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The idea is that each presenter is asked to offer a perspective on 'future possibilities' for museums and galleries from their own experience and thinking. The session is titled 'Provocations', so the 7-minute (max!) presentations are intended to offer a range of questions and viewpoints for delegates to consider over the course of the conference.

Firstly, I would like to make an important point that I am not here today as the voice of Australia's First People's. I am here to share my views and insights garnered from a 26 year career in the cultural sector, a career that has been shaped as a Murri from the Manallae mob of the Gomeri Nation.

My provocation is surprisingly (or not to some) an extension of the previous amazing two plenaries.

In saying that, it is an honour to be asked to be part of such a distinguished panel, to share my perspectives and to throw in a few provocations on future possibilities for the Museum and Gallery Sector.

Even more so considering there are very few occasions that Australia's First People's have a **valued** role in any broad discussion on future directions for the Museum and Gallery sector.

I think we can all reflect on this by the evidence of the appallingly low numbers of senior Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander managers or executives within the Australian Museum and Gallery sector.

So I'd like to ask some questions for you all to ponder, which of course is what this session is all about, and I'll frame this in the context of the Australian experience:

- Is there indeed anything wrong with the Sector?
- Does it need to change and for what reasons?
- And the key question for many First People's – who will be calling the shots?

Because to a lot of Australia's First People's that have been either in this space and or watching from the sidelines unable to get into the discussion, the big question is not will our voice be heard, but will it be valued?

Ok, Ok, let me stop and take stock because I am sure there are those in the audience saying oh it's that self-proclaimed grumpy old man who is sick of waiting and keeps popping up at these conferences over the last few years.

And I know there are those of you out there who share our frustrations, silently voicing:

"We know, we hear you, but what are the answers and how can we help?"

And those whose fall-back position is:

"well we've heard this all before" (and yes we have heard all this before – which is certainly the case for those of you here of a certain vintage who maybe even remember the ground breaking UNESCO Regional Seminar on the Role of Museums in Preserving Indigenous Cultures in Adelaide, way back in 1978).

By the way this grumpy old man was only seven then.

“Isn't this guy's seven minutes up yet? Let's move on to the more important stuff. They are only 2.9 % of the population and anyway haven't they already gotten enough!”

But let's go back to the questions.

Is there a problem with sector and does it need to change? The answer is yes. The sector has a major identity crisis, and this is reflected by its inability to offer any clear value proposition to itself or to the broader population.

This is due in part because we have bedded down our foundations in the realm of economic rationalism turning a blind eye to the benefits of nurturing any type of social capital.

So what is the answer?

Simple, acknowledging that you need us First People's as much, or if not more, then we need you, you just don't realise it yet.

People are probably asking right now:

“Hang on minute, what does that have anything to do with the big issue?”

Well the answer is that by building a new framework for the sector based on relationships with First People's, a new form of social capital will evolve that will be the paradigm shift for the sector.

So why First People's, why are they so special?

Well what other group, so broadly represented in Museum and Gallery collections, can draw on and share cultural knowledge systems that have existed continuously for millennium? What social structures have evolved through innovative and resilient responses to environmental, social and cultural disruptions?

And the simple fact is, because if you can make this work with First People's, the world is your oyster.

What does the model look like you may ask?

Well first you need the guiding principles, and to put it bluntly the current establishment doesn't have the answers. In terms of cultural collections; custodians and knowledge holders are the experts and therefore should be appropriately engaged at that level.

To me this means throwing out consultation. Anyone can consult and from what I have seen from a lot of consultations, most processes are like serving up a healthy dinner to my six year old son most nights.

“A lot of moving things around the plate (you know the good healthy stuff) and then settling on a few titbits, a bit of whining about - but I'd really just like a slice of bread, with the finality of no I'm full I can't eat any more only to come back a half hour later asking for ice cream.”

Any engagement should be initiated through a respectful approach to come up with a shared agreement on cultural outcomes. This must not dismiss that in the case of cultural collections, members of the community of origin, whether they be

custodians, cultural knowledge holders or cultural and creative practitioners should be leading the dialogue and shaping the outcomes.

First and foremost it's their stories and it is with them that their stories are kept alive. Sounds like a good motto.

So what's the future proposition for the Model? To me it's based on the simplicity of four C's: Collections, Connections, Community and Country.

That by using the afore mentioned principles, the sector begins a process of moving away from the focus of in house exhibitions to relocating its cultural collections back into community and on Country.

This may sound scary to some but it's all in the relationship. The challenge will be how communities are engaged and what the value sets embedded within the engagement are. Of course people will also need to move from the default position *"but it will cost too much"* to *"how can we make this happen?"*

And the outcomes? Well that's a question I will pose to the audience, can you see the value, and if so how would **YOU** make it happen?

Maybe the starting point is as simple as embracing truth, courage and commitment. Or maybe we need as a starting point convening something in the vein of the Chilean Rettig Report or the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Thank you.