

# Beyond Sun, Sea and Sex

Conference marketing and communication  
issues of the future

Anthony Judge

Director, Communications & Research

Union of International Associations

[www.uia.org](http://www.uia.org)

**5th IAPCO Forum: Deciding on the Future (Brussels, 1999)**

# Focus

- Extending boundaries of PCI identity
  - Logistics vs Content communication
- Neglected functions
  - Participant focus vs Organizer / VIP focus
- Hidden / Unexplored markets
  - Niche markets vs Mass Markets
- Emerging vulnerabilities and possibilities
  - Conventional vs Enhanced communication
- Conference innovation
  - Conventional events vs Innovative events

# UIA Conferencing Concerns

- International Congress on Congress Organization:
  - Barcelona 1970, Kyoto 1975
- Professional spin offs:
  - AIPC, IAPCO, AIIC, FIT, etc
- Associate Members (October meeting):
  - open space, networked laptops
- Transformative conferencing studies
  - <http://www.uia.org/uiadocs/aadocdia.htm>
- Participant messaging experiments:
  - Rio 1992, Chicago 1995, **electronic conferencing**

# Meetings as learning contexts

- About social systems
- Why they fail
- Possibilities for experiment
- Cross-sectoral, cross-cultural, cross-language
- If change cannot be achieved in a meeting...  
can the meeting recommend anything useful for wider society?

# My Credo !

## Meetings are...

- Most vital dynamic in society
- Essential to deciding / preparing the future
- Basic to celebrating the past
  
- Currently inadequate to these challenges
- Inhibited in exploring necessary innovation
- Reflect all the societal problems and possibilities to which they are addressed

# Meeting...

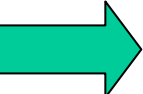
a quality without a name defining  
“a good place to be”

- There is a central quality which is the root criterion of life and spirit in a person, a place, a community, a meeting. This quality is objective and precise, but it cannot be named
  - (Apologies to Christopher Alexander: *The Timeless Way of Building*, OUP, 1979)

# Component qualities

- Alive ?
- Whole ?
- Comfortable ?
- Free ?
- Well-fitted ?
- Egoless ?
- Eternal ?
- Too beautiful !
- Too enclosed !
- Too ambiguous !
- Too theatrical !
- Too determined !
- Too effacing !
- Too mysterious !

# Focus

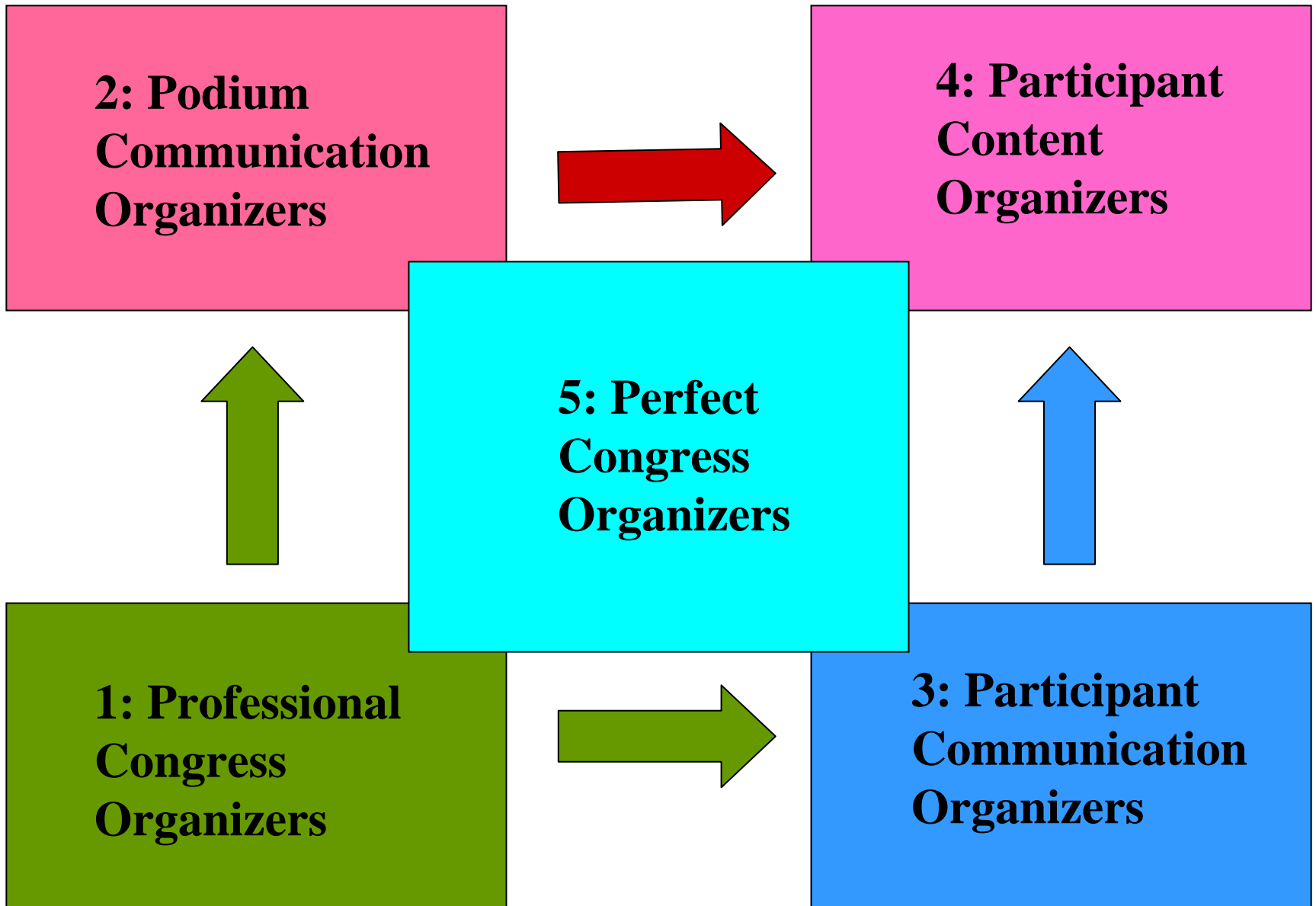
- 
- Extending boundaries of PCO identity ?
    - Logistics vs Content communication
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    - Participant focus vs Organizer / VIP focus
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?

# IAPCO: International Association of...

- 1. Professional Congress Organizers
- 2. Podium Communication Organizers
- 3. Participant Communication Organizers
- 4. Participant Content Organizers
- 5. Perfect Congress Organizers
- ?



**IAPCO ?**

International Association for  
Participant Communication  
Organization

**PCO ?**

Participant Communication Organizer

# Who is the client ? -- Who counts ?

## Who is the event for?

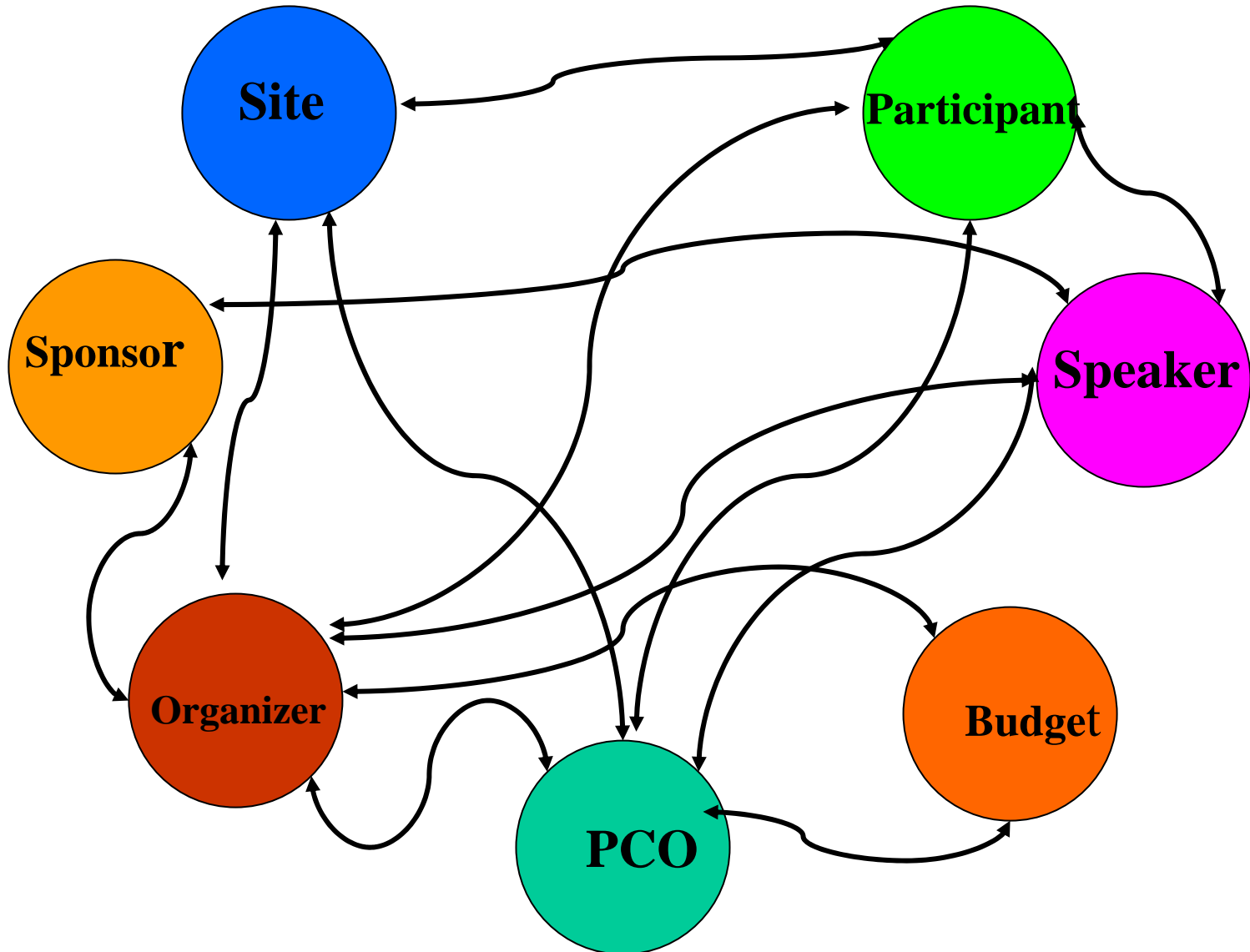
- Sponsor ?
- Organizer (convening organization) ?
- Speakers / VIPs ?
- Exhibitors ?
- Participants ?
- Accompanying persons ?

# Whose friend is the PCO ?

- Organizer ?
- Participant ?
- Sponsor ?
- Speakers / VIPs ?
- Exhibitors ?
- Conference centre management ?
- Press ?

# Who Decides ?

## Who is responsible?



# PCO's responsibility ?

- Do what the client wants..they are paying ?
- Remind the client of constraints / risks ?
- Offer unsolicited alternatives to the client ?
  - in the light of client's statements
  - in the light of similar events
  - in the light of cutting edge possibilities

# What business is the PCO in?

- If IBM reinvented itself....
- ...from being in the “typewriter business” to being in the “communication business”
  
- How might a PCO be reinvented...
- ...from being in the “congress business” to being in the “...???... business” ?



# Question 1

- Does thinking of the PCO role in new ways  
open new marketing possibilities for the  
future ?

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# Sun . . . Stars

- Conference stars
- Sponsors
- Podium focus
- -----
- Participants as planets...being shone upon
- Stars as resources...disempowered participants
- Participants “like children”...“Daddy knows best”

# Sea .... Seeing

- Seeing sights
- Conference as a show...show and tell
- See the famous ... be photographed
- -----
- Passive participants
- Sight seeing as a relief from the conference
- Conducted tours

# Sex .... Intercourse

- Congress ... in the original meaning
- Networking
- Corridors, bars and hotel rooms...privately
- -----
- Demeaning the plenary
- Corridor discussion is “what we really come for”
- “Safe sex”: conceptual contraceptives

# “Congress” vs “Rape”

- 1. Sexual intercourse
- 2. Formal meeting of delegates for discussion...
- 3. The act or action of coming together and meeting

– (*Longmans Dictionary of the English Language*)

# Inhibiting participants

- Over-programme
- Restrict document distribution
- Discourage gathering outside sessions
- Discourage spontaneous events
- Prevent networking
- Restrict question time
- Priority to stars....however long-winded

# Types of Participants

-- a UNESCO study --

- 1. Attend every session; take every document
- 2. Attend selected sessions; talk in corridor to 3
- 3. Talk in corridor to Level 2 & 3 participants
- 4. In bar, organizing next conference



# Personal Basic Needs

*(Maslow's hierarchy)*

- Physiological needs
  - hunger, thirst, shelter, sex, and other bodily needs
- Safety needs
  - security and protection from physical and emotional harm
- Social needs
  - affection, belongingness, love, acceptance, and friendship
- Esteem needs
  - internal (self-respect, autonomy, achievement)
  - external (status, recognition, attention, power, and face)
- Self-actualization needs
  - drive to best realize one's potential, including potential in personal growth, achievements and self-fulfillment

# Participant Need Hierarchy

*(apologies to Maslow)*

- Physiological needs (**Food, Hotels, etc**)
  - hunger, thirst, shelter, sex, and other bodily needs
- Safety needs (**Badges, Transport, Documents, Signs, etc**)
  - security and protection from physical and emotional harm
- Social needs (**Ice-breakers, Informal spaces, etc**)
  - affection, belongingness, love, acceptance, and friendship
- Esteem needs (**Show and tell, Distinguishing symbols, etc**)
  - internal (self-respect, autonomy, achievement)
  - external (status, recognition, attention, power, and face)
- Self-actualization needs (**Content, Insight, Results, etc**)
  - drive to best realize one's potential, including potential in personal growth, achievements and self-fulfillment

# Professional Participants ?

- Handicap (eg golf, chess)
- Risk tolerance
- Passivity tolerance
- Intervention performance
- Responsibility to collective
- Certification (licence) ?

# Question 2

- Does thinking of participants in new ways  
open new marketing possibilities for the  
future ?

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# Purpose of meetings

- Income
- Impress
- Important people
- Inform / Inculcate / Indoctrinate
- Inspire (Incentive, Impowerment)
- Initiate
- Interact (Intercourse)
- Integrate

# Purpose vs. Market niches

- Income
- Impress
- Important people
- Inform
- Inspire (Incentive)
- Initiate
- Interact (Intercourse)
- Integrate
- Very developed
- Very developed
- Very developed
- Well developed
- Well developed
- Somewhat developed
- Poorly developed
- Undeveloped

# “Escaping” markets ?

- Electronic
- Exotic
- Economic
- Exploratory
- Enhanced communication
- Extraordinary
- Evanescent
- Integration?
- No competence !
- No experience !
- No profit margin !
- Unacceptable risk !
- No facilities !
- No experience !
- No need !
- What’s that ?



# Types of tourism...and meeting?

- Cultural / Heritage / Spiritual
- Gastronomic
- Environmental (eco, hunting)
- Adventure / Mountaineering
- Multi-destination
- Entertainment
- Recreation (seaside, etc)
- Sports
- Business
- Incentive
- Cruise ship
- ?

# Challenge: Converting “tourists” into “participants”

- Tire kickers
- Unused potential

# Question 3

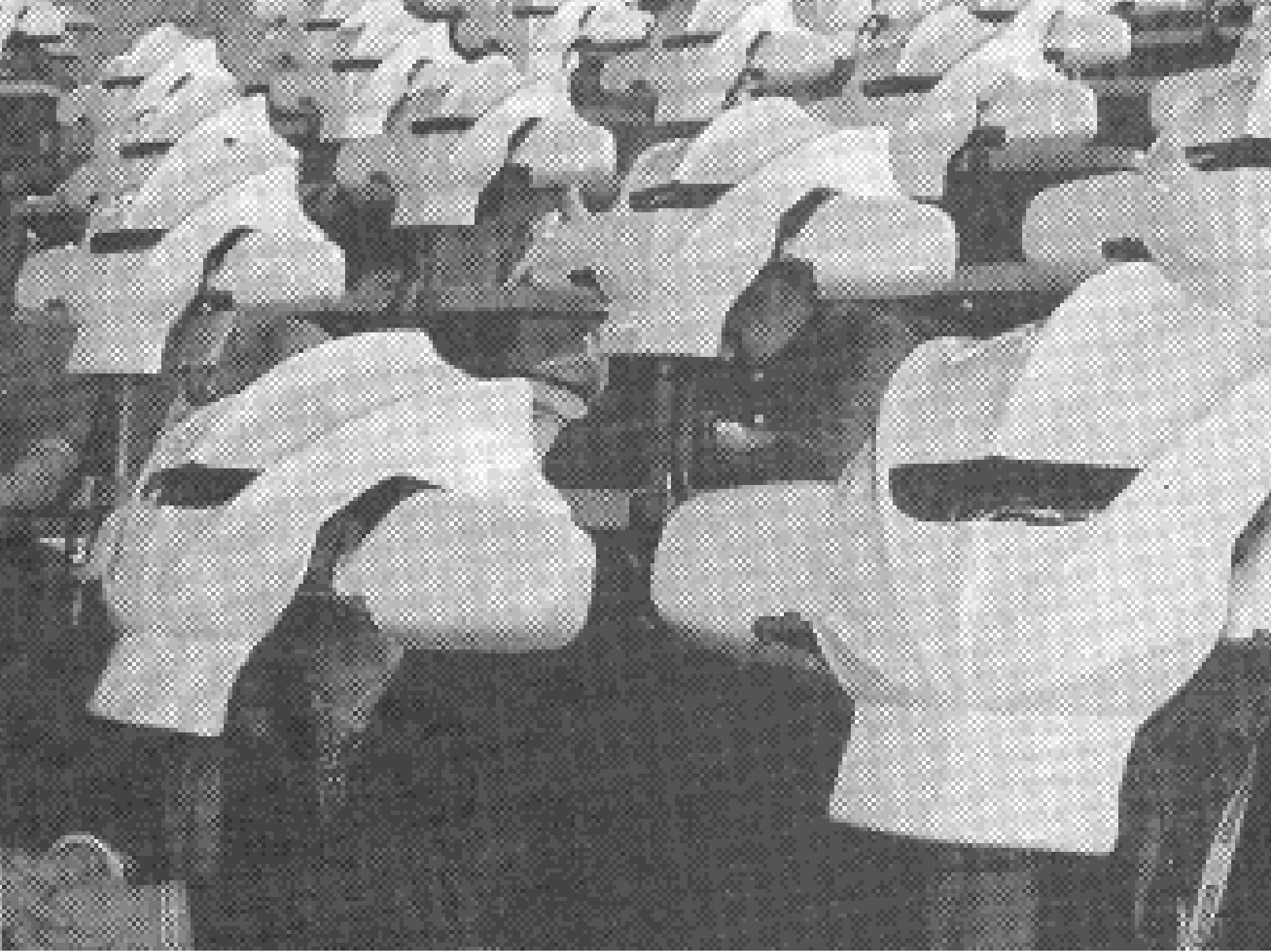
- Are the meeting markets of the future  
escaping from the “conference industry” ?

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# Electronic enhancement of podium communication

- Beamers
- Control of microphone use
- Restricted microphone movement
- Wall-screen (video conference)
- Controlled voting
- Electronic security



# Electronic enhancement of participant communication

- Facilitate floor intervention
- Participant-to-participant
- Cross-session
- In-session -- Out-session
- Out-of-session
- Distant participation
- Pre- and Post-
- Laptops in session (wireless networking)

# Business travel communications

- Laptop during travel
- Checking in...downloading e-mail
- In airport lounges, aircraft...
- Facilities in hotel rooms...not “business centres”
- In conference sessions ????
- Working while the VIPs speak ???



# Challenges of the past...and present

- Promotion
- Registration
- Badges
- Documents
- Meeting rooms
- Hotels
- Press
- Interpretation
- Transportation
- Security
- VIPs
- Speakers
- Finance
- Insurance

# Challenges of the future ?

- Enhanced communication
- Electronic conference integration
- Content organization on-the-fly
- Emergent order
- Spontaneous conference re-design
- From grid tracks to network tracks
- Risk management

# “Active Worlds”

<http://www.activeworlds.com/>

- Home to hundreds of thousands of users and millions of kilometers of virtual territory.
- In Active Worlds you can:
  - explore over 1000 unique virtual worlds (3D “conferences” ?)
  - build your own 3D world on the Internet (own conference centre?)
  - make new contacts and chat with people from all over the world
  - play interactive 2D and 3D games
  - choose from a vast range of identities (conference roles?)
  - shop online in a 3D virtual mall

# Multi-meeting participants

-- here but not here --

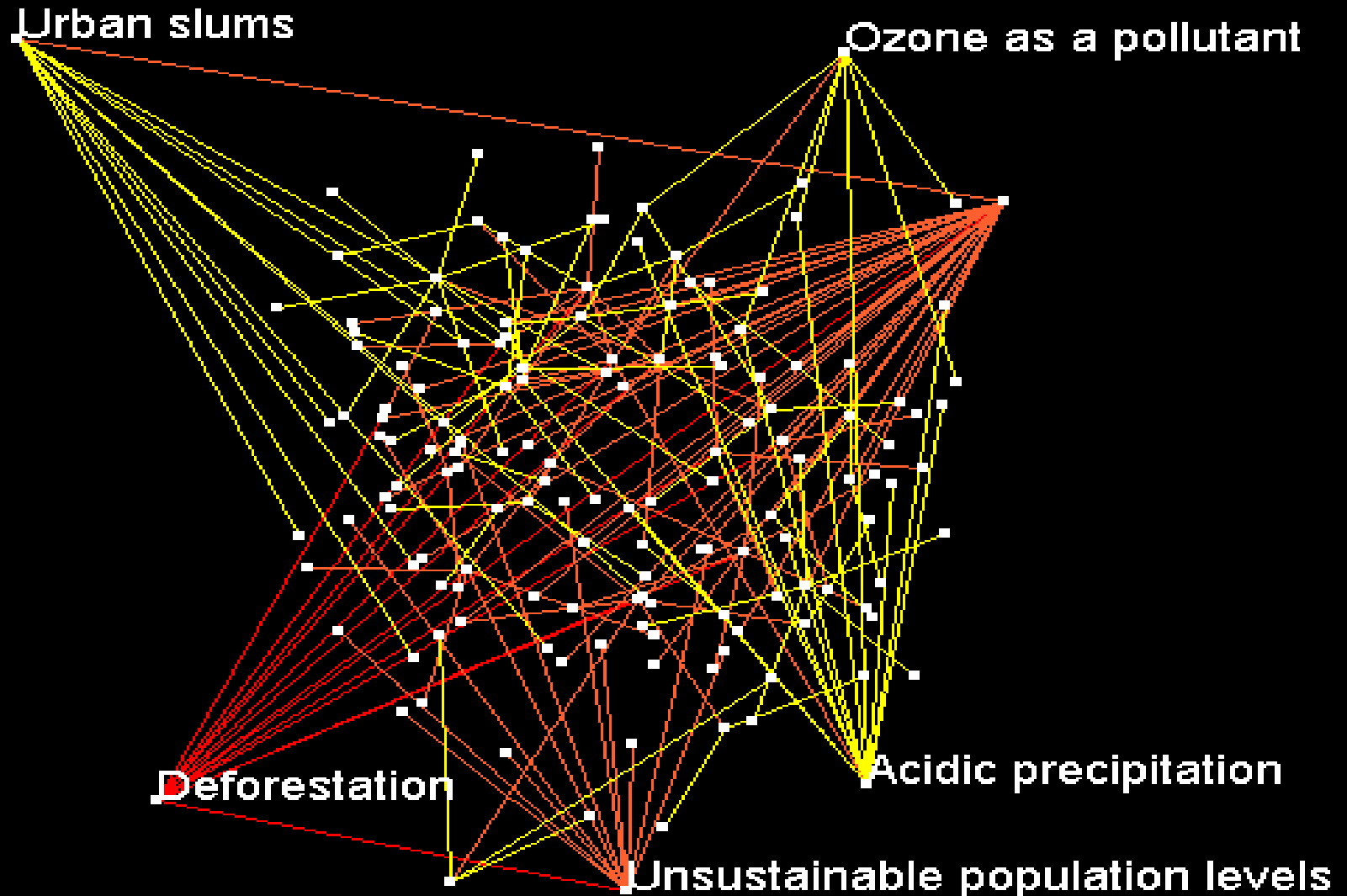
- Electronic interest groups
- Electronic task groups
- Conventional meetings
- Spontaneous gatherings
- Portable phones linking participants
- Internet-enhanced portables

# Temporal reframing of “participant”

- Extended participation (before and after event)
- External participant (away from event)
- Partial participant (specific sessions only)
- Conditional participant (“only if X is there”)
- Much shorter “meetings”
- Much longer “meetings”
- Marketing and financial implications

# UIA Conference mind-mapping

<http://www.uia.org/data.htm>



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<http://www.uia.org/data.htm>

**Discrimination against women**

**Social subjugation of women**

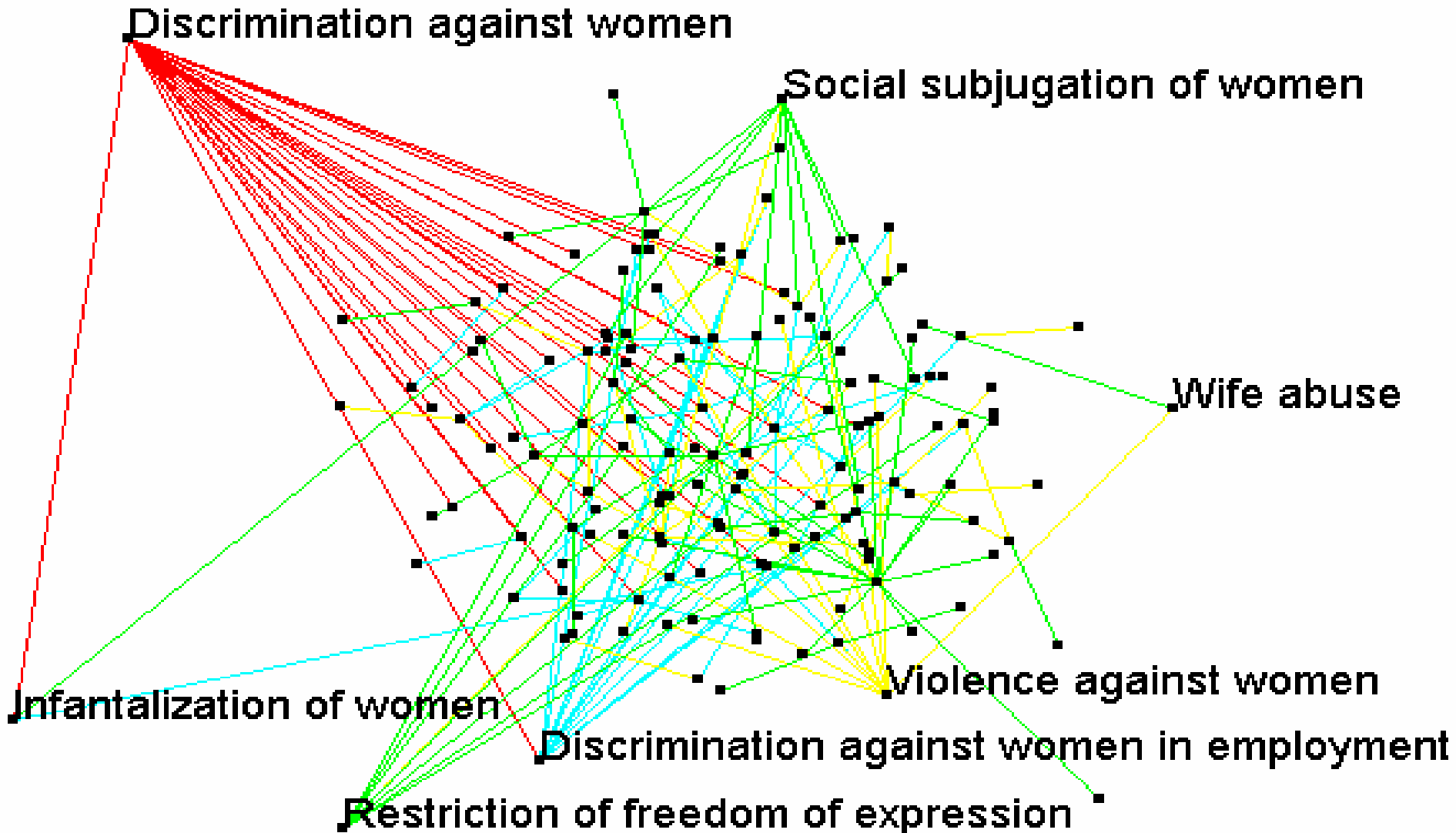
**Wife abuse**

**Violence against women**

**Discrimination against women in employment**

**Restriction of freedom of expression**

**Infantalization of women**

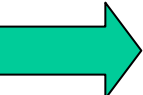


# Question 4

- If the computer technology available in meetings in 1999...
  - is as different from that available in 1979, 1989
- what are the implications for ...
  - meetings in 2019... or 2029 ?



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# Risk Options -- for Client and PCO !

- Play it safe ...
- Discuss the risks ...  
check client's  
tolerance
- Involve the  
participants
- Risk tracks
- High risk events
- “nobody got fired for  
buying IBM” !
- Theatre “angels” ?
- Venture capitalists ?

# Risk typology of meetings

- Pre-planned, pre-scheduled, guaranteed budget
- Last minute planning
- Open space sessions
- Spontaneous re-design

Cool...  
let's do  
it

If you  
insist

Thanks...  
maybe not

You must  
be joking

Spontaneous  
organization

**X**

Participant  
content

**X**

Participant  
communication

**X**

Podium  
communication

**X**

# Conferencing and risk

**Order**

Congress session

Caucasing

**Low participation**

**High Participation**

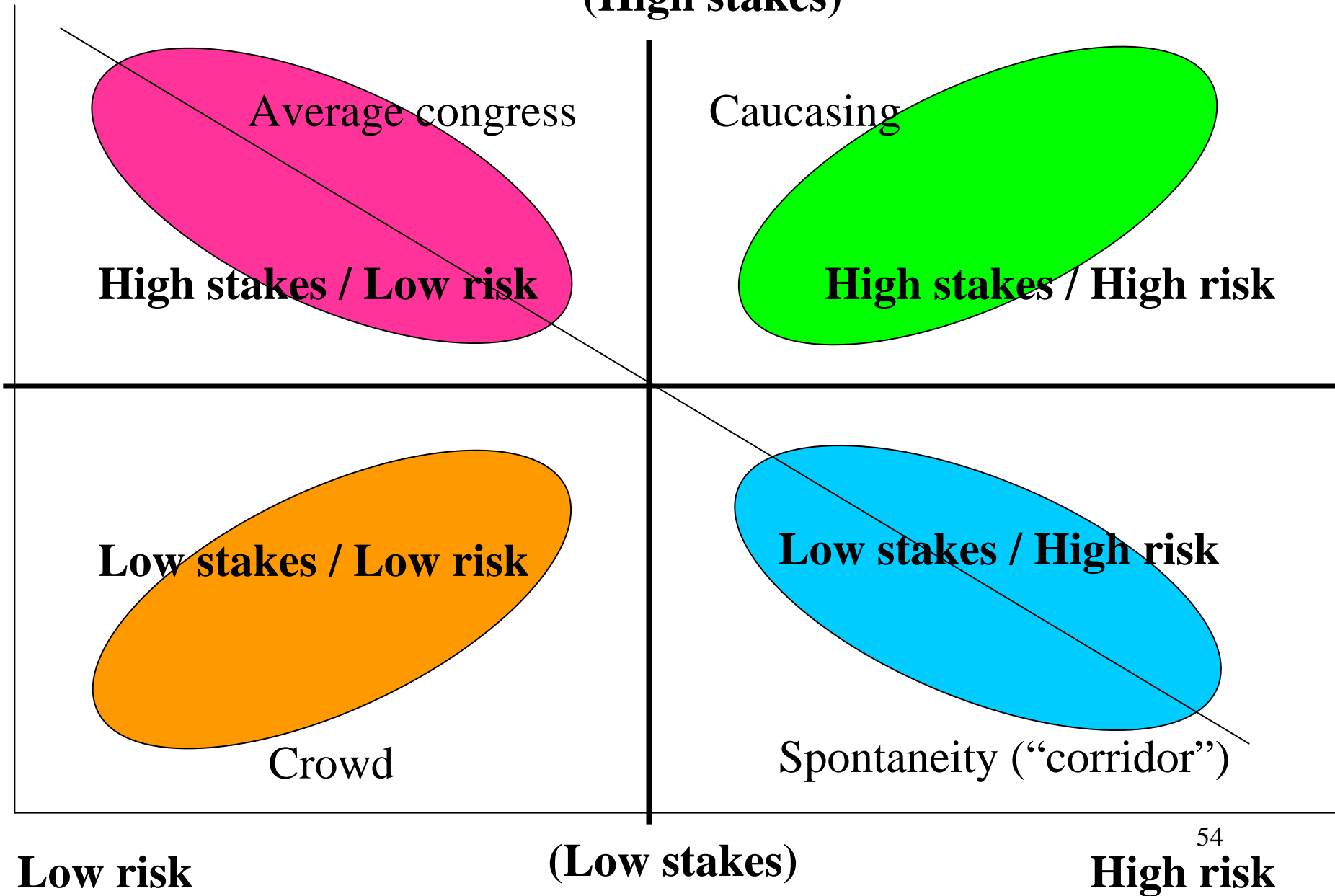
Crowd

Spontaneity (“corridor”)

**Disorder**

# Stakes and risk

(High stakes)



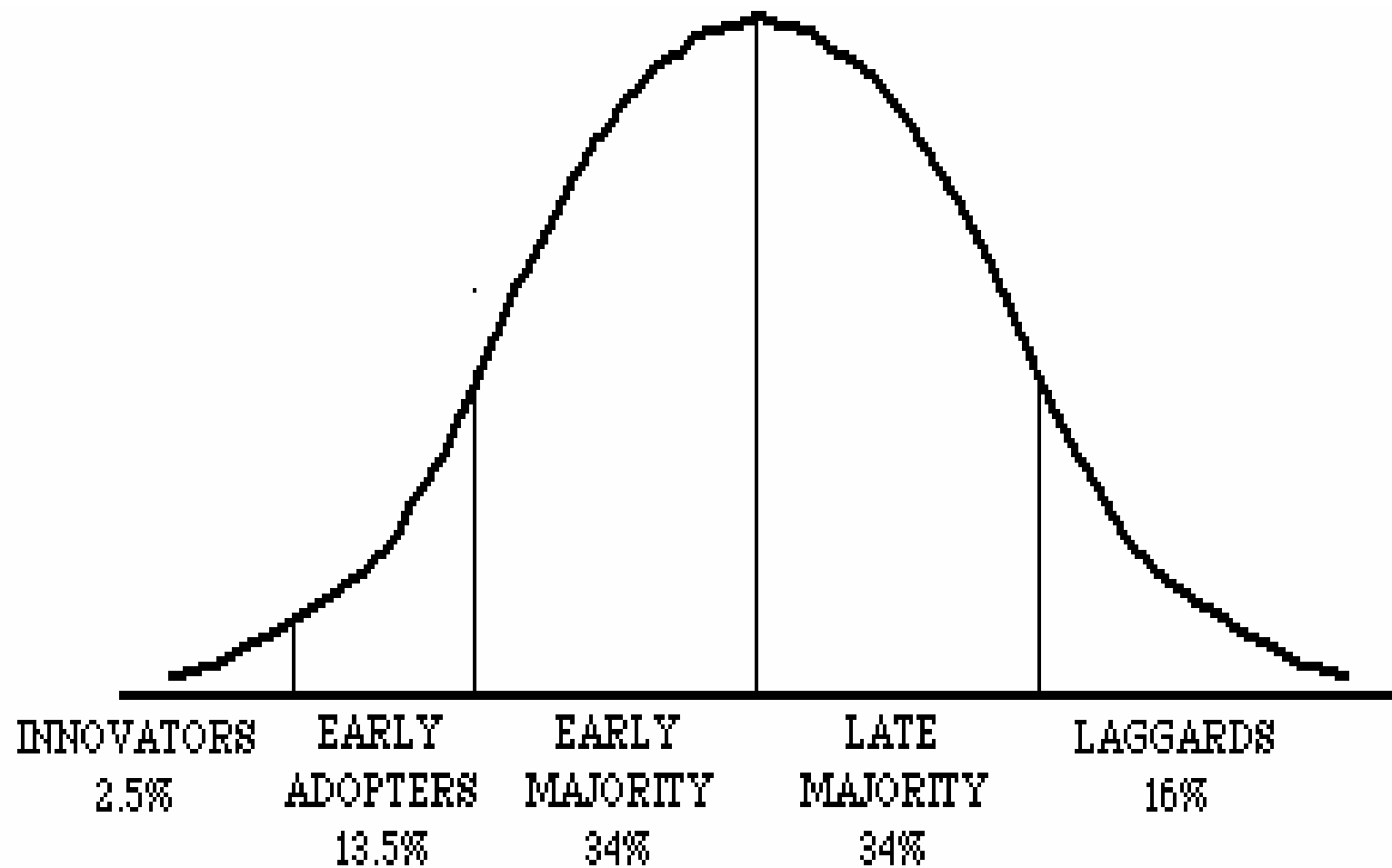
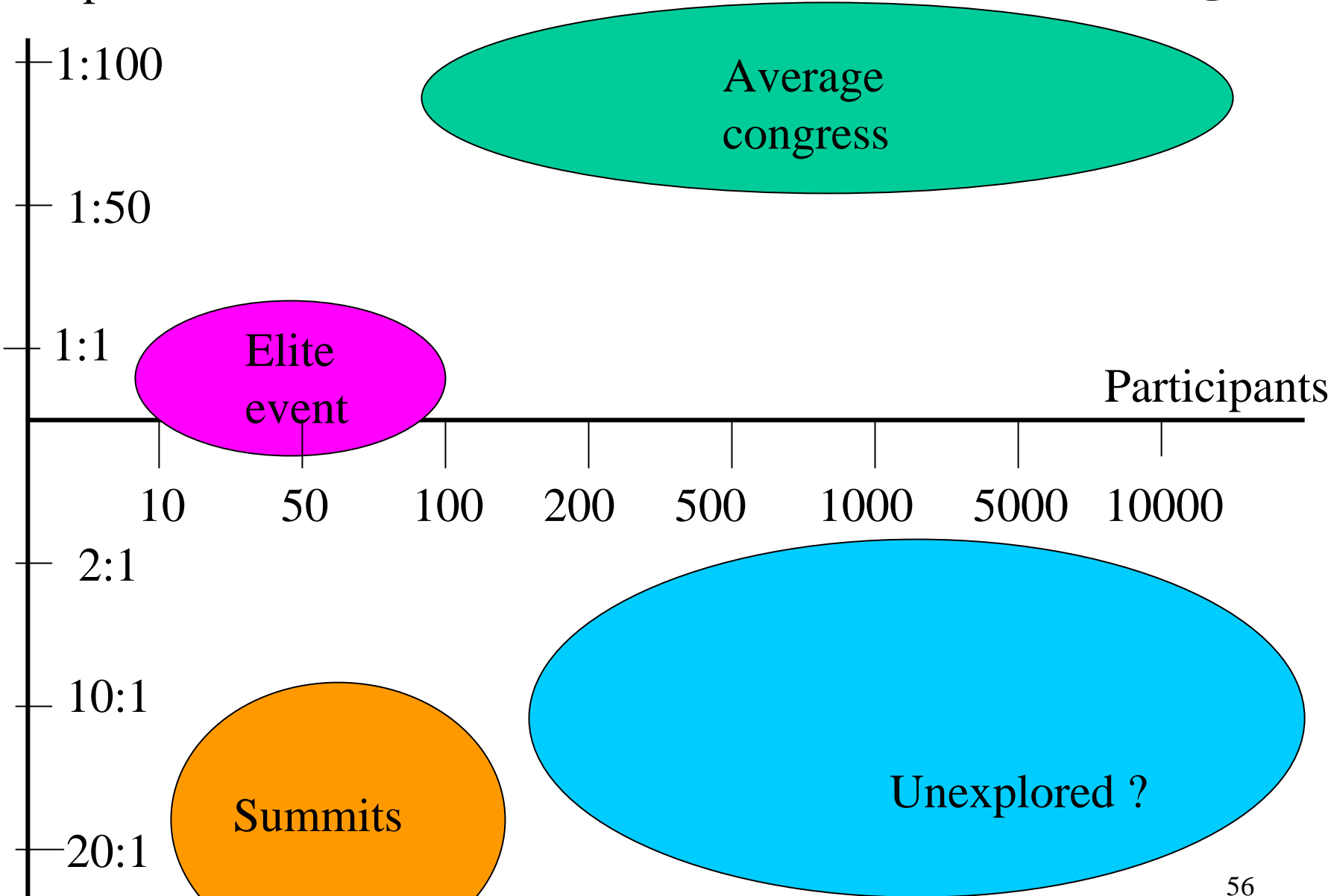


Figure 1. Bell shaped curve showing categories of individual innovativeness and percentages within each category

# Odds of successful conferencing ?





# Future Conference Marketing Criteria ?

- Site -- Conference center ?
- Tourism -- Cultural events ?
- Stars -- VIPs ?
- Contacts ?
- Novelty?
- Enhanced communication ?
- Enhanced social dynamics ?
- Cost?

# Long-term future of conferencing?

- 10 years ?
- 100 years ?
- 1000 years ?
- 10,000 years ?

# Focus -- reminder

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# Conventional PCO-associated roles

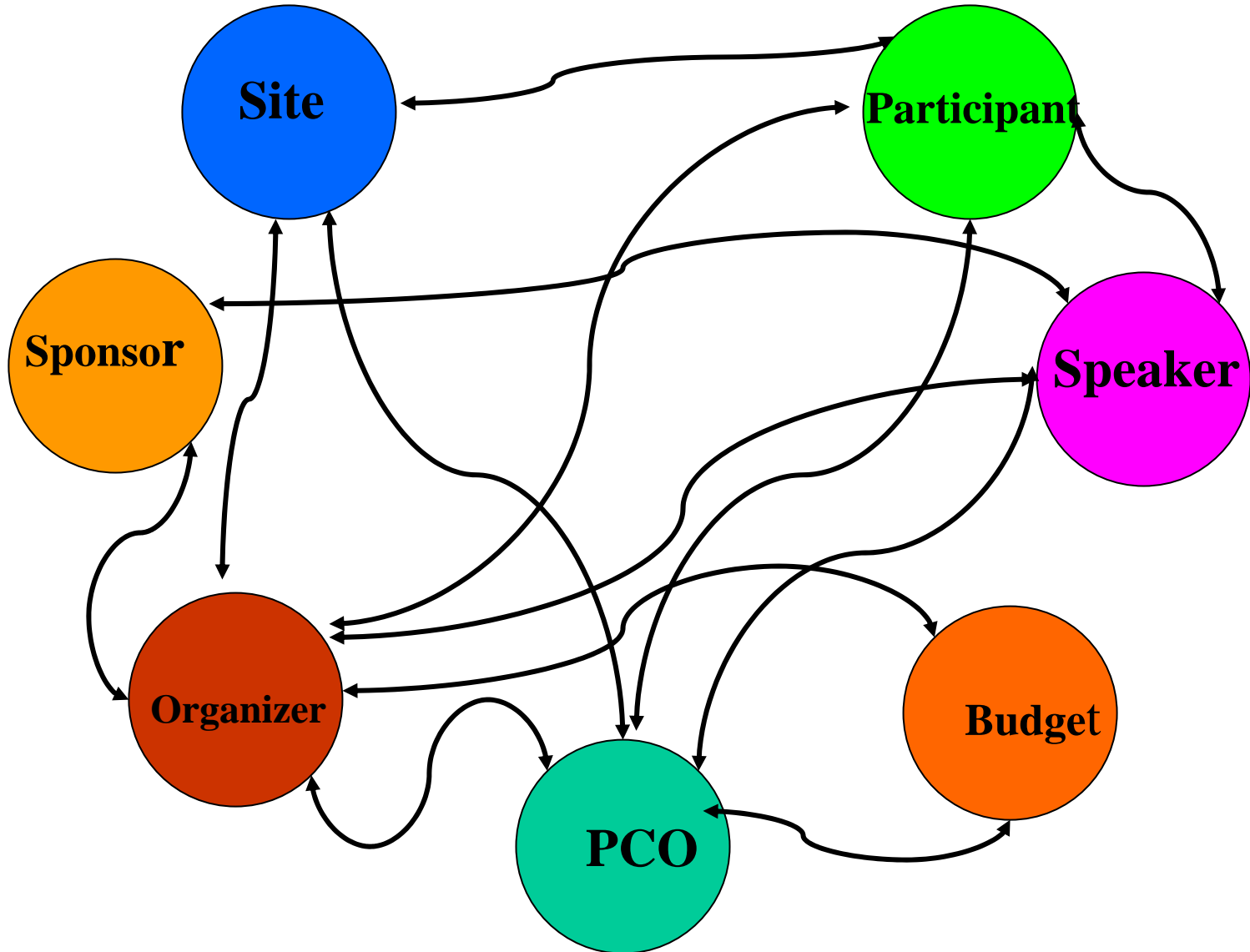
- Marketing / Public relations / Press
- Budget / Finance
- Travel / Facilities
- Registration / Management
- Documents / Reproduction
- Podium communications / Interpretation
- Recording / Video

# Future PCO-associated roles

- E-communication
  - e-mail / web marketing
  - pre-, post- and in-conference
  - registrations
  - conference product sales (e-commerce)
  - contact facilitation
- Group dynamics
  - contact facilitation (social host)
  - facilitation
  - group psychologist
- Content organization
  - knowledge organizer
  - session mind mapper / content visualizer
  - e-editor / digitalizer / web-CD-producer

# Who Decides ?

Gang rape or Mutual seduction?



# Conference co-creation ?

- “Running a meeting”
- .... participants may not wish to be run
  
- “Targeting an audience”
- .... participants may not be passive targets

# What if PCOs were like...

- Gardeners
- Chefs
- Astronauts
- Animal tamers
- Casting directors
- Interior designers
- Conductors
- Actors
- Midwives
- Genetic engineers
- ?



# Ideal PCO of the future ?

## ...a hybrid of...

- Tourguide
- Troubadour
- Charismatic leader
- Nasruddin
- Computer freak
- Psychotherapist
- Agony aunt
- Facilitator
- Financial wizard
- Aikido master
- Magician
- Quartermaster
- Spin doctor
- Social host(ess)

# PCO competitive edge

- Cost
- Experience
  - Conference size, security
  - Multi-cultural, politically sensitive
  - Locations (national, international, etc)
- References
- Image / Reputation
  - VIP events
  - Special events
  - Communication

# Challenges for PCOs

- Should the PCO role be reframed / extended ?
- Are there neglected functions ?
- Are there unexplored markets ?
- To what is the conference market vulnerable ?
- Who is responsible for conference innovation ?