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TRADESHOW EXHIBITS AS PLACES OF LEARNING:
A CASE STUDY OF AN EXHIBIT HOUSE IN THE MIDWEST

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the University of North Dakota

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Grand Forks, North Dakota

December
2016

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This dissertation, submitted by Sachel Josefson in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done, and is hereby approved.

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Department: Teaching and Learning

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Sachel Josefson
December 1, 2016

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study was to understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. The existing literature suggests that tradeshows are events of learning, but the purpose of this research study was to fill a pronounced gap in the literature by better understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning through the perceptions and experiences of industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house. Tradeshows have traditionally been understood to be temporary marketplaces where organizations from a given industry convene to display their products and services to potential buyers. While tradeshow exhibits are still seen in this research study as temporary places for trade, this research study went beyond this traditional view, to understand tradeshow exhibits as a complex phenomenon that could facilitate many experiences and opportunities for learning.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Tradeshows are events that bring together a group of people who share a common craft or profession, where organizations from similar industries gather to display their products and services directly to attendees. Tradeshows differ from other public presentation mediums, such as museums, retail environments, and art galleries, in that concentrated segments of professional and industrial markets drive them. For example, the Consumer Technology Association organizes an annual tradeshow event called, the Consumer Electronic Show (CES). Therefore, CES is a tradeshow organized so that companies (exhibitors) from the technology industry can display their wares, connect with people (attendees), and examine industry trends.

Tradeshows are distinctly different from other public happenings in that they transpire over a short periods, lasting one day to a few weeks, and occur periodically depending on the innovation cycle of the represented industry participating (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014). CES for example, occurs annually for four days. Tradeshows are complex and require many people and groups directly and indirectly to create such events. The two most important actors related to this study, aside from the tradeshow event organizer, are the tradeshow attendees and tradeshow exhibitors.

Attendees are persons who visit tradeshow events that do not represent in any way an organization exhibiting or directly connected with the tradeshow event organizer

(Exhibitor Media Group, n. d.). In the past, tradeshow attendees were understood to be key decision makers that could influence direct organizational buying. In more recent years, attendees are considered a more diversified group that attend tradeshows for various reasons (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006). For instance, Tanner and Drapeau (2013) suggest that some tradeshow attendees still visit these events as decision makers with intentions to make key organizational purchases, but many more attendees visit tradeshows with the primary goal to access personal and professional learning opportunities. Godar and O'Connor (2001) explained that attendees "return to tradeshows in large numbers year after year not only to purchase, but to educate themselves" (p. 79). To further this point, Borghini, Golfetto, and Rinallo (2014) concluded:

We now see a large numbers of tradeshow attendees who are non-buyers... These attendees visit tradeshows to glean important information and expertise about the industry... The prevailing interest of attendees at tradeshows is no longer driven by the goal of short-term buying, but rather by a desire to conduct learning expeditions. (p. 23)

In other words, attendees increasingly visit tradeshow events to learn. Research by Ling-ye (2005) further indicated that tradeshow attendees' desire to learn is facilitated in tradeshow exhibits, and is the primary reasons many attendees visit tradeshows; it is also a primary explanation of why tradeshows have continued to stay relevant in the 21st Century.

While the literature indicates that tradeshow attendees have become more focused on learning than buying, little is mentioned about the learning that takes place in the tradeshow exhibits that make up the larger event. All organizations with a physical

exhibit at a tradeshow are known as exhibitors. To have an exhibit at a tradeshow event, or to be an exhibitor, often involves a considerable investment by the participating organization. Costs include the rental space on the tradeshow floor, design and production of the tradeshow exhibit, travel accommodations, and other promotional materials. In addition, expenditures accumulate for exhibitors at tradeshow events for electrical, cleaning, and internet services; drayage; and, if necessary, additional staff. These examples of potential costs associated with exhibiting at a tradeshow do not encompass all the overhead an organization could encumber to exhibit at a tradeshow event, but they illustrate the fact that all exhibitors navigate a complex process to get an exhibit on a tradeshow floor, beyond even considering what is happening during the hours of the actual tradeshow.

While the literature related to tradeshows is limited, it suggests that these events facilitate the construction of critical knowledge and skills about ideas, products, and processes between attendees and exhibitors (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014); however, no research provides a comprehensive explanation of the attendee learning that occurs in tradeshow exhibits. Therefore, this study focused on understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. To understand learning within tradeshow exhibits, information on the perceptions and descriptions of industry professionals employed at an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States was collected and analyzed. In addition, this study examined examples of specific strategies and procedures used by professionals at the participating exhibit house to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits.

As a case study, the selected exhibit house, also sometimes referred to as an exhibit producer, has helped organizations navigate the complex processes required to be an exhibitor at tradeshow events for over five decades. An exhibit house, as the one in this study, is made up of tradeshow exhibit experts. These experts partner with other organizations to help plan, design, engineer, build, implement, and assess their tradeshow exhibit programs. Since exhibit houses are viewed as the exhibit experts, this case study aimed to better understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning by asking industry professionals at the participating exhibit house about their thoughts and experiences on creating exhibits to capture attendees' attention, as well as to inform and provide opportunities for learning.

In this case study, the chosen exhibit house was intrinsically interesting for its professionals' reputation and aptitude in executing exemplary tradeshow exhibits for clients (exhibitors). The chosen exhibit house is thought to be exemplary because it has received many awards for its excellence in creating tradeshow exhibit programs, as well as being known in the business as one of the most important exhibit houses in the United States.

Background of the Study

Management and marketing researchers dominated early tradeshow-related research studies, which date back to the 1960s. These early studies aided in understanding the positive economic impact tradeshow events had on local tourism for cities in the United States (Braun, 1992; Cavanaugh, 1976; Golfetto, 1991; Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 1995; Shoham, 1992). Furthermore, early studies aided in understanding how to potentially evaluate tradeshow events as a sales promotion and marketing communication tool

(Bonoma, 1983; Carmen, 1968). However, little was mentioned in these early research studies about the tradeshow exhibits that made up these larger events from the perspective of professionals at an exhibit house.

In more recent studies, tradeshow events have grabbed the attention of researchers in a variety of disciplines. For example, in sociology, theories by Bourdieu (1993) and Goffman (1974) have been used as theoretical frameworks to provide an understanding of how tradeshow events are embodiments of specific fields and how tradeshow events can be seen as a kind of neutral ground for exhibitors (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006; Skov, 2006). In organizational studies, researchers have characterized tradeshow events as symbols of innovation that facilitate development of new technologies and innovations (Lampel & Meyer, 2008). In political science, researchers have linked tradeshow events to the persistence and ongoing specialization of capitalist varieties (Gibson, 2015; Gibson & Bathelt, 2010).

Many of these recent studies have concluded that tradeshow events entail different things for different people. Most importantly related to this study, tradeshow events are often seen as rich events favorable to an atmosphere that brings together a group of people who share a common craft or profession to construct new knowledge and skills through face-to-face interaction (Bathelt & Gibson, 2014; Bathelt & Schuldt, 2008; Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014; Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006; Golfetto & Mazursky, 2004; Li, 2006; Marshall, 2009; Maskell, Bathelt, & Malmber, 2006; Rinallo & Golfetto, 2011; Tanner, Chonko, & Ponzurick, 2001; Zerbini, Golfetto, & Borghini, 2010). According to the work of Geigenmuller (2010) and the work of Damer, Gold, de Bruin, and de Bruin

(2000), meaningful learning experiences that occur at tradeshow events are thought to be possibly one of the main reasons tradeshow events continue to thrive in the 21st century.

Focusing on the learning that occurs through the collective, but at the same time isolated mixture of activities that is created at tradeshow events has been somewhat established (Skov, 2006). However, due to the limited research studies conducted related to tradeshow events in recent years, as well as the lack of research on the specifics of the tradeshow exhibits overall, this case study focused on comprehensively understanding the exhibits that make up the larger tradeshow event, especially as places of learning.

Study Context

Tradeshow events are often held indoors. The more well-known tradeshow events are typically held in large convention centers, such as McCormick Place in Chicago, Orange County Convention Center in Orlando, Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, Las Vegas Convention Center in Winchester, and the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center in New Orleans. Convention centers tend to be located close to airports and major highways in order to allow an easy flowing circulation system for visitors. Convention centers are much like sports stadiums, in that they have large entrances and wide hallways designed to funnel thousands of visitors to registration counters, then into the main event.

Within a convention center, the tradeshow event consists of a small city of exhibits that fills the tradeshow floor and attendees that are eager to go on, “learning expeditions” (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2004, p. 9). What makes tradeshow events interesting is not that each event is organized with its own city of unique exhibits and group of people that share a common craft or profession; rather, what makes tradeshow events attractive and efficient is that they can be erected and dismantled so frequently. The case

under study was an exhibit house that was a thought-leader in producing exhibit experiences that would often be seen at larger tradeshow events, which were often held at major convention centers, such as the ones listed above.

Once in the convention center, visitors either have pre-registered or must register at counters branded for the event. To gain access into the tradeshow, visitors are registered as either an exhibitor or attendee. In other words, nobody enters a tradeshow without proper registration. Exhibitors register to have exhibits within the convention center, and exhibitors are allocated a number of staffers to help facilitate the exhibit experience. Visitors that do not register as exhibitors, register as attendees, each with their own objectives, needs, and reasons for visiting the tradeshow event. Findings from this research study suggest that a number of attendees visit tradeshow events with an increasing desire to learn.

At many tradeshows, attendees are often categorized into groups with color-coded entry badges that presumably represent their objectives for visiting the event. For instance, it is common at a tradeshow for attendees to wear a badge that is green, which is hypothetically categorized for buyers. Entry badges are checked at certain checkpoints throughout the convention center, and various badge colors may allow for various levels of access within tradeshow events that often result in different experiences within a tradeshow exhibit.

Each tradeshow consists of a city of exhibits, sometimes thousands of them, each representing their own brand and uniqueness, while at the same time; each exhibit represents the larger tradeshow. Collectively, exhibits' personnel and attendees symbolize a grounded sense of an industry (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006). The sea of

exhibits that make up the tradeshow, “creates the condition for direct comparison of different companies against a backdrop of similarity” (Skov, 2006, p. 4). In other words, tradeshows are seen as a neutral ground for competition. The tradeshow enables each exhibitor to actively represent his or her organization and is one piece of the puzzle, while at the same time, collectively all the pieces of the puzzle symbolize the entire industry and group of people who share a common craft or profession. Thus, exhibitors understand that what happens in their exhibits will be critically judged by the many, sometimes thousands and upwards of over a million, attendees visiting the tradeshow. This competitive atmosphere of the tradeshow makes the exhibit crucial for the facilitation of attendees’ experiences.

Godar and Skov (2001) discuss one of the unique characteristics of tradeshow events that has implications for both exhibitors and attendees: tradeshow events are brief. The duration of most tradeshow events occur over a few days, and usually only once a year. This unique characteristic of tradeshows allows for short-lived personalized face-to-face contact for attendees in confined exhibits, which allows little time for reflective thought (Skov, 2006). This means that to create positive impressions in the exhibit, much thought and planning needs to go into creating these meaningful experiences. To help organizations execute these immersive exhibit experiences that effectively represent themselves, they often collaborate with an exhibit house, such as the one in this case study, to provide varying levels of services related to their tradeshow exhibits.

Statement of the Problem

Tradeshows are traditionally understood to be temporary marketplaces where organizations from a given industry convene to display their products and services to

potential buyers (Rinallo & Golfetto, 2011). The primary role of tradeshows was to reduce the transaction costs inherent in finding new customers and business partners (Floria, 1994). To facilitate this direct face-to-face interaction between sellers (exhibitors) and potential buyers (attendees), sellers staked claim over an area of the tradeshow floor, and invested in an exhibit as a means to interact with their target audience. While, for many reasons, tradeshow exhibits are still seen today as temporary places for trade, this research study went beyond this traditional view, to understand tradeshow exhibits as places that could facilitate many experiences and opportunities for learning.

Tradeshows have been described as rich events with the potential for many things, such as sales, marketing, networking, entertainment, and learning (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006; Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 2009; Jansson & Power, 2008; Norcliffe & Rendace, 2003; Skov, 2006). While the literature related to tradeshows is limited, very little of the tradeshow-related research focuses on the exhibits that make up the larger tradeshow event; and none of the tradeshow-related research is based on the perceptions of professionals at an exhibit house located in the United States. For example, Borghini et al. (2006) investigated attendee behavior at tradeshows, and they concluded that fewer attendees are buyers or even involved in the purchasing process than previously thought; more importantly, they found that one of the main reasons tradeshow attendees visit tradeshows is to learn. While findings from Borghini et al. (2006) focused on tradeshow attendees and recognized learning as important, the study was conducted in Europe with a different sampling and methodology than this investigation, and did not specifically discuss the learning process of the tradeshow exhibit in detail. Therefore, an in-depth understanding of the exhibits that makeup larger

tradeshow events within the United States was absent from the literature until this study was conducted. Findings from this study are presented in Chapter 4 and contribute to the limited body of literature related to tradeshows.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, or where attendees actively engaged themselves in an experience that allowed them to construct their own meaning based on the application of information, knowledge, and skills. The existing literature understands tradeshows as events of learning, but the purpose of this research study was to fill a pronounced gap in the literature by better understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning through the perceptions and experiences of industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house. Ultimately, this study was meant to inform the practice of professionals involved in the tradeshow exhibit industry by exploring the meaning of learning, as well as effective strategies and procedures used in the development of exhibits to promote learning in tradeshows.

Research Questions

Based on the focus and purpose of this study, the following research questions guided data collection and analysis:

RQ1: How do tradeshow industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house perceive and describe tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning?

RQ2: What strategies or procedures do industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house implement to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits?

Research Question 1 was intended to acquire an overall understanding and impression of how learning in tradeshow exhibits was perceived and experienced by

industry professionals at the participating exemplary exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Research Question 2 was intended to gather relevant information on strategies or procedures for learning employed by professionals at the exhibit house under study.

Significance of the Study

The findings from this study may be useful to people that would like information about exhibiting in the United States in general, and about understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning in particular. The aim of this study was to better understand how the tradeshow exhibit could be a tool to facilitate learning through the application of information, knowledge, and skills. Findings in this study may contribute to the field of marketing, design, and management by describing tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning, as well as identifying strategies and procedures that promote learning in tradeshow exhibits. Since tradeshow exhibit activities do not occur in a vacuum, findings from this research also provide insight into some of the other potential processes within the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. For example, this study found that creating a tradeshow exhibit that maximizes the potential for learning was perceived by participants to also have an impact on tradeshow attendees' decision-making process, ultimately better equipping them to make informed purchasing decisions. Therefore, the learning process was perceived to have implications for the sales process as well. This study is also significant because there are no studies found that provide an in-depth understanding of learning within the tradeshow exhibit, especially from the perspective of professionals in an exhibit house located in the United States.

Nature of the Study

According to Merriam (2009), “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their personal experiences, how they construct their world, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). This qualitative study was particularly interested in understanding how tradeshow industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house perceived, experienced, and described tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, as well as identifying strategies and procedures that promote learning in tradeshow exhibits. The guiding research questions above called for a qualitative research approach with a case study design.

To understand the perceptions, meaning, situations, experiences, and actions of participating industry professionals, inquiry was descriptive in nature, which means it focused on specific situations and/or people with an emphasis on words, rather than numbers, to communicate what the researcher learned about the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. Qualitative research methods refer to the procedures for collecting data that result in quality descriptive accounts mainly through observations, interviews, and documentation (Merriam, 2002). This study collected data through interviews, a focus group, observations, and documents. These sources of information are described in detail in Chapter 3.

Case study, the selected research design of this study, is one the most common qualitative research designs, widely used in social science research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Case study refers to the intensive study of a single case, or a bounded system of what is to be studied (Stake, 1995). The bounded system in this case study was an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. As stated earlier, an exhibit

house is an organization that is responsible for helping other organizations plan, design, engineer, produce, and execute tradeshow exhibit programs. This case study researched the perceptions and experiences of industry professionals directly employed by the selected Midwestern exhibit house, with the goal of understanding the complexities of tradeshow exhibits as places of learning.

To initiate this study, the researcher first approached the identified exhibit house and expressed interest in knowing more about how they understood tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. An agreement was made with the owner of the exhibit house for the researcher to conduct research at the exhibit house. The researcher purposefully chose the exhibit house because it is an intrinsically interesting exhibit house for its ability to create exemplary tradeshow exhibits for their clients (exhibitors), and engaging exhibits for their customers' users (attendees). Evidence that this exhibit house is exemplary is that they have received several awards for their excellence in creating tradeshow exhibit programs. Industry professionals working for the exhibit house under study were invited to serve as "participants" in this study.

Interviews were scheduled with industry professionals affiliated with the exhibit house under study, which included people from the Management Team, Marketing Team, Design Team, Sales Team, and Client Services Team. All participating industry professionals completed and signed a written consent form prior to engaging in the interview process. Observations were conducted at two different exhibits at two different tradeshows in the United States. Data analysis was based on Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) methods. Further information regarding the data analysis process is presented in Chapter 3.

In this study, data collection and analysis ran simultaneously. Based on the collected information, a detailed description of the case, the exhibit house, as well as emerging themes based on information provided from participating professionals are presented in this report. In Chapter 2, an outline of relevant literature related to the main topics of this study is presented. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the methodology, sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures. In addition, Chapter 3 provides information on the trustworthiness of and ethical considerations for this research. Chapter 4 presents the research findings, and Chapter 5 discusses these findings in relation to previous literature presented in Chapters 2, as well as offer implications and recommendations for future research.

Definition of Terms

To ensure mutual understanding of the terminology used in this case study, the following definitions are meant to clarify concepts and/or terms used in this research:

- Exhibit Manager: the individual responsible for his or her organization's tradeshow exhibit program (Exhibitor Media Group, 2015). Responsibilities for the exhibit manager can include planning, preparation, transportation, installation, dismantling, presentation, maintenance, and other related paperwork for the tradeshow exhibit.
- Exhibit Hall: the entire recognizable boundaries of the specific event area within an exposition or convention center where exhibits are located (Exhibitor Media Group, 2015).

- Exhibit House: a company that is perceived to be tradeshow exhibit experts that partners with other organizations to help them plan, design, engineer, build, implement, and assess their tradeshow exhibit program.
- General Contractor: show management appointed company that provides services to a tradeshow organizer and/or its exhibitors. Also known as official contractor (Exhibitor Media Group, 2015).
- Learning: an active process of constructing meaning through multiple types of learning, which can include passive knowledge acquisition, but also includes narratives, active construction, and transition (Piaget, 1966). For research purposes, learning will be defined as “the process of gaining knowledge and expertise” (Knowles, 2011, p. 17). For a more complex understanding of learning, refer to chapter 2.
- Tradeshow: a temporary event that is organized and managed by an organization (often an association) to bring together a group of people who share a common craft or profession to share specific ideas, products, or processes.
- Tradeshow Attendee: those visitors that attend a tradeshow event to experience the various exhibits. Attendees are not connected with an organization exhibiting or with the event organizer. Each tradeshow attendee has his or her own objectives, which guide his or her actions and determine how he or she constructs meaning within the tradeshow event.
- Tradeshow Exhibit: the entire structure that stakes claim on recognizable boundaries of the tradeshow floor, defined by the tradeshow organizer.

- Tradeshow Event Organizer: the organization that organizes, operates, and facilitates the tradeshow event.
- Tradeshow Floor: the area within a convention center that is organized to facilitate the interaction between exhibitors and attendees.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been relatively little research conducted related to tradeshow over the years. Skov (2006) complained that there was so little tradeshow-related research that she had to return to Allix's work done in 1922 to "establish a dialogue with existing knowledge" (p. 771). This chapter discusses the existing literature related to modern tradeshow. The literature review shows that empirical research related to tradeshow is sparse. Modern tradeshow of the kind investigated in this research study are events that have been established as temporary industry marketplaces to bring together different groups in a single location. For example, sellers from a particular industry who set up physical exhibits, known as exhibitors, to showcase, promote and market their products and services to potential customers and other targeted groups, known as attendees, examine the offerings in the physical exhibits (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014; Godar & O'Connor, 2001; Rinallo & Golfetto, 2011).

While tradeshow were traditionally understood to be primarily temporary marketplaces, modern tradeshow have since been recognized as extremely complex events that can be understood through multiple lenses, and from a variety of disciplines. For example, economist Ahola (2012) identified tradeshow events as symbols of progress, where attendees "collect information and learn" (p. 326), ultimately making these events useful for facilitating consumer creativity (Ahola, 2012). Also in economics,

Florio (1994) applied the inverse relationship between demand prices and limit prices to tradeshows, which understands these events as low-cost, high-density information exchanges. Tradeshows, thus, reduce the transaction cost associated with searching for information under inadequate market conditions. In other words, tradeshows are most effective when attendees look to learn, and when exhibitors maximize the potential for learning opportunities for attendees, when prices alone do not convey enough information about the differences in product quality. Also in economics, Maskell, Bathelt, and Malmberg (2004) listed numerous functions that take place at tradeshows. They claimed that actual trade is a marginal function at tradeshows, whereas learning through the exchange of information is understood to be an important function of tradeshows (Maskell, Bathelt, & Malmberg, 2004).

In marketing, a case study conducted by Gelfetto and Mazursky (2004) explained how a company within the yarn industry, which was full of copycat impersonators, established itself as a thought-leader of high-fashion apparel makers by displaying their own beautiful designs with their products. Because of this competence-based marketing approach at a tradeshow event, the yarn company improved its image and brand. It was also established in this research study that attendees consider tradeshows a learning experience, and not just a commercial event (Gelfetto & Mazursky, 2004).

Sociologists Aspers and Darr (2011) acknowledged that participating in tradeshows is an efficient way for exhibitors to overcome attendee uncertainty (Aspers & Darr, 2011). Also in sociology, Entwistle and Rocamora (2006) used Bourdieu's theory of Social Fields (1993) to argue that a major fashion tradeshow in London was a bounded event that operated as a mirror that encapsulated the entire field of fashion and its

membership. Skov (2006) used Erving Goffman's concept of frames or Frame Analysis (Goffman, 1974) to analyze tradeshows as neutral ground for exhibitors to mark their relative position in relation to other exhibitors within an industry. In addition, this study identified three types of tradeshows that provide a social setting that can be used to examine different types of encounters, which include encounters of trade, networking, and learning (Skov, 2006).

Encounters of learning at tradeshows can be with people, things, or exhibits to gain knowledge about trends, technologies, and markets. Within sociology, Lampel and Meyer (2008) infused field theory into organizational management and characterized tradeshows as "Field-Configuring Events" (p. 1026), which can be summed up as events that: (a) assemble diverse groups in one location, (b) have a limited duration, (c) provide unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interaction, (d) depend on ceremonial and dramaturgical activities, (e) are opportunities for learning, and (f) generate resources that can be deployed elsewhere and for other purposes (Lampel and Meyer, 2008).

Historical View of Tradeshows

The Industrial Revolution brought with it expositions and tradeshows. Among the first of these kinds of events were the expos of London (1756) and the Geneva Expo (1789). One of the most well-known events of this period, and truly the first real tradeshow, was the 1851 Great Exhibition of Art and Industry held in London for seven months in the Crystal Palace (Smith, 1992). Because of technological advances in transportation, 50% of the event's attendees were foreign visitors (Raizman, 2004). Here, goods were on display within the exhibit but not for sale or distributed. Rather, the purpose was to highlight "modernity, progress, and confidence in the possibilities of

industrialized technology” (Raizman, 2004, p. 52). From the perspective of attendees, such events were seen as opportunities to experience progress, ingenuity, prosperity, peace, materialism, and to learn about the accessibility to the middle class. The 1851 Great Exhibition was followed by several other international tradeshows and expos that continue today.

While showcasing innovations were only on display at the 1851 Great Exhibition, many of the mid-19th century tradeshows (known by some as commodity fairs) also had the core to facilitate sales and distribution. During this time, many tradeshows utilized a warehouse model where mass quantities of products were brought into their spaces and sold. This required exhibitors to manage and control an inventory, which created transportation issues between events and space issues within events. In the late 19th century, these types of tradeshows slowly disappeared, and a new type of tradeshow emerged (known by some as sample fairs), where samples of the products were showcased as examples of merchandise to secure purchase orders from commercial buyers that were shipped at a later date (Golfetto, 1988).

Until the mid-20th century, tradeshows were more general in nature, and a broad range of commerce, interests, and industry sectors represented the exhibits within tradeshows. In the mid-20th century, tradeshows started to become more industry specific. For attendees, these tradeshows were seen as the best method to stay informed about technology, innovation, and specific industries.

In the 1960s, the surge in magazines, radio, television, and other mass communication media provided another source of updated information, making the future of tradeshows unknown. The 1970s and 1980s was a time for dramatic growth in

tradeshows, especially in North America. In the 1980s, tradeshow events became even more specialized, often attended by industry-related members, and more so separated from the end customer. This specialization, according to Bathelt, Golfetto, and Rinallo (2014) made “tradeshows provide rich opportunities for learning through face-to-face interaction... Such learning opportunities are perhaps, the main reason why tradeshows still thrive in the age of the World Wide Web and social media” (p. 18).

Rapid growth of tradeshow industry has extended into newly developed areas, such as China, India, and South America. Recent studies have demonstrated that fewer attendees are interested in making immediate purchases at tradeshows (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014), which was more commonplace before the 1950s. Borghini, Golfetto, and Rinallo (2006) conclude that attendees are more interested in acquiring new knowledge and updating skills for future reference and potential purchases. In addition, Bathelt and Zakrzewski (2007) conceptualize tradeshows as focal points for the global knowledge economy. Pine and Gilmore (2011) suggest tradeshows could be a new way organizations can think about connecting with customers and securing their loyalty in the experience economy.

Theories of Learning

People are immensely complex. Therefore, it is difficult to attempt to describe our behavior in terms of theories. Tradeshows are also extraordinarily complex events, where attendees have an incredible range of experiences. Once people are at such an event, it is common for them to have epiphanies and lasting memories through experiences. These experiences are ones that John Dewey would call educative. Dewey, who strongly tied

experience with education, was also clear that not every experience leads to learning. In his book, *Experience & Education*, he remarks:

The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experience are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education (learning) cannot be directly equated to each other. For some experiences are mis-educative. Any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience... a given experience may increase a person's automatic skill in a particular direction and yet tend to land him in a groove or rut... An experience may be immediately enjoy and yet promote the formation of a slack and careless attitude... experiences may be so disconnected from one another that, while each is agreeable or even exciting in itself, they are not linked cumulatively to one another... Experiences may be lively, vivid, and interesting, and yet their disconnectedness may artificially generate dispersive, disintegrated, centrifugal habits. The consequences of formation of such habits is inability to control future experiences. (p.26)

Dewey make a few important points about learning that are relevant to the power of experiences at tradeshows. First, Dewey suggests that monotonous experiences that do not challenge attendees or stimulate attendees. Therefore, Dewey suggests that in order to learn, experiences must be both hands-on, but also minds-on. The above excerpt stresses that it is not enough for an experience to only be entertaining; rather Dewey suggests that experiences must also be organized with learning in mind.

Any discussion about learning must try to get a handle on the term. The term learning emphasizes a person where change happens or where change is expected to

happen. Boyd and Apps (1980), learning is a process that involves a change in behavior or attitude; or is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge or skills. Learning theories have tried to be classified into taxonomies over the years. For example, Hilgard and Bower (1966) recognized 11 different categories of learning theories, McDonald (1964) recognized 6 different categories, Gage (1972) recognized 3 different categories, and Knowles recognized 2 different categories. This research study was less concerned with recognized categories of different learning theories, but focused more on the set of principles, models, frameworks, and theories of adult learning. Since the people that participate in tradeshow events are adults, this study focused its efforts on understanding learning from that perspective. Just as there is no one theory that explains all human learning, there is also no one theory that explains adult learning.

The best-known adult learning theory or framework is andragogy. Knowles' coined the term "andragogy" in an article written in 1968. Andragogy distinguishes adult learning from the learning by children, which is known as pedagogy. Knowles (1980; 1984) andragogy is based on the following six assumptions about the adult learner:

1. As a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one of a self-directed human being.
2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for future learning.
3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental task of his or her social role.

4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature. From future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus, an adult is more problem-centered than subject-centered in learning.
5. The most potent motivations are internal rather than external.
6. Adults need to know why they need to learn something.

Knowles clearly saw this theory, or model of assumptions, or system of concepts, or framework as foundational to designing learning programs for adults.

While andragogy remains the most notable theory of adult learning, several other theories offer insightful understandings of learning. One that precedes andragogy is McClusky's (1963) theory of margin, which is a theory grounded in the idea that one's ability to learn is dependent upon his or her "load" of life, which squanders energy to be productive, and "power), which allows one to manage load. A more recent theory of adult learning is Illeris's (2002) three dimensions of learning, which captures cognition, emotion, and society. Lastly, another notable adult learning theory is Jarvis's (1987) learning process, which conceives that all learning begins with the five human senses of: sound, sight, smell, taste, and touch.

Tradeshows Recognized as Events of Learning

While many of the research studies above suggest tradeshows are events, in which numerous things transpire, most notably for the purposes of this study, tradeshows were seen as information-rich events where new knowledge and skills could be acquired. However, many of these studies seem to miss the distinctive interaction between attendees and exhibitors that make up the larger tradeshow. Borghini, Golfetto, and Rinallo (2006) investigated 11 European tradeshows to better understand attendee

behavior. Their research clearly showed that: (a) most tradeshow attendees are not involved in the purchasing process, but are rather more interested in learning, and even those attendees that are involved in the buying process are interested in learning; (b) as learning is one of the main reasons attendees visit tradeshow events, the most relevant outcomes and new knowledge constructed are often found unexpectedly; (c) attendees find inspiration at tradeshow events that fills them with enthusiasm as they learn about new opportunities; and (d) attendees are “immersed” in embodied experiences that allow them “to touch products”, “speak to people”, and “look at each other in the eyes” (p. 1156).

While there are still attendees that visit tradeshows as decision makers with intentions to make key organizational purchases, the literature overwhelmingly suggests that many more attendees will visit tradeshows with the primary goal to access personal and professional learning opportunities (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014; Godar & O’Connor, 2001; Ling-yee, 2005; Maskell, Bathelt, & Malmberg, 2006; Tanner & Drapeau 2013). For example, Godar and O’Connor (2001) explained that attendees “return to tradeshows in large numbers year after year not only to purchase, but to educate themselves” (p. 79). To further this point, Bathelt et al. (2014) concluded:

We now see a large numbers of tradeshow attendees who are non-buyers... These attendees visit tradeshows to glean important information and expertise about the industry... The prevailing interest of attendees at tradeshows is no longer driven by the goal of short-term buying, but rather by a desire to conduct learning expeditions. (p. 23)

Ling-yee (2005) also shared the view that learning between attendees and exhibitors is one of the key reasons for attending tradeshows, as well as a key measure for explaining the success of tradeshow exhibits in the 21st Century. In other words, tradeshows are now thought of as events that facilitate learning and innovation, where attendees obtain critical knowledge and skills from exhibitors (Tanner, Chonko & Ponzurick, 2008). However, limited research is available on tradeshow exhibits as places that influence and facilitate learning within tradeshow events. Furthermore, no studies were found that provide an in-depth understanding of learning within the tradeshow exhibit, especially from the perspective of professionals in an exhibit house located in the United States. Therefore, this study focused on understanding conditions, strategies, and/or procedures that influence learning within tradeshow exhibits by researching the perceptions and experiences of industry professionals at a Midwest exhibit house.

It is important to know that while learning is a massive discipline, understanding learning in tradeshows, especially in the tradeshow exhibits that makeup the event, is still relatively in its infancy. Therefore, the significance of this literature is that there is some literature that associates learning with tradeshow events, but there is little to no literature that discusses the tradeshow exhibits' role in the learning process. Understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning was the purpose of this research study.

Purchasing Processes

Attendees ready to purchase at tradeshow events have always represented an important target audience for exhibitors, as their purchases, interest in purchasing, or influence in the transaction process easily provide return on investment (ROI) measures for exhibitors. For a long time, research related to tradeshows focused on this one

omnipresent attendee, known throughout the literature as the “typical” attendee (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006). Understanding the buying process of these typical attendees can be explained in Kotler and Armstrong’s (2008) book, *Principles of Marketing*, whom explain the decision-making process for buyers, which consists of five stages: (a) need recognition, (b) information search, (c) evaluate alternatives, (d) purchase decision, and (e) post purchase behavior. These stages suggest that the corporate decision-making process that occurs at tradeshows starts long before the actual purchase and continues long after. This process is often long and a complicated procedure that can involve multiple people and procurement departments, all with different levels of power in navigating the decision-making process.

Specific to tradeshows, Borghini, Golfetto, and Rinallo (2014) discuss a purchasing-process model developed by Golfetto (2004), which consists of three stages: awareness of need, search for information, and purchase. This model proposes that tradeshows are the ideal format for buyers in the second stage of the purchasing process. Therefore, when a buyer has established a need through avenues that are particularly effective at stimulating new needs, such as advertising, tradeshows are then particularly effective tools in searching for information related to that established need (Florio, 1994). Searching for information at tradeshows is learning, and can be process to making an eventual purchase. This direct face-to-face contact with tradeshow exhibitors is not mediated or clouded by the media, allowing attendees to make their own conclusions about products and to eventually make a purchase.

Both of the above models indicate that buying is a process, and that tradeshows can be events that provide an effective format for attendees to gather information, evaluate alternatives, and ultimately navigate the purchasing process through learning.

Tradeshow Attendees

Another important line of tradeshow-related literature focuses mainly on the objectives of tradeshow attendees. Emphasis from this perspective has been placed on tradeshow attendees' motives and behavior (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014). As mentioned above, for some time, tradeshow-related literature focused on a single type of attendee, identified as typical attendees or buyers. Over time, this group was segmented into another type of attendees, identified as atypical attendees or non-buyers (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006).

Typical tradeshow attendees are identified as buyers. Contrary to what the name might suggest, these attendees only make up between 22-34% of attendees with intentions of making a purchasing decision within the next few months (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006). Typical tradeshow attendees are not only buyers, but also potential customers for exhibitors; they also visit tradeshow events on learning expeditions, with intentions of obtaining up-to-date information, knowing more about the industry, seeing new innovations for future reference, and stumbling upon unexpected knowledge for future reference (Blythe, 2002; Rinallo, Borghini, & Golfetto, 2010). Therefore, the information typical attendees search for at tradeshows is often not linked to short-term motivations. According to Godar and O'Connor (2001), although the majority of tradeshow attendees may not look to make a purchasing decision in the near

future, it is important for all attendees to maintain relationships and position themselves with exhibitors, so they can call upon them when a future need or problem arises.

The literature related to typical attendees not only suggests a shift away from making purchasing decisions, and towards learning, but it also suggests that the share of attendees with final decision-making power seems to have dropped (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014). Rather, a large proportion of attendees with final decision-making power are now being replaced by research and development scientists, engineers, designers, and other mid-level managers. Bathelt et al. (2014) explain that most attendees now return from a tradeshow event with samples, and are tasked to write reports about whatever they saw or found innovative and/or thought provoking. Then, these reports are shared with colleagues.

The literature refers to atypical tradeshow attendees as people that are not looking to buy in the near future, and are not seen as final decision-makers, which includes attendees that are already current suppliers of tradeshow exhibitors and competitors of the tradeshow exhibitors (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2004). Interestingly, the intentionality of these different atypical attendee groups appears to be very different. For example, atypical tradeshow attendees that identify themselves as existing suppliers of an exhibitor on the tradeshow floor would be trying to learn more about downstream sectors, and both parties probably have a stake in continuing to deeper their partnership, which could eventually lead to future sales.

Atypical attendees that identify themselves as direct or indirect competitors of the tradeshow exhibitors have many faces, which could include designers, technicians, or other representatives sent to the tradeshow to gather information about competitive

advantages or new innovations by potential adversaries (Bathelt, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2014; Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2004). Tradeshow exhibits that encounter this type of atypical attendee presumably would not be as well received as atypical attendees identified as suppliers. From a learning perspective, atypical attendees further the idea that tradeshows are events of learning, as obtaining up-to-date information is also important for these attendees (Blythe, 2002).

Tradeshows as events of learning provide opportunities for attendees to: (a) understand the range of products and services (Dudley, 1990); (b) gain new ideas for future use (Munuera & Ruiz, 1999); (c) preserve their credibility within their organizations (Krapfel, 1985); (d) better understand an industry and its evolution (Dudley, 1990; Godar & O'Connor, 2001; Morris, 1988; Rosson & Seringhaus, 1995); and (e) gather information, exchange knowledge, or reduce cognitive dissonance (Godar & O'Connor, 2001).

Summary

While tradeshow research provides some evidence about the existence of attendees' learning at tradeshows, not much was known about how tradeshow exhibits promote and were purposefully designed as places of learning, until this case study was conducted. This is a gap in the literature that should be intensively studied in order to help professionals in the field of exhibit design, including exhibitors and producers, when building exhibits. The purpose of this study was to further study a neglected phenomenon, specifically to fill the pronounced gap in the literature related to the tradeshow exhibit as places of learning and acquisition of knowledge. To understand

tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, this study examined an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to fill a pronounced gap in the literature related to the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon, specifically as places of learning and acquisition of knowledge, thus contributing to the body of knowledge related to tradeshow events. To understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, this study examined perceptions and experiences of industry professionals at, or affiliated with, a Midwestern exhibit house in regards to the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. Two primary research questions guided data collection and analysis: (1) How do tradeshow industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house perceive and describe tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning? (2) What strategies and procedures do industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house implement to promote learning through their tradeshow exhibits?

Based on the purpose and the research questions of the study, a case study design was selected. Data was collected from multiple sources of information, including interviews, a focus group, observations, and document review. These methods are further explained in the data collection section. This chapter is divided into sections based on Crotty's (1998) perspective in the research process, which includes: (a) epistemology, (b) theoretical perspective, (c) research approach and design, (d) research questions, (e) study site and sampling, (f) data collection, and (g) data analysis. In addition, the

trustworthiness of the study, as well as possible limitations and ethical considerations are explained.

Epistemology

According to Hamlyn (1995), epistemology is “the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope, and general basis” (p. 242). Maynard (1994) adds that “epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate” (p. 10). In other words, epistemology is the theory of knowledge and refers to how people know what they know. Different epistemological positions attempt to understand how the world is known, who can know the world, and what can be known through understanding the relationship between the inquirer and the known world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Steller, 2013). These abstract principles help to determine the harmony of the research process and the status of the conclusions reached by the researcher.

This case study was grounded in the constructivist epistemological position, which is the belief that to generate truth and construct meaning, people must actively live and participate in the world (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007). Tradeshows are just that, events that provide the potential to construct meaning through active participation. According to Crotty (1998), constructivism views all meaning and knowledge, and therefore the nature of all truth, as “contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). In other words, how people purport to know anything does not exist in some external world; rather, truth and meaning are constructed

(not discovered) through people's conscious experiences with the world, and by people living their own constructions in the world they are interpreting (Gray, 2014; Lock & Strong, 2000; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This philosophical position was taken for this research study because it aligns with the nature of tradeshow, the research questions, as well as the researcher's worldview.

Theoretical Perspective

Theoretical perspective is taken to mean the researcher's philosophical stance of the human world and social life within that world (Crotty, 1998). In some sense, the theoretical perspective consists of another set of assumptions that create a congruent bridge with the more abstract epistemological position or theory of knowledge to the more concrete research design or overall research strategy, and the research methods or specific techniques used in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data.

Intertwined with the constructivist epistemological position is the interpretivist theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998). Interpretivism is an umbrella term that includes another family of related traditions, such as symbolic interaction, phenomenology, and hermeneutics. Since the area of research has been so overlooked, this study considered all of these subcategories of interpretivism in the methodology and throughout the research process. Nonetheless, interpretivism is a major anti-positivist position that "looks for culturally and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 67).

According to Schwandt (2007), interpretivist theoretical perspective posits that, "the world is always interpreted through the mind" (p. 143). Therefore, each person has a reality of the human world where meaning is ultimately socially constructed, mediated,

and interpreted (Glesne, 2011). Interpretivist researchers are interested in studying social processes - how people interpret and develop truth and meaning about their lived experiences in the social world (Gray, 2014; Prasad, 2005). This case study stems from an interpretivist theoretical perspective because it viewed tradeshow exhibits as immediate objects of experience laden with potential for complex and rich social interactions. With that said, it is disingenuous to suggest that the meaning constructed from a tradeshow exhibit experience is universal.

Research Approach and Design

Qualitative research is another umbrella term used to cover a plethora of research methodologies and methods that provide an in-depth understanding of human beings' social world (Steller, 2013). While there are well-established approaches to quantitative research, qualitative approaches can differ in multiple ways as well. Gray (2014) provides several characteristics that are often unique in qualitative inquiry. First, the role of the researcher is to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon, often through the interaction with the everyday lives of individuals, groups, and organizations within a context-specific setting. Secondly, qualitative researchers do not typically seek data to generalize; rather, the research focuses on specific contexts. Lastly, the types of data gathering tools used by qualitative researchers tend to be more diverse, including observations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and the analysis of many forms of media (Gray, 2014).

Yin (2014) describes the qualitative research approach as a plan that logically links the research questions with the evidence to be collected and analyzed, ultimately circumscribing the types of findings that can emerge. In a sense, the research design is a

plan of action, strategy, or “blue print” for a particular research study. Research designs that align with the qualitative approach and interpretivist theoretical perspective, grounded in constructivism are emergent and flexible (Staller, 2013). This investigation used a case study design.

Case Study

The purpose of this study was to understand how industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit producer perceived and described their experiences in relation to tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. According to Yin (2008), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that researches a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 18). Miles and Huberman (1994) maintain a case as a “phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25). In other words, a “case” is a unit of analysis or a bounded system, which can mean an individual, a group, an organization, a role, a community, or a nation (Punch, 2005; Stake, 1995). A “case study” is therefore, “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam, 2009 p. 43).

The single most defining characteristic of the case study research design is the decision of what is to be studied (Stake, 2005). Setting these boundaries for each case can be challenging, but determining the unit of analysis for the study is of paramount importance to case study design (Yin, 2009). In this case study, “learning” in the tradeshow exhibit was not the case, as it was a phenomenon not intrinsically bounded, and therefore could not be the case. Rather, the case studied in this research was an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States.

The goal of the bounded system in this case study was to maximize what could be learned about the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon, especially as it related to understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. The case in this study was a Midwestern exhibit house that plans, designs, engineers, and produces tradeshow exhibit programs for other organizations. The researcher chose this specific exhibit house to be the bounded system, as it was intrinsically interesting for the ability of professionals in this exhibit house to create exemplary tradeshow exhibits for their customers (exhibitors), and engaging experiences for their customers' users (attendees). Evidence that the chosen exhibit house was an exemplary exhibit house were its numerous awards for excellence in creating tradeshow exhibit experiences, such as a "Best in Show" award at an international tradeshow for tradeshow industry professionals.

Research Questions

Based on the focus and purpose of this study, the following research questions guided data collection and analysis:

RQ1: How do tradeshow industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house perceive and describe tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning?

RQ2: What strategies or procedures do industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house implement to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits?

Research Question 1 was intended to acquire an overall understanding and impression of how learning in tradeshow exhibits was perceived and experienced by industry professionals at the participating exemplary exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Research Question 2 was intended to gather

relevant information on strategies or procedures for learning employed by professionals at the exhibit house under study.

Study Site and Sampling

The decision about where to conduct this qualitative research was an essential part of the process because it involved the choice of a specific case rather than others, as well as required choices to limit the parameters within the case itself (Glesne, 2007; Maxwell, 2005). According to Merriam (2009), qualitative studies most often take place at numerous sites that provide researchers with opportunities to observe people, conduct formal and informal interviews, and find documents in the real world. In this research study, people and things within the walls of the exhibit house under study were the primary target. However, in order to collect meaningful data from interviews, a focus group, and documents, the researcher also observed two different exhibits produced by the exhibit house under study from two different tradeshow events. Triangulation of data sources was implemented during data analysis through which the different methods, data sources, and analytical perspectives were combined to study the participating exhibit house and, in this way, increase the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings (Gray, 2014; Patton, 2015).

Study Site

According to Glesne (2011), obtaining access, “to go where you want, observe what you want, talk to whomever you want, read whatever documents you want... involves acquisition of consent” (p. 57). In this study, the owner of the exhibit house under study granted official permission. Once the owner of the exhibit house under study consented to his exhibit house being a part of this research, participants, specific

professionals working at the exhibit house, were invited to participate. Their participation included interviews, a focus group, observations, and documents within the case study. Signed consent forms from all participants were requested and obtained prior to data collection.

Sampling

Sampling is based on the assumption that time and access for conducting research is usually limited (Stake, 1995). This assumption caused researcher to choose a selection strategy for the best case, as well as make the best decisions within the case itself that align with the researcher's philosophical positions and research questions (Glesne, 2011; Maxwell, 2005). Thus, sampling is a method through which the researcher specified how, how many, and who gets to participate.

Aligning with the constructivist epistemological position, the most appropriate sampling strategy in this study was non-probabilistic (Merriam, 2009), which is also known as purposeful sampling and often used in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002):

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases and participants to study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one learns a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry; thus, the term purposeful sampling. (p. 230)

In this investigation, the researcher looked for a case and specific participants within that case that could provide "information-rich" (Patton, 2002) experiences related to tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. The case in this study was an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. This chosen exhibit house plans,

designs, engineers, produces, and executes award winning tradeshow exhibit programs for other organizations.

Approval to conduct this research was provided by the owner of the exhibit house under study. A total of eight individual interviews and one focus group with four other participants were conducted. The eight individual interview participants in this research study consisted of case study personnel that were identified as: (a) Exhibit Designer, (b) Director of Client Services, (c) Director of Design, (d) Vice President of Creative, (e) Vice President of Marketing, (f) Vice President of Sales, (g) Vice President of Strategy, and (h) Owner of the exhibit house. The four focus group participants in this research study consisted of case study personnel that all identified as design staff. All research participants involved in the research study were involved at various levels in developing meaningful exhibit experiences and had professional expertise in different areas. Documents added to the information about the case study, and included: design presentations, process documentation, photography, and collateral material from the two different exhibits observed at two different tradeshows.

Data Collection

Research methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research question” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). To do this, meaningful data must be generated, which Glaser (2005) suggests can be of any kind, such as interviews, observations, artifacts, field notes, memos, internet discussion groups, information from records, reports, industry related media, and so on. Stern (2007) agrees with Glaser (2005) by stating:

...everything is data; that is to say, everything I see, hear, smell, and feel... as well as what I already know from my studies and my life experiences, are data. I (the researcher) act as the interpreter of the scene I observe, and as such, I make it come to life for the reader... I grow it. (p. 115)

This notion of “everything is data” aligns with this case study. Data are bits of information, and collecting data is carried out in every conceivable way, from structured and measurable to invisible and difficult to measure (Glaser, 2005). Data collected and conveyed in numbers are labeled as quantitative. On the other hand, data collected and conveyed through words, stories, observations, and documents are labeled qualitative.

According to Patton (2014), “qualitative findings are on based on three kinds of data: (1) interviews, (2) observations, and (3) documents” (p. 14). Yin (2009) also uses these sources of data in case study designs to build and analyze a phenomenon. This investigation collected data through observations, interviews, review of documents, and a focus group. Throughout this entire research study, descriptive field notes were also written and used as a part of the data. According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw, (1995), “field notes provide a deeper appreciation of how field researchers come to grasp and interpret the action and concerns of others” (p. 13).

Interviews

The researcher conducted intensive interviews, which in itself is a research method for generating data through open-ended questions and probes that yield in-depth direct dialogue about people’s experiences, perceptions, opinions, feelings, and knowledge (Patton, 2014). In this study, eight intensive interviews were conducted as an opportunity to generate data through participating professionals’ perceptions and

experiences related to the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. The eight individual interview participants in this research study consisted of participants that were identified as: (a) Exhibit Designer, (b) Director of Client Services, (c) Director of Design, (d) Vice President of Creative, (e) Vice President of Marketing, (f) Vice President of Sales, (g) Vice President of Strategy, and (h) Owner of the exhibit house. To gain this in-depth understanding, the main goal was to elicit these interviewees' true feelings, desires, struggles, and opinions through carefully crafted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B). By creating open-ended questions, the researcher was able to take advantage of participants' unanticipated natural inclinations in order to generate valuable data.

Interviews were audio recorded with prior consent from the interviewees. This allowed the researcher to re-listen to the participants' tone, pauses, and overall character after the interview, and to conduct the analysis of the data. Limited descriptors were recorded to identify the case, tradeshows, exhibits, and participants that fall within the boundaries of this case study. For example, the researcher identified someone as a designer, director, vice president, or owner. Tradeshows were identified by industry sector and geographic region. Lastly, exhibits were identified by their size. These descriptors better framed the discussion of research findings, without disclosing any specific identifiable information.

The researcher referred to a prepared interview protocol (see Appendix B) that started with a few broad, open-ended questions. After posing each question to the participants, the researcher followed-up with probing questions that sought further detail and description about what had been said. During the facilitation of interviews, the

researcher needed to be attuned to the interviewee to know when to: (a) probe for more information, (b) redirect the subject more toward the research questions, and (c) let unforeseen conversation resume, potentially leading to new illuminating understandings.

Data was generated pertaining to tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. Three days were spent at the headquarters of the exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States for observation and to conduct six interviews, all with different individuals. Two additional interviews were conducted in person in Las Vegas, as these two individuals were unavailable during the researcher's time at their headquarters. In all, eight participants were interviewed, seven of the eight research participants held high-level management positions within the organization. The other participant was interviewed was not in a high-level management position, but rather had the title of Exhibit Designer. These eight intensive interviews produced 153 pages of transcript data.

Focus Group

Along with conducting individual interviews, the researcher conducted a focus group, which is described as “an interview on a topic with a group of people who have knowledge of the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 93). According to Macnaghten and Myers (2004), “focus groups work best for topics people could talk about to each other in their everyday lives” (p. 65). Therefore, this study conducted one focus group at the exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States, and consisted of four employees from the design department.

The focus group was intended to understand how the design professionals perceived tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, as well as recommended strategies and/or procedures that promote learning in tradeshow exhibits. A focus group protocol

(see Appendix C) with open-ended group discussions was created and implemented. The researcher chose to conduct one focus group with design staff because this group works with everyone involved in the process of planning a tradeshow exhibit experience. This focus group produced an additional 32 pages of transcript data.

Observations

Another primary technique to collect data in this study was observation. In general, data from observations consists of descriptions of people's activities, behaviors, actions, and the full range of interpersonal interactions and organizational processes that are part of observable human experience (Patton, 2014). This study included observations at the exhibit house under study, and two other observations were conducted in two separate exhibits at two different tradeshows. One of the observations was the exhibit house's own tradeshow exhibit. Field notes were taken during all observations to record events, interactions, and behaviors, as well as to describe the environment and atmosphere in settings. Field notes produced an additional 50 pages of data.

Observation descriptions consist of "the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 98). According to Glesne (2011), observational descriptions allow the researcher to see "patterns of behavior; experience the unexpected [and expected]; and develop a quality of trust, relationship, and obligation with study participants" (p. 63). Furthermore, Glesne (2011) discusses observations as ranging across a continuum from mostly observation, to mostly participation. To generate meaningful data, this research study conducted observations along different points on this continuum. The goal for all observations was for the researcher to keep an open-mind to new and interesting events, while staying

focused on the research questions. In this case study, three observational strategies were implemented: (a) fly-on-the-wall observation (Hanington & Martin, 2012), (b) contextual observations (Hanington & Martin, 2012), and (c) walk-a-mile observations (Luma-Institute, 2012).

Fly-on-the-Wall observation. This observation strategy is an approach to conduct research in an unobtrusive fashion (Hanington & Martin, 2012). When appropriate, this approach minimizes the researcher's impact on the activities of research participants. The fly-on the-wall observation strategy was appropriate during observations of the two separate exhibits at two different tradeshow because when watching exhibit staff and attendees interact, valuable insight was obtained. An exhibit can be designed with the best intentions, but what happens during the time of the tradeshow might be different. In this study, observations allowed the researcher time and space to pay careful attention to exhibit staff and attendees' behaviors, documenting the relationship between attendees, exhibit staff, and the surrounding exhibit as a place that affected the attendees' experiences.

Contextual observations. This is an approach to interviewing and observing people in their own environment (Hanington & Martin, 2012). In this study, data collection occurred through contextual observations at the exhibit house under study. As anthropologist, Margaret Mead observed, what people say, what people do, and what they say they do are entirely different things (Miles, Blocher, & Corporon, 2000). In this study, contextual observations helped reveal what people at the exhibit house under study actually did, and compared them with what they said to find similarities as well as discrepancies. In this situation, the researcher was an active participant in the process.

Therefore, as the researcher interacted with study participants, he needed to look for opportunities to gather useful information about tradeshow exhibits as places of learning.

Walk-A-Mile observations. This approach facilitates building empathy for participants through firsthand experience (Luma Institute, 2012). In this study, the researcher identified professionally as a designer, professor, and researcher, and personally as a hobbyist, sports enthusiast, father, husband, son, and middle-class American. Therefore, there were times when the researcher found himself familiar with organizations exhibiting due to his connection with the context and people. In this situation, the researcher was an insider, and as Atticus Finch taught in Harper Lee's (1960/1988) *To Kill a Mockingbird*, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his [or her] point of view... until you climb into his [or her] skin and walk around in it" (p. 30). There were situations at the exhibit house under study, as well as at one of the tradeshows, and in one of the exhibits where the researcher held insider status. When this happened, the researcher was able to experience similar emotions, conflicts, and other feelings that attendees felt during the tradeshow event. To keep insider assumptions in check during walk-a-mile observations, field notes from these observations primarily aided in trustworthiness.

Documents

While observations and interviews still dominate qualitative methods, document analysis is increasing in importance in the 21st century (Patton, 2015). In this research study, documents added to the information gathered from interviews, observations, and during the focus group. Thus, several types of documents were collected, systematically catalogued, and analyzed. Documents included, but were not limited to tradeshow exhibit

collateral materials, exhibit house meeting documentation, exhibit house client presentations, media accounts about the case under study, editorials about the case under study, blogs about the case under study, and social media posts about the case under study. Document review is important because it can provide what Patton (2015) calls a “behind-the-scenes look at the program that may not be directly observable” (p. 98). Written sources of any kind have the potential to enhance the accuracy of the interpretation and trustworthiness of the proposed qualitative research study, as in this study. Documents produced an additional 63 pages of data.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) advise the researcher to interweave data collection and data analysis from the very start of a study as a strategy for collecting new and, often superior, data. Data analysis is the focus of coding segments of data for category, theme, and pattern development that eventually leads to the formulation of assertions and propositions of the chosen case study. According to Merriam (2009), “the practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to your research questions” (p. 176). Data analysis in this case study was the process of harmonizing data through consolidation, description, and interpretation to better understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning.

Coding is defined as the process of managing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data, known as codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). According to Saldaña (2013):

...a code is a researcher-generated construct that symbolizes and thus attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern

detection, categorization, theory building, and other analytic processes. Just as a title represents and captures a book, film, or poem's primary content and essence, so does a code represent and capture a datum's primary content and essence. (p. 3)

Codes are straightforward descriptive labels that assign meaning to descriptive or inferential data compiled during a study. Codes can be seen as metaphors that represent data "chunks" of varying sizes. The data that make up the codes can be derived from interviews, observations, documents, field notes, journals, drawings, and so on (Saldaña, 2013).

This process of labeling codes grounded in the data is known as coding, which is ultimately data analysis. According to Merriam (2009), "coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of data" (p. 173). Therefore, in this study, coding was used to create an inventory of the entire data set. Furthermore, according to Corbin and Strauss (2008), coding is seen as both an art and a science. The art of data analysis is the researcher's ability to know when he or she has developed findings that are representative and feel right. On the other hand, the science of data analysis is a process of generating findings that are grounded in the data. This case study began data analysis as soon as the researcher started to collect data and consisted of four coding cycles: open coding, analytical coding, theme construction, and assertions and propositions. In total, this research study produced almost 300 total pages of data.

First Cycle: Open Coding

The process of data analysis begins by coding bits of data that are representative of the research questions. In the open coding cycle, segments of data are summarized, which can range from a single word to a full paragraph to an entire page of text (Saldaña, 2014). “Typically, codes get applied to larger units, such as sentences, monothematic ‘chunks’ of sentences, or full paragraphs” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 28). The goal of open coding is to begin to construct themes, and remain open to all the possible directions related to the research questions and indicated by the data (Merriam, 2009). In this inductive phase, new options emerge; and the researcher in this study sought multiple options to create choices as they related to the learning process within the tradeshow exhibit.

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggest starting the coding process with the following combination of coding approaches that serve as foundations for open coding: descriptive, in vivo, and process. In this study, these three foundational approaches were mixed and matched in this first cycle:

1. **Descriptive:** this type of coding assigns labels to data to summarize a word, paragraph, or an entire page of text. Descriptive codes eventually provide an inventory of topics for indexing and categorizing, which was helpful for this study because it included a variety of data forms.
2. **In Vivo:** this type of coding uses words or short phrases from the participants’ own words as codes. Phrases that are used repeatedly by participants were good leads for theme construction. In Vivo codes were placed in quotation marks to differentiate them from researcher-generated codes.

3. Process: this type of coding uses gerunds, or –ing words exclusively to connote observable and conceptual action in the data. Process codes imply actions intertwined with the dynamics of time, such as things that emerge, change, occur in particular sequences, or become strategically implemented.

Second Cycle: Analytical Coding

In the analytical cycle, coding goes beyond descriptive coding (Merriam, 2009). According to Richards (2005), analytical coding is “coding that comes from interpretation and reflection on meaning” (p. 94). In other words, analytical codes pull together or group a lot of material from the open coding cycle into more abstract and patterned inferential themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). At this stage in the analysis, data in this study was interacted to identify and modify key themes created in the open coding process. It was important to create an audit trail from the data to themes, and then into assertions. In both the inductive and deductive phases, the researcher was required to synthesize and make choices about larger segments of data.

Third Cycle: Theme Construction

The construction of themes is captured through saturation of recurring patterns that are in accordance with the analytical codes, open codes, and raw data (Merriam, 2009). During this primarily deductive stage of analysis, themes have a life of their own apart from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1968). The construction of final themes are not the data themselves, but rather final theme construction is the abstractions determined by the data. Merriam (2009) provides several criteria for final theme construction during data analysis, which include:

1. Representativeness: themes should be representative of the purpose of the research, and should provide an understanding related to the research questions.
2. Exhaustive: the researcher should be able to place all important and relevant data to the study into a theme or subtheme.
3. Mutually exclusive: each unit of data should be refined into only one theme or subtheme.
4. Sensitive: the name for each theme and subtheme is as sensitive as possible to the data. Therefore, someone reading the theme name should gain a sense of the nature of the phenomenon under study, which in this study is learning within the tradeshow exhibit.
5. Conceptually congruent: the same level of abstraction should characterize all themes at the same level.

Fourth Cycle: Assertions and Propositions

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), “there will be a greater need to formalize and systematize the researcher’s thinking into a coherent set of explanations... to do that is to generate assertions and propositions” (p. 124). This was so as this research study ensued. In other words, assertions and propositions were methods to connect, summarize, and synthesize sets of explanations that represented the findings and conclusions of the study. As defined by these authors, “an assertion is a declarative statement of summative synthesis, supported by confirming evidence from the data... A proposition is a statement that puts forth a conditional event (an if-then or why-because proposal) that gets closer to prediction or theory” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 125). They

further describe assertions and propositions to be seen as bullet points of the major themes constructed that the researcher can confidently put forth about his or her study (Miles et al., 2014), as was the case in this one.

Trustworthiness

To establish a sound study, this qualitative research study was evaluated for trustworthiness. According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), trustworthiness is established by the use of techniques that provide truth-value through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Therefore, to establish trustworthiness in this investigation, four strategies were used: (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) transferability, and (d) confirmability (Erlandson et al., 1993).

1. **Credibility:** the major concern in establishing credibility is “interpreting the constructed realities that exist in the context being studied and because these realities exist in the minds of the people in the context, attention must be directed to gaining a comprehensive intensive interpretation of these realities that will be affirmed by the people in the context” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 30). To establish credibility in this study, three strategies were implemented, including persistent observation, triangulation, and peer debriefing.

Persistent observation engaged the researcher in prolonged contact with the exhibit house that fell within the boundaries of the case. Also, persistent observations of two separate exhibits at two different tradeshow, as well as observations at the exhibit house under study, allowed the researcher to sort out the relevant from the irrelevant, and determine what fell within the boundaries of this case and what did not related to the research questions. Triangulation, on the other hand, was considered as a consistency

technique that combined various methods, data sources, and analytical perspectives to study the exhibit house under study to increase the accuracy and trustworthiness of the finding (Gray, 2014; Patton, 2015). Triangulation is the process of gathering data by multiple sources, methods, and theories to see if what is being seen aligns with what is being heard, as well as with being consistent with other sources of data. Triangulation suggests greater confidence in the research findings (Erlandson et al., 1993). The use of multiple sources in data collection and analysis provided the triangulation necessary for the credibility of this study. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also advocate for triangulation of data; they state, “The reason why observation is so important is that it is not unusual for persons to say they are doing one thing but in reality they are doing something else” (p. 29). According to Glense (2011), observation allows “you to learn firsthand how the actions of research participants correspond to their words” (p. 63), as was the case in this study.

As part of peer debriefing, conversations were held with tradeshow professionals in order to explore ideas, doubts, and for personal support. These conversations took place in various places and occasions. The use of this technique enhanced the credibility of this study. In addition, to further enhance the descriptive validity of the data, participants were provided with their interview or focus group transcripts and invited to review them for accuracy and completeness. Interviewees had the opportunity to identify any inaccuracies and to suggest any changes to improve clarity and precision.

2. Dependability: according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability is defined as the "means for taking into account both factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design induced change” (p. 299). The researcher

tries to clarify conditions in the phenomenon being studied, as well as changes in the design created by a constantly refined and deeper understanding of the setting. In this study, the researcher developed almost 50 pages of field notes that described the observations, and included the researcher's thoughts and ideas about the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon being studied.

3. Transferability: according to Marshall and Rossman (1989), transferability can be explained as "demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context" (p. 144). Purposive sampling and thick description were two techniques utilized for providing transferability to this study. Thick description of the case being studied was collected, and detailed descriptions of data presented in the following chapter may enable other researchers "to make tentative judgments about applicability of certain observations for their contexts" (Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 33).
4. Confirmability: the insights the researcher brought to this study, due to his professional experience and expertise, assisted in the construction of understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. However, the researcher provided controls for bias in interpretation, which are further explained under the limitations section.

Ethical Considerations

This section discusses the potential ethical issues surrounding the research, as well as how human subjects and data were protected. To protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality, all final transcripts and observation notes were anonymous and findings were reported without any identifiers that could reveal participant, exhibit, or

tradeshow identity. Titles were applied to all interviewees; the case itself was not identified in any way beyond its geographic location, as an additional aspect of risk management. Since all participants were adults who voluntarily participated and were allowed to leave the study at any point, there were no perceived risks associated with the participation in this study.

Internal Review Board approval from the University of North Dakota was sought to conduct the research and from the owner's participating exhibit house. A written consent form was provided to all participants prior to data collection (see Appendix A). The consent form explained the purpose of the study and its significance, as well as participants' rights before, during, and after the study. Time was offered to each participant to read the consent and ask questions. The consent form was signed by both the participant and the researcher. In addition, all data and analyzed files were kept on a password-protected computer and a backup was stored on an external hard drive. Printed materials, such as consent forms, were scanned onto the same password-protected computer and a backup was stored on the same external hard drive. All data, both electronic and paper, were stored in an appropriate and secure location.

Assumptions of the Study

Assumptions underpinning the interpretivist theoretical perspective selected in this study included the following: (a) different people interpret the world in different ways, thus there is not a singular, monolithic reality to which researchers can claim access, but rather multiple realities (Creswell, 2007); (b) the research process is a value-laden, not a value-neutral activity (Steller, 2013); (c) the researcher is an instrument in the research process, and all interpretations and observations are filtered through him/her

(Gray, 2014); and (d) participants will be honest and candid in the responses they give during interviews.

Limitations of the Study

Some limitations regarding this study included: (a) interviews and focus group were limited to participants from a specific exhibit house used as the case study; (b) the emphasis was solely on professionals' perspectives about learning and tradeshow exhibits; and (c) purposeful sampling was used, thus research findings could not be generalized.

For some a limitation of this research study can be seen through (d) the purposeful sampling strategies that were used to recruit and select participants. These non-probability approaches to sampling allowed for the selection of the exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. The researcher chose this specific exhibit house for this research study because it was intrinsically interesting and because it has been awarded numerous times for its excellence in creating tradeshow exhibit experiences. This may be seen as a limitation to this research study because the researcher is not able to draw conclusions for the entire tradeshow industry, but rather for the participating exhibit house. Drawing conclusions for the entire tradeshow industry was never the intentions of this research study, which can be better understood in the methodology (chapter 3) section of this dissertation. Also, although purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of research participants in qualitative research, this selection approach to sampling often deals with possible personal biases or preconceived notions, ideas, and values of both participants and researcher into the research process that need to be carefully monitored throughout the study.

Another potential limitation of this (e) particular sampling approach allowed the researcher to prioritize specific characteristics of the exhibit house under study. Rather than seeking an exhibit house that was a representative sample of the larger tradeshow industry, this case study represented what the researcher thought was one of the best exhibit houses in the country based on its reputation and awards. Therefore, the findings from this research study are thus limited regarding its generalizability, and are intended to represent what the researcher views as the leading edge, not the average. While the researcher has been diligently researching this topic for several years, this specific case study was conducted within a strict timeframe, which was established by the researcher's committee and the limitation recognized by the University of North Dakota to complete the dissertation process.

Summary

This case study utilized qualitative methods from a constructionist epistemological position in order to examine tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. This study assumed the description and understanding of multiple realities because "there is not a single objective reality but multiple realities of which the researcher must be aware. Extended research leads to a rich awareness of divergent realities rather than to convergence on a single reality" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993, pp. 11-12). Thus, a qualitative research approach with a case study design was best suited to examine the phenomenon of learning in tradeshow exhibits through the opinions and experiences of industry professionals at an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Two research questions guided this investigation. Data was collected from the owner of the exhibit house under study, as well as 11 other people employed at the

exhibit house under study through eight interviews and a focus group. In addition to the interviews and focus group, three observations were conducted, one at the participating exhibit house, as well as in two separate exhibits at two different tradeshow that the exhibit house under study produced. Lastly, informal and formal documents were collected for further analysis. In all, eight interviews, one focus group, three observations, review of documents, and field notes produced almost 300 pages of data to analyze. Data analysis included four cycles of processing based on the work of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). Trustworthiness of the study was accomplished by addressing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Ethical considerations related to the respect of the anonymity and confidentiality of the case, participants, and all people and locations related to this research; thus, pseudonyms and researcher identifiers were used. Assumptions and limitations of this study were also taken into consideration throughout this investigation. Chapter 4 presents the results of this study and Chapter 5 discusses these results in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, as well as addresses implications for the field of exhibit design, exhibit management, and the tradeshow industry, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter provides a description of key findings from the data gathered through the procedures detailed in Chapter 3 of this study. The aim of this chapter is to provide answers to the research questions guiding this investigation through the significant themes that emerged from data analysis. The study's two research questions were: (1) How do tradeshow industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house perceive and describe tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning? (2) What conditions, strategies, or procedures do industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house implement to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits? An overview of the main themes related to each of the two research questions is provided, followed by a discussion of data supporting each theme.

As discussed in Chapter 2, existing literature describes tradeshows as events of learning, but the purpose of the current research study was to fill a gap in the research on the creation and implementation of tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, where attendees actively process information and seek meaning through the application of knowledge and skills. Thus, to understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, this case study was conducted primarily at a well-known Midwestern exhibit house, and data was collected through site interviews and a focus group with participating industry professionals, as well as a review of documents. In addition, data was gathered and

analyzed from observations of two separate exhibits that the selected exhibit house produced at two different tradeshows.

Ultimately, this case study was meant to inform the practice of professionals involved in the tradeshow exhibit industry to better understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, as well as to examine effective strategies and procedures to promote learning in the tradeshow exhibit experience. If tradeshow exhibits are better understood as places of learning, then professionals in the tradeshow industry will be better prepared to effectively plan, design, engineer, produce, and execute tradeshow exhibits that maximize the potential for attendees' learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills. The following section of this chapter provides a detailed description of the case study setting and sampling, followed by the research results.

Description of the Setting and Sample

The case under study was an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States that develops exhibit programs for organizations. The chosen exhibit house was intrinsically interesting for creating exemplary tradeshow exhibits, having received numerous awards for excellence. Therefore, the researcher purposefully selected this exhibit house, as the data generated would result in trustworthy findings.

The researcher conducted eight formal interviews to generate data through participating professionals' perceptions and experiences related to the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. The eight individual interviewees in this research study consisted of case study personnel that were identified as: (a) Exhibit Designer, (b) Director of Client Services, (c) Director of Design, (d) Vice President of Creative, (e) Vice President of Marketing, (f) Vice President of Sales, (g) Vice President of Strategy, and (h) owner of

the exhibit house. To gain in-depth understanding, the main goal was to elicit the interviewees' true feelings, desires, struggles, and opinions through a carefully crafted semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix B). By creating open-ended questions, the researcher took advantage of participants' unanticipated natural inclinations in order to generate valuable data. All participants were involved at various levels of developing meaningful exhibit experiences and had professional expertise in different areas.

To further respond to the research questions guiding this study, a focus group was conducted with the intention of understanding how design professionals at the exhibit house perceived tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, including recommended strategies and/or procedures to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits. Design staff were chosen for the focus group because this group works with everyone involved in the process of planning a tradeshow exhibit experience. A focus group protocol (see Appendix C) with open-ended group questions was created and implemented.

Observation data for this study was collected in three primary locations. The first location was at the exhibit house, located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Here, observations were conducted, as well as the formal interviews and the focus group. The second location was inside an exhibit that was developed by the case study at a major medical tradeshow in Chicago, Illinois. The third location was inside the case study's own exhibit at a tradeshow for the tradeshow industry in Las Vegas, Nevada. In total, eight formal interviews and three observations were conducted.

While interviews, the focus group, and observations were the primary sources of information in this qualitative research study, documents were also used to triangulate data influencing the trustworthiness of the study. Written sources for data analysis

consisted of brainstorming tools used in the beginning of the conceptual development process, including concept presentation materials; historical photographs related to the findings; and media accounts related to the exhibit house.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the data that emerged from the collection and analysis of information used to answer the guiding research questions. A considerable amount of data were gathered, codified, arranged, and separated into subsets. Through the methods of data analysis described in Chapter 3, emerging themes were identified.

Research Question 1: How Do Tradeshow Industry Professionals at a Midwestern Exhibit House Perceive and Describe Tradeshow Exhibits in Relation to Learning?

Research Question 1 was posed to acquire an overall understanding and impression of how learning in tradeshow exhibits was perceived and experienced. Organizations that exhibit at tradeshow employ exhibit houses because they are industry experts. The following themes are grounded in the perceptions and experiences of such industry experts from a leading exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States.

Theme 1: The evolution of tradeshow exhibits from structure to strategy. A main theme that emerged from the data was the participants' identification and description of the juxtaposition of two major periods in time that marked the evolution of the participating exhibit house. During interviews, participants often expressed nostalgic recollections of how tradeshow, exhibits, exhibitors, and attendees were different years ago than they are today. For example, the Director of Design said, "I remember griping about how tough this business was 20 years ago. By comparison, I had it easy back then

because there was not so much asked of us. The industry has just become so much more sophisticated today.” The owner of the exhibit house added, “In the past, we really were more concerned with the form of the exhibit than the function; now tradeshow exhibits have become so much more strategic, and we think of them as multilayered vehicles that facilitate engaging attendee experiences.”

This “more strategic approach” to developing tradeshow exhibits has served as impetus for the evolution of the exhibit house under study. Most participants described these strategic approaches as the overall plan, design, engineering, production, and execution of tradeshow exhibits, which have made tradeshow exhibits places where various potential attendee experiences occur, one of which is learning. The owner of the exhibit house commented:

Being strategic is about understanding and researching the demographics of tradeshow attendees. It is about ergonomics and understanding what style will be reflected as aesthetically pleasing for attendees. It is about creating an experience that can invigorate meaningful relationships through fun and entertainment. It is about communicating a brand, and it is about creating meaningful learning experiences for attendees in the exhibits. The process today has just become so much more strategic when developing tradeshow exhibits experiences, and everyone is involved in the process and needs to be able to see or recognize the strategy and understand how things come together.

Thus, the exhibit house has evolved into an organization that recognizes the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon as increasingly complex. Furthermore, understanding tradeshow exhibits as a complex phenomenon has necessitated a strategic approach by the exhibit

house in producing tradeshow exhibits as places that facilitate multi-layered experiences for attendees, such as experiential places of learning.

While there are presumably many factors that underlie the junction of the two periods, one significant factor that seems to function as an evolutionary fulcrum in the life of the exhibit house, as perceived by many participants, was the terrorist attacks on the United States the morning of September 11, 2001. The Director of Design explained:

The events of 9/11 were crushing for the tradeshow industry. Overnight people quit traveling, and what happened was many organizations that had always been exhibitors at tradeshows, all the sudden sat out for two, three, four years. Throughout that time, these organizations felt that they really had not lost much momentum by not exhibiting at tradeshows. Or, if they did decide to be a tradeshow exhibitor during those years, they had scaled back their efforts significantly compared to the levels they were at pre-9/11... As an exhibit house, we were then forced to innovate and substantiate to these organizations that they were losing customers by getting out of the tradeshow game.

While the impacts of the 9/11 tragedy are immeasurable, one of the seemingly unintentional impacts of this event, was the creation of a shockwave that reverberated throughout economy and into the tradeshow industry. As organizations ceased exhibiting, attendees also ceased visiting tradeshows, ultimately devastating the foundation of tradeshow events. As the Director of Client Services reflected, “For a tradeshow to really exist there needs to be enough attendees at the event, and there also needs to be an adequate number of exhibitors.”

The ripple effect of these absences caused many exhibit houses in the industry to go out of business. Those that remained were forced to innovate and look at the industry through a new lens. The Director of Design reported:

Right after 9/11, we had to evolve by becoming much more strategic and develop real metrics that enabled exhibitors to see the value of exhibiting at tradeshows...

During that time, slowly more and more emphasis was put on developing meaningful attendee experiences in the exhibits, which eventually included a learning component.

Therefore, the two main periods of the evolution of the participating exhibit house could be understood as pre-9/11 and post-9/11.

Pre-9/11 was a time when the exhibit house primarily built exhibits that focused on the architectural qualities of the exhibit structure. It was a time when learning at the tradeshow event and certainly within the exhibits was largely viewed as invisible by attendees, exhibitors, and exhibit houses. This earlier era will be referred to in this research study as “traditional tradeshow exhibits.” Post-9/11 was described by participants as rooted in the current, reflective, and more strategic exhibit house that develops and produces multifaceted tradeshow exhibits with highly experiential and meaningful learning experiences. In this contemporary time period, learning at the tradeshow events was described by all participants as largely visible, and many of the larger exhibits that span the tradeshow floor today are strategic experiences where attendees have opportunities for learning. This more recent period will be referred to in this research study as “contemporary tradeshow exhibits.”

Traditional tradeshow exhibits. During the 1980s and 1990s, participants perceived that the exhibit house under study primarily produced tradeshow exhibits that focused on the aesthetics of the structures. These traditional tradeshow exhibits did little more than stake claim over a designated area of the seemingly endless tradeshow floor within the convention center to display their wares. The owner of the exhibit house explained, “Years ago, we were just primarily concerned with the structure and form of the exhibit.” This perception was echoed by the Vice President of the Sales: “It used to be that the exhibit house would be all about the architecture and about the pretty structure.” These observations illustrate how the primary responsibility of the participating exhibit house was to design and build aesthetically pleasing exhibits. The Director of Design further explained, “All companies wanted from us in the past was a good-looking exhibit that had as broad of shoulders, or broader shoulders, than anybody else on the tradeshow floor.”

The exhibit house’s approach to producing these traditional tradeshow exhibits was largely driven by the design department within the exhibit house. The Director of Design said:

When I came up in the business, the three-dimensional designer started the process, and beyond the architecture, we focused on the floor plan, how to bring people over to the exhibit, how to get them to enter, and configure the space so they can move through it effectively.

In other words, the designers at the exhibit house went through the design process to decide the aesthetic appearance of the architectural structure of the traditional tradeshow exhibits. Designers were responsible for placing many of the physical elements in the

space, such as products. Lastly, designer decided how attendees would best circulate through the space to view the products on display.

If there were any type of attendee experience in the traditional tradeshow exhibit, it was often the responsibility of the exhibitor, which often consisted of a dog and pony show delivered by the salesperson from the organization exhibiting at the tradeshow event. The Vice President of Sales explained, “It used to be that the salesperson was responsible for the exhibit experience by telling the company’s story.” Therefore, the organization exhibiting at the tradeshow relied heavily on its own salesforce to deliver attendee engagements and potential learning. However, as the owner of the exhibit house added, “If attendees were lucky, they might have gotten to learn what they wanted through a conversation from an articulate, approachable, and engaging salesperson who could identify with them.” This idea of being “lucky” to learn is important because the traditional tradeshow exhibit seemingly hoped the salespeople would do their best to deliver a pitch or experience into a tradeshow exhibit that was already produced. The Design Team Director reminisced:

Twenty years ago, exhibitors would have just brought a bunch of brochures, which by the way, many times they were horrible, not well-designed, not written in a way that was engaging. But that brochure was the only thing exhibitors used to engage attendees.

Therefore, during the period when the exhibit house produced traditional tradeshow exhibits, attendee engagements involved a salesperson, which left attendees with little more than a brochure. If the collateral material was well designed, which in many occasions was not, it was an opportunity for attendees to learn. This is important because

the exhibit house had little control of what happened on the tradeshow floor; rather those decisions were made primarily by the organization exhibiting at the tradeshow.

Another characteristic described by several participants was that, during this period, the attendee population that visited many tradeshow events was widely ranged. The Director of Design recollected, “If you roll the tape back and look at the history, say pre-9/11, everybody and their brother went to tradeshows. A lot of organizations sent many people, who frankly were out on a junket.” In other words, what this particular participant experienced during the 1980s and 1990s was that attendees who filled the convention center were made up of an extremely diverse group of people with diverse reasons for attending the event.

That being said, one of the primary groups within this expansive attendee population consisted of many highly influential owners and high-level executives. This group often attended tradeshows with the intention to buy a product. “It seemed that many, compared to today, of the tradeshow attendees consisted of owners or executives that were real decision makers. This group of attendees had the power within their organization to make purchases on the spot,” the Director of Design explained. This view was also shared by the Vice President of Sales: “There used to be a lot more highly-influential people that would attend tradeshows, to find business partners, and to make purchases right then and there.” The fact that these types of attendees had the power and means to close deals on the tradeshow floor made it easier to evaluate whether the tradeshow was successful for exhibitors. At the end of the show, if they made money, it was seen as a success and very little else mattered.

As learning presumably occurred in traditional tradeshow exhibits, it was not perceived as either the exhibitor's or exhibit house's responsibility, as all learning was largely invisible to tradeshow participants because it was either taken for granted or not recognized as learning. Thus, tradeshow attendees lacked awareness of their own learning. The Director of Design explained, "In the past, attendees probably learned a little bit in the exhibits, but they really didn't have any expectations to learn or really call it learning." The Vice President of Design commented, "I don't think we used to ever design tradeshow exhibits with learning in mind." Although attendees probably learned to some degree within these traditional tradeshow exhibits, it was not understood as learning. Potentially this is because subsequent knowledge was perceived either as tacit or as part of an attendee's general aptitude, rather than something that had been purposefully designed to be explicitly learned.

Contemporary tradeshow exhibits. Designing aesthetically pleasing exhibit structures has always been an expectation for clients that worked with the exhibit house under study. Research participants indicated that clients in more recent years asking the exhibit house to strategically develop multifaceted experiences. For the Vice President of Design, the exhibit house's strategic approach is perceived in a new way: "For us, tradeshow exhibits are more of a science today because we actually have the responsibility to prove their significance to organizations, which is something we didn't do years ago." This perspective was shared by the Vice President of Strategy, who said, "We are so much more strategic than we used to be, it is now very important that we truly know and understand our client (exhibitor), the target audience (attendee), and create

beautiful exhibits that are also meaningful experiences.” Likewise, the Vice President of Marketing added:

We've now deeply entrenched ourselves into what the perceptions of the brand are, to multiple audiences, what those attendees' key buttons are that engage them, understand how they learn, and then create a vehicle, if you will, that can tell that story. So, tradeshow exhibits are so much more strategic today than in the past.

Therefore, contemporary tradeshow exhibits have evolved into being strategic.

The Director of Design can best sum up the participants' perceptions about the exhibit house developing contemporary tradeshow exhibits:

Now honestly, more of the responsibility is on the exhibit to tell the story than probably the salesperson, and that is what we now do as an exhibit house. I mean we are still responsible for designing the beautiful structure and all the physical elements within the structure, but now we are also responsible for developing that engaging exhibit experience, which akin to writing a script for a play, only the attendee experiences it by walking through the stage instead of watching it from a chair.

These findings prove significant because they point to an important shift in the responsibilities of the exhibit house personnel in becoming more expansive and strategic.

This evolutionary process of the exhibit house under study indicates that its professionals' responsibilities increased beyond designing and building aesthetically pleasing structures, to also facilitating experiences more focused on the learning component within the tradeshow exhibit.

Evidence of this shift was also presented in the revision of documents showing that the participating exhibit house specifically asked their clients two main questions related to better developing a tradeshow exhibit as a place of learning: (a) What does the client think their target audience wants to learn about at the tradeshow? and (b) What has the client learned about how their target audience likes to best receive information at the tradeshow? These two questions about learning are evidence that the participating exhibit house was now interested in developing contemporary tradeshow exhibits that facilitate attendee learning, which was something not even mentioned with the exhibit house that developed traditional tradeshow exhibits. The Design Team Director explains another example of learning in contemporary tradeshow exhibits, whom said:

We live in a time when everyone has so much access to information at their fingertips through the internet, but at the end of the day, attendees still want to visit tradeshows because they want that face-to-face connection, and tradeshow exhibits provide that medium where attendees can learn information through a meaningful face-to-face experience... Attendees expectations now have grown from they'll learn a little bit and get a brochure to having an experience and getting some real tips and tricks about things they can apply and should be thinking about this next year. There comes a responsibility with that, if attendees are getting on a plane with expectations to learn at the tradeshow, the exhibitors better deliver on that, and that's where we come in.

This description points to the increasingly important role learning plays within the contemporary tradeshow exhibit experience, as well as the importance of face-to-face

human connection with likeminded individuals. A designer in the focus group also emphasized this:

People are realizing that they love the digital world, but they really love and need that face-to-face interaction and human connections, and today tradeshow events that facilitate this type of connection through the networking, entertainment, learning, and buying activities that happen through the exhibit experience.

To develop contemporary tradeshow exhibits that facilitate attendee learning, the procedure shifted from design driven to marketing driven. While the design team still has an important role to play in the process of developing contemporary tradeshow exhibits, the Vice President of Strategy explained, “Now the marketing team starts the process and charts the experience before the design team gets too involved.” The Vice President of Marketing expressed a similar view by saying, “The marketing team tends to drive the bus when it comes to developing the exhibit experience, and that includes the learning component of the experience.”

In other words, with the development of the traditional tradeshow exhibit, representation from marketing personnel seemed minimal. This suggests that over time, an entire group of marketing personnel was added to the procedure in order to establish and formulate a direction for the engaging tradeshow exhibits. This shift is historically important, because the ability to formulate contemporary tradeshow exhibits that were multifaceted attendee experiences, which included the conceptual understanding of tradeshow as places of learning, was seen by the majority of the participants as a multidisciplinary effort that began with the marketing team.

Based on participants' opinions, their exhibit house was constantly evolving. There were many transitions affecting the exhibit house's evolution. A noteworthy transition for the participating exhibit house under study was its commandeering of developing tradeshow exhibits. In the past, professionals often left this responsibility up to the salesperson. The Director of Design reflected, "Now, more and more of the responsibility is on the exhibit house to develop an experience where the exhibit helps tell that story, rather than simply relying on the salesperson to do so." The Director of Client Services further argued:

The salesperson does still have a role to play in the exhibit experience, but now the exhibit staffer does not need to be a salesperson at all. Rather, the exhibit is now a tool to employ that experience, and we are now more responsible for the direction of that experience and what the role of the exhibit staffer looks like in that experience.

In other words, the salesperson with the responsibility of delivering an engaging story has shifted towards an exhibit that, according to a designer in the focus group, "...has become a complex vehicle that facilitates meaningful attendee experiences driven by the exhibit staff."

In the past, professionals of the participating exhibit house worked with exhibitors to design exhibits for a broad attendee population. Over the years, the attendee population at tradeshows has become much narrower. The Director of Design suggested:

Due to many factors, the participation of attendees at tradeshows has become narrower. For example, tradeshows have become more specialized over the years, and even changes in things like transportation, cell phones, the economy, and

even the role the internet plays in people's lives have changed the world we live in... I mean things are just different at tradeshow than they used to be.

A narrower attendee population could have many implications. To better understand the implications related to tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, it should be considered what the owner of the exhibit house under study stated:

At some tradeshow, attendance may have decreased over the years, but at most tradeshow today, attendees are really interested in that particular industry event... Now, fewer transactions occur on the tradeshow floor than in the past, but more attendees now definitely have the ability to influence and have a real voice in the purchasing process after the show.

A shift in the tradeshow attendee population was perceived to be less diverse for the participating exhibit house in years that are more recent. While this attendee population was less diverse, it was believed to be more engaging. This less diverse tradeshow attendee population was also thought to consist of less high-level executives, and a greater proportion of mid-level managers. While this evidence was not quantified, it was perceived by the owner of the exhibit house who said, "Today, attendees encompass fewer high-level executives and more mid-level management personnel." This evidence is important in relation to the contemporary tradeshow exhibit as a place of learning because, as the owner further indicated, "Attendees are now tasked to learn at the tradeshow and report back to their colleagues, and more importantly report to the higher level executives so that they can make the purchasing decisions." Therefore, this presumable shift in the tradeshow attendee population results in a need for attendee

learning through the tradeshow exhibit experiences. The Design Team Director who explained summarized this:

In more recent years, fewer and fewer owners and decision makers attend tradeshow, and more and more mid-level executives are attendees at tradeshow that are not in a position to make on-the-spot purchases. These mid-level executives are rather tasked, not only to represent their company, but also to gather information to almost report back to the higher levels of management. This new tradeshow reality puts more emphasis on learning in the tradeshow exhibit experience, because if that attendee doesn't gather the necessary information, he or she cannot adequately inform the higher levels of management, which in turn impacts sales.

The participating exhibit house was not tasked to develop tradeshow exhibit experiences for attendees that position themselves solely to make on-the-spot purchases at the tradeshow, which may have been the case in traditional tradeshow exhibits in the exhibit house's former guise. Rather, as more mid-level executives attended tradeshow events with a desire to learn, the exhibit house evolved and was tasked to develop tradeshow exhibit experiences for attendees that needed to gather information to be shared with colleagues and reported to high-level executives at a later date.

To sum, an important perception of most participants at the exhibit house under study focused on the evolution from a focus on the structure of a tradeshow exhibit to the strategy of developing multifaceted tradeshow exhibit experiences. Some of the factors that caused this evolution were external to the exhibit house and ultimately outside its control, such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11, as well as the narrower attendee population

seen at tradeshows today. With that said, some factors that caused this evolution were internal, such as developing a marketing team to strategically enhance tradeshow exhibit experiences that were now perceived as places of learning. These external and internal factors were perceived to have an impact on the evolution of the tradeshow exhibits and the case under study. The Design Team Director concluded, “Honestly, I think learning got lost in the shuffle years ago, but now the purpose of the exhibit house is to help exhibitors tell their story by making exhibit experiences in way that are comfortable, engaging, and educational for attendees.”

Theme 2: Learn, relearn, and unlearn through exhibit experiences. Learning through experience has always been part of adult education. For example, in the event industry, conferences provide opportunities for a specific group of people who share a common craft or profession to learn through experiences, such as professional development workshops and educational sessions. Another opportunity for meaningful learning at most conferences is within the exhibit experiences of the tradeshow portion of the conference. The owner of the exhibit house under study explained:

A lot of conferences have a tradeshow and a lot of conferences provide educational seminars and educational credits outside of the actual tradeshow. But I think that a huge portion of the learning that actually occurs at these conferences, happens outside the actual educational workshops and sessions, rather the real learning happens through experiencing the various exhibit that makeup the tradeshow portion of the conference... We have even designed tradeshow exhibit experiences where learning literally consisted of attendees earning continuing education credits on the tradeshow floor. In this example, after

attendees learned through an experience, they would take a quiz that qualifies them for some CEU credits on a battery of monitors that also provided information.

In regards to tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, participants not only believed that attendees learned more on the tradeshow floor than in an educational session at a conference, it was perceived the learning that occurred on the tradeshow floor materialized through the exhibit experiences that made up the tradeshow. As the Vice President of Sales expressed:

...learning absolutely happens at tradeshow, it happens in the tradeshow exhibits through meaningful experiences... The most engaging exhibitors that we have as clients are those that want fulfill attendees' desire to learn through an engaging experience. These exhibitors not only want to show attendees new things. They also want to show attendees what they organization brings to the table... Learning through the tradeshow exhibit experience has just become so huge.

In addition, the Vice President of Strategy provided an example of attendees' learning through an exhibit experience:

We did an exhibit for company that sells a drug that has been around for a long time, but they added a new delivery system... What we wanted tradeshow attendees to do was rethink how they thought about this particular drug while they were in the exhibit, and they learned this throughout their experience... By the time attendees went through the experience, our goal for the exhibit experiences was that attendees would've learned about the drug, or again if they had

preconceived notions about the drug, the goal was to have them rethink it... So it was learning through that attendee experience in the exhibit.

All participants in the previous two quotes agreed that learning was a key component of tradeshow exhibits, fundamentally attendees were going through a process of constructing new meaning through his or her direct experiences and exposure to opportunities that maximize the potential for learning.

It is important to note that all research participants in this study perceived tradeshow exhibits as places of learning through meaningful experiences. These experiences were described as meaningful when attendees were consciously aware of their experience in the tradeshow exhibit. According to the Vice President of Sales:

Great tradeshow exhibit experiences have a vibe, they have a lot of high energy activities that engage attendees within the space, the story is engaging, and attendees learn about the company, culture, products, and industry trends through an immersive experience. A lot of exhibitors just have a standard message, cool-looking structures, but nothing that really captivates attendees' attention and gives them that whole experience they are looking for at the tradeshow... A good exhibit experience needs to make attendees stop in their tracks and go, 'Hey, what's going on there?' If exhibitors can get that buzz going, it's a start to a good experience, and these types of exhibit experiences make it easy for attendees to learn in the space.

Most participants agreed that attendees' immediate tradeshow exhibit experiences were constructed through various stimulating touchpoints that engage attendees, creating a buzz in the exhibit space that has the potential to cultivate learning.

Fundamental to this so-called “vibe” expressed by many participants was the essential question: What is meant by learning? All research participants referred to learning as some sort of meaning making, a process of change, or exchange of information. For example, the Vice President of Design said, “I think of learning as some kind of transfer of information or a process of making meaning from information through inquiry and experience.” The Vice President of Sales added, “Learning in the tradeshow exhibit is a means of getting attendees engaged in an experience that allows them to deeply understand, and really make their own conclusions about that understanding.” A designer from the focus group agreed: “Learning, to me, means trying to move attendees past just seeing a bunch of information on a wall or column to them being able to experience and apply information to their professional lives.”

The definition of learning expressed by the owner of the exhibit house thoughtfully reflected similar reactions and perceptions of other research participants about learning, but also added:

Learning in the exhibit is about a process, one that exposes attendees to a series of touchpoints that provide them with the opportunity to discover information that can potentially solve real-world problems... Through these types of experiences, the exhibit and staffer function as guides.

In understanding experience and learning in relation to tradeshow exhibits, there was perceived a legitimate role for the exhibit house under study in maximizing the potential for learning through experience. The Director of Design reflected:

Attendee learning is something that we think about... if we know that this is what attendees want to learn, as an exhibit house, we then have the responsibility to

work with our clients to provide ample opportunities for attendees to learn through an engaging experience, because there is the potential for real learning to occur through tradeshow exhibit experiences.

The Design Team Director further commented about the exhibit house's own tradeshow exhibit experience and said, "I want attendees that have been coming into our exhibit for several years to have an opportunity to learn something new, so everybody learns something every time they go through our experience." These sentiments point to the importance of the participating exhibit house's efforts to continually look for opportunities to maximize the potential for attendee learning through their exhibit experience.

Participants also indicated several challenges in developing tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, including the increased cost to create such experiences. As the Vice President of Marketing purported:

In a perfect world, every tradeshow exhibit would have attendees learning through wonderful experiences. It would be great if attendees learned about the organization exhibiting, and about their products or services, and about the industry and new trends through their experience, but the reality is that not all exhibitors care about meaningful exhibit experiences for tradeshow attendees, and many more than that don't have the budget to create those types of experiences.

Another challenge mentioned by many participants was the potential information overload. A designer in the focus group explained, "Tradeshows expose attendees to tons of information in one large room for four straight days." Couple the information overload

with the expectation that attendees want to get through an exhibit in a reasonable amount of time, the Vice President of Design commented:

Exhibitors really only have about 10 minutes to get tradeshow attendees engaged. If exhibitors are really lucky, they have an hour to get attendees to learn everything wanted through their experience... There really is just a very short timeframe for attendees to have a meaningful learning experience.

This competitive exhibit landscape challenged the exhibit house under study to develop tradeshow exhibit experiences that maximize the potential for attendees' learning in a short period.

Tradeshows are a major facet of most conferences. It was perceived by all research participants that exhibits that make up the tradeshow are great opportunities for attendees to learn through experience. In addition, tradeshow exhibit experiences were understood to have a vibe that connected and communicated ideas to attendees. Most participants also believed that learning in the tradeshow exhibit was a process through which the exhibit environment could potentially change tradeshow attendees by actively engaging them in experiences that allowed them to construct their own meaning based on the application of information, knowledge, and skills. By attendees actively engaging in the tradeshow experience, they in turn could cause changes to the exhibit atmosphere, making it a place of learning.

Theme 3: Attendee learning leads to exhibitor earning. Most participants of the exhibit house under study interpreted that, in the tradeshow industry, the decision to purchase an idea, product, or service often followed some sort of purchasing process. Tradeshow exhibits sought as places of learning had the potential to facilitate or even

expedite the transaction process, which was thought to eventually lead to a potential sale. Research participants also agreed that tradeshow exhibits have the potential to stimulate new needs for attendees, if they did not come to the tradeshow event with an established purpose. This established purpose was believed to be the foundation of the learning experience in the tradeshow exhibit.

The attendee learning experience in the tradeshow exhibit was believed to be the foundation that should lead to an eventual informed purchasing decision. This transaction process was seen as follows: purpose, learning, and informed purchasing decision. This process must be transferable, meaning that if an attendee comes to the tradeshow with a purpose, and he or she experiences exhibits that facilitate learning, this information must be able to be used to inform colleagues. This transference of information is important, as the attendee that attends the tradeshow is often not the final decision-maker. Therefore, tradeshow exhibits that facilitate attendee learning establish a foundation for an informed purchasing decision. In other words, the attendee learning process was believed to lead to attendee buying, which in turn is a sale for the tradeshow exhibitor that facilitated the learning experience.

The transaction process starts with an established need by attendees. The owner of the exhibit house explained:

When I think tradeshows, I see a large marketplace where the sales component is very important. But in looking at the exhibits, each represents its unique place in that marketplace and is an experience that consists of a balance between many different components, and learning is one of those components. Attendees represent a niche within this marketplace, and must come to a tradeshow with a

set of needs. Then, the exhibits can provide an opportunity for attendees to browse and compare products, all under one roof.

The owner emphasized the importance of seeing the tradeshow event as a marketplace for trade, and furthermore that tradeshow exhibits have the potential to facilitate this sales component or transaction process. The owner also indicated that the transaction process starts with tradeshow attendees' groundwork of coming to the event with an established purpose related to specific needs. The Vice President of Sales shared this view:

I think attendees need to go to tradeshows and into exhibits with a purpose to fill an identified need. Often new needs are identified while at a tradeshow event, but the bottom-line is that there's no reason to go to a tradeshow if they you don't have a purpose... Because it is that purpose that starts meaningful conversations and learning.

In other words, tradeshow exhibits can be places of learning that help attendees identify new needs; however, to insure that they function as places of learning, it was seen as relatively dependent upon attendees' purpose and readiness to learn.

Once attendees have identified a purpose for visiting the tradeshow event, the transaction process should center on learning in the tradeshow exhibits. All participants believed that there was a connection between attendee learning and the procurement of ideas, products, processes, or services for an organization. The Design Team Director explained:

In more recent years, fewer and fewer owners and decision makers attend tradeshows, and more and more mid-level executives are attendees at tradeshows that are not in a position to make on-the-spot purchases. These mid-level

executives are rather tasked, not only to represent their company, but also to gather information to almost report back to the higher levels of management. This new tradeshow reality puts more emphasis on learning in the tradeshow exhibit experience, because if that attendee doesn't gather the necessary information, he or she cannot adequately inform the higher levels of management, which in turn impacts sales for the exhibitor.

The owner of the exhibit house, who said, shared this view:

It seemed that many, compared to today, of the tradeshow attendees consisted of owners or executives that were real decision makers. This group of attendees had the power within their organization to make purchases on the spot... Attendees are now tasked to learn at the tradeshow and report to their colleagues, and more importantly report to the higher-level executives so that they can make the purchasing decisions.

In consolidating participants' comments above, the first point that was identified by the majority of participants was attendees' increased desire to learn. One of the primary reasons for this phenomenon was believed to be related to the shift in attendee population. In the past, more owners and high-level executives walked the tradeshow floors, most of whom had the organizational power to navigate through the entire transaction process on their own. Conversely, an increase in mid-level managers and other procurement personnel have been replacing high-level executives as attendees at tradeshows.

With limited organizational power, very few of these mid-level managers navigate through the entire transaction process at a tradeshow. This identified shift in the

attendee population has created a change in how the exhibit house under study develops tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. All research participants indicated that attendee learning was an increasingly important component developing tradeshow exhibits, as attendees are often sent to tradeshow events to learn, or to go on what one of the designers called “a fact-finding mission.”

Tradeshow attendees’ increasing desire “to gather information,” or “to learn at the tradeshow,” was rooted in the second point that was identified by the comments made above by the Director of Design and owner of the exhibit house, which was the expectation to “report back” to the organization they represent. In other words, when attendees visit a tradeshow event on “a fact-finding mission” with the expectation to help their organization navigate the learning phase of the transaction process, they are not only expected to learn, but also to report on the content of their learning. The Director of Design acknowledged that if these expectations to learn were not adequately met through the appropriate tradeshow exhibits, it seemed reasonable that attendees would be unprepared to later report to the final decision maker of the organization.

On the other hand, the Director of Design and owner of the exhibit house suggested that tradeshow events could potentially offer attendees with value if their expectations to learn and report were adequately met. The final point identified from the comments above is that if attendees do adequately learn in tradeshow exhibits, they would in turn be better prepared to appropriately advise the final decision maker to make an informed purchasing decision, which would end the tradeshow attendee transaction process. Furthermore, this informed purchasing decision “in turn impacts sales for the

exhibitor.” Thus, tradeshow exhibits that are places of learning for attendees could offer a procedure for exhibitor earning.

To sum, fewer transactions occur on the tradeshow floor than was previously perceived. Rather, the mid-level executives that attend tradeshow today are often tasked to learn about potential solutions related to a specific need, then after the event, report back to their colleagues and higher-level executives. Based on participants’ perceptions and professional experiences regarding the creation and facilitation of tradeshow exhibits, they agreed that strategic exhibits should facilitate attendee learning. Furthermore, tradeshow exhibits that are places of learning not only increase the potential for attendees to learn, they also facilitate the potential for attendees to teach their colleagues, which could in turn result in a purchase. A purchase for an attendee is a sale for tradeshow exhibitors.

All research participants agreed that the tradeshow attendee transaction process linked attendees’ purpose to attendees’ learning, and their purchasing in the tradeshow exhibit. The owner of the exhibit house explained, “If an attendee can learn how a product works in the exhibit, they can decide if it will work how they need it to, and then determine if it should be bought for them or recommended for their organization.” A designer in the focus group agreed: “Attendees know that learning about the different choices they have available to them at tradeshow and in the exhibit, allows them to better understand their needs, and make an informed purchasing decision related to their needs after the show.” The Vice President of Sales also indicated a link between an informed purchasing decision and learning to buy, and provided the following example: “Demonstration stations allow attendees to actively learn how a product works, which

doesn't guarantee a sale, but learning experience allows attendees to later make an informed purchasing decision." Thus, tradeshow exhibits that are places of learning were established to potentially serve tradeshow exhibits as places of buying.

Theme 4: The marketing team and the development of exhibit experiences.

Taking a tradeshow exhibit program from concept to completion requires many people's involvement with a wide range of skillsets working together. In this study, the exhibit house reflected a diverse group of people with various skillsets and roles including sales, account executives, exhibit designers, graphic designers, digital media specialists, production artists, detail engineers, marketing strategists, project managers, carpenters, and fabric experts, to mention some. While all these professionals bear some responsibility in developing tradeshow exhibit programs, all participants in this study believed that the marketing team shouldered "the lion's share" of the conceptual development in creating the experiential qualities that make tradeshow exhibits places of learning. The Design Team Director explained:

The marketing team [now] starts the process by charting the attendee experience that includes the learning component... Then, the design team develops a strategy for the exhibit that ultimately facilitates the attendee experience... There's a back-and-forth between marketing and design until it is right... the exhibit is a chassis, and the marketing team develops that foundation, and the design team add amenities to the chassis that will give the best opportunity for that story to be told and facilitate a meaningful experience.

Therefore, the conceptual process at the participating exhibit house begins with the marketing team developing a core experience. Further development of the concept then

fluctuates between the marketing team and the design team until the tradeshow exhibit proves a learning experience.

What also emerged from the data was agreement that the integration of the learning process into the larger tradeshow exhibit experience was mostly the marketing team's responsibility. The owner of the exhibit house explained, "What really attracts attendees into the tradeshow exhibit experience is substance. So, learning in the tradeshow exhibit is important and strategic to us, and our organization looks to the marketing team to find those learning opportunities and angles." More specifically, the marketing team was believed to have not only the main responsibility in the conceptualization of the exhibit experience but also of the inclusion of learning into the larger tradeshow exhibit experience.

However, it was also concluded that the marketing team, and presumably everyone else involved in the conceptual process at the exhibit house, was not adequately prepared to address the learning process. Participants associated with the marketing team substantiated the claim that the marketing team was not necessarily qualified enough to adequately address the learning process within tradeshow exhibit experiences. The Vice President of Marketing explained, "The marketing team has backgrounds in marketing and not in education, so they work with the clients, and through research, they really try to dig deep to understand the target audience, and how they like to learn." He continued:

As marketers, we don't know as much as maybe we should about learning. We probably don't go deep enough with it... We do tend to make assumptions, as it is very hard to get great information about target audiences, and what they prefer... Something that is happening now is we are conducting much more marketing

research about the target audience, which has been very successful, but we could still do better.

Despite these efforts, the owner of the exhibit house reiterated this challenge related to the marketing team's inability to effectively develop tradeshow exhibits as places of learning:

Learning is definitely a component of the tradeshow exhibit experience. With that said, the marketing team approaches the exhibit experience from a marketing standpoint, and that makes sense because they have a background in marketing, but unfortunately they also approach the learning component from that same marketing perspective, and not from an educational standpoint, or on that type of intellectual level, and maybe they should. That would be really interesting if we had someone with that type of educational background.

In understanding tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, based on participants' perceptions and experiences, it was clear that the marketing team in this case study has played an essential role in evolving the exhibit house to develop tradeshow exhibits into strategic experiences. With that said, one of the challenges related to these tradeshow exhibit experiences was their inability to address the learning process. The Vice President of Strategy summarized this issue:

The marketing team is responsible for developing the tradeshow exhibit experience, which, yes, includes the learning component, but the marketing team maybe doesn't know enough about learning to adequately address it, because we are marketing people, and not educators. It seems so obvious... I mean we discuss how to engage the target audience and how we think they will receive information

best, but we don't focus as much as we should, and aren't even prepared enough to address the learning component of the experience.

In sum, despite the efforts through market research, it was clear that the marketing team alone was unprepared to adequately address the learning process of the tradeshow exhibit experience. This created a significant challenge for the exhibit house in further developing tradeshow exhibits into places of learning.

Research Question 2: What Strategies and Procedures do Industry Professionals at a Midwestern Exhibit House Implement to Promote Learning through their Tradeshow Exhibits?

An essential feature of tradeshow exhibits as places of learning understands the strategies and procedures developed and used by the exhibit house under study to maximize the potential for learning within tradeshow exhibits. Research Question 2 was intended to gather relevant information on strategies and procedures for learning employed by professionals at the exhibit house. The following themes are grounded in the perceptions and experiences of participating professionals.

Strategy 1: Meaningful conversation using different communication channels. All participants from the exhibit house under study expressed the idea that tradeshow exhibits were places of learning through meaningful conversation between exhibit staff and attendees. The Director of Client Services explained, "Conversation or meaningful dialogue between real people is how learning occurs in tradeshow exhibits." The Vice President of Sales further reflected on this opinion; she commented, "Learning is a huge part of the exhibit experience, and anytime you engage the senses and have meaningful conversation, you're learning." In addition, a designer in the focus group stated, "Attendees may be able to learn about information on some company's website,

but actually learning through a conversation seems to me to have more meaning, because it can be specific to each attendee's needs." These comments exemplify the shared view that meaningful conversation between exhibit staff and attendees is linked to tradeshow exhibits as places of learning.

An important procedure that was linked between meaningful conversations to learning was the need to establish rapport through two-way communication. The Director of Design explained:

The exhibit experience facilitates learning. One of the ways that happens is through conversation between the exhibit staffer and attendee... The goal is not that the staffer gives a sales pitch, but rather they listen, which then provides context to a meaningful educational session. So, in order to understand their needs, the staffer needs to listen, ask good questions, and then deliver a meaningful message where they'll both learn through a back-and-forth conversation... So, that conversation is always top-of-mind.

Many participants agreed that dialogue between exhibit staff and attendees does not consist of a hard sell by the exhibit staff; rather, rapport needs to be created in order to establish the human connection so important in learning.

Establishing this human connection was thought by most participants to happen by asking good questions, listening, and understanding the discipline represented at the tradeshow. "The face-to-face human interaction between the attendees and exhibit staff is so important for learning. It is that human connection that everyone wants and learns from," a designer from the focus group explained. The owner of the exhibit house concurred:

All great exhibit experiences really start with a handshake and learning from each other through conversation... We need to always keep that human connection and create experiences that facilitate good and meaningful human conversation... Conversations lead to relationships, which eventually leads to that other sales related dialogue. But, creating exhibits that facilitate meaningful conversations are very effective, and learning should be a part of those conversations.

The Director of Design also commented about this point:

If exhibitors entertain and educate our target audience in the exhibit, they have the ability to deepen their relationship with attendees, it might just be for an hour, sitting around the table, having a conversation to learn about the company, products, what's new, and where we can go together.

All participants in this study agreed that meaningful conversation between exhibitors and attendees was an important strategy to promote learning and create the potential for deeper relationships between those involved.

Furthermore, for meaningful conversation to occur, it needs to be a priority for tradeshow exhibitors. The owner of the exhibit house stated:

The primary goal for exhibitors should be that attendees come into the exhibit and have a conversation. If attendees can engage in meaningful conversation, they will learn about the company exhibiting and what that company does. Through that exchange, attendees will leave the exhibit with a valuable impression that is good for them and good for the exhibitor.

Therefore, to promote learning, exhibitors need to make conversations a primary goal. On the other hand, what the owner of the exhibit house also described was that to truly

promote attendee learning in tradeshow exhibits, meaningful conversation should also be a primary goal for attendees. He further extrapolated:

Learning occurs the most through conversation, if attendees' eyes and ears are open, they should learn something through their exhibit experience. If attendees come to an event thinking you know everything, then their ability to learn becomes somewhat limited. If attendees are open-minded and hungry to learn, there is truly a nugget information in every conversation.

If attendees have the desire to learn at a tradeshow, they too should have the primary objective to participate in meaningful conversations in the exhibits through their own self-directedness. Therefore, these engagements should be planned by making them a priority for both groups, and not just expected to happen serendipitously.

Strategy 2: Demonstrations as a format for learning. Tradeshow exhibits are made up of a collection of spaces. One may be a reception space, while another may be a private meeting space. A space that was identified in this study to promote tradeshow exhibits as places of learning was one that facilitates demonstrations. The Vice President of Marketing commented, "Demonstration areas are often used inside tradeshow exhibits as a tool to educate attendees... Demos are a strategy that exhibits leverage to help attendees learn."

As the desire to learn has increased for attendees, demonstrations have been viewed as an effective strategy to promote attendees' learning. The Director of Design explained, "Attendees want to trial the product, they want to test the product's capabilities, they want to know what it costs, they want to know how it was made, and they want to know what it is made out of; and demos can help facilitate that learning

process.” In this regard, the Vice President of Design commented, “Demonstrations are used in the exhibit as a space where attendees can learn, and it could either be a self-guided or staff-guided experience using digital touchscreens.” All participants indicated during the interviews that demonstrations are an important format to promote attendees’ learning and a strategy in developing tradeshow exhibits.

Based on observations of two different exhibits at two tradeshows in the United States, demonstrations proved an important strategy in promoting attendees’ learning. One of the demonstrations that was observed was similar to attending a play, where all attendees sat in the audience and watched some sort of orchestrated visual experience accompanied by a verbal explanation about the organization’s service offerings. The exhibit staffer, who provided much of the demonstration in the role of educator, drove this theatrical experience; the staffer was understood to be the expert and the attendees were understood to be the trainees. Most participants in this study thought this type of passive demonstration was a common strategy in tradeshow exhibits.

The second demonstration observed by the researcher was a much more hands-on type. Aware of this specific demonstration, the Vice President of Sales commented, “All that information was also on that exhibitor’s website, but attendees that actually are able to hear it, and experience it through a hands-on demonstration is a more meaningful way to learn.” Therefore, unlike the theatrical demonstration, this more active demonstration did not leave the attendee alone to form conclusions. Instead, this hands-on demonstration included an exhibit staffer positioned to respond to attendees’ questions; thus, the staffer substantiated the advantages of the products through deep conversation.

The owner of the exhibit house commented, “The vehicle for learning in tradeshow exhibit experiences has been demonstration stations, which can be a presentation about how something works or more hands-on. These are both still very popular strategies to deliver information.” While it was observed and interpreted that attendees were more engaged when directly experiencing products firsthand, attendees that did not participate in the demonstration still had the opportunity to learn through observation. Thus, both observations conducted in the tradeshow supported participants’ claims on the significance of demonstrations as a format for learning.

According to research participants, exhibitors often attempt to digitally represent their organizations’ demonstration format. While this may be the only option in some instances, and often much less expensive than having a live staffer in the exhibit, it was overwhelmingly suggested by the participants that attendees benefit more from seeing and trying the real thing. The owner of the exhibit house explained:

I have seen exhibitors spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to display some learning component or demonstration through an onscreen digital media engagement, and most attendees just walk by. But in that same exhibit, if there were instead a face-to-face demo of that same product, those same attendees would stop by, and through their experience and dialogue with a staffer, they would learn something, and would be moved, and changed.

The Director of Client Services added:

Demonstration stations are important and have been around for a very long time. I think that they provide a space that really facilitates meaningful one-on-one conversations between attendees and the exhibit staff. Showing and trying

products live is just a better way to learn instead of seeing a video on the monitor.

Then when attendees leave the exhibit, the staffer can give that attendee a brochure that has the same or more information on it, so the attendee can remember when they explain it to their boss or whoever after the show.

These thoughts reiterate the value of a space dedicated to demonstrations that allow attendees to experience real ideas, products, processes, or services from real people. Participants believe that attendees value and potentially learn more from face-to-face demonstrations, which are also believed to encourage human conversations and connections compared to digital media demonstrations at tradeshows. The implications for this is that the tradeshow exhibit experience should keep that face-to-face conversation at the center of interactions and is evidence that the tradeshow exhibit is not the experience, but rather facilitates a meaning conversation, which together create a meaningful experience.

Furthermore, testing a product through hands-on experience allows attendees to make judgements related to the product and claims made by the exhibiting organization. The owner of the exhibit house commented:

Standards and credibility of a company is substantiated when attendees actually get to try and engage the product and learn how it is used, and that is extremely important. In those cases, that demo that creates an opportunity, which can get attendees past those preconceived notions, and get them to think, 'Wow, this really does work' and 'I can see myself using this product'... being able to use and implement the product in your hands is everything for attendees.

Demonstration spaces not only allow attendees to assess the credibility of the exhibitor's claims in real-time, they help to challenge possible assumptions previously held by all parties involved.

Findings in this study indicate that demonstrations are an important strategy to promote tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. As the Vice President of Strategy said, "Demo stations are a popular strategy to educate attendees. They allow attendees to demonstrate the product so they can learn how it works; and if they like the way it works, then they may consider buying it." Thus, if a particular product they personally experienced at an exhibit impresses tradeshow attendees, the potential for learning is present, which may lead to an informed purchasing decision by the attendees' organizations.

Strategy 3: Digital media as an interactive learning experience. Digital media has become predominant throughout the years in tradeshow exhibits. All participants in this study acknowledged learning opportunities were created by the confluence of digital media employed through computers, tablets, or monitors in tradeshow exhibits. The Director of Design commented, "There are many different ways attendees can learn in the exhibit experience, a very common way is through digital media." The Vice President of Marketing further added, "Digital touchscreens provide access to so much good information, they allow attendees to go as deep as they want, and they can learn so much from them." Thus, an effective strategy to promote learning is through digital media.

Exhibits that once used posters, brochures, and mockups in years past have become immersive interactive learning experiences that employ smart phones, smart boards, and tablets loaded with engaging digital media content and access to the World

Wide Web. The Vice President of Design has seen this shift firsthand, and said, “All exhibitors were doing in the past was simply handing out as many brochures as they could.... Digital media now allows attendees to have an interactive learning experience in so many different ways.” The owner of the exhibit house also expressed the potential benefit that digital media possess, “Digital technology can be used to effect great dialogue. It can do some really cool things, and it can be a great resource to help attendees go deep into catalog and deep in content.”

While the Vice President of Marketing explained that some tradeshow attendees are “intimidated by digital media experiences”, he offered this edifying example:

For one of our clients, we did a tabletop digital media interactive. It was all driven by projector and a connect system that were really fun, engaging-looking projection, and then as attendees moved things, content would pop-up so they were really learning about the company, products, and services through their fun experience.

This example illustrates that digital media not only can promote tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, they also create interactive learning experiences that extend the potential of learning from a one-way stream of digital media content, such as the content in a newspaper, into an interactive two-way learning experience, customized to the needs of the attendee.

That being said, the participants of this study also expressed a weariness in what they saw as the over-saturated nature of digital technology in society to the detriment of dialogue and personal connection amongst people. The owner of the exhibit house emphatically emphasized this point:

Related to the topic of digital content and digital media, we live in a world where we are steeped in the shit. I mean your next thermostat is integrated into your phone... Companies are doing this in exhibits, kind of an automated exhibit experience... We work hard with our clients to create compelling and meaningful exhibit experiences and we are very effective, but I think we have come to a point where we are so saturated in technology that it is no longer interesting. I mean technology can be used to affect great dialogue, it can do some really cool things, and it can be a great resource to help you go deep into catalog and deep in content, but we need to always keep that human connection and create experiences that facilitate good and meaningful human conversation. When there is this human connection, then technology can be a good way to support the experience.

One of the suggested procedures to implement the digital media strategy was to not have it automated; rather, the exhibit staff to facilitate the attendee experience should control the digital media. The Vice President of Marketing explained, “We are finding that there should really be an exhibit staffer to accompany attendees with the digital media to provide that human connection at every point in the exhibit.” The Vice President of Strategy also echoed this point when he said, “Digital media touchscreens can be a self-guided experience for attendees, but to truly make the exhibit an environment where attendees learn, I think it should be a staff-guided experience.” Therefore, while participants from the exhibit house under study believed that digital media has the potential to serve as a means for valuable attendee learning; it should be

driven by a live human being and not through some one-way dehumanizing automated happening.

In summary, four main themes emerged from the data address Research Question 1, which strove to better understand tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning. The first theme, (1) The Evolution of Tradeshow Exhibits from Structure to Strategy, captures key perceptions regarding tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning, specifically the notion that tradeshow exhibits have evolved into complex multi-layered experiences through strategic processes. While tradeshow exhibits have been presented in the literature as events of learning, data indicates that the evolution of exhibit houses developing tradeshow exhibits as meaningful places of learning is yet to evolve, or is still in its infancy. The second theme, (2) Learning Through Tradeshow Exhibit Experiences, recognizes that, based on participants' views, attendee learning occurred through their experiences facilitated by the tradeshow exhibit. The third theme, (3) Attendee Learning Leads to Exhibitor Earning, suggests that when attendees learn about an idea, product, or process through a meaningful tradeshow exhibit experience, they are better prepared to make an informed purchasing decision than if nothing was learned. The last theme related to Research Question 1, (4) The Marketing Team and the Development of Exhibit Experiences, proposes that while everyone within the exhibit house has an opportunity to make the tradeshow exhibit experience a place of learning, it is primarily the marketing team that is responsible for developing the learning experience. While this is so, it was also determined that with backgrounds in marketing, members of the team are not adequately prepared to address the learning process of the exhibit experience.

The second set of themes addresses Research Question 2, which was posed to identify strategies and procedures that promote learning in tradeshow exhibits; these themes include: (a) Meaningful Conversation Using Different Communication Channels, (b) Demonstrations as a Format for Learning, and (c) Digital Media as an Interactive Learning Experience. The first strategy identified in this study was the use of meaningful conversations as a tool to facilitate attendees' learning. The second strategy that promotes learning was related to space for demonstration stations; and the third major strategy was the implementation of various forms of digital media content, such as websites, micro-sites, games, digital video, social media, virtual reality, and other applications. Together, both sets of themes provide valuable information that allows for a rich and in-depth understanding of tradeshow exhibits as places of learning as they relate to the case study. The following section provides detailed descriptions of each theme organized by research question.

This chapter provides a description of key findings from the data gathered through the procedures detailed in Chapter 3 of this study. These themes are meant to inform the practice of professionals involved in the tradeshow exhibit industry to better understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, as well as to examine effective strategies and procedures to promote learning in the tradeshow exhibit experience. These themes provide professionals in the tradeshow industry to better plan, design, engineer, produce, and execute tradeshow exhibits that maximize the potential for attendees' learning and acquisition of knowledge and skills. The next chapter provides an important assertion based on the themes described in this chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is divided in three sections. The first section provides a discussion of the research findings regarding participants' perceptions, descriptions, and experiences related to tradeshow exhibits as places of learning and the review of literature presented in Chapter 2. Limitations of the study are also presented. The second section addresses implications for the professional practice in the tradeshow field. The last section includes recommendations for future research that explains areas that need further examination based on findings in this study.

Tradeshows facilitate direct face-to-face interaction between sellers (exhibitors) and potential buyers (attendees). To do this, organizations stake claim over a small portion of the tradeshow floor. To shape these spaces on the tradeshow floor, organizations invest in an exhibit that facilitates interactions with attendees. The vast number of exhibits of a tradeshow have traditionally been understood to create a marketplace where organizations from a given industry convene to display their wares to attendees, the potential buyers (Rinallo & Golfetto, 2011). The primary role of these traditional tradeshow events was to reduce the transaction costs inherent in finding new customers and new business partners (Floria, 1994).

The available literature related to tradeshows is limited, and even more so in discussing tradeshow exhibits. While earlier research (Banting & Blenkhorn, 1974;

Bonoma, 1983; Carmen, 1968; Cavanaugh, 1976; Gopalakrishna, Lilien, Williams & Sequeira, 1995; Kerin & Cron, 1987), and more current research (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006; Hanse, 2004; Huang, Tsai & Huang, 2010 Sarmiento, Simoes & Farhanmehr, 2014), as well as the findings from this current study point to tradeshow as temporary events that facilitate trade, the literature has also described tradeshow as rich events that facilitate experiences that extend beyond just trade (Center for Exhibition Industry Research, 2009; Jansson & Power, 2008; Norcliffe & Rendace, 2003; Skov, 2006). These studies are supported by findings in the current research. Furthermore, the literature lacks in-depth information about the exhibits that makeup large tradeshow events, especially within the United States and particularly as places that influence and facilitate learning.

For the purpose of this study, learning in the context of tradeshow exhibits was interpreted as a broad process in the exhibit environment, in which the interactions between attendees and exhibitors often influence attendees' experiences in a way that allows them to construct their own meaning based on information, knowledge, and skills. This research study went beyond the traditional view of understanding tradeshow events as only marketplaces, with the intention to understand the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon, specifically tradeshow exhibits as places that facilitate learning. Thus, strategies and resources used by professionals at the participating exhibit house were also examined.

Research findings from this study were based on the perceptions and experiences of industry professionals at an exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. The information gathered and analyzed in this study was primarily

intended to help to prepare tradeshow industry professionals to effectively plan, design, engineer, produce, and execute tradeshow exhibits and maximize the potential for attendees' learning. In this investigation, two main research questions guided the research process: (1) How do tradeshow industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house perceive and describe tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning? and (2) What strategies or procedures do industry professionals at a Midwestern exhibit house implement to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits?

Data was collected from multiple sources, including interviews, a focus group, and observations, as well as a review of documents. Three days were spent at the case study headquarters office located in the Midwest to collect information through interviews, a focus group, and observations of the setting. In addition, observations and additional interviews were conducted on two different exhibits at two separate US tradeshows. One of the tradeshow exhibits represented the healthcare industry, and the other represented the event industry. Documents from the participating exhibit house and the selected tradeshows were also collected and analyzed. Data analysis followed four cycles of analysis suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which included: (a) open coding, (b) analytical coding, (c) theme construction, and (d) assertions and propositions. Trustworthiness of the study was achieved through credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. A detailed description of the data analysis process and specifics of the soundness of the study were provided in Chapter 3.

Summary of Findings

This research study aimed to provide an understanding of tradeshow exhibits as places of learning based on perceptions and experiences of industry professionals at an

exemplary exhibit house located in the Midwestern region of the United States. Through the analysis of collected data and to respond to Research Question 1 of this case study, four major themes were identified: (a) The Evolution of Tradeshow Exhibits from Structure to Strategy, (b) Learning Through Tradeshow Exhibit Experiences, (c) Attendee Learning Leads to Exhibitor Earning, and (d) The Marketing Team and the Development of Exhibit Experiences.

The first major theme that emerged from participants' information was the evolutionary process for the exhibit house under study in relation to learning from structure to strategic experiences. This evolutionary process occurred through nostalgic reclamations of how tradeshows, exhibits, exhibitors, and attendees had a different view of tradeshow exhibits in the past, as compared to today. Participants indicated a juxtaposition of two major periods, before and after September 11, 2001. There were five major characteristics throughout these time periods that effected how the exhibit house understood tradeshow exhibits as places of learning: (a) the design primarily consisted of the aesthetic beauty of the tradeshow exhibit structure, whereas now, the designs consist of developing multifaceted experiences where an aesthetically pleasing exhibit is expected; (b) the process started with the design team, whereas now, the process begins with the marketing team; (c) the message, years ago, was delivered by the salesperson, whereas now, it is the actual exhibit that facilitates the staffers' delivery of the message; (d) the activity in the past consisted of exhibitors simply distributing as many brochures as they could; currently, exhibitors provide engaging interactive experiences; and (e) tradeshow attendees once consisted of owners and high-level executives that were real decision makers, but more mid-level managers are now roaming the tradeshow floor.

The second major theme that emerged from this study was in relation to attendees' learning facilitated by tradeshow exhibit experiences; participants as those that had a vibe and communicated ideas to which attendees were found to be connected understood these experiences. It was believed that learning in the tradeshow exhibit is a process through which the exhibit environment can potentially change tradeshow attendees by actively engaging them in experiences that allow them to construct their own meaning based on the application of information, knowledge, and skills. By attendees being actively engaged in the tradeshow experience, they in turn cause changes to the exhibit atmosphere, making it a place of learning.

The third major theme in relation to tradeshow exhibits and learning emerged as one in which exhibits had the potential to facilitate a transaction process, which was thought to lead to a possible sale. Research participants from the exhibit house under study agreed that tradeshow exhibits have the potential to stimulate new needs for attendees, if they had not come to the tradeshow event with an established purpose. This established purpose was believed to be the foundation of the learning experience in the tradeshow exhibit. The attendee learning experience in the tradeshow exhibit was in turn believed to be the foundation that should lead to an eventual informed purchasing decision.

This transaction process was seen as transferable, meaning that if an attendee came to the tradeshow with a purpose, and he or she experienced exhibits that facilitate attendee learning, this information should be able to be transferred to inform fellow colleagues. This transference of information indicated by most participants is important, as the attendee that attends the tradeshow is often not the final decision-makers.

Therefore, tradeshow exhibits that facilitate attendee learning, establish a foundation for an informed purchasing decision.

The last major theme that emerged from the analysis of data in this study was that tradeshow exhibits were developed by the marketing team at the exhibit house under study, and taking a tradeshow exhibit program from concept to completion requires many people's involvement with a wide range of skillsets working together. While all these skillsets bear some responsibility in developing tradeshow exhibit programs, all participants in this study believed that the marketing team shouldered "the lion's share" of the conceptual development in creating the experiential qualities that make tradeshow exhibits places of learning. However, despite valiant efforts through market research, it was clear that the marketing team was unprepared to adequately address the learning process of the tradeshow exhibit experience.

Through further analysis of collected data and to respond to Research Question 2 of this case study, the following strategies and procedures to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits were identified: (a) Meaningful Conversation Using Different Communication Channels, (b) Demonstrations as a Format for Learning, and (c) Digital Media as an Interactive Learning Experience.

The first major strategy mentioned by participants was meaningful conversation. Learning through meaningful conversation between exhibit staff and attendees should not only be a priority for exhibitors, but if attendees do indeed have the desire to learn at a tradeshow, they too should have the primary objective to participate in meaningful conversations in the exhibits through their own self-directedness. In other words, for meaningful conversation, both parties need to make it a priority.

The second major strategy mentioned by participants was demonstrations. For years, demonstrations have been the basic format for learning in tradeshow exhibits. All participants from the exhibit house under study believed that a space dedicated to demonstrations in the tradeshow exhibit provide the potential for attendees' learning to occur. One of the ways to get attendees to learn was to show them, let them practice, and allow them to make their own conclusions about the results. Using demonstrations to facilitate learning allows attendees to participate either as industry practitioners or as observers.

The last major strategy that participants thought promoted tradeshow exhibits as places of learning was digital media. Digital media has become more predominant throughout the years in tradeshow exhibits. In this study, all participants acknowledged learning opportunities were created by the confluence of digital media employed through computers, tablets, or monitors in tradeshow exhibits. While digital media was identified as a popular strategy to promote tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, digital media also has its potential challenges. It was believed that tradeshow events are saturated with technology, often making it difficult for attendees to separate the wheat from the chaff when it comes to meaningful information and learning. With that said, it was also suggested that a procedure to mitigate this confusion is to have staff members from the exhibiting organization drive the digital media interactive experience.

Discussion

This research study is the first of its kind, as it focused on understanding tradeshow exhibits specifically as places of learning. The aim was to better understand how tradeshow exhibits could effectively facilitate learning through the application of

various strategies, procedures, and resources. A discussion follows of main research findings in relation to the review of literature.

Assertion 1: Defining Learning in the Tradeshow Exhibit

In discussing tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, the first topic that needs to be discussed is learning. The existing tradeshow related literature purposely or inadvertently does not often directly use the word “learning” and/or does not adequately address what is meant by learning in a tradeshow (Alberca-Oliver, Rodriguez-Oromendia, & Parte-Esteban, 2015; Blythe, 2015; Bonoma, 1983; Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006; Gopalakrishna & Lilien, 1995; Hansen, 2004; Herbig, Ohara, & Palumbo, 1997; Lampel & Meyer, 2005; Rosson & Seringhaus, 1995). The existing literature seemingly does not often use the term “learning” presumably, because defining learning can prove complex, as the term is quite elusive, compounds many variables, and can be inferred through many perspectives. For instance, Hilgard and Bower (1966) concluded that, “It (learning) is extremely difficult to formulate a satisfactory definition of learning so as to include all the activities and processes which we wish to include, and eliminate all those which we wish to exclude” (p. 6).

Furthermore, Burton (1963) characterized learning as a “change in the individual, due to the interaction of that individual, and his environment, which fills a need and makes him more capable of dealing adequately with his environment” (p. 7). This idea was similar to Skinner’s (1968) treatment of learning in the field of psychology, as essentially “change due to experience” (p. 10). These learning theorists see learning as a process through which behavior is changed in some way through a sequential and

repetitive systematic process. Knowles' (2014) defined learning more broadly as “the process of gaining knowledge and expertise” (p. 17).

This case study argued for a broader definition of learning within the tradeshow exhibit, similar to that of Knowles. The findings in this research study support all previous theoretical understandings of adult learning, such as that of andragogy (Knowles, 1968), the theory of margin (McClusky, 1963), three dimensions of learning (Illeris, 2002), as well as Jarvis's learning process (Jarvis, 1987). In this case study, learning in the context of tradeshow exhibits was not only interpreted as present in the tradeshow exhibit, but also broadly defined as a process, of understanding, of thinking, of rethinking, of listening, and of conversing face-to-face, in an environment that facilitates experiences that allow attendees to construct their own meaning based on the application of information, knowledge, and skills. This definition of learning in the tradeshow exhibit represents the findings from this study; as well as incorporates a broad and balanced understanding of learning that includes, but is not limited to, passive reception, transactional, experiential, and active construction.

This definition of learning in the tradeshow exhibit illustrates that learning is indeed a key process of the phenomenon. The following definition illustrates additional research needs to be completed to further understand the learning process of the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon.

Assertion 2: Learning is a Key Process of Tradeshow Exhibits

A number of research studies have addressed why tradeshow attendees visit tradeshow events. This literature related to tradeshow attendees has widely accepted that they attend events to effectively gather information (Borghini, Golfetto, & Rinallo, 2006;

Borghini, Golfetto and Rinallo, 2014; Golfetto, 2004; Rosson & Seringhaus, 1995; Tanner, Chonko & Ponzurick, 2008). Rosson and Seringhaus (1995), for example, identified attendees as needing short-term purchasing information, as well as information that is more long-term in nature. This attendee learning at tradeshow events can be explained through the non-sequential mixture of moving throughout the tradeshow event and talking with other members from the same group of people that share a common craft or profession (Hansen, 1996; Knowles, 1980). Research findings from this investigation confirm that tradeshow events are events of learning in which there are opportunities for the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Furthermore, based on the participants' perceptions, much of the attendee learning at the tradeshow event occurs in the tradeshow exhibits, which could be considered important places of attendee learning. This in turn means that learning is a major process of the tradeshow exhibit experience, and should be treated as such.

Declaring that learning is a key process of the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon does not imply that learning did not previously occur in tradeshow exhibits or that it simply occurred serendipitously. Rather, it is quite the opposite. This conceivably means that all learning was perceived as largely invisible, or the term learning itself was associated with more formal education and training settings with a guided curriculum, such as universities.

This case study reaffirms that tradeshow events are events where learning occurs. This research builds on that understanding and suggests that the learning at tradeshow events has become increasingly more important in the 21st Century. Therefore, this research study adds that the academization of tradeshow exhibits was collectively perceived as

something relatively new. As learning becomes relevant at tradeshow events, the exhibits that makeup tradeshow events will need to fill that increasing demand, putting additional responsibility on exhibit house professionals.

Assertion 3: The Call for Meaningful Learning Experiences in Tradeshow Exhibits

For many, tradeshow events are the backbones of innovation. Jammed in these exciting events are hundreds, sometimes thousands, of tradeshow exhibits from across the globe. Each exhibit is a place with the potential to renew old partnerships and make new ones, to communicate a brand, to have fun, and to sell. The literature reviewed and findings from this research study overwhelmingly indicate that tradeshow exhibits have the potential to be places that facilitate meaningful attendee learning experiences, but these sources also indicate that producing tradeshow exhibits as places of learning is still in its infancy. Therefore, more emphasis is needed into understanding the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon, specifically as places of learning.

In this regard, Borghini, Golfetto, and Rinallo (2004) suggested that attendees that visited tradeshow events were involved in different types of “learning expeditions” (p. 9). Unquestionably, the findings in this case study also indicate that attendees visited tradeshow events with the expectation to learn. For example, the Director of Design said, “Attendees’ expectations now have grown from they’ll learn a little bit and get a brochure, to having an experience and getting some real tips and tricks about things they can apply and should be thinking about this next year.”

Therefore, while tradeshow events are understood as incidents that facilitate learning, the full potential of tradeshow exhibits that make up the event as formats for learning is far from being realized. Thus, the need for all people involved in the planning,

designing, engineering, production, and execution of tradeshow exhibits to be aware of and knowledgeable about how to produce tradeshow exhibits as places of learning is paramount in the tradeshow events' ability to continue to be meaningful occasions that facilitate learning.

The call for meaningful learning experiences in tradeshow exhibits is important for practitioners because the literature suggests that the meaningful learning experiences that occur on the tradeshow floor are believed by many in the tradeshow field as possibly one of the main reasons why tradeshow events still continue today and thrive in the 21st century (Damer, Gold, & de Bruin, 2000; Geigenmuller, 2010). Participants in this case study expressed on many occasions similar sentiments about the increasingly important role learning plays in the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon, but at the same time the owner of the exhibit house under study said, "Learning is a component of the exhibit experience that is still in its infancy." Furthermore, findings in this study determine that answering the call for meaningful learning experiences in tradeshow exhibits is about more than just showcasing cool new products, services, and processes; rather, it is about purposefully developing tradeshow exhibits as places of learnings through meaningful face-to-face human connection.

Among the possible strategies and procedures to promote tradeshow exhibits as places for learning, participants in this study mentioned meaningful conversations, demonstrations, and digital media as the most relevant ones. In regards to meaningful conversations, for example, Rinallo, Borghini, and Golfetto (2010) also highlighted that tradeshow offer people that share a common craft or profession a neutral ground for attendees to meet with exhibit staff and other attendees to have important conversations

about the industry in general, or more specific knowledge about products and suppliers. However, Rinallo et al. (2010) primarily associated conversation as an important driver for relational experiences, but did not directly associate conversation with attendees' learning as it was found in this case study. What is still unknown is the deeper complexities of effectively implementing conversations in tradeshow exhibit experiences.

In this study, another strategy that was perceived to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits was demonstrations. Regarding this matter, Rinallo et al. (2010) found that attendees wanted to primarily see and examine products; furthermore, on average, 25% of exhibitors hosted activities in their exhibit, which included demonstrations, social events, and entertainment events. This research study supports the findings by these authors in regards to tradeshow exhibitors strategically employing demonstrations on the tradeshow floor. Based on participants' opinions in this case study, the exhibit house under study has effectively used demonstrations for years to facilitate attendees' learning, but a deeper understanding of demonstrations within tradeshow exhibit experiences is still needed.

In addition, many participants in this case study mentioned the importance of using digital media. In this regard, Bathelt, Golfetto, and Rinallo (2014) also suggested that digital media technology could extend the scope of attendee experiences and access to information beyond the walls of the tradeshow exhibit. The findings in this case study also indicate that digital media has become prominently used throughout the years in tradeshow exhibits. All participants from the exhibit house acknowledged learning opportunities were created by the confluence of digital media employed through computers, tablets, or monitors in tradeshow exhibits. Therefore, as presented in the

literature, findings in this research study also indicate that a call for meaningful learning experiences is needed to realize the full potential of the tradeshow exhibits that make up the larger event.

Implications

Findings from this case study contribute to the tradeshow field, particularly those individuals that help plan, design, engineer, produce, and execute tradeshow exhibit programs. Results of this investigation support the argument by the existing literature that tradeshows are events where learning occurs. To adequately fulfill the potential of these events, this research study puts out a call that learning in the tradeshow exhibits is vital for those involved in the process. Furthermore, this case study provided three practical strategies: Meaningful Conversation Using Different Communication Channels, Demonstrations as a Format for Learning, and Digital Media as an Interactive Learning Experience. to promote attendees' learning through tradeshow exhibit experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Answering the call for learning in tradeshow exhibits based on the conceptual themes from this research study requires that individuals who plan, design, engineer, produce, and execute tradeshow exhibit programs embrace the learning process. Not only should these individuals embrace the learning process in tradeshow exhibits, but they should also make sure that someone involved in the process understands learning. This could mean hiring someone with an educational background in teaching and learning, or training someone to better understand the learning process. This research study provides an understanding of tradeshow exhibits as places of learning, and found that while

learning may have occurred in tradeshow exhibits in the past, it has taken an evolution for the learning process to be strategically implemented into tradeshow exhibits.

This research study indicates areas or other processes related to the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon that are not directly explored or that fall outside the boundaries of this study related to learning, such as aesthetics, marketing, entertainment, networking, and sales. In the future, it is important that all of these areas be researched independently and together. In short, this research study is a call for more research on the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon in the United States and globally. Through this research process, one of the areas found to be interesting for further investigation is the idea of an informed purchasing decision, as it became increasingly clear that learning is often associated with formal education, such as college, and buying is often associated with business.

Conclusion

For adults in the industry in the United States, tradeshow events are vital for learning. Every year, thousands of associations and other organizations bring together in one city thousands of their members from across the states, nations, and the world to celebrate their industry, to renew old friendships and make new ones, and to setup a temporary marketplace for new and exciting innovations. But unquestionably, the full potential of these tradeshow events as formats for learning is far from being realized, largely because those involved in the process to develop the exhibits do not adequately understand the learning discipline and have not adequately embraced tradeshow exhibits as places for learning.

This research study advances a novel conceptualization of the exhibits that makeup tradeshow events and their role as places of learning by providing evidence that

learning is a major process of the tradeshow exhibit experience. This new perspective on the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon has been fundamentally absent in the literature, hence the significance of this study.

This study examined how industry professionals perceived and described tradeshow exhibits in relation to learning, as well as explored what strategies and procedures industry professionals at the participating exhibit house implemented to promote learning in tradeshow exhibits. Main themes emerged from the analysis of data collected from multiple sources. These themes allowed answering to the two research questions guiding this investigation.

The full potential of tradeshows as formats for learning is possible, but only if the tradeshow exhibits that are developed are truly places of learning. If this call for learning were answered by tradeshow exhibitors, the larger tradeshow event would better resemble a science center than a marketplace. Based on the findings from this case study, if the full potential of tradeshows as formats for learning is realized, attendees not only will acquire awareness and knowledge on a specific product, but more importantly, they would be adequately prepared to make informed purchasing decisions, which could result in more potential earning for exhibitors.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Researcher: Sachel Josefson

Contact: Sachel.Josefson@und.edu (218) 209-1064

Department: Teaching & Learning (PhD Candidate)

Purpose of the Study and Invitation to Participate

You are being asked to participate in a research project based on the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. The purpose of this study is to understand tradeshow exhibits as places of learning. As a participant, you will be asked to set a time and location with the researcher. It is estimated that interviews will last between 1-2 hours. If you are willing, the interview will be audio recorded for the purpose of review and transcription. The researcher may also ask you to arrange times to be observed in your natural surroundings within the case.

Risks and Confidentiality

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. No real identifier will be used at any time. All parts of your interviews will be coded with a pseudonym for the purpose of review and in the final report. In addition, to make sure that the information shared in the final report is correct, you will be offered a summary of interview and observation comments in order to check for accuracy.

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study. However, if you feel uncomfortable you may ask to stop or choose not to answer a particular question. Your participation is voluntary and your decision to not participate or to discontinue your participation at any time will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

Benefits

An in-depth description of tradeshow exhibits as places of learning has the potential to increase understanding about the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon.

Statement of Research

The researcher conducting this study is Sachel Josefson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Sachel Josefson at the information above. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or if you have any concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279. Please call this number if you cannot reach the researcher, or you wish to talk with someone else.

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Participant's Name _____

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher (Sachel Josefson)

Date

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Tradeshow Exhibits as Places of Learning

Interview Code: _____

I. Audio recorder tested

II. Verify consent form has been signed.

III. Review purpose of the interview:

The purpose of this study is to understand the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. It is estimated that the interview will last between 1-2 hours. If you are willing, this interview will be audio recorded for the purpose of review and transcription. No names or identifier will be used.

IV. About this interview:

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

V. Demographic Information

1. Sex: Male or Female
2. What is Your Age:
3. Education Completed: High School Diploma / Associate Degree / Bachelor Degree / Master's Degree / Doctorate Degree
4. Department: Management / Design / Sales / Marketing
5. Number of Years Employed at LES:

VI. Interview Questions

The interview will start more general, as the researcher does not want to lead participants.

1. Tell me about a typical tradeshow exhibit at LES.
2. What are you likely to do first in the process of designing (marketing, selling, or managing) a typical exhibit at LES?
3. Suppose you were responsible for the LES exhibit at the next major tradeshow related event, such as ExhibitorLive 2016. What would it be like? What would you do? What would you like attendees to know when they leave the exhibit? How would you ensure that attendees left the exhibit with the knowledge or skills you intended? How would you ensure that attendees left the exhibit satisfied?
 - a. If the interview participant has actually been responsible for a previous LES exhibit, elicit descriptions of what it was actually like for that participant.
4. Some people will say that the sole purpose of all tradeshow exhibits should be to sell. What would you tell them?
 - a. If the interview participant agrees that the sole purpose of all tradeshow exhibits should be to sell, then ask, did you know that with the exception of retail-oriented buyer tradeshow, actual sales are very rare on the tradeshow floor (Alessandra, Underation & Zimmerman, 2008). What are your thoughts about that?
5. Would you describe what you think the ideal tradeshow exhibit would be like?

Once the interview participant mentions learning, knowing, or acquiring skills in the tradeshow exhibit, the researcher will ask:

1. What is your opinion as to whether learning occurs within the exhibits at tradeshow?
2. Describe an example of how a tradeshow exhibit facilitated an attendee learning experience.
3. How do you feel about tradeshow exhibits as places where learning occurs?
(Reword of question #6)
4. If an exhibitor wants attendees to learn, how do you as a designer (marketer, manager, or sales representative) approach the situation?
5. If an exhibitor wants attendees to learn, how do you as a designer (marketer, manager, or sales representative) ensure that learning occurs within tradeshow exhibit?
6. What conditions influence attendees' acquisition of knowledge and skills in tradeshow exhibits?
7. Think of strategies that LES implements to promote learning within tradeshow exhibits. I would like you to tell me about these experiences.
8. Think of procedures that LES implements to promote learning within tradeshow exhibits. I would like you to tell me about these experiences.
9. What are some common characteristics or keywords to describe the learning that occurs in tradeshow exhibits?

Possible probe language:

1. Tell me more about . . .
2. Walk me through . . .
3. You mentioned _____, tell me more about this.

4. You mentioned _____, how would you define this?

VI. Thank participant

VII. Assure them of confidentiality

VIII. Remind about potential follow-up

VIII.I Member-checking

IX. Ask for any final questions of participant

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Tradeshow Exhibits as Places of Learning

Interview Code: _____

I. Audio recorder tested

II. Verify consent form has been signed.

III. Review purpose of the interview:

The purpose of this study is to understand the tradeshow exhibit phenomenon. It is estimated that the interview will last between 1-2 hours. If you are willing, this interview will be audio recorded for the purpose of review and transcription. No names or identifier will be used.

IV. About this Focus Group:

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

VI. Interview Questions

The interview will start more general, as the researcher does not want to lead participants.

1. Tell me about a typical tradeshow exhibit at LES.
2. What are you likely to do first in the process of designing (marketing, selling, or managing) a typical exhibit at LES?
3. Suppose you were responsible for the LES exhibit at the next major tradeshow related event, such as ExhibitorLive 2016. What would it be like?

4. What would you do? What would you like attendees to know when they leave the exhibit? How would you ensure that attendees left the exhibit with the knowledge or skills you intended? How would you ensure that attendees left the exhibit satisfied?
 - a. If the interview participant has actually been responsible for a previous LES exhibit, elicit descriptions of what it was actually like for that participant.
 5. Some people will say that the sole purpose of all tradeshow exhibits should be to sell. What would you tell them?
 - a. If the interview participant agrees that the sole purpose of all tradeshow exhibits should be to sell, then ask, did you know that with the exception of retail-oriented buyer tradeshows, actual sales are very rare on the tradeshow floor (Alessandra, Underation & Zimmerman, 2008). What are your thoughts about that?
 6. Would you describe what you think the ideal tradeshow exhibit would be like?
- Once the interview participant mentions learning, knowing, or acquiring skills in the tradeshow exhibit, the researcher will ask:
1. What is your opinion as to whether learning occurs within the exhibits at tradeshows?
 2. Describe an example of how a tradeshow exhibit facilitated an attendee learning experience.
 3. How do you feel about tradeshow exhibits as places where learning occurs?
- (Reword of question #6)

4. If an exhibitor wants attendees to learn, how do you as a designer (marketer, manager, or sales representative) approach the situation?
5. If an exhibitor wants attendees to learn, how do you as a designer (marketer, manager, or sales representative) ensure that learning occurs within tradeshow exhibit?
6. What conditions influence attendees' acquisition of knowledge and skills in tradeshow exhibits?
7. Think of strategies that LES implements to promote learning within tradeshow exhibits. I would like you to tell me about these experiences.
8. Think of procedures that LES implements to promote learning within tradeshow exhibits. I would like you to tell me about these experiences.
9. What are some common characteristics or keywords to describe the learning that occurs in tradeshow exhibits?

Possible probe language:

1. Tell me more about . . .
2. Walk me through . . .
3. You mentioned _____, tell me more about this.
4. You mentioned _____, how would you define this?

VI. Thank participant

VII. Assure them of confidentiality

VIII. Remind about potential follow-up

VIII.I Member-checking

IX. Ask for any final questions of participant

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