

## ***The value of 'value' for museum leadership***

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### **Introduction**

Some years ago, I was doing research to develop a typology for measuring museum value. Public respondents in the study described their experience of museums using words such as discovery, joy, inspiration, pleasure, excitement, refreshment and enrichment. When they expressed what, in their opinion, museums meant to communities, they spoke of identity, civic pride, belonging, a learning resource for the whole community and the opportunity to shape the future by understanding the past. Museums are valued and make a positive difference for people and communities. Above all, we want to keep making this difference.

To do so we need to build a sustainable future. For leadership this means navigating challenging economic and socially changing times. In today's world, museum leaders need to be proactive, entrepreneurial and capable of finding opportunities in challenge. They also need to be able to leverage value.

Value is the subject of my talk today. Value is at the heart of almost every aspect of our practice. It is the essence of what we are and the outcomes that we produce. It is at the source of our arguments for continued funding. Being valued is at the heart of our sustainability as a sector.

To be of value is to be considered positive, significant and worthwhile. Museums both embody and create value but being of value and creating value does not happen in a vacuum. Museums occupy a universe of relationships that have a role in determining what value they create and how their value is perceived valued. There have been various attempts to map this universe for us and today, I am going to explore two of them which are relevant to museum leadership.

### **Public value**

In 1995, Mark Moore developed and published his theory and model of Public Value. Aimed at publicly funded institutions, Moore proposes that the overarching purpose of the public sector is to create Public Value. Public value, he argues, adds benefit to the public sphere by addressing unmet social needs, 'conditions which need to be ameliorated, substantive problems to be solved and rights to be vindicated' (Moore 2007).

Moore anticipated an emerging trend. Nearly two decades ago, he cast public agencies as institutions tasked with making a positive difference in the civic domain. And- besides foreshadowing the social purpose of museums, he provided a model of public value that can be realized through a set of partnerships involving the institution, the government and the public.

He achieved this through designing a strategic triangle which identifies these partnerships and the role that each plays in collectively activating public value. At the apex of the triangle are the 'authorizers' upon whom museums depend for approvals and funding. At one corner of the triangle's base is the public, the citizens who have three roles: as co-producers in determining what kind of value a museum should create, as recipients of that value and as its ultimate authorizers. Finally, between the authorizers and the public, located as the third point of the triangle is the operating environment of public institution such as museums.

For Moore, the creation of public value depends on being intentional and the willingness to intentionally create public value depends significantly on its leadership. Moore believes that the dynamic social and economic environment within which museums operate offers opportunities for leaders to be 'proactive stewards of public assets' directed purposefully to making 'a positive difference in the lives of individuals and communities' (Moore and Moore 2005).

However, to be able to develop partnerships with both authorizers and the public, the museum leader needs to know what each of these sectors expects from the institution in terms of value. To add flesh to Moore's three environments of authorizers, operations and the public we need to turn to another thinker and another triangle.

### **Three types of value**

In 2006, John Holden looked at specific *types* of value associated with each of the three groups in Moore's strategic triangle. The operational environment of the museum is linked to what Holden calls 'institutional' value. Institutional value is produced by the *way* in which museums relate to and engage with their constituents through their programmes, their services and their ethos. Institutional value is fundamental to building sustainable relationships with the public and the authorising environment through generating trust and mutual respect.

Institutional value begins by looking inward. Clarity about institutional values helps to create the circumstances from which other values can emerge. In order to make a difference in the public realm, a museum must first be able to articulate its own values and the value that it intends to create. And this is where leadership plays a vital role.

A leader has to create a space where the values of an organisation can be reviewed and discussed. The value cycle begins with a close examination of the institution's original mission and purpose, what the institution stands for now and what it wants to stand for in the future. It continues by identifying what distinguishes the institution from other attractions and what it does best. It uses this platform to decide what impact it wants to have in the future, what difference it wants to make and for whom –and- it takes a hard look at what is feasible based on resources and capacity.

Adherence to a shared set of values gives museum staff a collective framework within which to work, a common purpose and a shared sense of direction for the organisation as a whole. It builds corporate consistency, clarity and efficiency and, importantly, it gives the museum the authority to be selective (Korn, 2007; 2013). Selectivity about the use of scarce resources is of crucial importance in the current economic climate where we are often being called upon to do more with less. Clarity about institutional value provides a framework with which to choose programmes that complement and build on the institution's values rather than dragging it in directions which deflect from them.

When an institution knows what distinguishes it from competitors, branding becomes more focused. When it is clear about its core values, branding is more authentic. When it knows its brand value, it can create long-term relationships with the public-particularly, those sectors of the population who share similar values because they have a vested interest in the sustainable future of the brand (Halliday and Kiely, 1999).

The authorising environment, however, is interested in the public in their role as citizens. For authorisers, the focus is on how the value that museums produce translates into some kind of measurable effect on the population as a whole. They need to know that what museums do translates into something that reflects their big picture concerns.

To return to Moore's model of the relationship between governments and public institutions, he envisages cultural leaders exerting influence to *help* governments 'discover what *could be done* with the assets entrusted to their offices' (Moore and Benington 2011). Part of the job of museum leadership is to be cultural advocates, ensuring that an accurate understanding of museums is embedded into the thinking and practice of policy makers and funders. And that requires museum leaders to develop convincing narratives that demonstrate the 'essentialness' of museums and their on-going value to society.

## **Conclusion**

I began this presentation by stating that value is at the heart of what we stand for, what we produce, how we practice and our approach to our work. Understanding value gives leadership a framework for achieving five important dimensions of museum management (Scott 2013). I conclude this paper by briefly exploring the relationship between value and these five dimensions- *accountability, audiences, assets, advocacy and adaptability*.

### *Accountability*

We are accountable upwards to the authorizing environment, outwards to the public and stakeholders and inwards to our own institutions. Being of value is at the heart of each of these relationships. It is our continuing value that is the measure used to assess whether we are considered essential to governments and the public.

### *Audiences*

Maintaining relevance, meaning and connections with audiences in an increasingly competitive leisure market is crucial to our on-going sustainability. Finding that place of intersection between the values audiences are seeking to satisfy with leisure and what the museum stands for is central to building sustainable relationships.

### *Assets*

In these constrained economic times, museums need to ensure that they are using their assets strategically for results that build capacity and ensure the ongoing future of the institution. We cannot do everything for everyone. Value shows us what we can do well and where we should put our effort for maximum effect.

### *Advocacy*

The dividend that is produced through an investment in culture is value. We need a narrative that shows how this value is essential to our society- not a 'nice to have'. We need a story that shows governments that we create public value.

### *Adaptability*

Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is dynamic. Change is accelerated as never before. Value keeps us grounded and in touch with a core that endures. Value helps us keep our finger on the pulse of change. It is seeking. It reveals the unexpected, the emerging trend, the next likely scenario. It enables us to be proactive and set the course within a dynamic environment towards a sustainable future.