



**the happy
museum**

Case Study – real practice, real impact

**IWM North – new tools,
new ways of working**

IWM North opened in 2002 and is partially government funded. It has 24 full time staff and attracts around 340,000 visitors a year.

IWM North – new tools, new ways of working

This case study is about how IWM North used the 'story of change' tool to develop overall vision. Related to this, the museum tested different approaches to visitor object handling – and now uses the one which was the most successful. The museum has a new focus on wellbeing and sustainability.

This case study is relevant to:

- Senior management team
- Learning and community engagement teams
- Curators

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Highlights

“We now think differently about what success looks like - we have a stronger focus on the wellbeing agenda now rather than just marking success against visitor figures.”

Zoe Dunbar, Head of Exhibitions,
IWM North

- The project played a part in furthering the museum’s thinking in terms of its impact on wellbeing , which it now sees it as a measurable outcome
- The story of change tool was used to develop a vision and plan implementation
- Six approaches to visitor object handling were tested and evaluated
- The museum’s focus on sustainability was reignited and a ‘green team’ was established



Museum profile

IWM North opened in Manchester in 2002 in a building designed by Daniel Libeskind and has since welcomed over three million visitors. It is the youngest of IWM's five branches and the first outside the south and east of England. The

museum has recruited more than 400 people through its award-winning volunteer programme. The museum has a full time staff of 24 and it is partially government-funded.

"The project highlighted to us the importance of first-hand or eye-witness testimony to the experience on site and we have built upon this since then, with more veterans in the galleries sharing their stories."

**Zoe Dunbar, Head of Exhibitions,
IWM North**

Happy Museum funded activities

IWM North used Happy Museum funding of £14,250 to carry out research into different approaches to object handling by visitors – and the museum now regularly uses the most successful of these (object handling supported by veterans and volunteers). In parallel, the museum's leadership

used Happy Museum tools in an internal 'Re-imagining IWM North' development process. The changes to come from this include elevating the role of wellbeing in planning and monitoring the activities of the Learning & Access and Exhibition teams at IWM North.



What happened?

“The story of change tool is a useful as a way of thinking through what you are trying to achieve, what matters and how what you do links through to what you achieve. This is part of the way I think now.”

Charlotte Smith, Head of Discovery and Learning, Chester Zoo

“Working on the Happy Museum project has made us think differently about what success looks like,” says Head of Exhibitions Zoe Dunbar. “We have a stronger focus on the wellbeing agenda now rather than just marking success against visitor figures.”

The Happy Museum work at IWM North was an integral part of the Re-imagining IWM North development process the museum was undertaking. The project was a piece of action research testing six approaches to object handling to explore their impact on wellbeing and civic engagement. The six approaches were: the handling of large objects; access to a mystery object trolley; using veterans to support object handling in the IWM’s TimeStacks; art sessions run by a mental health charity; and group sessions organised with Veterans North. The objects used ranged from a First World War Field Gun to a soldier’s prayer beads or last letter home.

The ‘Participating with Objects’ project aimed to promote civic engagement through experimental object handling, enabling people to connect around issues of life and death, how war shapes lives and what, in the future, we might need to be fighting for. An unplanned outcome was raised awareness of environmental sustainability, both in members of the public and in the senior management team.

The museum leadership team used the ‘story of change’ tool to plan the museum’s overall vision. As

well as this, the museum staff used reflective logs, non-hierarchical teams, and a research-led approach to developing working practice. These were all new approaches and were appreciated by the museum’s staff. The project successfully informed museum development, but also created wider, unexpected organisational change.

The evaluation found object handling does contribute to enhancing the visitors’ experiences, stimulating debate, supporting wellbeing, raising engagement and environmental awareness. According to one visitor’s feedback, it made the museum feel “less stuffy and restricted - it makes you want to go back.”

The research found that: large objects had the highest impact in the short and long term; the mystery object trolley was popular and challenging for children; free display was seen as too informal; the veteran-supported handling of objects in the TimeStacks allowed poignant themes to be explored in a short time; art sessions generated creativity and discussion, but required the most resource; and the veteran-led sessions generated wellbeing for the veterans, but less new thinking and needed considerable facilitation.

“Using veterans to support object handling at our TimeStacks was the most successful approach we tested,” says Zoe Dunbar. “This highlighted to us the importance of first-hand or eye-witness testimony to the experience on



site and we have built upon this since the project completed. There are now more veterans in the galleries sharing their stories. Object handling still forms a strong part of what we do and we now have object handling trollies manned by our veterans and volunteers.”

The Happy Museum work had an impact beyond just object handling. The museum used – and continues to use – tools that were introduced during the project. “The museum’s leadership team used Story of Change to plan the future of IWM North and our core purpose and function,” says Zoe. The tool was a fundamental part of the process and the IWM North leadership team here have subsequently used this model to plan and chart progress. “Story of Change is a good tool because you start with where you want to get to and then plan your path to get there.”

Charlotte Smith worked at IWM North during the Happy Museum project and has gone on to use the learning in her new job as Head of Discovery and Learning at Chester Zoo. “I have used a version of Story of Change as one of the tools to develop and redefine new programmes and an overall strategy here at Chester Zoo. It is useful as a way of thinking through what you are trying to achieve, what matters and how what you do links through to what you achieve. The focus on the difference an activity makes and measuring what matters is part of the way I think now.”

Sustainability is also a higher priority since the Happy Museum project. “The museum has set up a ‘green team’ that looks at sustainability issues and specifically how we might become more environmentally friendly and carbon neutral over the next few years,” says Zoe Dunbar.

For Charlotte Smith, the Happy Museum project played a role in her decision to take on a role focused on sustainability and conservation. “One of the key aspects of this was considering whether I wanted to ‘reflect the world or be a hammer to change it’ – something that has stuck with me from the Happy Museum symposium in 2013 as summing up why my current role was so appealing – it is the opportunity to be a hammer to change things.”

“Happy Museum and the focus on what matters and how we can effect change was one of the catalysts for me taking my role at Chester Zoo. It reignited an interest in sustainability and the focus on wellbeing has supported my approach as a manager (in terms of staff wellbeing) and as well as wellbeing being part of the mix of things I consider when developing visitor experiences and learning programmes. Being part of a community that explores these ideas and having the opportunity through the symposiums and events to take time out and think and to share good practice, was really valuable.”



What's changed?

“Happy Museum reignited an interest in sustainability and the focus on wellbeing has supported my approach as a manager.”

Charlotte Smith, Head of Discovery and Learning, Chester Zoo

New tools: the museum has learnt new tools and approaches, such as the story of change tool and the importance of testing and evaluating what matters.

New ways of working: using the story of change to develop an overall vision for the museum meant involving staff and stakeholders of all kinds.

Focus on wellbeing: by starting with a vision and a 'story of

change', the IWM North team questioned their definitions of success and began to explicitly view wellbeing a priority outcome.

Focus on sustainability: the use of wellbeing as a desired outcome and by engaging with audiences and veterans helped the museum team make a link between war and human fragility and environmental sustainability and the long term. The museum has set up a 'green team'.



Happy Museum success factors

Since 2008, The Happy Museum project has been testing a set of working principles through commissioned projects. These 'action research' projects have helped us identify critical success factors of how, what and why museums might re-imagine

themselves in the light of these principles. The table below is a summary of our 'Story of Change' tool (More information here: www.happymuseumproject.org). This case study best demonstrates the aspects of practice highlighted in red.

Principles	How? Drivers	What? Delivery	Why? Difference we make
Measure what matters	Share a wellbeing vision Share a Story of Change	Use time, resources and scope creatively Measure what matters to people	To re-think what matters
Be an active citizen	Encourage active engagement Anticipate challenge and change	Work experimentally Use everyone's potential	To create happy, resilient people
Pursue mutual relationships	Share ownership Ensure mutual benefit	Work across hierarchies and teams	To create happy, resilient teams
All of which help re-imagine museums for better community LIFE*			
Create the conditions for wellbeing Learn for resilience	Consider playfulness, creativity, activity and aesthetics	Be a good host Broker relationships	Communities are: • Learning • Interacting • Feeling happy, satisfied and worthwhile • Environmentally aware
Value the environment and be a steward of the future as well as the past	Consider the social and financial benefits of being green	Use the museum's unique resources. Lead by example: care of people, place and planet	

* The Happy Museum Project is conducting a national LIFE survey, where LIFE = Learning, Interactions with others, Feelings and emotions, and Environmental awareness. More: www.happymuseumproject.org

Tools used

The IWM North team used the 'story of change' to define their vision for the project and to plan the route to achieve that vision. The purpose of this tool (which is similar to theory of change, or logic modelling) is to make sure we start by focusing on the difference we want to make rather than on the activities we may use to achieve those ends.

Using a story of change challenges 'business as usual' thinking by

More on using a Story of Change can be found here:
www.happymuseumproject.org

starting with the overall purpose and working backwards. The process of 'measuring what matters' can then start at the planning stage – by defining the success factors for a project, a strategy or a change of direction. The tool is also valuable for helping to communicate a vision to staff, volunteers and all stakeholders, as well as the thinking that underpins it.



Online resources

Museum website: www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-north