

Leading Creativity

David Fleming, 20 August 2007, Vienna

- 1) In this paper I wish to consider what is creativity, and to explore what it is potentially at odds with.
- 2) How is this creativity applied to museum work – to the collections, to the context within which museums work, to museum visioning, and to audience development?
- 3) What leadership is required?

I shall use some examples of thinking relating to a new British national museum which opens for the first time this week in Liverpool – the International Slavery Museum.

1) What is creativity?

- Doing all the things needed to deliver a successful museum
- Doing things differently but effectively, to achieve the desired end
- Often it will mean making more with less
- New pressures/new demands = need to be creative (change and managing change is a constant)
- Continuing to do everything the same is not an option.

Creativity is potentially at odds with what?

Not finances – creativity can create more impact at lower cost (= efficiency)
Not collections – creativity can unlock potential in collections (= effectiveness)
Not audiences – creativity will attract audiences

The answer is personnel – museum staff, poss also governing body, because tradition and conservation are still strong forces in museums.

Traditional attitudes are the enemy of creativity, of efficiency, of effectiveness. But this is changing too; museums, once bastions of mourner's temples to lack of imagination, now bursting with creativity – future is bright, though challenging.

2) How is creativity applied to museum work?

A Collections management - collecting, documentation, conversation, storage, research. Lots potential, but I wish to concentrate on other aspects of management.

B Context - i.e. the environment and structures within which Museums operate. This context must be managed the museum is to prosper:

Governance

Eg:

Trustees

Enthusiasts

Politicians – must be engaged in the work of a museum through the museum demonstrating its outcomes. Politicians are relatively easy to win as allies providing the museum fulfils its potential in achieving economic and social value.

Local Environment

Including:

- Municipality
- Media
- Business
- Health
- Education
- Cultural
- Community
- Visitors

Regional Environment – similar to above plus tourism and Regeneration agencies

National Environment

Including:

- Government
- Cultural
- Media
- Visitors

International Environment – all of the above

The key concepts here are **advocacy** and **partnership**

International Slavery Museum examples:

Local black community (Slavery Remembrance Initiative Steering Group) – a consultative device to identify perspectives in this controversial and difficult area of work.

Education sector (Liverpool University) – research partnership.

Government - the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Deputy Prime Minister's office both have a significant involvement and interest because of the political importance and relevance of this issue.

International Partnerships, eg the National Museum of African American History and Culture, USA, the TransAfrica Forum, USA, research institutions, educational partnerships in Sierra Leone, Senegal, Haiti, Brazil

Media - a huge amount of international interest.

Some ambivalence from local politicians, local business, tourism sector.

C Vision – should be powerful, passionate and creative – essential requirement for the modern museum.

key concepts are:
social value role
education role
positive action, inclusion, diversity – issues
extrovert not introverted – attitude

International Slavery Museum example:

The museum as freedom fighter – the museum with a concern for human rights at heart of its vision. Fighting racism.

D Audiences

The above – collections, context, vision, led creatively, will generate bigger and more diverse audiences for museums.

Other activities include:

Exhibitions
Promotion and advocacy
Education programmes
Partnership
Access (design, language, philosophy)
Consultation and participation

3) What leadership is required?

The ability to adopt a change agenda – there will be resistance and risks.
Leadership needs to display:

COURAGE – play to win!
DECISIVENESS – don't dither!
DETERMINATION – keep to the agenda, don't be watered down
VISION – open mind, imagination
AMBITION – aim high, believe museums can effect change
WISDOM – experience and judgement
COLLEGIATE – don't attempt to go it alone
POLITICAL AWARENESS
MEDIA AWARENESS
PLANNING - long term

The International Slavery Museum is:

- Controversial
- Combative
- Committed
- Story led

There is:

- Internal resistance (tradition)
- External resistance (racism)
- Scepticism re: potential (lack of vision)

