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Building Stories – the Art of the Project Manager in Exhibition Development:

An Analysis of *Death and Diversity* at Wellington Museum

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the role of both project management and the project manager in museum exhibition development at one museum. Specifically it investigates the necessity of such practice and the various inherent factors that lead to exhibition development success. It argues that project management is not only vital to this success but that such success is dependent on the unique skill and ability of the project manager. Ultimately this thesis advocates for a special breed of project manager suited to the museum environment.

Owing to limited museum-based research in this field, it is unclear how effective project management is in developing museum exhibitions and subsequently, understanding the effectiveness of the project manager's contributions to this process. This research provides a much-needed qualitative study that not only examines the role, but also provides insight into the mindset of one such professional. In addition to introducing museum project management, an in-depth case study focusing on the Wellington Museum (former Museum of Wellington City & Sea) investigates the intricacies associated with this practice. In particular it centres on the *Death and Diversity* exhibition staged in 2011, where the Museum initiated an inaugural project manager role and then retained it for a large-scale capital development planned for completion in 2020.

Utilising qualitative research methods this thesis builds three sections: a context chapter, one case study, and an ethnographic study. Open-ended, in-depth interviewing of both the Museum's project manager and the director give valuable insight into the practice and perceptions about the role. An observational study examines project manager behaviour and interaction during project meetings. The analysis highlights the complexities of contemporary exhibition development. In an increasingly evolving and resource-limited world of equally increasing scrutiny, this advocates for a profession tailor-made for such complexity in the unique museum environment.

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I wish also to acknowledge the foresight and assistance provided by my supervisor Dr. Susan Abasa (Massey University Museum Studies Programme Coordinator). Her expertise and guidance were central to achieving completion of this study.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge all those undertaking exhibition development in museum environments, whether a project manager or not. It is your vision, professionalism, dedication and creativity, which ensure a wealth of stories are constructed and shared, and communities represented and catered for.

READER'S NOTE

As a means to better explain the process of project management and the relationship to museums, I've drawn an analogy between the museum environment and a coastal hill. This geological metaphor is drawn from my prior under-graduate study in the discipline and encompasses the primary topics in this thesis: project management; museums; and exhibitions. In this way I aim to guide the reader through the often-complex nature of these topics using an environmental feature commonly known. The hill represents the layers of a museum and an exhibition, but also the steps of project management, thus facets of the hillside can be adequately compared to facets of these topics. This provided for a characterisation of a project manager as a weathering agent – the water component that filters throughout all these environments.

At the time of writing this thesis, the Wellington Museum changed its name from Museum of Wellington City & Sea. The prior name is prevalent in sources researched and also appears in many quotes. Where appropriate, I have accommodated this name change throughout the thesis, however Museum of Wellington City & Sea still appears in some instances within the text.

When referring to the **Museum**, I am referring to Wellington Museum. When referring to **The Trust**, I am referring to the Wellington Museum Trust.

Lastly, all images within this thesis have been granted permission from their respected sources. Notably, most of these images have been acquired from Museums Wellington. Permission is credited beside each image.

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ABBREVIATIONS

MW	Museums Wellington
NSTP	National Services Te Paerangi
OEA	Office of Ethnic Affairs
Sol	Statement of Intent
WCC	Wellington City Council
WHB	Wellington Harbour Board
WMT	Wellington Museums Trust

