

Governance and management challenges in establishing Robben Island as a National Museum and a World Heritage Institution in post-apartheid South Africa

Gregory Davids & Nosipho Blacky

University of the Western Cape

gjdavids@uwc.ac.za & nosiphob@robben-island.org.za

Abstract

This article focuses on the governance and management challenges in establishing Robben Island as a world class National Museum and a World Heritage Site. The first democratically elected government of South Africa identified it to be established as a National Museum and World Heritage site. Robben Island conjures in the minds of South Africans, images of the hardship and suffering brought about by the apartheid system of the previous regime. Over the past twenty-seven years, RIM had been beset with governance and management challenges and received continual bad publicity. The article provides an understanding of what the major governance and managerial challenges were and makes recommendations to improve the management of the museum, based on the findings that emanated from the study.

Keywords: National heritage site; National Museum; Organizational development; Robben Island Museum; Restructuring; Organizational challenges; Governance.

Introduction and background

This article focuses on the governance and management challenges of the Robben Island Museum (RIM) in its quest to become a well-functioning National Museum and a World Heritage Site. Robben Island forms part of South Africa and is situated in the Atlantic Ocean approximately 12 km off shore from the City of Cape Town. Cape Town is commonly known as the “Mother City” and is located at the southern part of South Africa and is a major tourist and economic centre. The island is home to a variety of wildlife such as birds, penguins, seals and tortoises and over the years was used for various purposes. In 1488 the Dutch named the island “Robben (meaning ‘seal’) Island”. During the 1600s the Dutch East Indian Company (DEIC)² used the island first as a fresh produce supply station for its ships and later as a

-
- 1 Anon., “South African History Online, Towards a people’s history” (available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/robben-island>, as accessed June 2019).
 - 2 Anon., “South African History Online: Towards a people’s history. The Dutch settlement” (available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/dutch-settlement>, as accessed May 2019).

prison. At various times during the 17th and 20th centuries the island was used as a hospital for socially unacceptable groups.³ In 1936 the island's function changed to military use during World War II and in 1959 the South African Department of Correctional Services converted it to a maximum-security prison for political prisoners.

Robben Island acquired its present significance in South African history because it functioned as a prison for political detainees from 1960 until 1991. Notable leaders of the anti-apartheid movement such as Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela were incarcerated there. In the context of contemporary South Africa, the island epitomizes, on the one hand, the pain and suffering experienced by the majority of South Africans during the apartheid regime, while on the other hand, it is symbolic of the struggle against and victory over the apartheid regime.

Robben Island Museum (RIM)

The first democratic government of South Africa was elected in 1994 and ushered in a constitutional democracy aimed at protecting the rights of all South African citizens.⁴ In August 1995 the South African Government established the "Future of Robben Island Committee" whose mandate was to determine the best future use of the island prison. The chairperson of the Future of Robben Island Committee, Ahmed Kathrada, a former Robben Island prisoner stated the following:⁵

We will not forget the brutality of apartheid but we do not want the Island to be a monument of hardship and suffering. Instead it must be a monument reflecting the triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil.

On 4 September 1996 the then Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Lionel Mtshali, announced Cabinet's approval of the recommendation of the "Future of Robben Island Committee", which stated the following:⁶

Robben Island should be developed as a World Heritage Site, a National Monument and National Museum, which can become a cultural and

3 N Phaswana-Mafuya and N Haydam, "Tourist expectations and perceptions of the Robben Island Museum – A World Heritage site", *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 20(2), 2005, pp. 149-169.

4 Republic of South Africa (RSA), Interim Constitution of 1993, Government Printers, Cape Town, 1993.

5 Anon., "Brand South Africa, A guide to the history and importance of Robben Island" (available at <https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/south-africa-fast-facts/history-facts/guide-to-history-of-robben-island>, as accessed May 2019).

6 RSA, Cabinet Declaration, Lionel Mtshali, Minister of Arts and Culture, Government of South Africa, 4 September 1996.

conservation showcase for the new South African democracy, while at the same time maximizing the economic, tourism and educational potential of the island and so encourage its multi-purpose usage.

The South African government wanted RIM to be opened to the public as soon as possible, so that it could stand as a beacon of change and new order as well as a symbol of hope and reconciliation.⁷ To give effect to afore, RIM moved away from the traditional western approach to museum work and adopted the new museology principle of being more inclusive of all people. In this regard RIM does not only display the physical artifacts but importantly uses the ex-Robben Island political prisoners to share their experiences of life on the island.⁸

Four months after the Minister's approval, in January 1997, under the management of the South African Department of Correctional Services, the RIM opened its doors to the public as a tourist destination without any formal management structure or strategic planning, in order to fulfill its mandate as the first National Museum of the new democratic South Africa.⁹ Two years later in 1999, the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared the RIM a World Heritage Site.¹⁰

In the haste to open the doors of the museum, all organizational theories and principles were flouted. The RIM started operating more on political sentiment than on sound organizational theoretical frameworks guiding the establishment of organizations.¹¹ The vision, mission, formal structures, policies, systems, human resources and leadership that contribute to good governance were absent or dysfunctional. The old adage, "failure to plan, is planning for failure",¹² seemed to hold true for the Robben Island Museum (RIM) which was struggling to become a well-managed museum and national heritage site.

7 G Corsane, "Using ecomuseum indicators to evaluate the Robben Island Museum and World Heritage site", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 13(3), 2007, pp. 399-418.

8 C Shearing and M Kempa, "Museum of hope: A story of Robben Island, *The Annals of the American Academy*", 592, 2004, pp. 62-78.

9 M Shackley, "Potential future of Robben Island: Shrine, museum or theme park?", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7(4), 2001, pp. 355-363.

10 Anon., "South African History Online: Towards a people's history" (available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/robben-island>, as accessed June 2019).

11 M Shackley, "Potential future of Robben Island: Shrine, museum or theme park?", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 7(4), 2001, pp. 355-363.

12 W Churchill, "He who fails to plan, is planning to fail" (available at <https://www.in.gov/dnr/water/files/wa-IEAP.pdf>, as accessed on 18 September 2018).

RIM was in disarray and from 2005 until 2010, it received qualified audits, and a “disclaimer” in 2007-2008.¹³ The Auditor General’s (AG) opinion of audited financial statements falls into four categories and the “disclaimer” is the worst of the four categories. According to the AG¹⁴ a disclaimer is when the auditee provided insufficient evidence in the form of documentation on which to base an audit opinion. A disclaimer is indicative of an organization in crisis and reflects a situation of a financial management system that is non-functioning or non-existent.

Given its adverse audit opinions the deduction is that RIM’s financial management system is non-existent and a fertile ground for financial misappropriation and corruption.¹⁵ The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA) criticized the RIM for its poor financial management and in particular mentioned the increased deficit and lack of proper record-keeping.¹⁶ SCOPA drew attention to financial irregularities by highlighting issues such as conflict of interest of a RIM council member who was a shareholder in the ferry services.

The ferry service is the only means of transport to cross the twelve kilometer stretch of ocean to reach Robben island. The ferry service is fundamental to Robben Island Museum’s existence. The management of RIM appears not to understand the critical importance of the ferry service which is mismanaged. Incidents such as the sinking of the Robben Island ferry in September 2017 and the subsequent rescuing of 64 tourists and five crew members are¹⁷ indicative of the mismanagement of the ferry services and the resultant impact on RIM.

Fred Khumalo (2012)¹⁸ succinctly described the results of the ineffective and poor management of the RIM, as “shambolic, shocking, embarrassing, disgusting, insulting, infuriating ... I am running short of words that do justice to the appearance of Robben Island”.

13 Parliamentary Monitoring Group, Chairperson: Ms T Sunduza (ANC), Robben Island museum audit outcomes and turnaround strategy, Arts and Culture meeting, 11 February 2013.

14 Auditor General of South Africa, “Audit terminology” (available at <https://www.agsa.co.za/Auditinformation/Auditterminology.aspx>, as accessed June 2019).

15 P Joubert, “How Robben Island was robbed”, *Mail and Guardian*, 1 August 2008 (available at <https://mg.co.za/article/2008-08-01>, as accessed May 2019).

16 B Ndenze, “Money woes trouble Robben Island Museum”, *AOL*, 14 November 2007.

17 C Dolley, “Robben Island Ferry sinking: No one checked the weather, Samsa finds”, *News 24*, 28 November 2017.

18 F Khumalo, “Shut down the Island”, *Sunday Times*, 8 November 2012.

Problem statement

The Robben Island Museum has a history of organizational problems, such as governance, management and organizational conflict.¹⁹ The museum had been subjected to allegation of financial mismanagement, leadership battles, corruption and environmental incompetence.²⁰ Twenty-seven years after its establishment, the RIM is struggling to become a well-functioning, financially sustainable national museum and a world recognized heritage organization. RIM is a dysfunctional organization and it affects the achievement of its mandate assigned to it in 1997 when it opened its doors as a National Museum and a World Heritage Site. The objective in this article is to understand what the causes were that resulted in this situation and present the findings and recommendations to place the RIM on a path of organizational effectiveness.

Research methodology

The Robben Island Museum was used as the case study for this particular research. The qualitative research method was used because it enabled the documenting²¹ of real events, getting an insider's perspective, observing special behaviours and studying written documents or observing visual images. Neuman indicates that qualitative research enables the researchers to gain rich information about the social processes in specific settings.²² Data was collected from a number of sources and compared to ensure the validity and reliability thereof. The data collection consisted of the analysis of annual reports, internal strategic documents, RIM publications, media reports, government and parliamentary portfolio monitoring group. Interviews were held with senior management and board members to garner their views on the RIM governance and management challenges. The triangulation method was used to ensure the validity, reliability and objectivity of the findings of the study. Triangulation is an approach that uses multiple data sources, and methods or investigators within the study of a single phenomenon.²³

19 C Dolley, "Robben Island museum not aware of its own weather warning for ferry that nearly sunk", *News 24*, November 2017.

20 H Bamford, "Shock at the state of Robben Island", *IOL*, 20th July 2009 (available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news>., as accessed January 2019).

21 W Neuman, *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 4 (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 2000).

22 C Marshall, "Appropriate criteria of trustworthiness and goodness for qualitative research on educational organizations", *Quality and Quantity: International Journal of Methodology*, 19(4), 1985, pp. 353-373.

23 R Heale, D Forbes, "Understanding triangulation in research", *Evidence Based Nursing*, 16(4), 2013, p. 98.

Organizational effectiveness

Corporate governance is a fundamental aspect of ensuring that organizations function effectively and achieve their strategic goals. Companies fail because of poor governance.²⁴ Failed companies are generally associated with lack of consistent policies, control procedures, guidelines and mechanisms to ensure accountability and fiduciary duty. Corporate governance impacts on “the efficiency with which a corporation employs assets, its ability to attract low-cost capital, its ability to meet societal expectations and lastly, its overall performance”.²⁵ A major contributing factor to corporate failure is “knowledge malnutrition”.²⁶ This is a situation when non-executive directors had been appointed with insufficient understanding of the company to steer the business in a changing environment. The directors are responsible for strategic direction but because of the knowledge deficiency, become a liability rather than an asset. The danger thereof is that management steers the directors who have a limited knowledge and understanding of organizational matters. Hendry and Kiel concur, stating that “information asymmetry” exists between non-executive directors and top management.²⁷ By the very nature of their internal position, management has intimate knowledge of the business, putting the board, and particularly the non-executive directors, at a disadvantage. Management controls information flows and could filter or withhold information to the board. The result is that the board makes decisions on limited or outdated information.

Corporate governance is dependent on a well-designed and functioning organization. A lack of or poor organizational design results in chaos and manifests in poor performance in areas such as financial results, and leading to the low morale of employees.²⁸

The development of the organization’s vision and mission is important and provides the platform for the organization’s strategic planning, as well as the

24 A Lakshan and W Wijekoon, “Corporate governance and corporate failure”, *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 2, 2012, pp 191-198.

25 H Gregory and M Simms, “Corporate Governance: What it is and why it matters”, 9th International Anti-Corruption Conference, 10-15 October 1999, Durban (available at 9iacc.org/papers/day2/ws3/dnld/d2ws3_hjgregoriesimms.pdf, as accessed on January 2019).

26 K Mellahi, The dynamics of Boards of Directors in failing organizations, *Long Range Planning*, 38, 2005, pp. 261-279.

27 K Hendry and G Kiel, “The role of the Board in firm strategy: Integrating agency and organisational control perspectives”, *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, 12(4), 2004, pp. 500-520.

28 C Anderson, *Management, skills function and organization performance* (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1988), pp 543-599.

methods for achieving its future goals.²⁹ Ravanfar (2015), in his discussion of the McKinsey 7s model of Organizational Development (OD) asserted that the success of an organization is dependent on maintaining a balance of seven key areas.³⁰ The 7S Model specifies seven factors that are classified as “hard” and “soft” elements. Hard elements are easily identified and influenced by management, while soft elements are more intangible and influenced by corporate culture. The hard elements are strategy, structure, systems, while the soft elements are shared values, skills, style and staff. These seven areas illustrate the inter-connectedness of elements that define an organization’s ability to succeed.

Fairholm (2009) maintained that strategic thinking revolves around the notions of visioning, scenario building, and forecasting.³¹ It is about sense making and designing appropriate plans to deal with future eventualities while directing the organization to achieve its goals and objectives. In its haste to start up its operation, the Robben Island Museum started operating without giving attention to this key factor, resulting in organizational resources not geared towards achieving a central vision.

The structure is designed to facilitate achieving corporate vision, goals and strategy. It stipulates the way the organization is arranged, who does what and who reports to whom. It describes the hierarchy of authority and accountability in an organization and the way the organization’s units relate to each other.³² It is an indication of the flow of information and the line of authority. It similarly removes any ambiguity or confusion amongst staff on the reporting lines.

The systems³³ refer to the procedures, processes and routines that apply in managing the organization. The financial management system is an important element to ensure that the resources are spent responsibly and accounted for in a diligent manner. As indicated earlier, RIM finances were in disarray as a direct result of its poor financial management systems.

29 G McLean, *Organization development* (San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler, 2005), pp 220-300.

30 M Ravanfar, “Analysing organisational structure based on 7s Model of McKinsey”, *Global Journal of Management and Business Research: Administration and Management*, 15(10), 2015, pp. 6-12.

31 M Fairholm, “Leadership and organizational strategy”, *The Public Sector Innovation Journal*, 14(1), 2009, article 3.

32 R Burton and B Obel, “The science of organizational design: Fit between structure and coordination”, *Journal of Organisational Design*, 7(5), 2018.

33 R Lynch, *Corporate strategy: The implementation process*, 4 (Financial Times Press, Prentice Hall, 2005), pp 445-573.

The shared values are reflected in the corporate culture and the general work ethic. Organizations with weak values and common goals often find their employees following their own personal goals that may be different or even in conflict with those of the organization or their fellow colleagues.³⁴ Organizational culture affects the way in which people think, make decisions and ultimately the way in which they perceive, feel and act.³⁵ Organizational culture remains an important consideration in strategy implementation. In the case of the Robben Island Museum, a difference of view exists regarding the organisational culture between staff who had been imprisoned on the island and those who had not. The ex-political prisoners were of the view that they were best placed to determine the organizational culture, or how things ought to be run.³⁶ This tension impacted negatively on the RIM operations and resulted in the resignation of the first director in 2003.

Leadership style refers to how key managers and figures of authority execute their duties in achieving the organization's goals. The behaviour of leadership figures determines the organizational culture and the subordinates tend to emulate the type of behaviour displayed by leadership and authority figures. In the case of the RIM, many of its Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) were said not to lead by good example and were consequently suspended under a cloud of suspicion of corruption.

Skills comprise the capabilities and talents of the organization's management and staff, which could determine the types of work and achievements the company can accomplish.³⁷ It is normal for an organization to assess its available skills and expertise and make the required changes in order to achieve the goals determined in its strategy.

Staff refers to the personnel of the company, the size of the workforce and how they are trained and equipped to deliver on the tasks allocated to them. Effective human resources management is therefore fundamental to the sustainability and survival of any organization.³⁸ In 1996 the Robben

34 E Martins and F Terblanche, "Building organizational culture that stimulates creativity and innovation", *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 6, 2005, pp. 64-74.

35 P Lok and J Crawford, "The effect of organisational culture and leadership style on job satisfaction and organisational commitment: A cross-national comparison", *Journal of Management Development*, 23(4), 2003, pp. 321-338.

36 R Rossouw, "No place on Island for ex-prisoners", *Mail and Guardian*, 13 December 1996 (available at <https://mg.co.za/article/1996>, as accessed May 2019).

37 M Ravanfar, "Analysing organisational structure based on 7s Model of McKinsey", *Global Journal of Management and Business Research: Administration and Management*, 15(10), 2015, pp. 6-12.

38 R Noe, J Hollenbeck, B Gerhart and P Wright, *Human resources management: Gaining competitive advantage* (New York, McGraw Hill, 2010), pp 193-199.

Island Museum (RIM) rushed to recruit staff and the normal processes of recruitment and selection were not adhered to. The Western Cape coordinator of the ex-political prisoners' committee, Zolile Ndindwa claimed that no advertisements were placed and that Andre Odendaal, the first CEO of RIM, contacted him to recruit former prisoners to fill new positions.³⁹ The recruitment practices were not aimed at acquiring staff with the necessary skills-set required to contribute to the RIM's achievement of its vision espoused by the Future of Robben Island Committee in 1996 but rather aimed at employment creation.⁴⁰

Goold and Campbell (2002)⁴¹ seem to build on the McKinsey 7s model emphasizing the fit for purpose strategy and the need to recruit and appoint the right staff at the right time and place in the right positions to achieve the organizational vision. Human resources capacity holds the key to the successful implementation of the organizational strategy, as it designs the strategies, systems and structures required for successful implementation. Hence the importance of recruiting staff based on merit and not on principles of nepotism. RIM's recruitment practices during the establishment phase was based on the criteria of being political prisoners on the island rather than having the necessary skills-set to perform specific functions.⁴²

Organizational design is a system-wide process of planned change aimed at improving overall organizational effectiveness by way of enhanced congruence of such key organizational dimensions as external environment, mission, strategy, leadership, culture, structure, information and reward systems, and work policies and procedures of successful organizations.⁴³

A critical variable in organizational design is the leadership factor. Leadership is the most important competitive advantage of a company⁴⁴ and poor performance is the result of a dysfunctional leadership team. Leadership is a critical factor in the survival and the growth of the firm and takes on different

39 R Rossouw, "No place on Island for ex-prisoners", *Mail and Guardian*, 13 December 1996 (available at <https://mg.co.za/article/1996>, as accessed May 2019).

40 G Underhill, "Robben Island's turmoil", *Mail and Guardian*, 4 October 2009 (available at <https://mg.co.za/author/glynnis-underhill>, as accessed June 2019).

41 M Goold and A Campbell, *Designing effective organisations* (USA, Wiley and Sons, 2002), pp 97-145.

42 R Rossouw, "No place on Island for ex-prisoners", *Mail & Guardian*, 13 December 1996 (available at <https://mg.co.za/article/1996>, as accessed May 2019).

43 E Lawler and C Worley, *Built to change* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2006), pp 10-49.

44 M Jones, "Politics of failure: Dysfunctional leadership and organisations – Workplace politics and poor performance", *Executive Journal International Institute of Management*, 2005 (<https://www.iim-edu.org/thinktank/papers/ceo/dysfunctional-leadership-organizations-workplace-politics.pdf>, as accessed May 2019).

shapes.⁴⁵ The board of directors has a collective leadership responsibility to provide strategic direction for the organization. Similarly, the CEO and his/her management team provide leadership in implementing the strategic goals of the organization. The Board and the CEO have different but complementary leadership roles to ensure the success of the organization in achieving its goals.

Many leaders fail to align employees with the organisational strategy and to help them understand their role in implementing the strategy.⁴⁶ Strategy alignment is achieved through fit for purpose, structure, capable leadership and effective people system and culture. The critical determinants of organizational design and effectiveness are linked to the leadership style of its managers and the group's overall size and stage of development.⁴⁷ Leadership is not possible if lines of authority and responsibility are unclear. Likewise, control is out of the question if people do not know what tasks they are responsible for and how these relate to the overall objective of the organization. It is the manager's responsibility to organize and deploy resources to achieve the objectives of the organization by organizing their resources, in a way that marshals their strengths and weaknesses. Middle-management plays an important role in ensuring organizational effectiveness because it has to understand, interpret and implement a policy that it did not formulate.⁴⁸ Middle-management therefore has the power to fast-track or to frustrate the implementation of strategy.

Summary and analysis

The research showed that the African National Congress (ANC) majority-led government⁴⁹ was instrumental in the appointment of the first Robben Island Museum (RIM) Council and its executive and were mostly drawn from ex-political prisoners, academics and political activists, rather than heritage managers or persons with a corporate management orientation. The first council and management understood the political transformational agenda of the new democratic government but lacked organizational experience on

45 K Sunday, I Adekunle and O Roseline, "Organizational survival: The effects of leadership skill and strategy", *Science Journal of Business and Management*, 2(2), 2014, pp. 44-49.

46 M Haid, D Shroeder-Saulnier, J Simms and H Wang, *Right Management* (Philadelphia, Publisher, 2010), pp 4-22.

47 R Hurduza, "The impact of leadership on organisational performance", *SEA Practice Application of Science*, III, 1(7), 2015, pp. 289-293.

48 J Balogun, "The practice of organisational restructuring: From design to reality", *European Management Journal*, 25(2), 2007, pp. 81-91.

49 G Corsane, "Using ecomuseum indicators to evaluate the Robben Island Museum and World Heritage site", *Landscape Research*, 31(4), 2006, pp. 399-418.

how to establish heritage sites. One interviewee indicated the following:⁵⁰

There were no paradigms to refer to in the years prior to our democracy in 1994, there were no similar institutions, on which experience one could lean on. There were very few individuals to guide us. In other words, our work in this very important institution had to start from the scratch. The personnel were obliged to work through trial and error.

The research revealed that a number of factors such as the high attrition rate of the CEOs, the overlap of roles and responsibilities of the Council and management, and the hostile relations between the Council chairperson and CEO contributed to poor governance and management. The first CEO, Andre Odendaal resigned unexpectedly in 2002 and the RIM Council took over the management of the museum.⁵¹ The museum chairperson, Ahmed Kathrada stated that the CEO's resignation was intended to restore the confidence of the visitors to the museum, donors and other stakeholders. The Council appointed two council members, Ben Martins and Paul Langa to carry out the functions and responsibilities of the CEO. The RIM management functions were *de facto* taken over by the RIM Council, resulting in a collapse of the oversight and management function. In 2005, the caretaker CEO and Council member, Paul Langa, was appointed CEO.⁵²

In 2007, Mr Langa, together with the Chief Operating Officer (COO), Denmark Tungwana and Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Nash Masekwameng were suspended under a cloud of corruption allegations.⁵³ Mr Seelan Naidoo was appointed CEO in 2007 without important management support such as the CFO who was suspended. A year later in May 2008, the RIM Council and the newly appointed CEO, Naidoo, were forced to step down.⁵⁴ According to Eyewitness News, the resignation was in part due to pressure by disgruntled staff fearing employment losses as a result of the restructuring process.⁵⁵

The hostile relationship between the Chairperson of Council, Naledi Tsiki, and the Interim CEO, Seelan Naidoo, contributed to the organizational

50 Interview: Anonymous, Robben Island, 2012.

51 Anon., *News 24 Archives*, "Council to run Robben Island", 13 July 2002 (available at <https://www.news24.com/xArchive/Archive/Council-to-run-Robben-Island-20020713>, as accessed June 2019).

52 B Ndenze, "Former inmate to head Robben Island Museum", *IOL*, 22 April 2005 (available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news>, as accessed May 2019).

53 H Bamford, "Shock at the state of Robben Island", *IOL*, 20 July 2009 (available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics>, as accessed July 2019).

54 Anon., *Mail and Guardian*, "Robben Island Museum Council resigns", 26 May 2009 (available at <https://mg.co.za/article/2009-05-26>, as accessed June 2019).

55 *Eyewitness News*, "Robben Island Council Members resign", 26 May 2009 (available at <https://ewn.co.za>, as accessed January 2019).

problems and ultimate resignation of both the board and CEO.⁵⁶ In June 2009 Prof Henry Bredenkamp was appointed caretaker CEO until November 2010. During his tenure Bredenkamp functioned without a Council until its appointment in March 2010. This is an important finding because the CEO operated without Council oversight to hold the CEO accountable. The situation above is opposite to that of 2003 when the RIM Council took over the management function. Both instances contributed to poor governance because of the integration of the roles and responsibilities of the Council and management resulting in the lapse of accountability. In November 2010 a new CEO, Sibongiseni Mkhize, was appointed.

The rapid turnover of CEOs resulted in a lack of strategic direction and implementation thereof.⁵⁷ The RIM had seven CEOs from 1997 until 2010 with only two permanent appointees while the other five served in interim positions. The fact that seven CEOs managed the organization in the span of 13 years and none of them completed their contract terms, is indicative of an organizational leadership crisis.

Given the uniqueness of RIM heritage and symbolism, it demands a management structure staffed by individuals who are knowledgeable with first-hand experience of the island prison on the one hand and on the other hand professionals with knowledge of museology and heritage sites. RIM's greatest heritage assets are the ex-political prisoners. They shared their stories and first-hand experiences with the visitors to the museum. While this is important, given the history of the RIM, an oversight was the failure to appoint skilled professionals in the critical positions to contribute to the effective operations of the RIM.⁵⁸ The research showed that the non-appointment of professional staff to complement the skills-sets of the political employees, resulted in a number of governance and organizational deficiencies.⁵⁹

The organizational structure normally is designed to implement strategy. This was not the case with the Robben Island Museum because the organizational design and staffing were implemented to advance an organizational strategy

56 G Underhill, "Robben Island Turmoil", *Mail and Guardian*, 4 October 2009 (available at <https://mg.co.za/article>, as accessed April 2019).

57 Anon., *Mail and Guardian*, "Robben Island Museum gets another interim CEO", 11 June 2009 (available at <https://mg.co.za/article/2009-6-11>, as accessed June 2019).

58 Anon., *IOL*, "Robben Island facing serious threats", 5 July 2004 (available at <https://www.il.co.za/news/southafrica>, as accessed June 2019).

59 RIM has not been able to develop and sustain capacity to deal with conservation challenges as a result of:
1. Absence of on-site director- experience in historic site management
2. Conservation architect to help conservation and maintenance systems.

intent on creating 'jobs for pals'.⁶⁰ This resulted in duplication, overlap and confusion of roles and responsibilities, leading to administrative paralysis and organizational inefficiencies. The RIM comprised of a management structure of eight senior managers, 25 unit managers and 250 staff. The absence of a clear definition and demarcation of job descriptions, coupled with the duplication of functions and responsibilities, resulted in role confusion and blame among senior management and ultimately very little was accomplished.

Financial management was not one of the RIM's key strengths. This is borne out by the Auditor General's (AG) report that showed that over a period of five years from 2005-2010, it achieved only qualified audits, and a "disclaimer" in 2007-2008. This is indicative of an organizational culture where financial management is not a priority or where the financial management capacity is lacking.

The research further revealed that the RIM was responsible for delivering municipal services on Robben Island although this was not its mandate.⁶¹ In the rest of South Africa, local municipalities are responsible for the delivery of basic services such as water provision, sanitation, refuse removal and infrastructure.⁶² It is unclear why the responsibility for the provision of these services was shifted to the RIM, without any additional financial or capacity support, which placed more pressure on an already precarious financial situation. Furthermore, it placed additional pressure on RIM to recruit staff experienced in the systems and processes of delivering basic services.

The findings point towards an organizational culture of conflict and power relations that negate the implementation of organizational policy. A case in point was the conflict between the board chairperson and the CEO. The chairperson of the board was an ex-Robben Island political prisoner who had political power rather than the necessary administrative expertise.

The research exposed the ex-political prisoners as powerful stakeholders, who at various points in the RIM history played an important role in highlighting management's incompetency and the perceived corruption, which led to the resignation of the CEOs and the resultant leadership instability.

60 H Bamford, "Shock at the state of Robben Island", *IOL*, 20 July 2009 (available at <https://www.iol.co.za/news>, as accessed on April 2019).

61 G Underhill, "Robben Island turmoil", *Mail and Guardian*, 4 October 2009 (available at <https://MG.co.za/section/news>, as accessed January 2019).

62 RSA, Constitution of South Africa, Chapter 7, Government of South Africa, 1996.

Furthermore, evidence provided insight into tensions that exist between the ex-Robben Island political prisoners and the other staff members.⁶³ The ex-Robben Island prisoners view themselves as of higher status than the other staff, due to their earlier imprisonment on the island, and hence want to be treated as such.⁶⁴ This resulted in tension with management and consequently impacted negatively on the overall organizational strategy implementation.

Conclusion

The objective of the article was to highlight the organizational challenges associated with the establishment of the Robben Island Museum (RIM) as a National Museum and a World Heritage Site in post-apartheid South Africa. This study shows that many of the RIM's organizational and management challenges can be traced to its beginnings. The lesson that emerged from the study is that political vision and commitment is important but it is not enough to establish and manage an organization effectively. The establishment of a successful museum and heritage site requires a combination of individuals who understand the historical context, together with those who possess the required skills-sets to implement strategic plans and manage the operations of the organization.

The findings of this study led to a number of recommendations:

- Strengthening of governance and oversight: There should be a clear definition and demarcation of the roles and responsibilities of the Council and the executive management of the institution. The Council needs to provide leadership, strategic direction and effective oversight. Furthermore, the Council must not interfere and engage in operational management functions. In order to maintain the independence and integrity of the oversight and monitoring role of the Council, no Council member should assume an executive position.
- Formulation of policies and systems to guide the administration during implementation: A lack of policies and systems creates confusion and introduces the opportunity for implementation based on individual understanding and bias. This ultimately results in organizational conflict. The organizational structure must be designed to implement the strategy, as opposed to the current principle of creating employment for party cadres.

63 Parliamentary Monitoring Group, Robben Island Museum Status Report, Arts and Culture Meeting, 8 May 2018 (available at <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting>, as accessed on 20 August 2018).

64 T Petersen, "Mandelarisation of Robben Island must stop- ex-prisoners say they are being sidelined", *News24*, 30th October 2018 (available at <https://www.news24.com/South Africa>, as accessed May 2019).

- Appointment of a Chief Executive Officer on a five-year contract to lead and bring about organizational stability: The CEO is pivotal to guide the organization on its journey to implement the strategy. Stability at the CEO level will assist in the development and implementation of the vision and strategy, restore and contribute to staff morale and ultimately enhance productivity. The buy-in of the senior management team is important to support and drive the restructuring process to achieve the RIM mandate and vision.
- Appointment of a skilled heritage management professional: This is critical, in order to develop a sound business model that can further the organization's strategic objectives. An organizational skills audit must be undertaken.
- Recruitment and selection of staff based on merit and the principle of 'fit for purpose': This is essential because staff with the right skills and placed in the right positions, will contribute to putting the RIM on a recovery path.
- Design of a monitoring and evaluation system: This is required to ensure the alignment of implementation and strategy. An effective monitoring and evaluation system will identify implementation problems timeously, allowing for appropriate action to be taken.
- Prioritization of financial management and the recruitment and appointment of a Chief Financial Officer: This is a critical organizational position, which requires a suitable candidate with the necessary financial qualification and experience to turn and stabilize the organization's financial situation.
- Clarification of the status and roles of the ex-political prisoners, in relation to the rest of the RIM staff: This is crucial, to prevent confusion and conflict regarding the roles, responsibilities and status of the different RIM staff members. The ex-political prisoners must be represented at the board level to ensure a buy-in on the vision, mission and setting of strategic goals. This will contribute to team-building and an organizational culture that is conducive to the effective implementation of the organization's strategic plans.

RIM represents an important part of the South African liberation struggle. It is therefore important that a turnaround strategy be implemented to place the RIM on a path of recovery to function as envisaged in its founding documents that RIM must be known as the world-wide icon of the universality of human rights, hope, peace and reconciliation.⁶⁵

65 Robben Island Museum Annual Report 2006/7, President Nelson Mandela "turned the Island into a world-wide icon of the universality of human rights, of hope, peace and reconciliation" (available at www.robben-island.org.za/files/publications/.../AR_2007, as accessed August 2018).