For Love or Money
Confronting the State of Museum Salaries

Edited by Dawn E Salerno, Mark S Gold and Kristina L Durocher

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FOR LOVE OR MONEY
CONFRONTING THE STATE OF MUSEUM SALARIES

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN

RE-ENGINEERING THE WAY MUSEUMS WORK

Jon Ingham
MANY MUSEUMS TRY TO MINIMIZE their staffing budgets by reducing headcount and keeping their employees’ salaries low. But this strategy is not sustainable. It is a bit like trying to lose weight – you can focus on your diet and lose a few pounds, but are most likely to end up putting the extra weight back on. Instead of this, most people find the best way of losing weight is to change their lifestyle. The same type of thing is true in organizations too, so what museums really need to do if they want or need to “slim down” is to change the way they organize their work and their people. The supplementary effect of this approach is often that museums will need fewer people and, in most cases, they will also be able to pay their people more appropriately too. This chapter reviews the opportunity for this re-engineering, supported by digital technology, and its impact on the types and levels of staff rewards.

The changing context of work
Organizations across all sectors, not just museums, are currently undergoing major transformations due mainly to the impact of digital technologies. The museum sector itself has seen many instances of this, for example with the use of guides and apps to help people explore and learn about their collections. Devices such as multimedia guides allow visitors to walk at their own pace whilst accessing tour guide-like support (Van Gogh Museum, n.d.) and mobile games such as the V&A’s Secret Seekers enable families to uncover facts about the V&A through a social gaming experience (Price, 2017). Even more innovative approaches include a pen which allows visitors to create and collect their own objects (Cooper Hewitt, 2014). Other institutions, such as Detroit (Detroit Institute of Arts, n.d.), Cleveland
(Moore, 2015) and elsewhere are using virtual and augmented reality to provide exciting new immersive ways of interacting with displays. Increasingly, museums are looking at the Internet of Things (IoT) and the better use of data to provide even more personalized, engaging and educational experiences.

However, digital transformation is rarely just about technology. All the above examples potentially disrupt a museum’s business model and allow or require the development of new, broader organizational ecosystems. For example, many museums have partnered with Google Arts & Culture (Google, n.d.) to extend their audiences and allow people to view objects or access collections in different ways – a development which has direct potential impact (both positive and negative) on access, collections management, processes and staff.

Digital technologies are also allowing commercial organizations to get closer to their customers and other stakeholders in order to better understand and meet their needs. Likewise, many museums are also developing deeper, longer-term and more collaborative relationships with their own “customers” (i.e. both visitors and wider audiences), embedding themselves within the societies and communities in which, and for which, they exist. So, just like their commercial counterparts, museums increasingly need to become more customer-centric, which includes the use of human-centered design initiatives (such as journey mapping, personas, participatory design, user testing and prototyping) in the way they work.

These approaches are particularly important in museums which often find themselves in a rather unfortunate paradoxical position. The positive aspect of this is that the work museums do is increasingly recognized as lying at the center of culture,
knowledge, creative and tourist industries – all of which provide significant economic and social benefits. However, at the same time, we see that in many countries museums’ outputs are often undervalued by both the public and governments, leading to reduced funding (and therefore greater pressure on sustainability), or even self-financing arrangements, which can force museums to reduce salary levels.

Dealing with such a situation requires museums to become ever more entrepreneurial, commercial, digital- and customer-focused in order to find new ways to provide compelling experiences for their customers. In turn, this requires re-engineering of the way museums work – with museum staff themselves at the center of this approach.

People have always been the basis for success in any organization. This is probably best explained in a classic Harvard Business Review article on the service profit chain, which demonstrates how satisfied employees lead to satisfied customers (Heskett et al., 2008). These days, we tend to focus on employee experience, or the level of satisfaction provided by the nature of people’s jobs, and the physical, cultural and digital environments in which they work (Morgan, 2016). We need to provide people with a compelling employee experience in order to provide the sort of compelling customer experience outlined above. Providing a compelling employee experience therefore requires deployment of the same kind of techniques (such as journey mapping), organizational and managerial activities as those which are customer-centric.

As shown in Figure 1, it is also useful to recognize that new opportunities for performing activities and changing the context of work are often best identified by people that are near to where
### FOR LOVE OR MONEY

#### FIG. 1: The museum service profit chain in the digital age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESIGN APPROACHES</th>
<th>NEW SOLUTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journey mapping</td>
<td>Use of digital technologies and data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personas</td>
<td>Closer to employees / workers and customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User testing</td>
<td>New organization / business models</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prototyping</td>
<td>Organizational networks and business ecosystems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE OF INSIGHT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employees / workers and employee / worker facing HR and other groups</td>
<td>Satisfaction with overall integrated experience (design of job / gig plus digital, physical and cultural environments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers and customer facing employees and workers</td>
<td>Satisfaction with omni channel access to museum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Increased revenues and margins
- Repeat visits
- Profitability and staffing budget to pay people appropriately in the new organization model
the work is done, rather than by those actually doing the work. For example, the source of insight for external opportunities should be customer-facing employees rather than customers, and the source of insight for internal opportunities should be HR generalists or business partners, rather than employees themselves.

Taking the retail sector (another sector in which organizations often aim to reduce staff costs) as a comparator, Harvard Professor Zeynep Ton promotes a good jobs strategy as the basis for an uncommonly employee-centric way of operating (Ton, 2014). This is based on an ongoing cycle in which good quality and quantity of labor leads to good operational execution, which then provides high sales and profits, which in turn allows higher staffing budgets to provide the required labor. In particular, a “good jobs” strategy allows organizations to maintain a certain level of slack resourcing, which enables them to respond to new requirements and opportunities.

Ton’s research suggests this strategy provides significant business benefits over a “bad jobs” approach, and that the strategy works in other sectors too. For example, in manufacturing, Toyota has been more successful than many companies because its well-trained and empowered workers are able to implement standardized management processes which enable the company to deliver excellent quality.

In the museum sector, a good jobs strategy needs to involve quality employees working in a flexible way. This will often require moving away from the standard nine-to-five workday and a single location, to being more available when and how customers want access – for example with varied staffing patterns responding to peaks and troughs around exhibitions. Staffing also needs to respond to new and more quickly
changing skill requirements, which include a more commercial focus, customer service, partnership working, and the broader mindsets and abilities required to provide value. Increasingly, staff will also need to work in cross-functional teams and internal or external networks.

One current example is a transformation taking place across the seven museums run by Leicester City Council in the UK, where curator positions are being replaced by a new audience development and engagement team, aimed more tightly at attracting new and more diverse audiences (Adams, 2019). Whilst this is a controversial move, generating huge debate on social media channels, with museum professionals concerned about loss of scholarship and expertise, the move is designed to create a more nimble service that is more directly responsive to the needs and expectations of a twenty-first century audience. Today’s audience development and engagement teams are yesterday’s curators.

Therefore, the advancement of digital technologies, the adoption of increasing people-centricity and the promotion of good jobs strategies may reduce, and will certainly change, the demand for staff. This makes a museum’s workforce even more important to its success. Museums need to invest in their core domains – but they need to invest in smarter and more tailored ways of managing their staff too.

**Changing requirements of staff**
Managing staff more smartly is also important because the expectations of the workforce have changed. People want, and increasingly demand, a sense of purpose and meaning from their employment as well as a connection with others in the
workforce. Employers in all sectors already need to respond to this demand, which will become an essential requirement if we see the widespread introduction of initiatives like Universal Basic Income (UBI). UBI will result in people having a realistic opportunity to work on what they want to do, rather than have to do, and could provide a significant opportunity for employers like museums in the creative economy.

People also want more flexibility, often including the need to work part- rather than full-time, to work at home, to work for multiple organizations as freelancers, or to develop “side hustles” on top of their main employment. Importantly, these expectations are not limited just to generation Y or Z (or their global equivalents such as China’s post-80s) but are increasingly expressed by people of all ages. Organizations, therefore, need to focus on meeting these workforce needs as well as their business and customer ones. Sometimes this can be quite easy. For example, museums often need project-based staff to design exhibitions and this short-term focus often fits the aspirations of people who want to work in this role.

Similarly, museums’ increasing need for flexibility often means they need to get work done by temporary employees, contract or “gig” workers, and consultants. This contingent workforce is an increasingly common addition to the traditional organization. For example, as shown in Figure 2, Charles Handy’s shamrock organization model (Handy, 1995) now needs to be considered to have four constituent parts (or leaves) rather than just three:

- A core workforce with specific skills and a high alignment with a museum’s mission who want a long-term relationship with the museum. The core workforce may
FIG. 2: New museum workforce segments.
include curators and conservators, but also front-of-house and visitor experience staff, whose excellent as opposed to average performance can make a huge difference to customer experience.

- A **contract** workforce of key talent who do not fit the above profile but are still really important for the museum’s future. Handy suggests this may include people who have previously been employed by the organization. Web designers and other digital staff may also fall within this category, perhaps with part-time, often freelance, engagement contracts.

- A **peripheral** workforce who will probably be employees rather than gig workers, but who may bring a “gig mindset” (McConnell, 2018) to their work, meaning that they are more focused on their own development and career rather than loyalty to their current, short-term employment. This workforce segment will include staff working in generic functions such as finance and marketing, as well as areas like security and food and beverage (if these are not outsourced).

- The additional leaf provided by the **contingent** workforce of gig workers and other short-term contributors. This group could include people working in a range of different areas in which it is easier and more effective to rent rather than own capability. As opposed to the contract group, these staff will not generally provide a strategic differentiation and this means they may need to be managed with rather more focus on efficiency.

Each of these different workforce segments has different requirements and expectations and will need to be treated differently, though similarly in terms of the relative quality of the approach.
Meeting each of these segment’s needs can be fairly easy since the flexibility required by an organization is often similar to the flexibility desired by individual staff members. However, the challenge is often in matching the two. For example, Glassdoor reviews from staff on zero-hour contracts in the UK show a significant difference in perspective depending on whether these arrangements have been designed to meet employees’ as well as the employer’s needs (Ingham, 2015). In addition, staff need to be participants in the design of any flexibility to ensure it really does meet their needs. Organizations also need to focus on providing suitable integration between these workforce categories in order to avoid tensions between them (McIlvane, 2019), as has been reported recently at Google (Wong, 2018).

Other ways of meeting the workforce’s new expectations include providing more involvement in the core domain of the museum. For many staff, this will be a highly influential reason that they work in the sector and most museums could make much more of this alignment than they do, maximizing the opportunities for intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation. For example, museums could develop internal communities which enable staff to contribute outside of their specific job areas, extending opportunities for their meaningful collaboration, activity and impact. Creating formal or informal forums within the museum to encourage and facilitate this begins to blur organizational lines and also creates more fluid, flow-to-the-need teams.

The role of volunteers in many museums shows the potential provided by people who are naturally aligned to the core domain of the museum and want to contribute to a museum’s cause, separate from any financial compensation for doing so. A good
example is the UK’s London Transport Museum, which has a large volunteer workforce, including roles which might usually be considered standard paid positions, including research, IT, help desk analysts, curators, and event stewards. The museum takes this approach a stage further by using volunteering as a means to meet the museum’s broader mission, providing volunteering experience as a means for people to grow into transport engineering careers with other employers through the museum’s Enjoyment to Employment program (London Transport Museum, n.d.). However, it is important that this opportunity is not taken too far, as providing broader and more altruistic benefits can never be a good excuse not to pay people appropriately, and there is an argument that not paying volunteers and interns facilitates the idea that museums exclude people from poorer backgrounds, which is something that modern museums must seek to balance in their diversity strategies.

Opportunities for re-engineering
The changes required to support both customers and employees are often going to be very significant and may require radical re-engineering rather than more incremental change (although implementing these radical changes in an ongoing, agile manner is often the very best approach).

As shown in Figure 3, re-engineering means developing new processes and services to meet specific objectives, without being constrained by the way things are currently done. However, a key requirement is that these objectives now need to refer to employee expectations as well as business and customer needs. In addition, redeveloping processes and services to meet these needs will often benefit from including design thinking,
FIG. 3: Re-engineering museum work and staffing requirements.
personas and journey maps to help ensure interactions with employees at key touch points within or around the process are as positive as possible.

Once processes and services have been redeveloped it is possible to identify new roles and skill requirements to support these, allowing staff appropriate discretion to identify new ways of meeting customer needs in order to provide exceptional experiences.

These roles can then be grouped together to provide new jobs and gigs to be performed by people acting in the different segments of the workforce. These jobs and gigs will increasingly need to be supported by the use of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotic process automation and robotics (Jesuthasan and Boudreau, 2018), as well as outsourcing, to ensure core, contract and peripheral staff can concentrate on the most valuable activities, as well as the digital gig working platforms required to support contingent workers.

These jobs and gigs can then be grouped together into an updated organization design. Whilst most organizations in the museum sector and elsewhere have traditionally organized themselves using functional and divisional structures, they are increasingly using new organization models (Ingham, 2017) based on project teams (the main opportunity for contract and especially contingent staff), and communities and networks (core, peripheral and contract staff). They are also increasingly using new approaches such as self-management. Museums should also look at using these more modern approaches, particularly as they tend to support people’s sense of purpose and empowerment, helping them to add value to the institution and their customers.

Based on the above steps, museums can then check whether
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core</th>
<th>Peripheral</th>
<th>Contract</th>
<th>Contingent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-operation across networks</strong></td>
<td>Organizational performance ✔</td>
<td>Organizational performance ✔</td>
<td>Ongoing retainer ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultivation of relationships in communities</strong></td>
<td>Organizational performance ✔</td>
<td>Organizational performance ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration in project teams</strong></td>
<td>Organizational performance ✔</td>
<td>Overall contribution ✔</td>
<td>Time / expertise / output ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Co-ordination of individual work in functions and divisions</strong></td>
<td>Time served / skills ✔</td>
<td>Overall contribution ✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIG. 4:** Rewarding new workforce categories.
they have the right people working in these redesigned roles and reselect people into them as appropriate. Museums should also think more broadly about recruitment pools which may help them improve the diversity of their workforces. Museums also need to set up mechanisms to support changes in the workforce, such as the reformed HR and management processes required to support the various workforce segments. One particularly important requirement is to update the museum’s reward strategy and practices.

**Impacts on rewards**

For many museums this type of re-engineering may mean a need for fewer core employees, but with these and other staff being more highly paid, as well as a need for looking new reward and recognition opportunities.

As shown in Figure 4, we increasingly expect to see museums adopting the following reward and recognition models:

- The **core** workforce receiving most of their pay through a higher base salary with progression being based on time served and the acquisition of skills to compensate this group for their ongoing commitment and involvement in a broad range of discretionary activities. They may also receive some variable reward linked to overall organizational performance to support their collaboration with other staff in projects, communities and networks, but this is likely to be quite limited since incentive pay is not generally a key motivator in the museum sector.

- **Peripheral** staff receiving a lower base than core employees, with pay progression based upon their overall contri-
bution in their jobs and on projects, with – where it makes sense – additional variable payments based on the performance of their departments or the whole organization.

- **Contract** staff being paid mainly on a project basis, either for their time if an employee, or for their outputs if a contractor, with pay in either approach reflecting the value of their accumulated experience and expertise. These staff may also be given additional retainers to keep them linked with the museum between projects.

- **Contingent** staff paid mainly for completing tasks and projects, as well as maybe some payments for ideas and innovations and other impacts. These staff may not be paid that much by any one museum but have the potential to generate higher levels of revenue from across their broader portfolio of work.

Museums also need to ensure that these different reward approaches are seen as fair by each of the different groups. This will be aided by greater pay transparency, enabling each group to understand the different reward approaches used for each group, if not the actual pay structures used within them.

To support collaboration across the workforce, we expect to see reducing pay differentials within museums so that, on an overall balance-sheet-based perspective, there is both a reasonable pay ratio between the most valuable core employee, and perhaps the lowest paid contingent worker (on a pro-rata basis), and that this ratio is also perceived as fair within each of these different categories. This will also respond to increasing shareholder and public concern about executive pay, and increasing pressure on both minimum wages and the immigration of
cheap labor in some areas, including the USA and UK.

However, as identified earlier on, pay is not the only motivator for people in any organization and museum staff in particular are motivated by a range of other factors. We therefore expect to see greater use of benefits and other personalized support, helping to meet the varied needs of a more diverse workforce, together with the increased use of recognition and perhaps other approaches like gamification to maintain levels of engagement, for at least as long as levels of pay remain low.

Summary
Re-engineering the work and staffing of museums aided by digital technologies and new approaches offers the potential for museums to find ways of moving from a focus on efficiency and saving money (a bad jobs strategy) to one focused on value and experience (a good jobs strategy). Whilst museums should follow this approach to ensure their own success and engage wider audiences positively in their domain, it would also support fairer rewards for the staff working in this sector.
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Garrett James Donnelly, Head of Museographic Exhibitions, Louvre Abu Dhabi

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