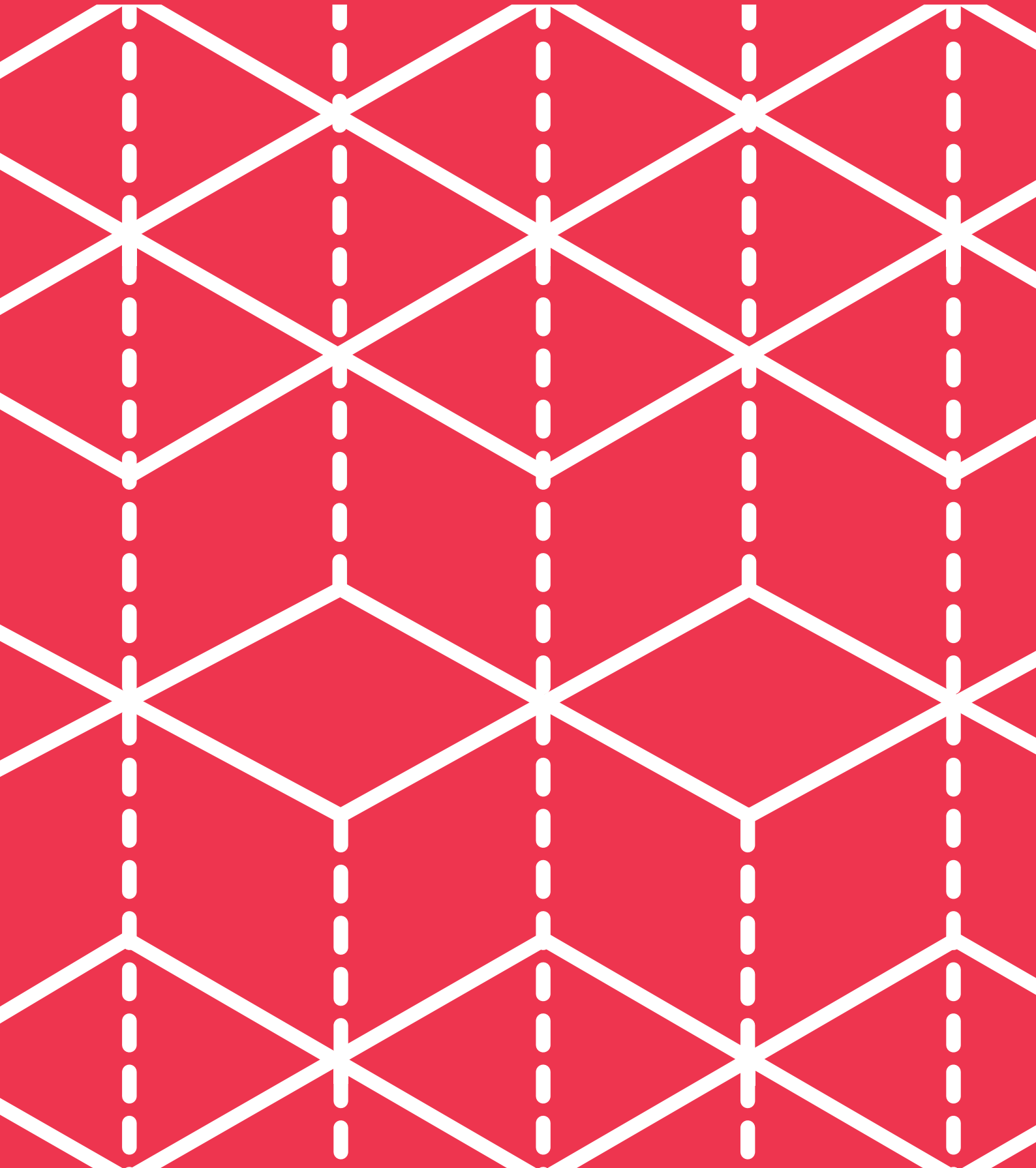


1. Findings



What is knowledge transfer?

Why does it matter?



And what has prompted MLA London, with the London Development Agency's support, to take a closer look at the 'knowledge transfer' between museums, libraries and archives and businesses in London?

As a term, knowledge transfer is as ambiguous as any other element of the so-called knowledge economy. Definitions range from the technical:

“transferring good ideas, research results and skills between universities and other research organisations, business and the wider community to enable innovative new products and services to be developed.”

Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform

to those which recognise the human element:

“At its simplest, knowledge transfer is about starting a conversation.”

Economic and Social Research Council

This piece of research occupies an interesting space between the two. We have looked at the technicalities of mobilising the knowledge base in museums, libraries and archives: what is there and how it can benefit business. There are fascinating examples here; the aircraft manufacturer who used old undercarriages in the RAF Museum to rethink their own landing gear, or the architect who used a design from a retail firm's textile archive to make their shop front stand out from the local competition.

But we have also examined the people who make up those businesses, whose ideas enable the business to innovate. Who are they, what are their working lives like, and how can we use museums, libraries and archives to start richer conversations which lead them to moments of discovery or inspiration? Here we have the change manager who used the Apollo missions exhibition at the Science Museum to take his board through a seemingly-impossible change programme, or the planner who likes to get away to “the quiet space of the library” for thinking time.

The changing nature of work – new networks, portfolio careers, hotdesking and PDAs – has necessarily informed our research. We have also taken into account a small but growing body of literature on the role of interruption, slowness and slackness in creativity and productivity in the workplace. Interesting, too, is the changing conception of the ‘knowledge’ or ‘creative’ worker – recent research by NESTA (2008) found that over half of all creative professionals are working outside the creative industries.

In such a complex environment, working with unclear definitions, we agreed that econometric research methods may not tell us very much. Trying to count an intangible world and affix a bottom line to it seemed both impossible and rather pointless. Instead, we have commissioned a more narrative enquiry, using people’s stories and experiences to build a picture of what is happening, how and why. A fuller document explains the methods used by Sparknow, but it is worth noting that the technique allowed us to get at both the BERR-style knowledge transfer and the ESRC human interactions that contribute to knowledge exchange and innovation in the workplace.

What follows is the interpretation by Sparknow of the data that were gathered, supported by selected evidence, commentary and illustration. We conclude with an epilogue which lays out MLA London’s priorities for next steps in the Knowledge Transfer Programme. A separate document explains how we plan to take these priorities forward through a series of pilot projects.

I would like to conclude by thanking the team who has worked so hard on this research, the LDA for supporting it and, in particular, the advisory group, who have given their time and expertise to illuminate a path which we hope will, in coming months, lead us, our sector and London’s business community to exciting new places.

GRAHAM FISHER CEO, MLA London

Moving knowledge

The spread of understanding from one person to another. The discovery that makes work more interesting and more successful. The small break that lets light into a problem. These are vital sources of satisfaction and inspiration, and they shouldn't need technical terms and elaborate justifications, but just now they do.



Both learning and reflection are proper uses of work time.

The man who does nothing to distract his mind and allows his trouble to acquire a complete empire over him is acting unwisely and making himself less fit to cope with his troubles when the moment for action arrives. **Bertrand Russell**

*“You can’t go into the museum, it’s like stepping into some ancient sh*t. Well, not ancient – Victorian.”* **Brick Lane shopkeeper**

The internet is a valuable tool, but Googling Plato can never be the same experience as reading *The Republic*, let alone being directed to *The Republic* by a qualified librarian who can also help you to widen your reading in classics or political philosophy.

The guarantor of cultured society is a proper storehouse of knowledge, properly maintained – not a cringeing imitation of Starbucks, where the staff are under the lash to ‘up their quotas’ or else. **Will Self**

According to Lewis Hyde, the prevailing marketplace mentality is part of a cycle: without an effective opposing ideology, capitalism has no need of cultural or scientific trophies and lapses into mercantile monomania.

The wheel will turn, he says: some force will awaken the gift economy and reassert the value of the commons, but for now every asset must have a value in the marketplace. One of our purposes here is to express the economic value and usefulness of the cultural commons.

A city’s intellectual capital is key to its business readiness. A highly educated pool of qualified and talented individuals is essential not only to the staffing needs of companies doing business in the city but also to business’s ability to drive innovation.

**Cities of Opportunity,
PriceWaterhouseCoopers 2007**

The modern City is in many ways a cruel, heartless place, and its occupants work such cripplingly long hours that inevitably they lack much of the roundedness of earlier generations.

**David Kynaston,
The City of London Vol. 4**

London’s museums, libraries and archives are among her jewels: centuries of accumulated knowledge, wisdom and insight, curated by experts and made accessible to us all. They don’t just deliver information: they confront the user on all sides with possibilities, connections, feelings and ideas, with a richness and presence that defeat preconception.

The purpose of the Knowledge Transfer Programme is to bring that wealth to the business world, but our first finding is that it doesn’t really make sense to talk about a relationship between business and museums, libraries and archives. Both groups are too diverse, and the relationship between a newsagent and the public library is not at all the same as that between GlaxoSmithKline and the Wellcome Institute.

The reality is a long, irregular and porous frontier, wide and boggy in some places, marked by cliffs in others. People move across this border carrying knowledge and seeking inspiration, sometimes routinely as part of their work, sometimes by accident, sometimes without realising that they have.

In the literature of the knowledge economy it is often necessary to talk about knowledge as if it were a tradeable and bankable commodity. This neglects what to us are its most important features: knowledge is embodied in the knower, and for it to be transferred a relationship of understanding must form, however briefly, across a gap. When we talk about knowledge transfer we are saying that one person has changed as a result of encountering another, either in person or through their work.

There are two kinds of change that benefit the person crossing over into museum, library and archive spaces. There is the direct transfer of knowledge, where people gain information and understanding that is useful to their work, and there is the cultivation of insight, where a spacious and richly appointed intellectual environment promotes reflection and inspiration and leads to better use of knowledge both old and new.

“Television companies regularly come into the RAF Museum looking for information and leaving with several unexpected bonuses. For example, one crew came to film in front of an aircraft, but were delighted to see (and film) the logbook of a crew member killed in the accident they were interested in, held in the museum’s archive.”

“My ceramics are a blend of delicately-decorated Japanese tea ware, researched at the Percival Foundation and traditional English pottery I found in my local museum.”

“We use our archives to confirm what we’re doing now, not predict what’s going to come next – but we could. All our shops had wooden floors in the 1930s, then the carpet went down in the 1970s. Now, we’re back to wooden floors. It’s the same with food halls – they used to be central, then they disappeared, and now they’re back. We could be using our archives much more efficiently.”

“I know retro-innovation sounds like an oxymoron, but after a long discussion with colleagues about the meaning of the term innovation, we decided that it didn’t just mean those things that were absolutely new, but those that were newly relevant or newly applied.

Energy conservation was an everyday necessity to past generations and they had strategies to deal with scarcity that we have since forgotten or neglected, so we should be looking at past lifestyles for attitudes and ideas that we can translate into a 21st-century context.

We often gain as much insight from looking back at what used to be commonplace as we do from imagining the future, and I often think that we could be working with heritage organisations to make more use of – and prove the value of – their collections and knowledge.”

As part of their sponsorship of the

‘Elizabeth’ exhibition at the National Maritime Museum, Morgan Stanley supported a learning programme on leadership for local A-level business studies students. Developed by the museum, using the museum’s collections, know-how and spaces, the programme also involved senior staff of Morgan Stanley in delivery to the students. The evaluation was so positive that Morgan Stanley agreed to sponsor further leadership programmes on Nelson and Shackleton, and extend the period of their support for an unprecedented fourth year.

In creative professions and those that conventionally require participation in a knowledge community, it is relatively easy to see these benefits at work. Architects, lawyers and the makers of kitchen tiles are all likely to have well established patterns of library, museum and archive use that they regard as part of their normal toolkit, or at least as a necessary cost of operation.

In the mainstream business world it takes more imagination to see the benefit on the bottom line. There are occasions when you can trace a connection – museum knowledge leads to improved aeroplane undercarriage leads to profit – but they are rare, and it is harder still to weigh the benefits of time spent in reflection. The real profit is an accumulation of indirectly-owned and intangible assets: the knowledge, ability, satisfaction and inspiration of the people who make up the company.

We need to bring individuals and institutions closer together so that encounters are more likely and the benefits of knowledge exchange clearer. Among larger companies this will mean convincing senior people that periods of reflection and knowledge-gathering are proper uses of working time and that the company archive properly deployed is far more inspiring than the beanbags in the innovation centre. The key message there will be that museum, library and archive time is a wise investment by the company in its people.

Small businesses and freelancers are naturally less distrustful of individual inspiration, as are the designated creative and innovative units within larger companies, but even here it is hard to release the time it takes to reflect and rethink, and instead of fears of frivolity we have to counter the perception of the sector as a place of stodgy antiquity. The message there will be to locate museums, libraries and archives as useful places of work that also offer expansion and intellectual provocation: the stone that gives an edge.



Introspection for businesses...

Do your library and information people have influence over business decisions?

Do they have contact with the front line?

Could you use your archive as a means to establish and convey the core values of the organisation?

Do you actively encourage your staff to spend time away from their desks in museums, libraries and archives?

Can you describe where and how your business functions have contact with museums, libraries and archives and what that contributes to your business?

Do you know how your staff use museums, libraries and archives in their own work practices and professional development?

Do you have people in a knowledge transfer role who could build partnerships with museums, libraries and archives?

and for museums, libraries and archives

Are you confident that you understand and articulate your knowledge offer to businesses and other organisations?

Have you explored the full range of assets and experiences you could offer to business or do you just offer a few services you think they want?

Do you have ways to monitor or survey business use of your services?

Do you have people in a knowledge transfer role acting to bring about business partnerships? Are they real partnerships or just logo placements?

Do you have in place staff development programmes, exchanges, study tours or mentoring systems to develop skills and awareness to supplement the primary technical skills of your staff?

Could you collect case studies, illustrations and evidence of the knowledge transfer between you and business, explicit and diffuse, and offer this know-how to others in your professional networks?

Are there other, possibly similar, museums, libraries and archives with whom you could build joint ventures to reach into the business world?

“People don't have the habit of going to the library. They are surprised that I'm away from my desk. And they say, 'what were you doing', 'I was in a library' 'Oh yeah?' The subtext is – that's not work.”

“The lobbies of hotels, the foyer of the V&A, the steps in front of the National Gallery: these are perfect workplaces. That's how work works now.”

“People must have spent years building barriers between these departments. Even now when I get things achieved my team say, how did you do that? I think you just have to have the confidence to ask the dumb questions.”

“... and they have humans to help you. When I was in York, the librarian helped me to find what I wanted in three different places: I would never have found any of them on my own.”

La Dérive

The situationist Guy Debord urged his readers to step out of their routine, to stop treading the same path every day but to experience without preconception the complexity of their environment, to understand their location and so their existence. His view was that modern cities ignore and curtail the emotional lives of their inhabitants. The *dérive* is a rapid passage of noticing and resonance that changes one's understanding of the world.

“We didn't use objects from a museum for our inspiration space because we simply couldn't meet the demands that would be placed on us. We've got corporate cabinets, not proper climate controlled storage, and we want to handle the objects – what museum would let us do that?”

“I think it was the historian Theodore Zeldin who said that 'the purpose of cities has always been to meet'. A greater understanding and appreciation of this simple truth would, I think, greatly help much of the thinking that currently goes on. The task for London's policy makers is not to make London a centre for production, or even for specific, fast-growing industries – rather it should be to facilitate meetings and the initiating and building of connections.”

On every side the walls around workplaces are breaking down, and museums, libraries and archives have a great opportunity to broaden their reach. There are places where it makes sense to offer dedicated business services, but it is far more important to recognise that the core activities of curation and interpretation are relevant to business too. They need to embrace the idea of themselves as vital sources of space and inspiration, and reach out into businesses in the same way as they do to homes and schools.

There are places where all of this is already happening and the benefits are already felt. We want to make people aware of this success and we see mutual understanding as the route to real engagement between business and museums, libraries and archives. We propose work on these broad fronts:

- building relationships so that engagement is made possible
- building translation capacity so that benefits are made clear
- adding simple, useful facilities to draw people in
- making a case for the rounded employee so that it becomes respectable for business people to linger and learn
- making the case for the museum, library and archive as a place of opportunity and invention.

The environment in which this will happen is a very conducive one: the idea of the workforce as infantry is finally losing ground and we see guerilla workers skipping between private and public spaces, forming shifting alliances according to their interests and colonising niches that please them. Accessible information services and networking tools have made people self-reliant finders-out: now we need to help them to see that information quality is more important than quantity, understanding more important than discovery.

London

Anyone who lives in London will tell you that it is a perversely local place. For all its sprawling possibilities, most people remain within very close boundaries both geographically and culturally. Just as there are children in Tottenham who have never seen the Thames, there are university-educated stockbrokers who would never think of visiting the British Museum.

London speaks 300 languages and belongs to at least 14 major faiths. If its bricks are little villages it has swallowed over the years then the mortar was laid by two thousand years of immigration. It is a million different encampments, jammed together and overlaid one on another, and it is one of the most abundant cities in the world. In a recent PriceWaterhouseCoopers study it was found to lead the world in intellectual capital and came second only to Tokyo for connectedness.

London is a turbulent flux of art, business, invention, speculation and accumulation in which many swim, and many struggle to stay afloat. It has some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK and some of the least. It is constantly refreshed by new arrivals and new collisions, and by its magnetic effect on artists, makers, musicians and hopefuls of every kind.

London's business sector is also distinctive. The historical agglomeration of craft, commerce, finance and guild-backed civic mercantilism has left us with a diversity of styles and types of business. London holds the European headquarters of over a third of the Fortune 500 firms but it also excels in architecture, advertising, design and creative and cultural industries, where 57% of the businesses are small or micro enterprises and most of the workers are now floating laptop users.

This new breed of floating knowledge worker is really just the latest in a long tradition. London's business affairs have frequently taken the form of arguments between opportunists in coffee shops. The London Stock Exchange was born in Jonathan's Coffee-house in Change Alley, largely through the efforts of traders who had been expelled from the Royal Exchange for rowdiness.

London always adapts, yet somehow stays the same. It is a vast and turbulent place but it has a continuity and an idea of itself that many cities lack, and that is largely thanks to the richness of its knowledge resources. It's an example from which many companies could benefit.



“The thing itself reaches all the senses and prompts thoughts and feelings that can’t be anticipated. The mundanity and yet enormity of a piece of the moon will always have more transformative power than a mere description could.”

“The only staff development thing that I can ever remember or enjoyed being on was about leadership, using Julius Caesar, Shakespeare. It’s the only one I can remember. I hadn’t read Julius Caesar but I went back and read it, on my own, voluntarily.

If you can make the link between the two things – think of museums and archives and resources that can be used for things other than their historical value – you may not only provide a service that business is willing to purchase, at a good price, but also something that encourages those who’ve experienced it to go and see these things for curiosity, enjoyment. That’s what they are really for.”

You must look for the turns, not the straightaways, and thus you must peer far enough into the past to identify patterns. It’s been written that “history doesn’t repeat itself, but sometimes it rhymes.” The effective forecaster looks to history to find the rhymes, not the identical events. So when you look back for parallels, always look back at least twice as far as you are looking forward.

Paul Saffo

The Business Engagement Manager

at the British Library is in the marketing department but isn’t from a marketing background. But as the role is one of engagement, it is part of the marketing operation. It exists to build relationships and fill gaps. It faces inward to experts, departments and knowledge holders and outward to interest groups, networks and businesses of all kinds.

It has been very successful in reaching minority groups and individual entrepreneurs and among its diverse audiences it has found a great need for knowledge and expertise and an even greater need for someone to tell people where to start finding it.

London’s museums, libraries and archives are well positioned to support these new patterns of work and personal fulfilment, to help businesses marshal their knowledge resources, to win loyalty and support from the new kinds of worker and to make a substantial contribution to London’s continuing pre-eminence, not only in culture and scholarship but also in business and innovation.

To take the first steps in this direction, we propose a new bridging role: a worker whose purpose is to bring business needs into the museum, library and archive sector and respond with the services that will meet them. In many places this role nearly exists, and some inspired individuals are doing this kind of work on their own initiative, but they work separately and often against the grain of their workplace.

Many Higher Education institutions now have Knowledge Transfer Officers responsible for turning academically-generated inventions and techniques into business possibilities. We propose the creation of a similar role at the museum, library or archive, where the knowledge resources are special not necessarily because they’re new but because they are rare, authoritative, well-structured and often unique. We want to develop knowledge products and bring them to market, to create new facilities and relationships and to support a culture of reflection and innovation throughout the business world.

This role – we’ll just call it bridge building for now, as it will fit differently into each organisation – will need inspired explorers and interpreters. They will move with ease between the rapids of the modern business world and the slower eddies of their museum, library or archive, bring to each an understanding of the other, build individual relationships, break down barriers and assumptions, create services, offer depth and reflection to business and at the same time reinvigorate their institutions.

Substance

The high-level relationships that we've found between business and museums, libraries and archives – as opposed to the individual encounters – are generally of two kinds. There are partnerships of opportunity, usually in the form of sponsorship and rarely extending far into either organisation, and there are the efforts by companies to build a story of themselves.

We're not sure about the sponsor's logo on the poster. Both the company and the beneficiary of its brand-based generosity might benefit greatly from taking a longer view and building a real, substantial partnership based on their core purposes rather than just improving their window-dressing.

The second group gives an idea of how this might start to happen. John Lewis uses its internal company archive during staff induction to bring people into the family and show them that they are part of something distinctive and historical. The benefits are so great that the archivists now face outwards too, taking questions from public and press.

Transport for London – a business less than ten years old – uses the London Transport Museum in similar ways: as a curiously external heritage, a place to make new people feel part of a connected effort and as a friendly public face. The museum uses its unique position in the capital to extend similar services to other transport companies.

A company without an idea of itself, its purpose and its history is, in a very important way, hollow. This company 'culture', however debased that word has become, is a vital source of strength. It aligns the people who make up the company, gathers them into a collective effort and persuades each of them to support the whole from within. It makes the company stronger, more resilient, better able to withstand change and to make tough decisions.

Without that sense of something worthwhile to belong to, the company has only an outer shell of corporate purpose to hold it together. People's commitment to it will be conditional and temporary and the whole assembly becomes brittle and hard to steer. In times like these, where businesses routinely merge, split, globalise, localise, rebrand, reposition and relaunch, perhaps the lack of substance is no longer affordable.

John Lewis Archive

The John Lewis archive is at the heart of the Partnership, acting as a unique and valued information resource for the company's business activities, and providing a vibrant connection to the past which makes sense of, and enriches, today's business activities. Judy Faraday, the company archivist, says that this is possible because "we're customer focused, not object focused. It's much easier to take someone from the company and train them to work in an archive than it is to get an archivist to be business focused."

This business focus translates itself into an impressive ability to respond to enquiries from all areas of the business. Whether it be an architect wanting a design from the textiles archive to help a new shop front stand out from the competition, or a store manager seeking a memorable event from the past as a highlight of a leaving presentation to a member of his or her staff, the archive is ready and able to help. It also receives a lot of enquiries from the media, academics and family historians.

However, it's not just about responding to other people's enquiries. The archive actively promotes the company's history in a way that supports its current activities. See, for example, the calendar of momentous – or just quirky – events in John Lewis's history, produced every December for the press and PR team to help them plan promotions over the coming year. Or the talks which Judy regularly gives to Women's Institutes and other groups – "one a week. It's a subliminal form of advertising. I wouldn't do it if I didn't think the business would benefit from it."

On some occasions, these talks have very specific purposes beyond straightforward marketing. When Robert Sayle was redeveloped into John Lewis Cambridge, local customers were concerned that a well-loved institution was disappearing. Judy gave talks to "almost every voluntary group in the area," to explain the history and the ethos of the company. This lessens the fear, makes the company more friendly and helps customers to accept the change.

To develop this further a new web based resource has been created. The community archive project works with staff and the local communities around John Lewis stores to record the history of these shops, and encourages participation from anyone who can remember the earlier days of these businesses. This project was designed by the archive but relies on volunteer retired staff to run, update and edit the sites. It offers an opportunity for intergenerational work, develops links with the local community and demonstrates the company's commitment to the towns in which it trades.

The archive's other website, The Memorystore, offers a resource at the other end of the age scale, providing teachers and children at Key Stage 2 & 3 with free downloadable resource packs which can be used to develop work plans for a variety of subjects using material from the archive collection.

Perhaps most interesting of all, however, is the way in which the archive is actively used to support the Partnership's identity and make visible to staff, with a light touch, the long history of the values which underpin its success as a business. The archive has a strong presence on the intranet, where special anniversaries and points of interest are highlighted. The archive frequently provides stories to the company's weekly in-house magazine, drawing out in particular the company's long-term commitment to staff development. Finally, many new staff are inducted in the company's archive, to give them a rich sense of the organisation they're joining.

“...can we find a new model, perhaps with new actors, that takes the positive aspects of the commissioned company history but avoids the risks of propaganda and distortion? Not easy in a world so concerned about image and ‘controlling the narrative.’”

“One thing we had was a collection of 10,000 photographs of the Avebury monument, pictures taken on a grid, which is a very structured system of recording. It occurred to me that the pictures and method could be a fantastic resource to teach fieldwork, so I tracked down the archaeologist who took them and we worked to digitise them.

This was the hook which allowed us to use them as a learning tool, a way of creating a virtual walkabout. The point is, there’s a mountain of objects and know-how that could be repurposed for training if we’re inventive. If there is one thing that museums can do for business, it’s about training of different kinds.”

“For the bank, this was not about matching the carpet colour or filling a certain size space on the wall, but about using art to reinforce an aesthetic of value, as a way to engage people, to open up perceptions, get them to think about something they’ve never thought about before. It’s not about the bank adding value as a company. It’s about valuable work, the value of the labour of producing the work and then the connections it prompts. The pictures can add value by extending people’s thoughts about a whole range of things: ornithology, nature, preservation, Christianity, religion, retreat, isolation. They don’t tell, they invite.

It’s not just a one way dialogue about what work is relevant. It’s a process of mutual education. That’s the challenge. There’s no set agenda. Through conversation about the collection, and through the selection process, the client begins to realise it’s about a different way of seeing. But it’s important not to spell things out immediately or you sound terribly worthy. You need to draw people in.”

The imagination is a muscle. If it is not exercised, it atrophies.

Neil Gaiman

The purpose of the bridge builder will be to create and promote a broader and more varied range of offerings, designed so that people can move gradually into greater professional engagement, accessible to a wider range of people, continuous with the public work of their institution and joined up into a coherent package. They will create cosy niches for the new kinds of roving knowledge worker as well as broad platforms for corporate engagement.

The bridge building function needs to be represented both in board-level strategy and on the ground. It needs a career path that makes a virtue of experience and breadth. It needs the clout to shift institutional thinking so that the fear of commercialisation is replaced with a desire for relevance, and it needs the insight and practical experience to seize opportunities and invent relationships.

We don’t expect that every museum, library or archive can appoint a dedicated bridge builder. To begin with it is more likely to happen at the level of a connecting body like MLA London. We hope that as the role becomes established, smaller institutions will see the need to devote some of their staff time and seek the appropriate training. By small increments a set of competencies will be defined, career paths will turn to take them in, opportunities will be spotted both in business and in museums, libraries and archives, and a profession will slowly emerge.

The bridge builder will want to begin by creating tools that appeal to the business mind – sharp ways of getting things done – but our longer term purpose is to transfer not only knowledge but also wisdom, insight and values. One day we hope it will be common for a business person to spend time in the museum, library or archive in search of reflection and inspiration, not just getting things done, and that the consequent release of tension and growth of understanding will be regarded as valuable assets cleverly won.

London Transport Museum

London Transport Museum, and its role within the transport sector in London, is a good example of many kinds of knowledge transfer in action.

Over the past two years or so London Transport Museum has undergone a £22.4m redevelopment, which has offered it the chance to reapproach the story of transport in London, to represent the full scope of transport for London (with whom it shares responsibility for aspects of London transport archives) and to consult with people from the transport sector in general.

The focus has moved from vehicles and technical history towards the social history of transport – the people who travel on the system, or work within it. “We have a much wider remit. It’s no longer just about buses, trains, and trolleybuses. It’s not even just about public transport: our story represents transport as the lifeblood of cities across the world. Putting London in this context as a world city is really important, as many transport businesses operate multinationally. I think the wider transport industry can see how the new Museum story is relevant to them, and that’s why we’ve attracted their support. We can act as a host and facilitator for the industry – which has an increasingly wide scope, encompassing everyone right out to the banking, legal and insurance worlds.”

The Museum has a very effective knowledge management partnership with Transport for London’s Archives department. The Archives have formal responsibility for keeping the records, but the Museum has traditionally been the guardian of the informal memory of the company. The partnership is particularly effective in relation to family history. The Archive is not required to keep records beyond a certain period, so the old staff magazines in the Museum library are often the only record of an individual having worked for London Transport.

The Museum is used by the business in several other ways. For example, when planning London Underground poster campaigns, the Museum’s Head of Trading is involved to add his knowledge about what is likely to have long-term commercial viability in the Museum shop. Likewise, the Museum provides background information for contractors carrying out work on the transport infrastructure. Much of the system is now well over 100 years old, so knowledge about how it developed and what exists ‘as built’ is essential to delivering the contract.

“Some of the industry, like Transport for London” use the Museum for the formal induction of their new staff, to set their role in context. For others staff visit more informally, again because they feel ownership of the content within the Museum. Capita, one of the Museum sponsors, used the gallery content to help put the congestion charge into context. Our galleries dedicated to contemporary and future issues are of particular interest to the corporate world.”

Justine Cooper, as Stakeholder Relations Manager for the Museum holds, she thinks, a unique role in the sector. “I’m very interested that the sector has not realised how useful having a dedicated stakeholder resource can be. As far as I know, I’m the only person in that role. My business is to market the museum, not in advertising terms, but within our stakeholder world. It would have been much more difficult to take on my role without the instigator of our major redevelopment project.

“The moment a company has committed to supporting the museum, I start developing a relationship with them. I establish their business objectives, develop the partnership through regular contact and look for opportunities to involve them and their staff in the Museum, working to see how can exceed their expectations. It is my hope that these new partnership will enhance our sustainability and strengthen our future fundraising potential.”

“Really we started our corporate patron scheme more for the money than for better links with business, but over a series of lunches and meetings it became clear that this was important to them: making a museum was about committing to Croydon in quite a deep way. Croydon was a 60s boom town, the sad butt of jokes, and businesses were leaving. It slowly became clear that this was all about investing in hope for Croydon, trying to salvage something of what was special and give it a more positive image, a brush with culture that it definitely didn't have.

At first it was really hard, local people would say ‘Croydon doesn't have a history: what are you doing here?’, but businesses wanted to buy into the hope. There were private views, which was a pretty big thing, getting employees to feel good about the place, give it the psychology of a place with a past, not just a stop on the road to Brighton.”

“It's different, holding a meeting in a library. Something seeps out of the books.”

“I like to take my [MBA] students to museums and libraries, precisely because they are so inexpert in reading them. It's like The Apprentice: you give them a task they're unfamiliar with.”

“I send my young people to the City Business Library to do their market research for a business plan. The facilities and, especially, the people are really good.

Graduates might be able to find the information for themselves, but other people need help and that's what the City Business Library is so good for.”

“People who organise the actual details of events are quite junior, in both museums and businesses. Left to themselves, they'll do exactly what they did last time because they know it works. To make a real change, you need senior-to-senior contact, and that's hard to manage.”

Software innovation, like almost every other kind of innovation, requires the ability to collaborate and share ideas with other people, and to sit down and talk with customers and get their feedback and understand their needs.

Bill Gates

Behind the bridge building work we would like to see a broad effort to change perceptions. It will be a slow process built out of indirect steps: networking among museums, libraries and archives and with business people, recruitment of advocates, orientation of leadership, trials, errors and lessons learned, but we think it is important that the case is made by the sector as a whole rather than having to be restated by every institution. Each place will make a different specific offer to a different group of people, but all will benefit from a growing awareness that as a group they have qualities and assets that businesses need.

This effort should take the form of a shared communications programme that gathers success stories, distributes innovations and ideas and presents a coherent argument across a united front. It would culminate in ad campaigns, toolkits and rebrandings, but to begin with the focus should be on small steps: raising awareness, building mutual understanding and cultivating relationships that go beyond the shallows of sponsorship and brand-combination. The Knowledge Transfer Programme is taking the first steps in this direction.

We would also like to see collective offerings of a more practical kind. If every museum, library and archive (and art gallery and concert hall) were offering the same wireless internet access, for example, then busy people would know without having to ask that these were places where some kinds of work could be done. We don't want to homogenise the sector – diversity is its strength – but we want people to be confident that some small practicalities are available and that they will be cheap, standard and easy to use.

The final requirement, once mutual understanding has led to the creation of the right facilities, and cultural shifts mean that people are disposed to use them, is that we make people aware of what is available. To this end we suggest that the newly joined-up communication function of the sector should lead to the

British Medical Association (BMA) Library

Jacky Berry is a bridge builder and information agent provocateur par excellence. Before joining the BMA, she spent seven or eight years fusing the library and knowledge management services at Linklaters – one of the ‘magic circle’ legal firms – and aligning them with the business of doing the law.

One of the major challenges was to resuscitate regard for information professionals. This included persuading the lawyers that information was, indeed, a profession, and not a service that could be provided by a secretary with spare time. The attitude to overcome was expressed by one partner: “why would anyone with a degree not want to be a lawyer?”

One of the most important changes was to relocate small cells of librarians to each legal team, at the elbow of the lawyer on demand, or even able to predict the lawyer's needs. Through proximity, they could show their ability to grasp the business or legal issues and help shape responses by contributing their information expertise.

“We're still here to make their lives easier, and a little bit richer too,” says Jacky. “We all think Google's going to answer everything, but you've still got to wade through a lot of stuff to find your answer. The information professional makes sense of it. And it's not just ‘oh, there's the answer’: the information professional will give you a wider view ‘have you thought of looking at this? Google can't have that conversation.”

Jacky moved from Linklaters to the BMA some two years ago to take on a different, but perhaps even greater, challenge. The BMA is one of the largest associations of UK health professionals, with over 139,000 members. The library sat at the heart of a complex of buildings which brings to mind an Oxbridge college – green squares, table-clothed dining, plenty of oak panelling and not a great deal of running in corridors.

The library was a double-height panelled room onto which was trained a web cam, in part as a joke as there was so little activity to witness. The practical services were highly regarded, with a swift turnaround on identifying and sending out special items. The sense of the ‘emotional library’ – a space and support services that you knew were there even if rarely or never used – constituted a considerable implicit part of the value members saw in joining the Association. Though these emotions may have been unexpressed, they were strong.

The library team, and Jacky, worked to save the research services from being outsourced to the British Library, citing the outrage when other professional associations withdrew such services. “You must control the demise yourself, or be aware that you're going to get bad press and manage it. Libraries and what they do can be so emotive for people and, whether they articulate it or not, the BMA members definitely feel that the library belongs to them and gives meaning to their membership. It's essential to work with them.”

As the library moved to a new, squatter, squashed space, all the alterations were designed to invite new relationships and behaviour, while remaining rooted in a good sense of the history of information services to BMA members. The challenge for librarians is to make the leap to a culture of confidence: of selling themselves as though they are a business. “We need to hook members in by persuading them that we'll make their lives easier: we can't afford to wait for custom. One thing I've done is to assign library staff to each committee in the BMA so that we can understand what's happening, develop services that meet current needs and then sell them back to committees. That's the kind of thing we need to train all museum, library and archive professionals to do – to feel comfortable to get out there and hook people in.”

“Businesses will always leap to the commercial solution. They have people coming in and selling things to them day after day – they don’t think to go to a museum, library or archive.”

“When we moved, we changed the service in two ways. We brought the know-how and library functions together and we gave each practice group its own library, positioned them physically in the middle of each. If a lawyer had a really difficult legal problem that could be helped by the knowledge management systems, the information person would sit with them for hours, so that they really understood the nature of the business that the lawyer was trying to achieve, rather than just trying to work out what book or article they wanted.”

“I like to work in my local library. I go there first thing in the morning and work until they kick me off the computers. I can get things done – a full day’s work.”

“Even short sessions – an hour’s 1:1 with Dame Anita Roddick or with the Inventor-in-residence – provide a touch of inspiration or knowledge transfer that you can’t measure, but that’s likely to change the nature of an individual’s business and lead people into new ways of engaging with the other resources on offer – the librarians and information experts, the collections, the workplaces. But there are real challenges in putting some kind of value on these experiences of a kind that the knowledge economy likes.

How does one manage the mismatch between value that’s generated and the countable outputs? Must things be measured, or is it enough to facilitate the experiences and know, anecdotally and by witnessing the excitement, that the presence of people, things and place have conspired to bring about a transformational moment?”

“The key is to respond to all enquiries about hiring the museum space by saying that you only have a ‘package’ available – a tactic many companies use themselves. This hiring package includes use of the space and interaction with the collections in some way. They have to pay for both, whether they like it or not. Of course you then have to make such interaction attractive too...”

creation of a guide that will become a standard index of the museums, libraries and archives of London and detail everything from the location of entomological expertise to the places with the best cake.

To begin with this might look like a guidebook or directory, but we see it evolving into an online mapping and finding service built largely out of mutual recommendation. By the time it is mature we expect it to be a vital layer of information in an electronic London.

In ten years time there will be a virtual city overlaying the real one. It will appear on mobile devices and in workspaces, interpreting, labelling and organising the real city, locating and connecting people and adding layer upon layer of evaluation and interaction. London’s geography will be as much about knowledge resources as physical structures, and in that world the city’s museums, libraries and archives will be her skyscrapers and palaces.

The work that is done now to build relevance and to understand the language and tempo of business is also preparation for a future where it will not be enough to wait for people to come through the door, but where they must be reached and helped and made aware of what is possible. The world of production and commerce and the world of collection and understanding are closer than they have ever been and it is in all of our interests to bring them together.

A spotter's guide to business users



1. The information professional

Paradoxically essential to and marginalised by the internet age, the information professional specialises in knowledge about knowledge: its location, evaluation, retrieval and dissemination.

Some are domain experts, some are generalist information handlers. They include archivists, librarians and curators, but also business information managers, data warehouse, trainers, authors and journalists, intranet administrators. They use museums, libraries and archives often, with purpose, and they bring a toolbox.

2. The domain member

These people, either conventionally or on their own initiative, work in a way that involves a sustained relationship with a particular collection or institution.

They include doctors and lawyers who must stay in touch with their professional resources, architects eyeing up each others' work at RIBA, textile designers who frequent the V&A, set-builders at the Geffrye Museum checking authenticity, botanists referring to canonical resources at Kew and history teachers leading school parties around the Foundling Museum. Their use is intermittent but dedicated.

3. The creative intermediary

Most professional use of museums, libraries and archives is delegated not to information specialists, but to creative intermediaries whose work is one part inspiration, three parts knowledge transfer.

When a company commissions a poster in a particular style, it is buying skill and invention but it is also delegating the task of finding, understanding and reapplying preserved knowledge. The same goes for architects, radio producers, marketers, upholsterers and the designers of cutlery. Their use is irregular, sometimes frequent, often grazing rather than digging and likely to be spread across several institutions.



4. The broker and facilitator

The broker has usually emerged from one of the other groups here to become the agent of others' exposure. Unlike the intermediary she is not herself the vehicle of understanding: her role is to help people towards fruitful encounters.

This is a diverse group working at different levels, some at the institutional level creating possibilities, others at the individual level drawing people in. It includes dedicated museum and library employees, enlightened managers and project leaders, trainers, teachers and consultants of every flavour. Their use is broad, takes many forms and favours novelty as much as sustained engagement.

5. The accustomed user

This is a broad group, distinct but not homogeneous, of people who have chosen to incorporate museum, library and archive use into their personal or working lives. It is not purposeful in the same way as the groups above, but chooses to spend a certain amount of its time being nourished, surprised or just entertained.

Neither is it superficial: these are people who believe that the environment, the exposure and the effort of understanding are good for them, and seek it out. Their use is broad but often habitual and they feel loyalty and a sense of belonging to their favoured institutions.

6. The casual visitor

This is a large – and growing – group whose purpose in visiting a museum, library or archive is not to do with its collection or expertise, but a fringe activity like the café or the shop.

Their choice of an institution is likely to be driven by convenience, branding and an idea of what it says about themselves and is only indirectly related to the substance of the place. Their patterns of use are similar to those of the accustomed user, though the basis of their choices is different, and engender similar but milder feelings of belonging. In some cases they will be very frequent users.

Next Steps

It is clear from the report that there is no universal model for knowledge transfer in museums, libraries and archives.

People are inspired by different things, work in different ways. If we direct our efforts exclusively towards, say, helping businesses to develop new products and services from sector resources, we would limit a bigger conversation about what is possible in the relationship between the museum, library and archive sector and businesses in London. Through the research process, Sparknow identified two main categories of business need:

- Specific interventions to provide better information, to orchestrate networks of knowledge-sharing, and to provide a space and resource that helps workers to reflect and develop innovative ideas
- A broader, more subtle and more complex understanding – in both business and the sector – of the role that museums, libraries and archives can play in meeting business needs

Sparknow laid out sets of pilot project recommendations to address these needs, which MLA London and the LDA have reviewed and prioritised into three categories:

Core projects: those areas on which the LDA and MLA London can make an impact by jointly dedicating short term energy, effort and resources – these can act as the hub of a wider, longer term programme of work around knowledge transfer, and be early places which bring the two worlds together in new and practical ways.

We would like these to include work to develop the role we are calling (for now) ‘bridge builders’ – people who understand both worlds and can act to catalyse, cajole, persuade, nudge and challenge in both so as to bring about early and exciting changes and open new channels of communication. We hope to develop simple training modules, perhaps working in partnership with HR professionals and their associations, which will support and spread this understanding more widely across employees and ‘knowledge workers’ in both worlds.

Partnership opportunities: those activities which look fertile for investment by others and which MLA London can help orchestrate. These include ideas such as the Guide to Hidden Museum, Library and Archive Workplaces, an award for the sector professional of the year for achievement in a business context, a trustee orientation programme to guide trustees of museums, libraries and archives to think more widely about business relationships and further research to establish a firmer and more tangible value proposition to make the business case for more substantial knowledge transfer activities.

Spillovers, arguments and wider changes: those areas which, while interesting, need to be part of a longer term campaign of provocation, conversation and engagement, and which might later prove good areas for pilots and projects, or which might lead to more substantial policy and practice changes and exchanges across both the sector and business.

This is a broader campaign of new conversation which might take place, for example, in hosted open days at archives where experts and business professionals share experiences of the latent potential put to work in a business setting. It might include study tours and published case studies – for example, where a museum acts at the hub of a business network, or where a library has put itself to good use as a workplace – where current good practice is assiduously gathered and widely published. All this would be supported by an effort to collect practical ideas, tools and techniques for reflection and self-assessment on both sides. In short, ways of asking and answering unfamiliar questions which we hope will lead to inspiring and challenging new answers (and, of course, new questions).

All in all, we hope that these pilots will form the beginning of a conversation that helps the two worlds to understand each other better. We want to establish situations where knowledge transfer can happen, where new ways to meet specific business needs can be found. We want to improve the sector’s offer to business and help them to develop new audiences and, in the longer term, new income streams. Finally, we want to raise awareness of our work, attracting new partners to the programme.

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