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**A Look at the Leadership of the Valentine
Riverside Museum**

by

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Senior Project

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Richmond, VA

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A Look at the Leadership of the Valentine

Riverside Museum

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Leadership 498

Dr. Fred Jablin

by
Carlo Arjona

Valentine Riverside

Richmond is a city rife with history. Over the several hundred years that this city has been in existence, it has seen a host of significant events. From the oration of Patrick Henry's "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech high atop Church Hill in St. John's Church, to the burning of the city during the Civil War, Richmond has been a site of many events that helped to weave the fabric of this country. One would be hard pressed to recount all of the events that took place here, the way of life that existed, or the identities of all of the people that make this city unique. One organization, however, attempted an endeavor to do just that, in a new and different way. It sought to recount all of the spirit of the city's glory days for today's residents and visitors of Richmond in such a way that would make the process attractive, even fun, for anyone who wished to walk down the path of the city's history. That organization was the Valentine Riverside Museum, an establishment that was to breathe fresh life into the city's past and bring it alive again. This museum began with a burst of excitement, a wealth of fanfare, and the highest of expectations to make its vision of unlocking Richmond's history in a fresh new way, a reality. Sadly, after sixteen months of operation, the doors of the Valentine Riverside closed for good. Many Richmonders, visitors, supporters, and stakeholders wondered just what went wrong to bring this organization to such an untimely end. As the existence of the Valentine Riverside Museum fades further and further into their memory, many of these same people *still* wonder what it was that made this museum, a teacher of the Richmond's history, a piece of Richmond history itself.

There are a number of explanations for the organization's failure. Some cite the

museum's lower-than-expected attendance. Some cite the museum's portrayal of city history. Other's think the museum just evolved before its time, while still others feel the problem lay in Riverside's leadership. Many of these possibilities are intertwined, yet in this study, I hope to focus on this example through the lens of leadership. I intend to analyze this case as it relates to scholarly discourse on leadership. It may reveal of faults. It may reveal merits. It may even place the fate of the Valentine Riverside beyond the accountability of anyone involved. In any event, though, my intent is to shed some light on the circumstances of the museum's existence and remove the mystery, so that this chain of events can be summed up as a lesson and not entirely a loss.

This study will rely on a breadth of information gathered from numerous sources to paint the portrait of the Valentine Riverside completely. It will gather insight from interviews, news accounts, and scholarly works to put the entire organization into perspective. Its progression will begin with a chronicle of events beginning at the planning of the enterprise to the close of its doors. Next, it will seek to divulge the insight of people involved, both within and beyond the organization to get a firsthand interpretation of the events of 1994 to 1996. Next the study will attempt to frame the input of interviewees in terms of a variety of leadership theories and perspectives. Finally, it will seek to describe how leadership theory and research might have been applied in this case to bring forth a more positive outcome.

Review of the Literature

In reviewing the circumstances surrounding this organization and speaking with individuals involved, I attempted to understand the Valentine Riverside Museum in terms

of several leadership theories. Among the approaches I found useful were charismatic leadership theory, perspectives on the function of organizational mission and vision statements, Stakeholder Theory, Resource Dependence Theory, insights on the functions of boards of directors in the non-profit sector, as well as Organizational Life-Cycle theories. I used these theories and approaches to establish a framework by which to understand the events of Valentine Riverside through a leadership lens.

Charismatic Leadership

A considerable amount of recent leadership research and theory revolves around understanding the nature of charismatic leadership. This naturally leads to the question of what charismatic leadership is. Such a leader is said to be “a person who arouses emotions in his [/her] people, which motivate them to act beyond the framework of what may be described as exchange relations, of ‘give and take’.”^{1,2} There tends to be an emotional attachment between the charismatic leader and the followers.³ Moreover to a large extent, “the leaders are images created by the led, who use the leader as a ‘screen’ for their projections and attributions.”⁴ The reasoning for such an emotional attachment and endearing image of the charismatic leader resides in the leader’s abilities, that is, “Charismatic leaders are although to possess ‘superhuman’ qualities or powers of divine origin, which set them apart from ordinary men. The locus of authority in this system rests with the individual possessing these unusual qualities; it is not associated with the traditions, beliefs, or laws of a society.”⁵

With this definition in mind, it is useful to next understand in what contexts these leaders most frequently emerge. Some sources suggest that these leaders can be found in

times of urgency, as in a crisis or during a period of organizational flux.⁶ They tend to represent a source of relief from the mental strain that comes from the gravity or ambiguity of such instances.⁷

The question naturally arises as to what qualities such leaders hold to have such an effect on followers. The literature suggests that "...charismatic leaders are distinguished by their vision, their rhetorical skills, their ability to build a particular kind of image in their hearts and minds of their followers, and their personalized style of leadership."⁸ More specifically, "...a charismatic leader provides a source of inspiration for the follower, displays empathy, dramatizes the mission of the organization, inspires awe in followers, projects self-assurance, enhances his/her image, employs empowerment techniques, assures followers of their competency, and provides followers with opportunities to experience success."⁹ In addition to identifying the remarkable capabilities and qualities of charismatic leaders, the literature offers a caveat to the mystique of charismatic leadership: "Although these three leadership skills [vision, rhetorical skills, impression management] may help an individual to be seen as charismatic, charismatic leadership is probably more a function of the followers' reactions to a leader than of the leader's personal characteristics."¹⁰

As noted above, followers have unique reactions to charismatic leaders. Their responses often include, "...strong affection for the leader...similarity of follower beliefs with those of the leader¹¹...heightened emotional levels¹²...unquestioning acceptance of the leader by followers; willing obedience to the leader; and trust in the correctness of the leader's beliefs¹³ [and]...heightened expectations by followers of themselves."¹⁴

Although charismatic leadership has many attractive features, it should not be misconstrued as being a leadership panacea. The literature advises us that charisma does not automatically equal excellent leadership, there are elements of it that can prove detrimental if unchecked, in other words, "...not all charismatic leaders are necessarily good leaders."¹⁵ Precisely because charismatic leaders' effects can be more emotional than rational, many observers have warned of the dangers charismatic leaders can pose. Hughes, et al approach this idea, "...At their worst, charismatic leaders emotionally manipulate followers and create dysfunctional dependencies for their own self-aggrandizement."¹⁶ Additionally, problems in the leader/follower relationship may arise if the of charismatic leader's extraordinary qualities are not accompanied by emotional ties.¹⁷ Furthermore, even if the balance in these two elements is achieved, it must be maintained for charismatic leadership to be effective. According to Hughes, et al, charismatic leadership comes with yet another caveat:

...charismatic authority systems tend to be short-lived. Charismatic leaders must project the image of success in order for followers to continue believing they possess superhuman qualities. Any failures to accomplish the proposed changes to society will cause followers to question the divine qualities of the leader and, in turn, seriously erode the leader's authority.¹⁸

Yet another consideration for the effective implementation of charismatic leadership revolves around power distance, specifically, "the further the leader from the led, the more space for them to "invent" him or her and construct him or her as a product of attribution and projection -- not necessarily related to his/her real nature."¹⁹

Functions of Organizational Mission Statements

Vogt provides a solid foundation for understanding the purpose these statements

serve:

The mission statement, or purpose, of [an] organization is the broad description of its reason for existence. It is the single statement that differentiates your organization from other organizations in the community. It is the source from which all of your organizational plans and dreams, strategies, objectives, policies, and outcomes flow. It is the vehicle for the empowerment of your staff to focused action.²⁰

As note above, an organization's mission statement serves a variety of functions. An organization's mission helps to establish its "goals, objectives, and activities--that is, [its] long-range and strategic plans."²¹ Beyond this, the mission aids in self-assessment in terms of the organization's beneficiaries and the services the organization provides.²² In turn, the mission statement helps an organization's staff members more clearly identify their purpose and the preferred way to fulfill that purpose.²³ In other words, it helps clarify "roles, responsibilities, goals, and competencies" for members of the organization.²⁴ The literature likens organizational mission to a road map, that "shows the management where it should be and gives general directions for how to get there."²⁵ Additionally, it "provides guidelines and boundaries for day-to-day decision making."²⁶

We can move on to ask what characterizes a "good" mission statement. Vogt suggests that a mission contains three essential elements, namely: "identification of the market, customers, clients, or those for whom services are provided, also the end or goal toward which services are delivered, as well as enumeration of what services are going to be provided."²⁷ Scholars also suggest that the mission be developed by a special committee that includes a cross section of members of the organization and people from outside the organization.²⁸ The resultant mission statement should "say clearly and exactly what an organization expects to accomplish"²⁹ in such a way that "every member of the

organization [is] able to understand its objectives.”³⁰ The mission should also have specifically measurable objectives that will allow the organization to decide whether it has successfully achieved the mission.³¹ This idea of feedback on organizational performance as a feature of a mission statement is highly recommended since, ‘If the mission is not successful, good measurements provide timely information management can use to determine if the mission or strategies were poorly designed, poorly implemented, or both.’³² The literature goes on to suggest that the organization identify its customers, differences, values, and talents.³³ Finally, it should identify what is expected of members of the organization.³⁴ This insight reveals how critical a strong organizational mission is.

Organizational Vision

Related closely to the idea of mission is yet another concept, organizational vision. A vision is said to ‘provide direction and drive everything that is done in an organization.’³⁵ Its purpose is analogous to that of a rudder to a ship.³⁶ Vision can be viewed as:

a picture in your mind of the ideal or utopian organization, life, marriage, and so on. Visioning, a right-brain activity, is creating a full-color, detailed movie in your imagination that you can recall with the proper stimulus. A vision, like a dream, is vivid; you can see, taste, smell, hear, and feel it. With the proper stimulus, visioning, or visualizing, is not a difficult process. Actually, people visualize all the time; they call it daydreaming or fantasizing. For an organization with many diverse members, however, developing a common vision can be difficult, and the degree of difficulty is “directly proportional to the number of members.”³⁷

Despite this difficulty, a vision must encompass common sentiments, ‘The vision, to be most effective, should represent the ideals of the entire organization.’³⁸ Further, in conceptualizing a vision, the leader needs to be sure that it is geared to empower

followers.³⁹ One leadership scholar sites a vision as being comprised of a triad of elements:

The vision trilogy consists of culture, people, and product or service. The culture of an organization is simply the way it does business. The people component of the vision trilogy is the selfish, or what's-in-it-for-me, part. The product or service component of the vision trilogy is the ultimate reason why the organization exists...it often extends to the organization's role in the environment and society....⁴⁰

To make a vision real for the entire organization, a vision statement is often necessary. However:

A vision statement is not required, but it does fulfill two useful functions...it simplifies the planning phase for defining the vision. [It] provides an organizing mechanism that enables managers to integrate an amorphous collection of goals, dreams, challenges, and ideas and make them concrete. The process of developing a vision statement ultimately yields the vocabulary for the vision."⁴¹

Scholars argue that, "The evolution of a final vision statement requires consensus building, listening, and provoking."⁴² The resultant vision statement, like a mission statement, assists in making critical organizational choices and "provides criteria for decision making."⁴³ In addition to revealing the best choices, such a vision goes a long way to revealing the importance of members' input. As Lipton observes,

People need to feel that they are making a useful contribution to a worthwhile venture; the vision enables them to see how their effort contributes to the larger picture...A vision must give people the feeling that their lives and work are intertwined and moving toward recognizable, legitimate goals...When people understand the desired culture-the values that support the purpose and strategy-they know what is expected of them."⁴⁴

Critical to these outcomes is a sense of permanence in the vision, that is, "...a vision does not fluctuate from year to year but serves as an enduring promise."⁴⁵ The implementation of a successful vision once again mirrors the idea of mission and also is related to the concepts associated with Stakeholder Theory discussion to be elaborated on in the next

section. More specifically, "Many successful vision statements define a mission that begins by identifying the stakeholders and defining what they expect from the organization."⁴⁶

Stakeholder Theory

As suggested above, a critical component of successful mission and vision statements is the identification of who the organization serves, or its stakeholders. Although several conceptualizations of Stakeholder Theory have been proposed, there seem to be recurrent themes across them. Conceptualizations focus on identifying who are the stakeholders of an organization and some of their characteristics. Several perspectives are presented below:

Stakeholders are groups or individuals who can affect or are affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives. The organization has both primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders include customers, owners, lenders, employees, suppliers, governments and others whose influence is vital to the organization's survival. Secondary stakeholders such as special interest groups and the media influence or are influenced by the organization but are not engaged directly in business with it. Nor are they essential to its survival.⁴⁷

At the core of all versions of stakeholder theory, however, is the proposition that a company interacts with five separate interest groups: its shareholders, its customers, its employees, its suppliers and the community at large.⁴⁸

Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory essentially posits that an organization's sustainability is determined, in large part, by the extent to which it considers the interests of its stakeholding communities. His definition of a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of a corporation's purpose" (Freeman, 1984, p. vi).⁴⁹

In general, we see through each of the definitions, the idea that stakeholders are integral parts of an organization's purpose and function in society.

In examining the literature on Stakeholder Theory, I focused on research exploring the consequences of ignoring an organization's stakeholders (an issue I thought relevant to the case of the Valentine Museum). One drawback of ignoring an organization's stakeholders in developing long-range plans is that such "strategic plans and performance measurement systems either lack focus or are too narrowly focused on a limited objective."⁵⁰ An identification of stakeholders is also necessary for an effective articulation of an organization's values and goals, central elements of the mission statement. As Sharman observes, without analysis of stakeholders:

Even organizations that have implemented various improvement programs and tools...are still unable to articulate a believable, acceptable set of values, objectives and measurable goals...if the organization undertakes a structured strategic planning process without fully considering stakeholders' needs, it might end up with mission statements that either say everything but mean nothing or are hopelessly unrealistic. Similarly, a misunderstanding of stakeholders and their needs has an impact on the understanding of managers' communications to the organization...Not only does a lack of attention to stakeholders inhibit managerial communications, but it also negatively influences leader/follower power distances, "managers try to dissociate themselves from groups that are simply vying for power and promoting their own agendas."⁵¹

Organizations that wish to avoid the pitfalls associated with neglecting stakeholders should perform a stakeholder analysis. This analysis is one in which the organization "analyzes the needs and expectations of stakeholders"⁵² and communicates these needs to members of the organization.⁵³ Specifically, the literature indicates that this is carried out via interviews and focus group sessions with stakeholders directly or with internal organizational personnel who can play the role of a stakeholder.⁵⁴

Beyond an understanding of who an organization's stakeholders are, and the necessity to assess their needs comes the obligation to understanding the interests of

stakeholders. A unique relationship exists between the interests of stakeholders and the organization, 'Individual stakeholders' interests vary depending on their perception of how the organization's behavior will further their interests.'⁵⁵ 'Time, quality, and cost' are part and parcel with stakeholders' interests.⁵⁶ With all of these needs and characteristics taken into consideration, the organization maintains, 'parameters for focusing its strategy, orienting its employees, and establishing internal goals for process performance.'⁵⁷

Resource Dependence Theory

In some inter-organizational relationships, one organization holds such a stake in another that the principles of yet another theory, Resource Dependence Theory, can be applied. This theory speaks to the influence held by organizations providing necessary resources for a beneficiary organization related to the decisions that the beneficiary organization makes. 'Resource Dependence Theory suggests that organizational behavior becomes externally influenced because the focal organization must attend to the demands of those in its environment that provide resources for its continued survival.'⁵⁸ The literature refers to these benefactor organizations as the *organization set*.⁵⁹ The overarching structure of resource dependence theory has two parts, one outlining organizational demands and the other outlining the leader's handling of these dependencies.⁶⁰ Resource dependence theory describes the development of inter-organizational power and argues that this power affects the activities of organizations...this second part of resource dependence theory traces the various strategies of organizations and their managers to cope with external constraints resulting from resource interdependence.'⁶¹ At times the behavior interdependence⁶² between

organizations may be so great that, “the activities themselves [i.e. operation of the organization] are dependent on the actions of another social actor.”⁶³

Boards of Directors

Leadership displayed by an organization's board of directors can help that organization manage various internal and external dependencies. In particular, the way the membership of a board is constituted may reflect the organization's environmental dependencies, especially for non-profit organizations. For Example recommend that a board look beyond the organization to get the input of vital “stakeholders” to get an accurate measurement of whether the organization is reaching its goals.⁶⁴ Integral to installing a successful board, they submit, is making it clear what the board member's role will be, what that prospective member expects to gain from the position, and what s/he is willing to put into the organization.⁶⁵ Some suggest nominating committees that oversee recruitment issues and ensure that a balance is maintained between the board's needs and those of other personnel.⁶⁶ Further, the importance of frequent interaction between board members and organizational executives is recommended in order to minimize or avoid potential communication problems.⁶⁷ Even a board that may not have commitment or role clarity problems has the potential for another problem, factions. However, factions are not always problematic to organizational functioning since their existence may suggest the need for meaningful change.⁶⁸ A solid board can help guide an organization at each point of its maturity.

Organizational Life Cycle

Organizational Life Cycle theories assert that there are certain characteristic

developments that an organization goes through at different points in its history. Researchers have posited that an organization goes through anywhere from four to nine “stages” throughout its existence.⁶⁹ In general “these stages are: (i) sequential in nature; (ii) occur as a hierarchical progression that is not easily reversed; and (iii) involve a broad range of organizational activities and structures (Quinn and Cameron, 1983; Lavole and Culbert, 1978).”⁷⁰ In brief, these stages can be generalized into periods of “inception to growth, maturity, and decline or redevelopment.”⁷¹ At the initial stage, the organization is consumed by financial concerns.⁷² During the “growth stage,” the company expands drastically and quickly.⁷³ Here, structural concerns take precedence.⁷⁴ Often, this stage is followed by structural rigidity which tends to stifle the organization’s operation and agility⁷⁵ ultimately ending in “downfall.”⁷⁶ Following this point, the organization begins to decline “because rapid growth and expansion, which was the result of initial successes, led to self deception, inflexibility, shortsightedness and cultural rigidity (Lorange et al., 1987).”⁷⁷ This stage typically includes “unrealistic optimism, poor communication, commitment to past strategy, conformity, groupthink, over-conservatism and mistrust (Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984; Pfeiffer, 1981, Lorange et al., 1987; Adizes, 1979).”⁷⁸ Interpersonal problems soon follow, including “increased rivalry among political coalitions, power conflicts and scape-goating (Pfeiffer, 1981, Adizes, 1979).”⁷⁹ Following this stage, an organization will cease to exist altogether or adapt.⁸⁰ This adaptation often involves the replacement of key leaders.⁸¹ In the absence of such changes among others, more decline results and “bankruptcy and corporate failure are inevitable.”⁸² Later in the report, these theories and research perspectives will be applied to better understand

the events of the Valentine Riverside Museum.

Methodology

Having established a firm foundation of relevant leadership theory, and approaches to understanding leadership theory and organizational effectiveness, the next section of this report describes the means that were employed to understand the organization that comprised the focus of this study, the Valentine Riverside Museum (or Riverside). In particular, the methods I employed to conduct my study sought to discern whether the demise of the Valentine Riverside came about as a result of merely economic factors, or perhaps failures in leadership and decision making.

Before I undertook gathering data for this study, I outlined the methods by which I intended to meet my objective. Based on my research of several options open to me, I decided to pursue a combination of the case study method, which relies heavily on interviewing as outlined by Yin⁸³, Backstrom, and Hursh-Cesar.⁸⁴

This method seemed to lend itself most readily to the type of study I planned to conduct. Examining the events at the museum from a case study perspective allowed me to gain insight from several of the organization's stakeholders, compare information, and infer what took place at Riverside vis-à-vis current leadership theory and practice.

Yin⁸⁵ outlined some guidelines which I attempted to utilize in order to make the examination of the Valentine Riverside as revealing and successful as possible. Yin outlines five specific areas that should guide such a study from the start:

- 1) a study's questions
- 2) its propositions
- 3) its unit(s) of analysis
- 4) the logic linking data to propositions
- 5) criteria for interpreting findings⁸⁶

These translated, for my purposes, into a host of questions about critical decisions made in the last operating days of the museum, propositions about how the organization reacted when faced with the negative consequences of some of their decisions and practices, as well as other events.

I needed to take my design a step further to what Yin refers to as the “theory building” component of the case study.⁸⁷ Before I even began to collect data, I tried to theorize/hypothesize about whether the leadership and practices of the organization truly were at the center of its eventual problems, whether the economic forces surrounding the museum just prior to its closing overpowered the leadership of the museum (whether it was effective or not), or if there were other factors beyond either of these that contributed to the collapse of the organization. This gave me an idea of what form possible answers to my questions might take.

I also tried to follow Yin’s suggestions concerning methods of collecting data. He notes that a review of organizational documentation is a useful means of reinforcing or challenging information that comes from individuals. In my application, I sought to use many of the types of documentation that he outlines, including: “letters, memoranda, and other communiqués; agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports of events, administrative documents, and news clippings...”⁸⁸

Thus, I made an effort to balance the information that I obtained from people firsthand with information available from archival records.

In gathering data from individuals, I relied extensively on interviews and the techniques that Yin proposes to conduct them. I performed short “focused”⁸⁹ interviews

with as many of the individuals involved in the organization that were willing to give me input. I developed questions aimed at fleshing out what some of the organization's practices were, their attitudes about the museum's impending crisis, their opinions of the leadership of the organization, among others. As the study progressed, I conducted follow-up some of my interviews with the individuals to obtain their insights about issues that were uncovered in interviewing other respondents if questions arose during the collection of other data.

Although, I originally intended to utilize surveys to gather information both from people whom I could not interview and from those who may have had only an indirect relationship to the organization. This was not possible, however, due to the dispersion of many of the key players since Riverside's closing as well as due to a general hesitancy of such people to volunteer information about this still highly sensitive issue.

In analyzing the data I collected, I focused on identifying striking similarities and vast disparities in accounts offered by interviewees and from archival records, etc. I grouped like data together, and then applied the various leadership theories and approaches discussed earlier to understand it. Basically, I compiled lots of data and compare it to leadership theories in search of some sort of "best fit" (recognizing that such a fit might represent an amalgamation of approaches.)

In sum, I formulated pointed questions that sought to generate accurate and honest responses from interviewees. I used these methods to query key leaders in the organization, lower-level staff, and extra-organizational stakeholders. Additionally, I undertook a review of documentation about Riverside to corroborate and add to

respondents' accounts. Finally, I explained the results of the data in terms of current leadership theories.

In carrying out the above objectives in actually collecting data, I experienced several difficulties. In addition to having my intended survey approach affected by difficulties finding Riverside participants, I found that the pool of interviewees was very limited. Generally, it was difficult to determine who key individuals in the organization were, as I had to construct this list from the input of those who would talk and from a loose newspaper trail. The sensitive nature of the organization and the emotional ties it still has some two to people made many of them reluctant to discuss Riverside with me. It generally was a negative experience for them that they did not want to revisit. Furthermore, some anticipated interviewees informed me that discussing Riverside threatened friendships with others formerly involved there. Another potential respondent, representing a bank formerly involved with Riverside, asserted that volunteering information about Riverside jeopardized the confidentiality of bank agreements, etc. still existing. I also encountered some legal restriction as to what some participants in the Riverside venture could disclose about their involvement due to agreements they entered with the organization upon its closing. The document analysis I undertook was not as fruitful as I had anticipated either. Many of the documents that I examined were related more to the infrastructural setup of Riverside and the materials, invoices, and building schedules surrounding its establishment. Some other information I gathered was promotional, and helped to give an overview of the museum's exhibits and its approach to the presentation of history. I had hoped to gather a cache of documents from Riverside

Board meetings, information about the Ethyl study carried out, vision and mission statements, or correspondence revealing the remarks made by Riverside's leaders about critical decisions. Thus many of my primary avenues for research were limited. Fortunately, those who were willing to assist in my study contributed enough information for me to understand at least in general terms what happened from Riverside's inception to its close.

Results:

How Riverside Came About

On the lower grounds of Ethyl Corporation's headquarters and on the banks of the James River in Richmond's Downtown, are located the buildings that comprise the Tredegar Iron Works. This was the site of the 19th century iron smelting plant that supplied much of the metal used in manufacturing the armaments of the civil war. These buildings had been all but abandoned and sat dormant at the location until the early nineties when representatives of Ethyl decided to refurbish them. In the period that followed the renovation of the buildings, Ethyl would open the facilities for the use of area community service endeavors. Members of Ethyl felt that the site was still underutilized, and decided to turn over use of the buildings to a worthy area non-profit organization. The corporation's offer was pursued by members of the Valentine Museum.

The Valentine Museum, located on Clay Street in a district known as Court End, refers to itself as the 'Museum of the Life and History of Richmond, and offers exhibits related to significant events of the city's past. The museum decided that it wanted to expand its efforts through a new facility that would accommodate the exhibits limited by

the space restrictions of the Court End facility. It had communicated the possibility of the endeavor to Richmond Renaissance, a local non-profit organization dedicated to maintaining a vibrant economy and positive urban atmosphere in Richmond's Downtown. The organization was impressed by the prospect, mainly because of how the Valentine's Director described the project, and gave it a vote of confidence. The expansion of the Valentine took the form of a subsidiary organization called the Valentine Riverside Museum that would soon call the buildings located at the foot of Ethyl's headquarters home.

Shortly after the Valentine approached the Ethyl Corporation about the possibility of occupying the Tredegar site, the company allocated approximately \$600,000 for the organization to do an intensive study on its proposal and present the Corporation with a detailed plan of its intent. Over the course of several months the Valentine carried out the study. Heading up the study was Frank Jewell, then Director of the Court End Valentine site, and the person who hoped to serve as Director of the Riverside branch. He had come to the Valentine some years prior from a position at the Colorado Historical Society, and before that, from an executive position in sales at Macy's. Jewell was chosen to head the new Riverside effort, and so soon he and his Valentine Riverside associates presented to Ethyl Corporation the results of their findings. Ethyl Corporation reflected on the information presented in the study over the course of a year. Finally, thoroughly impressed by Jewell's presentation, representatives of Ethyl Corporation gave the Valentine Riverside project the green light.

On Memorial Day 1994 the Valentine Riverside Museum officially opened.

It did not take long to discover a lack of visitors though. Projections were that 400,000 people would visit the museum per year⁹⁰; only 100,000 actually came, many of whom were repeat visitors using their passes. This naturally generated concern among Riverside's Leadership.

Attendance is Down

Starting around the winter of 1994 there seemed to be some controversy brewing over the museum's presentation of the city's history, specifically in regard to "conflicting messages in its interpretation of city history."⁹¹ Many visitors were disturbed by the way Riverside focused on the depiction of African American in the exhibits, "Some of the controversy about Riverside focused on what some viewed as an emphasis on the role of African-Americans in the development of the city."⁹² The Richmond Times Dispatch conducted a poll to determine visitors' opinions on this issue.⁹³ Their results revealed that many "complained about the park's emphasis on 'minority history and the way whites are depicted.'...A woman who said she attended the gala opening of Riverside...was 'astounded by the racism of the exhibits. Not one nice thing [was] said about whites.'...Others were critical of Riverside's message saying 'it is very pro-minority' and 'unfairly bashes whites.'" One commentator on the museum stated "the historical interpretations at Riverside would send members of the Valentine family, who founded the museum, 'rolling in their graves...Richmond's history is presented inaccurately-and at the expense of the city's white residents. We're just having it rammed down our throats...I never owned a slave. My father never owned a slave. My grandfather never owned a slave. And I really resent the guilt trip that's being forced on us.'"⁹⁴ In reviewing their

poll, the newspaper itself concluded the museum has come to represent a big-ticket public whipping post of sorts, a riverside conscious that scolds whites for their past domination of blacks and too sharply reminds uneasy blacks of their slave history in this country.”⁹⁵

Contrary to the press’ account of the issue, a staff member of Valentine Riverside stated to me in an interview that the historical presentation was probably not the root of the museum’s attendance problem. This respondent suggested that Valentine Court End had exposed more delicate racial issues in previous exhibits without a negative response, a notable one of which included the display of a Ku Klux Klan robe. Further, this respondent did not see a particular problem in generating discomfort in visitors over historical issues. The interview also yielded the fact that Riverside experienced a ‘huge spike in membership’ that was maintained throughout the organization’s existence. This interviewee also suggested that it is a mistake for a museum to rely on a significant portion of its revenue coming from visitors.

Another respondent involved primarily in fund raising efforts for the museum stated to me that the attendance problem was due in part to the level of development of the area surrounding Riverside. The interviewee mentioned that the organization came before its time and may have fared better if its opening had coincided with the extensive development of other river front attractions; the museum simply could not survive as the only attraction by the river. Additionally, this respondent told me that the organization “overbuilt the market,” the person felt that local interest was not a strong enough to lure an adequate number of Richmond-area tourists to stay viable. In this respondent’s opinion, the mistake behind the low visitation was failure to look critically at initial attendance

projections. In this case, a “devil’s advocate” who would have ignored the fascination of the endeavor and warned of the overly optimistic numbers may have forced the organization to rethink the numbers and its plans. In any event, there was grave concern over numbers of visitors (or lack thereof) to the Valentine Riverside.

Finances Suffer

The Valentine Riverside was experiencing an even deeper predicament that made matters worse, specifically finding itself sinking deeper and deeper into financial trouble. These financial problems started about seven months into the actual operation of Valentine Riverside.⁹⁶ The serious problems began at the end of 1994⁹⁷ and though attendance problems seemed to be the most ostensible cause, it is believed that the brunt of the problem was generated by corporate donors who did not give their pledges, “Those [corporate pledged] funds, as well as lower-than-expected use of the multi-use facility apparently are the primary elements contributing to the cash shortfalls.”⁹⁸ Chairman of the Board of the Valentine Museum, Stuart Christian, noted in a newspaper account the type of vicious cycle that the dilemma spawned, “Because of pledges that haven’t been received, Christian said the museum is not in a position to borrow cash needed in order to generate more funds.”⁹⁹ A key person involved in the fund raising efforts who spoke with me stated that there was no way to predict that corporations would pull out. Beyond the loss of private sector support, Riverside eventually had to endure losing a significant source of state funds as well. In January 1996, after giving \$200,000 in 1994 and 1995, the Valentine Riverside was dropped from Governor Allen’s budget.¹⁰⁰ The museum had cost about \$22.5 million¹⁰¹ to produce, and it was going to take an equally significant

amount of money to resolve its fiscal problems.

Before leaving this explanation of the basis of Riverside's financial woes, it would be useful to examine the rationale surrounding the pledge situation from the standpoint of one of the major designated donors, James River Corporation. According to a Richmond Times Dispatch article, Robert C. Williams, President and C.E.O. of James River Corporation,¹⁰² stated that there may have been some inconsistency between what the original plan of Valentine Riverside called for and what actually developed. The corporation had pledged \$2 million to Valentine Riverside,¹⁰³ yet this donation did not materialize, "We'll [James River Corporation] keep our commitment when it's clear that the project is going forward as originally discussed."¹⁰⁴ Another account by Williams suggests the same idea, "There are some issues that have developed that are significant regarding the economics of Valentine Riverside. The mission is different than what we subscribe to. I guess going back two years ago, we did not have in mind, or were told anything about, an amusement park on Tredegar St., which is what we have..We bargained for an industrial museum, not an amusement park."¹⁰⁵

The idea of Valentine Riverside resembling an amusement park more than a history museum tends to resurface throughout the chain of events surrounding the organization and in accounts from stakeholders within and outside Riverside. A chief fundraiser for the organization stated to me, however, that the product that developed at Riverside was "first-rate" and quite consistent with the plans communicated to corporate donors at the beginning. In addition to the above reasoning for withholding its pledge, Williams cites a "weakened economic position" at James River Corporation that prevented the business

from following through on the pledge.¹⁰⁶ A comment made in an interview I conducted with a key leader of the museum substantiates this idea. The respondent states that James River Corporation had never officially made a commitment to giving a pledge at a certain time, but rather said that it intended to make a donation once James River was in a financial position to do so. Further, the interviewee submitted that all of the corporate donors submitted their pledges as they had promised, but that the Valentine's financial needs either exceeded the amount donated or occurred before the time donors had committed to provide their gifts. At some time, however, a general concern was expressed by several corporate donors over how donations would be used.¹⁰⁷

In looking back it is not hard to see how desperately these donations were needed. The museum ended 1994 \$500,000 over budget.¹⁰⁸ By February of 1995 Riverside's debt was more than \$10 million and was still accruing.¹⁰⁹ Much of this financial obligation was to Crestar Bank, the major lender for the Valentine Riverside endeavor. By December of 1994, the museum had missed a \$54,000 dollar payment to Crestar bank that was secured by [until then, unfulfilled] corporate pledges.¹¹⁰

Early 1995 saw more major changes in the Riverside's situation. During this time, Frank Jewell resigned from his position as Director. Different accounts cite divergent reasons for this resignation. One account states, "much of the criticism [for Riverside's problems] was directed at President Frank Jewell, who resigned under pressure in February [1995]."¹¹¹ Another suggests that "Jewell resigned mainly because of un-kept pledge promises...,"¹¹² and reportedly claimed that "This [the pledge situation, the change in leadership, and reaction to the content of exhibitions] is the re-WASPing of the

Valentine.” Jewell’s resignation was followed closely by the resignation of Valentine’s Deputy Director. Chairman of the Board Stuart Christian and Henry Valentine, board member and heir to the museum’s founder, then assumed leadership of the organization.

The Final Days

The organization’s problems, especially the financial ones, were long from over by this point and forced the leadership of the Valentine Riverside to react. The museum had originally charged \$9 for admission but due to circumstances and a need for more visitors, reduced it to \$5.¹¹³ In a cost-cutting measure, about a third (seventeen) Riverside staff people were laid-off.¹¹⁴ As a further cost-cutting effort, the board reduced the museum’s hours of operation.¹¹⁵ In light of the need to cut costs and maximize revenue for Riverside, some staff volunteered their time to keep the museum open and profiting as much as possible during the period of cutbacks.¹¹⁶

Despite the efforts of Christian, Valentine, and the Board, on August 4th 1995, the Valentine Riverside Museum shut its doors for good.¹¹⁷ This still left many issues to be dealt with, however. Primarily, there was still the matter of the \$9.1 million debt to Crestar Bank, which the City of Richmond took on.¹¹⁸ This proved to be the final incentive that the City had to offer for the bank to build its new headquarters on the South side of the river.¹¹⁹ Ethyl Corporation then regained control of the site, and the Valentine Museum at Court End saw its annual budget go from \$5.4 million when it had administered Riverside to \$800,000.¹²⁰

Why it Happened

Problems may have been Pre-existent

Although the above noted external monetary concerns were of considerable import in understanding the museum's closing, my sources suggested that Valentine Riverside's failure may also have been related to leadership dilemmas as well, some of which had been growing since before the museum's opening.

A primary issue surrounds the manner in which the leadership of Riverside handled financial matters. A number of sources cited the museum's heavy reliance on corporate donations during Riverside's inception as having been problematic.¹²¹ Many felt that too much faith was put in corporate supporters.¹²²

Another problem area for the leadership reportedly lay in the relationships Frank Jewell established between himself and the museum's staff and the board of directors. Interview respondents stated that often staff members hesitated to confront Jewell with problems or suggestions for fear of their jobs. Additionally, sources mention that Jewell's tendency to change focus from project to project caused problems for the staff.¹²³ According to one interviewee, the museum was understaffed. This interviewee went on to say that the "big picture" of the organization's vision was communicated to the staff well, but that the "nuts and bolts" of how this vision would be executed was not communicated, and the staff was not given clear direction.

The strained relationship between Frank Jewell and the Valentine Board were equally problematic to those experienced by the staff. As a newspaper account mentions, "Jewell charged that key board members had betrayed him and that important corporate donors had withheld millions of dollars in critical pledges to Riverside."¹²⁴ Trust and disclosure issues were also reportedly present at Riverside,¹²⁵ namely in that some of

Valentine Riverside's finances were unknown to the Board, and informants suggest that Jewell was keeping some things secret. Jewell's level of control over the operation of Riverside has come into question as well. Interviewees suggest that the board was so engrossed with Jewell's vision of the museum that they often blindly followed his lead. Furthermore, they suggested that they were not proactive enough in intervening when they knew that a certain decision or path of action would be problematic. These problems were compounded by the lack of contact that existed between Jewell and the Board, which was restricted to the occasional board meetings. Despite the study, the reasons for such problematic communication and contact are still unclear.

Understanding the Leader

While I intended my study into Riverside to encompass all of the leadership issues at work, all of the circumstantial factors, and all of the leaders, it seems that more and more information points to a close relationship between the museum's troubles and its primary leader, the Director, Frank Jewell. It is hard to determine whether this is a fair assumption or if there were some underlying socio-political issues surrounding the data provided about him. It will be useful to briefly try to understand him. When asked about the nature of this man, whose name appears in report after report, interviewees say he 'lacked financial responsibility, went too fast, and was impatient.' In another instance he is described as "a man with grandiose ideas who couldn't carry them out."¹²⁶ Some of his appeal as a leader, however, may have been derived from his background in sales. Interviewees say that he could make very good presentations, could write grants particularly well, and was very persuasive. His rapport with the National Endowment for

the Humanities was useful for the organization, but his alleged ‘history of people problems’ was a liability.

Other Issues

In seeking to understand the circumstances surrounding the organization and its failure, a number of possible reasons have emerged for why things went wrong. One factor that interviewees cited was the marketing of the organization. The efforts were supposedly not geared enough toward attracting area tourists. This was evidenced specifically in the lack of outdoor advertising used to promote Riverside. There were not enough billboards and signs to guide passing tourists from interstate 95 all the way down to Tredegar Street.

Additionally, in managing the museum, an interviewee stated that fewer decisions were made from a historical standpoint than were made from a fiscal standpoint. The most salient example of this idea was the carousel, which was not in keeping with the history being portrayed, but rather was mistakenly included according to what marketing interests dictated. Additionally, the nature of the site came into the analysis. It was said that the staff, primarily accustomed to the typical gallery format of museums, lacked familiarity with organizing outdoor attractions, which are inherently different from the former style.

According to interviewees, overconfidence is said to have been in the equation as well, specifically due to the boost generated by Riverside’s selection as a National Endowment for the Humanities funding recipient. A successful acquisition of funds from this organization, known for stringent application guidelines, is a notable accomplishment for a museum. The ego boost associated with such an achievement may have gone a long way to the organization’s loss of objectivity and eventual undoing.

Analysis & Discussion

I came into this study with preconceived ideas about what may have led to the untimely closing of Riverside, some based on “gut feelings” others based on leadership theory. One idea related to plain numbers, that despite relatively sound leadership, flawed marketing efforts prevented an adequate flow of visitors (and cash) to the museum. Later I began to hypothesize that perhaps Richmonders had refused to patronize the museum because of its focus on blacks’ place in city history. Finally, in a similar vein, I surmised that corporate donors, after experiencing the museum’s presentation of the history of Richmond’s blacks, purposely held back contributions so that the museum would fail and no longer disturb the conservative status quo of the area. Having examined the organization over the course of the study, I am still rather ambivalent about why the venture was not a success, and I cannot say confidently that these are all of the likely reasons behind it. In terms of the leadership aspects of the museum, I suspected from the very beginning that there were internal disagreements and disorder. This feeling was triggered by learning about the turnover that took place in Riverside’s last months. My analysis of the relation of the leadership issues at the museum to the theories discussed in the rationale section of my study are presented below.

Charismatic Leadership

Source after source cited the museum’s Director, Frank Jewell, as being a charismatic leader. He is said to have remarkable rhetorical skills that shined during the search for support of the museum at the planning stage. He pulled many people “on board” the Riverside idea and allowed them to formulate individual visions of what the

organization would be like. Interviewees suggested that the board of Riverside was caught up in the momentous possibilities of the undertaking. Additionally, Jewell fits the theory's model of rising during a period of organizational change, (i.e., the branching of the Valentine to Riverside.) The idea of charismatic leaders losing their appeal seemed to evidence itself through some of the negative comments about the former Director that surfaced in my study. Despite the Director's initial appeal, interviewees expressed displeasure for his eventually apparent lack of financial management and interpersonal skills. This is reminiscent of the idea of the charismatic leader displaying empathy or employing empowerment techniques. Once these shortfalls became clear to the staff, their idealistic view of him diminished. Additionally, the limited interaction between the Board and Jewell may have provided the great power distance that contributed to "invent" the fanciful image of him in the first place. As the literature on charismatic literature also pointed out, this leader/follower relationship tends to be short-lived, as was the case at Riverside. It was not terribly long into the operation of the museum that leadership problems arose. Throughout the life span of Riverside, this study has shown the positive and negative impact of charismatic leaders.

Vision, Mission, and Stakeholders

In applying these ideas to the Valentine Riverside, some areas become evident that may have departed from the tenets of vision, mission, and Stakeholder Theory that research suggests. The first of these applies to the relationships between the leadership of the organization and the staff. It is not clear whether the atmosphere at Valentine Riverside was one conducive to such consensus building that the literature dictates for

strong mission and vision statements. Similarly, the differences in vision and mission that seem to have been apparent tend to coincide with the disparity between the Director's intentions for the museum and those of the corporate donors. I never learned of a discrete mission or vision statement, but rather just the idea that the museum was to be a fun attraction for families. Thus, if I was unable to gather a mission or vision statement from either interviewees or archival records, it is possible that such an ambiguity existed among the organization's stakeholders either. It is questionable that the leadership even recognized that the staff, the visitors, and the corporate donors were the significant (primary) stakeholders of the organization. In this sense, it could be said that the visitor turnout to Riverside was proportional to the extent to which the leadership of the museum considered their interests as stakeholders. Additionally, the under-staffing, and strained interaction between staff members and Riverside's Director may have precluded another tenet of organizational vision, specifically that the staff needs to see its contributions pay off for the organization.¹²⁷ In addition, the implied lack of direction that existed as the Valentine Riverside staff tried to realize the organization's vision suggests other areas of concern, namely ambiguity over when the museum's goals were met and what the expectations of the staff were.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the purported inconsistency between the organization's aims proposed to corporate donors and the product that evolved speaks to another characteristic of strong organizational vision, namely that the vision should be constant over time.¹²⁹ Also, the harsh separation of Jewell from the organization may be a negative example of vision at work, specifically as it relates to the view of the leader. What may have occurred is the loss of the credibility that can result from a poorly

managed vision,¹³⁰ specifically exemplified through the perception of the leader's inability to "deliver" the promised vision and the subsequent desertion by his followers.

Resource Dependence Theory & Boards

The degree to which the survival of the museum depended upon corporate donors (organization set) and admission fees may suggest a mismanagement of Riverside's dependence on sources of resources in its environment. A better handling of the matter might have included more support from wealthy individuals, a broad variety of public institutions, and a host of grants. This would have prevented any one or two groups of stakeholders from dominating Riverside's fate. Under such a network, the leadership might have been able to shift its reliance to a sufficient number of ancillary supporters and thus survived even amidst several corporations' withholding of pledges.

I can only speak about the board situation at Riverside to a limited degree, as I was unable to obtain a list of the members and their affiliations. It is safe to say, though, that they had different ideas about the organization's goals. Similarly, as evidenced through their whole-hearted acceptance of inflated attendance projections, it is rather evident that the board did not include enough "outside" members of the Metropolitan Richmond community to comprise an effective and unbiased sounding board for problematic decisions (i.e., the number of patrons possible).

Organizational Life Cycles

It seems that Riverside's short life span represented only the inception stage of the organizational life cycle outlined in the literature, although ironically within this stage, some elements of later stages emerged. The "consumption by financial concerns" is

displayed by looking at the financial crisis that engulfed the museum. It was never able to actually secure the funds that would have allowed it to progress to the next stage, but instead financed its existence with debt. This outstanding debt itself eventually consumed the organization. In terms of the characteristics of later stages that emerged, elements of each of the final three stages were evident. The period when the major site modifications took place to make Riverside a high-tech, state-of-the-art historical facility complete with the finest in advanced electronics seemingly suggests the rapidly expanding “growth stage.” The continual acceptance of and extensive planning around impossible numbers of visitors to the site is reminiscent of the “structural rigidity.” This assertion is reinforced by the “unrealistic optimism, poor communication, commitment to past strategy, conformity, groupthink, over-conservatism, and mistrust” that began to surface among the leaders, which ultimately resulted in many resignations and leadership changes. Finally, the irreparable monetary damages, futile efforts by management to maintain the organization, and the eventual bankruptcy of Riverside suggest the decline stage outlined by Organizational Life Cycle theories.

Conclusion

In closing, this study of the Valentine riverside Museum has fulfilled its purpose of teaching me something about leadership. I would never have known so explicitly what factors were at work in this organization if I had not conducted this in depth analysis. Perseverance despite many people’s aversion to Riverside issues as well as the willingness of several participants to generously give their time and insights made the endeavor feasible. With the lessons in mind about Riverside, its leaders, its financial situation, its

social ramifications, and even its intense secrecy, I have been able to arrive at a better understanding of leaders, followers, and their complex relationships. Therefore, despite the fact that so much went so wrong at the Valentine Riverside Museum, and it had to cease enlightening people with lessons about history long before its time, this museum, even after the fact, was able to give me a memorable lesson in leadership.

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