

## **An Argument for Agile, Lean, and Hybrid Project Management in Museum Conservation Practice: A Qualitative Evaluation of the Morris Collection Conservation Project at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts**

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**Abstract :** This paper is part case study and part literature review. It seeks to introduce Agile, Lean, and Hybrid project management concepts from business, software development, and manufacturing fields to museum conservation by looking at their practical application on a recent conservation project at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts. The author outlines the advantages of leaner and more agile conservation practices in today's faster, less certain, and more budget-conscious museum climate where traditional project structures are no longer as relevant or effective. 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 by private collectors Michael and Joyce Morris. It was a medium-sized conservation project of moderate complexity, planned and delivered in an environment with multiple known unknowns - unresearched collection, unknown conditions and materials, unconfirmed budget. The project was later impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, introducing indeterminate lockdowns, budget cuts, staff changes, and the need to accommodate social distancing and remote communications. The author, then a staff conservator at the Sainsbury Centre who acted as project manager on the Morris Project, presents an incremental, iterative, and value-based approach to managing a conservation project in an uncertain environment. The paper examines 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 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, including 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. Although not intentionally planned as such, the Morris Project had a number of Agile and Lean features which were instrumental to its successful delivery. 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 in favour of a hybrid model, which combines traditional and alternative project processes and tools to suit the specific needs of the project.

**Keywords :** agile project management, conservation, hybrid project management, lean project management, waterfall project management

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