



**The AIM
Hallmarks**
of Prospering Museums

CONCEPTS & INSIGHTS FROM THE AIM LEADERS AND ENABLERS PROGRAMMES

This paper distils some of the ideas which underpinned the AIM Hallmarks Leaders and Enablers programmes, 2016 - 2018. For more about the programmes and the authors, see the note at the end of the paper.

Leadership Theme

Leadership can be found, enabled and developed not only in the Board and the executive team but throughout an organisation. This is critical in ensuring that people engage with, contribute to, and act on the strategic vision, rather than becoming passive recipients of someone else's thinking.

Leadership and management are complementary but different. Management is concerned with maintaining the existing organisation ('doing things right') whereas leadership is more about facilitating change ('doing the right things'). John Kotter says: 'Management is about complexity... Leadership is about coping with change.' While managers set targets, leaders set direction and vision. While managers organise implementation, leaders mobilise support for the vision. As managers are required to control and monitor progress, leaders will be engaged in motivating and inspiring their people. Leadership complements management; it doesn't replace it.

Further reading: John Kotter – What Leaders Really Do (1999)

Governance Theme

Governance of your museum matters. There is a big difference between merely complying and good governance. The Charity Governance Codes for smaller and larger charities (both 2017) are well recognised standards of good practice in the governance of charities, including museums. The Codes offer a useful and practical framework for enabling Boards to improve their governance practice. The Codes have the support of the Charity Commission.

Each of the seven principles of the Code has a title and broad overall statement, followed by a rationale, key outcomes and recommended practice. Each can be used as a basis for considering how strong the governance of your museum is, and what practical improvements you might make in governance.

The key principles of the Code are:

- Organisational purpose: The Board is clear about the charity's aims and ensures that these are being delivered effectively and sustainably
- Leadership: Every charity is led by an effective Board that provides strategic leadership in line with the charity's aims and values
- Integrity: The Board acts with integrity, adopting values and creating a culture which help achieve the organisation's charitable purposes. The Board is aware of the importance of the public's confidence and trust in charities, and Trustees undertake their duties accordingly
- Decision making and control: The Board makes sure that its decision-making processes are informed, rigorous and timely, and that effective delegation, control and risk assessment and management systems are set up and monitored
- Board effectiveness: The Board works as an effective team, using the appropriate balance of skills, experience, backgrounds and knowledge to make informed decisions
- Diversity: The Board's approach to diversity supports its effectiveness, leadership and decision making
- Openness and accountability: The Board leads the organisation in being transparent and accountable. The charity is open in its work, unless there is a good reason not to be

Further reading: The Code of Governance for smaller and larger charities can be accessed at <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en>

The Chair of the Board has a pivotal role in enabling Trustees not only to fulfil their legal responsibilities but also to ensure they are able to contribute to the development of the museum and its activities. The expectations of the Chair are often substantial although legally they may have no additional powers.

The Board has a responsibility to support and enable their Chair to lead well and learn the skills required to manage Board meetings, deal with Trustee recruitment as well as support and maintain oversight of the museum Director/Chief Executive.

Further reading: Ruth Lesirge and Ros Oakley – A Chair's Compass, Association of Chairs (2014)

A Chair's Compass can be downloaded from <https://www.associationofchairs.org.uk/resources/chairs-compass/>

Executive leadership

Leaders of any museum need to be well informed, authentic and open to learning. The role can be rewarding and lonely at the same time. Being a leader requires continuing learning and development as well as the ability for self-reflection. One major task for any leader is to enable their team and individual members within that team to function well.

One helpful framework is the five Cs of a high performing team:

- Clarifying primary purpose, goals, objectives and roles
- Co-creating interpersonal and team dynamics: team culture
- Connecting and engaging all critical stakeholders
- Commissioning: ensuring a clear commission for the team and contracting on what it must deliver
- Core learning: reflecting, learning, integrating

Further reading: Peter Hawkins – Leadership Team Coaching in Practice (2014)

Another way of thinking about motivating team members is to look at how you can tap their discretionary energy. This endeavour has been described as achieving 'flow', a state of heightened focus and immersion in activities with inner clarity:

- Full employment of people's capabilities to meet a goal or challenge
- Individuals experiencing 'flow' were more productive, felt part of something larger, and derived greater satisfaction from their work
- Individuals setting goals for themselves to increase capabilities
- Individuals articulating a willingness to repeat activities in which they had achieved 'flow'

Further viewing: Mihaly Csikszentmihaly TED talk on flow (2004)

https://www.ted.com/talks/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi_on_flow

There are very few teams that move through consistently calm waters. The best leaders achieve an understanding of the difficulties as a basis for taking remedial actions that enable team members to work well individually and together.

In five dysfunctions of a team, Patrick Lencioni offers an important model for understanding where teamwork can go wrong:

- Absence of trust — unwilling to be vulnerable within the group
- Fear of conflict — seeking artificial harmony over constructive passionate debate
- Lack of commitment — feigning buy-in for group decisions creates ambiguity throughout the organisation
- Avoidance of accountability — ducking the responsibility to call peers on counterproductive behaviour which sets low standards
- Inattention to results — focusing on personal success, status and ego before team success

Further reading: Patrick Lencioni – The Five Dysfunctions of a Team (2002)

Understanding your museum

Effective leaders manage to maintain a helicopter as well as a close up view as to how their museum functions. One tool that helps in this process is that of the cultural web which enables assessment of what the informal as well as formal arrangements of power and decision making are:

- Stories – (e.g. the anecdotes you are told when you join the museum as a staff member or volunteer)
- Rituals and Routines – what is seen as acceptable behaviour including what is valued by leaders and managers in the museum
- Symbols – visual representations of the museum (e.g. logos, branding, formal or informal dress codes).
- Organisational Structure – both the structure in the staff organigram of the museum, and unwritten lines of power and influence that indicate whose contributions are most valued.
- Control Systems – ways the museum is controlled (e.g. financial, accreditation and quality systems, and rewards including the way they are measured and distributed within the organisation)
- Power Structures – The pockets of real power in the museum. Who really has the greatest amount of influence on decisions, operations, and strategic direction?

Further reading – Gerry Johnson, Kevan Scholes and Richard Whittington – Exploring Corporate Strategy (2008)

McKinsey 7Ss applies a different lens to the museum highlighting the interconnectedness of the 7 elements to which a leader must attend:

1. Strategy: the plan devised to maintain and build competitive advantage over the competition
2. Structure: the way the organisation is structured and who reports to whom
3. Systems: the daily activities and procedures that staff members engage in to get the job done
4. Shared Values: called "superordinate goals" when the model was first developed, these are the core values of the organisation that are evidenced in the culture and the general work ethic
5. Style: the style of leadership adopted
6. Staff: the employees and their general capabilities
7. Skills: the actual skills and competencies of the employees working for the organisation

Further Reading: Lowell Bryan – Enduring Ideas: The 7-S Framework (2008)

(the concept of the 7Ss was developed by Tom Peters and Robert Waterman)

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/enduring-ideas-the-7-s-framework>

Good leaders are able to express clearly the direction of travel and the purposes of their museum. Story of Change is a tool that helps describe a museum or project's pathway from the need it addresses to the differences that the project wants to make (outcomes) and what the museum plans to do to achieve these (activities).

Further reading: NESTA – Guidance for developing a theory of change for your programme (2011)

All museums face challenges

Theories and models offer leaders a way of analysing and understanding what is going wrong. Two particularly useful aspects of understanding poor practice are groupthink and silo thinking.

Groupthink afflicts many organisations, including museums, who become too comfortable in their thinking about themselves, their future and their competitors. Groupthink often involves:

- Illusions of invulnerability creating excessive optimism and encouraging risk taking
- Unquestioned belief in the morality of the group, causing members to ignore the consequences of their actions
- Rationalising warnings that might challenge group's assumptions
- Stereotyping those who are opposed to the group as weak, evil, biased, spiteful, impotent, or stupid
- Self-censorship of ideas that deviate from apparent group consensus
- Illusions of unanimity among group members, silence is viewed as agreement
- Direct pressure to conform placed on any member who questions the group, couched in terms of "disloyalty"
- Mindguards - self-appointed members who shield the group from dissenting information

Further reading: Irving Janis - Groupthink (1982)

Silos are systems, processes, or possibly a department or part of a museum that operate in isolation from others. Silos of the mind lead to unexamined assumptions and categorisations and ingrained patterns of thinking. Specialisation can improve efficiency but can also lead to tunnel vision. Discrete divisions make responsibilities clearer but can lead to bureaucratic rivalry, infighting or one part of the organisation not knowing what the others are doing. Organisational silos typically do not share the same priorities, goals or tools.

Further reading: Gillian Tett – The Silo Effect: The Peril of Expertise and the Promise of Breaking Down Barriers (2015)

These are just tasters of the areas of work that were covered over the period of the programme. Its legacy is a broader appreciation of the resources available to leaders and an increased confidence in accessing and using them.

About the authors and programme

In 2016 and 2017 we led a programme for 4 cohorts (two of Museum Leaders, two of Museum Enablers). It developed their leadership, management and facilitation skills. Participants were drawn from across England, Scotland and Wales.

The programme was delivered through 4 or 5 residential modules. Each module was punctuated by an action learning set.

Our ambition in planning this programme was for participants to have the opportunity to learn new tools and concepts, to learn from each other, and – ultimately - to support networks of professionals working in museums long after the programme was finished.

The residential sessions included presentations from us as well as extensive group work, analysis of specially written case studies, and inputs from external speakers working in museums and the wider charity sector. Participants were also encouraged to undertake pre-course reading and, through reading new articles on current developments, to reflect on choices for museums and their own development.

We collected feedback after each module and modified our plans in the light of what participants found useful and wanted to apply in their museums.

This note identifies some key concepts that participants valued and the insights they told us they gained through the AIM programme.

Hilary Barnard and Ruth Lesirge

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