove from that, so I think kind of alternating going between fish meetings and going to the more clinical ones to present because it felt like I got less from the ones this time where we were all kind of told to go to them.
5 : Interview E	as an employee of the user, the software user, the way that I approached it was twofold, it was firstly to go and find out what was coming in the future, to see if our current headaches were going to be fixed in the future and to make sure that my number one priority for the future development was high up on their list so to really sell. And sometimes, depending on the relationship with the supplier, the second way that

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| A - towards final version | education, so it is looking at how I can improve my teaching.

Do you think they are using the conferences as you know...
A: a springboard?
KS: yes, just to test?
A: yes, definitely. And certainly that is what I did. When I, as my first year as a Ph.D. student, the first presentation I did and my supervisors said you should definitely do this was I just basically said this is the literature I have reviewed and these are my findings and I've developed this conceptual model and I'm just about to go and do a pilot study. What do you think? And I just put the question out and I said I welcome thoughts, ideas, suggestions, criticism, not a problem. And I found it was really supportive. |
| 10 : Interview J | I don't have a background in that erm... in that area. But you know so that is why I went I thought well see what people are doing you know is this an area for opportunity, erm... for us to erm... to explore. Maybe it is not, you know but that is ok as well. You know you get to meet people, see what people are doing, maybe we can collaborate with them, so that is what I did.

are there any reoccurring conferences that you go to?

J: That's usually the stroke ones because that is my specialty and it allows me to keep in touch.

KS: Yes keep in touch with?

J: Keep in touch with what is happening, what my colleagues are doing, you know is there... you know sometimes when you go you, you develop collaborations with people.

I don't go to as many conferences as I should and because I think well we need to do more, we need to make more progress in our research before we go to erm... before we go and talk about our work and I think that is a mistake. I think the more you go the more you see what other people are doing, the more you can keep up with you know advances and I think that my research has been hindered by the fact that I |

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	don't go to as many conferences as I should. I should really go to maybe at least 2 or 3, about 3 I would say. I go to 1 or 2 conferences, erm... and I should go to a minimum of 3 I think in different areas. One clinical conference, one you know basic science, and erm... you know one in a different area. Doesn't have to be expensive but...
11 : Interview K	
12 : Interview L	
14 : Interview N	I have returned because I like seeing people, it is networking, erm... it helps to keep me in touch with practice in my field, I think and to be aware you know to try and be aware of what was happening in teacher education new ideas, erm... new ways of doing things, but always for me with a focus on how can that practically help me improve my course. the reason I go back to that conference is I find it practically useful for course design, student experience and so on.
15 : Interview O	The role that I do when I go out is just have a look at, it was two-fold, one to have a look at the emerging technology and what we could use moving forward, and also having a look at the technology that is causing us problems at this moment in time, to see if there is any resolutions that are out there or, liaise with people that have had those problems. We went there for the reasons that I have just said about looking at the technology that is out there, having a look at the problems that we had got there is a lot of candidates that are over there that have had the same sort of issues that we have currently, in my new company, going to these places and meeting with these people is... there is a strong community that wants to help out each other, and it is not necessarily [11:35 he mentions end users and partners but it breaks up] but it is always good to be able to say right well we have had this issue, well how did you resolve it well we resolved it like this, or we resolved it like that and there is a lot of people going about and wanting to help each other and the networking and everything else is really good at these events where there are open and honest conversations that go on between erm... the people that have had the problems without the inclusion of the partners, or the consultants being there to muddy the water. it is a company that hosts it but they are still helping people to solve their problems? O: Yes, being cynical about it I would say they are, they are senior people that are frustrated with Microsoft and have seen a niche gap that can drive user validation and user communities moving forward so they all you know, when people go Microsoft are actually trying to jump

17 : Interview Q	these are people who are not only interested in mathematics education, they also really love mathematics. And, basically I spend my time doing maths. Erm... which I love. Thoroughly I really, really enjoy and of course, alongside that you pick up, you deepen your own subject knowledge which supports my teaching at Sheffield Hallam, erm... you make connections with people, and erm... you also as well as deepening your subject knowledge, you also think of new approaches to the subject and so on and so, it has been very much, it is very much been, it has very much fed into my networking with practitioners, and my teaching mathematics at Sheffield Hallam.
18 : Interview R	as a researcher you need to do things in the lab with your team, you need to go out and listen to people and learn from them. And also you have to contribute to the conference, you have to, you have to present what you are doing
2 : Interview B	
3 : Interview C	
4 : Interview D	it wasn't quite so much a plan as a strategy to look out for particular types of events that would fit with things I was doing at the time or things that I was interested in learning about and finding out about. Some of it was opportunist in terms of some people don't advertise their events until a month before the event, so. But knowing that I was looking for particular things where I needed to meet some people perhaps so it wasn't just about being there to cover my hours but it was so I could use it for another purpose so.
6 : Interview F	it was quite relevant to some of the modules that I taught on so I was trying to go down and sort of trying to find out what's going on within the industry so we could embed a bit into what we were doing
7 : Interview G	
8 : Interview H	
9 : Interview I	What was it that made you go? I: I thought that... I thought there would be some content there that might be useful in erm... teaching, actually, you know sort of keeping up-to-date with, what was happening in the industry, and you know up-to-date changes, and stuff like that.

1.10. **AL : Increased confidence**

	AL : Increased confidence

E) Participant information sheet

CONFERENCE EXPERIENCE

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

The research is carried out for the purpose of a PhD research at Sheffield Business School at Sheffield Hallam University and the information from the interview will be anonymised. The data will be stored in accordance to Sheffield Hallam University's rules and permission for this research has been given by the SBS Faculty Research Ethics Committee. The anonymised data is likely to be utilised for other publications, such as in articles in academic journals, and with your permission it may be available for further research following the PhD study.

The participation requires you to attend a single interview which is anticipated to last for approximately 45-60 minutes and consists of you discussing your overall conference attendance with the researcher. The interview will take place in a public place at your convenience.

The participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point up to 3 months after the interview without having to state a reason and then no information from you will be used in the study. Following the interview you will have the opportunity to read the transcript of it and comment on it.

The study, which is funded by Sheffield Hallam University, is anticipated to end in the second half of 2017. The researcher is happy to share her results with you, please provide her with your e-mail address for this purpose as well as for copies of any further publications.

For further information, please contact Katrin Stefansdottir on K.Stefansdottir@shu.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns please contact Dave Egan, the director of study for this research on D.J.Egan@shu.ac.uk. Other supervisors for the study are Dr. Phil Crowther and Dr. Peter Whalley and they can be contacted through Sheffield Business School, Stoddart Building, City Campus, Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield, S1 1WB or on phone 0114 225 5081.

F) Participant consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

WORKING TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Conference experience

Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies

	YES	NO
1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.	☐	☐
2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.	☐	☐
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study.	☐	☐
4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.	☐	☐
5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.	☐	☐
6. I give my permission for the interview to be audio recorded.	☐	☐
7. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.	☐	☐

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name (Printed): _____

Contact details: _____

_____

Researcher's Name (Printed): _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Researcher's contact details:
Katrin Stefansdottir
Sheffield Business School | Unit 5 | Science Park |City Campus
Sheffield | S1 1WB
Tel: 0114 225 5257 | Email: K.Stefansdottir@shu.ac.uk
Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.

G) Academics' conference journey

Need Recognition	Decision-Making Process		Preparation
	'Shallow'	'Deep'	Minimum to maximum engagement

- Influence of Career Stage
  o Knowledge when to attend
    ▪ Information from senior colleagues
    ▪ Communication from Event Creators through various channels
    ▪ Need to present research
    ▪ Experience
- Requirement to present research
- Requirement to represent workplace
  o Invitations to attend
- Topic update
	- Conference Design Factors
	  o Topic
	  o Other Attendees
	  o Programme
	  o Location
	- Previous Experience
	- Total Cost
	  o Money
	  o Time
	  o Awareness
		- Influence of career stage
		  o Earlier:
		    ▪ Gain ideas
		    ▪ Become familiar with the topic area
		  o Later:
		    ▪ Gain specific knowledge
		    ▪ Enhance productivity
		  o Continuous curiosity and positive attitude towards learning
		- Contribution and Visibility leading to outcomes:
		  o Improved knowledge
		  o Collaboration
		  o Increased visibility
		- Preferred Conference Topic Area
		  o Topics close to research areas perceived more interesting
			- Decide what to attend
			- Travel and accommodation arrangements
			- Write paper/abstract
			- Design presentation

Location, Venue, F&B	Relevance of Topic	Relevant Attendees	Opportunities to Learn and Contribute	Opportunities to Network	Community fit

- Limited influence from career stage
- Venue more influential than destination
- Heavier influence when other conference factors deliver poor experience
- Destination influences tone
	- Topic needs to be in accordance to communication from event creator
	- Enhanced experience when topic is on attendee's preferred area
	- Internal conferences cover too wide topics
		- Relevant topic provided relevant attendees
		- Reputation and/or previous experience indicated who attends which conferences
			- Increasing engagement through the career ranging from:
			  o Exhibitions
			  o Posters
			  o Verbal presentations
			- Different engagement for natural and social scientists
			- Parallel sessions often perceived negatively:
			  o Attendees miss out on sessions
			  o Leads to poor attendance
			- Quality of the speakers influence
			- Limited attention span of the attendees
			- Opportunity to 'test ideas'
			- Brings out much emotions
			- Increase in confidence
			- Question and Answers sessions
			  o Influence of other attendees' behaviour and attitude
				- Opportunity to interact outside of daily network
				- The networking takes learning to the next level
				- Event creators have a responsibility to provide strategically created networking opportunities
				- Less formal conversations perceived positively as often this leads to more personal acquaintance
				- One day conferences give less opportunities for networking:
				  o Less time for reflection
				  o But an opportunity to keep in touch and stay updated
				- Challenges in networking
				  o Wide range of emotions
				- Attending individually:
				  o Forced to network
				- Attending with colleagues:
				  o Comfort zone provided
					- Highest level of engagement when feeling part of the conference community
					- Importance of welcoming and support
					- Difficulties to feel a community belonging:
					  o During early career
					  o After changing roles
					  o At industry conferences
					  o In inclusive and clique communities
					- Influence of competitiveness
					- More supportive communities at:
					  o Social science conferences
					  o Emerging science conferences
					- Hierarchy perceived

Post-Conference Outcome		
Assets	**Opportunities**	**Outcomes**
- Preparations - Community's awareness of research - Ideas - Contact information - Stories to share with students - Understanding of other academics - Confidence in contacting people met a conferences - Wider awareness of the research area	- Complete drafts of papers - Future collaborations - Share new knowledge with colleagues - Reflections on learning and networking	- Paper published in peer-reviewed journal - Confidence - Stronger and wider network - Material for research

H) Professionals' conference journey

Need Recognition	Decision-Making Process		Preparation
	'Shallow'	**'Deep'**	**Minimum to maximum engagement**

- Influence of Career Stage:
  o Early
    ▪ Explore field
    ▪ Building a profile
  o Later
    ▪ Visibility in organisation and/or industry
    ▪ Invitations to attend
  o Always
    ▪ Receive relevant topic update
- Influence of role:
  o Accreditation requirements
  o Different roles require different attendance
  o Expectancy of sales
- Communication from event creator
	- Conference Design Factors
	  o Programme
	  o Other attendees
	  o Location
	- Total cost
	  o Money
	  o Time
	    ▪ Workload pressure
		- Influence of career stage
		  o Earlier:
		    ▪ Build profile
		    ▪ Demonstrate ability
		    ▪ Gain ideas and knowledge
		  o Later:
		    ▪ Gain specific knowledge
		    ▪ Expand expertise
		    ▪ Enhance productivity
		    ▪ Develop opportunities for collaborations
		    ▪ Providing and gaining support
		  o Gain up to date knowledge
		- Visibility leading to outcomes:
		  o Sales
		  o Collaboration
		  o Increased visibility
		- Managers seen as supportive and available
			- Decide what to attend
			- Travel and Accommodation Arrangements
			- Familiarisation with programme, speaker and attendees
			- Arrange meetings

Location, Venue, F&B	Relevance of Topic	Relevant Attendees	Opportunities to Learn	Opportunities to Network	Community fit

- Limited influence from career stage
- Heavier influence when other conference factors deliver poor experience
- Destination continent influences tone
	- Topic generally experienced as very relevant
	- The topic could be very specific
		- Could provide business
		- Like-minded
		- External conferences in general had relevant attendees
		- Internal conferences had more relevant attendees to managers
		- The message needed to be adapted to the attendees to make them relevant
			- Influence of career stage:
			  o The more experienced attendees can more easily set learning in context
			- Influence of conference design:
			  o Influence of speakers´ skills
			  o Varied sessions enhanced learning
			  o Must have space to reflect to maximise learning
			  o Limited attention span
				- The networking takes learning to the next level
				- Invites opportunities for collaborations
				- Attending individually:
				  o Can be scary and intimidating
				  o Previous experience leads to supporting behaviour and effort to initiate conversations to those attending individually
				- Attending with colleagues:
				  o Comfort zone provided
				  o Opportunity for introductions
				- Event creators have a responsibility to provide strategically created environment for networking opportunities
				- Influence of alcohol
				  o Conversation starter
				  o Conversations could be more honest
				  o Can have a negative influence on attendance
					- Highest level of engagement when feeling part of the conference community
					- Increased likelihood to develop friendships
					- Communities can be strengthened at conferences
					- Internal conferences could provide a feeling of belonging to the organisation
					- Difficulties to feel belonging when not able to enter groups
					- Influence of 'unspecified dress code'
					- Influence of conference design

Post-Conference Outcome		
Assets	**Opportunities**	**Outcomes**
- Increased knowledge - New insights - Larger network - Visibility - Deeper understanding of own workplace - Feeling part of own organisation	- Confidence to follow up with new contacts - Credible image and trust established - increased likelihood of recommendations - Sales / Projects in the future - Ability to act on new knowledge	- New projects - New clients - Increased sales - Friendship

I) Researcher's interview reflection notes – examples

i.   Reflections on interview 4

Observational notes - ´what happened notes´
- First meeting place didn´t work. We walked into the café we had chosen and she said that she knew a few people in there. We decided to go elsewhere as she pointed out that they might come up to her for a chat and therefore interrupt the interview.
- We went elsewhere and I bought lunch and we ate before we began the interview.
- After 60 minutes we hadn´t finished so I asked for permission to continue.
- She brought prompts with her.
- I was way too tired when doing her interview and I constantly had to hide my yawns which wasn´t good.
- She brought a folder with her to the interview with material from various conferences.

Theoretical notes - ´attempts to derive meaning´ as the researcher thinks or reflects on experiences
- Her attendance pattern is very different from the first three as she was working as a consultant and needed the conferences for making contacts and make sure her knowledge was up to date.
- She never attended conferences longer than a day and always within a comfortable driving area. She found it easy as there is much on offer within her topic within the area.
- The prompts she brought showed a very different pattern to what happens afterwards than previous interviews had demonstrated.
-

Methodological notes - ´reminders, instructions or critique´ to oneself on the process
- I had restructured my questions somewhat before this interview and now I really wanted to emphasised what happens after the event.
- She was curious about the layout of my questions, the tables. They were purely that way because I wanted to have my questions on one page so I could glance on it and not have to flip it.
- She told me afterwards that when I took a pause to look at my questions and asked something she had realised what type of information I was after which I need to be careful about.
- I was jotting down questions to follow up on now instead of interrupting with "why" and "how" and that worked well.

ii.   Reflections on interview 9

Observational notes - ´what happened notes´
- This interview was only for 45 minutes but I didn´t really feel that I needed more time. He didn´t seem at unease so it I didn´t have the same feeling that I was using his time, he really reacted as he wanted to help me.
- In the end there always comes a good extra discussion.

Theoretical notes - ´attempts to derive meaning´ as the researcher thinks or reflects on experiences
- He spoke about always going to a conference with the intention of doing at least one thing as a result of it and it has to happen quickly. Why isn´t this emphasised more in the evaluations and why aren´t the evaluations only asking about this following the conference? This is definitely something which is emphasised much by the ROI methodology. I´m also starting to sense this difference between the social science academics and others, the former goes to tell about their research and just listen and hear what others are doing, whereas many others are going with the main intention to learn something they can put into practice straight away or build a relationship with someone which will lead to something straight away.
- "We don´t learn from experience… we learn from reflecting on experience" – John Dewey.

Methodological notes - ´reminders, instructions or critique´ to oneself on the process
- I almost forgot to ask about evaluation, I have to remember it because it gives valuable data.
- Interesting how he didn´t see anything valuable for himself on the interview as everyone else has discussed, maybe he is very reflective already.