

The effects of performance management culture on museums

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Summary

This paper looked at the way in which museums have adopted new forms of performance management, partially in response to the changing beliefs of policymakers and funders. The core of the research is based on a series of 44 semi-structured interviews with staff from a diverse set of nine museums and policymaking and professional organisations. The aim of the 'new managerialism' (as it is termed) is to create museums that are 'more accountable, more efficient, more entrepreneurial and more responsive to customer needs'. Some museums have resisted the new managerialism and found that such an approach does not align with their artistic and creative sensibilities. Others have appropriated the approach to fit their missions and business models, but with some unintended consequences.

The research found a great deal of variation in the way in which performance management was adopted and appropriated

Small museums found themselves beholden to performance management in such a way that left little room for autonomy and creative experimentation in their practice. They looked for ways in which they were able to satisfy local policymakers social objectives. Larger museums (partly due to their power and position within the cultural sector, but also due to their pre-existing workplace cultures) had been able to better appropriate the new managerialism for their own ends, but this has led to division within individual museums where departments with distinct objectives sometimes competed against each other.

These is a sense in which art and culture are illusive to measurement by the formats of the new managerialism

But the aims and objectives that drive the need for greater access and accountability are generally sound. The author calls for a form of meaningful public engagement by museums that is subservient to neither 'short-termist politicised agendas or even private funder calculations of visibility and cheap publicity'.

Keywords

interview **UK** **measurement** **museum** **performance**

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