



Digital transformation in the event industry – answering the competence needs of event professionals with Hybrid Ninja

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Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences
Degree Programme in Aviation and Tourism Business
Strategic Thinking and Leadership
Master's Thesis
2023

Abstract

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Degree Master of Hospitality Management
Report/Thesis Title Digital transformation in the event industry – answering the competence needs of event professionals with Hybrid Ninja
Number of pages and appendices 60 + 3
<p>This thesis is written as a part of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences development project Hybrid Ninja, that is developing new study modules aimed for event industry professionals and adults seeking new career paths in the event industry. The subject of the thesis is a result of conversations and needs assessments with the thesis supervisor and the commissioning party, and it is created to support Hybrid Ninja's product development. The aim of the thesis is to create development proposals for the training modules, and explore, how the Hybrid Ninja project helps fill the hybrid- and virtual production competence gap for event professionals. In the introduction, the background of the thesis is explained.</p> <p>First the thesis takes the reader to familiarise with the phenomenon of digital transformation and digitalisation, more specifically in the event industry in Finland. Then the text moves on to exploring the topics of events and their digitalisation, and the challenges the changing industry causes to people working the field, the event professionals. Finally the important competencies and traits of these event professionals are summarised and the current training and study possibilities of events, especially hybrid- and virtual events are explored.</p> <p>In the next chapters, first the approach and methodology of the thesis is explained, then moving on to presenting the Hybrid Ninja project and the pilot project related to it, with the thesis process running the reader through the timeline of writing the thesis and thought processes behind it. To finish, the results of the thesis are presented, which are followed by the discussion where the author meditates on the validity and reliability of the whole process and the results, reflecting on the journey and time spent with the assignment.</p>
Keywords Hybrid event, Virtual event, Event industry, Event production, Digitalisation, Digital transformation, Training, Competence, Competence gap, Service Design

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1 Introduction

The development and spread of technology in every area of life, various trends and world situations are things that shape people's preferences, spending habits, possibilities, free time, and how they work. Especially during the past three years, due to the COVID19- pandemic, everyday life, work and free time experienced major changes, and people and companies had to make the leap to the digital world to keep things running. These developments and changes also affect the events industry, whose digital revolution was accelerated by the pandemic, or at least created more awareness of the possibilities of digital events for both consumers and event producers themselves, as events moved to different digital platforms as they could not be experienced safely live.

To successfully and effectively make use of the new possibilities and dimensions the digitalisation of the event industry opens for event producers, they need to learn how to use their existing knowledge and professional skills in this new environment, and how to utilise the new tools digitalisation offers them. The transition to the hybrid- and virtual event productions offers both possibilities and challenges to the event professionals and has created a need for new study- and training programs for professionals both already in and entering the working life.

To answer these competence needs and new challenges of the event world, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences has launched a Service Design project called Hybrid Ninja. The project develops new training aimed for Finnish event professionals, that focuses on hybrid- and virtual events and their production. This thesis will follow along a part of the ongoing development project, help in the service development process, and create understanding of the phenomena related to the subject, resulting to development proposals and meditation on the applicability of the new training.

1.1 The delimitation of the thesis and research questions

This thesis is written as a part of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences project called Hybrid Ninja, that is developing new study modules aimed for event industry professionals and adults seeking new career paths in the event industry. The subject of the thesis is a result of conversations and needs assessments with the thesis supervisor and the commissioning party, and it is created to support Hybrid Ninja's product development.

The aim of the thesis is to further develop virtual and hybrid event training for event professionals, in support of Hybrid Ninja, and as a result to form recommendations on how to develop the training for event professionals. The work also aims to find out, how can the Hybrid Ninja project help fill the hybrid- and virtual production skill gap for event production professionals.

To reach the goal of the thesis and answer these research questions, the author has taken part in piloting two of the five Hybrid Ninja study modules in development, conducted interviews and collected feedback of the pilot. The pilot project and the company it was implemented in, will both be described in more length on the upcoming parts of the thesis. As the thesis is written to aid in developing a service and to find recommendations for Hybrid Ninja service product development, it is done using service design as an approach. The research methods used to conduct this thesis are mainly interviews and feedback collected during the pilot and benchmarking the current situation of hybrid- and virtual event production training in Finland. The service design process and used methodology will be opened in further detail later in the chapter *Thesis approach and methodology*, page 23.

In this thesis, the writer takes a look on the digitalisation of the event industry as a trend and how it affects the work and needed skillsets of the people working in it, to create a better understanding of the current situation and possible future of event professionals. This understanding together with acquired data and using service design processes helps formulating and bringing plausibility to the development recommendations. The delimitation of this thesis is to apply to the Finnish field of events and the preparatory education in Finland, as the Hybrid Ninja project that it is tied to, is currently mainly targeted to an event professional that will be working and taking part in the Hybrid Ninja studies in Finnish, and in Finland.

1.2 The commissioning party

Hybrid Ninja is a project led by Haaga-Helia UAS, that aims to train event business professionals in the field of hybrid- and virtual event production, improving their competence levels in the evolving industry. Haaga-Helia provides degree programmes, such as studies leading to a bachelor's and master's degree, and non-degree programmes, such as studies in the open University of the applied sciences and themed courses deepening professional knowledge, aimed to professionals already in work life (Haaga-Helia 2022a). By the time of writing the thesis, the five-part study module is planned to be a part of Haaga-Helia's selection of non-degree programmes, offered amongst the selection of courses aimed for people already in working life, and for example as a part of courses catered by the employment coaching services, as the Hybrid Ninja's online- and hybrid event study modules are designed to help professionals already working in the event industry, or adult learners wishing to further their careers, learn to combine digital and traditional event production tools and grow confidently in the everchanging and digitalising field. (Haaga-Helia 2022b).

The Hybrid Ninja project is created as a response for the identified need for competences and additional training amongst the event industry professionals especially in the wake of the large-scale changes in the event industry trends, digitalisation and live-event standstill caused by the Covid19-

pandemic. The project produces a set of hybrid- and virtual event management training modules and certificates of competence as of proof of education and competency. Hybrid Ninja is a service design project, that utilises and blends in with Haaga-Helia's networks and other projects, strengthening not only the university's reputation and visibility in the event industry and service design, but also further utilisation of the results and future cooperation by bringing experts from different fields together. (Haaga-Helia 2022b).

The Hybrid Ninja training has five modules, that are designed to guide and introduce the participant gradually to more complex and specialised information on event production – live, virtual and hybrid. The training is to be done individually at one's own phase and time online, on a platform called Howspace. The platform contains theory, virtual teamwork and collaboration and individual tasks. The modules three, four and five do have meetings as well, where the participants are required to arrive at a physical classroom to workshop, teamwork and for example try together creating a hybrid event for the student group. The first module is aimed especially for those, who are greener in the event industry and do not yet have a broad understanding of the field, or those already working on the field but wanting to refresh or update for example their vocabulary or the theory behind the basics of their work. The second module is focused more on the customer experience and how to create successful events based on Service Design approach and customer centric thinking and processes. The main topics are reached in modules three and four, as in the module three the virtual events and their production is learned about, and on the next module the focus is in familiarising with the hybrid event features and tools. In the last, fifth, module the participant studies about the events as a business and familiarises or revises topics such as budgeting, official regulations and security. The table below introduces the modules in more definition, according to Hybrid Ninja course descriptions on Howspace, the platform the modules are currently available on.

Table 1. The Hybrid Ninja training study modules in detail (adapted from the Hybrid Ninja training introduction on Howspace 2023)

MODULE 1	MODULE 2	MODULE 3	MODULE 4	MODULE 5
Event production basics	The recipe for customer experience success	Virtual event	Hybrid event	Events as a business
The goal is to understand or recall	The goal is to deepen information about	The goal is to understand the implementation and	The goal is to familiarise the special features of	The goal is to understand how to make the event a

MODULE 1	MODULE 2	MODULE 3	MODULE 4	MODULE 5
Event production basics	The recipe for customer experience success	Virtual event	Hybrid event	Events as a business
the basics of event production.	customer understanding, its collection, and its utilisation in scripting the event.	technology of virtual events.	the implementation of hybrid events, emphasizing the consideration of two different audiences and the means of participation.	business-supporting part. In addition, the module introduces official regulations, accessibility, and safety.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry understanding and terminology • Event goal • From goals to budgeting, metrics/analytics • Event format selection • Production and project management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Target group understanding • Customer experience, Service path • Gamification • Inclusion and engagement • Event script 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platform selection • Content production and the importance of facilitation • Production roles • Technology • Performers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinating live and online • Spatial solutions • Creating an enjoyable event • Tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official regulations • Security • Accessibility • Automation • Business logic, Business understanding

Hybrid Ninja value proposition, according to the training production team's management tool Miro-board, is to provide training for event producers, event professionals, so that the participant can create better events and expand their skills, answering the competence needs of the field. The training also helps the participant to understand how to decide about the choice of event format and how to help the customer arrive at the right choice as well. The participants' understanding of the different aspects of organizing a hybrid event has increased after the training, and the participant is able to produce a hybrid event with the help of the lessons learned in the training.

The value proposition is met, when the student can pick the content most interesting and necessary to them, and participants can choose to either start from the very basics of the event production studies or pick the modules discussing virtual- and hybrid events and the more nitty-gritty business side of things, such as the business understanding and analytics in module five.

Part of the Hybrid Ninja study module development work is piloting the course and its materials with test groups and collecting feedback from the event professionals attending in the pilot studies. Two out of the total of five study modules were piloted in the process of writing this thesis, and they were built and facilitated by the Hybrid Ninja project team. The pilot was carried out with the help of the author at an events and travel production company, that will be called the pilot company in this thesis, where a small group of event producers of various career paths and experiences took part to the pilot. More of this process and its results in later chapters of this thesis.

1.3 The pilot company

The pilot company, which participated in this prototyping, is a Finnish travel and events company that manages several brands offering consumers and corporate clients various travel and event products and services, often tailored by the clients' needs. They offer services for both Finnish and international clientele, and their event and travel specialists produce mostly conferences and seminars besides incentive and recreational events and travel services. The services include organizing events and experiences of all sizes, as well as arranging flights, transportation, and accommodation, and preparing related activities. The company does not offer hybrid- and virtual event productions, and most if not all of the production teams do not have experience in the hybrid- and virtual world of event production, which makes this company a good case for the pilot and testing the study modules developed for the Hybrid Ninja project, as the professionals can bring out their expertise in the event field, while having the learning experience of an actual student in the course, providing important feedback and point of views to the Hybrid Ninja development team. The company also was thought to bring diversity to the already existing data, as the focus has been on purely event companies, and in the pilot company many of their productions may fall on the grey area of event- and travel productions.

The Hybrid Ninja prototype was piloted in the company during October and November of 2022 for a group of four producers and two managers, and especially the producers were actively participating in the project and giving feedback. The managers did not have time to focus on the study module prototypes as much, but they did take part in giving the interviews and feedbacks. The group consisted of Finnish event- and travel professionals of different educational and work backgrounds, with a variety of years in the event field. More of the pilot group, their backgrounds, and their input in the chapter 3.4. *Service Prototyping: The Hybrid Ninja -pilot.*

2 Digital transformation of the event industry in Finland

As the world around us is constantly changing, now not least with the new dimension opened by various technologies and the Internet, as well as various global crises. Changes require learning new things, applying old knowledge, and adapting to the present and the future. This adaptation and change take place on a personal level, and more broadly in different business sectors, creating a need for new skills and expertise. The change also affects the event field of business and its professionals, and the disruption in business was highlighted due to the COVID-19 pandemic that hit the industry in 2020. The pandemic was in many ways a catalyst in speeding up changes and solidifying new elements and processes in the event field, as it forced professionals to re-think how they could keep working and still provide attractive, productive, and high-quality events to people. The change, however, was already there before the pandemic, more or less recognized by professionals and their companies. Trends and megatrends have been pointing to different possible changes and disruptions in the industry, and agile companies have less trouble adjusting to the trends and predicting them.

To better understand what the project Hybrid Ninja is all about and to create valid recommendations on how to develop training for event professionals, it is important to comprehend the digital transformation and its effects, the current and possible future direction of the event industry in the digitalising world and the professionals working in it. This chapter is written these goals in mind, to lay a foundation of understanding of the most important terms and phenomena around the topic, to be able to later answer the research questions and reach the aim of the work. First by understanding the megatrend of digital transformation that is changing how we live and work, day to day. Then diving more into the digital transformation of the event industry, and how it affects the people working in the field, the focus being on the event business, professionals, and training in Finland.

2.1 Digital transformation

One of the most significant megatrends globally has been the rapid development of technology, with it the spurt of digitalisation and digital transformation in the 21st century. Digital technologies have changed our daily lives: the way we spend free time, consume culture and information, execute daily tasks, work, and maintain social relationships. Digitalisation and digital transformation affect different fields of business and service, as we are going through a transitional period from the traditional ways of daily operation and problem solving to new strategies that involve the use of new digital technologies and applications. The effects of the megatrends have penetrated our world so deeply, digitalisation has become what is called the fourth industrial revolution, which is described as a fusion of technologies between the physical and digital world. (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 48; Salama 2021, 246).

While the terms digitalisation and digital transformation are most probably familiar to the reader, their difference in meaning may still be unclear to some. Digitisation is also a term that may often be confused with digitalisation, while it is only the first steps towards digitalisation, as digitisation is changing from analogue to digital form, without changing the content or process itself (Gartner 2023). Digitalisation then again is the use and employment of digital technologies and skills to transform social and business infrastructures and processes, moving and adapting interactions, processes, and businesses to digital platforms and roles (Bloomberg 2018). To take things further, digital transformation is the strategic process where for example an organisation implements digitalisation projects, such as digitalising processes and tools, and adapts to the digitalised environment by for example training employees (Bloomberg 2018).

According to Salama (2021, 244) the digital transformation started already in the 1980's, as the technology, the Internet of Things and automatization entered people's lives at workplaces and homes. Now, at its simplest, digital transformation in 21st century can mean the blending of personal and corporate information environments and integrating the transformative effect of new digital technologies such as social, mobile, analytics, cloud, and the Internet. A broader definition describes it as the integration of digital technologies and business processes into a digital economy, and an even more detailed understanding covers the use of these technologies to influence three organisational dimensions: externally with an emphasis on digitally enhancing the customer experience and changing its lifecycle; internally influencing business activities, decision-making processes, and organisational structures; and holistically, where all business divisions and functions are affected, often leading to completely new business models (Salama 2021, 243)

While the development has been already ongoing hand in hand with the development of technology, the COVID19-pandemic sped up and established the process in many areas, as it forced an increased demand and need for remote connections, digitised processes, and digitalisation of for example work and social connections and events in spaces that had not been digitalised before, or at least at the same volume (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 48). Digital transformation is an increasingly important topic – and challenge - for organisations, as well as understanding it is not only about investing in digital technology but also organisations restructuring themselves to adapt and enable developments that exploit technology and bring their businesses to new growth. This applies also to the event industry, presenting digital solutions to optimise the event management processes and shifting events from live to virtual settings. (Salama 2021, 242).

While digital transformation opens doors for many possibilities, there are, however, struggles and challenges that comes with it. Law-making and regulations have developed slower than the new

environment where people and business operate in, as it would have been difficult to predict effects and possibilities of the Internet. In 2023 we are in a situation where a significant part of people's daily activities take place in a space that is largely dominated by a few large multinational technology companies, and the distorted competitive structure and the absence of game rules in the data economy may be harmful for both people and societies (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 48). In Europe, new legislation and rules related to digital services are created at an accelerating pace, aiming to ensure consumers access to safe digital products and services, and that transparency and control over the data collected from them increases (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 49). The issues are not only about regulating the new environment, but also ecological, as the new technology requires energy and raw materials. The issues affect people also on personal level, as for example in working life not being able to develop the right management and technology skills to cope and achieve the transformational effects of new digital technologies in companies may cause dissatisfaction and challenges in leadership and institutional level, such as workers' attitudes, and innovation fatigue (Salama 2021, 243-244).

2.2 Events and digital transformation

There are many trends developing and changing the event business field, such as circular economy-thinking and consumers being increasingly socially-, economically-, and environmentally conscious and demanding. To profoundly discover and understand the varying spectre of the trends affecting the event industry would be impossible in this thesis, so the author is in this chapter focusing on phenomena that are directly linked to the digitalisation of the field, such as the transformation from physical to Hybrid- and Virtual events. For the sake of the context of the thesis, the author focuses mainly on describing the Hybrid- and Virtual events trends and will not, for example, tackle the ethical themes or questions surrounding them or other phenomena such as the Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Reality.

But first – what an event actually is, and what does it comprise of? The central organization of the event industry in Finland, Tapahtumateollisuus ry (2023), describes events as time- and space-bound, planned and goal-oriented occasions aimed at those whose daily routines the event is outside of. An event can be a once-in a lifetime experience or recurring, and it can take place in either physical or virtual space (Tapahtumateollisuus 2023). Events can also be used in many different situations and for different purposes and either physical or online, hence it is important to assess in what environment they would be most natural and effective to organize: is the event for example an opening of a facility, an annual celebration, a culture event, or a seminar (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 28). In addition to either physical or virtual events, a hybrid event is often a possibility, where

the participant can decide for himself whether to participate online or physically arrive at the location. Which implementation is chosen depends on the event's goals, target audiences and budget. (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 29.) The virtual and hybrid events are described in more detail in the next subchapter, *Different types of events enabled by the digital transformation*.

Roughly, events can be divided into paid and free, public- or private events, work- or leisure events, online- or physical events, or a combination of these. They can be classified according to content as well, such as sports- and cultural events, spiritual events, political events, business events, recreational events, and events related to free time or work. What they all have in common is that their planning and implementation require a wide range of skills from the creator, as each event has its own characteristics, to which special attention must be paid. (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 42.) In any type of an event, to be successful, the participant gets something for their time and feels that participation is useful and brings them value, as well as the event organizer can be satisfied with the choices made, organisation and that the purpose was fulfilled (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 84).

Table 2. Examples of different event types (adapted from Tapahtumateollisuus Ry 2023)

CONTENT	FORMAT	BUSINESS
Art, culture, entertainment	Festivals, amusement parks, fairs	Organizing events
Sports	Concerts, theater, exhibitions	Rental of event spaces
Business	Congresses, conferences	Performer and program services
Science, teaching, training	Seminars, meetings, symposiums	Event technology services, sales, and rental
Political, governmental, municipal	Parties, galas	Event construction services, sales, and rental
Religious, spiritual	Competitions, matches, tournaments	Ticket sales staff
Incentive events	Shows, markets, sales events	Ancillary services
Cultural celebrations	Opening ceremonies, launches	Planning and consulting
Private events	Demonstrations, processions	Digital event services
Other		Other special services in the event industry

As the types of events vary, there can be several target groups in an event as well, the primary being the ones the event is mainly arranged for, and the secondary target groups can be for example media representatives, company's own staff or stakeholders. When planning an event and the audience must be considered, which means accessibility, the need for interpretation, the needs of special groups and equality in the event should always be considered. (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 105.) Target groups have become more and more conscious and demanding, and the desire for convenience and responsibility may make people prefer online events. In addition, the generation

of digital natives also know how to navigate and take advantage of remote events, and as consumers they approach them in different ways than the generations before them (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 179). Customer based planning of the event is key, especially when a company organising events, or an event professional is in the process of transforming to hybrid- and virtual events for the first time. Taking diversity into account might pose both challenges and resolutions, as the operating methods from physical events may not work in a virtual setting, or the virtual setting offers new access to tools and solutions to attending an event. Digital transformation can, besides providing new solutions to accessibility, event processes and execution, increase the effectiveness and efficiency of events, as well as help implement responsibility program of a company. Digitalisation has brought various applications to events, thanks to which the invitation process, participation and networking are increasingly easier (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 69).

The use of technology and digital media enhances and provides a more immersive experience for the event goer, as they allow access to in-venue devices, such as smartphones, for more detailed content and gamification, stories, statistics, instant replays, fancams and so forth during events (Yeoman, Robertson, McMahon-Beattie, Backer & Smith 2015, 203). This has also changed what audiences, event hosts and performers may expect from the events, and what is needed from the event venues and platforms to guarantee the enjoyment of the enhanced event experience. Event venues need to provide the Internet connectivity, technological architecture, and infrastructure to support such ventures (Yeoman & al. 2015, 204). Virtual event attendees are also a rich source of data for companies, and the insight provided by the data can be used for further development projects, building brand and cultivate market and customer perspectives (Chodor & Cyranski 2021, 4).

The developments also provide a possibility to experience the event without being in any physical venue, such as beforementioned online and hybrid events. While they can be seen as competition in relation to ticket sales and attendance of a live event, they can be seen as way to greatly expand the audience for the event, and to gain more exposure. For those who cannot attend the event, they may still gain some of the event experience if it is live streamed online or if highlights are available afterwards through the organisation own website, social media or through general video platforms. (Yeoman & al. 2015, 205.) This can be further enhanced with different technologies and platforms, that increase the sense of inclusion and reality, such as live chats, Virtual Reality, 360 cameras, games that attendees can participate on, and virtual stands or, for example, participant avatars that can communicate with each other. Through such mechanisms event organisers can expand their audience, strengthen the brand image, and capitalise through social media by creating stories and imagery around the event, which can encourage and attract those not attending to join in the future events. (Yeoman & al. 2015, 205.)

The technical development is not, however, the only direction the events are developing. The event should also be more experiential than ever, and offer eventgoers, in addition to entertainment or knowledge, unforgettable experiences and stimulate both senses and thoughts. These are created with activities, participation, visuals, soundscapes, and creative scripting of the event. After the event, the eventgoer should have learned something new, gained new tools for their own life or work, been inspired, or refreshed. When planning an event, the producer should think about how the goals of the event, in other words why the event is being held, are achieved by planning the event from a visitor-oriented perspective, and how the preparation, implementation and follow-up of the event as a process guarantee its success. (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 79-80.) Time should be set aside for the planning and preparation of the event, so that the content of the event and the work, resources, partners, and budget necessary for its successful implementation are created and adequately prepared. The implementation phase of the event is often quickly over in itself, after which the final assembly and aftercare phase of the event are often a little overlooked. However, the post-phase is important, as it summarizes the event, collects feedback from the team, clients, participants, and stakeholders, sees how the budget was implemented, and compiles development items that can be taken into account in future productions, developments and work. (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 75-76.)

2.3 Different types of events enabled by the digital transformation

For years, consumers have been able to enjoy different sports, music, culture, and political events even when they could not attend the event live, as livestreams on TV and different Internet platforms and recordings have been widely available for a bigger audience. These kinds of events have already been very normalised, and many might not even think they are attending an event, even though their attendance happens as a passive audience member behind a screen. To activate and engage said passive audience member, event and TV-producers have come up with different solutions, such as submitting messages, photos, and voice mails to be broadcast during the event, participating in games and voting one's favourite performers via text message, as the live event is broadcasted. As the digital transformation has drastically changed how people go about their lives, the expectations, needs and wants for events have also changed – not to mention the effect worldwide crisis such as the COVID19-pandemic had, and still has, on the event business. New types of events were introduced to consumers – or rather a new audience was introduced to non-traditional event types, that one does not need to be live attending to, to be a productive, fully engaged member of. A big leap to virtual- and hybrid event world was made, forcing companies and people quickly adjust to a different platform and experience, often by trial and error.

The vocabulary of online events is still evolving, and virtual events are spoken about in many ways, for example sometimes the terms digital event or remote event are also used. A virtual event is one where the participants are taken to a parallel reality, for example a meeting or conference that either was originally held as a physical event and moved to be online or was created to exist only online. The only way that you can access and attend the event is via the Internet from the computer, laptop, mobile device, or streaming platforms. (Chodor & Cyranski 2021, 1-2; Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 58.)

The simplest forms of virtual events can take place for example on a video calling platform, such as Teams or Zoom. In more advanced online events, the event is organized on a separate event platform, which serves as the event's broadcast location, when they are broadcast from a conference room where attention has been paid to sound quality, lighting and even branding. (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 58.) In the most demanding form of online events, digitality is utilised to the full extent and with the help of studio and a green screen, the event can be branded with high quality, often such implementations are also invested in terms of content, and they can use for example augmented reality technology to fully engage and immerse the participants. Even though the goal may be an interactive and immersive experience, it is important to understand the target groups and the goal of the event, what can be translated successfully to the virtual platforms and their attendee's readiness to use the required technology and the facilities of the place of participation. (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 59.)

There are several pros and cons to online events. The most obvious benefits may be related to the use of time and accessibility, as online events allow participation beyond geographical limits, do not require traveling, and they are typically shorter in duration than live events. Online events can also be more environmentally friendly than live events, as the event's carbon footprint shrinks as travel, catering and material costs and waste are eliminated. Virtual events also leave data that makes it easier to create reports and statistics after the event, as well as recordings that can be shared and used again. (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 62.) Some of the cons or pitfalls may include data safety issues, technical issues, and poor scheduling Wallo and Häyriinen (2022, 62) also mention limited competences and lack of needed skills on either the side of the organisers and/or the participants, making the process, production choices or the event itself challenging to successfully execute, unclear and of poor quality.

Another type of event that blends both the features of live and online events, is the hybrid event. Hybrid events refer to events that can be attended both online and at a physical venue, and there are always both live and online elements, and the same content is consumed in both. Planning and implementing a hybrid event require a lot of time and know-how, as it basically is two different

events, with at least two different spaces and audiences. The idea is that the participants get a similar, equal experience, whether they attend online or live, and to create an event where these two audiences can be connected and interact with each other. (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 63.) The live streams mentioned in the beginning of this subchapter are a form of hybrid events as the participants are gathering both live at the venue and online to watch the event together, at the same time. Typically, in events like these, such as livestreamed sports- or culture events, the virtual experience however is not always equal to the live experience of the event as for example the engagement and consideration of the virtual participants may typically lack compared to the live participants.

Now there is more variety to hybrid events besides the livestreams, as digital technology encourages connectivity and engagement and for example more companies hold business events such as team building, gala evenings, conferences, and seminars in hybrid spaces. The needs and wants for hybrid events are more complex, and both participants and organisers expect more interactive experiences. For example, hybrid business workshop event would bring near to no value to the virtual participants, if they could not engage in conversation, brainstorming sessions or team building with the live participants. Organizing a hybrid event is challenging, as in practice, there are two events to be planned at once, and both need their own expertise as a live event cannot simply be copied as such into a virtual platform, or vice versa. The challenge is to consider both audiences as equals and to decide how to create a common experience for both and take into consideration the possibilities and limits of both the physical venue and the virtual platform. (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 63.) Some points worth noting could be, for example, advising the participants of the event before and during it, the functioning of the event's technology and the creation of enjoyable event spaces both live and virtual, scheduling, hosting, possible gamifications, engaging and immersing both audiences. While creating hybrid events may require resources and expertise, the flexibility it offers for the participant is increasingly valuable. The participant can choose how to participate, which can lead to less last-minute cancellations, companies and consumers saving money, time, and be more climate friendly, as one can also participate online and does not need to cancel if they cannot travel or got changes in their schedules. (Wallo & Häyriinen 2022, 63.)

A high-quality online and hybrid event requires an online platform and tools that serve as the location of the event, where the participants arrive, and that provides the event organizer with the workspace they need. Content and programs are created for the event just like live events, but here the script of the event must consider the limitations offered by the virtual space as well as the possibilities in terms of, for example usage of the space, time, moving people into different teamwork spaces/platforms and the participant activation. In addition to the virtual platform, a working space and a space for broadcasting are needed, such as a studio, a virtual studio or a physical space

from which the performers and hosts perform and from which material is sent to the virtual participants. In addition to traditional event experts, more and more specialized and technical skills are needed, such as broadcasters, cinematographers, lighting personnel, directors, technicians and so on. (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 63.)

2.4 The events industry and its digital transformation in Finland

The event industry is moulded by professional and business activity related to the production and organisation of this kind of events, that generates revenue. The event industry refines encounters and gatherings by adding value to them, through which successful events and experiences are born. Events can be used as distribution platforms for different contents and can be implemented in different formats. (Tapahtumateollisuus 2023.) Experts of various backgrounds and specialties work in the event field, making it a large and diverse industry (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 42).

Various events have always been organized in Finland, but the event industry can be considered to have been born in the footsteps of cultural and sports activities, and as a result of social change. When free time and wealth has increased, and consumption habits have changed in a more experiential and conscious direction, the events industry has developed greatly in the footsteps of cultural and sports activities supported by the state. The event sector since developed to be intertwined with culture and sports, but still as an independent business sector, that operates many types and forms of events. (Kuusisto, Sahlstedt, Välimäki & Westerholm 2023, 29-30.) As technology and expertise in the event industry developed, the specialization of events and services began: operators in the field started to specialize in different services and fields of events, and in the 21st century, they began to produce more diverse and high-quality events for both entertainment and work life (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 32-33). Event planning and production services learned and developed as working with business clients, producing models for production processes, budgeting, and project management, which have been implemented more widely in event sectors. In the 2010s, the demand for events has grown continuously and improved the quality of events, technical implementations, and the overall customer experience. The growth of the industry has also been supported by the growth of supplementary services and infrastructure needed by the events, such as the increase in accommodation and restaurant supply. (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 32-33.)

In the 2010s every year brought growth, including a record year in number of events for Finland's 100th anniversary, that accelerated the development even more. The year 2020 was predicted to be another record year for events, however, the global COVID19- pandemic struck at the beginning of the year and changed everything, and the year 2020 became a year of record losses for the industry and the industry's long-standing growth came to a halt. Due to the pandemic, an average of 50–70% of the turnover of companies in the sector was lost two years in a row, and around

6,500 permanent jobs in the sector disappeared. (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 34.) As the industry is recovering from the pandemic, the terms health safety, private event, and public event have become familiar to the public, and with the easing of restrictions, the desire of customers to return to events also live has been significant, and the demand for events is high. The crisis also highlighted the need to clarify, promote and unify the field of the Finnish events. In June 2020, an event industry association called Tapahtumateollisuus ry was founded, which after its establishment became the representative of the event industry and started promoting and developing training and education in the field. (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 34; Wallo & Häyrinen 2022, 19.)

The pandemic was followed in 2022 by the effects of the Russian war in Ukraine, which also caused changes in the Finnish field of events. Well-known and popular event venues were changed, and the focus of live events in different regions in Finland has changed a bit, at least for now, which has brought both new opportunities and challenges for new event centres, as the infrastructure is insufficient for the number of new events and their guests. The war has also affected the number and routes of guests arriving from abroad, which has made it difficult to reach an international audience live. (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 35.) This effect, however, may not be as severe as it could, as many are already offering and accustomed to virtual and hybrid options.

The crises of the beginning of the 2020s caused many changes, and some of the positive can be considered the comprehensive organization of the event industry and the rapid formation of industry understanding. The understanding of the scope and importance of the industry has increased significantly after 2020, but it was still seen that the importance and effectiveness of the event industry is not yet recognized to a sufficient extent, as for example often in statistics event visitors are counted as tourists and the root cause of tourism, event visits, remain unobserved. (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 35.) If the biggest trend before was environmental and social responsibility, the crisis years brought up virtual and hybrid event, and aided many companies in their digital transformation, as taking the leap was essential for survival of business and for people to stay connected and schools to keep on with the curriculum. Virtual and hybrid events had existed before, but now there was the need and want to develop their quality and range. (Wallo & Häyrinen 2022, 20.)

According to a release published by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (2023), future development targets for the event industry in Finland include identifying effectiveness, removing barriers to growth, and improving statistics and data collection in the industry. The event industry in Finland is still not recognised as its own industry but defined as a service business. By identifying and defining the event industry, it would be possible to speed up its development in a targeted manner, for example in terms of legislation, which does not yet recognize the event industry as a business but restricts the activity indirectly through various laws. Finnish cities provide a good

example of recognizing the importance of the event industry and making use of it, even though there are differences between them in how they recognize and measure the effects of events on the international competitive position of tourists, the economy, image, and identity, as well as the experiences of well-being and community, which the cities also use in different ways to develop events. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2023.)

2.5 Event professionals in the changing industry

The event industry is very personnel-intensive and needs various types of expert work to plan and implement events, which means there are plenty of different jobs and opportunities in the event industry for job seekers, from marketers to stage builders and from security personnel to presenters (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 166). As the popularity of virtual events grows, audiovisual producers and experts in various digital applications are popular, and in the changing field of events, the professionals will need to re-examine their role and formulate it to align with new realities and demands (Waechter, 25 May 2021). As the event industry and the people working in it is diverse and versatile, so is the job of an event producer. The job of an event producer consists of several different areas depending on the organisation one works in or the event they are organising, and there are several titles of event producer, such as technical producer or program producer. Sometimes producers are called project managers as well, and each event agency has its own titles and hierarchies. (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 167-168.)



Figure 1. Examples of tasks of an event professional

Working on events can be rewarding, versatile and situation-sensitive, which means the event producers need to be hard-working people with good pressure tolerance. The work emphasizes creativity, the ability to solve problems, networking, and especially the ability to get along with different people, as events are largely teamwork, that involve not only the colleagues of the event producer, but also for example partners, subcontractors, and performers. Even though ultimately the organisation that organises the event is also responsible for it, the guarantee of the event's success is

the event producer, as they lead the entire project, is responsible for the coordinating of the project, the creation of the plan, budgeting, production, delegating tasks, communicating with subcontractors, implementation, and reporting. The producer makes sure everyone knows their roles, schedules and are motivated and inspired to work with enough resources and correct tools, so that the work can be executed as agreed, does a risk analysis, and has a second plan in the back pocket in case of emergencies, and is a great communicator (Wallo & Häyrynen 2022, 167-168.) In some companies, in addition to creating the event itself, the producer is the one doing customer service for both the client that has bought the event production but also the attendees of the event, receiving and creating the event offers, presentations and sales once a request comes in, being the contact person for event audience and stakeholders, managing the participant information, hosting and managing the event on-venue, doing the customer after-care, making sure invoicing is done correctly and communicating with the marketing team as well. Event professionals can be true multitaskers and multitalents, holding both technical and soft skills needed in their jobs.

The events industry is hectic in itself, and the changes that the industry is going through with the digital transformation may increase the stress of event specialists in some areas, but also offer solutions or new ways of working. Some event professionals may be nervous about the shift to virtual spaces, fear being left behind in the face of constant change and even change fatigue. (Chodor & Cyranski 2021, 71–72.) The crises of the early 2020s also have a significant impact on employment in the events industry. When business was suspended, companies had to lay off their employees for extended periods of time, which caused a significant part of the established, skilled workforce in the events industry move permanently to other fields. In the event industry, there have been constant challenges in finding enough personnel, let alone skilled personnel, for tasks that require considerable manpower. (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 37.)

In addition to the quantitative labour shortage, the problem is a shortage of certain special skills in the field, as not enough workers are trained for the new tasks and needs in the event industry. There is a shortage of expertise especially in the fields of event technology and construction, as well as in the field of commercial event production and project management (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 37). This is going to be a big growth area, and most if not, all event producers going forward will need knowledge and experience in producing virtual events. Additional training and new education are developed and needed to meet the requirements of not only the future of the event field, but the current situation as well, as the virtual and hybrid events entered the field while many professionals lacked knowledge and competence to switch from traditional events to the virtual world. (Chodor & Cyranski 2021, 71–72.) How these changes affect the knowledge and skills that are required of an event professional will be explored in the next subchapter.

2.6 Competence needs in digitalising event industry

Competence consists of knowledge, skills, attitudes, experiences, and contacts that enable good performance in certain situations. Organizational learning, on the other hand, means the organization's ability to renew itself by changing its values, operating methods, and processes. In practice, renewal means that the organization is ready to constantly acquire new skills and utilize it immediately. Organizational competence also includes processes, operating methods, and culture. (Sydänmaanlakka 2022, 171.) The rapidly changing operating environment challenges event professionals to constantly renew their know-how, methods of development and cooperation, and thinking, which means competence is never static but develops and adapts throughout life. This need for renewal is reflected in the entire competence system and affects all people. For continuous renewal to be possible, it is necessary to pay particular attention to the development of the following four elements: know-how, needs orientation, an ecosystem-like way of working and measurable effects. (Sitra June 2022, 3.) It is also not to be forgotten, that continuous learning, maintaining professional and personal knowledge, adaptability and balancing the changing work life are skills in themselves, that need to be exercised and given tools and support for.

Professional well-being requires that one takes good care of their competence: knowledge, skills, motivation, experiences, and contacts. Professional well-being is also the ability to survive and progress in one's own career and to balance work with other areas of life in the best possible way. (Sydänmaanlakka 2022, 111-112.) Continuous renewal and personal growth are also opportunities for an individual to find balance with themselves and their environment (Sydänmaanlakka 2022, 124) as the need for new and refreshed competences is ongoing, as the development of consumer behaviour, technology, business, processes, and tools does not stop once an event professional graduates from school and enters work life.

Soft skills, or human skills, constitute to how one thinks, works, and relates to other people, creating a strong foundation for positive workplace performance in terms of innovation, adaptive thinking, collaboration, and more (Lewis July 2021; Marr September 2022). These skills needed in the future work life and to upkeep professional welfare are increasingly important, as the work life is in constant change due to digital transformation and work culture developments, and increasingly intensive in some industries.

Some of the essential soft skills are critical but creative thinking, understanding impact of decisions and diversity, and ethical awareness, as the workplaces, consumers and clientele are more and more diverse, decisions made in work affect for example data safety and credibility of the business, and clients expect creative solutions to their problems or requests. Communication and collaboration skills, emotional intelligence and coaching are skills, that are needed in teamwork, customer

service, and managing people, be it stakeholders or people at the same company. Especially strong communication skills are increasingly important, as collaborating has moved to virtual platforms, where miscommunications are more at risk to happen, and quieter team members may be easily overrun by their peers. Active listening, reframing, body language and clarity in communication are still important skills, particularly when the communication is happening via video, voice call or chat. Some competences that have been highlighted in recent years are adaptability, continuous learning, and time management. Time management is important, as one needs to be effective and efficient at work, and for being able to allocate enough rest and time for themselves, finding work-life balance and taking care of physical and mental health. Adaptability and continuous learning maintain a mindset and attitude, where one keeps both professionally and personally learning, stress management skills in changing work environment and staying optimistic about overcoming challenges and helping in managing and navigating different situations and people effectively. (Lewis July 2021; Marr September 2022.) Project cycles and event productions may be intensive and stress-inducing, and the event producer has to stay on top of project management duties as well as navigate a variety of people, in a world that is in constant state of change. When comparing these soft skills to the description of the work and characteristics of an event producer, it is easy to find connections and reason for developing and maintaining these competences, especially in a field of business as intensive as events.

Digitalisation changes work, from work culture, processes and working methods to tools rapidly, which causes challenges when workers who match the tasks offered are not available, and those looking for work cannot find work that matches their skills. Many tasks are automated, require special skills or have developed in such a way that the old ways of doing work are no longer necessarily completely valid. (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 35.) Especially in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some professionals might have been “thrown to deep end of the pool” and asked to take part in producing a virtual or hybrid event right away, translating more traditional event knowledge to virtual spaces with no previous training or knowledge of virtual events. Some might not have even attended one in their life before producing their first. For an event professional, this means that the changing working life and society requires continuous skills development, and the importance of new learning, creativity, understanding of wholes and meta-skills is increasing. The lengthening of working careers also increases the need for continuous learning, which in turn means that training bodies and other skills development structures and practices are experiencing increasing pressure to change. (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 35.)

Digitalisation and digital transformation are particularly visible in the operating methods. The development of technology enables a more distributed operation – the construction and orchestration of ecosystems are emphasized. More and more data is accumulated, which increases the need to

know how to process information even more efficiently and, on the other hand, to use it acceptably and responsibly. Technology offers opportunities from facial recognition to modifying the environment, which is why it is increasingly important to consider the conditions under which technology is introduced. (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 48). Competence is, however, needed not only for new technology and its use, but also for understanding the social effects and ethical issues of technology and the new processes, that is digital culture (Dufva & Rekola 2023, 49).

In the post-pandemic world, labour shortages and skills shortages are a significant problem in several industries, and the event industry is no different, as is established in the earlier chapters. In Finland, it has long been possible to obtain training and education in various cultural fields, however in the event industry, there is also a need for similar skills such as script and content design skills as well as light design skills, but training is scarce. There is technical training for event technology, but training for event production specific skills and tools is limited, and many companies currently train their experts themselves in a “learn by doing”-mentality. (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 42.)

As the event industry is very diverse, the skills needed often overlap with several different industries, making event companies compete for the same professionals as culture and arts. The competition for a screenwriter, for example, can be between TV, film and theater operations, events, the gaming industry, and marketing communications (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 42). Tourism has also been very tightly associated to events in Finland, and there are competences that overlap in those fields as well, leading many Finnish educators offering training and studies where the basic studies are more broad, offering knowledge that can be used more diversely in for example the events, culture, arts and tourism fields, from which the student can then choose more in-depth courses and studies depending on where they want to specialise in.

2.7 Current training and study possibilities for event professionals in Finland

There are as many paths to become an event professional as there are people working in the industry. As already established in the previous chapters, future event professionals and people already working in the event field seeking supplementary education or training, are coming from a diverse background and have a variety of options in where to study and gain or refresh their skills. As the event industry is growing and evolving with the world it exists in, the change creates competence gaps and need for more workforce and new talents, the need for different trainings and education grows as well.

In Finland, education for entering the event industry, or indirectly related to it, is offered especially by third-level educational institutions, where aspiring event producers may train all over Finland to

for example earn a degree in cultural management or a bachelor's degree in hospitality management and later continue to master's or acquire supplementary additional training already after entering working life. In addition, various entities, such as companies and organisations in the field, organise training and courses of different levels and intensity. To paint a picture of the current situation of training and study possibilities of event management in Finland, the author dug through different Google searches and websites intended for study guidance, such as the Finnish National Agency for Education and Studyinfo (opintopolku.fi) that offer links and information on different schools and educators, study paths, and careers from to people of all ages and backgrounds, including for example upper secondary and higher education, workshops for the youth and adults, and adult training possibilities. The main key words used in the search of education and training possibilities were events, culture, event producer and manager, event production and management, virtual events, hybrid events, digital events, future studies, tourism, and hospitality, as they were seen suitable in finding education and training that could be directly or indirectly applicable to training event professionals considering the information obtained so far.

The findings of the research show that the upper secondary degree educators, such as vocational schools and high schools, did not seem to offer education that would lead to a career in the events industry, even though in vocational schools it is possible to study arts, such as dance, media and music, a degree in restaurant and catering, business, and tourism. (Opetushallitus, 2023; Opintopolku 2023a.) These degrees can very well be used as base knowledge and provide capabilities for the event industry and may open doors to different jobs or future studies. However the findings left the author wondering, if it would be beneficial at this level of education to instead of having very specialised lines of study to mix parts of business, culture, hospitality and tourism studies, opening wider possibilities for the students and creating a more diverse base of skills that can be utilised and directed more in depth in future studies and work, and to make the event field an as visible alternative as the others as well. Apprenticeship training programs offer the same possibilities of education as the vocational schools, and this option seems to be highly dependable on how keen companies and entrepreneurs are in creating contracts with students and cooperating with schools, as the training may well last for one to three years (Suomen oppisopimuskoulutuksen järjestäjät ry 2023).

Higher education, such as the university and the university of applied sciences, offer more of a variety of studies that lead more directly to a career path in events field. Universities offer studies that lead to a degree in cultural management, arts, and social sciences in tourism field. From these lines of study, cultural management studies and degree seem to be the closest that could provide competences that can be directly applied to the event field, although the others mentioned may well prepare for taking different managerial roles or support learning at work when transforming

from studies to working life. Universities of applied sciences seem to offer more variety in options that lead to the event industry related careers, offering degrees in hospitality, business, and cultural management. (Opintopolku 2023b.) The hospitality and cultural management studies most often mention training or courses in event management or creating events, and there was three UAS, Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and Humak University of Applied Sciences, that separately mentioned studying digital solutions and digital service design or offering introductory level virtual event courses in their degree curriculums and are specifically offering related courses either individually or as part of degrees, of which Haaga-Helia UAS seems to emphasize the event management aspect the most, as other schools lean more to cultural management (Haaga-Helia 2022c, 34-35; Humak 2023; Metropolia 2023a; Metropolia 2023b). The difference between cultural management and event management studies seem to be that as cultural management students learn about various cultural phenomena, funding, productions and research methods, as the event management studies has a clearer focus on learning about the event field as a business and industry, how to create successful and experiential events are organized responsibly, different event field roles, tools and processes (Haaga-Helia 2022c; Metropolia 2020).

Descriptions of the studies are mostly quite vague on universities and university of applied sciences websites, and not all study guides were accessible at the time of writing this thesis, which may affect the results and accuracy of the research done, as it is possible the author has missed or not understood to connect some offered trainings and studies to the event field, and more specifically, virtual and hybrid event production. As an outsider looking for event management- and virtual event management courses it is not always clear whether courses will also include the virtual- and hybrid event learning, or if they lean more towards traditional event processes or if digital service design studies are including experience/event industries as well. Digitalisation seems to be included to all curriculums, but more as part of service design, media, journalism, marketing and sales, communications and platform and data economies courses and studies. (Opintopolku 2023b.) Some other providers for training, are TE-services (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment) together with universities of applied sciences and civil educational centers, that offer trainings aimed for adults and those in need of career and employment support, and at the moment of writing the thesis lean on the traditional live event productions, tourism, and theatre and performance technology (KEHA-keskus 2023).

Another educational provider is AJK-Jatkokoulutus (AJK), a Finnish adult education organisation. It is a private educational institution offering educational services, that specialise in adult education for visual artists, interior designers, and event producers both remotely online and live on campus (AJK-Jatkokoulutus 2022a). They offer two options for education in the event field: nine months

event producer training, that is intended for those who work with events and for everyone interested in the tasks of event production and organisation, and 14 months long event producer's training program, where one can complete a professional degree in Business. The degree is intended for those working in event production or marketing. The nine-month training teaches to manage the entire process of event production with the help of theory and practical tasks, while the degree is completed in AJK education program with a learning contract in cooperation with Mercuria Pro. (AJK-Jatkokoulutus 2022a.) Mercuria Pro is another privately owned educational center, that specialises in offering training in the commercial sector, such as professional degrees in Business and Entrepreneurship (MPro 2023). Besides the longer training programs, AJK offers an event producer online course, which is very similarly built to the Hybrid Ninja course. The course is an independently studies online course, that has four modules: starting with Module 1 and the basics of event production, Module 2 focusing on the client, target groups, marketing and communications, Module 3 moving on to event planning and virtual events, and ending with Module 4 that focuses on processes, budgeting, and practicalities. The table below will demonstrate the contents of the modules in more depth. The course is aimed for everyone, but especially event professionals already in the field seeking for refreshing their skills and seeking new viewpoints and ideas. AJK courses and education are available in Finnish for an additional cost that depends on the training, which is one big difference to the Hybrid Ninja training, which is offered for free. (AJK 2022b.)

Table 3. Event producer online course modules (adapted from AJK-Jatkokoulutus 2022b)

MODULE 1	MODULE 2	MODULE 3	MODULE 4
Why is the event organised?	Who is the event organised for?	What does the event offer the participants - what are you planning?	How to produce the event?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose and goals of the event • Objectives and measurement of results • Types of events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining the target groups • The impact of target groups on planning • Communication, marketing, and invitation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative design • Content planning • Virtual events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process of producing an event • Event production planning and budgeting • Directing the event in practice

All found studies and training are provided largely for free except for private education centers, and some tuition- or course fees may occur in open university of applied sciences or university studies,

civic college studies, or individual advanced studies courses, price varies by the schools, and mostly by longevity and depth of the training in question.

The findings of this research showed that applicable studies and trainings are offered throughout Finland by various operators, and that they are accessible mostly via application and entrance exams, or by paying a tuition fee, depending on whether the training is provided by for example the Finnish school system (upper secondary schools), universities and universities of applied sciences (UAS), community colleges, or whether the training leads to a degree or is offered as an independent course. Most of the trainings and education is provided only in Finnish, except for a few English or Swedish options mainly in universities and UAS, which may hinder the attractiveness of Finnish education and work in the eyes of potential non-Finnish speaking applicants, Erasmus students and career opportunity seekers. The findings were in line with what the author had assumed as most educational institutions did not have specialised event management studies, but had them as a part of other degrees, such as service business, culture and arts or tourism and hospitality. Summer universities and open path studies in both universities and UAS may offer few more in-depth trainings for event professionals or people interested in the field, and there are also independent courses offered by universities of applied sciences that are aimed to train, supplement, and refresh the skills of professionals already in working life. The training provided by AJK-Jatkokoulutus took the author by surprise, as she had not heard of the educational center before, and in the similarities their courses share with Hybrid Ninja, However, the selection for training purely related to the events industry is very limited, and there were only a couple of courses and one event producer degree programme, and even less focusing on virtual and hybrid events, for example, even though there is a growing demand for this expertise.

Competence can be acquired through a work-based learning contract and by learning on the job, which means learning during orientation, projects and from colleagues, which of the latter seems to be the prevailing custom at the time of writing this thesis. However, as previously mentioned, the event field is a diverse industry where all sorts of specialisations, competences and educational backgrounds may turn into one's strengths and advantages. As the event industry in Finland evolves, unionises and grows, there is a great need for a variety of skills and new know-how, which can be provided by these people, but then again the developments in the event industry also urgently call for more event business specialised and focused education and training, that helps answer the skill gaps and competence needs that have grown as the tools, technology, demands and processes of the industry has developed in greater leaps than some of the educators, event companies and professionals in the field.

3 Thesis approach and methodology

This thesis paints a picture of the digital development of the event industry, and how it has affected the competence needs of industry professionals, to support Hybrid Ninja's service design process and to find possible development proposals for the product. Due to the nature of the work, qualitative research was chosen as the research method, as qualitative research aims to describe, understand, and interpret the researched topic (Kananen 2008, 24). The chosen approach for the thesis is Service Design, which comes naturally as the Hybrid Ninja project in itself is a service development project.

As already mentioned, qualitative research is often descriptive, and focuses in processes, meanings and understanding the phenomenon at hand with the help of words, texts and images. It mainly studies associations that are almost impossible to analyse with statistically due to the complexity of the processes and phenomena. Qualitative research involves direct contact between the researched and the researcher, as the researcher goes to the phenomenon to observe or interview. (Kananen 2008, 25.) In addition to the descriptive, practical nature of the thesis and the pursuit of a deeper understanding, the choice was also influenced by the nature of the Hybrid Ninja project itself, the already collected data and the selected data collection methods, such as interviews and an in-depth study of the phenomenon. Interviews, benchmarking, and the acquisition of theory using different sources were selected as the research methods of the thesis in order to get the most realistic and up-to-date picture of the researched topic.

3.1 Service Design as an approach

This thesis is done using Service Design as an approach. According to Tuulaniemi (2011), Service Design helps in detecting strategic possibilities of services, innovating new services, and developing existing services. Also, according to Moritz (2005, 39) Service Design is the design of the overall experience, the process, and the strategy to provide that service. Service Design is a concrete activity that combines both the needs and expectations of the users and the business goals of the service provider into functional services, and where the intangible parts of the service are made visible with visualizations and character models. The goal of Service Design is to create service products that are economically, socially and ecologically sustainable. (Tuulaniemi 2011, 25.) In the centre of Service Design is understanding the client, and the market, to develop ideas and finally translate them into feasible solutions and to help implementing them. (Moritz 2005, 39.) This makes the approach fitting for this thesis, as the approach describes the aim of the thesis in itself: the thesis is written to aid in development of a new service, the Hybrid Ninja study modules, and the aim is to create recommendations for how to go forth with the service development. To generate informed and feasible recommendations, it is important to understand the context – the digital

transformation in the event industry and the need of competence it has created and the clients – the event industry professionals and potential future students of Hybrid Ninja training.

Service Design is a process, during which service experiences are planned and shaped to be useful, desirable, effective, and efficient for both the client and the service provider, keeping the client in the center. The process helps to understand consumers, the market, resources available and insights into clients' expectations, needs and experiences. (Moritz 2005, 39-40.) The process also follows the principles of creative problem solving, as developing new services is the creation of something new, and thus unique, by nature. Therefore, it is not possible to define and describe service design as a completely consistent process that follows a specific template, or to describe a process that would work one-to-one in the development of all kinds of services and in all situations. (Tuulaniemi 2011, 126-127.) There are many ways to carry through the Service Design process, and one of the more known is the Double Diamond, which is the chosen model for the use of this thesis.

According to Design Council (17 May 2019), the Double Diamond conveys a design process in a simple manner to designers and non-designers alike, making it easy to understand and implement. The two diamonds represent a process of exploring an issue more widely or deeply, which is called the divergent thinking, and then taking focused action, which is called convergent thinking.

The diamond tips represent the four D's of Service Design – Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver. These four D's all carry their own purpose in the design process, and they are showcased as pairs in the visual presentations of the Double Diamond, such as pictured below. The first diamond helps create understanding of what the problem is, hence Discover. It involves speaking to and spending time with people who are affected by the issues, in other words, the clients. Discover is paired with Define, which means defining the insight gathered from the discovery phase in a different way. In the second diamond, the pairing is Develop and Deliver, as the second diamond encourages people to give different answers to the clearly defined problem, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and co-designing with a range of different people. Delivery involves testing out different solutions at small-scale, rejecting those that will not work and improving the ones that will. This process is nonlinear, which is represented by the diamond shapes with turns and corners and the arrows, as during the process there may be new learnings which can send back to the start phase. Making and testing ideas can be part of discovery, and as service providers are constantly getting feedback on how products and services are working, they will be continuously developed. (Design Council 17 May 2019.)

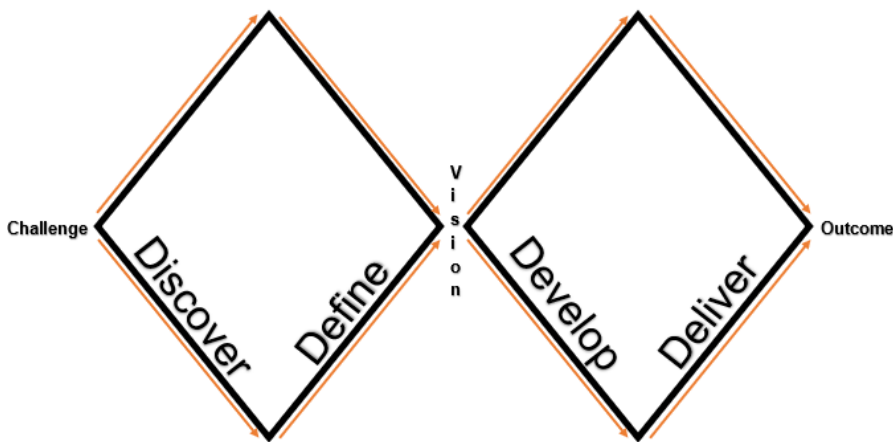


Figure 2. Service Design Process: The Double Diamond (adapted from the Design Council May 2019)

To drive effective problem-solving, the framework advocates for embracing four core principles. A people-first approach is key; by prioritizing and understanding of service users, their unique strengths and challenges, problem-solvers can better tailor solutions to suit their needs. Additionally, critical thinking, risk-taking, and collaboration are key ingredients for success. By embracing these principles, problem-solvers can more holistically address complex challenges and drive meaningful impact. (Design Council 17 May 2019.)

In this thesis, the Double Diamond model is used as the guide for the thesis process, as it is very adaptable for different Service Design projects. To reach the goal of the thesis, which is to find recommendations for the development of the Hybrid Ninja study modules (the Challenge), it is important to understand the target group and the environment they operate in, which in this context is the event professionals in the Finnish event industry, and the possible need for new training or competence gaps following the recent digital leap to hybrid and virtual events. Discovering and defining this helps creating insight into the current situation and assess the need for new skills and training, which is done in the second chapter of this thesis and earlier stages of the Hybrid Ninja project, that the author was not yet present for. In the development phase, some of the Hybrid Ninja study modules were tested in a pilot conducted in the pilot company with a group of event professionals, which helped the Hybrid Ninja team collect feedback and evaluate their work so far. For the thesis, the pilot offered more targeted insight and feedback on what the event professionals want to learn and feel they need to learn, and how useful the training was from their perspective.

This, again, helps in the process of developing solutions. Finally, the steps of delivery and outcome, are presenting these recommendations and answering the question of how the Hybrid Ninja project help can fill the hybrid- and virtual production skill gap for event production professionals.

Service Design is a multifaceted process, that has many different process models and various methods that can be used to carry out the processes and collect the necessary information for the design project to succeed. In this thesis there were some different methods used to collect information and cultivate understanding of relevant phenomena and topics, such as benchmarking, interviews and service prototyping, and the next subchapters open these methods more to the reader.

3.2 Benchmarking

In this thesis, benchmarking was used to create an understanding of existing possibilities of training and studying the virtual- and hybrid event production in Finland and to paint a picture of what could Hybrid Ninja bring to the field to support event professionals and fill the compatibility gap.

Benchmarking is a method based on an interest in how others work and succeed. Most of the time, successful or successful organisations are studied, the aim is to learn the reasons for their success and to implement ways of working that have been proven elsewhere. The object of comparison can be, for example, organisations in other industries, other departments of your own company, competitors, or industry statistical averages or standards. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 163) For this thesis the benchmarking was done by comparing competitors, as the author searched for similar training and study possibilities offered by other universities, schools and organisations offering trainings on hybrid and virtual event production, as the Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences Hybrid Ninja-project. This was done to not only understand the current situation of the possibilities for people seeking these courses and training, but also to possibly learn from others, what could the Hybrid Ninja project be doing as well and improve the development project at hand.

Benchmarking requires thorough groundwork, as at first it is identified what needs to be developed, which in this case is the Hybrid Ninja project. Next, for each development target, comparison partners are sought, for example organisations that are more successful in the matter in question or that have, for example, the best key figures or reputation – such as other similar trainings and education possibilities and what they offer for the student. After this, information is systematically collected on how these organizations succeed in this, for example how extensively do the courses and trainings offered by other educators deal with the themes of virtual and hybrid event production. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 163)

Benchmarking can be done by comparing or, for example, by visiting the organisations being studied (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 164). In this case, the comparison was made by searching for information on the Internet with the help of different educational institutions and websites that offer or compile education.

Benchmarking results are evaluated with a critical and creative eye, and then applied to one's organisation. It's crucial to identify actions from which new insights are learned and apply them to one's own activities. By leveraging this knowledge, one is better equipped to optimise processes and operations in a way that benefits the organisation and development project at hand. By comparing a company's operations to those of its competitors, it can gain significant advantages in terms of competitiveness. For one, this helps clarify how a company's own operations stack up against others. Additionally, it can speed up innovation by learning from the innovations of other companies. Ultimately, understanding how one's own operations compare to those of others is crucial to staying competitive and maintaining a strong market position. In benchmarking activities, it is good to always ensure the legality of the activity and remember to agree on the confidentiality of information in an appropriate manner. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 164)

3.3 Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most used data collection methods in both research and development work, and is a good choice, for example, when collecting material that opens new perspectives, clarify, or deepen understanding of researched issues (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 95). The Hybrid Ninja project team had already done interviews of event professionals and people working in the field besides extensive research to create a knowledge base about the necessity of the project, the competence gaps in the event industry in Finland, an outline of the training and its contents and customer segments. However, to be able to create more insight and feedback on the Hybrid Ninja training already in the works, some of the study modules were piloted in the pilot company and interviews done with the group of event professionals participating on the pilot.

There are different interview methods, and choosing a method requires consideration of what kind of information is needed to support the development work. The biggest differences are related to the degree of structuring of the interview, for example how tightly the questions are formulated and how much the interviewer can improvise and be flexible in the interview situation itself. Interview structures separate interview types from each other, such as standardised, semi-structured and conversational interviews. Other types are theme interviews, in-depth interviews, and group interviews. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 95.)

The interview method used during making this thesis was the semi-structured interviews, with elements of a structured interview, as there were specific questions the Hybrid Ninja project team wanted to learn about, and keeping the interview conversational created a more relaxed and natural environment, where the interviewee could feel more secure to express themselves. A structured interview is suitable when one wants to collect information and ask the same questions to a large group of people, or when the interview is used to complement previously conducted qualitative data collection, which of the latter was the situation during the writing of the thesis. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 96) However, even though there was a ready question pattern that stood same for all interviews, the interviewer let the sessions be more fluid and conversational, as in a semi-structured interview. In a semi-structured interview, the questions are prepared in advance, but the interviewer can change their order according to the flow of the interview, and the exact wording of the questions can vary.

Questions prepared in advance but not suitable for the situation can be left unasked, and questions that come to mind can be asked during the interview. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 97.) This is what was done during the interviews of this thesis, other than no questions were left out to reach the aimed goal of data collecting.

The Hybrid Ninja study modules included a feedback session as well, which was conducted much in a group interview-style, where the conversation was started with a possibility to answer first anonymously to the questions and then continuing the conversation in the group from there, with the lead of the Hybrid Ninja team members. In group interviews there are several participants, and the advantage over an individual interview is that the dynamics prevailing in the group take the issues discussed to new levels. There can be more interviewers, as for example in the Hybrid Ninja session there were two, because two interviewers can create a more relaxed atmosphere and stimulate the conversation in a more diverse way than one. In addition, one interviewer can focus on the conversation while the other records the reactions of the participants, which is what was done in this session as well. The themes covered in the interview have been decided in advance, and the information to be obtained has been determined. The group leader guides the discussion and ensures that topics of interest are covered. The method is especially suitable for situations where there is not much information about the topic, or the information is vague in nature. (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2009, 100-101.)

For this thesis, the semi-structured interviews were conducted before the pilot to find out the event professionals' expectations and attitudes towards the training. The author met personally with everyone interviewed, and recorded each of them so the interviewer could focus on the conversation,

and the recordings were subsequently transcribed for data gathering. The technology brought certainty and increased the reliability of the results, as the recordings were transcribed into a format where they can be processed. The materials were wanted to be as verbatim as possible, so the author used the Microsoft Office Word's automatic transcription program to assist in the transcription, and manually corrected into more readable form. After the pilot, during the group meeting, the team collected feedback with a group interview or conversation to collect feedback on the training and how the expectations were either met or lacking.

3.4 Service Prototyping: The Hybrid Ninja -pilot

According to Tuulaniemi (2011, 85) in Service Design, prototyping refers to building a quick model to aid planning and development. Prototyping is used to test whether the developed concepts work as they should or are thought to work. It is also an inexpensive and quick way to test the functionality of concepts in practice. The goal is to increase understanding of the service product being developed, of the things that work, and note the things that don't fit the service. All in all, prototyping is testing, and development in interaction with the prototype group. It is one way to minimise the risks of failure, when introducing a product to wider audience. (Tuulaniemi 2011, 85.)

Prototyping is an essential part of service development, and it is preferably done in its all phases. Service prototyping is used to quickly describe and test service-related elements and concepts with customers or service providers. Service prototyping enables the testing of several key aspects. It verifies the functionality of the service, gauges customer interest and desirability, assesses usability, and evaluates whether the service aligns with the company's strategic objectives. It can also identify areas that need improvement or refinement before the service is launched. Service prototyping is a reliable tool to ensure that the service meets the expectations of both the end-users and the company producing it. (Tuulaniemi 2011, 85.) As part of Hybrid Ninja's service design process, the study modules were piloted, in other words prototypes of the courses were created, which were presented to the pilot group, that consisted of event professionals. After the pilot, Hybrid Ninja's work group had new experience, perspectives and data that helped them move forward in product development and in the production of study modules that are still in the design phase.

Prototyping brings a third dimension to communication as well, which can produce a deeper understanding of the development target (Tuulaniemi 2011, 85). This also happened when, in connection with the thesis process, Hybrid Ninja's team implemented study modules at pilot company for the group as part of the prototype phase, during which discussions and different perspectives opened about Hybrid Ninja's content, tools and methods, as well as considerations that the product devel-

opment team had not thought of. Prototyping can also be used to illustrate a service chain, a service environment or even a service ecosystem, and different prototyping methods can be used to ideate different contact points of the service. (Tuulaniemi 2011, 85.)

In the pilot, modules one and three were introduced to the pilot group. Module one covers the fundamentals of event production and includes topics such as understanding industry terminology, as well as the goal and objectives of events. Overall, the module aims to provide learners with a strong foundation in event production. Meanwhile, Module three is focused on virtual event production, which is becoming increasingly relevant in the current global context.

Table 4. Hybrid Ninja study modules one and three

MODULE 1	MODULE 3
Event production basics	Virtual event
The goal is to understand or recall the basics of event production.	The goal is to understand the implementation and technology of virtual events.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Industry understanding and terminology • Event goal • From goals to budgeting, metrics/analytics • Event format selection • Production and project management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Platform selection • Content production and the importance of facilitation • Production roles • Technology • Performers

The prototype also included a contact lesson – a workshop held by two of the Hybrid Ninja team members, that was held as part of the Module three to test some workshop- and contact lesson materials planned for the module. In this case the workshop was also used as an opportunity to collect feedback and notes of both modules from the pilot group, to hear their thoughts of the study structure, materials and the Howspace-platform that is used as the online-platform for the Hybrid Ninja course.

These modules were chosen for the prototype, as the first was most finished of the five, and has the basics of the training included. As the pilot group in the pilot company was comprised of event professionals with mostly years of experience in the field, the Hybrid Ninja production team and the author of this thesis deemed the first module to probably be too familiar and not possibly bring too much value to the pilot group, the module three was also hurried into such a form that its content could be presented at least as a raw version to the test group. This way, there could be insight and

data of the familiarity and interest for the topics of virtual event production because of the pilot as well. This was interesting to the author and Hybrid Ninja team especially as none except of one participants of the pilot group had previous experience in virtual and hybrid event production as a professional, only the traditional event production.

The pilot group was formed out of four producers of two different teams, and the managers of these teams. The participants were chosen by the author of this thesis and asked to join, which they eagerly did as they were very interested in the topic and the studies' themes. The selection process of the participants was quick, as it included almost all producers from the two teams of the company, that were doing event productions. The only ones left out were ones that were not interested in participating or would not benefit from the Hybrid Ninja modules, such as travel agents or the sales team. The pilot group attended the prototype modules with their own names but were granted anonymity for the thesis. Hence, they are each given identifiers according to their position at work and a number to be able to create an anonymous profile for each. For example, an event producer or incoming event and travel specialist may be called Producer 1 and Producer 2, as their both jobs are to do the travel- and event arrangements and production for their clients and groups.

Producer 1 has been working in the field for about six years. They have a bachelor's degree in cultural management. Mainly, Producer 1's job includes organising corporate events of various types and sizes, such as seminars and galas, and often these events are brought from Finland to abroad, for example company incentive- and teambuilding events. Producer 2 has a master's degree in philosophy but has worked in the event and tourism industry of over ten years. Their work currently includes producing incoming business events in Finland for foreign companies, including the travel arrangements. Producers 3 and 4 have the same job descriptions as Producer 2, and both have a bachelor's degree in tourism. Producer 3 has worked in the events and tourism field for about six years. Producer 4 has recently graduated and, at the time of writing the thesis, worked at the pilot company as a production assistant for less than a year.

Amongst the pilot group were two team managers as well, and they will be called Manager 1 and Manager 2 whenever mentioned later in the thesis. Manager 1 is responsible for the team that focuses on the Finnish business event- and travel clientele of the pilot company and has been with the pilot company near to ten years in various related positions. Manager 2 has a master's degree in science, and over ten years of experience in different tourism- and events related work. At the time of writing the thesis, Manager 2 was the closest supervisor for producers 2, 3 and 4, responsible for the incoming events and tourism business and group clientele.

Table 5. The pilot group members introductions

The pilot group	
Producer 1	Bachelor of Culture Management. Six years of experience in the event field, currently focuses on business events and related travel arrangements.
Producer 2	Master of Philosophy. Over ten years of experience in events- and tourism related positions, of which around seven years in events with incoming business groups.
Producer 3	Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management. Six years of experience in the event field, working with incoming business groups.
Producer 4	Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management. Production assistant, working as a team with Producers 2 and 3.
Manager 1	About ten years of experience in the industry. Experience in more managerial roles than hands-on event production, however, understands the field and is very involved with their team's production work. Works with Producer 1.
Manager 2	Master of Science. Over ten years of experience that leans more on tourism field and business administration or managerial roles, but also experienced in event production. Works with producers 2, 3 and 4 as a team leader.

Hybrid Ninja studies are carried out almost entirely as online studies, apart from the workshops of modules three, four and five, for which students must arrive on campus. The workshops durations are one or two days maximum. The platform for online studies is the beforementioned Howspace platform, whose usability and suitability for the use of the studies, and functionality were tested and explored during the pilot for both the admin and the student, as the platform was new for some of the Hybrid Ninja team members as well.

Besides testing the Hybrid Ninja prototype with people outside of the Hybrid Ninja team for the first time, the pilot project gave an opportunity for collecting insight of what event professionals might expect or want from such study modules, and to possibly provide new ideas or viewpoints for the Hybrid Ninja team. The prototyping process involved interviews, opening the prototype for the pilot

group, feedback and a workshop, and the process and its results are discussed in the next chapter.

4 The process and outcome

In this thesis, supporting the Hybrid Ninja project, it was set out to work on development proposals for the new virtual and hybrid event production training that the project is designing, and to investigate how can the Hybrid Ninja project help fill the hybrid- and virtual event production skill gap for event professionals. The training that the Hybrid Ninja project is developing is named Hybrid Ninja in accordance with the project and aims to fill the competence gap created by the digital leaps of recent years in the job market of the event industry. The training is executed as part of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences' open-to-all study modules, which anyone can register for, and the study module is set to be free of charge for participants at the time of writing the thesis. Although the course offered by Haaga-Helia is open to everyone, Hybrid Ninja's target audience is event industry professionals already in work life and who want to develop or supplement their own professional expertise. Another target audience is others interested in the event industry or those moving into the industry who want to learn about hybrid- and virtual event production. In addition to the development suggestions, the thesis aims to evaluate how the Hybrid Ninja project can help fill the hybrid- and virtual production competence gap for event production professionals in the Finnish event field. This means that the author of the thesis examines the virtual and hybrid education that is already available in Finland, and based on the estimated need for competence and the development proposals he has created, compares the study content of Hybrid Ninja with the needs of the target group. This allows creating an understanding and to be able to evaluate the necessity, competitiveness, and topicality of the Hybrid Ninja course for experts in the event industry at the time of the thesis process.

As the thesis process started, the Hybrid Ninja project already had collected an extensive knowledge base and had a lot of research work done in support of the service design project. The project team had done interviews, benchmarking and by different Service Design methods learned about the current situation in the Finnish event field and event professionals. They had already created insight of the competence needs in the field, target group profiles, and proposals for the platform, structure, themes, and contents of the study modules, as well as a draft for customer journey, marketing plans and co-operation with Tapahtumateollisuus ry and other Finnish event operators. The writer of the thesis jumped in on the process at a time, where the next steps were to create a prototype of some of the modules, and pilot the Hybrid Ninja studies at a company, that would invite the pilot project and allow employees and preferably managers in joining the pilot studies as well.

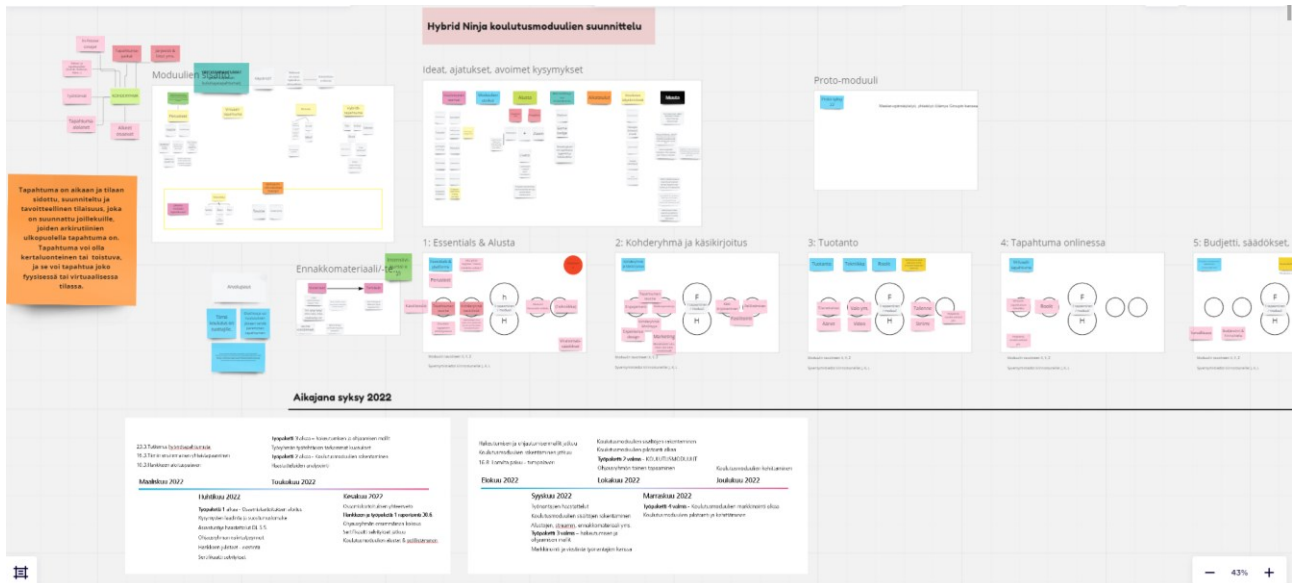


Figure 3. Hybrid Ninja project table of 2022, showing the plans and drafts for the study modules (Hybrid Ninja Miro-board)

In the next subchapters the process of the thesis is presented following the steps of the Double Diamond process. The steps, as explained earlier in chapter 3.1. *Service Design as an approach*, are Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver. Here the steps are separated in two subchapters, as in the two diamonds representing the process, as it makes the work more fluent to present.

4.1 Discover and Define

The first two steps of the Service Design process represented by the Double Diamond are Discover and Define. These steps help create understanding of the issue at hand, and involves speaking to and spending time with the people affected. The insight gathered from the discovery phase lead to defining the challenge, and the steps and work needed in the next phases of the process, such as designing a prototype and solutions to the problem. (Design Council 17 May 2019.)

As already mentioned, the problem of the design project and the background information and data had already been mapped to a large extent, when the writer of the thesis joined in the Hybrid Ninja project. The steps of the first Double Diamond phase had already largely progressed to the Vision, and partially to the following steps of the second diamond as well. Hybrid Ninja's team had already identified the problem, the Challenge in the picture below, which in this case is the competence gap of Finnish event producers in terms of hybrid and virtual event production. During the Discovery phase, the Finnish field of events, training opportunities and expertise had already been researched, and in accordance with the next Define phase, a database was created based on the

research results for e.g. target group profiles, the content and themes of the necessary expertise, and a Vision was outlined for the identified problem. In this case, the Vision to reduce the identified skills gap is to create competence. This means creating new education, a set of study modules, which will be offered as part of Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences' open studies. This training is the Hybrid Ninja project.

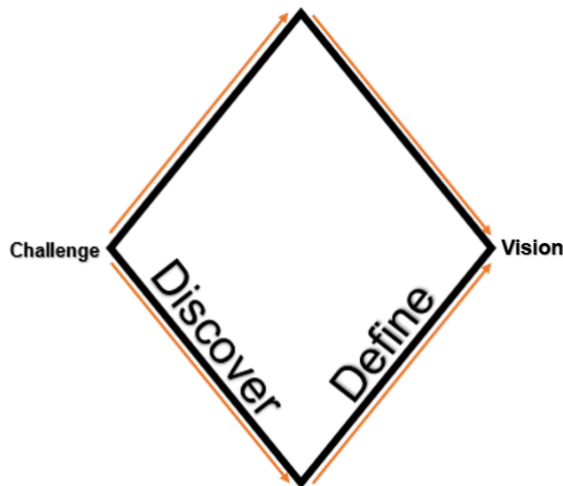


Figure 4. The first Diamond (adapted from the Design Council May 2019)

In the thesis, the author aims to create development proposals for the outlines and solutions already created in the Hybrid Ninja project, the new hybrid and virtual event training. The purpose is also to evaluate how well Hybrid Ninja will respond to the established need for competences. In order for this to be possible, the author of the thesis must also create a comprehensive knowledge base and understanding of the phenomena and the target groups, so that the final result of the work is well-founded and valid. For this reason, the process of the thesis is a Service Design process, and largely follows similar themes as the ground work already carried out by the Hybrid Ninja-project team.

The first step was to identify the problem that the thesis aims to solve, in other words the Challenge. The thesis was carried out as an assignment for the Hybrid Ninja project, so together with the project's working group and the thesis supervisor, the Challenge of the thesis was set to create and pilot a prototype in a tourism and event production company, the pilot company, where the author of the thesis was working during the thesis process. The set goal met the needs of the Hybrid Ninja project, and the topic is interesting for the author, so the proposal came naturally. However, as it sometimes happens in Service Design projects, as the process progresses, the needs become clearer and may be reshaped. This is what happened with the thesis as well, and the Challenge had to be later redefined. This is why the diamond pattern is insightful, as it reflects the non-

linearity of the process, and the possibility of re-evaluating the stages of the process and the assumed needs and results. This is exactly what happened in the thesis process, and the goals of the work, the Challenge, were outlined again with a few refinements, to what had been previously presented as the aims of the thesis. We will come back to this later in the text as the description of the process continues.

In order to pilot the training prototype, the author of the thesis selected a few employees from the pilot company, who were asked to participate in the pilot project. The selection was based on the job description of the employees, and focused on the employees who did the most event production or related work, and whose job includes producing different types of events. The company is very tourism-oriented, so everyone's job description also includes travel arrangements related to events at home or abroad, or the events often have a tourism element, such as producing an event abroad for Finnish clients or producing an event in Finland for clients arriving from abroad. The pilot group was allowed to use working time to test the training prototype, which was a suitable incentive for the group to participate, in addition to their own personal interest and desire for new learning.

The next step in the process was to start familiarising with the target group and the phenomenon. The author of the thesis set out to implement this by interviewing the pilot group, and researching the digitalisation of the event industry, as well as defining what hybrid and virtual events mean and their impact on the competence needs of event professionals. The last-mentioned part has been implemented as a written theory part, and the collected knowledge base can be found in chapter two of the thesis, *Digital Transformation of the event industry in Finland*.

The interviews were conducted in two sets for the pilot group. The first interviews were semi-structured, and they were used to create a picture of the initial situation of the pilot group, the backgrounds of the participants and expectations for the pilot project, prior knowledge of the hybrid- and virtual events and the development of the event industry, as well as the wants or needs of development of one's own competence. As the first interviews were conducted before the start of the pilot project, they were also used to map out which modules the Hybrid Ninja development team should prepare for the prototype phase for piloting.

The interviews revealed that the members of the pilot group with production tasks found training like Hybrid Ninja to be useful and important, especially for a producer or professional who does purely events, or for a person who plans to work in the event industry. They also felt interest in the hybrid- and virtual event concept and know-how, especially because they have never produced such themselves. However, the producers felt that despite the digital development, live events will be the most important event format, although it was noted that hybrid- and virtual events have their

own advantages and situations where they can be more useful than traditional events, such as various meetings, trainings and seminars. Accessibility, avoiding unnecessary travel, and bringing events to a larger audience, such as livestreamed sports and cultural events, were considered advantages of the hybrid- and virtual events. They also believed that hybrid- and virtual events will either increase to some extent or at least remain part of the event field. There are some differences in these views when interviewing the two managers, as from their point of view hybrid- and virtual events have not achieved the same status or popularity as the producers experienced but were more inclined to believe that the trend will fade when live events are allowed to start without restrictions again after the COVID19-pandemic. Additional training was generally considered important for maintaining the employee's motivation and competence and for career development, but the supervisors considered it more reasonable to outsource the competence related to hybrid- and virtual events to service providers specialised in this, as the relevant competence can be purchased when necessary.

In the pilot group, there was also a difference in how useful they felt the future pilot project would be for themselves or for developing the company's expertise. In the interviews, the producers were more inclined than their supervisors to think that hybrid- and virtual event expertise or at least the development of a deeper understanding of it would be useful in the company, but also a minority of the producers felt that it was possible that they would someday produce hybrid- and virtual events themselves. Most of the interviewees also felt that producing traditional live events is more motivating and rewarding for them, because then the event can be felt in all senses, and for them the live human encounters are an important part of the job, a counterbalance to office work. In particular, Producer 1, 2 and 3 were of the opinion that the competence would be useful in the company mainly in meetings and seminars of business groups, but more useful in developing personal competence, especially in order to better understand partners who offer digital services and the needs of customers who ask for them, but also for future job search and possible new career paths.

All those interviewed believed continuous training and supporting it at the workplace is important and stated that training can be supported in many different ways, for example by offering financial or time-related resources and support for the training. The producers, however, hoped for more initiatives and the providing of training opportunities from the employer, while the supervisors felt that it is a matter for each employee themselves to be proactive, and propose new training, then the practical matters related to the training are agreed with the employer. Everyone had a positive and curious attitude to the upcoming pilot project and thought of it as a refreshing change to work, and hoped to learn new things, especially about the differences between the production of hybrid and virtual events compared to traditional events, budgeting, what to take into account with virtual event productions and the opportunities in hybrid- and virtual events.

Based on these results, Hybrid Ninja's team decided to create prototypes of Modules 1 and 3 for the pilot. The first module, as already mentioned, deals with the basics of events, and works well either as an intro to Hybrid Ninja training if the student is more experienced, or creates a foundation of event knowledge for beginners in the field. The Module 1 was also the most complete of the modules in development in the prototype design phase. The Module 3 is all about virtual events and was selected as the second module to be piloted based on the information gathered from the interviews. The Module 3 corresponded to the subjects of interest and expectations of the interviewees in terms of themes and content and would include a workshop that the Hybrid Ninja team wanted to be able to pilot as well. The pilot project was also considered to be too empty or "easy" for the pilot group if prototypes were only tested from the first module, and the pilot was also supposed to be genuinely useful and interesting for the participants of the pilot group.

Prototypes of the modules were developed and built on the Howspace platform by members of the Hybrid Ninja team, who each had their own area of responsibility in terms of content production based on their own strengths and work delegation. The prototypes were completed quickly, as the groundwork and data collection necessary for the content of the modules was already well advanced at this stage. The author of the thesis participated in the development by listening in development meetings and by providing perspectives as someone who works in the field. After the content of the prototypes was completed, they were built on the Howspace platform. The completion of the prototypes was rushed so that the pilot could be scheduled for October-November 2022, as it had been agreed that the Hybrid Ninja training would be published and available to students in the Haaga-Helia UAS spring term of 2023. The figure below opens the timetable for the pilot autumn.

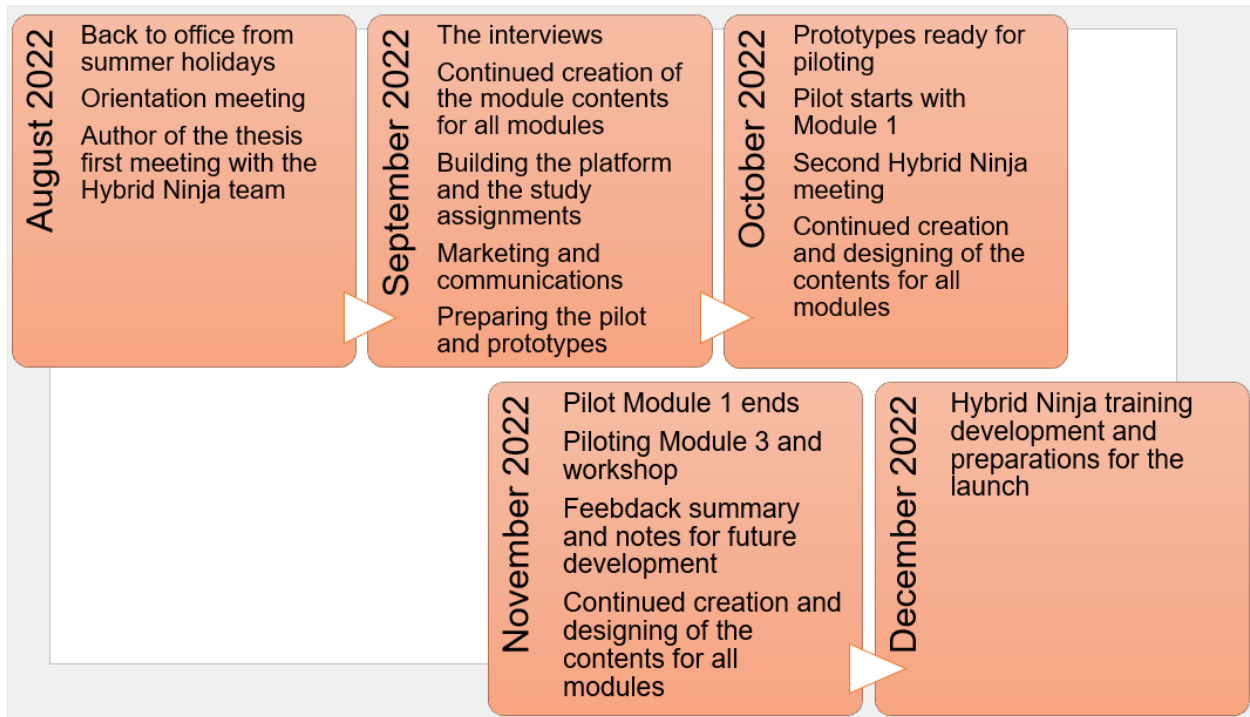


Figure 5. The Hybrid Ninja timeline of fall 2022 (adapted from the Hybrid Ninja Miro-board 2023)

In the end, some of the interviewed members of the pilot group did not participate in the pilot itself, but looked through the materials offered and gave feedback based on them. All of the producers participated in every phase of the pilot, but due to their work schedules, the supervisors did not have time to delve deeper into the prototypes or participate in the workshop, during which the final feedback was also collected, and the participants were interviewed in a conversational style. However, both supervisors browsed through the materials, and one also gave some light feedback on them during the pilot. The table below shows the activity of the pilot group in the different phases of the pilot.

Table 6. The participation of pilot group members

	PRE-PILOT INTERVIEW	PILOT	FEEDBACK/COMMENTS DURING PILOT	WORKSHOP/FEEDBACK SESSION
PRODUCER 1	X	X	X	X
PRODUCER 2	X	X	X	X
PRODUCER 3	X	X	X	X
PRODUCER 4	X	X	X	X
MANAGER 1	X	/ **	/ **	
MANAGER 2	X	/ **		
**Did not have time to commit to the pilot, took a quick look on the materials.				

The piloting of the Hybrid Ninja module prototypes happened over a two-month period, where the pilot group studied the prototype modules one and three, did assignments and gave feedback of the course materials, structure and on the choices made with the platform and the overall look of the course. In the preparation of the pilot, the author of the thesis and the team of Hybrid Ninja collaborated, and the author was the primary contact for the pilot group, as well as responsible for pilot-related communication, preparation and launch of the pilot in the pilot company. The author of the thesis was in contact with Hybrid Ninja's working group and helped the pilot's parties to understand each other in the case of problems that arose during the pilot, such as non-functioning links, or questions and clarifications related to tasks coming from the pilot group. During the pilot, those who participated in it were involved with a very positive attitude and said that they found the prototypes interesting and well-structured, although Module three in particular was still somewhat incomplete during the pilot, and some of the module's contents were replaced with short theme titles and placeholders.

During the piloting of the prototypes, anonymous feedback was constantly collected from the pilot group. The anonymous feedback forms were structured, and at the end of each study unit or discussed theme on the learning platform Howspace, in which questions were asked about the success, interestingness, and clarity of the units and modules, and of the tasks was mapped, and whether the members of the pilot group felt the tasks helped with internalisation and application of the learned content. From the responses, the Hybrid Ninja team compiled summaries and points to be considered in the further development of modules and training. The author of the thesis has also seen the feedback and collected notes for the ideation of their own development proposals. The feedback was mostly positive, and the Hybrid Ninja team also received some comments and feedback on the details and contents of the teaching materials. The structures of the prototypes were perceived to be mostly clear and easy to use, but especially the inflexibility of the platform when moving between different contents caused negative feedback. The visuality, the versatility of the materials and the consistent examples throughout the material, as well as the related tasks, received praise from the participants. The development targets were the technical details on the platform, especially materials in attachment files or images that either did not open, files broken or difficult to use in a web browser, or the texts were unclear due to their small size.

The pilot ended with a workshop, which was implemented as part of the prototype of Module three. The workshop was carried out as a live meeting at the premises of the pilot company, where the author of the thesis prepared the meeting space and stayed to observe the occasion, and two of the developers of Hybrid Ninja prepared the materials and arrived to facilitate the event. At the workshop, final feedback was also collected, and a summary was made of the experiences and thoughts of the pilot group for the further development of Hybrid Ninja, and the producers of Hybrid

Ninja had the opportunity to also ask clarifying questions regarding the feedback previously received to the pilot group, if something had remained unclear so far.



Tänään ohjelmassa

- 9-9.15** Aloitus, esittäytyminen ja lämmittely
- 9.15-9.30** Alustus tekniikasta ja budjetoinnista
- 9.15-10.30** Suunnitellaan virtuaalitapahtuma
- 10.30-10.45** Tuotosten purku
- 10.45-11.00** Yhteenveto ja lopetus





Figure 6. Screenshot of the intro page of the workshop presentation, listing the schedule of the day (Aromaa & Pöyhönen 15 November 2022)

During the workshop, the pilot group carried out one assignment as group work, for which the program first included a short review of the principles learned earlier, then a brief on technology and budgeting of the virtual event given by the Hybrid Ninja facilitators. The output, in other words the virtual event plan prepared in the group, was presented to the facilitators, with whom the task was discussed, and the ideas raised by the task were analysed and reviewed as a group. The task included, among other things, planning the given virtual event, which in this case was a wine tasting event, the content and designing the experience, outlining the process and different stages of the production of the event, as well as assigning and sketching the necessary roles and the tasks they contain. The pilot group also described what kind of platform they felt met the needs of the event, and considered the features and functionality of the virtual event platforms they knew for implementing wine tasting. The group recorded all of these on paper with the help of ready-made role cards and templates, which the Hybrid Ninja team documented for further development of the workshop and assignments.

Feedback from the pilot group in the workshop was mostly positive, especially regarding the versatility, usability, and multimedia nature of the materials. They also had good comments on the task

materials, for example the role cards of the workshop task were completely missing the role of the event producer itself, and the assignments of the modules needed more conceptualisation and a clearer grounding for bigger tasks. The previously mentioned ease of use and clarity of the Howspace platform was also praised, although navigating the site and following the progress in studies was perceived as challenging. According to the participants, the workshop itself was of an appropriate length, although the nature of the assignment was such that they would have liked to have spent more time on it, and some of the pilot group members would have been interested in seeing how the assignment could have been further refined to implement the event on a real online platform among the pilot group.

After the workshop, Hybrid Ninja team and the author of the thesis made a compilation of the feedback, considerations and development points and ideas that emerged during the pilot, and the development work in the project continued with the prototype modules and other modules. At this point, other busy projects took the author's attention from Hybrid Ninja to work, and as the Hybrid Ninja project progressed from the pilot phase to the development of modules, it was difficult for the author to see their role in the project anymore. For the author, the situation led to about a month's break from the thesis and the Hybrid Ninja project during December 2022. At the beginning of January, the situation of the thesis was re-evaluated with the thesis supervisor, because the author had come to the conclusion that the original goal of the thesis, the Challenge, no longer corresponded to the situation in which Hybrid Ninja was as a project, and where the thesis had remained in terms of content. The author had difficulties understanding their role during the design and implementation of the prototypes and the pilot, which during the process had been different from what it was assumed to be at the beginning of the process. Now the author felt that they were stuck in the role of a communicator, where they would hardly have gotten material for writing the thesis, when at the beginning of the process thought that author would be more closely involved in the prototype development process and facilitating the pilot project. So, it was time to revisit the process of the first diamond again, and refine, based on the information acquired during the process thus far, how this thesis work could be used to create a final product that could truly serve the client's needs, in other words help develop the Hybrid Ninja project, but in a way that would also enable the progress of the thesis.

As mentioned previously, The Double Diamond process is non-linear, which enables needs and goals to be re-evaluated based on acquired knowledge and expertise, so that the final product is customer-centric and serves the relevant, identified needs as well as possible. After the process progressed to the point where one should move to the next step to produce answers to the given problem and create a final product, the thesis author re-detailed the goals of the work, which were

given a new form with the approval of the thesis supervisor. The new goals of the thesis then became the development proposals for the Hybrid Ninja project based on the data collected in the fall of 2022 and the pilot project, as well as an assessment of how well the Hybrid Ninja training meets the established competence gap within event professionals caused by digital development. With these re-evaluated goals, the author felt that they could best use the already existing data and aid the Hybrid Ninja service design project in development. The diamond below has been modified to adapt to the first half of the Double Diamond-process, but in the picture the process steps have been replaced to reflect the course of the process made in the thesis, as well as the new goals, the Challenge, and the Vision after the re-evaluation.

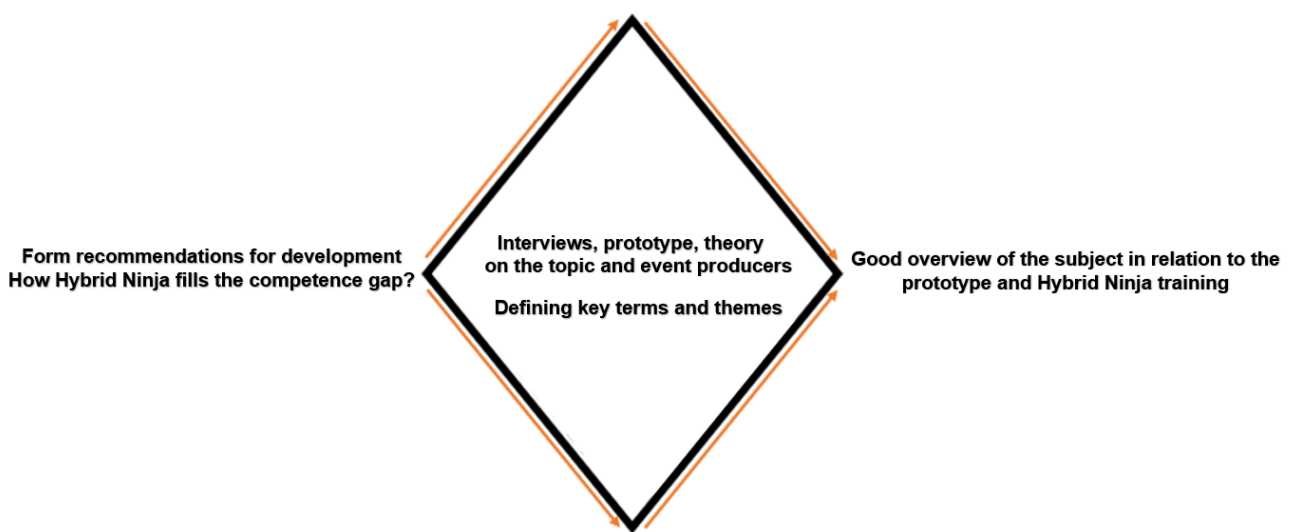


Figure 7. The Double Diamond's first phase revisited after Discovery, Defining, and Redefining of the process, Challenge and Vision of the thesis (adapted from the Design Council May 2019)

4.2 Develop and Deliver

The second phase of the Double Diamond moves on from the Vision to Developing different answers to the clearly defined problem, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and co-designing with different people. The Delivery then again involves testing out different solutions at small-scale, rejecting those that will not work and improving the ones that will. (the Design Council May 2019)

The diamond representing the second phase is pictured below.

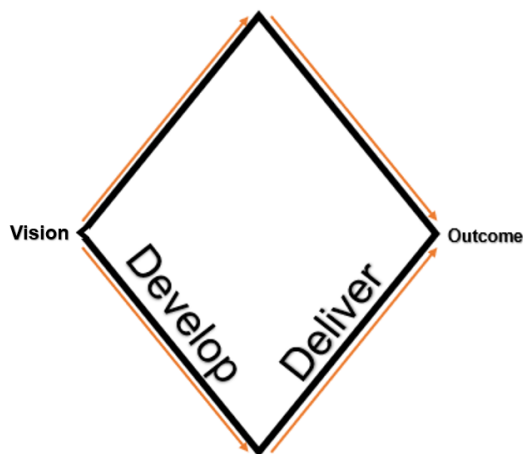


Figure 8. The second Diamond (adapted from the Design Council May 2019)

In regards of this thesis, the steps of the process in question are realised in a slightly different way than what the description of Design Council exactly describes. During the thesis process, an understanding of the problem to be solved and the phenomenon surrounding it has been outlined in the Vision. In the Develop-phase, the purpose is to develop the desired solution, in this case the development proposals for the Hybrid Ninja project, as well as how can the Hybrid Ninja project help fill the hybrid- and virtual production skill gap for event professionals. The testing of the Deliver-phase does not take place in the sense that during the process the author of the thesis would have, for example, presented the final result of the work and tested the proposals and outputs with the Hybrid Ninja team in the project development work. This is partly due to the time limit, but unfortunately also due to the author's own endurance fading during the process. In this work, testing and creating prototypes from the results of the thesis therefore remains at the level that the return of the thesis is the Delivery phase, and the self-evaluation and numerical evaluation of the thesis, as well as possible takeaways from the development of the Hybrid Ninja project, are part of the testing and evaluation of the results. In other words, this paragraph combines the steps of the phase from development directly to results.

The results are partly based on the existing data from the Hybrid Ninja project and conclusions made about, among other things, the existing problem (competence gap), created target group profiles (event professionals and people entering the field), and the solution, meaning the Hybrid Ninja training modules. During the thesis process, the Hybrid Ninja project data was supported by the author's own background work to create their own data base (as seen in chapter two, interviews, pilot process and feedback from pilot). Piloting and being part of the prototype progress also

promoted the development of the solution beyond the test phase, helping further the Service Design process of the Hybrid Ninja training. Based on these steps and information, the author aims to create justified solution proposals for Hybrid Ninja's service design project.

In this thesis, several sources and methods of data collection have been used, and the interview questions have been checked with the thesis supervisor and with the team of the Hybrid Ninja project, who commissioned the thesis. The interviewees were treated equally, and everyone was interviewed using the same structure. The author of the thesis did not express his own opinions or preconceptions during the interviews in order not to influence the answers of the interviewees. All interviews lasted approximately the same amount of time, and their analysis took place as transparently as possible and based on themes and theory in connection with the pilot of the Hybrid Ninja project. The information base collected from written sources has also been tried to be obtained from sources found to be reliable, such as learning materials and articles provided by the Haaga-Helia UAS library. The written knowledge base is also strictly limited to deal only with the central themes and concepts of the project, in order to avoid clutter and misunderstandings. During the process, the author of the thesis has also used their own experience and expertise related to the production of events.

Service Design is customer- and people-oriented design process, and it is important to understand for whom the product or solutions are being created, and in what kind of environment the target group works. Hybrid Ninja's target customer segmentation, event professionals and new people entering the field, already exists for this project. The operating environment has also been outlined, but no separate description has been made of it. The customer segmentation is also supported by the interviews conducted during the thesis process and the mapping of the situation in the Finnish event industry, as the collected material consistently shows the need for event industry professionals for additional and further training. The author has come to this conclusion, because the events industry in Finland has taken great strides towards digital services, specifically hybrid- and virtual events, especially in the last three years, which is a very short time for such big developments, sped up by the pandemic in particular.

Not many training options for producing these special events were found during benchmarking, which would indicate that professionals have learned the twists and turns of hybrid- and virtual events independently or learning by doing at work. There are few alternatives for training in hybrid- and virtual events as part of the curriculum of degree education at, for example, HUMAK, Metropolia and Haaga-Helia Universities of Applied Sciences, as part of a degree or individual paid course at AJK-Jatkokoulutus. This means, that the Hybrid Ninja project responds to the competence gap rather well by creating a new, free training in Haaga-Helia UAS. Since the supply and competition

are as described in terms of education, it could be argued that the Hybrid Ninja project identified the need, the target group, and the solution to the problem very effectively. The increasing opportunities for training, as well as the rapidly recovering industry after the crises, could also be seen as attracting new students and industry changers to the industry.

Before moving on to the proposals related to the course contents of Hybrid Ninja, the author would like to point out that it would be good to have at least one expert of the event field as a permanent member in the team developing study materials for event production, so tacit and applied knowledge related to the field can also be utilised in addition to books and generally available information. During the Hybrid Ninja-project, one event professional working with the project moved to another company, so that in the author's understanding, there was no person actively working in the field and doing the work in question, working on the development team.

Based on the information collected throughout the thesis process, the development proposals for the Hybrid Ninja training are presented on the text below. The recommendations are more in form of themes and topics, as it would be impossible to go into detail of all of them in this thesis. Topics to be covered in the Hybrid Ninja training would be listed as follows:

Basic industry understanding

- A concise description of the event industry and its features in Finland, the most important organisations, and companies
- Key terminology and concepts of the events industry
- Diversity of the industry jobs, and different roles in the events industry
- Event formats and the selection of event format
- Event as a process
- Target groups, customer experience design, service path
- Event facilitation (traditional and hybrid or virtual)
- Experiential nature of the event – program, activities, gamification, and commitment

Virtual event

- The effect of the event format on the process and roles of production and implementation
- Event platforms
- Customer experience design, service path in a virtual environment
- Experience, script, and facilitation in a virtual environment
- Technology

Hybrid event

- Two events – live and online, and the effect of the event format on the process and roles of production and implementation
- Event space and platform solutions and coordination
- Customer experience design, service path
- Experience, script, and facilitation in a hybrid environment
- Technology

Important, slightly more demanding topics in event production (live, hybrid and virtual)

- Events as a business, analytics, data collection
- Budgeting
- Communication
- Official regulations, copyrights, security
- Ethics, social- and environmental responsibility

These themes emerged strongly both from written sources and from the interviews conducted before the pilot. At the time of writing the thesis, most of the themes are already part of the teaching content of Hybrid Ninja (see Table 1, page 3–4), but the author has started with the basics to create a solid foundation or for a refresher for a more experienced student and moves from the basics to more detailed and precise themes. In the basics, it's good to start with a theory that even a beginner can use to get to grips with the world of events, before jumping into more detailed and difficult topics. In the implementation of Hybrid Ninja, the author has not seen an introduction to the roles and employment opportunities in the event industry, which can be especially important for someone planning a career to see and understand its diversity, in order to be inspired to continue studying and develop tasks and skills that interest them most.

The author also wants to point out, for example, regarding responsibility issues, that taking the event online does not make the event carbon neutral, and it is important to know at least the basics about the digital carbon footprint and other responsibility issues such as accessibility, especially in a constantly more aware and proactive operating environment and clientele. Event participants, especially those from different backgrounds and age groups, may also have different understanding of the common rules of, for example, security and ethics on virtual platforms, and not everyone understands that, for example, the event may not always be recorded, or screenshots allowed to be taken to share with others. It is also good to note that when an event changes from a live event to an online event, it is not enough that the process and content of the event are transferred to the new environment as it is, as the study materials of Hybrid Ninja expresses as well. The rhythm of the event, the clientele, the experiential and programmatic possibilities are very dependent on the

environment in which the event is produced. It is also of paramount importance that those working on the event understand the terminology, know how to use the necessary tools and technology, and know how to work with various stakeholders, and are able to communicate and plan the work effectively.

One consideration, which has also already been taken into account in the implementation of Hybrid Ninja, is the consideration of students from different study or work backgrounds applying for training. At the time of writing the thesis, the issue has been considered conveniently by dividing the studies into modules that can be selected independently, from which everyone can choose the modules they consider the most useful and interesting. Because of this, on the one hand, the author would avoid structuring modules in such a way that information relevant to the general knowledge of events can only be obtained from one module, as, for example, Module four explains the topic of communication, which is not covered at all in the other modules.

A few theme suggestions for the study content were omitted from the above list, which are not necessarily very relevant in terms of the course content and hybrid- and virtual events, but could in principle fit into, for example, Module 5. The themes in question are generally important in the working life of the future, and also in the present, especially for event specialists who are multi-talented and work with people. These include soft skills, coaching and people management. Also, a look at the future of the events industry as part of the studies could be motivating and inspiring, because getting to know the futures' research and trends of the events industry could make the student more intrigued and understanding of why they study and need to improve their competences, and open new perspectives for building a career path in the events industry. It could also lead to committing to training more enthusiastically and be used for example as marketing for other course offerings.

Another general development idea would also be combining experts from different fields. Materials for Hybrid Ninja's training have already been created in cooperation with experts in the event industry, but it could be interesting to involve, for example, TV producers, game designers, coders, lawyers, storytellers and, for example, experts in social media to plan some materials, create lectures applicable to events and for overall inspiration. The last general suggestion the writer wants to give seems self-evident when dealing with hybrid- and virtual event themes, but in the future of the modules they could be changed at least partially to hybrid or virtual, if Hybrid Ninja is wanted to be launched for more wide audience in Finland. Currently the live meetings and workshops are only held in Helsinki, which limits the number of students and puts other cities in an unequal position.

The development proposals related to the learning platform have already come up during the pilot, which have been found to be challenging to implement after getting to know Howspace's platform in more detail. The platform is easy to use and clear, but as soon as there is a lot of material, Howspace becomes heavy and confusing at times. According to the author's understanding, there are no alternatives to this other than changing the platform or coding the page, or if the Howspace developers modified the platform to be a little more flexible in terms of content stacking on the pages. The platform is otherwise easy to understand, visually pleasing and multimedia versatile, which enlivens the learning experience. In terms of functionality, however, Howspace apparently works so that all material is stacked linearly into one long page, which can make it difficult to move between different topics, and make it difficult to find materials, student publications, discussions and comments. While writing the thesis, navigating between pages and materials, and monitoring the progress of your own study path is also awkward, and it is not possible, for example, to have a floating navigation bar on the side when browsing the page. When the course runs at a larger volume, these may be things worth considering - is the platform right for implementing courses for larger numbers of students?

Otherwise, the contents of the completed modules are of quality, useful and well-paced. The materials are versatile, and the student can choose the study pace and style that suits them, and even longer materials do not feel boring once used to Howspace's layout. The colour schemes of the materials and the little ninja that accompanies the page bring personality and softness to the contents, as well as playfulness to studying.

To answer the other research question of the thesis, how can the Hybrid Ninja project help fill the hybrid- and virtual production skill gap for event production professionals, it is to be mentioned that the training offer is currently few and far between, and alongside Hybrid Ninja, direct training for hybrid- and virtual events is apparently only available in a few lines in higher education institutions as part of a university of applied sciences or university degree. It is also possible to study independent, fee-based courses, the price of which can put a person in a financially weaker position in an unequal position compared to other people who want an education. According to the author's understanding, there are still no free, easily accessible courses that offer additional training and that are easy for those already working. Hybrid Ninja is free, and its structure and content are easily approachable, even in terms of time. This, and the contents of the training together, form a training package that very well answers the competence needs of the event field right now, as the training offers new, easily accessible education of events basics, hybrid- and virtual events for event professionals already working in the field and people looking to enter the profession.

All in all, the image below summarises Hybrid Ninja's value proposition as it is recorded on the project table on Miro board. Based on the collected information in theory, the pilot project and the reflection that took place in the thesis, it could be said that the value promise given for Hybrid Ninja is true, and those who apply for the Hybrid Ninja training will be supplemented with knowledge of the event industry, especially with regard to hybrid- and virtual events.

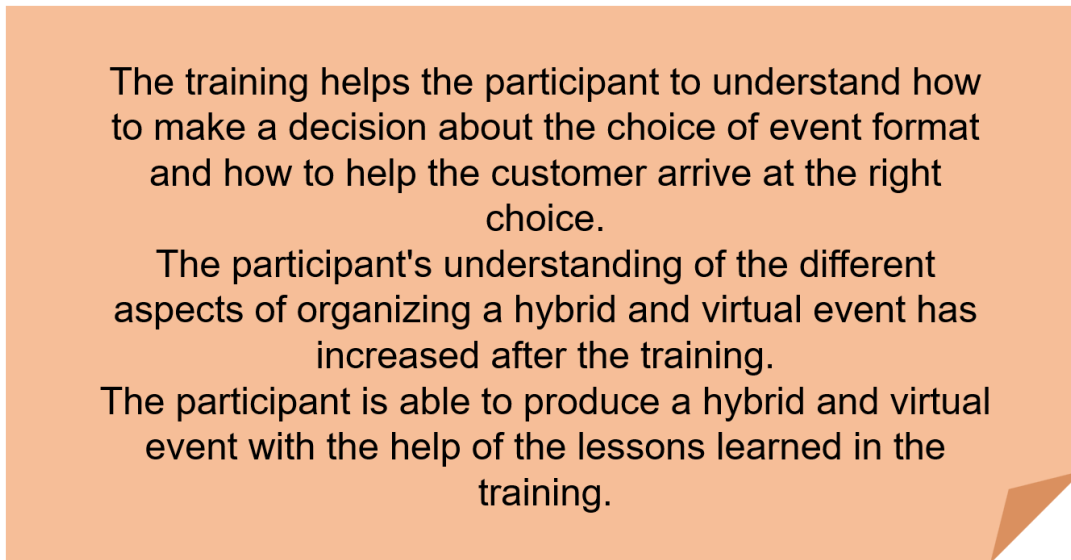


Figure 9. Hybrid Ninja value proposition (adapted from Hybrid Ninja Miro-board 2023)

In addition to training that complements skills, Hybrid Ninja hopefully also provides inspiration and motivation for experts in the event industry, as well as for new talents applying to the industry. Hopefully, training is also here to stay, even if it changes its shape over time, as the events industry, which is constantly changing, needs experts with quality training to renew itself and developing.

5 Discussion

Digitalisation probably will not eliminate live events completely, at least in the near future, but they have become a permanent part of the versatile range of events. Digital development has been seen and will probably be seen most strongly as the digitisation of production models and tools, as well as the development of digital services and dimensions related to live events. A good event experience already today consists of many digital parts, such as event-related information on social media channels, following participants on social media and information about events shared through social media communities (Kuusisto & al. 2023, 40). Connection, community, and content are the heart of any events, and no matter the format, will be the meter of a successful event.

The developments of digital transformation in the event field, even though already ongoing, were pushed forward by the recent global crisis, as people were forced to socially distance and figure out new ways of connecting. Hybrid- and virtual events have been amongst us in many forms for years but feels like only now have gotten the recognition. The ice hockey game or concert streamed live is not only a video on the screen, but also a hybrid event. And the boring online meeting on a Monday morning is a virtual event, just as much as a bigger online-seminar or product launch event would be.

Hybrid- and virtual events are here to stay and have created a competence gap amongst the Finnish events professionals. Where to learn the tricks and tips of the hybrid- and virtual events, and how does the production even differ from traditional live events? And then again, should all event professionals expand their skillset and become hybrid ninjas, especially if personally not interested in that area of event production? Not every company will nor need to digitise in the way of starting to produce hybrid- and/or virtual events, even if it closes doors to some business avenues/ventures. Live events are not, as of now at least, disappearing and the craving for live experiences and meetings is a part of human nature. If an event company or event professional decides to specialise in live events and productions without digging deeper in the virtual world of events, their decision is still valid and viable.

However, dipping toes in virtual- and hybrid event production and having at least a basic understanding of how it works, can help in understanding the evolving event industry, possible competitors and co-operators, fellow event professionals and possible growing opportunities (both personal and business) better. Running an events business, freelancing or working a managerial role in the events field might also be reasons to stay on top of new education, information and trends of the field. For someone seeking new things to learn, ways to improve their market value while job seeking or venturing to new career paths, or simply wanting to have a comprehensive set of skills

and understanding of their profession, additional training and continuous learning as a lifestyle is warmly recommended.

The aim of the thesis was to support Hybrid Ninja project in developing new training for event professionals, and as a result to form recommendations on how to develop the training further. The work also aimed to figure out, how the Hybrid Ninja project helps fill the hybrid- and virtual production competence gap for Finnish event production professionals. The answers were developed over time and familiarisation with the phenomena and Hybrid Ninja project, and were written out in the previous chapter 4.2 *Develop and Deliver*. The process and sources used to reach the goals of the thesis are described in previous chapters as well, and even though the author feels the final product is not the best they can do, it is enough to stand behind of.

The theory was created using trusted sources from Haaga-Helia libraries both online and physical books, and the source material was rather versatile and sufficient in creating a reliable base knowledge of the subjects of the thesis. The methodology and justifications of chosen processes and methods could have been more profound, but the author did not want to stretch the part of the thesis to be too long and wanted to keep it simple. The text for the process and results are not the best work and created under some pressure to just get the job done. There should be more theory-based arguments and information, and better wordings used to make the text better quality and more credible, but the chapters do communicate what was wanted to put out and the results are adequately justified.

The thesis topic was chosen, as future studies, digitalisation and the events field are of interest for the author, and the author had no interest in making a commissioned thesis for the company they worked at. The thesis projects and commissions on Haaga-Helia UAS website caught the author's eye, and they contacted Monika to hear more of the digital event projects they had going on. Hybrid Ninja came up, and the thesis was set to start right away, and in the beginning, there was much excitement to start working. However, as the process was started in the end of May in 2022, the summer holidays came before meetings or further discussions with the Hybrid Ninja team were able to be had, and the long pause in communication right in the beginning phase started cumulating some anxiety around the project. The author wanted to graduate quickly, as the study leave was about to end and it was already known that the upcoming winter would be busy at work, with not much energy left for studies in the free time. A plan was made to quickly put together the pilot project, and write the thesis by December 2022, which, as the reader already can see from the thesis process description, did not happen. In the end, the thesis process had a month long pause in December and was then slowly continued throughout the spring semester of 2023, reaching its final in May. What a journey. What did the author learn?

Firstly, it was really interesting to dig deep in the events industry, event management guidebooks and many articles of digitalisation and future studies. These topics were enjoyable, and it was nice to be able to put together a summary of the learnings of these subjects for the thesis. The Hybrid Ninja-project was interesting and as the author has never seen how courses and study materials are created for educational purposes at an actual UAS, this project provided a possibility to look behind the curtains a little bit. The Hybrid Ninja course materials and themes are also looking good, and the author feels like they have gotten an extra course right before graduating upon reading through and familiarising with the materials.

Another learning was, that the author is very optimistic about their use of time and writing speed, especially as someone who is for the first time writing a text such as a thesis in English. There were times of frustration, as the process did not progress, as there seemed to be not enough hours in a day and even weeks of lack of motivation and with the hurdles of combining studies, work, hobbies, and life. The author fell in old bad tendencies of very poor time and self-management skills at times and should have been more active in communicating in the autumn of 2022 when first started to feel unsure of the role and assignment given during the process of developing the Hybrid Ninja prototypes and pilot, instead of shying away and ending up switching the research questions in January. This thesis process has definitely been a reminder of some weak spots such as time management, self-discipline and communication skills, that still need developing.

Surely the thesis supervisors have seen a lot of these struggles in other students as well but thank you Monika for keeping such a great attitude and always being there with guidance and help, maybe some therapy sessions as well when needed. Your excitement over parts of the text have been really valuable source of energy in times when the thesis has felt dull and forced. Now looking at back at this pile of pages, there is a proud feeling of being able to in bursts of both excitement and fret at least finish a project like this in a language that is not always the easiest to write subject texts with and learning a lot while doing it.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. The Pre-Pilot Interview forms

Esihenkilö Q's

1. Onko jo olemassa olevaa tapahtuma-alan osaamista kartoitettu työpaikalla, kuinka?
 2. Millaista tapahtuma-alan osaamista yrityksessä on?
 3. Käytetäänkö olemassa olevaa osaamista hyväksi, pystytäänkö sitä suuntaamaan tiimeissä työn toteuttamiseen ja kehittämiseen?
 4. Mikä on tyypillisesti tapahtumia järjestäessä tiimeille helppoa, mikä haastavaa?
 5. Missä usein onnistutaan tapahtumia tuottaessa ja toteuttaessa? Mikä saa onnistumisen aikaan?
 6. Entä millaisessa tilanteessa tapahtumaa järjestäessä jokin on mennyt pieleen. Mikä meni vikaan? Mistä se johtui?
 7. Mitataan tiimien/tapahtumien onnistumisia jotenkin, ja onko erilaisille tapahtumaformaateille käytössä eri mittaustapoja? Miten?
 8. Jos mitataan, kuinka mittaustuloksia käytetään/käytetäänkö tuloksia tuotannon kehittämiseen?
-
9. Koetko työyhteisön hyötyvän lisäkoulutautumisesta, miksi?
 10. Oletko harkinnut lisäkoulutuksen tai kurssien tarjoamista työpaikalla?
 11. Kuinka näet tapahtumakentän muuttuvan, ja firman roolin tapahtumissa tulevaisuudessa?
 12. Mistä lisäosaamisesta työyhteisö ja firma hyötyisi tällä hetkellä parhaiten?
 13. Minkä tyyppiseen koulutukseen olet esimiehenä valmis sitoutumaan, sekä millaista tukea tarjoamaan koulutukseen osallistuville?
- >> esim työajan puitteissa tapahtuva koulutus, maksullinen koulutus, vapaa-ajalla tapahtuva koulutus (miten kannustetaan siihen), lyhyet kurssit tai intensiivikurssit, pitemmät koulutusjaksot etc)
-
14. Toisiko VH-koulutautuminen lisäarvoa ja hyödyllistä osaamista tai työkaluja työpaikalle?
 15. Onko työpaikalla virtuaali- ja hybridituottamisesta kokemusta tai olemassa olevaa osaamista?
 16. Mitä työkaluja VH-tuotantoa ajatellen työpaikalla jo on, mitä puuttuu?
 17. Aikooko työpaikka hyödyntää VH-mallia ja työkaluja tapahtumatuotannossa tulevaisuudessa, jos firmassa on (uutta) osaamista?

Tuottaja Q's

1. Millaisena näet toimenkuvasi tapahtumatuottajana

- a) nyt
- b) ja tulevaisuudessa

...tuleeko tapahtumat ja niiden tuotanto mielestäsi muuttumaan, miten?

2. Millaista kokemusta sinulla on tapahtumatuottajana? (koulutus pohja, minkä tyyppisiä tapahtumia tuottanut..?)

3. Koetko, että pystyt käyttämään alan osaamistasi ja potentiaaliasi (monipuolisesti) työssäsi? (vastaako työ osaamistasi, ollaanko työpaikalla tietoisia osaamisestasi)

4. Mikä tapahtumien järjestämisessä on...

- a) ...vaikeaa?
- b) ...helppoa?

5. Missä yleensä onnistutte?

6. Palauta mieleesi tilanne, jossa olet onnistunut (virtuaali- tai hybridi)tapahtumaa järjestäessä hyvin. Mikä siinä oli onnistunutta? Mikä sai sen aikaan?

7. Entä tilanne, jossa (virtuaali- tai hybridi)tapahtumaa järjestäessä hommat menivät pieleen. Mikä meni vikaan? Mistä se johtui?

8. Mittaatteko tapahtumatuotannon onnistumisia? Jos mittaatte, millaisia työkaluja käytätte mittaukseen ja kuinka käytätte tuloksia? (työkalujen ja prosessien kehittämiseen, työnjakkoon, toimintamalleihin..?)

9. Oletko harkinnut lisäkouluttautumista tai kursseja, mitä?

10. Millaisesta lisäkouluttautumisesta koet, että olisi sinulle hyötyä, miksi?

11. Millaiseen koulutukseen tai kurssimuotoihin olisit valmis sitoutumaan, ja mitä toivot koulutukselta kurssille osallistuessasi?

>> esim työnantajan tukema, työajan puitteissa tapahtuva koulutus, vapaa-ajalla tapahtuva koulutus, itsenäisesti etenevä vs ohjattu koulutus, lyhyet kurssit tai intensiivikurssit, maksulliset kurssit, pitemmät koulutusjaksot, lähiopetus, etäopetus etc

12. Oletko ollut mukana tuottamassa VH-tapahtumaa, ovatko VH-tapahtumien tuotannon työkalut ja prosessit entuudestaan tuttuja?

13. Toisiko VH-tapahtumien tuottamisen koulutus ja työkaluihin tutustuminen lisäarvoa osaamiseesi/työhösi/tukisiko urasuunnitelmia ja oman ammattiosaamisen kehittämistä?

14. Millaista tukea toivoisit saavasi VH-tapahtumatuotantoon ja sen työkaluihin tutustuessasi?

15. Kuinka toivot koulutuksen tapahtuvan – teoriaa, harjoittelua, työkaluihin ja erilaisiin alustoihin tutustumista itse tai yhdessä, luentoja, workshoppeja...?

16. Millä tavoin uskot/toivot pääseväsi harjoittelemaan ja toteuttamaan VH-tuottamista arjessasi?

Appendix 2. Feedback forms of the Howspace modules

KÄYTETTÄVYYS

1 Oliko oppimisalustaa helppo käyttää?

1 Tukiko kokonaisuuden rakenne mielestäsi oppimista?

1 Olivatko oppimismateriaalit helposti löydettävissä?

1 Palaute oppimisalustaan liittyen

Mikä siinä oli erityisen hyvää? Oliko jossain toivomisen varaa?

SISÄLTÖ/TOTEUTUS

1 Havainnollistivatko annetut tehtävät moduulin teoriaosuuksia tai kokonaisuutta?


1 Kuinka innostavia annetut tehtävät olivat?

1 Kuinka hyvin moduulin oppimissisältö vastasi odotuksiasi?


1 Perustelut

 Vain omat vastauksesi näytetään


1 Mikä oli onnistunutta tai inspiroivaa? Esim. tehtävätyyppi, materiaalin muoto (=esitys, video kaavio, teksti..) tai asiasisältö?

 Vain omat vastauksesi näytetään

1 Mitä muuttaisit tai poistaisit? Esim. tehtävätyyppi, materiaalin muoto (=esitys, video kaavio, teksti..) tai asiasisältö?

 Vain omat vastauksesi näytetään

1 Mitä uutta kokonaisuus tarjosi sinulle?

 Vain omat vastauksesi näytetään

1 Avoin palaute lähipäivästä 9.2.

1 Terveisesi koulutuksen kehittäjinjoille