

The Manchester Museum: delivering measurable benefits

Background

The Manchester Museum is unique. In no other university can you find such an encyclopedic compendium of human creativity from every corner of the globe, alongside evidence of the evolution of the planet over the last 4.6 billion years.

The Museum's value to the University lies in its contribution to research, teaching learning and the cultural life of the region. It adds to the University's image abroad and makes it an attractive place to study and work for students and staff. The Museum's award winning work in community engagement and in widening participation in education and the attractiveness of its displays and programmes to a large and broad audience make it one of the premier cultural attractions of the North West.

Challenge

The Manchester Museum, as a university museum, must deliver measurable benefits that meet the increasingly demanding standards in both academic and the public sectors. To meet the challenge, in 2003, the Museum underwent a radical restructure and adopted new ways of working to enable the organisation to flourish and adapt responsively to change in a way that serves the purposes of the University and external stakeholders.

Key aims of the restructure were to:

- Increase the Museum's contribution to University's teaching, learning and research
- Enhance public engagement and expand the learning provision for schools
- Play an increasingly major role in the cultural life of both the city and the region

The impact of the restructure was significant for the Museum staff, their ways of working and the overall culture of the organisation. Two main challenges emerged:

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1. The need for more management expertise. The Museum had lots of great specialist staff, many with little management experience. There was a need to equip staff with the skills that were appropriate to the changing needs of the museum sector and enable them to work in a joined up way.

2. The museum had to redefine the way it worked for their stakeholders and funders. The Museum is partially funded by the University of Manchester and the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), they also received funding from the DCMS to increase capacity, develop the skills of the workforce and modernise working practices. The Museum found that funders within the arts and cultural sector were increasingly expecting collaborative working with multiple partners in different sectors for added impact.

=mc's brief

The Museum's Assistant Director, Nigel Thompson, approached =mc to see how we could help them address these challenges. They needed all staff to operate as 'one organisation', which required:

- Tools to drive cross-team and smarter ways of working
- Appropriate management training for staff
- A robust project management system to focus on stakeholder needs

As Nigel says, "a core part of the solution was workforce development – a huge task in the cultural and heritage sector, where previously little investment had been made. We needed a selection of tailored solutions to help our staff change the way they work."

What we did

In consultation with the Museum, =mc designed and delivered a series of training programmes to give staff the right management toolkits relevant to their work. This involved specialised programmes for both newly appointed and existing managers, and a series of project management training to align their ways of working.

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We are continuing our work with the Museum, recently they merged the collections learning and access teams – a significant merger for two-thirds of museum staff! At the same time the opportunity was taken to broaden the management base, a strategy team comprising of senior managers was established together with an operations group to oversee the delivery of the annual operating plan

In addition to the training programmes, we're delivering consultancy to develop strategic leadership at a senior level. The Museum's senior team will be using =mc's Competency Assessment Tool (CAT) for 360° peer feedback, which will determine what competencies exist, and what else is required to achieve the Museum's goals.

"=mc is our trusted partner in driving change in our organisation. We like their flexibility in offering both 'off the shelf' and bespoke solutions. Without =mc we wouldn't be moving forward with the speed and confidence as we are now."

Nigel Thompson, Assistant Director, Manchester Museum

The results

The results so far have been far-reaching and feedback from staff has been extremely positive. The training has helped to develop and enhance cross-team working and improve communication. The Museum has also seen a change in the way staff approach projects – processes are more joined up, with a focus on stakeholder expectations ensuring beneficial outcomes for all.

There is plenty more on the horizon for Manchester Museum, as a more joined up organisation, they are looking to nurture a creative culture where bright ideas thrive. Future initiatives will involve a mixture of their in-house fast-track training programmes and the continued use of =mc to help deliver a range of bespoke and off the shelf solutions.

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Want to know more?

www.museum.manchester.ac.uk – for more information about The Manchester Museum.

Or contact Roz Capps, =mc's Practice Manager on 020 7978 1516 or email r.capps@managementcentre.co.uk to find out how we might be able to help you.

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