

# Designing an escape room with the Experience Pyramid model

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<p>The concept of real life room escape, although relatively new, has been constantly gaining popularity and spreading across countries and continents. Despite the ever-growing appeal and widespread appreciation, the phenomenon is highly underresearched.</p> <p>The authors of this paper, employed at InsideOut Escape Games – the first room escape company of Finland – decided to explore the question of applicability of available experience design tools in the context of room escape. The Experience Pyramid Model, which claims to provide a holistic overview of an experience at all of its stages, was chosen to be analysed in regard to its potential usefulness in the process of designing a real life room escape game.</p> <p>In order to test the hypothesis that the chosen model is capable of helping produce a memorable and meaningful room escape experience, Project Phoenix - an original game created for InsideOut Escape Games - was developed. The game development process involved exploration of the existing theoretical framework for room escape design, a detailed analysis of the aspects of the Experience Pyramid model, as well as its application in the room escape setting, all of which are discussed in the present paper in detail.</p> <p>The results of the study support the assumption that an experience design tool like the Experience Pyramid model has potential in assisting the professionals of the room escape industry in creating meaningful experiences for their customers. It is, however, evident that additional research on the topic of using experience design tools in the context of room escape is required in order to test the findings of the present study.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Escape room, experiences, experience design, experience pyramid model	

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# 1 Introduction

The entertainment market of today is constantly growing and evolving - new options and ways of spending one's spare time are becoming available as we speak. From movie theatres and laser tag to karaoke and stand up comedy shows and everything in between - a modern consumer is spoiled for choice. There is, however, one phenomenon, which has been booming in popularity in the recent years, winning over the hearts of excitement- and fun-seeking individuals around the world. This phenomenon is room escaping. The concept of real life room escape is not new, but it has been largely neglected by researchers, in spite of its steadily growing appeal to the public.

The authors of this thesis, employed at InsideOut Escape Games Oy company - the pioneer of room escape in Finland - deemed this situation unjust; thus, an idea for this paper was born. It was decided to attempt designing an escape room using one of the tools developed by the experts in the field of commercial experiences, later analysing and describing the process. The tool chosen by the authors is the Experience Pyramid model created by Sanna Tarssanen (2009). The model's characteristics and its applicability in the room escape context are discussed in the present thesis in detail.

The paper is structured in the following manner: the theoretical part includes presentation of the concept of room escape, as well as the chosen experience design model; in the next part the said model is applied to escape room design at large; and lastly, the plan for an escape room experience designed using the model is presented.

## 1.1 Objective of the thesis

The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate how well the Experience Pyramid model can translate to the escape room industry, and whether it is possible to create a successful escape room experience based on it. The model aims at providing structure for creating an engaging experience, which takes into consideration the whole customer journey starting from the motivation to try the experience on offer all the way to the possible mental change, which might occur as a result of undergoing it. Most escape rooms do seem to take certain aspects of the Experience Pyramid into consideration, intentionally or not; but there is no cohesive model that could help an escape room designer structure the process of room design and make sure that the product is consistent from start to finish, and able to leave a lasting imprint on the players. The authors' goal was to test out their hypothesis that the Experience Pyramid model might prove rather useful in the context of room escape design, as it aims at creating a memorable and meaningful experience, which, in the

authors' opinion, any escape room should strive to provide. Project Phoenix was created by the authors to test this hypothesis.

## **1.2 Project Phoenix**

Project Phoenix is a working name for an escape room designed with the Experience Pyramid model. The planned room was meant to replace an already existing one, called "The Blocks", on which the new room's story is largely based - hence the name *Project Phoenix*, which evokes associations of rebirth and resurrection, in this case - of an escape room. "The Blocks" resides at the premises of InsideOut Escape Games – an established Helsinki-based room escape company, in which both of the authors are employed. The original intention was to actualise the developed plans and create the room in reality, so that the authors could eventually evaluate whether it performed as intended, and whether all of the levels and elements of the Experience Pyramid model used as a foundation for the design, were present in the customer journey. However, due to unforeseen circumstances the current room could not be renovated at the time of the writing of the present thesis, thus all the assumptions made in the plans for the room are hypothetical. The design process of Project Phoenix, as well as the explanation of how the chosen experience design model was applied to it, are presented in Chapter 5.

## **2 Real life room escape games**

This chapter presents an introduction into the world of real life room escape games. Firstly, the overall concept of room escape is explained, after which InsideOut Escape Games company, at whose premises Project Phoenix was planned to be actualized, is presented. It is followed by a brief history of the room escape concept. As the goal of the project undertaken by the authors of this paper is designing a room escape experience, basic room escape design principles are also covered in this chapter. Lastly, the concept of flow is analyzed. The latter is viewed by the authors as a significant theory to address in the context of the project, as in the room escape environment flow is considered by many industry professionals to be of utmost importance for creating a memorable experience for the player, as it is crucial for achieving the desired level of immersion.

### **2.1 Room escape concept**

As the whole concept of real life escape rooms is relatively new and virtually untouched by the academic community, there is no universally recognized definition for it. Due to this reason, the definition presented in this paper is of an aggregate nature, based on a multitude of sources, including the research of Scott Nicholson, Professor of Game Design and Development at Wilfrid Laurier University, Adam Clare, Professor of Game Design and Director of Interactive Education at George Brown College, as well as web pages of established room escape experience providers (Escape Room LA, SCRAP, InsideOut Escape Games, Claustrophilia). As the authors of this paper have been working in the escape room industry for a prolonged period of time, personal insights based on their experience are also provided.

Real life escape rooms are themed live-action adventure games, in which players – as a rule, a team of two or more people – find themselves locked in a room, or a series of rooms, from which they must physically escape within a set amount of time. In order to find the way out, the players have to solve a variety of puzzles by searching for clues and objects scattered around the room and using them to complete various tasks. The puzzles used in escape rooms are varied in nature and can range from logical, mathematical and analytical problems to sensory tasks and out-of-the-box challenges, which require creative thinking and unconventional ideas. Room escape games are meant to not only serve as an entertaining way to spend time with one's family, friends or colleagues, but they also aim at testing and developing the players' analytical, observational, organizational and communication skills, as well as critical thinking, creativity and ability to cooperate with others and function effectively as a team. This point is emphasized by many escape room providers in the description of the experience on their respective web pages, see e.g. Exodus Escape Room, InsideOut Escape Games, Escape Hunt Adelaide, The BreakOut, as well as by Nicholson (2015).

A lot of the existing escape rooms set an age limit for their players, as the puzzles used in the games are targeted at adults and are usually too challenging for children. Otherwise, socio-demographic characteristics of potential players have absolutely no relevance, as room escape is a game suitable for a person of any age, gender, build, profession, status, cultural background, physical fitness or level of education. As Nicholson (2015, 2) points out, “the most successful teams are those that are made up of players with a variety of experiences, skills, background knowledge, and physical abilities”. It is also worth noting that a lot of room escape companies also strive to accommodate players with disabilities by making their premises wheelchair accessible and rooms playable for people with hearing or mobility impairments.

When done well, escape rooms are highly immersive and succeed in transporting the player into a different reality, where one might find himself acting as an explorer, a secret agent, a private investigator, a science lab assistant, or even a potential victim of a deranged zombie. Although themes of escape rooms vary greatly, the main goal of any room escape designer is to create a game, which is not only intellectually stimulating, but also manages to leave a lasting impression on the participants. This is not an easily achievable goal, but it is definitely feasible with the right amount of expertise, professionalism and know-how. The concept of room escape is closely tied with the psychological concept of flow, a state of complete absorption of a person in the activity he or she is preoccupied with. Flow is extremely important in room escape, as it is precisely what makes the experience engaging and, ultimately, meaningful. The idea of flow is discussed in detail in subchapter 2.5.

## **2.2 InsideOut Escape Games**

InsideOut Escape Games Oy was established in April of 2014 in Helsinki, Finland by three childhood friends from Hungary – Agnes Kaszas, Zsafia Purnhauser and Dora Nemeth. By that point, room escape games had already spread across their home country and their popularity was constantly increasing; in Finland, however, the concept was still widely unknown. Having decided to fill this void in the Finnish entertainment market, Kaszas, a professional actor, Purnhauser, a graphic designer, and Nemeth, a psychologist, joined their forces and diverse talents to create the first escape room of Finland, which was opened in Helsinki on the 1st of April, 2014. Their goal was to combine theatre, entertainment and science to produce a unique experience, taking room escaping to a new level. Within the first several months after the first room of InsideOut Escape Games began operating, the popularity of this new type of entertainment became so high that six months later the company moved to a new location, where three new rooms were opened to satisfy the demand. Currently the company operates



six different escape rooms in two locations of the city, one in the neighborhood of Kallio and another in Vuosaari on the premises of a conference hotel Best Western Rantapuisto. All the rooms have different themes and include “Escape from the Surprise Party”, “The Appointment” and “The Blocks” in Kallio, as well as “The Bar of Monsters and Madmen”, “The Ministry of Future Investments” and “Sensation” in Vuosaari.

Besides being the first and original escape room of Helsinki and Finland in general, the main difference of InsideOut Escape Games from its competitors is its theatricality and strong emphasis on the immersiveness of the guest’s experience. The founders of the company believe that the experience of room escaping should feel as realistic and engaging as possible from the moment the guest enters the building and the first interaction with the company staff to the moment the game is over. This is ensured by careful design of the rooms, including everything from the decor and music playing in the background to the game puzzles themselves, as well as by training of the employees, who are required to play a certain role related to the game’s theme throughout the pre-gaming process, as well as during the game, e.g while interacting with the players over the microphone, giving hints, etc. Great customer service is another one of the company’s great values based on the belief that the team’s game master’s attitude, alertness and willingness to find the right balance between being helpful and providing the players with a certain amount of freedom to take control of the situation are of extremely high importance and can make the experience so much more memorable and enjoyable.

The InsideOut Escape Games team consists of very diverse individuals from a variety of cultures and backgrounds, of different ages, nationalities and levels of education. The multicultural international atmosphere also manifests itself in the fact that the company’s primary language of internal communication is English, with the majority of games being hosted in the English language as well. Other languages, in which players can experience the game, include Finnish, Swedish, Hungarian and Russian. The company strives to accommodate its guests not only in terms of the ability to choose the language of the service, but also in the matter of accessibility of the rooms for people with disabilities – the games have been play tested, and enjoyed, by individuals with hearing and mobility impairments.

In addition to operating six different rooms in Helsinki, InsideOut Escape Games provides a first-of-its-kind movable escape game called Wall Escape (appendix 3). Wall Escape is a 30-minute long variation of a room escape game, where all of the puzzles, locks and challenges are located on a mobile wall, and no actual room is needed, except for several

square meters of empty space for its installation. Wall Escape is intended for use at various special occasions, from festivals to weddings and birthday parties. It is used both for company promotion at events and hire by corporate and private individuals.

### **2.3 Brief history of real life room escape games**

Although the exact date, or even year, of the establishment of the first escape room facility is unknown, the research of Nicholson (2015, 3) suggests that the first documented activity labeled as an “escape game” was the Real Escape Game created in 2007 by the publishing company SCRAP in Kyoto, Japan. The concept started to gain popularity and spread several years later, with the amount of escape room companies increasing rapidly in years 2012-2013, first in Asia and then all over Europe, and subsequently in Australia and North America. Hungary is considered to be the room escape hub of Europe, with its first escape room facility Parapark having been established as early as 2011. The concept of real life escape room has a number of precursors from the field of interactive media. Nicholson (2015) describes six of such precursors, all of which have, in one way or another, promoted the emergence of the escape room phenomenon as we know it. Among these are live-action role-playing games; virtual point-and-click adventure games, specifically escape-the-room digital games; puzzle hunts and treasure hunts, with MIT Mystery Hunt being the most notable example; interactive theatre and haunted houses; adventure game shows and films, including the Amazing Race, Fort Boyard and the like; and themed entertainment industry experiences, like the MagiQuest franchise or 5 Wits family entertainment centres. (Nicholson 2015.)

According to the online Escape Room Directory (2016), which currently represents the most reliable source of information on the amount of room escape venues in the world, there are presently 4096 escape rooms in 1769 different sites, residing in 68 countries. This goes to show how popular and ubiquitous the concept has become over a relatively short period of time, which makes the authors of this paper believe that the room escape phenomenon deserves a lot more attention and research in the academic world.

### **2.4 Escape room design principles**

As stated above, the amount of research and literature on the concept of escape rooms is scarce; thus, there are no universally approved methods or techniques of designing them. There are, however, certain design principles that have been described in the works of Nicholson (2015) and Clare (2015), which should be taken into consideration by anyone embarking on a challenging quest of setting up a potentially successful escape room facility. These basic design principles are discussed in this section.

Clare (2015) claims that the first step in designing an escape room is choosing a theme, which creates the context for the entire room and helps to “convey the narrative and justify the challenges the players must experience”. In his opinion, the theme does not have to be limited to the physical space, where the game takes place, but can, and probably even should, spread to the pre-game area and even the whole location of the escape room facility. According to the research of Nicholson (2015), in which he surveyed the owners of 124 room escape facilities from various parts of the world, not every escape room out there has a specific theme or a narrative. In fact, 13% of games analyzed proved to belong to the category of escape rooms, which are not more than a collection of puzzles and tasks without any kind of story or theme behind them; and although the vast majority of escape rooms analyzed in the said research, are very much narrative-driven, where puzzles are part of the storytelling and cannot be separated from the room’s narrative, Nicholson asserts that none of these design paths are right or wrong and all of them have the right to exist and can be enjoyed by players equally. According to Clare (2015), however, the theme can matter even more than the puzzles themselves, and in some cases it can be powerful enough to make up for mistakes in the puzzles or other elements of the room design.

No matter whether it has an overarching theme and narrative or is devoid of them, an escape room cannot happen without the presence of puzzles, which are essentially the backbone of the game. Clare’s (2015, 40) definition of a room escape puzzle is “any challenge, which requires using mental effort to logically solve a problem.” In his opinion, just looking for hidden clues and objects does not constitute a puzzle and is more of a way of exploring the space and engaging with it. Nicholson (2015), however, seems to disagree with it, as searching for objects is mentioned as a puzzle in his research. As stated previously, the variety of puzzles used in escape rooms is quite large and it ranges from riddles and word puzzles to tasks that require good hand-eye coordination or an ability to think outside the box, plus many things in between. In his work, Nicholson (2015, 19-20) compiled a list of puzzles widely used by room escape designers in their games and arranged them in accordance with their frequency of use in the analyzed rooms. According to the list, the already mentioned searching for physical objects hidden in the room is the most used puzzle with the frequency use rate of 78%. Indeed, in the majority of escape rooms the players start the exploration of the space by examining the items located inside it, trying to identify the ones that can provide an insight into the story and help them solve the puzzle at hand. The second most used puzzle type is team communication (58%), where players have to cooperate and exchange information between each other in order to conquer a certain challenge. This fact yet again emphasizes the idea of room escape being an activity rooted in communality and teamwork, something that requires a joint effort in order to achieve success. Other frequently used puzzles include light puzzles (primarily, the use of UV light to uncover hidden messages), counting, noticing something

obvious in the room, symbol substitution with a key, using object in an unusual way, searching for objects in images and many others. The full list is presented in Appendix 1. It is also worth noting that some types of puzzles, though extremely engaging and stimulating, are very rarely found in escape rooms due to the complexity of their execution. Examples include puzzles that use the players' senses of smell and taste, as well as those based on the players' interaction with the actors present inside the room.

Puzzle placement and distribution play a very important role in any room escape game. Puzzles can be introduced individually, with the solutions contributing to one final metapuzzle, or in a sequence, where each previous puzzle is connected to the next one. There are many different types of puzzle organization, but both Clare (2015) and Nicholson (2015) identify three main ones: open, linear/sequential and multi-linear/path-based (figure 1).

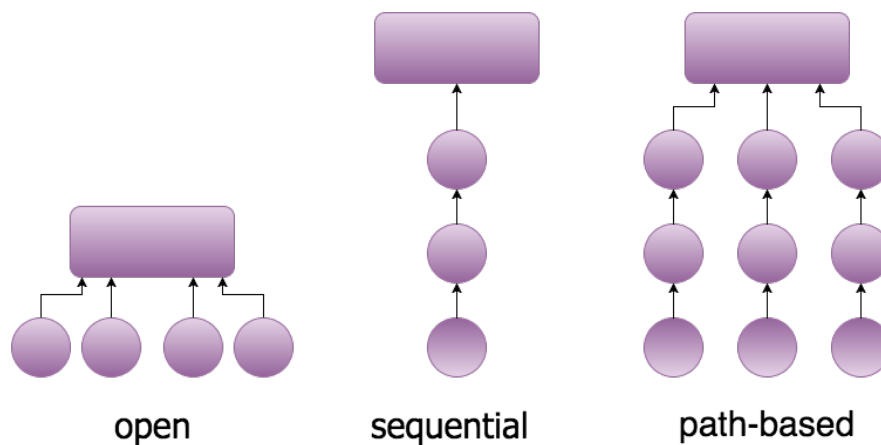


Figure 1. Types of puzzle organization (Nicholson 2015, 17)

According to Nicholson's research (2015), path-based method of puzzle organization, where the players are presented with a number of puzzle paths at the same time, is the most common one. This is not surprising, as such method allows for a gradual increase in puzzle difficulty, which is often crucial for an adequate game flow. In addition, path-based puzzle organization provides the players with an opportunity to work on multiple tasks at the same time, which is beneficial for larger teams. Another common type of puzzle organization is sequential (linear): here, the players start with just one puzzle, the solution of which will uncover the next puzzle, which will in turn provide some insight for successful completion of the following puzzle in the sequence, and so on. In both Clare's (2015, 17) and Nicholson's (2015, 44) opinion, this method of puzzle organization works best for smaller rooms and smaller teams, as it is the easiest to follow. The open method of puzzle organization is used rather rarely (Clare 2015), as the fact that all – or most of – the puzzles are presented to players

right from the start makes it incredibly hard to control the difficulty level of the game, which might easily hinder the game flow and spoil the players' experience.

As Nicholson (2015, 17) points out, instead of adhering to any of the basic types of puzzle organization, a lot of escape rooms use more complicated customized models and hybrid models, combining elements of the three main methods into one that better fits the idea of the game. This way, the game might, for instance, start with a linear puzzle sequence and later open up and split into several paths, eventually coming back into one linear sequence again.

Although a game designer is always free to choose the puzzles and methods of puzzle organization that he or she pleases and deems appropriate for the room created, it is important to bear in mind that these choices are critical for the game flow. It is absolutely crucial to remember about the importance of variety – both in types of puzzles and their difficulty levels. If the challenges are repetitious, way too easy or extremely complicated, it is very hard to keep the player engaged and motivated. Clare (2015) suggests starting the game with a simple puzzle and increase the difficulty as the game progresses. In his words, “a quick win early on will build [the players'] confidence and enthusiasm” (2015, 23). He also emphasizes the importance of the “know your audience” -rule, according to which understanding of your customers – how experienced they are, what their knowledge base is – helps you design an escape room with an appropriate level of challenge.

Other important rules of thumb regarding room escape puzzles include rather self-explanatory things, like placing the puzzle within the players' reach and visibility, having it well-lit, making it durable, and having it follow the universal logic principles, i.e. making sure that the players' do not need to inherently possess any particular knowledge on a certain subject (for example, rules of chess or customs and traditions of Ethiopian people). Clare (2015) suggests that the best way to ensure that all the conditions of a good puzzle have been fulfilled is to play test it.

No matter which types of puzzles one uses in an escape room and how they are placed and organized in the space, it is important that they connect to the theme and the narrative of the room – in case those are present. Each puzzle should have a purpose and add substance to the existing story – in this case the game experience becomes engaging and meaningful to the player.

## 2.5 The concept of flow

The concept of flow has existed and been known for a very long time, but it was given its name by a Hungarian psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi. An acknowledged expert on the matter, he has produced a sizeable amount of papers and publications exploring the idea of flow, with the most notable being his seminal work titled “Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience” (1990). There, he defines flow as “the state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (1990, 4) and argues that people are happiest when experiencing the flow state. Flow, or “being in the zone”, as it is often referred to colloquially, has to do with a heightened sense of focus, motivation, with complete absorption in an activity. It has a lot of common characteristics with a state known in psychology and psychiatry as hyperfocus (Webb, J.T., Amend, E.R., Webb, N.E., Goerss, J., Beljan, P. & Olenchak, F.R. 2005), although flow is always described in a positive light, while hyperfocus is known as a condition, which gets the person experiencing it “locked on” a task and makes him or her unable to redirect their attention to another thing when need arises (Brown 2008).

According to Csíkszentmihályi and Nakamura (2002, 90), the characteristics of the flow state include the following:

- Intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment
- Merging of action and awareness
- Loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor)
- A sense that one can control one’s actions; that is, a sense that one can in principle deal with the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever happens next
- Distortion of temporal experience (typically, a sense that time has passed faster than normal)
- Experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, such that often the end goal is just an excuse for the process

As for the conditions that should be fulfilled in order for a person to enter the state of flow, Csíkszentmihályi and Nakamura (2002) mention obvious proximal goals and immediate feedback on the progress, as well as a balance between the perceived challenges and one’s existing skills, meaning that the level of challenge should be adequate for one’s capacities.

According to Csíkszentmihályi (1990), along with ritual, art, pageantry and sports, play is one of the fundamental enjoyable flow activities, as it is usually constructed in a way that the participants are able to achieve a highly enjoyable state of mind. Such characteristics of play as providing the player with a clear goal and a possibility of having control and receiving immediate feedback on the progress make it an activity highly conducive to flow.

Provided that an escape room is well executed, it can be a perfect stage for achieving the state of flow, as it fulfills all of the conditions discussed above: there is a very clear and obvious goal to one's actions, which is to escape from a room within the set amount of time; the immediate feedback on the progress manifests itself in the successful solution of puzzles, opening of locks and finding hidden objects or messages; the tasks found in the room provide an appropriate challenge for the players, so the balance between the difficulty level and one's capacities is achieved.

As mentioned above, distortion of temporal experience is one of the characteristics of flow, which is very descriptive of playing room escape, as a big number of players frequently describe their experience by saying that the time spent inside the room simply "flew by" or that an hour felt like a much shorter period of time. Room escape also fits the characteristic of being intrinsically rewarding, as according to the authors' personal experience of working in the industry, in most cases even if the participants do not succeed in completing the game within the set amount of time, they still describe it as an enjoyable and memorable experience – after all, it is a collection of small victories, which do not lose meaning in the absence of one major victory. The sense of control is also essential in room escape, as the players do not experience any external interference and find themselves learning to take control of the situation and assume command of their own actions, which may or may not guide them to success.

Ultimately, flow is a desirable outcome of any room escape experience, as it makes it so much more engaging and, in turn, meaningful. Being in the state of flow is not only enjoyable, but it also promotes development of one's skills and capacities, which in the room escape context include those extremely important in the everyday life of any modern person – critical thinking, creativity, communication skills, problem solving skills, teamwork, etc.

It is important to note that although the authors of this paper view the theory of the flow state as very relevant in regard to the concept of room escape, it is not discussed or analyzed here in much detail, as within the scope of this study flow is viewed as merely an outcome of thoughtful and careful escape room design. In other words, flow does not act as a basis for the study, but the authors believe that it is important to address the theory at least in general terms in order to introduce the concept that is mentioned multiple times throughout the paper.

### **3 Experience literature review**

In this chapter the authors present the review of the experience literature that was analyzed for the purposes of this thesis project. To begin with, the concept of experience - what is meant by this term and how it is defined by the professionals of the field - is discussed. Next, the Experience Pyramid model is presented and its elements and levels are examined in detail.

The Experience Pyramid model (Tarssanen 2009b) has been chosen by the authors as the main tool for designing the room escape experience, Project Phoenix. There are other models for designing a meaningful experience, such as the Total Experience Management model (Gelter 2010), the experiencescape (O'Dell & Billing 2005), as well as the Experience Realms made famous by Pine and Gilmore (2011), in which they define and provide insight on how to design a holistic, meaningful experience residing on the "sweet spot", combining the escapist, esthetic, entertainment, and educational realms. While acknowledging the remarkability and potential of the aforementioned tools, the authors saw the Experience Pyramid model as more applicable and straightforward considered the objective of this thesis. The model presented by Tarssanen (2009b) goes into great detail in regard to which elements of an experience should be considered on each level from pre- to post-experience. Some other significant viewpoints and models – such as Servicescape by Bitner (1992) – from other authors are connected with the model used, but they merely serve as a way of deepening the understanding of each element or level discussed.

#### **3.1 The concept of experience**

When we talk about experiences in regard to the business context – as products for sale – it is important to understand exactly what meaning we put into this concept. The basic dictionary definition of the word experience can already give us a rather good idea of what makes it different from other business offerings – commodities, non-experiential products and services. Whether you look at the Cambridge Dictionary (2016) definition, which claims that an experience is "something that happens to you that affects how you feel", or Oxford Dictionary (2016), which defines it as "an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on someone", the main point all the sources seem to agree on is that experiences are always rooted in feelings, in impressions. Mind you, one does not have to remember every detail of the experience afterwards in order for it to be memorable and meaningful, but it is the imprint that it leaves in the heart and mind of the experiencer (Pine & Gilmore 2011). Naturally, there are many things being sold that can qualify as experiences – from a dental appointment to a tram ride – as they inadvertently evoke some kind of emotions, pleasant or not, be it worry, delight



or boredom. The experiences we are interested in, however, are about something much deeper and more powerful than being scared at the dentist's or bored on a commute to work – the experiences we are interested in are meaningful, memorable, and possibly even life-altering. According to Pine and Gilmore (2011), an experience – the fourth economic offering – is a staged, memorable set of events that is rich with sensations, engaging the guest in a personal way. Another perspective on experiences is provided by Boswijk, Thijssen and Peelen (2005). After asking 300 people what paid-for experiences they would never forget, they found that all of them had several things in common, namely they were personal and exciting, they had to do with “letting go of old patterns and discovering new frontiers”, made a high emotional impact and brought about a surge of energy. After extensive research, Boswijk, Thijssen and Peelen came up with a set of characteristics that describe a meaningful experience. They are as follows:

1. There is a heightened concentration and focus, involving all one's senses.
2. One's sense of time is altered.
3. One is touched emotionally.
4. The process is unique for the individual and has intrinsic value.
5. There is contact with the 'raw stuff', the real thing.
6. One does something and undergoes something.
7. There is a sense of playfulness
8. One has a feeling of having control of the situation.
9. There is a balance between the challenge and one's own capacities.
10. There is a clear goal.

(Boswijk, Thijssen & Peelen 2005, 144)

### **3.2 The Experience Pyramid model**

Not every experience a guest goes through can qualify as a meaningful one. The latter, however, is, or in the very least should be, the ultimate goal of any experience provider. The greatest challenge here is that the meaningfulness of an experience is highly subjective and is very much dependent upon a multitude of factors, a lot of which the experience designer or experience provider has absolutely no control over. There are, regardless, ways of impacting the guest's experience by controlling the elements of it that can be controlled and making sure that every aspect of said experience serves the purpose of making it meaningful, memorable and positive. This idea is supported by a number of researchers, including Shedroff (2001, 2), who claims that “the elements that contribute to superior experiences are knowable and reproducible”, as well as Pullman and Gross (2004, 552), who point out that “the service designer can design for experience and operations manager can facilitate an environment for experience by manipulating key elements”.

The Experience Pyramid model (figure 2) is an extremely useful tool for any experience designer, as it not only helps to answer the difficult question of what exactly constitutes a meaningful experience, but also provides a sort of a checklist, which the experience professional can refer to in the quest for creating something really outstanding. According to Sanna Tarssanen (Tarssanen 2009b), the creator of the model in question, the Experience Pyramid represents a perfect product, in which all the elements and levels of experience are taken into consideration.

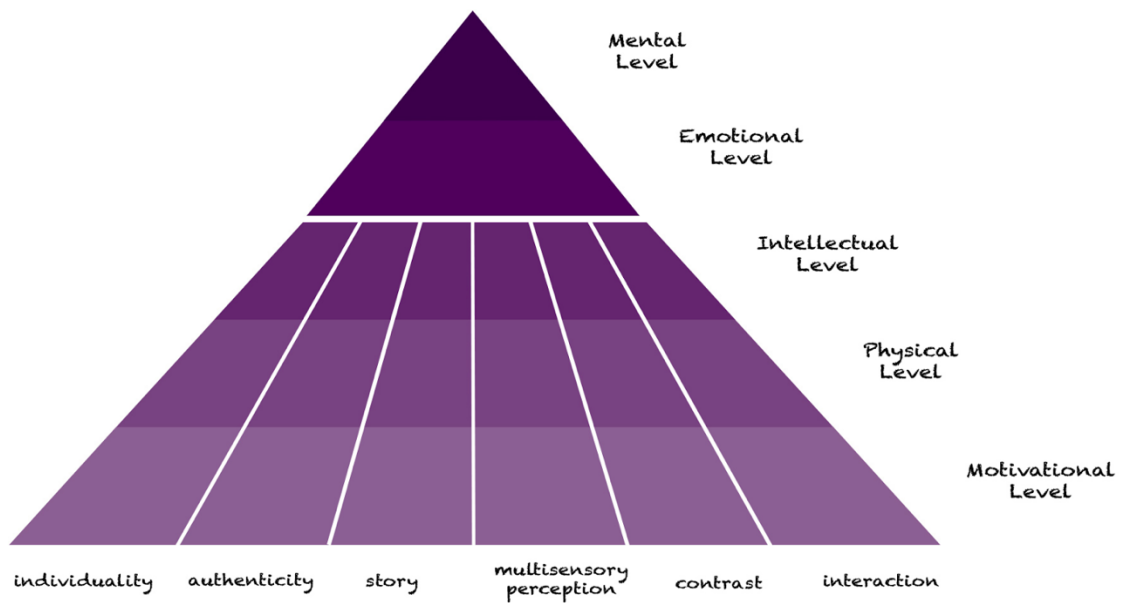


Figure 2. The Experience Pyramid model (Tarssanen 2009b, 11)

The elements of the product, presented on the horizontal axis of the model, affect the guest experience, and can be moderated by the experience provider. The six elements are: individuality, authenticity, story, multisensory perception, contrast, and interaction. All of these should be considered when creating and evaluating an experience product, and ideally they should be present on each level of the guest journey. Tarssanen (2009a) sees the elements in three groups: core of product (individuality, authenticity and story), target group (contrast), and experiencing (multisensory perception, interaction). The vertical axis of the Experience Pyramid Model represents the levels of experience, which in turn represent a guest's journey through all of the experience stages, from the pre-experience to the post-experience, from mere curiosity towards a product all the way to the mental transformation undergone as a result of using or experiencing it. (Tarssanen 2009b.)

### 3.2.1 Core of product

The core of product consists of the elements of individuality, authenticity, and story (Tarssanen 2009a). Together they form the idea of the experience, giving meaning to it and guiding every step of the process.

Individuality refers to the fact that an experience product should be as unique and flexible as possible. Ideally, one should not be able to find exactly the same product elsewhere, and the experience is customized to fit each guest's needs. It should be noted that as a rule, the more customisable a product is, the more expensive it will most likely be to produce. (Tarssanen 2009b.) This is why Pine and Gilmore (2011) advise companies to mass customize by creating new value through reducing or eliminating guest sacrifice, which represents the gap between what guests want exactly, and what they settle for when buying mass-produced goods and services. This requires the company to be highly knowledgeable of its target market and its individuals' needs and wants. Co-creation is very beneficial when customising experiences, as the guest is encouraged to participate in the creation of the experience, allowing individual needs and wants to influence the outcome – thus reducing guest sacrifice. (Pine & Gilmore 2011.)

An efficient way to stage unique, customised, and engaging experiences is to consider theatre as the basis for communicating with the guest by treating the work environment as a stage, and employees as actors performing a role. This way the guests look forward to interacting with the employees and it becomes a memorable experience in itself besides the actual product they're purchasing. When employees are encouraged to actively communicate with the guests as a character, and preferably taking a note from improv theatre in the performance, the interaction between the parties already makes each guest experience unique. (Pine & Gilmore 2011.)

Individuality is an immensely important element of meaningful experiences, as Pine and Gilmore state, "customising a good turns it into a service, customising a service turns it into an experience, and customising an experience turns it into a transformation" (2014, 28). On the other hand, when a service product is intentionally created engaging, the experience rarely is the same for every guest, as Sundbo and Darmer (2008, 6) point out. According to them, each individual's previous experiences will affect their interpretation of the product, which in turn will affect the way the person engages with it. Thus it can be said, that guest will be having an experience of some kind in any case, but it is up to the producer to make it as memorable, unique, and engaging as possible. It's about exceeding expectations, creating not only customer satisfaction, but customer surprise.

Authenticity is about how credible the product is: how well it sits in the existing lifestyle and culture, as well as how well it supports the producer's local identity (Tarssanen 2009b, 12). The producer should remember to respect the original culture in its representation without exploiting, offending, or falsifying its idea. The chosen theme for the product should also fit the character of the organisation staging it.

The term *servicescape* (Bitner 1992) refers to the built environment, in which the service takes place, and it is in the servicescape where authenticity is strongly manifested. Symbols and artifacts are used to communicate a certain image to the guests using implicit signals (Bitner 1992), which should be consistent and support the chosen theme with either original or imitative representations (Pine & Gilmore 2011). The items and decoration used around the servicescape should be of as high quality as possible and should not look cheap – unless that is the chosen theme. If the servicescape is poorly designed, authenticity of it will suffer, and so will the believability of the theme.

Essentially, the experience should give an impression of *realness*. The word *impression* is the key, as an experience can be perceived highly authentic while being produced far away from where it originates, paying homage to the original, rather (Chhabra *et al.* 2003). As Pine and Gilmore (2011) point out, the experience designer must acknowledge the fact that they will not be able to construct a 100% representation of the original, and thus should not try to fool the guests into believing it is. Figuratively speaking, think about an artist painting a realistic picture of a real life situation, trying to capture the moment as well as he can but through a different medium. In the end, it is up to the guest to determine whether or not a product is authentic, as no matter how genuine and natural it seems to the producer, the decision regarding authenticity will be greatly affected by personal perceptions and past experiences of said guest.

Story is the narrative running through the experience; it is closely connected to authenticity, and is present in all of the stages from pre- to post-experience. It needs to be credible without conflicting details in order to give the product context, provide the guest with motivation to experience it, and create justification for actions. (Tarssanen 2009b, 13.) Pine & Gilmore (2011) claim that theme-making should encompass aforementioned factors along with keeping the story coherent through the experience, which is essential to a successful experience product. They see storytelling as a vehicle for scripting themes, which, at their best, are stories that are reliant on guests' engagement in the experience creation process.

As Randy White (1998) adequately put it, “storyline-based themes are powerful. They draw guests into a fanciful, imaginary world and have the potential to touch the eye, mind and head of visitors”. He claims that a well-crafted story can be very believable as a back story, directing the designers creativity for crafting the experience; a credible back story gives authenticity and unifies the experience, ultimately creating an emotional bond with the guest. This idea is supported by Radoff (2011), who calls stories “emotional alchemy” and claims that “they have a wonderfully transformative power that can change people’s minds and convey meaning that might be lost through more analytical explanations” (Radoff 2011, 228).

As it has already been mentioned, meaningful and memorable experiences are always linked to feelings, so evidently, it is absolutely crucial for any experience maker to pay great attention to this element of the experience.

### **3.2.2 Target group**

Knowing your target group – your audience – is important in order to bring the element of contrast into the experience. Contrast between the guest’s everyday life and the product should be recognisable. In order to learn something new about oneself, the experience should be out of the ordinary and exotic, forcing one to break out of learnt habits and see things in new ways and from new angles. (Tarssanen 2009b.) Essentially, the experience should be something out of the ordinary, the opposite of mundane. Of course, everyone has different perspectives on what is usual and mundane and what is not, which is why both target market and their culture should be analysed carefully. According to Hansen and Mossberg (2013, 210), the contrast of the experience to everyday life brings about deeper awareness and creates a solid foundation for higher emotional involvement, which in turn results in a larger degree of immersiveness.

Theming the experience is an immensely helpful tool for bringing contrast to the guests’ everyday lives, if well designed. Pine and Gilmore (2011) claim that an engaging theme should alter one’s sense of reality by affecting the sense of space, matter, and time, integrating them into a cohesive, realistic whole. The producer of the experience should create a theme that alters a dimension of the human experience, something out of one’s everyday life. The servicescape should be made engaging and multi-dimensional by offering multiple places within a space, the items placed there supporting interaction and enhancing the theme. Bringing elements from the past or future, or another dimension of reality help alter one’s sense of time. A well orchestrated theme gives the guest’s imagination something to feed on and connect with the product. (Pine & Gilmore 2011.)

### 3.2.3 Experiencing

Multisensory perception and interaction are the elements that exist only during the experience, supporting it in a tangible way - no sense can be perceived without somebody being the subject of that perception, as no interaction can happen in the absence of someone to interact and be interacted with. As opposed to the rather abstract concepts of the elements that belong to the other two groups - that is, core of product and target group - multisensory perception and interaction are seen as more concrete aspects of the experience.

Multisensory perception is about managing ambient conditions, taking all the five senses into consideration. The sensory perceptions experienced by the guest should support the theme, as well as the narrative of the product, and help immerse oneself in the story, making it seem more real, feel richer and more profound (Tarssanen 2009b, 13). Senses trigger memories from individual's own past, linking personal emotions to the experience – either positive or negative – and the more stimulating to the senses the experience is the memorable it will be. One should, however, be careful, so as to not overpower the senses either – there has to be a balance, as overuse of multisensory elements can be as harmful and destructive as lack thereof.

The ambient conditions of the servicescape should not be overlooked, as it affects perceptions and ways of responding to the experience. The ambient conditions become increasingly noticeable when the guest spends a considerable amount of time in the servicescape, the sensory perceptions are extreme, and when they conflict with expectations (Bitner 1992). Wakefield and Blodgett's (1996) study found, that often when the primary service was of a satisfactory quality but the servicescape poorly designed, losing customers was a probable result as they didn't feel comfortable spending time there. It is beneficial for the experience provider to have another person to evaluate the ambience of the servicescape especially after a long period of running the service, as one tends to get accustomed to the servicescape and fail to notice deficiencies – which the customers surely will, and repatronage becomes less likely.

Interaction can be viewed from multiple perspectives when we talk about experiences. There is interaction between the guest and the product, the guest and the experience provider, as well as interaction among the guests participating in the experience together. All of these types of interaction should be considered and taken into consideration, as they are all equally significant. If a product is experienced by the guest together with others, it raises group spirit and status of the individual, links participants closer together, and the experience gains common acceptance when done properly. Effective and successful interaction between the guest

and experience provider is just as crucial, as it supports staging the experience and individuality of the product. (Tarssanen 2009b, 14.) When the experience provider treats work as a stage for his performance, interaction with the guest becomes more vibrant and the experience more individualised, bringing contrast to their everyday life.

According to the study by Thoman et al. (2007), social factors can influence the motivation of the guest before and during the experience. Besides that, the conversations had afterwards about the experience with those one experienced it with affect formation of memories and representations of interest and motivation associated with it. There is not much to be done about regulating the social interactions between the guests other than designing a servicescape that supports it.

“All social interactions are affected by the physical container in which it occurs” (Bennett and Bennett in Bitner 1992, 61). According to Bitner (1992), the design of the servicescape can either support or hinder the communication between and among customers and employees, and impact the nature of social interaction. She also stresses that one servicescape design doesn't fit all, but one should analyse the type of service being offered and build the space according to which kind of interaction is the most beneficial for supporting approach behaviour of customers and reach the functional goals of the organisation.

#### **3.2.4 Motivational level**

The first level that the author of the model distinguishes is the Motivational Level, which corresponds to the pre-experience stage. On this level the interest is awakened and the expectations start forming in the guest's mind. Those can be very well influenced through the use of various marketing tools and techniques. It is absolutely crucial to include as many aforementioned experience elements in the marketing campaign as possible. The ultimate goal is to have the marketing of the product or the experience reflect all of those elements, so strictly speaking, it should be individual, authentic, interactive, support the narrative of the experience, as well as promote contrast and multi-sensory perception. (Tarssanen 2009b, 15.)

As traditional marketing can hardly satisfy all of these conditions, one should turn to experiential marketing techniques, which are gaining popularity across fields and industries. Experiential marketing is, in essence, making the marketing of the product an experience in itself, a tasting of what is available, so to speak. As Williams (2006, 485) accurately put it, “experiential marketing is about taking the essence of a product and amplifying it into a set of tangible,

physical, interactive experiences which reinforce the offer”. Through engaging with experiential marketing, the consumer does not simply see and acknowledge the offer from the outside, but he feels it by being a part of it in an engaging, exhilarating way. (Williams 2006.)

### 3.2.5 Physical level

Next comes the Physical Level, where the guest encounters the product or experience in its material representation. This is where all the different stimuli are activated and the experience is being perceived through the multitude of senses. (Tarssanen 2009b, 15.) On this level it is very important to make sure that all the physical aspects are smoothly integrated into the experience and nothing stands out or seems out of place – unless, of course, there is a conscious purpose behind it. Every item, every feature, every color and sound should work towards a common goal. Hultén (2011) argues that the environmental context of the consumed service is very important, as it has a very significant impact on the creation of emotional connections.

Talking about the Physical Level of experience we can refer to the well-known Hierarchy of Needs model proposed by Maslow (figure 3), which suggests that before we can even think of trying to appeal to deep and meaningful human emotions and aspirations, we need to take care of the basic needs, i.e. physiological needs, as well as the need for safety. In other words, first and foremost, it is important to ensure that the environment, in which the experience is being consumed, is safe and pleasant. (Maslow 1943.)

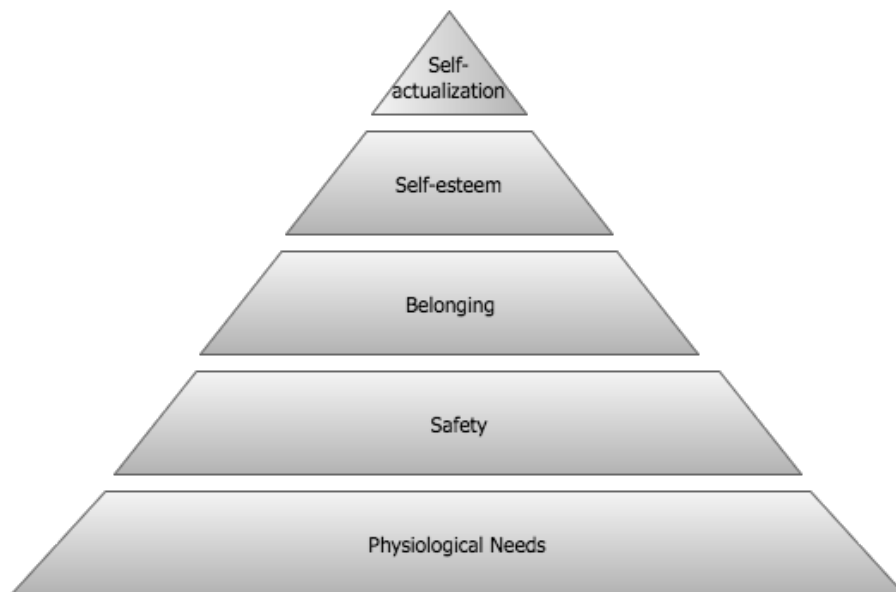


Figure 3. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model (Maslow 1943)



Bitner's (1992) concept of servicescape is beneficial to consider on this level. According to her, as the customer is consuming the service in the same space where it is produced, the design of the servicescape may have a strong impact on the customer's perception of the experience. From Table 1 one can see the environmental dimensions that affect the perceived servicescape and build the foundation for either approach or avoidance behaviour. These dimensions include ambient conditions, space and function, and signs, symbols and artifacts. (Bitner 1992.)

Table 1. Physical environmental dimensions of a servicescape (Bitner 1992)

Ambient conditions	Space / Function	Signs, Symbols, and Artifacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Temperature</li> <li>• Air quality</li> <li>• Noise</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Odor</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Layout</li> <li>• Equipment</li> <li>• Furnishings</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signage</li> <li>• Personal artifacts</li> <li>• Style of decor</li> <li>• Etc.</li> </ul>

The elements of the pyramid can manifest themselves in various ways, and are the most prominent on this level and thus crucial to manage accordingly. The servicescape should be modifiable in order to support individual customer needs. The items placed in the space and its design must give an impression of credibility by supporting the story, so that it makes a cohesive whole. Each of the five senses should ideally be affected in order to make the experience seem more real and trigger emotional responses. The design of the servicescape should also be done in a way that contrasts the guest's everyday surroundings, and supports interaction between and among customers and employees.

### 3.2.6 Intellectual level

The sensory stimuli obtained at the Physical Level are interpreted and made sense of at the next stage, which is the Intellectual Level (Tarssanen 2009b, 15). By processing all the information the guest has previously acquired with the help of the senses, in this phase he makes conscious judgement about the experience and decides, whether it was satisfactory or not (LaSalle & Britton, 2002). As the name suggests, this level is all about the intellect, about thinking and analysing. In order for the experience to even aspire to meaningfulness, it has to include some elements of learning and education, one way or another (Tarssanen 2009b, 15). Learning in this case does not necessarily mean a school-like acquisition of knowledge about a particular subject - although this can also be the case – rather, it is about broadening

one's horizons, developing existing skills or acquiring new ones, exploring the self, gaining new perspectives, evolving intellectually.

According to Moody (2012), meaningful experiences appear to be a very powerful learning tool. It is through experiences that we learn most important skills and develop our capacities. Jennings and Wargnier (2010, 14) argue that learning in the modern society should be focusing on action and output, rather than on information. Education involves active participation of the guest, so that instead of passively absorbing information, one is immersed in the action of learning (Pine & Gilmore 2011).

The elements of the pyramid at this level start to fuse together, creating a cohesive whole instead of individual aspects of an experience. The guest should understand the story as they have spent time in a servicescape that triggers their senses and creates an authentic setting contrasting their everyday life, thus creating an impression of a certain place and time. The experience should feel like it was specifically made for the guest, with interaction with the service provider and co-experiencers enforcing immersion in the experience.

### **3.2.7 Emotional and mental levels**

As evident from Figure 2, the last two levels of the Experience Pyramid are separated from the rest. The reason for this is the fact that these levels are completely out of the experience designer's reach, as the processes happening here are extremely subjective and highly personal. The first one of these two levels is the Emotional Level, where an emotional response to the experience is formed. Emotions are integral to any meaningful experience, and, naturally, the creator of the experience should always aim for the positive side of the emotional spectrum, i.e. joy, happiness, excitement, gratitude, etc. Although the emotional response cannot be controlled or sometimes even predicted, it is possible to say with a certain amount of confidence that providing that all of the elements of the experience were carefully considered at all of the preceding levels of the guest journey, it is very likely that the emotional response would in fact be positive. (Tarssanen 2009b, 16). As evident from service design and experience design literature, emotions felt by the guest during the consumption of the experience or upon its completion, have important implications for the experience provider. According to Pine and Gilmore (1998, 1999), companies that manage to not only satisfy the guest's needs, but also succeed in evoking a positive emotional response to the experience and making it pleasurable, can enjoy a higher level of customer loyalty. Zaltman (2003) notes that the emotional elements derived from the experience make a much more considerable impact on consumer preference than the tangible parts of it. Ideally, when reaching this level the guest should feel connected with the story, the organisation, and the people they experienced it

with. Besides that, they should feel appreciated and special, that the experience left an imprint on them.

The last and the most desirable level of the guest experience is the Mental Level. The ultimate goal, and usually the result, of any meaningful and powerful experience is a change, a lasting transformation (Tarssanen 2009b). The transformation does not have to be drastic, mind-blowing or cathartic, but it has to be valuable and, yet again, meaningful. It can be a change in one's lifestyle, personality or way of thinking, a newly acquired hobby, a paradigm shift, discovery of a new strength, overcoming of a fear, rethinking of values, or any other kind of personal growth and transformation. Change is the peak of the Pyramid, the Holy Grail of the experience designer, and the only thing that can, if not guarantee, then at least substantially increase the probability of attaining it, is a solid well-thought-out foundation, where all of the elements have been carefully considered and successfully integrated. According to Pine and Gilmore (2011) people want more than just a lasting memory, they want lasting change as a person. They also claim that transformations are built on experiences – as experiences are built on services – which were customised to fit each customer's needs in order to reach high levels of personal change.

## 4 Designing with the Experience Pyramid

As mentioned previously, the Experience Pyramid is a very useful tool for designing and staging memorable experiences. It provides great assistance at all of the stages of experience design, from devising the overall idea of the experience to identifying possible gaps and disparities in the final stages of production. This chapter will concentrate on using the Experience Pyramid model specifically for designing a room escape experience. First, the elements and their application in a room escape setting will be briefly discussed, after which a deeper analysis of the levels of the experience, including the integration of the elements in each of them, will be presented.

It should be noted that the assumptions and interpretations of escape rooms made here are mostly based on the works of Clare (2015) and Nicholson (2015), as well as personal experience of the authors after well over a year of working in an established escape room facility, as there is very little research on this particular subject currently available.

### 4.1 Elements

While there are recurring themes and puzzles in room escape facilities, one should strive to create a unique experience and emphasize the crucial element of individuality, especially because of the one-time nature of the experience - replayability of an escape room is a rare occurrence and the authors will not be focusing on this aspect, as they don't regard it as a crucial one. As the idea behind escape rooms is about solving puzzles and the surprise element behind the closed door, it is less than ideal that a player has experienced the exact same game before. As said, some themes and puzzles are very common – such as prison escape as a theme and the use of UV light in puzzles (Nicholson 2015, 19) – which means that if one decides to do something that has been done often before, it is wise to at least include an original twist or a special way of actualising it, especially concerning the theme.

Most of the customisation, which helps to boost individuality of the experience, is created through social interaction with the game master and within the group itself. Every player and group coming to play a room is different, which affects the way the members communicate with each other, perceive the puzzles and engage with the space; this results in the fact that not one group will have the exact same experience. The game master should also influence this fact with their own performance, treating the encounter with the guests as a chance to partake in a theatrical act, modifying the experience by interacting with the players in order to immerse them in the process. Another way to customise the room es-

cape experience is to add something about the group coming to play. For example, InsideOut Escape Games has an extra service option available for special events such as birthdays and such, where information about the individual being celebrated is gathered beforehand and is then integrated into the experience, making it more personal.

The experience should feel as real as possible – authentic – in order to immerse the players in the story. Implicit signals communicating the image of the story have to be consistent and well-rendered throughout the experience, and nothing should feel out-of-place. Symbols and artifacts should be at least of a proper imitative representation of the original idea, especially if the escape room is based on a real-life culture or phenomenon, such as a detective's office. It is somewhat easier in this sense to take upon designing a room that has a theme that brushes with fantasy, as one does not need to consider whether or not it represents real life. Nevertheless, the designer must ask themselves, "Is this credible" no matter how out-there the theme is. Another useful question is, "Is this tacky", especially with popular culture themes. The theme should also be chosen and actualised with good taste, in a non-offending way if it is of the controversial type. It can be argued, that building an escape room with the theme such as Anne Frank's days of hiding might portray bad taste as a tragic event is turned into amusement (Flood 2016).

As it has been said before, the level of authenticity of the product will be decided by the guests – the players in this case. When one comes to play room escape, the player is fully aware of the fact that whatever is inside the room is not real, but they accept this and instead of trying to figure out how believable the story is, they let their imagination run free. This can be encouraged by interacting with the game master, whose duty is to get the players to play along. In the best case scenario, the players are excited to, for example, take part in a bear's birthday party and enjoy finding out more about this character while in his room. If you get the players to engage with the story already before entering the game, the experience will seem more authentic, as their imagination helps them to step inside the fictional scenario.

It is immensely important to create a compelling story for an escape room, as it gives the player a motive and purpose for their journey in, and eventually out of the room in the given time frame. It is simply not enough just to have a room full of locks only for the sake of opening them - there needs to be a reason why. An escape room should go beyond just a theme, it should engage in active storytelling. A good story helps the guests dive into the experience and take on a role themselves, detaching from the 'real world' and achieving the flow. When designing the room, it is beneficial that one considers the story in great de-

tail, imagining what happened during and before the planned scenario, and what the characters of the story are like. This helps the designer avoid being superficial and add layers and twists in the story, and thus in the experience itself. The story must be coherent throughout the experience in order to produce high levels of immersiveness. In the end, it is the game master who can either make it, or break it concerning the story. It is on their shoulders to get the players to play along and accept the authenticity of the story.

Regarding multisensory perception, one must be careful with sensory stimuli inside the room, as they can be beneficial in supporting the immersiveness of the story, making it seem more real, but they can easily become overpowering and make the player detach themselves from the experience. The mood-enhancing music should be kept on an adequate level where communication among group members flows smoothly, the smells and tastes do not cause nausea but evoke mental images of a certain time and place, visual representations are rich and well rendered, and different materials are used adequately – all these working along to support the story. Ideally, all five senses should be considered in the experience, either in the general servicescape as elements of design, or/and incorporated in the puzzles.

Escape rooms in general aim to bring high levels of contrast to players' everyday lives by crafting a scenario, in which they most probably would not end up normally. It is fairly safe to assume that opening locks and solving various puzzles – in order to defuse a bomb, for example – isn't something a lot of people do on a daily basis. Escape rooms strive to create a multi-dimensional, time-altering space which brings about new experiences and a learning aspect. A well-crafted theme is a great way of bringing contrast, which is why a lot of escape rooms have a pinch of supernatural in the story, or are placed in a different time. It could even be said that the players are paying for having a highly contrasting experience compared to their normal lives, wanting to be transported into a compelling story; to have an adventure. Many people have fallen into an everyday routine, to which real life escape room games bring a refreshing change.

Interaction among the players and with the game master is a key element in escape rooms. The experience by default is meant for two persons and more, and the group's success is highly dependant on its members' ability to communicate with each other. There is little to be done in order to help social interaction between group members, other than create a space where interaction is easy and crucial in order to get forward. And as it has been said many times before here, the players' interaction with the experience provider must not be underrated. The game master should portray the story of the room in a compelling way and give it some foundation in the form of a solid back story. They should

strive to engage players in the story, asking them questions and answering theirs – still according to the role – to get them deeper into the turn of events before entering the room; taking inspiration from improvisation theatre is helpful. If the standard practice in the company is to give hints to the group in the room via a microphone, the game master should still stay in the character, all the way until the story has gotten a closure. By interacting with the players in an engaging way, through a specific role, the game master has all the tools for enhancing the immersion and individualisation greatly.

#### **4.2 Motivational level**

An ability to evoke interest of a potential consumer in the experience offered is a challenge for any business, and escape rooms are no exception. It is especially true in the environment of increasing competition, as room escaping is constantly gaining popularity and some room escape markets quickly become oversaturated, bursting with multiple offers from a large variety of companies, both well established ones and newcomers. This is why it becomes crucial to be able to differentiate and stand out from the crowd of competitors already at the level of the customer's interest and curiosity, the motivational level.

Clever marketing is the only way to succeed in this endeavour. As mentioned in Chapter 3, an experience company can greatly benefit from adopting experiential marketing techniques instead of using traditional forms of marketing, like advertising in print, on TV or radio. Experiential marketing is much better suited for promoting an experiential product, like an escape room, as it can demonstrate it in the best possible light and give the potential consumer a much clearer and more in-depth view of the offering. A challenge that room escape providers might face when adopting experiential marketing, however, is inability to demonstrate a lot of the actual experience, as the specific nature of the concept is keeping the experience awaiting the player a mystery until the moment it actually begins. There are, nevertheless, ways to work around this issue: one does not have to reveal any important parts of the game or the story behind it during the promotion process, the most important thing is to convey the atmosphere of the experience, intrigue the potential consumers, tickle their imagination and, most importantly, get them to feel something - something you would want them to feel when partaking in the experience you create.

A great example of using experiential marketing for room escape promotion can be taken from the practice of InsideOut Escape Games. Their movable Wall Escape game has been proven very effective in promoting the actual room escape games that the company has to offer. The Wall Escape game presents a short version of an escape room, where

the players, although not needing to physically escape from anywhere, have to solve a variety of puzzles and open multiple locks all the while being engaged in a moving and intriguing story. Though Wall Escape is not used to promote a specific game in the company's repertoire, it does a phenomenal job at explaining the concept of room escape to those unfamiliar with it in an extremely captivating manner. All the elements of the Experience Pyramid model can be effectively incorporated into a game like Wall Escape. The uniqueness of the experience represents the individuality - the game is always co-created with the players, as they are an indispensable part of it, thus ensuring that no two experiences are alike, as there are never two identical teams. Authenticity shines through not only in a fascinating story about the lost wisdom of a Finnish grandfather, which features a lot of references to the Finnish culture, but also in the fact that the participants are immersed in a situation very similar to an actual escape room. The story is a strong aspect of Wall Escape - there is an engaging narrative running through the entire game and the players are subject to it from the first second until the last one with the help of the game master, as well as the puzzles, which all play integral parts in the development of the plot. Multisensory perception is given a lot of attention in the Wall Escape: the sight is stimulated by a variety of visual puzzles and elements of the game, the auditory element is represented by the game master's narration of the story throughout the experience, the touch is manifested through the opening of locks and interaction of players with various props, while the smell is utilized in a puzzle that features an assortment of traditional Finnish smells like cinnamon, tobacco, coffee and tar. The next element of the Pyramid, contrast, is very observable in the Wall Escape game, as it offers the players an unusual experience and provides them with a chance to escape the reality of their everyday life and experience something new and out of the ordinary. Just like a regular escape room, Wall Escape is an activity designed for a group of people, so interaction is of high importance in this experience. The players get a chance to interact not only among themselves, but also with the game master and, of course, the game itself. This type of interaction - one that is very tangible and immersive - is extremely hard to recreate by using only the conventional marketing techniques.

Transmedia storytelling is also an engaging way of marketing, as it tells a story with a proper narrative structure across multiple media platforms. It takes into consideration the different user experience of each medium and expresses the story in various ways, but still as a cohesive whole. It is a complex subject, but beneficial in creating a multidimensional marketing experience. (Scolari 2009.) Storytelling is an essential part of escape rooms, and connecting potential players to the story already in the marketing stage supports immersion in the scenario even before the actual experience begins.



All in all, using something like the presented Wall Escape to promote escape rooms can be very powerful, as it succeeds in the most important objective of the Motivational Level - promoting the experience in an engaging way, conveying its atmosphere and evoking emotions similar to those that might be felt during said experience - exhilaration, competitiveness, surprise, excitement, empathy, motivation, etc.

### **4.3 Physical level**

The success of a room escape game depends greatly on the quality of the physical space, where it takes place. There are many things that have to be taken into consideration on this level, as the physical environment plays an enormous role in the formation of the overall impression and creation of the atmosphere of the experience. One extremely important thing to consider is the general ambient conditions of the space - since the players will be spending up to an hour in the room, the environment should be conducive to a long stay there. The temperature should be comfortable, the room ventilated and well-lit - unless darkness plays an important role in the game. There should not be any unnecessary obstructions or obstacles that might act as annoying nuisances on the way to having an enjoyable time. The physical manifestation of the game should fully support its intangible elements like the story and the atmosphere. The decor needs to fit the theme, and each of the puzzles, props and other game elements has to produce an impression of belonging to the space - even a single out-of-place object can greatly disturb the experience by undermining its credibility.

The design of the room escape servicescape should support the authenticity of the chosen theme and created story: if one decides to create an office of a paleontologist, it would be only logical to fill a bookcase in the corner with encyclopedias about prehistoric animals, scatter some fossils around the working desk or put a map of important excavation sites on the wall. The objects used in the room have to at least produce an impression of being genuine, even if the supposed fossil is in fact made of plaster and the places flagged on the map have never been of any interest to paleontologists. The designer must also not forget to evaluate whether the puzzles make sense in the context of the story or not, why would they be placed in the space. Room escape, after all, is all about storytelling and roleplaying, so complete genuineness and originality are not required - maximum believability, however, is.

The story can be promoted not only through the correct use of well-designed props, but also through a thoughtful design of the pre-game space, which is often disregarded by

room escape providers. If the space, where the players begin their experience, e.g. the lobby, offers some physical clues related to what is awaiting them (a “Professor of Paleontology” plaque on the door, as an example), it boosts the immersiveness and helps make the transition into the experience smoother.

Although it would be virtually impossible to customize the physical space of a room escape game for each of the players, or even each team, the fact that the room escape experience is for the most part a co-created one, individuality of it will manifest itself through the unique way each player interacts with the space and objects found within it. Other important things for supporting the element of individuality are originality and freshness of design and maximum avoidance of cliches and repetitiveness. Although the theme used in the escape room might not be extremely innovative, the execution and physical representation of it should, in one way or another, be unexpected and capable of surprising even the most sophisticated player.

The element of multisensory perception is especially strong on the physical level of the experience, as this is where the consumer’s senses are very actively involved and they, in essence, become the main engine of the consumer’s perception process. The physical environment of the room escape venue should be designed in a way that as many of the players’ senses are stimulated in the game process. The visual component of the environment, i.e. the decor and appearance of puzzles, is usually given much more thought than any other element of the multisensory spectrum, and although it is extremely important and should not be overlooked, it should not overshadow all the other components, as they are just as crucial for a well-rounded experience. Sound can be extremely powerful in the process of creating the right atmosphere and getting the players in the flow, thus using a suitable soundtrack fitting for the theme of the room is not just advisable, but strongly recommended. Some auditory elements can also be used in puzzles and game steps - this will deepen the multisensory perception even further, as in this case sound will not just stay in the background of the experience, but will occupy its centre stage, if only temporarily. Same goes for the other senses, like touch, smell and taste. Touch, of course, is a much easier one to manipulate in the context of room escape, as it is always present in the game by default - the nature of the game dictates that the players have to physically interact with puzzles by touching things, opening locks, exploring hidden spaces, etc. The situation is much more challenging when it comes to smell and taste, as those are quite hard to incorporate into the gameplay. The trouble especially with stimulating taste is that it brings up hygiene issues and keeping stock of the edible items, as well as the question whether a player would even be willing to taste something unknown. It is, however, advisable to attempt integration of all these multiple senses into the game puzzles, as it will

make the experience so much more engaging, memorable and unique, taking the participants to another place and time. One should also remember, however, that excessive stimulation of senses can be just as harmful and derogatory to the experience, as a lack thereof. The experience can be very well crafted and engaging, but if the player feels uncomfortable and this feeling does not even fit the story, possibility of repatronage is much diminished.

In order for the player to be transported into a different reality and get that crucial sense of immersion, the environment of the game experience should contrast the player's everyday routine, which is usually not that difficult to achieve with the well executed decor. The whole design of the space should work towards making the player forget about the world outside of the room, where the experience is unfolding. Escape rooms generally succeed in creating this type of contrast for their players, unless, of course, the game designer's goal is to recreate the typical environment of an average representative of the general population, which is very rarely, if ever, the case.

The room escape space needs to be designed in such a way that it supports interaction - puzzles and tasks, as well as the overall spatial layout of the room, should encourage teamwork and communication among the players and not hinder them. The more puzzles that require active simultaneous participation of several players there are, the better. Vice versa, organization of game tasks in such a way that they can be accessed, due to a limited space or an inconvenient placement, by a single player, is not advisable.

To sum it up, the design of the physical environment and physical elements of a room escape game should be cohesive and convincing, as well as engaging and facilitating togetherness and cooperation - only then will it help the player achieve the desired state of immersion and flow, which in turn will assist in creating a memorable and meaningful experience.

#### **4.4 Intellectual level**

Although being primarily an entertaining activity, room escape can also be regarded as an educational experience, as it creates a perfect environment for nonconscious learning and skills development. Solving puzzles and racking one's brain over challenging tasks are a major, if not central, part of any room escape experience. Thinking, analyzing, reasoning and deducing are some of the most frequently performed actions in this type of environment. Thus, one can correctly assume that the intellectual level is extremely prominent in

the room escape context, and its importance should under no circumstances be overlooked or underestimated by the room escape experience designer.

More often than not, room escape players choose to spend their time trying to find a way out of a locked room not because they feel like they need to work on their analytical skills or acquire some new information about zombies or the profession of a detective, but because they deem playing room escape games fun and exciting. However, even though learning and development of one's skills and capabilities are essentially just a bonus to the enjoyable time spent with family, friends or coworkers, they are a crucial part of any meaningful room escape experience, whether the player consciously realizes it or not.

A successful room escape game teaches its players multiple things: how to think unconventionally, how to look at a problem from multiple angles, how to connect different elements that might seem unrelated at the first glance, how to be attentive and observant, how to work under pressure, how to know when to persist and when to let go, how to effectively communicate with teammates, and a myriad of other how-to's. But all of it is possible only through facilitating a wholesome experience that provides not only food for the eyes, ears and other sense organs, but also for the mind.

Each of the players participating in a room escape game possesses a unique set of traits, characteristics and personal features, which means that everybody's journey through the room will always be unlike anyone else's. The game participants will each discover the room in their own way, exploring the space how they deem appropriate and making sense of it accordingly. Different people have different ways of doing and thinking, making connections and placing puzzles of different logics. Although the uniqueness of different players' experiences is in a way a given in the room escape context, it is important to find ways to further support the element of individuality by developing puzzles that would cater to different minds and logics, thus ensuring that every participant can apply his/her intellectual potential, knowledge, skills and abilities. In other words, an escape room, where most of the tasks make the players count things or solve word puzzles, is not a good escape room - variety is key.

At this level the narrative behind the game should be making full sense to the players and all the elements within the room shall be working along to enforce the understanding. In other words, making sense of the room and the experience that takes place within it happens in the context of the story. The elements of story and authenticity are intertwined here, as one supports and reinforces the other. The perception of authenticity can hardly

be controlled at the intellectual level, as the players will form their own judgement of it on the basis of all the signals acquired at the previous stages. However, cohesive and coherent story can justify the presence of certain objects and elements in the room, making them feel more authentic and belonging to the environment, this way influencing the players' opinions.

The element of contrast at this level is manifested through the novelty and uncommonness of the intellectual challenge. The vast majority of players do not usually encounter the puzzles, which they are faced with in an escape room, in their everyday life, so participating in this type of game makes them break out of their habits, forcing the brain to think in different, often unusual, ways. A challenge for the game designer here is the need to create non-trivial and unexpected puzzles and tasks to ensure the aforementioned novelty, which becomes especially difficult in the environment of a competitive room escape market.

In order to get to the solution of certain puzzles and tasks, the players have to utilize their various senses, often needing to combine those in the right way. This type of sensory multitasking makes the intellectual challenge deeper and more stimulating, giving the experience more meaning and realness.

With room escape being a group activity, interaction at the intellectual level is strongest in regard to teamwork. Here it is all about learning to function within a group - delegating tasks, finding ways to cooperate with the team, recognizing each member's talents and potential, discussing and accepting other people's opinions even if they contradict one's own. Although all of it will greatly depend on each particular group's team dynamic, which is naturally impossible to predict or, let alone, control, the game designer can make an impact through thoughtful design of the challenges, which will encourage interaction, cooperation and teamplay, as those will have a huge effect on the overall immersion in the experience. Going to a room escape is a social experience which enforces the connection between individuals.

At this level all of the experience elements really start to fuse together, they work in unison, supporting and reinforcing one another, to intensify the players' experience and give meaning to it. Although here they become very hard to control and manage due to the reason that the players' role becomes so much more prominent in the process of co-creation of the experience, it is now clear that there are still ways how a designer can influence them in order to ensure a positive result.

#### **4.5 Emotional level**

Once the experience has risen to this level, the elements bind to each other, creating a cohesive whole; the elements are still there, but they can be neither singled out nor controlled anymore. If all the preceding levels of the experience have been considered with great care and attention, the players will have a meaningful experience, evoking positive emotions - although it is never guaranteed, in the very least one can say that it is a highly likely outcome. The success of this endeavor is highly dependent on the group dynamics and individual team members, but it is possible – and crucial – to create a favourable environment. It should also be noted that escape rooms are designed to send the players on a journey of emotions, and, for example, a certain degree of fear is often a desired reaction. Emotions, which are not positive by their nature, are felt strongly, which helps in immersion, and more often than not makes the experience a memorable one. It does not mean, however, that players, who feel distraught and frightened by their room escape experience, will necessarily enjoy it - the point here is that, although it might seem counterintuitive, provoking the participants to feel things that are inherently negative might actually enrich their experience. Nevertheless, in the end the positive emotions should outweigh the negative.

At this level the players should be emotionally involved with the story of the room, acting in the space as if the scenario was real and they were a part of it. Time starts to fly by as the players get more and more focused on the tasks at hand. This kind of immersion is what an escape room should strive to facilitate, as it will result in the much coveted state of flow.

As mentioned before, the room escape game designer should pay great attention to how the puzzles are organized within the game, as it can have a considerable impact on the emotional state of the players. If one faces a very complicated challenge early on in their journey, the level of frustration imposed by this encounter might be so high that no matter what the further game process is like, the overall experience would be regarded as a fail. A gradually increasing difficulty level of room escape tasks is always a safe bet and is very much advisable, as it ensures a steady progression and smooth game flow, where the players get more and more confident and goal-oriented as the game unfolds and they are much more willing, as well as much more prepared, to take on greater challenges in the late stages of their room escape adventure.

The game master's performance before, during and even after the experience will help the players immerse themselves in the story and get that emotional satisfaction. The interaction between the team and their "guide" through the game is very important, as the game master's actions and attitude can provoke both positive and negative emotional responses. The game master must possess an ability to "feel" the team, to understand their needs and challenges, to sense how much freedom and autonomy they require - if the players feel like they have independently managed to find their way through the game, they will feel empowered and self-actualized; and vice versa, if the game master made it clear that they would not have been successful without him/her "holding their hand" throughout the process, the feeling of failure and worthlessness might overshadow all other emotions. The post-experience communication of the game master with the team can be just as significant as the interaction before and during the game process. Sometimes, whether they managed to solve all the challenges and get out of the room in time or not, players need validation of their effort and achievements, however small those might have been. The game master is able to boost the confidence of those who succeeded in their adventure and reinstall it in those who were less lucky, to shed light on and help make sense of the tasks or plot twists that might have been misunderstood during the game process, to give valuable advice for improving teamwork and group communication - all of these things help the team to get closure for the experience and give more meaning to it by evaluating it with someone who has been following their journey objectively. The role of the game master is crucial for the success of any room escape experience, that is why room escape experience providers need to make sure that their employees receive proper training.

It is evident that there are many things that can have an impact on the emotions felt by the players in the course of going through a room escape experience - a lot of them have been discussed previously in the paper, as well as in this subchapter. Everything from decor and room temperature to the uniqueness of the story, the way the puzzles are arranged within the room and adequate training of the escape room employees will in the end play a part in how the experience is perceived and whether the players end up being happy with it. No detail is too small to consider if the desired result is to satisfy the sophisticated and demanding modern consumer.

#### **4.6 Mental level**

The peak of the pyramid – a personal transformation – is achieved by building a solid foundation from the levels below. As said, the transformation does not have to be a major one, it is not crucial that the player comes out as a completely changed person, but the

experience should leave a lasting imprint that will be beneficial for the individual. The most common aspect of transformation is that the player will make room escaping their new hobby - the phrase "this is so addicting" is very often heard by game masters after the game. Engaging in such an experience has all the possibilities for enhancing one's skills, especially when done regularly. Logical and analytical thinking, working better in unfamiliar situations, and teamwork skills improve, to name a few.

Transformation can also happen only after one escape room experience where the player learns something new - possibly their views on how they work as a group member and the light, in which they view their fellow escapers, are changed. Going to an escape room is a social experience, which enforces the connection between individuals. The experience more often than not helps the individuals to enhance their relationships with each other as they immerse in the process together, being forced to cooperate and trust one another. Being immersed in such a peculiar experience will bring a much needed change to one's everyday life, providing the individual in question with energy to continue doing mundane tasks. Perhaps an experience such as this will give them the courage to pursue their dreams, step out of the comfort zone and dive into unknown situations more often and with more confidence.

The game master's role can be influential in reaching this level, too. Discussion with the objective observant of the team's progress and behaviour in the room will help the players analyse their performance and understand what they could do better next time. Surely they will also be able to discuss this between themselves without the participation of the game master, which is what happens in any case. After exiting the room, the analysing of the experience starts almost immediately between the group members, as well as internally, and will continue well after they leave the facility. The professional viewpoints of the staff, on the other hand, are often regarded as authoritative, which might make the players more willing to take their advice to heart.

Transformation starts from within, which is why this level is the least controllable one by the experience provider. There is absolutely no way to predict what will happen inside someone's mind, heart and soul during the experience or upon the completion thereof - not in the context of room escape, not anywhere else. Transformation is a highly personal, even intimate, thing, which cannot be imposed, induced or forced. One can and should, however, make an effort of paving the way towards it, ensuring that the path to this mental change is sturdy, properly supported by the carefully considered lower levels of the experience pyramid.



## 5 Project Phoenix experience design

As mentioned previously in the Introduction part, Project Phoenix is a working name for an escape room designed by the authors in collaboration with the owners of InsideOut Escape Games. The room was planned to be actualized during spring 2016, but due to a force majeure event within the company the execution of the plan had to be postponed. Due to this reason the specifics of the design of the room, especially the puzzles, which constitute the essence of any room escape game, will be discussed in an overall manner without going into much detail in order to preserve confidential and proprietary information.

The room has been designed using The Experience Pyramid Model, whose application to real life escape rooms was discussed in the previous chapter.

### 5.1 Design process

The authors of this paper did not have any experience in designing escape rooms prior to Project Phoenix; this is why the first logical step in the design process was to consult professionals of the field - in this case, owners and founders of InsideOut Escape Games, whose expertise on the matter is rather extensive. The discussion of their standard room designing practice resulted in the conclusion that the creation process does not usually follow any specific rules or guidelines and results mostly from intensive brainstorming, at least in the case of the company in question. Due to this reason it was decided to choose brainstorming as the main idea generation technique for Project Phoenix.

Keeping in mind the importance of Experience Pyramid elements of story and authenticity, the authors decided to create a narrative based on the previous game "The Blocks" and connect it with the neighborhood where the game space geographically resides - Kallio. They felt like this connection to the "past" of the room, as well as the culture that surrounds its physical space, would boost the perceived genuineness of the story. This premise was the starting point of the Project Phoenix design process.

After a number of brainstorming sessions, various options of the game story were created and presented to the InsideOut Escape Games owners for evaluation, after which several more rounds of story alterations based on their comments and suggestions were done until the result was satisfactory. It is worth mentioning that ultimately there were three versions of the game narrative created: a short version for posting on the company's website, a version that the game master presents to the players on the spot, as well as a version

that encompasses the whole story from beginning to end with a full in-depth description of the characters and plot twists.

After finalising the story, the process of puzzle design was initiated. In order to create and develop tasks and challenges for Project Phoenix, the authors drew inspiration from the created story, other InsideOut Escape Games' escape rooms, as well as their own experience of playing various escape rooms. One important point to address here is that the multisensory element of the Pyramid model was considered especially carefully on the stage of puzzle design. Project Phoenix was planned as an experience that would be able to engage all the players' senses, this is why development of puzzles that would utilize the participants' sense of sight, hearing, touch, smell and even taste was crucial. The element of interaction was also taken into consideration - a lot of the created challenges rely heavily on the players' communication and teamwork skills, and the puzzle placement within the space was strongly influenced by the idea of creating an environment conducive to collaboration and cooperation. More information on puzzle design for Project Phoenix can be found in subchapter 5.4.

Puzzle organisation was also very significant for the potential of the players' achieving the flow state during the game. Path-based organisation type was chosen as best fitted for Project Phoenix. The tasks that mark the beginnings of the puzzle paths were deliberately created rather simple with every next one getting more challenging, which ultimately is meant to gradually build the players' confidence and get them to slowly but surely engage with the game and get immersed in the playing process.

When thinking about the physical representation of the game and planning the decor of the room, the authors resorted to the moodboard tool, as it felt like a great way to get inspiration and visualise the story, which would ultimately help create the right atmosphere in the game space. In order to get a better understanding of what the room should look like, the authors attempted to get a deep look into the characters and the story itself. The main question that drove all the design decisions was how to make it all seem as real as possible.

## **5.2 Story**

*The space, previously used as a storage room, is haunted by an ill-meaning spirit, who has gotten out of control and due to an unknown reason started to pull in objects from all around, overflowing the space. A person whose profession is dealing with spirits – she called herself “spiritician” instead of a traditional exorcist – came to the rescue and tried to take control of the spirit, but she felt that something was off the moment she opened the*

*door; she felt unexpected and unexplained familiarity. The spiritician then closed herself up in the room – nobody knew what exactly was going on in there, but at times the noises coming out from there were unbearable. Until there was silence. For days nothing happened and nobody dared to go in, but then a note was slipped from under the door in which she wrote that she needed help, “apprentices with bright hearts”.*

The previous paragraph is the background story, which will be communicated to the players before the game, mainly by the game master. They will have read the short description – the overall theme, rather than the actual story – of the room on the website beforehand, but the main storyline will be revealed by interacting with the game master, who will take on a role of a concerned worker that has no clue as to what is currently happening inside the room. It is crucial that the game master gets the players to engage with the story in the pre-game area and make them understand the purpose for their journey into the room. It is also the game master’s responsibility at this point to inform the players of the rules, as well as instruct them on how to get hints, where to find the emergency key, and how to use locks – all explained in the context of the said story.

This is the point where the players step into the story, as they are brought there to act as apprentices for the spiritician, to help her in ways that are still unknown. Once the players step inside the room, the rest of the story will unveil before them.

*When exploring the haunted space for the first time, the spiritician found an item from her past - it was hidden in one of the boxes inside the room. Many years ago this item was given to her by a childhood friend, who mysteriously and unexpectedly disappeared when they were children. Coincidentally, the item went missing the very same day. The spiritician, taken aback by the accidental discovery, began her experiments, now more determined to get to the bottom of the mystery than ever. She managed to find out that the spirit haunting the former storage consists of multiple souls, which it has acquired throughout the years - the souls it fed on in order to gain power. She realized what the only explanation to finding the item inside this room, as well as to her friend’s unexplained disappearance several decades ago, was - among all the souls consumed by the evil spirit was that of her friend’s. The spiritician did not hesitate - she was determined to save her long lost friend by opening a portal into the spirit world. But something went wrong in the process - she got sucked in, too.*

*Now the players are assured that they are on a mission to save both of them, but soon they will discover that it is not possible anymore – the only ones they need and are able to*

*save now are themselves. The spirit corrupts the souls it acquires and uses them to lure in new victims, feeding on their souls every second they spend inside the space. In order to rescue themselves, the players must try to outsmart the spirit and use the spiritician's notes to not only get themselves out of the room, but to close the portal to stop the spirit from gaining more power.*

The story inside the room will be revealed to the players through the spiritician's diary notes, design of the room, as well as by being incorporated in the puzzles. In the beginning of the game there is a short video of the alarmed-looking spiritician talking to the camera, which starts to play on a little TV in the corner immediately once the players step inside. The video has a lot of static, like a broken VHS, with only a few clear frames where in essence she tells the viewers that they have to get out within one hour.

It is extremely important to once again note that the room escape game in question - Project Phoenix - is based on the game which resides in the space at the moment - "The Blocks". The story of the current game is a bit more simplistic: an old storage is haunted by a spirit, which, according to the rumors, makes things change place and likes to play with heads of the people who dare to go inside. The new game continues this tale and gives it more depth, with the continuation giving more credibility to the already existing story, especially for those, who have already played the room, as they will return to the same story - a different chapter of it.

Not only is the planned game based on the current one, but it also connects with the neighbourhood, in which the physical place resides - Kallio in Helsinki. Within the game story the spirit, having gone completely out of hand, is pulling in objects from nearby places - glasses and coasters from various neighbourhood bars, candles from the church next door, etc. - collecting them inside the storage it has occupied. The players will also come to discover that the spiritician and her friend, whose soul she is determined to save, spent their childhood in Kallio. This connection of the room to its geographical location will be mostly visible in the design of the space, as well as partly communicated through the story elements, i.e. spiritician's diary.

When creating the story for the new game, the authors came up with a detailed description of the characters of the story, their relationship and history, the history of the space itself regarding spirits and supernatural phenomena, and what happens after the players exit the story in order to have a solid foundation for building a credible experience. The story for the room has been fully created by the authors in cooperation with the owners of

InsideOut Escape Games, thus making it original. While the supernatural, haunted-by-a-spirit theme is fairly common, the story created is layered and has an original, unexpected twist with a quirky spiritician instead of a traditional crucifix-wielding exorcist in order to make the experience unique.

### **5.3 Design of the room**

The design is cohesive with the story, portraying an overflowing storage with objects connected with the neighbourhood, the time when the story's characters were children – the 80s, and random items which storages tend to have. As the space is relatively small, one must be careful not to over-clutter it either. It is not a well-lit space - it gives a feeling of an abandoned room, where the only light source is slowly dying out. There are blackened marks on the walls, as if something was burned. For a visual image, see Appendix 2 to see the moodboard created for the room. Authenticity will be reached by sourcing the items for the game from local stores and hunting down retro objects from the 1980's.

The music in the room will not be made of songs per se, but will consist of quiet voices whispering to each other in Finnish, children's laughter, sound of walking, a child singing, etc. – all in surround sound so that the players get a feeling of the spirit being all around them. The sounds get more intense and frantic as the time passes. The smell in the room will be woody and earthy, made possible with a scent diffuser. The materials used will be mixed, creating different surfaces and textures.

The small space will be made more interesting by having hidden compartments and many places to go through. Because of the size, there is no real possibility of adding another room, so instead the one room will partially change design as the players move forward in the game. There are four special tasks that once solved will each cause a curtain drop from a hidden compartment on the ceiling, where a part of a bigger end puzzle will be revealed. This will give the experience a surprise element, which players are usually very fond of, and visualise the twist in the story.

### **5.4 Puzzle design**

The design of the puzzles for Project Phoenix was approached with the determination to create a set of unique and unexpected tasks that would not only fit the chosen theme and story, but become an essential part of them, helping propel the created narrative forward all the while making it more complex and meaningful. Variety and incorporation of multiple senses into the tasks were also paid great attention to in the design process.

In order to give structure to the otherwise chaotic space, it was decided to “zone” the room by creating two puzzle clusters, where most of the challenges and tasks are concentrated. The said clusters are located on the opposite sides of the space, emphasizing the juxtaposition of the story’s main characters - spiritician vs spirit, good vs evil. The puzzles located within these opposing clusters are, however, very much connected and have to be combined in order to find the solution and move forward, which is meant to underline the proverbial connection and interdependence of good and bad, not only within the said story, but on a larger scale - in life.

The puzzles developed for Project Phoenix room escape game include the following types: *searching for a physical item in the room, out-of-the-box thinking, riddle, pattern identification, hearing, team communication, assembly of a physical object, shape manipulation, noticing something “obvious” in the room, touch, abstract logic, strategic thinking, counting, maze, smell, taste*. This rather varied assortment of puzzles ensures a good level of challenge for the players, who will be forced to use a multitude of approaches and types of logic, allowing different players’ talents and skills to shine through, as well as keeping the level of repetitiveness and boredom at the minimum. As evident from the list, all of the five senses were incorporated into the puzzles: besides the visual challenges, which, as a rule, make up the majority of the game in escape rooms, hearing, touch, smell and taste were also integrated into the tasks to ensure the maximum level of immersion. It is impossible to say whether all of the sensory puzzles, especially the taste puzzle that might bring up hygiene issues, would be positively received by the players; this is why play testing of the room is crucial.

When it comes to puzzle organization in the game created, it is in essence a path-based type, albeit a more complex version of it. There are quite a few meta-puzzles present in the game, in which the players have to combine several elements and/or objects found, as well as a number of discovery puzzles that require the players to simply find or discover something (an important object, a piece of valuable information, etc.) and standalone puzzles that consist of one part and do not require any outside elements or data in order to solve it (ex.: a sudoku puzzle). Figure 4 demonstrates puzzle organization of the Project Phoenix room.

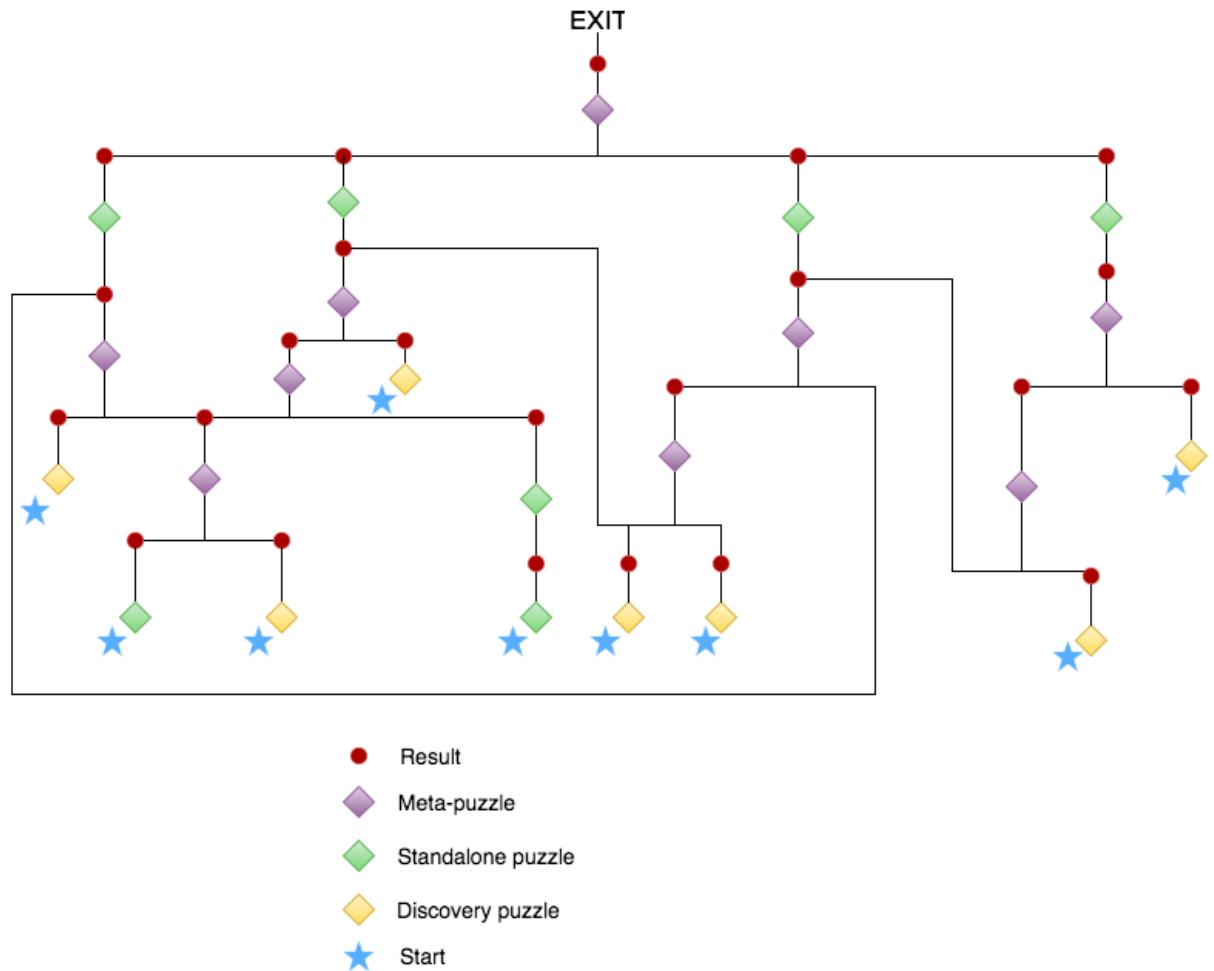


Figure 4. Puzzle organization in Project Phoenix

Another important point to address regarding the puzzles is the justification for their presence in the room. Although any player understands that locks, tasks and challenges are an essential part of any room escape game, there needs to be a valid reason for them within the created story - otherwise, the credibility of the experience might suffer. The justification for puzzles in the context of the Project Phoenix narrative lies in the assumption that the spirit is trying to stall those who enter the space enough, so that it can feed on their souls. The spirit's nemesis - spiritician - has thankfully managed to make sure that in case something goes wrong, whoever enters the space after her - in this case the players, who act as "apprentices" - have enough clues and information to get all those puzzles solves and all the locks opened. The spiritician's notes will guide the apprentices through the haunted storage and help them achieve the main goal - close the portal and escape the space before the spirit becomes too powerful.

## 5.5 Marketing

Advantages of utilizing experiential marketing techniques for the promotion of experience products, discussed in the previous chapter, are evident - due to this reason it was decided that experiential marketing would be the preferred tactic in the case of Project Phoenix as well. The main goal of the marketing efforts is to intrigue the potential experience consumers, engage them with the created story already at the motivational level and convey the atmosphere of the room in an immersive and exciting way.

In order to create a buzz before the opening of the new room, "Looking for a professional exorcist" advertisements will be posted around Helsinki, especially the Kallio neighbourhood, as well as online - in suitable forums and Facebook groups. During the build-up process, the new room will be also "advertised" to the players coming to play the other games at the company's Kallio venue. This staged "advertising" will include a "Do not enter! Exorcism session in progress" sign on the door of the room, as well as exorcism-style sounds (screaming, chanting, rattling) coming from the space. The game masters' comments, e.g. "Don't mind this, please - spiritician/an exorcist is at work", will also support the atmosphere of intrigue and mystery.

A new Wall Escape game will be created to support the promotion process - it can be seen as a demo of the full game, a tasting that leaves one wanting more. The premise for the game lies in the idea that Wall Escape represents a trial challenge for potential "apprentices", a test that will show whether the players possess the needed skills and abilities to take on the battle with the evil spirit. The Wall is also haunted - it was found in the space occupied by the spirit and retrieved for research, and now it serves as a tool for the recruitment of prospective "apprentices", as it is able to showcase their capabilities in regard to dealing with the supernatural. Just like in the Project Phoenix room, the multisensory element is given a lot of attention in Wall Escape in order to increase immersiveness. Senses will be incorporated into the puzzles: the players will be trying to decipher an encoded message from "the other side" recorded on an old tape recorder, analyze the smells of the potions proven to have an effect on the spirit, investigate the tactile properties of the spirit's favourite possessions, etc. The puzzles used in Wall Escape will not repeat or have the logic of those integrated into the Project Phoenix game, but will still connect with them story-wise. The tasks will also heavily rely on the team's interaction, not only amongst each other, but with the game master, who will be co-creating the experience with the players, sharing important insights about the complicated situation with the unleashed spirit and providing assistance with the puzzles at hand. It does not matter, if the players will not be able to get to the end in the given time frame, as the game master



will explain that it was a good practice round for them, and now they have valuable experience if they want to come and assist the spiritician.

## **5.6 Customer journey**

Taking into consideration the marketing plans discussed in the previous subchapter, it becomes extremely difficult to say, or even predict, where the first encounter of the potential customers with the Project Phoenix experience will happen and what it will be like. It might be in the street, when they notice the looking-for-exorcist ad; or at a festival, where they enrol in the apprentice recruitment process through Wall Escape; or even at Inside Out Escape Games' Kallio venue, where they accidentally learn about the issue with the unleashed spirit.

But no matter, where and in which manner this first encounter happens, the next place the player will venture to in case of a decision to learn more about Project Phoenix is the company's website. As the player goes to InsideOut Escape Games' internet page in order to book a game, they read the short game description, which says,

"We lost control of the spirit in our old storage - an exorcist needed to be found. A spiritician answered our ad, claiming to be a professional in her field. The energy radiating from the space feels different now that she began her work... but... not in a pleasant way. Now she needs help, who is brave enough to go in there?"

Inspired by the description the potential players will book the game, after which they will receive a confirmation email that provides all the needed details, as well as a personal code they need to produce at the front door.

Once the players arrive at the facility's front door, they will be greeted by their game master, who will inquire about their purpose. The unsuspecting players will try to explain that they have come to play a game, which they have reserved, but the game master acts confused - she has no knowledge of any games. Only after the personal code, received with the booking confirmation, is presented, the game master exclaims that the players must be the apprentices for the spiritician. While the players are leaving their belongings in the lockers provided, the game master starts telling them about there having been barely any sign of the spiritician lately, and claiming how good it is that the apprentices have finally found the time to come and help her. Discussion about spirits and how to handle them ensues, and the players are engaged in the conversation by the game master, who is asking questions about their spirit-handling skills. The group is taught how to use the locks, as

the spirit might use them to trick those who enter the space. The group is told the rest of the story while being instructed what to do and what to avoid inside of the room. A necklace with a vial pendant containing protective herbs is offered to each of the players in order to temporarily ward off the spirit.

A video starts playing on the screen, the players understand that they only have an hour before the herbs wear off completely and their souls become exposed to the spirit, but the rest of it is incomprehensible as there are seemingly random words heard, such as *portal* and *save her*. The time starts and they begin their exploration. Through opening boxes and puzzles they will find out what happened in the space. The first thing they find is a journal – which is missing pages that will be discovered later on – where the spiritician has written about her first findings, the fact that she found her lost item in this place signals that her friend is trapped and she is on a quest to release her. A bit over halfway through the game they realise that the spiritician and her friend cannot be saved anymore, and they have been tricked into the space where the spirit is feeding on their souls. The herbs in the pendant given in the beginning slows down the process, but if they don't get out before an hour has passed, their souls will be irreparable. Besides saving themselves, they need to get ahold of the object that the spiritician found in the beginning, and take it out of the space in order to close the portal opened by her, as the presence of the object in the room only feeds it more. As the time passes, the sounds around them grow more frantic and they start to hurry in order not to be captured by the spirit.

The puzzles might get difficult for the team, at which point they will ask for help. The hints will be given to them mainly via physical helpcards that are dropped into a mailbox attached to a wall next to the door. The hints might also be given by a voice, a friendly soul trying to help them from the outside. The clues are more of a push in the right direction than straightforward answers served on a silver platter - after all, in order to feel accomplished and confident, the players have to be coming to the puzzles' solutions independently. By being challenged, the players learn to think from new perspectives in order to find the solution.

By the time the hour runs out, some teams will have succeeded in finding the final key themselves, beating the spirit - in this case celebration ensues. Unfortunately, not every team will have the joyous experience of opening the door themselves, and will be let out by the game master. Whichever happens, the game steps will be analysed through discussion between group members and their game master, going through the moments of success and addressing the points where things could have been done in a better way.

Especially in case of the team’s failure to escape, the game master must help them identify their strong points and offer helpful advice for the future room escaping attempts, as those who do not manage to escape in time are often prone to focusing only on the fact of their failing. Nevertheless, the main point to be underlined by the game master in the post-game conversation with the team is the fact that the group enjoyed themselves during the process, that they managed to challenge themselves, work as a team, enforce the connection between individuals, and spend time immersed in another reality.

## 5.7 Results

The plan for Project Phoenix was created by drawing inspiration from the Experience Pyramid Model, striving to encompass its each element and level. The motivational level is seen in the marketing; the physical level - in the authentic design of the room and puzzles that reflect the story in a multisensory way; and the intellectual level - in the organisation of the puzzles and variety of tasks, and in the way everything makes sense in the context of the story. The experience has been designed in a way that it would support full immersiveness in the scenario, which is enforced by careful consideration of the elements of the pyramid on its three lower levels, that now form a cohesive whole – thus climbing on the emotional level, where the players feel connected to the story, as well as each other. Reaching the mental level is made possible by creating an experience where the players can challenge and learn something new about themselves and their team during an hour spent away from their everyday lives, experiencing something totally different, which might give them new energy and confidence to adopt different perspectives and maybe will push them towards some kind of an internal transformation.

Table 2 summarizes the application of the Experience Pyramid model in the design of Project Phoenix:

Table 2. Levels of the Experience Pyramid regarding Project Phoenix

<p>Motivational level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Experiential marketing: Wall Escape               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualism through uniqueness and interaction                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• game master engaging the players in the story</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Authentic design and story that connect it to the actual room</li> <li>• Contrasting activity and scenario regarding the players’ everyday lives</li> <li>• Multisensory puzzles</li> <li>• Interaction needed within the group and the game master                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- social media</li> <li>- making the scenario seem authentic</li> <li>- storytelling</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advertisements around Helsinki and social media about needing an Exorcist</li> <li>- Restless noises coming from inside the room while other rooms' players are present</li> </ul>
Physical level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualism through uniqueness and group behaviour</li> <li>• Authentic design and puzzles that make the scenario seem more real</li> <li>• Everything connected by the story</li> <li>• Contrasting activity and scenario regarding the players' everyday lives</li> <li>• Both the puzzles and the design of the room are multisensory</li> <li>• Puzzles that support interaction</li> </ul>
Intellectual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individualism through unique set of traits in the group</li> <li>• Authenticity through cohesive design</li> <li>• Everything makes sense in the context of the story</li> <li>• Variety of puzzles and tasks bring contrast</li> <li>• Multisensory puzzles where the player has to multitask with senses</li> <li>• Tasks that demand teamwork</li> </ul>
Emotional level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cohesive whole that forms around the story</li> <li>• Immersiveness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game master's performance engaging the players in the story</li> <li>• Supportive conditions for reaching the <i>Flow</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• puzzle organisation</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>• Variety of emotions triggered</li> </ul>
Mental level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformation through challenging themselves</li> <li>• Learning something new about themselves or/and the team</li> <li>• Game master helps analyse the experience</li> </ul>

As Project Phoenix is still merely a plan, it is rather challenging to evaluate how successfully the levels would be reached in reality – mostly referring here to the emotional and especially the mental level, as those are the least controllable and mostly subjective, dependant on a variety of factors. It is also only after the test games that it will be known whether the game developed is overly complicated or too simple, if the *flow* is achievable, how well the sensory elements work, and whether the story makes sense within the gameplay or not – among many other things. It is not a rare occurrence that a game has to be modified after the test runs, as so many different factors influence the end result. The main concern regarding puzzles is the tasting task - the reason for that are hygiene issues and

uncertainty in regard to whether the players would be willing to taste something unknown, as discussed earlier.

Marketing-wise the authors are fairly confident in the developed plan, as the Wall Escape has proven to be an efficient way of promoting room escape games and motivating the potential players to come and play the full version. Nevertheless, it also needs testing to see if the puzzles are logical and it is at least nearly solvable in the given time frame. Transmedia storytelling would be smart to consider also, or at least see if social media could be utilised further with this project besides the usual Facebook and Instagram posts. One possible idea was to include neighborhood bars and shops in the marketing by asking them to post on their own social media about disappearing items, but this idea still needs refining.

## 6 Discussion

The Experience Pyramid seems to fit well with the room escape industry, as it encompasses many aspects that already exist in escape room design, but portrays them in a sensible and straightforward structure. The authors did not encounter any challenges while working with the model - the process of applying it to the industry felt smooth and the pieces seemed to fall into place naturally. One must remember, however, that the authors had not designed an escape room before Project Phoenix, which means that there is a strong possibility that an experienced designer might have a different experience dealing with the model in question.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, presently there is no proper model or universal tool for designing an escape room, nor has an existing experience creation model ever been applied to the industry. Thus, the present study can at the very least serve as a basis, on which designers can build on, and might inspire one to create a proper, original model for room escape design. In Appendix 4 one can see a summary of how the Experience Pyramid can be applied to escape room design in the form of a concise checklist.

Project Phoenix strives to live by the rules of the Experience Pyramid. While the emotional and mental levels cannot be fully controlled or even influenced in a major way, the elements have been carefully considered on the preceding levels, creating a sturdy base for reaching the peak of the pyramid. As it has been said before, the success of the design when actualised cannot be fully assured, but in theory all the aspects of a successful escape room are present.

There are several things that in hindsight might have been beneficial to consider in the design process of Project Phoenix. First of all, the authors did not use any storytelling model when creating the game narrative, which was simply developed over the course of a handful of intense brainstorming sessions. As the element of story is extremely important for an experience product, it might have been advantageous – or in the very least interesting – to use some kind of a storytelling tool. Transmedia storytelling could have been addressed in the motivational level, as it is becoming increasingly essential in modern marketing. In the design of the physical level it might be beneficial to study Bitner's (1992) servicescape model more in depth and apply it to the room escape setting. It would have also been interesting to do research on the customers in order to find out what exactly the company's main customer group is like, and what they prefer in the experience. The authors have had countless discussions with players in regard to this matter, but no proper research has ever been constructed.

For future research the authors suggest connecting other experience design tools to the real life escape room industry, and perhaps attempting to utilize multiple ones by combining them; it would also be interesting to try to develop a model or a tool specifically for designing an engaging escape room. In general, the industry needs more research on all aspects of the real life room escape concept, as it still is a fairly new phenomenon.

The time spent working on this thesis and subsequently Project Phoenix has been a valuable experience in many ways. The project allowed the authors to connect a model that had been extensively studied in the course of their education at Haaga-Helia UAS to an industry, in which they are currently employed, and to test its effectiveness in the creation of an experience product. It was interesting to analyse the elements and levels of the Experience Pyramid from a different point of view, and to see how various aspects of room escape design, which are often discussed and acknowledged by industry professionals, could be connected with and related to it. Designing Project Phoenix challenged the authors to use their creativity, the experience of working at a room escape company and the knowledge acquired from their education to create an experience that would comply with the Experience Pyramid and result in an engaging, actualizable escape room experience.

## 7 Conclusion

In the course of analysing the process of the Project Phoenix experience design, the authors have come to the conclusion that the Experience Pyramid model translates well to the escape room industry, and its aspects can be seen in a lot, if not the majority, of existing escape rooms. While the marketing part of room escape games, which represents the motivational level in the Experience Pyramid model, is not thoroughly researched, the physical, intellectual, and emotional levels are considered important by industry professionals (Clare 2015 and Nicholson 2015), according to whom the design of the physical space, as well as other aspects of the game, should be done in a way that challenges the players and immerses them in the experience, helping them reach the state of flow.

The Pyramid does not bring anything new to designing escape rooms per se, but it makes the process more streamlined and organised, providing a structured base for creating a wholesome, engaging experience. In addition to the design of the actual product, it takes into consideration the ways of marketing this product to customers in an engaging manner, which is viewed by the authors as a very beneficial aspect of the said model. Another viewpoint emphasized in the Experience Pyramid, which the authors believe to have paramount importance in the context of real life room escape games, is that the experience should aim at leaving a lasting imprint on the players, which might in turn trigger meaningful personal transformation.

The design plan for Project Phoenix was created using the said model, taking each element into consideration on each of the levels, where they are possible to control. The authors saw the model as a helpful tool, especially for the less experienced escape room designers – although as said, it is difficult to evaluate if the designed room would be a success, as theory and reality do not always coincide. Besides relying on the Pyramid, the design is also based on the authors' own experience of working at an established room escape company. By actively interacting with the company's guests and closely following their games, they managed to reach an understanding of the players' preferences, the appropriate level of challenges for various player categories, as well as the effect a game master might have on the player's experience with their own performance – to name a few. The authors of the present thesis are left under the impression that the design plan developed for the Project Phoenix is plausible and it supports gradual and successful transition from the bottom of the Experience Pyramid to its peak, not only in theory, but also in practice.



To conclude, the questions asked by the authors in the beginning of their journey, i.e. whether the Experience Pyramid model is transferrable to the context of room escape and whether it is possible to design a meaningful and memorable room escape experience using the said model – can be now both answered with a rather confident yes. However, practical implementation of the developed plan along with subsequent analysis of the results are required in order to be able to reach the highest level of confidence in the positive answers to the questions asked.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Types of puzzles used in escape rooms with data on use frequency

What puzzle types are in the room?	%
Searching for physical objects hidden in the room	78%
Team Communication	58%
Light	54%
Counting	53%
Noticing something "obvious" in the room	49%
Symbol substitution with a Key (such as looking symbols up in a book)	47%
Using something in an unusual way (Out-of-the-box thinking)	47%
Searching for objects in images	43%
Assembly of a Physical object (such as a jigsaw puzzle)	40%
Algebra and other Mathematics	39%
Pattern identification (such as visualising a shape in a set of dots)	38%
Riddles	37%
Ciphers without a Key (such as a letter substitution)	35%
Hearing	26%
Mirrors	26%
Abstract logic (such as Sudoku)	22%
Research using information sources	20%
Strategic thinking (such as Chess)	20%
Hand-eye Coordination (such as shooting a target)	17%
Rope or chains	16%
Traditional Word Puzzles (such as a crossword or word search)	14%
Mazes	14%
Physical Agility (such as a laser maze)	13%
Touch	12%
Knowledge of facts not provided in the room	11%
Shape manipulation (such as a matchstick puzzle)	11%
Liquids	9%
Social engagement with actors	7%
Physical engagement with actors	4%
Smell	3%
Taste	1%

(Nicholson 2015, 19-20)

## Appendix 2. Moodboard for Project Phoenix



### Appendix 3. InsideOut Escape Games' Wall Escape





**Appendix 4. Checklist for creating an escape room based on the Experience Pyramid model**

<p>Motivational level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the marketing a unique experience in itself</li> <li>• Make the marketing message credible</li> <li>• Connection with the story of the main product</li> <li>• Make it out-of-the-ordinary</li> <li>• Consider all the five senses with sensory stimuli</li> <li>• Interaction between the company and the potential players</li> </ul>
<p>Physical level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design a unique room</li> <li>• The general design and puzzles must represent the story</li> <li>• Stage an unusual scenario</li> <li>• Make it seem as real as possible</li> <li>• Consider all the five senses with sensory stimuli, also with puzzles</li> <li>• Supportive ambient conditions</li> <li>• Space supports interaction</li> </ul>
<p>Intellectual level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate an experience which will work for different kinds of groups of people</li> <li>• The story must be cohesive and credible throughout the customer journey</li> <li>• A variety of puzzle types that force players to think in different ways</li> <li>• Design the optimal puzzle organisation</li> <li>• Place puzzles that require interaction between group members</li> <li>• Multisensory multitasking puzzles</li> <li>• Every action makes sense in the context of the story</li> </ul>
<p>Emotional level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game master's performance engaging the players in the story</li> <li>• The experience feels real, forms a cohesive whole</li> <li>• Strong emotional response to the experience, mainly positive</li> </ul>
<p>Mental level</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game master helps the group to analyse the experience afterwards</li> <li>• The experience has provided the players a chance to break free from learned habits</li> </ul>