

# Profession or occupation?

Peter van Mensch

## CECA 1981 Svendborg





**Rijksmuseum van Natuurlijke Historie  
National Museum of Natural History  
Leiden (Netherlands)**

**UNESCO Recommendation on participation by the people at large in cultural life and their contribution to it (Nairobi 1976)**

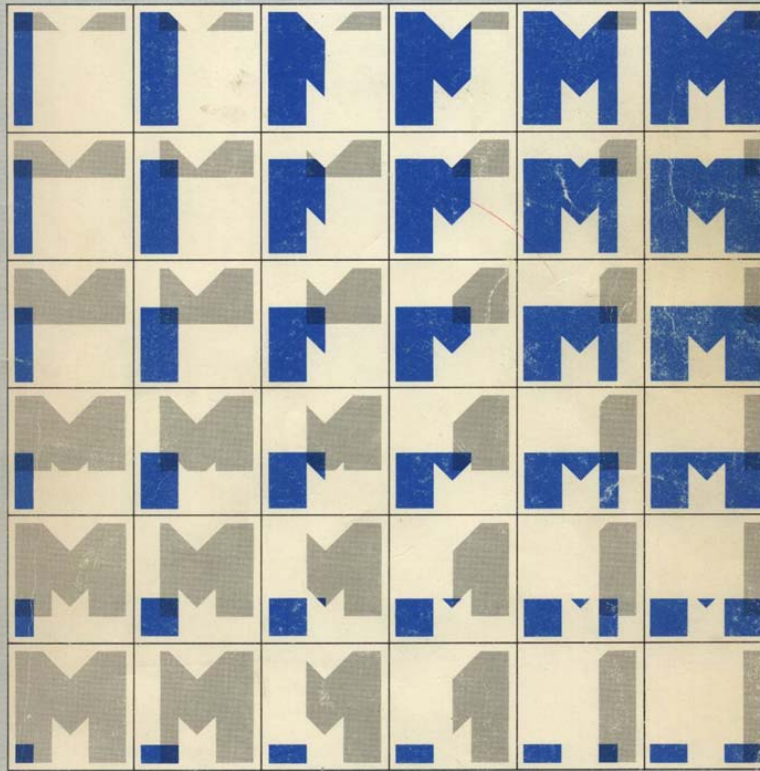
**participation** by the greatest possible number of people and associations in a wide variety of cultural activities of their own free choice **is essential to the development of the basic human values and dignity of the individual,**

access by the people at large to cultural values can be assured only if social and economic conditions are created that will enable them not only to enjoy the benefits of culture, but also to **take an active part in overall cultural life and in the process of cultural development**

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## Naar een nieuw museumbeleid



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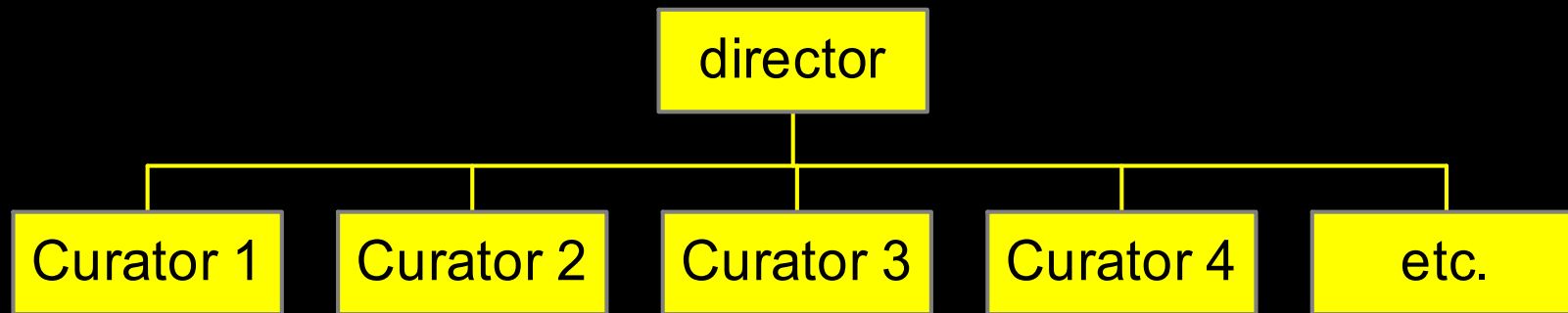


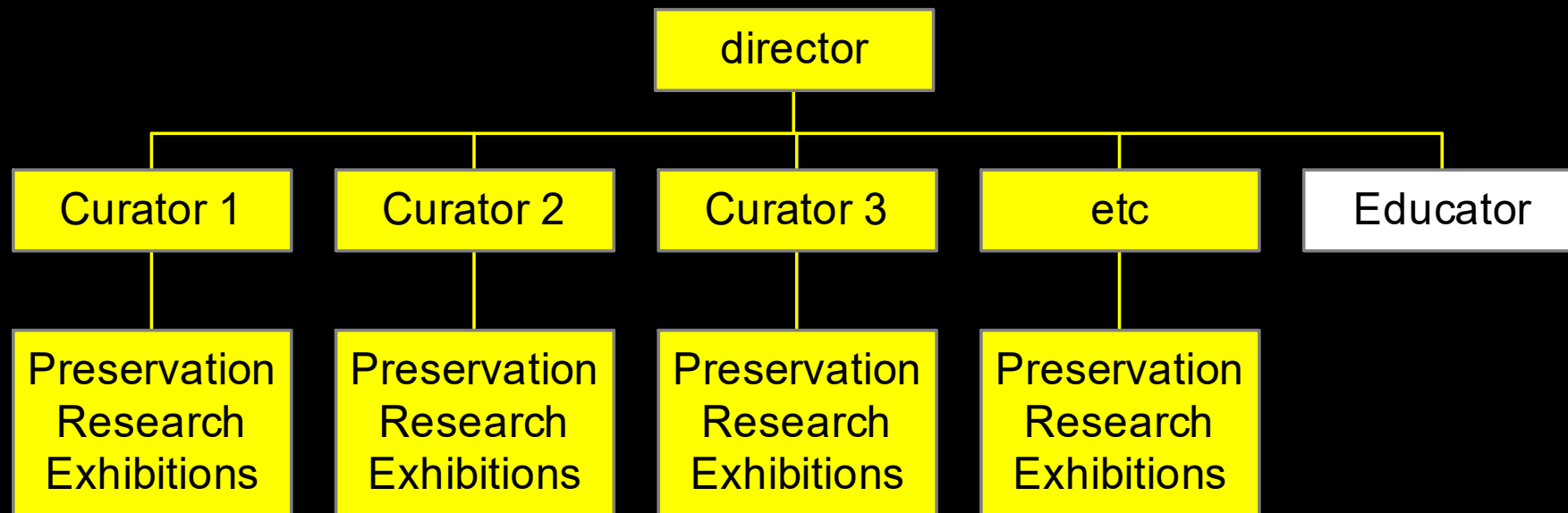


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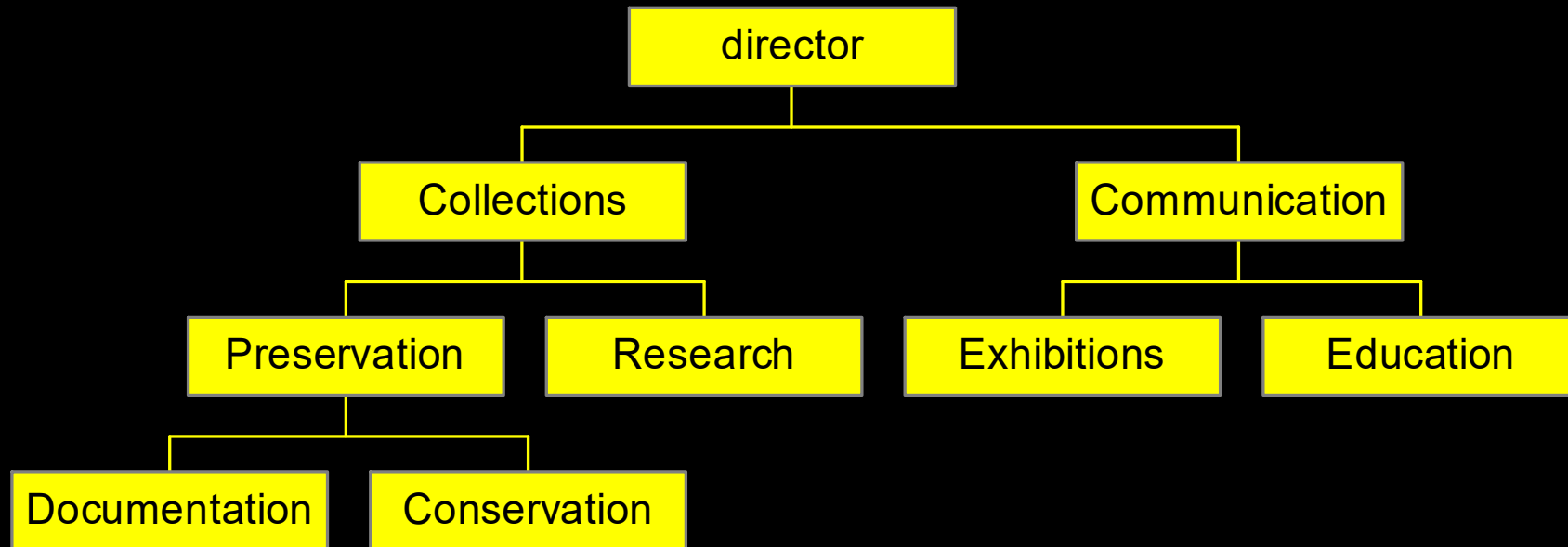


# Collections based organisation





# Functions based organisation



# MuWOP

MUSEOLOGICAL WORKING PAPERS NO 1/1980

Museology  
— science or  
just practical  
museum  
work?



## ICOM – ICOFOM International Committee for Museology 1977



**Jan Jelinek & Vnoš Sofka**

# Codes of ethics

- 1977 Museums Association
- 1977 Museums Association of New Zealand
- 1978 American Association of Museums
- 1979 Canadian Museums Association
- 1979 Southern African Museums Association
- 1982 Australian Museum Associations

# RETHINKING THE MUSEUM

AND OTHER MEDITATIONS

STEPHEN E. WEIL



1990  
INSTITUTION PRESS  
INGTON AND LONDON

## IN PURSUIT OF A PROFESSION

The Status of Museum Work  
in America

Early in the nineteenth century—first in Great Britain and then spreading to the United States—a new phenomenon appeared in the workplace. Sociologists now call it “professionalization.” It was a process by which a group of workers who were engaged in a common occupation could, through their own effort, achieve public recognition that their work constituted a distinct “profession” and that each of them—as a practitioner of that profession—was entitled to the special respect that is due a “professional.” Whereas only physicians, lawyers, and the clergy—the practitioners of the so-called learned professions of medicine, law and theology—had been accorded such status in the early 1800s, by the early 1900s we find that architects, nurses, librarians, dentists, accountants, pharmacists, engineers, social workers, and opticians—among others—had all succeeded in achieving professional recognition in either Britain or the United States, or both.

Originally prepared as the keynote address for the 1987 annual meeting of the Council of Australian Museum Associations, Brisbane, Queensland, September 1987. Reprinted, with permission, from *Museum News*, November/December 1988. Copyright © 1988, American Association of Museums. All rights reserved.



# The Distinctive Numerator

By Stephen E. Weil

For the past 25 years, I've been engaged in a conversation with my fellow museum professionals about the fundamental strengths of the museum as a social institution and about what of value the individual museum can contribute—and what it cannot—to its several publics and to its community.

I came into this conversation through what could be described as a hyphenated interest—something common to most of those who work in museums. On one side of the hyphen is a disciplinary interest—art, history, science, and their variants. On the other is an institutional interest, a concern with the museum as a highly specialized and distinct means of cultural transmission. Although there might still be followers of communications theorist Marshall McLuhan, who said the medium is the message, most of us are inevitably involved with both a disciplinary message and the institutional medium by which that message is disseminated. Rarely, though, are any of us equally involved with both.

In 1967, when I first went to work for the Whitney Museum of American Art, my primary interest was clearly in the disciplinary side of the hyphen. Having worked the previous four years in a remarkably aggressive commercial gallery, it seemed to me that the museum would provide a more sympathetic and even dignified setting in which to expand my involvement with contemporary art and with New York City's then-bustling art scene. The museum as an institution, though, was something to which I had scarcely ever given even a moment's thought.

What was shortly to swing me over

*Stephen E. Weil is emeritus senior scholar at the Center for Museum Studies, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. This article is adapted from his speech delivered upon acceptance of the Distinguished Service to Museums Award at the 1995 AAM Annual Meeting in Philadelphia.*

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to the other side of the hyphen—to an abiding interest in the museum as a medium—was the series of assaults launched against New York City's art museums in the late '60s and early '70s by a number of loosely organized and overlapping groups of artists. Those groups—in particular, one that called itself the Art Workers Coalition—seemed convinced that their local museums truly had the power to stop the war in Vietnam, to convince the federal government to release its "political prisoners," and to put an end to racial, sexual, and other inequalities of every kind.

One of the most dramatic of these assaults occurred at the AAM annual meeting that opened at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City on June 1, 1970. The meeting was a riot. Literally, and by the dictionary: a violent disturbance by a number of persons assembled together in a public place. Early on the first morning, some 30 artists wearing T-shirts stenciled "Art Strike Against Racism, Sexism, Repression and War" infiltrated the meeting, rushed the speakers' platform, and commandeered the microphone. They demanded that a spokesperson from their ranks be given precedence over the scheduled program, and that, in lieu of other business, the AAM members in attendance take action on a series of demands intended to be binding on their respective institutions.

These demands were cast in a rhetoric typical of the time. Number three, for example, was that "All urban museums . . . devote 15 percent of their funds the first year, 20 percent the second year, increasing to 40 percent of their total funds toward decentralizing museum facilities and services" for vari-

ous categories of "oppressed people." Demand number four was that the AAM declare as inseparable the freedoms under which the artists work from the immediate release of the Black Panthers and all political prisoners in this country." Amidst considerable chaos, the meeting was abruptly adjourned. More trouble followed the evening when the participants convened at The Brooklyn Museum, where there was a third outbreak, this time when then-Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York came to address the membership and took himself instead in a noisy confrontation with the artists.

Disruptive as those tactics have been, one of their positive—far from intended—consequences was that those of us who were charged with countering these assaults from the far longer and harder about the conditions that might otherwise benefit the public? Why were they of continued support? What were museums, as one of the leaders of the Art Workers Coalition and member of an establishment that "sees the social lynchmen, maneuverers, and deniers [them] a voice in the streets and policies that shape their lives" confines them to the position of amusing hostlers for the capitalist class," or might such museums be necessary, we found ourselves inclined to talk with one another in the probing ways that we had not known for many days when it seemed all too evident that museums were not entities in themselves—fully engaged in preservation and even presentation of the objects held in their collections.

Those assaults have long since passed, but, thankfully, the conversation

triggered still goes on. Central to it has been the very question to which those rioting artists of 1970 assumed they already knew the answer: What kinds of positive changes can museums really effect in the world beyond their doors? Were those artists correct to think that museums could be the agents of such sweeping and dramatic change, that they could single-handedly stop a war, end injustice, or cure inequality? Most of us then and still today would answer no. Museums cannot really do those things. But we might answer yes to the related question of whether particular museums can make substantial contributions toward those ends. To say that an individual museum does not have a lever to move the world—that it cannot be a compelling agent of fundamental social change—is not to deny that it can still be a powerfully effective source of influence. Through the personal enrichment of its visitors and by the part it plays in helping to form an educated, informed, sensitive and aware citizenry, the individual museum can make an enormous contribution toward what is ultimately the most important task any of us face—building a just, stable, abundant, harmonious, and humane society.

Where we continue to encounter difficulty is in describing more precisely the contributions that museums make toward these ends. Two things do, however, seem clear. First, it must ultimately be acknowledged that there is no one single contribution that is common to all museums. Notwithstanding our craving for definitional simplicity, the spectrum of contributions that museums make to society is as broad and as richly varied as are museums themselves. And second, notwithstanding recent demands that we begin to quantify the value of those various contributions, it may well be the case that they will not prove susceptible to such neat quantitative modes of measurement. Concerning the first point: What holds our field together in its aspiration to professionalism are those aspects of museum work that serve as our common denominator: the maintenance, documentation, and study of collections and their use in public programs. We come to annual and regional meetings to talk about techniques, about meth-

ods, about process. These are vital, of course, and necessary. But we must always remember that they are not sufficient. What each of our institutions contributes to its community derives not from its common denominator but from its distinctive numerator—from what it alone can contribute to the well-being of a specific group of people in a specific time and a specific place. Back in our communities what matters is not process but product, the results we accomplish, the outcomes we achieve.

In short, our distinctive numerators. No one numerator is necessarily more right for a particular museum than another. Many are possible. The question is one of choice. As social institutions, museums can accommodate a multitude of different and even potentially conflicting purposes: they can focus on heritage, on community building, on public education, on preservation, on scholarship, on providing important experiences. If rightness is to be judged at all, it lies not in the purpose chosen but in firmly choosing a purpose and in making that choice publicly and consistently clear.

The demand that we be able to measure a museum's contribution to its community in some quantitative way—to show more exactly how much value it's added in exchange for the support it's been given—is very similar to that being made today upon colleges and universities. It may even be a by-product of the repeated assertion that museums are primarily educational in nature. Universities, however, can demonstrate their institutional effectiveness through students' achievement. There is no exact parallel for museums.

The changes that museums can effect upon their visitors and in their communities are far different and subtler in their nature. Frequently, they can only be ascertained—not measured, but ascertained—cumulatively and over time. The ways in which these changes most visibly manifest themselves are rarely dramatic and frequently indirect.

Short-term economic impact studies aside, many museums are hard-pressed today to show what tangible benefits they provide to their communities. If museums are to be accountable—which no longer seems a matter of choice—it

will be even more critical that we work together to clarify and better articulate the long-term impact and importance of the different outcomes museums produce. We must develop the means to ascertain and demonstrate these. That we must do so against a confusing and constantly shifting background of changing demographic patterns, accelerating technological development, and evolving social structures does not excuse us from that effort. It simply means that we must accept the frustrating reality that what we are finally able to clarify about museums and their contributions today will almost certainly have become cloudy again by tomorrow.

To date, our conversation about museums and the values they provide has been productive and taken us far, but it has not been conclusive. Perhaps that's as much as can be hoped for. Our situation may well be like that described in the anonymous quotation with which Fremont E. Kist and James E. Rosenzweig concluded their 1985 book on organizational management, *Organization and Management: A Systems and Contingency Approach*:

We have not succeeded in answering all our questions. Indeed, we sometimes feel that we have not completely answered any of them. The answers we have found only serve to raise a new set of questions. In some ways we feel we are as confused as ever. But we think we are confused on a higher level and about more important things.

None of us can afford to abandon this conversation. What we lack is not confidence but a more useful vocabulary, not a visceral sense of the good things that a museum can make happen but a better means to make that sense articulate. If this conversation still leaves us confused, we can at least be sure that—thanks to having taken this time to talk with one another—our confusion will be at a higher level and about more important things. ■

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2008



Référentiel suisse  
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ICOM Suisse – Conseil international des musées

2010



Museumsberufe –  
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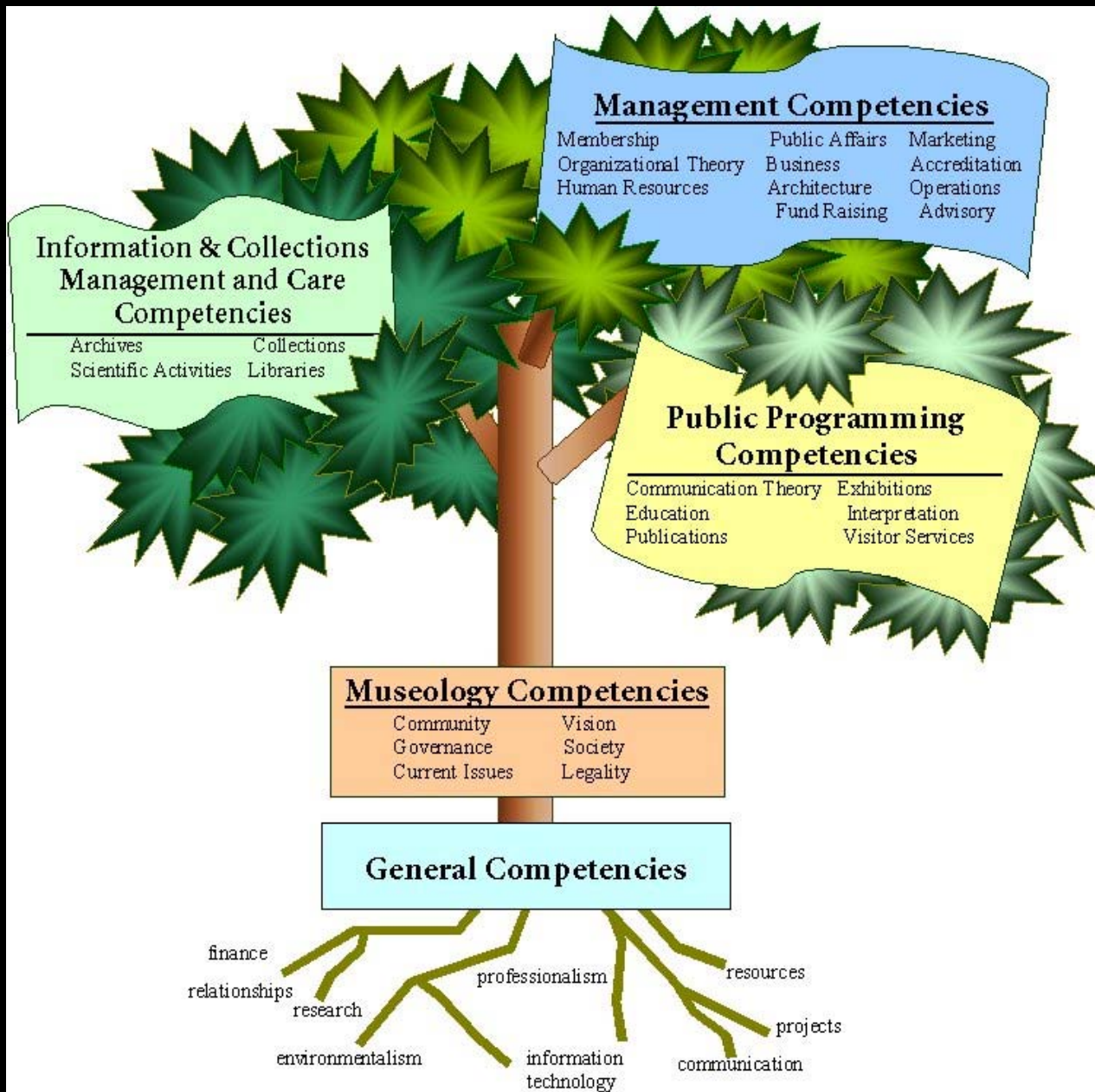


#### Anforderungsprofile

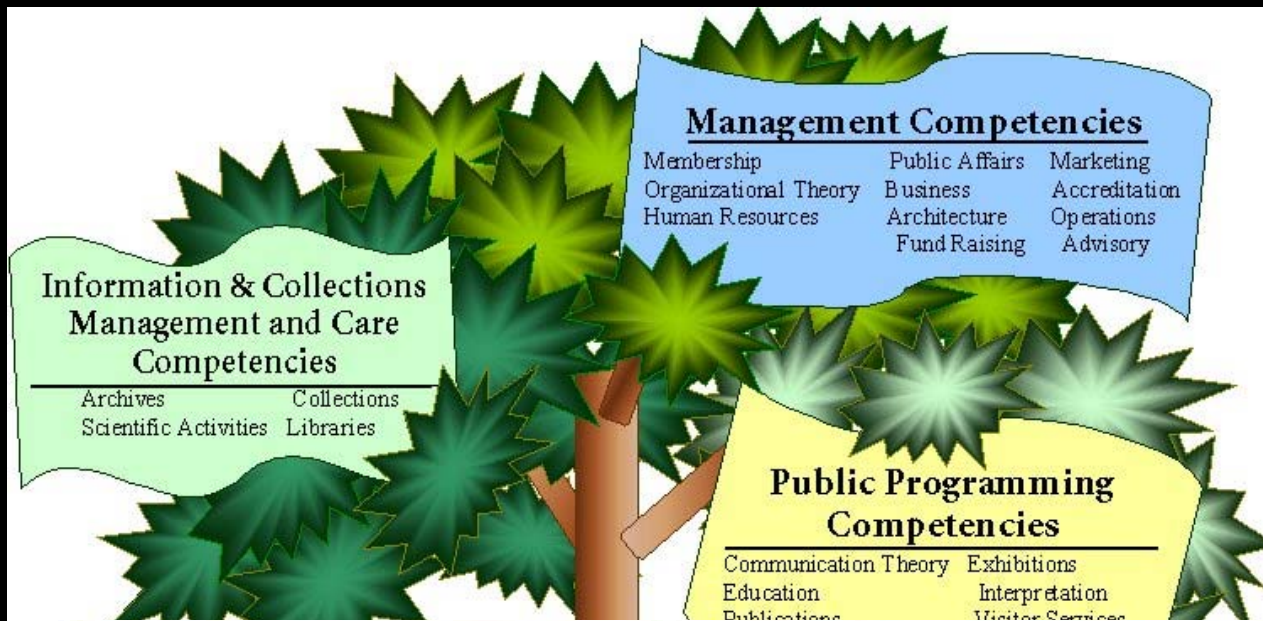
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- Restaurator/in
- Sammlungsassistent/in
- Leiter/in Dokumentationszentrum
- Ausstellungskurator/in
- Ausstellungsgestalter/in
- Leiter/in Vermittlung und Museumspädagogischer Dienst
- Vermittler/in
- Leiter/in Besucher- und Aufsichtsdienst
- Assistent/in Besucher- und Aufsichtsdienst
- Leiter/in Bibliothek/Mediathek
- Webmaster
- Verwaltungsleiter/in
- Leiter/in Logistik und Sicherheit
- Leiter/in Informationstechnik
- Leiter/in Marketing, Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und Fundraising
- Leiter/in Pressestelle

2008

**ICOM-ICTOP  
International Committee for Training**

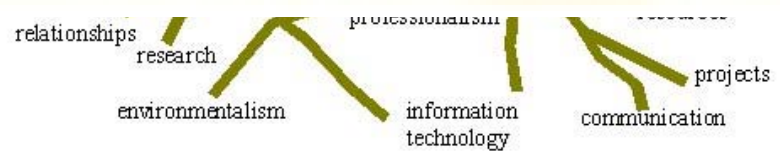


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International Committee for Training**

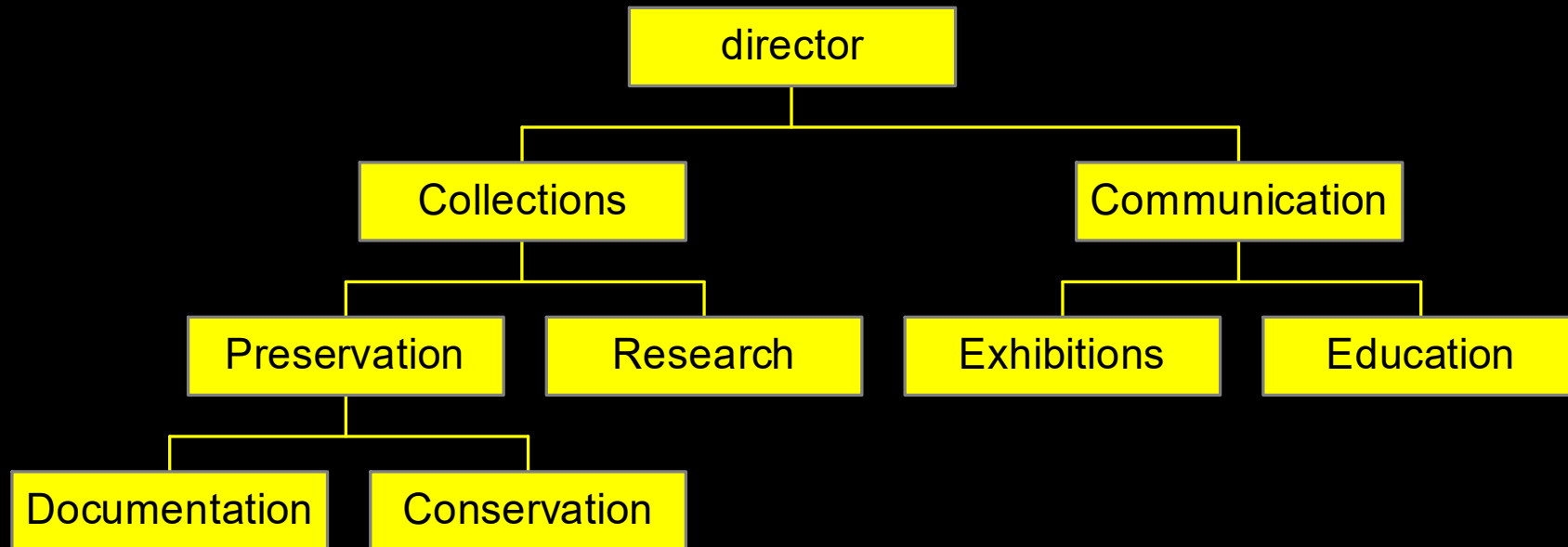


**Museology Competencies**

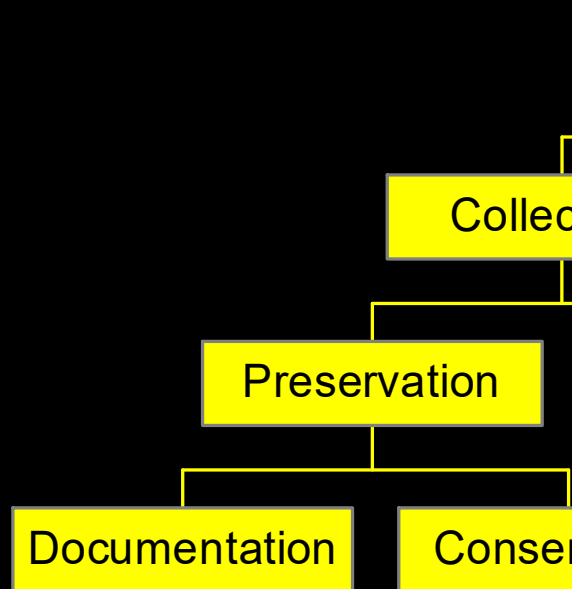
Community	Vision
Governance	Society
Current Issues	Legality



# Functions based organisation



# Functions based organisation



## unresolved dilemmas

- outsourcing / project staff
- volunteers / participation
- new specialisms / new media

**theory**

**professionalism**

**ethics**

**practice**





Museum News 83, 2004, (6): 37-41.

*The real relics in our museums may be the ways we think and work*

## Change and Complexity in the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Museum

Lois H. Silverman and Mark O'Neill<sup>1</sup>

Since the 19th century, the museum world has been characterized by simplicity, in which everything is either one thing or another - a masterpiece or a minor work, a reproduction, a great artist or an apprentice, this species or that. Such a reduction to the tasks of taxonomy, made the world manageable 100 years ago. By the 21<sup>st</sup> century many fields moved from classification to analysis, museums have abandoned 19th-century concepts of human nature.

For example, the Victorian theory that human beings are born "blank" and that the world imprints its meanings is the basis for many views of community. Though that approach underestimates the complexity of human psychology, it isn't difficult to understand why this is so. After all, a reduction to the familiar and a sense of control of the complex is empowering. Yet it also is easy to see why that approach no longer applies in the contemporary world. Professions that must take the complexity of people and experience into account.

Like other fields, the museum profession seeks graspable explanations that can support and guide its practice. Over the years, many of us have flocked to museum-friendly scholars as Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and others for useful typologies and concepts. While the work of these writers has informed museum practice, our demanding daily schedules leave little time for critical, and sustained discussion and analysis of theory. All too often we adopt a seemingly useful academic concept, bringing about minor adaptation to our practice. Those professionals whose responsibilities include evaluating and providing informative data from and about visitors. But for most museum staff, there is little opportunity for engaging in the development of a deeper and more complex understanding of the museum experience.

Small steps are taken in our yearly conferences, special projects, and development forums; in the uncommon workplace that commits to professional development groups; and through the growing number of people writing and publishing museum literature. Yet despite many museum workers' enthusiastic reception of Donald Schoen's "reflective practitioner" concept - introduced and adapted in the United States in the 1980s by Mary Ellen Munley - too many museum workers remain uncommitted to the development of a deeper understanding of the field of museum practice.

# THE RETURN OF CURIOSITY

WHAT MUSEUMS ARE GOOD  
FOR IN THE 21ST CENTURY



NICHOLAS THOMAS

## CECA 1981 Svendborg

