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***W.4.3.3.A CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS
IN MUSEUM CONTEXT AND GUIDELINES
TO BUILD A CREATIVE PRACTICE***

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Abstract:	This learning object will explain the importance of creative thinking skills applied to the museum context and introduces general guidelines to start building a creative practice



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Aim and objectives

The aim is to explore the role of creative thinking skills applied to the museum context and introduce general guidelines to start building a creative practice.

Learning outcomes

After studying this resource, you will be able to identify the most important outcome of creative thinking skills in museum work.

Keywords

Creative thinking guidelines, thinking outside the box, problem solving, self-learning, creative confidence, reflexivity, divergent thinking, intrinsic motivation, lifelong learning, museums



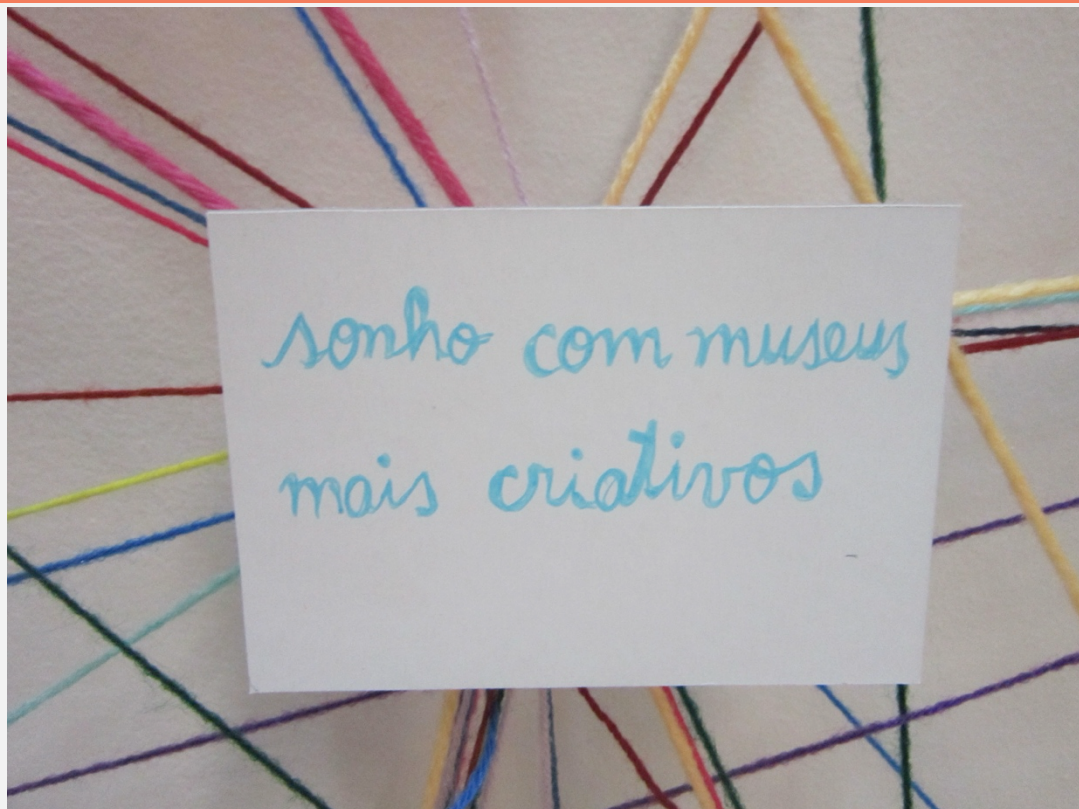


Figure 1 - "I dream with museums more creative" © Ana Carvalho

1. Creative thinking skills in museums

Why is it important to talk about creative thinking skills in museums?

Creativity lies at the heart of museums. For centuries, museums have been collecting and preserving objects that reflect human creativity.



On the other hand, museums are assumed to be a “creative system” in itself (Ferreira 2016), where many activities behind the scenes are developed so museums reach their full potential at the service of society.

But are museums maximizing the creative potential of their workforce to reach their mission?

Addressing the shifting challenges of society requires flexibility and improvisation in museum practice. Creative thinking is likely to be one of the essential skills for museum professional’s better face change, adapt and move museums forward.

As Linda Norris and Rainey Tisdale (2014) point:

‘Museums need creativity now more an more – so many museums are taking three steps forward and two steps back as they struggle with reality [...]: how to serve a broader and more diverse audience, how to build capacity, how to encourage meaningful participation, how to care for ever-expanding collections, how to articulate public value.’

To ensure that museums reach their full potential in society, a creative museum practice is essential. The most important outcome of creative thinking skills in museum work is helping museum professional’s enhance their creative potential to build a practice that supports the museum mission.

Thus, creative museum professionals are key to ensure that new ideas, new perspectives and solutions are produced and add value

to the activities developed, in any museum area, from back-office to front-of-house.

It is about incorporating the creative process into your daily work, from creating a new digital strategy or a new interactive solution for an exhibition, to new interpretative methods, management techniques or new bold ways of engaging online audiences.

The need to develop creative thinking skills in museum practice concerns the entire museum staff, whether you are the director, the curator, the digital strategy manager, the education officer, the registrar, the exhibition designer, or the museum visitor assistant; whether you are starting your career or are more established in your job.

Remember that building a creative practice is not only for contemporary art museums as it might look at first sight, is rather a valuable strength to any museum type (history, natural history, archaeology, anthropology, art...), whether they are small or big museums.

Ultimately, creative thinking skills are useful to build creative museums and help them to thrive. But change starts with your individual path and practice. It requires work and motivation. It is also about experimentation, finding what works for you and what doesn't. Remember, there is no formula that fits all.



Figure 2 – I want museums to be creative... © Ana Carvalho

2. Guidelines to start building your creative practice

Now that you have learned the value of creativity thinking skills in museum practice it is time to guide you with some steps to start building your creative practice.



These steps relate to anyone that wants to enhance their own creative potential, whether you are a museum professional or not. Don't see them as a recipe, but a whole set of ideas to help you find your own way of being creative. Eventually, you will start learning what works and what you can apply in your museum daily routines.

Below there are some key guidelines adapted from the book *Creativity in Museum Practice*.

Pursue a passion

Creativity is very much associated with **intrinsic motivation** – learning, thinking, and improving just for the pleasure in itself. If you are not used to train your creativity, you may want to try a hobby that you enjoy, thus creating space for discovery and imagination in your life. Redevelop your passion for something as an initial step to explore your own creativity.

Build your creative confidence

Find situations that lead you to take some risks and experience creativity. One possibility is to take a workshop – it could be about drawing, sushi, photography, 3D modelling and printing, designing robotics, or any other topic that sparks your interest. The goal is to stimulate your brain to observation, curiosity, and learning new things, produce ideas and implement them.

Cultivate knowledge and skills in your domain

More and better ideas are usually generated when you have knowledge in the area you are problem-solving. One way to build your creative thinking skills is to learn everything about a certain



topic you are interested in. It could be learning more about a specific content related to your museum work (how to improve your digital skills, how to manage a project plan development) or take an online course, like you are doing now. Challenge your creative practice by stimulating the lifelong learner inside of you.

Develop a creative habit

Creativity thinking skills need regular practice. As for any other routines, you need to include creativity in your daily life and map your progress along the way. The goal is to make creativity spontaneous and not something you do once in a while because you have to.

Reflect on your creativity

Have you observed how your ideas were generated, in which circumstances? Can you see if your creative thinking skills are having any impact in your daily work? Which parts of the creative process are frustrating and which are thrilling? What is working and what is not? Do you need to look for more opportunities to improve your creative thinking skills?

The more aware you are about your creative thinking development more likely you are prepared to make positive changes in your life and in your museum practice.

Below there are six additional guidelines to enhance your personal creativity, adapted from the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi theory (1997):

1. Stimulate your curiosity and interests:



- Try to be surprised by something every day
- Try to surprise at least one person every day
- Write down each day what surprised you and how you surprised others
- When something strikes a spark of interest, follow it

2. Cultivate flow in your everyday life:

- Set a specific goal everyday to look forward to
- If you do anything well, it becomes enjoyable
- To keep enjoying something, you need to increase its complexity

3. Nurture habits of strength:

- Take charge of your agenda
- Make time for reflection and relaxation
- Shape your space (including in your workplace)
- Find out what you like and what you hate about life (and work)
- Start doing more of what you love, less of what you hate

4. Develop internal characteristics:

- Develop what you lack (personally or professionally)
- Shift often from openness to closure
- Aim for complexity

5. Apply your creative energy:

- Find a way to express what moves you
- In your life and in your museum look at problems from as many viewpoints as possible

- Figure out the implications of the problem
- Implement the solution

6. Explore divergent thinking:

- Produce as many ideas as possible
- Have as many different ideas as possible
- Produce unlikely ideas

Synopsis

In this presentation we started by looking at the importance of creative thinking skills in museums. We focused on the value of creative thinking skills to help museum professional's enhance their creative potential and, thus, build a practice that supports the museum mission.

We also introduced 11 guidelines to start building your creative practice: pursue a passion, build your creative confidence, cultivate knowledge and skills in your domain, develop a creative habit, reflect on your creativity, stimulate your curiosity and interests, cultivate flow in your everyday life, nurture habits of strength, develop internal characteristics, apply your creative energy, and explore divergent thinking.

Do share your opinions with us and your fellow learners about what you have learned. Do you have an example to share?

List of references

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Ferreira, I. (2016). *Criatividade nos Museus: Espaços “Entre” e Elementos de Mediação*. Casal de Cambra: Caleidoscópico and Direção-Geral do Património Cultural.

Norris, L. & Tisdale, R. (2014). *Creativity in Museum Practice*. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press.

Further reading

Video “How to Stimulate the Creative Process”, from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPC8e-Jk5uw>. This video (1 minute and 47 seconds to listen) is about six overall ideas that may help you stimulate creative thinking: 1) Sleep on it; 2) Exercise your body; 3) Allow your mind to wander; 4) Keep learning; 5) Fire up your brain with exhilarating situations; 6) Record your fleeting thoughts.

Glossary

Intrinsic motivation: refers to a behavior that is driven by internal rewards.

Divergent thinking: is producing as many and different ideas as possible. It is about “thinking outside the box”, looking for solutions that are unconventional or unlikely.

