World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology
International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol:16, No:11, 2022

Qualitative Evaluation of the Morris Collection Conservation Project at the Sainsbury Centre of Visual Arts in the Context of Agile, Lean and Hybrid Project Management Approaches

Authors : Maria Ledinskaya

Abstract : This paper examines the Morris Collection Conservation Project at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts in the context of Agile, Lean, and Hybrid project management. It is part case study and part literature review. To date, relatively little has been written about non-traditional project management approaches in heritage conservation. This paper seeks to introduce Agile, Lean, and Hybrid project management concepts from business, software development, and manufacturing fields to museum conservation, by referencing their practical application on a recent museum-based conservation project. The Morris Collection Conservation Project was carried out in 2019-2021 in Norwich, UK, and concerned the remedial conservation of around 150 Abstract Constructivist artworks bequeathed to the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts by private collectors Michael and Joyce Morris. The first part introduces the chronological timeline and key elements of the project. It describes a medium-size conservation project of moderate complexity, which was planned and delivered in an environment with multiple known unknowns – unresearched collection, unknown condition and materials, unconfirmed budget. The project was also impacted by the unknown unknowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as indeterminate lockdowns, and the need to accommodate social distancing and remote communications. The author, a staff conservator at the Sainsbury Centre who acted as project manager on the Morris Collection Conservation Project, presents an incremental, iterative, and value-based approach to managing a conservation project in an uncertain environment. Subsequent sections examine the project from the point of view of Traditional, Agile, Lean, and Hybrid project management. The author argues that most academic writing on project management in conservation has focussed on a Traditional plan-driven approach – also known as Waterfall project management – which has significant drawbacks in today's museum environment, due to its over-reliance on prediction-based planning and its low tolerance to change. In the last 20 years, alternative Agile, Lean and Hybrid approaches to project management have been widely adopted in software development, manufacturing, and other industries, although their recognition in the museum sector has been slow. Using examples from the Morris Collection Conservation Project, the author introduces key principles and tools of Agile, Lean, and Hybrid project management and presents a series of arguments on the effectiveness of these alternative methodologies in museum conservation, as well as the ethical and practical challenges to their implementation. These project management approaches are discussed in the context of consequentialist, relativist, and utilitarian developments in contemporary conservation ethics, particularly with respect to change management, bespoke ethics, shared decision-making, and value-based cost-benefit conservation strategy. The author concludes that the Morris Collection Conservation Project had multiple Agile and Lean features which were instrumental to the successful delivery of the project. These key features are identified as distributed decision making, a co-located cross-disciplinary team, servant leadership, focus on value-added work, flexible planning done in shorter sprint cycles, light documentation, and emphasis on reducing procedural, financial, and logistical waste. Overall, the author's findings point largely in favour of a Hybrid model which combines traditional and alternative project processes and tools to suit the specific needs of the project.

Keywords : project management, conservation, waterfall, agile, lean, hybrid
Conference Title : ICMSHM 2022 : International Conference on Museum Studies and Heritage Management
Conference Location : London, United Kingdom
Conference Dates : November 18-19, 2022