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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Angela R. Dawson

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2020

Abstract

Sudden Leadership Loss and the Importance of Succession Planning in Behavioral Health Care

by

Angela R. Dawson

MS, University of Phoenix, 2016

BS, University of Phoenix, 2012

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Psychology in Behavioral Health Leadership

Walden University

February 2020

Abstract

This study examined sudden leadership loss and the importance of succession planning in behavioral health. The organization at the center of the study is located in the midwestern United States and is known for providing stellar services to its clients and fostering a quality workspace for its employees. The findings provided the organization with a clear and specific understanding of the value of succession planning for sustainability. The study was conducted using a qualitative research method. Semistructured interviews with 5 senior-level leaders from a single site location provided the primary source of data. Additional data were collected from the organization's current and historical policies and procedures. The following themes emerged as a result of the study: communication, professional development, employee resistance, leadership support, and work environment. Findings from this study revealed that the organization lacked formal succession-planning strategies during a time of leadership loss. Further findings supported how the lack of succession planning impacted the performance of the affected project team and the quality of services provided. Implications from this study reveal how similar behavioral health organizations can plan for change and unexpected leadership loss. This study's findings can contribute to social change by helping leaders of behavioral health organizations create work environments that value strategic succession planning, employee development, and information sharing.

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Section 1a: The Behavioral Health Organization

Introduction

The business concept of succession planning is vital in behavioral healthcare institutions (Rosenthal, Monahan, Rouch, & Doherty, 2018). Rothwell (2017) used the idea of behavioral impacts in institutions to establish common ground in healthcare organizations. Changes in leadership, especially unplanned changes, can cause staff to react in ways seen as resistant and gives employees a sense of having no direction (Gartenstein, 2019). Succession planning is an organizational process in which job positions are occupied after an employee's comprehensive training and transition from a preceding position (Rothwell, 2017. For instance, a clinician approaching retirement would be expected to train a junior clinician who, in turn, would be expected to occupy the lead position once retirement occurs (De Bono, Heling, & Borg, 2014).

Succession planning as a business practice plays a vital role in managing healthcare institutions and maintaining quality behavioral healthcare should there be an unexpected loss of leadership (Rosenthal et al., 2018). According to Day (2007), succession planning is key in promoting a business industry in terms of producing professionals with more practical experience in addition to academic knowledge. In essence, career grooming in the practical field of any profession plays an important role in strengthening the economic sectors involved (Nelson, Kasper, Hibberd, Thea, & Herlihy, 2012). Framed in the context of this research, behavioral health organizations benefit from the purposeful identification, mentoring, and training of junior staff in preparation for management and leadership positions (Moore & Wang, 2017).

A succession plan is developed and executed in such a way that new leadership, from an internal transition or external addition, will have a relatively easy time when handling the inherent responsibilities of their new positions (Dyess, Sherman, Pratt, & Haniski, 2016). Aside from the obvious benefits of planned change, it is important to discuss the business benefits as well. Having a continuity plan in place could help the behavioral health organization maintain its reputation with clients in the event a disruptive event takes place, such as leadership loss (Kraft, Sparr, & Peuss, 2018). In simpler terms, a business can achieve success if it has a consistent revenue generation stream with profit margins that is sustained during a loss of leadership. Succession planning is fundamental in ensuring operations do not degrade in quality through necessary planned or unplanned transitions.

Problem Statement

A company's awareness of impending change is important in its ability to manage change (Weiner, 2009). However, awareness alone is not sufficient and will not necessarily prepare an organization for fail-prevention resulting from unexpected leadership loss (Weiner, 2009). The partner organization for this study is a behavioral health agency located in the midwestern United States that had recently gone through an unplanned and abrupt change of leadership. For the purpose of this study, the agency is referred to as Behavioral Health Organization A (BHOA).

BHOA experienced the sudden loss (death) of the vice president (VP) for clinical operations. In addition to the VP responsibilities, this individual had also recently taken over leadership of a program that had just been awarded the largest contract in the

organization's 40-year history. While supporting grieving employees, the organization experienced internal conflict associated with filling the vacant leadership position, as no immediate transition plan was in place. This conflict and uncertainty led to additional problems, such as documented employee complaints and employee turnover. This research study addressed the question of how a behavioral health organization managed an unplanned and abrupt change in leadership.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify sudden leadership loss and the importance of succession planning in behavioral health. At the center of this study is a behavioral health organization located in the midwestern United States that had recently been affected by an abrupt loss of senior leadership. The organization was appropriate for this qualitative case study because of its recent unexpected loss of leadership, whereby it was left without a leader and without a succession plan to move forward after the loss. The goal of this qualitative study was to provide recommendations to BHOA that could aid in the successful transition of leadership during a period of loss, position vacancy, and change.

Analytical Framework

The Baldrige excellence framework was used to guide this study. This framework provides a comprehensive list of assessment categories and criteria, inclusive of leadership and workforce engagement, that are used internationally by organizations to promote a systems perspective for organizational improvement (Baldrige, 2019).

Interviewing and observation are the most common formats of qualitative data collection (Jamshed, 2014). For the purpose of this research, I interviewed approved senior-status leaders and program directors. Using a semistructured interviewing format, I collected data about how leadership transitions occurred within the organization. I reviewed employee files, meeting minutes, and current and historical data to provide insight into job responsibilities and job performance before, during, and after leadership transitions. Individual education and work history data helped me determine qualifications for internal job promotions, succession planning, and the best use of employee skills during a leadership shift.

The use of meeting minutes and historical articles contributed to the validity of the research topic, as they allowed me to establish a timeline of change and any shifts in leadership and service quality as well as the causes associated with them. I reviewed data from the organization's quality survey results and reports before and after the loss of leadership to substantiate the maintenance of quality service during the recent abrupt change.

Significance

This doctoral research can contribute to positive social change by providing recommendations that may aid behavioral health organizations in the successful transition of leadership during a period of loss, position vacancy, and change. The research highlights for senior leaders the importance of inclusion and communication of impending change in order to maintain a healthy workforce environment. I provided the behavioral health organization involved in the study with an assessment and analysis that

highlighted the current gaps in succession planning during a phase of unexpected leadership change.

Researchers have suggested that the use of succession planning in healthcare is limited (Titzer-Evans & Shirey, 2013). Specific to behavioral health organizations, few actively use succession plans, and those that do often only target executive leadership positions (Shirey, 2008). The current demand for excellence in patient care and safety indicates that there is a need for succession programs in healthcare organizations (Titzer-Evans & Shirey, 2013).

In understanding behavioral healthcare from a leadership point of view, one would accept that there are complexities within departments that must be reconciled as part of the adjustment to new leadership. From a contextual perspective, for instance, one would understand that new leadership will have their own characteristically significant style and attributes, which may include a different form of service delivery and goals (Powell et al., 2017).

Summary and Transition

For an organization to achieve sustainable change, quality initiatives must become a standard way of working rather than a superficial addition to routine clinical care (Silver et al., 2016). Sustainability does not happen by chance, so change strategies should be preplanned for unexpected leadership transitions. Similar to quality improvement plans, this process starts by diagnosing sustainability problems in advance. Therefore, having no succession plan in place could present a serious disadvantage for an institution to impose a change absent an adequate process of change planning and

sustainability (Titzer, Shirey, & Hauck, 2014). In the next section, I provide an outline of the partner in this study, BHOA. Section 1b contains chosen research and design methods and addresses the researcher's role, the study's purpose, ethical considerations, and study participants. In Section 1b, I identify data-collection methods, data organization, and analysis techniques that provide validity and reliability.

Section 1b: Organizational Profile

Introduction

Many times, abrupt leadership changes in healthcare organizations can cause disruptive confusion and untold mix-ups. In the present study, I provided BHOA, a behavioral health care organization located in the midwestern United States, with an analysis of the company's experience associated with the loss of a senior leader. The organization's vision is to promote health and well-being for clients, advocate access to healthcare services, and practice progressive staff development that results in quality customer care that exceeds customer expectations. Using BHOA as a case study, I aimed to answer the following question: How does a behavioral health organization manage change in leadership that is unplanned and abrupt? In the next section, I provide key information relative to BHOA's profile and the key factors of its operation and assets. The regulatory requirements under which BHOA operates are presented, along with a breakdown of the organization's suppliers and partners for service provisions.

Organizational Profile and Key Factors

According to BHOA's website and company brochures, the organization opened its doors in 1970 as a small counseling office that provided individual, group, and family outpatient counseling services. Today, BHOA provides employee assistance programs (EAP) and work/life wellness services to managers, employees, and families of over 2,000 companies nationwide. To date, BHOA has grown from a regional provider of behavioral health services to a nationally recognized leader, providing best-in-class behavioral management training as an organizational development service. BHOA works

with Fortune 500 corporations, government agencies, top universities, and hospital systems.

According to the organizations website, the consumers served by BHOA come from over 2,000 companies with whom the organization is networked worldwide. BHOA has a core competency of operational and fiscal effectiveness. BHOA works to remove common barriers families and employees face in receiving quality behavioral health treatment and referrals. Most recently, BHOA received its most lucrative government contract with provisions for servicing individuals returning home from prison.

Assets

According to BHOA's website, it is one of the few independent privately held national behavioral healthcare companies nationwide. It is not owned by or affiliated with any pharmaceutical company, insurance company, hospital, corporation, or treatment company. No officer, staff member, or employee has any financial interest in a treatment facility to which a client might be recommended or referred.

A major asset of BHOA is its supporting clinical staff, which is made up of an extensive national network of behavioral specialists who meet strict provisioning requirements. This network now includes thousands of professionals in over 3,000 cities throughout the continental United States and around the globe through an international EAP network. Important financial assets to BHOA are insurance companies, managed care networks, and individual contracts for service between it and other organizations.

Regulatory Requirements

According to documents provided by the director of human resources, BHOA is guided by regulatory requirements from its home state's Bureau of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. One of the bureau's requirements is that all members of the clinical staff meet educational requirements for state licensing. Another regulatory requirement is that the organization must provide training for all staff on its policies and procedures with respect to the privacy and confidentiality of treatment records and healthcare information (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2003). BHOA also works in alignment with the State Mental Health Code Act 258 of 1974.

The State Mental Health Code Act was written into legislation to codify, revise, consolidate, and classify the laws pertaining to mental health; appoint responsibilities of certain state and local agencies and officials and private agencies; and regulate certain agencies and facilities providing mental health or substance use disorder services. It was also written to govern provisions for certain charges and fees; establish civil admission procedures for individuals with mental illness, substance use disorder, or developmental disabilities; establish guardianship procedures for individuals with developmental disabilities; establish procedures regarding individuals with mental illness, substance use disorder, or developmental disabilities who are in the criminal justice system; provide for penalties and remedies; and repeal acts and parts of acts.

Organizational Relationships

According to BHOA's website, it is a nonprofit that provides employee assistance and work/life services, offender reentry services, campus assistance programs, managed

behavioral health, and critical incident services. It maintains a national network of 13,000 counselors, and it can be found in over 3,000 cities throughout the United States, with certification and licensure in a broad array of clinical specialties.

BHOA's services offering section of their website provided that BHOA serves a diverse population of people with different professional orientations. Although its main location is situated in the heart of a major metropolitan city, it has several branch locations, which enables it to have an extensive customer base. According to BHOA's website, its stakeholders are the individuals it serves, its employees, administrators, referral sources, funders, and its immediate community. Senior leadership for BHOA consists of the organization's owner, who also serves as the president and chief executive officer (CEO).

Working under the direction of the president is BHOA's VP and the VP of clinical operations. The VP of clinical operations unexpectedly passed away, and, at the time of this study, the organization had been unable to fill this role, resulting in an extended period of vacancy for an important leadership position. The VP of clinical operations has the responsibility of overseeing the company's EAP and its Offender Success Program. Currently, while the position remains unfilled, the EAP manager temporarily serves in that capacity to oversee the programs that were left without a leader (see Figure 1).

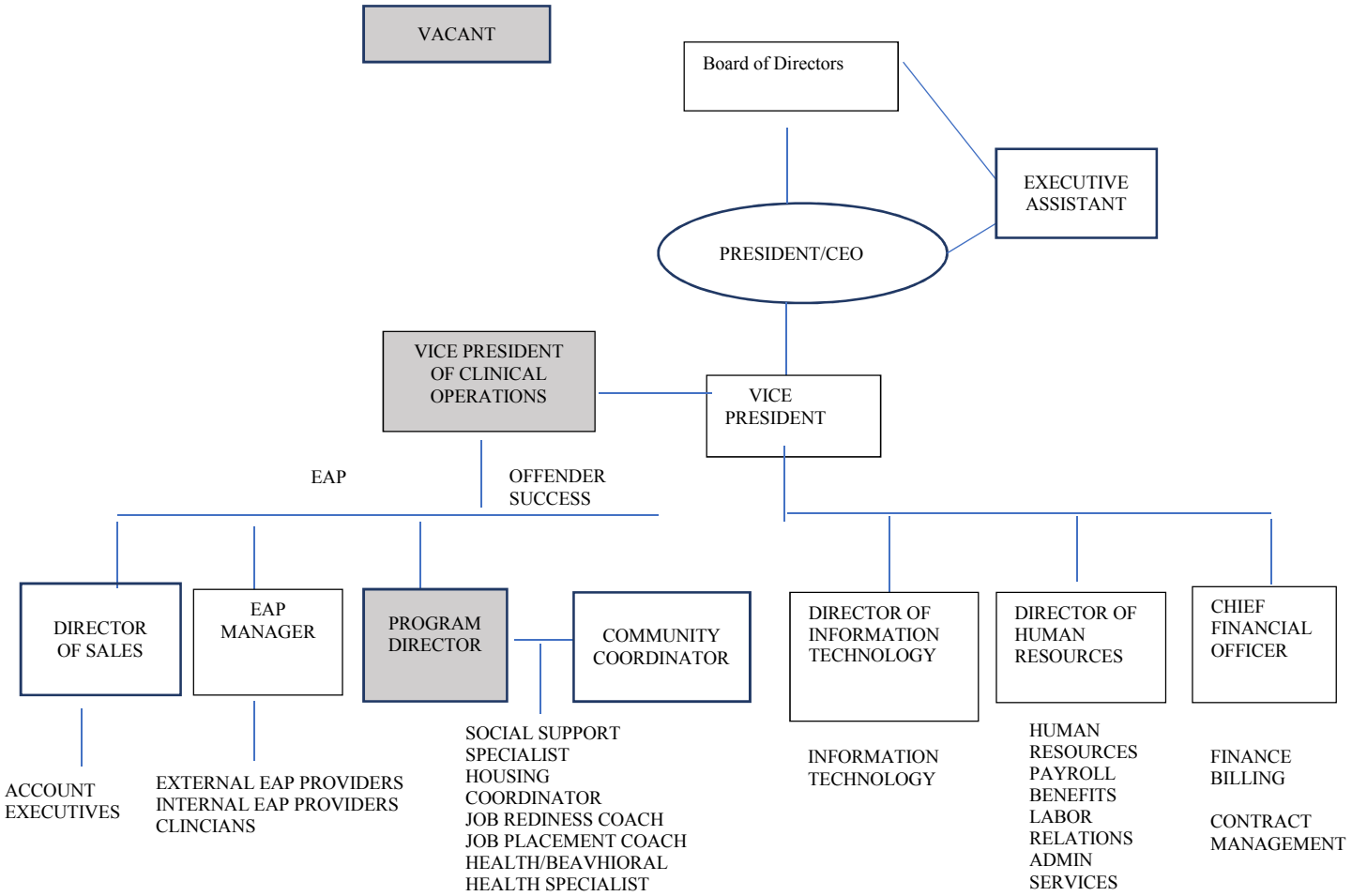

Figure 1. BHOA organizational chart.

Suppliers and Partners

BHOA works with various partners and suppliers so its staff and support staff can provide timely, accurate, quality service to clients. The Offender Success Program works with parole offices in the two counties it serves. Participant 3 noted that the parole offices provide external meeting places where clinicians can conduct assessments of parolees' needs and coordinate services with parole officers. BHOA partners with community mental health providers to provide offenders with reacclimation services upon returning to their communities. Participant 1 stated that to provide quality and complete wraparound services, BHOA partners with several suppliers in the local area (see Table 1).

Table 1

BHOA Program Suppliers and Vendors

Housing	Social support agencies	Job coaching	Job placement	Behavioral & physical health care
Churches	Focus	Job coaches	Talent bank	Local hospitals
Shelters	Hope	Libraries	Recruiters	
Housing choice program	National Dry Goods			
Landlords	Secretary of State			
	Crossroads			

According to Participant 4, Offender Success Program staff are provided with company-issued laptops and cellular devices by Verizon Wireless and the Micro Center. Throughout the year, BHOA hosts several events for its staff and community members, such as board meetings, nonprofit summits, seminars, trainings, and holiday parties. Suppliers for these events consist of local catering services and restaurants, Office Depot, Staples, U-Line, and the Display Group. The EAP side of the organization partners with local clinicians and other behavioral healthcare organizations that it uses to outsource referrals.

Environment

According to the Donalson, Mollenhauer, Shjerven & Servizio (2017), a survey of six regional EAP providers showed that three of the six reported a rise in the number of crisis counseling sessions provided in 2015. The report also showed an increase from the number of individuals requesting EAP services for anxiety from 2015 to 2016 in North America. Reported use of EAP services outside North America was 3.8% less from 4.3% in 2015, with the reason reported as increased access to alternative resources (Donalson, Mollenhauer, Shjerven & Servizio, 2017).

After conducting a provider search using Google, I discovered there are approximately seven EAP service providers within a 50-mile radius of the metropolitan area where BHOA is located. Of the seven EAP providers, BHOA is the only provider of traditional EAP services that is also listed as the administrative agent in its region for the state's department of corrections. This service listing enables BHOA to provide behavioral health services to returning citizens, which no other EAP provider in its region

can provide. According to the company's website, BHOA's corporate office is considered somewhat small in terms of number of employees and buildings, though it has a national reach through an extended provider network.

Findings on BHOA's website found that BHOA has been recognized as one of the state's farthest-reaching nonprofit counseling companies . Findings also support that the company has grown from a regional provider of behavioral health services to a nationally recognized leader providing best-in-class behavioral health management, training, and organizational development services . BHOA is one of a small number of EAP firms that have twice been awarded a full 3-year accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF).

In essence, the competitive circle is somewhat small when comparing BHOA's offerings, network size, credentials, and service flexibility to other similar organizations in its area. BHOA stays above other competitors by offering an array of services and flexibility within those services. According to BHOA's senior leadership, not being afraid to step outside the norm has provided the company with major new funding opportunities, which also sets it apart from its competitors.

Strategic Context / Performance Improvement System

While BHOA's strategic advantages correlate with its vision and core competencies, its challenges are also attached to its vision and are projected to align with its goals for the year 2020. Because of its size, the human resource department has the responsibility to ensure that all quality standards are met. BHOA uses a consumer survey program called Gainsight PX, survey software that uses program analytics combined with

the ability to segment users so that surveys are administered at the right time of service to get a true sense of customer sentiment (Gainsight PX, 2019).

Data collected from Participant 5 indicated that the human resource department organizes all in-house staff trainings. It also oversees employee files that contain information pertaining to renewals of employee training, licensures, and certifications. BHOA is CARF-accredited, which requires adherence to prescribed standards of quality. According to CARF (2019), to obtain accreditation, an organization must commit to quality improvement, focus on the unique needs of the individuals it serves, and monitor the results of its services.

CARF's standards require that the provider undergoes an on-site survey conducted by a team of expert practitioners CARF selects. During the on-site survey, the provider must demonstrate it conforms to a series of rigorous and internationally recognized CARF standards. Once the results of the on-site survey are in, CARF prepares a written report of the provider's strengths and areas for improvement. If a provider has sufficiently demonstrated its conformance to the standards, it earns CARF accreditation (CARF, 2019). After receiving the report, the provider must submit a quality improvement plan to show how areas of concern will be addressed for improvement. Then, each year during the accreditation term, the provider must submit a report to CARF documenting additional improvements it has made (Participant 5).

Summary of Primary Offerings

Services

BHOA offers an array of services to its clients. Deploying these services effectively requires strategic organizational skills, management prowess, and leadership expertise. The organization is responsible for service continuity and client satisfaction. According to BHOA's website, the following services are offered:

- EAP/Work Life: This service provides viable and usable resources for families, such as assisting an employee with time management options that assist with preventing employee burnout. EAP/Work Life also provides employees with referrals for self-care, helping them maintain a healthy balanced lifestyle.
- Assessment, Referral, and Short-Term Problem Resolution: This service provides solution-focused counseling and action-oriented intervention to help employees resolve problematic situations, improve their quality of life, and restore and maintain workplace productivity.
- Case Management Services: These services provide oversight of follow-up, tracking and reporting, and other essential components of the program, ensuring successful clinical outcomes. Case management services follow a client from initiation of services to completion of services, ensuring ease of services and assisting with removing barriers to success.
- Childcare and Eldercare Resources: This service gives assistance to families that are in search of schools and daycare facilities. Services also extend to identifying competent nursing homes and in-home care providers for aging parents.

- Online Resources: The agency provides a comprehensive library of over 4,000 topics, online forums, self-tests, videos, and financial calculators.
- Offender Re-entry Services: BHOA assists individuals returning to the community after prison. Services include housing assistance, clothing assistance, family reunification, and behavior healthcare services.

Organizational Details

BHOA identified and understood that there was a need for behavior healthcare services in the community. The need was identified as early intervention (family education, training, and support); appropriate care (available interventions that are shown to be effective for diagnosis or disorder); and keeping families together. Early intervention is likely to be more effective when provided at the onset of a problem behavior or situation rather than later (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2019).

According to Participant 5, BHOA's vision is to strive to exceed customer expectations through progressive, proactive, and ongoing staff development, promoting health and well-being while advocating access to healthcare services

BHOA's service brochure stated that the organization's mission is dedicated to promoting high-quality, creative, cost-effective approaches for providing current and emerging behavioral healthcare. The organization pledges to develop and conduct innovative EAPs, managed behavioral healthcare, and work/life services designed to meet the needs of individuals, corporations, management, and organized labor on a regional and national level

Core Values

The following core values for BHOA were examined in this capstone:

1. People: BHOA respects the dignity of each person and values every person's participation in the design, choice, and provision of services to meet their unique needs.
2. Community: BHOA believes that services and support options should be designed to meet the needs of each person.
3. Commitment: BHOA believes in the people it serves, its vision and mission, its workforce, and the community at large.
4. Excellence: It is the belief of BHOA that services and supports must be provided in an ethical manor, that established outcome measures are met, and that goals and behaviors are based on clinical research and best practices.
5. Accountability: According to Participant 1BHOA believes that it has a responsibility to be a good steward in the efficient and effective use of all human, fiscal, and material resources. As such, it is dedicated to the continuous evaluation and improvement of behavioral health.

According to BHOA's website, the organization is trusted by hundreds of clients around the country. It customizes solutions for each individual enterprise to optimally meet the needs of over one million employees while providing strong value. BHOA works across all industries and business sizes, from large multinational manufacturers to small independent businesses.

Company Achievements

BHOA is one of a small number of EAP firms that has twice been awarded a full three-year accreditation from the CARF. Its staff members' average experience exceeds 17 years in clinical and account services. BHOA has proven its commitment to its customers by having been awarded the coveted Sloan Award, and it is a two-time winner of the 101 Best and Brightest Award. For BHOA, maintaining accreditation is vital, as it relays to its consumers that the organization meets standards characteristic of safety, staff competency, and overall quality care and services. Accreditation also signifies that the program meets and follows required rules to hold and maintain licensure from its state licensing agency.

Organizational Background and Context

Recently BHOA experienced an abrupt, unplanned loss of leadership when the VP of clinical operations passed away. Significant in a list of her work achievements, she wrote the bid for the organization to be granted the biggest government contract in its history. Six months after being granted the contract and one month before the contract went live, the organization found itself without the person it relied on to run the program. BHOA had no succession plan in place and there was internal conflict and confusion related to how best to fill the position.

With the largest contract in its history at stake, BHOA had to regroup while dealing with grieving employees, an interrupted project team, and the need to answer the following critical questions: How will we continue to provide quality service during this time of transition? How can BHOA continue to provide quality service without

leadership? What happens to an organization when it sustains a loss of this nature? This study provided BHOA with a better understanding of themes, challenges, and opportunities related to its loss of a senior leader.

According to the Client Services section of BHOA's website, it is located in the metropolitan area of a midwestern U.S. city and is trusted by hundreds of clients around the country. BHOA extends services to large multinational manufacturers and to small independent businesses. Clients range from blue- and white-collar employees seeking EAP services to returning citizens needing the Offender Success Program, which is governed by the state's department of corrections. BHOA is guided by the requirements of its state's Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs and also works in alignment with the Mental Health Code Act 258 of 1974. The contract to serve returning post-prison citizens requires that the organization adhere to the policies under the contract for the state's department of corrections.

Summary and Transition

BHOA has grown from a small counseling office that provided individual, group, and family outpatient counseling services to a robust multi-faceted organization that extends services to large multinational manufacturers and to small independent businesses. In the wake of an unexpected loss of leadership, the company found itself at a significant loss. Being a service provider to over 2,000 clients nationwide, the company had to be able to move forward during a time of loss and continue to provide the quality services that had become its hallmark and brand.

Section 2 seeks to answer the research question, “How does a behavioral health organization manage change in leadership that is unplanned and abrupt?” It also provides specific, conclusive, and employable data relative to the research question, correlating insights from comparable organizations that have sustained similar losses. The supporting literature provided the foundation for the study and contributed research from credible researchers that aids in identifying gaps in research or conflicts from other studies. Finally, succession planning is defined and an overview of its importance and history is given.

Section 2: Background and Approach – Leadership Strategy and Assessment

Introduction

In this study, I aimed to discover how a behavioral health organization manages unplanned and abrupt changes in leadership. Many stages are involved in the reshaping process that happens during an organizational shift. In the field of behavioral health, maintaining quality standards is a priority during any such shift (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Factors that affect the course of the change include technological innovations, demographics, professionalism, and competition, which can also assist in shaping the organization's adaptation process (Cascio & Montealegre, 2016). Change of leadership and management within the behavioral healthcare arena is, by nature of what is involved in the dynamics of change itself, a difficult process, but a successful organizational change can be attained with a proper management system (Al-Abri, 2007). Herein lies the reason for a clear and specific understanding of the importance of sustainability, which refers to holding the gains of an improvement project even in the face of staff and organizational turnover (Silver et al., 2016).

In the following subsections, I provide an overview of the relevant academic literature, with a focus on the importance and benefits of succession planning. Additionally, the sources of evidence used in this case study and BHOA's leadership strategy are discussed. The analytical strategy for this case study is presented and addresses the data-collection methodology and types of data used.

Supporting Literature

When an organization's leader exits unexpectedly through circumstances like retirement, resignation, or death, organizations must adjust, even in the wake of grief, to an emotional and sometimes abrupt change in the normal and expected "order of things." To examine this phenomenon, I conducted a review of literature on the effects of leadership loss and the importance and benefits of succession planning. Multiple databases were accessed for this review, including but not limited to Walden University Library Pro-Quest, Google Scholar, Research Gate, and Sage Publications. Peer-reviewed sources were emphasized as primary sources of information. Keywords used for the literature review included *leadership loss, unexpected loss, leadership death, behavioral health succession planning, succession planning, behavior leadership,* and *leadership transition.*

A crisis in an organization can be attributed to many things, the sudden loss of leadership being one. During this time of sudden loss in an organization, remaining leaders are caught off guard, yet with the world watching, they are expected to say (and do) something to manage the situation (James & Wooten, 2008). One of the many consequences of an organization mishandling a crisis like sudden loss is its reputation being damaged for years to come. James and Wooten (2008) defined organizational crisis and provided six competencies that, if followed, could lead an organization successfully through a critical time (see Table 2).

Table 2

Crisis Competencies

Crisis type	Signal detection	Preparation & prevention	Damage control & containment	Business recovery	Reflection & learning
Accident	Sense-making	Issue-selling	Decision-making	Promoting organizational resilience	Post-crisis activity
Employee-centered	Perspective-taking	Organizational agility	Communicating		
Product safety & health incidents			Risk-taking		
Scandals					

Unexpected Leadership Loss

The Center for Creative Leadership (2006) presented information to promote a greater understanding of adaptability and the cognitive, emotional, and dispositional flexibility leadership change requires. This information also supports the premise that when the unexpected change is the result of death, leaders should be aware of emotions connected to grieving employees. Kell (2010) provided an example of successful change in leadership by providing an in-depth discussion of how Coca-Cola's succession strategy helped change the company's leadership and shaped the future of the company. Other major organizations, such as Apple and Nintendo, have also demonstrated the importance of planning for successful changes in leadership.

Mullaney (2017) examined the death of Apple founder Steve Jobs, whose death left other industry leaders and consumers wondering how Apple would perform without him. Before Jobs died, he stepped out of his position to allow his company and investors time to prepare for business without his leadership. Jobs's predecessor Tim Cook

displayed a management style that was much more low-key than Jobs's had been. However, both his style and the substance of his leadership were contiguous with that of Apple's founder, which is how the company managed to sustain growth during leadership change and become the most valuable company in the world (Mullaney, 2017).

Rosin (2015) shared that the unexpected death of president and CEO of Nintendo in July 2015 took the company by surprise, discussing how the company operated without an official leader and was guided by what Japanese law refers to as representative directors. When a CEO passes away unexpectedly, succession planning becomes an even bigger challenge. An organization must be ready to respond once it encounters changes in its environment. Many organizations fail to survive because they are unable (or unwilling) to adapt to changes in the environment, and they end up being assimilated into other organizations (Rosin, 2015).

Unexpected loss of a leader is tough for an organization and even worse when there is no plan in place (Santora & Sarros, 2012). In the absence of a succession plan, staff and remaining leaders often enter a phase of limbo or a period of no growth, which can cause the organization to lose future opportunities (Santora & Sarros, 2012). Further research has shown that promoting staff members who do not possess the skills to be successful in their new roles causes high stress and feelings of being overwhelmed, which results in them stepping down from their new positions (Rishel, 2013).

Succession Planning

Defined

Harter (2008) explained that succession planning should be addressed at the inception of startup or in the business-planning process because it is critical for sustaining a flourishing business, yet it is often not taken as such by competent, logical business owners. White (2018) identified succession planning as an organizational process that builds a pool of trained workers who will, in the event of employee or leadership loss, have the necessary skills to fill vacant roles. Once potential successors are identified, the organization focuses on developing these individuals' necessary skills, knowledge, and expertise so that in the event of leadership loss, they will be able to transition into the necessary roles. Highlighting that a change in leadership can be a result of more than a resignation, succession planning makes certain there is a strategy in place for someone to step in, get promoted, and assume the former leader's duties without a loss in productivity and morale (Day, 2007).

Wallin, Cameron, and Sharples (2005) described succession planning as a process an organization uses to assure necessary and appropriate future leadership by employing a pipeline of talent that has the capabilities of sustaining the organization's goals without interruption. Succession planning does not preclude bringing in talent from outside the organization. Through the definition of succession, the authors divulged that succession planning is not a job guarantee or entitlement, but when paired with targeted and intentional leadership development, succession planning can provide opportunities while

maintaining the focus that not every participant in succession-planning activities will move into a leadership role (Wallen et al., 2005).

Francis (2019) viewed succession planning as one of the best methods of promotion and retention within an organization and defined it as an organizational process that identifies and develops internal employees who possess the potential to fill key leadership positions should the need, planned or unplanned, arise. Succession planning increases the availability of skilled employees by focusing on the right person, not just the available person. Francis explained that succession planning is framed around the idea of recognizing potential leaders within the organization and pairing them with existing leaders for professional development and mentoring so they are available should the need arise.

History

The origins of succession as a research topic continues to be up for debate. Kesner and Sebora (1994) published a book documenting the past, present, and future of succession planning. It provided a review of the research history for succession planning, including the phases and categories of research on succession planning and a detailed investigation of what a successor is. Noted case studies questioned the role of Grusky throughout the 1960s. However, Prior to Grusky's work, noted knowledge of succession planning was the result of individual case studies (Kesner & Sebora, 1994).

Researchers have investigated succession planning beyond the CEO level and the involvement of the board of directors. Rothwell (2001) noteed that Fayol (1841-1925), the French pioneer of management history, was among the first to recognize and

document the universal organizational need for succession planning. Succession is part of every company's future. However, it remains unknown when it will happen and when the organization should start preparing.

Importance

The impact on an organization's progression of service could be devastating if a successor is suddenly required and none has been identified (Henderson, 2006). Swensen, Gorringe, Caviness, and Peters (2015) stated that successors should be developed using the organization's mission and vision. Succession planning is key to the stability of organizational leadership and helps ensure a seamless transition from the leader leaving the organization to the incoming candidate (Calareso, 2013; Cole & Harbour, 2015). Swensen et al. concluded that leadership development should not be separated from the conditions and culture of organizational design.

Sources of Evidence

The following sources of evidence were used to support the research. Semistructured interviews with individuals holding leadership positions within BOHA allowed me to gather pertinent data. Interviewing senior management also allowed me to examine how their vison of leadership aligned with the organization's vision. For the purposes of this research, only approved senior-status leadership and program directors were interviewed. All participants were interviewed using a standard set of interview questions (see Appendix A).

Exploring BHOA's employee files provided insight into job responsibilities and job performance. Information contained in each employee file also outlined individual

education and work histories, which assisted me in determining qualifications for internal job promotions, succession planning, and best utilization of employee skills during a leadership shift. Notes (secondary data) contained in employee files were also used to determine how employees behaved during and reacted to change situations, capitalizing on strengths and avoiding undue pressure and stress.

Meeting minutes and historical articles contributed to the validity of the research topic because they were used to establish a timeline of change and any shifts in service quality, as well as the causes associated with them. I also conducted a review of the organization's quality reports, which are generated through an external survey source. The quality report reviewed before and after loss of leadership to substantiate the maintenance of quality service during the abrupt loss of leadership. Lastly, a document review allowed me to gather more comprehensive historical information without interrupting stakeholders. The use of Walden University's library and Google Scholar assisted me in finding peer-reviewed scholarly articles relevant to the research topic, using key words such as, *leadership transition, unexpected leadership loss, succession planning,* and *the importance of succession plans.*

Leadership Strategy and Assessment

Coleman (2017) found that effective leadership is important to successful organizational change. Successful leaders communicate the what, why, and how when change is foreseen. Organizational managers should listen to their employees' opinions and watch the changes that often loom in the background of organizations (Coleman, 2017).

The organization implements strategy and identifies strategic challenges by using a set of processes and practices that are aligned with the organization's mission and vision (D.R., personal communication, June 3, 2019). At the beginning of the year, BHOA's CEO and his leadership team meet to update corporate strategy and clarify the company's strategic vision (D.R., personal communication, June 3, 2019). After the annual meeting is held, divisional leaders meet in a similar manner to discuss assigned strategic responsibilities and associated challenges. Throughout the year, the separate teams and departments meet for corporate communication, knowledge sharing, compliance updates, and program success (D.R., personal communication, June 3, 2019). Annually in May, the human resource department conducts employee performance reviews and assists in professional goal setting and professional development programs (R.D., personal communication, June 11, 2019).

Clients and Population Served

BHOA is trusted by hundreds of clients around the country (BHOA Client Services, 2019). The organization extends services to large multinational manufacturers and to small independent businesses. Clients range from blue- and white-collar employees seeking EAP services to returning citizens needing to receive services through the Offender Success Program, which is governed by the state's department of corrections (BHOA Client Services, 2019).

BHOA receives all its clients for EAP services through a referral process. It enters into a contract with an employer so it can provide its employees with mental health services. Typically, the employees call to receive mental health services over the phone

or they come into the office. When a client calls, a customer service representative records the client's identifying information and reason for referral. From that point, the client is then transferred to a therapist who conducts a full interview. (F.S., personal communication, June 19, 2019)

BHOA uses electronic medical records (EMRs) to record all communication with clients and any services provided to clients. For the organization's EAP services, clients are engaged initially through a telephone interview. In some cases, the therapeutic relationship can continue telephonically; however, there are cases when a client may have to come into the office to continue the therapeutic process. The EMR tracks the services being provided and ascertains whether the employee can receive adequate services or if he or she needs to be referred out for further assistance. Using the EMR also makes it easier to track progress and print reports for requesting employers. (Participant 3)

Offender Success Program clinicians visit the offender in prison 90 days before his or her release to conduct a face-to-face needs assessment. Fifteen to 30 days before release, the same clinician will meet with a transition team. This meeting is held via video conference at the local parole office. Along with the clinician, attendees include the parolee and his or her assigned parole officer. The purpose of the meeting is to identify services needed and provide the parolee with resources that will make his or her return to the community as seamless as possible. After all services are complete, clients receive a written quality survey in the mail, the purpose of which is to gather information from the client relative to the quality of services he or she received. This also assists the company with tracking outcomes. (Participant 4)

Offender Success Program clients are received directly from the department of corrections. Once an offender is released from a regional prison, the organization is given a referral. According to an informal department handbook, if services are needed, the employee then enters the offender's identifying information in the EMR system and refers him or her to the representative who governs the particular service needed. Services are recorded in another database used for tracking by the department of corrections. (Participant 4)

Analytical Strategy

Over a 6-week span of time, personal interviews and various data-collection methods were used to collect data relative to the research topic. Interviewing senior management provided an opportunity to identify leadership's vison and how it aligned with the overall organizational vision. Senior management consists of the VP of the company, VP of clinical operations (deceased), community coordinator (acting program manager), chief financial officer (CFO), director of information technology, and the human resources director. Each interviewee contributed information by answering the following questions:

- How do you think any abrupt change in your organization can affect your work? Please elaborate.
- Sometimes an employee can get used to a certain kind of leadership. Do you think the abrupt change in such leadership can affect employees? Please elaborate.

- How do you think management can best manage change in an organization and why?
- Would you prefer the status quo in an organization or constant changes and why?
- How can a shift in leadership affect the program team?
- How does a loss of leadership impact the quality of care?
- What, if any, strategies do your organization currently have in place for leadership change?
- Has this organization ever suffered an unexpected loss of leadership? If yes, how was it handled?
- How is the success of your program measured?

Before starting the interview process, I asked BHOA's VP for permission to interview senior staff and gain access to current and historical corporate correspondence and meeting minutes. The director of human resources was asked for permission to view employee files and documents for the purpose of this research. Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I submitted copies of the interviews back to the interviewees for a member check to verify the validity of the information. Once data were collected, they were uploaded into NVivo, coding software that aids in the qualitative analysis of research data.

A qualitative data analysis was conducted by developing codes using open coding. Using manual coding, data were organized into folders of similar themes, relationships, and patterns. Themes were identified by paying attention to phrases and

word repetitions from interviews with senior leaders. Primary and secondary data comparison was gathered from employee files. Lastly, the data were summarized to link the findings to the research topic.

The goal of this research was to recommend procedures for effective leadership change in behavioral health facilities. In addition, it can help identify alternative courses to incorporate change in the wake of varying situations and factors (Kraft et al., 2018).

Summary and Transition

For the leadership of an organization to maintain its standards while going through an abrupt change, employees should not be afraid to face challenges they have never encountered, and they should feel supported throughout the process. Organizational executives must communicate the ways in which changes will be initiated. At the same time, managers within the organization should avoid and mitigate conflict caused by the changes that might affect their goals. Organizational leaders should be ready for internal change and ensure their staff can adapt to emergent and consequential environmental changes.

Section 3 provides an analysis of the organization and details how it acknowledges its employees and creates a supportive work environment. In Section 3, I also outline how BHOA collects, shares, and stores knowledge assets.

Section 3: Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management Components of the Organization

Introduction

In Section 2, I explored the current research literature on maintaining quality standards during an abrupt change in leadership, and I explained the current study methodology in detail. Often, abrupt leadership changes in healthcare organizations can cause confusion and internal resistance, which results in a decline in service quality. Recent failings in the health and social care systems have highlighted the need for higher levels of clarity about the responsible party when identifying and responding to failures in quality (Cokpekin & Knudsen, 2012).

Qualitative research methods have a long history in the social sciences and deserve to be an essential component in health and health service research (Ranney, Choo, Garro, Sasson, & Guthrie, 2015). The purpose of qualitative research is to make sense of patterns among words to provide the reader with meaningful data without compromising its richness and dimensionality (Leung, 2015). To support the validity of this study, a qualitative research method was used in the form of semistructured interviews with senior leaders. Using a grounded theory approach, the following themes were identified: leadership absence, staff resistance, and lack of training and communication within.

Section 2 included data-collection methods, ethics, study validity, and reliability methods. Research methods included BHOA's historical and current written leadership plans. I conducted face-to-face interviews with current individuals in senior leadership

roles and reviewed the human resource management's written hiring practices for the purpose of answering the following questions:

- What organizational practices can be put into place that will assist the organization with maintaining quality standards when there is no leadership present?
- How does the behavior health organization measure performances pre- and post-leadership changes?
- What is the current practice for managing change internally?

Analysis of the Organization

A supportive work environment plays a significant role in the establishment of an employee's learning process (Attiq, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2017). Participant 5 conferred that one of BHOA's values is its designation as one of the Best and Brightest places to work. Work environment and external social work environment, consisting of satellite locations such as parole offices and community partner locations, are noted sources of critical influence on employee innovation (Cokpekin & Knudsen, 2012).

BHOA uses practices that assist in creating a warm, inviting, and effective workforce environment. Internally, when an employee goes above his or her regular scope of work, the employee is recognized with a Going the Extra Mile award, which is the organization's way of publicly recognizing an employee's effort to go above and beyond his or her regular assigned duties. As a token of appreciation for outstanding performance, the employee has an opportunity to pick from an assortment of gift cards that range from dining to home improvement. Another way BHOA shows employees

appreciation is by hosting annual summer picnics for the employees and their families, a holiday party, and occasional free lunches. Participant 5 said that employee birthdays and work anniversaries are also celebrated.

BHOA offers mental health days and encourages work-life balance for all employees. Work-life balance is described as meaningful daily achievement and enjoyment in each of the four life quadrants (work, family, friends, and self), all of which are important in the field of behavioral healthcare and in the work environment (Short & Palmer, 2003). As indicated, BHOA's management operates with an open-door policy, offering team members a neutral space to discuss their concerns relative to the work environment or team member dynamics. Participant 3 shared that it is management's responsibility to follow up personally on any concerns their team members bring them, with satisfactory resolution as the primary goal.

In many organizations, the board of directors is responsible for long-term decision making and corporate strategies that should be implemented by management in order to achieve the company's objectives (Camillus, 2017). For BHOA, effective management of operations is coordinated by key performance measures, which measure the performance of a process. If performance measures are met and if program goals are attained, it is an indication to senior-level directors that management is effective. Participant 3 indicated that quarterly meetings are held to ensure programs are in alignment with specific program goals by matching outcomes with key performance measures.

BHOA improves its key services and work processes by offering additional programs that rely on outside community partners to reach its program goals. In this case,

to improve services, the company holds what they refer to as "vendor audits," which allow it to track its community program progress. Participant 4 indicated that the audits also help identify barriers to program success.

Knowledge Management

Using key performance measures allows the organization to keep its overall objective at the frontline of all decision making. It is important for senior leadership to know who is responsible for monitoring specific program measurements. When necessary improvements are identified, senior-level management then meets with program leaders to discuss program needs and determine if program realignment is needed. Effective use of knowledge is crucial to an organization's survival and success. Knowledge assets can be inclusive of both explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge (Smith, 2001).

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) of 1996 requires that any information pertaining to individual consumers must by stored, shared, and managed following HIPAA rules. The security rule requires entities to maintain reasonable and appropriate administrative, technical, and physical safeguards for protecting electronic personal health information (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003). To ensure compliance, BHOA establishes organizational guidelines for disclosure of client information in alignment with HIPAA privacy rules.

The use of an EMR program is beneficial not only for the organization but also for individual users. Organizationally, EMRs allow for the safe transmission and storage of consumer information, while the user benefits from a reduction in clerical errors,

which allows safer care of clients. Other forms of knowledge management consist of what the organization refers to as its main database.

An informal employee handbook documents that the main database is used to store customer data processed by front-end consumer service representatives, sales, and marketing departments. The resulting knowledge can then be stored, transferred, and shared across the organization using technology tools such as email and video conferencing.

Summary and Transition

In this section, I detailed the importance of building a supportive workforce to achieve high performance and ensure effective workforce operations. The behavioral health organization in this study takes pride in being classified as one of the brightest and best places to work in the state. In order to maintain this distinction, the organization recognizes how important it is to maintain a healthy work atmosphere. Employee engagement strategies have proven to reduce staff turnover, improve productivity and efficiency, retain customers at a higher rate, and increase profits. A healthy workplace gives employees a level of comfort, confidence, and security that allows them to communicate openly and freely, thus becoming more productive, which in turn, aids in the maintenance of quality services.

In Section 4, I present how the data were collected, coded, and analyzed. It includes the presentation of findings along with themes that resulted from interviews with senior leadership. The implications for behavioral health organizations and the social change impact are also discussed.

Section 4: Results, Analysis, Implications, and Preparation of Findings

Introduction

In this qualitative case study, I examined how the lack of succession planning affected a behavior health organization during a phase of abrupt and unplanned leadership loss. This study was conducted at a behavioral healthcare organization located in the midwestern United States. The organization recently experienced an unexpected loss of leadership when its VP of clinical operations died suddenly. The VP had had a tenure of 30 years with the organization and was responsible for two major areas of the organization. Prior to the VP's untimely death, the organization had been awarded the largest contract in its 40-year history. As a result of this unexpected leadership loss, the organization was left without one of its most valued senior leaders and a brand new program with no direction.

The impact of sudden leadership loss and the importance of succession planning in behavioral healthcare was the focus of this research. To effectively address the research topic, qualitative data were gathered by conducting semistructured interviews with individuals holding senior leadership positions within the behavior health organization. Interviews were held in mutually convenient locations where the participants could be relaxed and poised to respond to questions. Interviews were held over a 3-week time span, and each interview session lasted 30 to 40 minutes. To explore the research topic fully, the organization's employee files, meeting minutes, survey results, and historical articles were reviewed. The selected sources of data were reviewed to substantiate and support data collected through the interviewing process.

In the following section, I describe how data were collected, coded, and analyzed. I conclude the presentation of findings with recommendations for the behavioral health organization that can assist them with identifying the need for succession planning and suggestions for implementation.

Analysis, Results, and Implications

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the interpretation of data that have been collected and involves organizing and combining data from various sources for the purpose of testing and supporting research. Data analysis includes compiling, dissembling, and reassembling data using specific analytic software (Yin, 2014). For this study, I was the primary data-collection instrument, and I performed all interviews and document analysis. I chose the triangulation method for data analysis to compare data collected from interviews, and I reviewed journal articles for the purposes of identifying trends among organizations that sustained an unexpected loss of leadership, both with and without a succession plan.

Researchers use triangulation to address potential failings of a selected research method, further credibility and reliability, and enhance trustworthiness of data (Abdalla, Oliveira, Azevedo, & Gonzalez, 2018; Yin, 2018). Qualitative research includes the organization and interpretation of data and the replicability of raw data (Yin, 2014). I used NVivo data analysis software to merge data gathered from participants of the study and collected corporate documents. I used the data analysis software during my qualitative research study to organize, sort, and code data to be analyzed.

Data analysis for this study began with the review and transcription of corporate documents, including meeting agendas, meeting minutes, financial statements, and other documents relative to this study. I also used the verbatim textual documentation of interview recordings for the purpose of gathering an in-depth understanding of the research problem. The analysis of data was conducted only on responses gathered by conducting interviews and reviewing corporate documents. Names of study participants have been concealed to maintain confidentiality and honor the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board. Johnson (2015) confirmed that NVivo software provides coding, analysis, identification of themes, and storage to assist in gathering an understanding of a specific phenomenon.

Results

The following research question guided this study: Sudden leadership loss and the importance of succession planning in behavioral health. Leadership succession planning is crucial to the continuity of the comprehensive vision of a healthcare organization (Ellinger, Trapskin, Black, Kotis, & Alexander, 2014). The findings from the study analysis revealed that the behavior health organization did not have an active succession plan. Additionally, the participants all agreed that although there were successors in place for alternate positions, the current leadership loss left a significant void in the organization due to the newness of the affected program. Participant 1 stated,

> I became overwhelmed with anxiety after the loss. We had just begun to put this program together and had not yet created policies to govern the program. Finding

leadership was of priority; however, holding the program team together was just as important.

I used semistructured interviewing and data from the organization's employee files, client satisfaction surveys, and other relative documents to gain an understanding of how the loss of leadership affected the organization's climate and performance.

Study participants consisted of five senior leaders from EAP and the Offender Success Program, all of whom held positions in the same physical location. The participants' professional and educational backgrounds varied from clinical to sales and business, all with graduate-level degrees. Of the five participants, tenure within their individual professional fields ranged between 8 and 20 years. After obtaining approval from the Institutional Review Board, I arranged interviews with each leader. Interviews were initiated by a letter of introduction to the proposed research, a brief explanation of my role as the researcher, and their proposed contributions to the study.

Data were collected from the participants using semistructured interviews and organizational documents the BHOA shared with me. During the interview, each participant was asked a series of nine open-ended questions (see Appendix A). Upon completion of the interviews, the recorded data were transcribed, and a printed transcription of the interview was forwarded to each interviewee for review of accuracy. Once data had been absorbed, they were entered into NVivo 12 Plus for analyzing and coding.

Using data analysis and coding themes, I identified the following five major themes: (a) communication, (b) professional development, (c) employee resistance, (d)

leadership support, and (e) work environment. Figure 2 displays the recurring words identified by study participants that can be used while formulating a plan for succession. The data collected from this research study aligned with the transformational leadership theory identified by Burns (1978), who first introduced transforming leadership in his research on political leaders, although this term is now used in organizational psychology, as well.

According to Burns (1978), transformational leadership creates change in the life of people and organizations. It redesigns perceptions and values and changes employees' expectations and aspirations. Transformational leaders motivate followers through idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. Transformational leaders also encourage followers to come up with new ways to challenge the status quo and alter the environment to support being successful (Bass, 1985).

Figure 2. Word cluster of top 21 recurring words contained in this study.

Theme 1: Communication. The first theme presented from the data was communication, the lack of communication, and its importance. The most reoccurring words within the node related to this theme were *opportunities*, *communicating*, and *open* (see Table 3). Communication helps employees better understand impending change. According to Participant 5,

> Because of the type of immediate loss our organization sustained, there was no time to prepare our staff. When the loss occurred, we immediately met to discuss how to effectively communicate how we would handle transition of management and assist our grieving staff during the time of loss.

Table 3

Word Frequency Related to Communication

Word	Frequency of use
Communicating	15
Vital	8
Open	11

Zhu and Manjarrez (2017) agreed that transparency in succession planning yields stronger employee engagement and positivity-influencing behavior. Management theories support the idea of open communication within the workplace, and these management theories are central to performance in any organization. Managers should strive to create an environment in which others are motivated to put in their best (Bhagrava, 2003). Participant 4 stated,

> We had not experienced a loss of this nature since my tenure. We are a behavioral health organization; our first priority was the mental health of our own

employees. The immediate goal was to meet the emotional needs of our staff through communication that provided reassurance and emotional support.

While conducting interviews with the study participants, I noted the similarity in how participants appeared to be committed to the importance of open communication and how it would increase employee performance and retention. I also observed each leader's positive attitude as it related to being open to internal change. A harmonious work environment allows employees to increase their levels of effort and align their actions with the organization's goals (Hill, Hawkins, Ferris, & Weitzman, 2001). The best way for employees to know that an employer values them and is vested in their growth within the organization is to tell them, communicating to them that they have a place to grow and be challenged along the way while providing them with advancement opportunities.

Communicating explicitly shows employees the transparency of the organization, which is something valued greatly by upcoming leaders (Kook, 2015). According to Participant 3, "If the organization were to allow leaders to communicate more openly with subordinates, information about impending changes, we could combat the high level of resistance to unplanned change." Participant 4 agreed: "Communication is vital, and there has been a noticeable difference in our environment since we have made it a requirement for upper-level leadership to provide an open door to the members of their departments." Finally, Participant 5 added, "By providing an open door for employees to communicate with their program leaders, the organization's goal is to improve working relationships, which will foster an environment where employees are open to discuss interest in other opportunities that are forthcoming."

A breakdown in organizational communication can quickly lead to internal conflict, when in fact, the only issue may be a misunderstanding about another party's expectations (McQuerrey, 2019). Open communication is an essential key to succession planning and the role of leadership in it (Amzah, 2009). During our interview, Participant 3 reported contributing to the efficiency of communication during the time of loss, indicating that several team members from the affected department complained about what they referred to as ineffective methods of communication from acting management. Participant 3 commented that the company had experienced a temporary breakdown of communication because the CEO was out of the country and had to be conferred with before any decisions relative to the change could be made: "We were asked to share minimal information until the appropriate decisions were made."

A leader is identified as an employee that possesses an exceptional skill set and has the potential to step forward and take charge. Leaders understand the importance of communication and the vital role it plays in mentoring others who lack experience: "I am open to new ways to communicate to my team" (Participant #3). Communicating organizational change is difficult. Many attempts at change end in failure, and for some, the failure is due to poor communication and the lack of acceptance by employees.

Theme 2: Professional development. The second theme was professional development; the most frequent words by node within this theme included *professional development*, *training*, *time*, and *resources* (see Table 4). Investing in staff development and training prepares the organization for succession planning and filling in unplanned staffing gaps. Iqbal and Hasmi (2014) confirm this point by stating that education forms

the foundation for human growth and development. Employee development opportunities (both internal and external) are important for employees, as when these opportunities are presented, it indicates the organization cares about its employees and wants them to develop (Antonocopoulou, 2000).

Table 4

Word Frequency Related to Professional Development

Word	Frequency of use
Training	7
Time	5
Resources	5

Organizational success or failure depends significantly on employee performance. Therefore, more organizations are investing more resources in employee development. When an employee's performance increases, the organization becomes more effective (Champathes, 2006). Tuition reimbursement fosters a sense of loyalty between the employee and the employer; by offering this benefit, the employer becomes invested in its employees' success and in turn the employee feels invested in the company. Participant 5 indicated, "Employees stick around longer, which reduces employee turnover and it also saves the organization the time and resources of finding and training new hires."

Research has provided a number of best practices for providing professional development (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Although BHOA does not follow the best practices for providing professional development, it has provided options for employee improvement. The following best practices have been defined for professional development:

- Be of sufficient duration.
- Actively engage participants.
- Include modeling and demonstrating.
- Focus on discipline-specific content.
- Provide support during implementation.
- Encourage collaborative participation.

To gather a greater understanding of how the organization embraced educational and professional development, I reviewed the organization's benefits package for new hires. One benefit outlined in the package was tuition reimbursement and professional development opportunities. The organization offers training and professional development opportunities internally, and it also sets aside reimbursement benefits for staff who are interested in external development. The organization offers multiple reimbursement options: Graduate/professional-level reimbursement is $1,900 per year; undergraduate reimbursement is $1,500; and trainings and seminars carry an annual maximum reimbursement of $900.

The tuition reimbursement option is available to all full-time employees at the start of their employment. Employees are eligible for the full reimbursement rate after 12 months of employment, but they may take advantage of the benefit at a prorated reimbursement rate prior to 12 months of employment with the approval of their department managers.

Another data-collection method was a review of employee files, which allowed me the opportunity to track how many employees actually took advantage of the

education and training opportunities. A total of 1,200 current and previous employee files were available for review dating back to 2016. One-hundred files (50 past employees and 50 current employees) were randomly selected to sample for this review (See Figure 3).

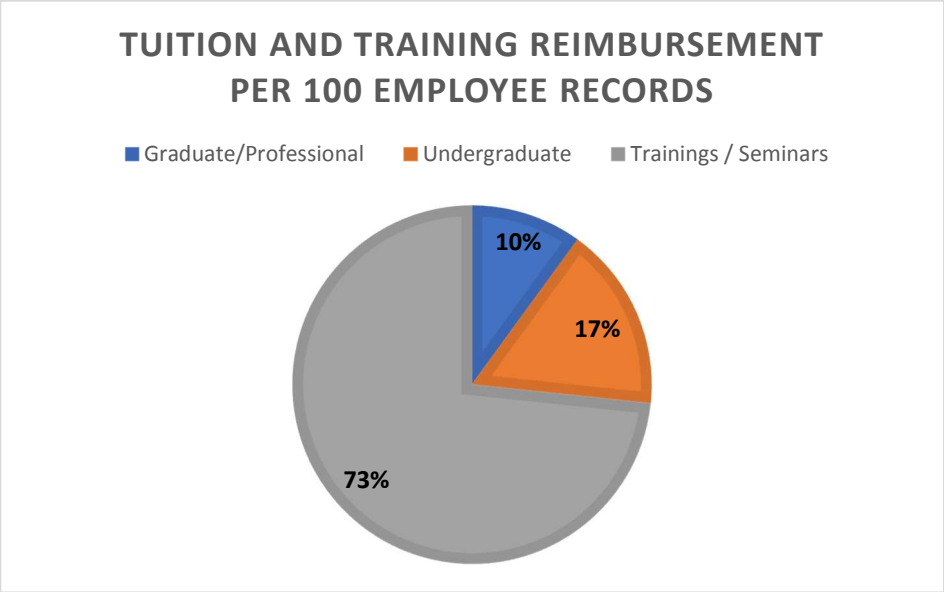

Figure 3. Education and professional training reimbursement.

Of the files selected, 30 employees had utilized the training funds. The data suggested that less than one-third of the organization's employees had accessed the professional development opportunities. These data provide insight into the organization that fills gaps in employee development, which is relative to gaps in the ability to promote qualified candidates internally. Each of the five participants interviewed for this study held the organization in high regard as it related to the company's devotion to the tuition and professional development reimbursement programs. Each of the interviewed participants had taken advantage of one or more of the development programs and reported great benefit from it. Participant #3 commented, "I encourage my staff to take

full advantage of any training opportunities that will assist them in developing professionally."

Theme 3: Employee resistance. The third theme that emerged from participants' responses was employee resistance. The most frequently mentioned words in this node by theme were *resistance*, *change*, and *power* (see Table 5). According to Participant 4, "Any abrupt change in leadership, if not handled in an expeditious way, can cause major team resistance, which in essence is caused by fear." Through times of change, effective leadership has been attributed to successful outcomes, including fewer instances of resistance (Hackman & Johnson, 1996; Yukl, 2002).

Table 5

Word Frequency Related to Employee Resistance

Word	Frequency of use
Resistance	5
Change	5
Power	3

Participant 3 shared that the shift in leadership had had a major effect on specific program teams. Numerous outside vendors reported that there had been a noticeable shift in professionalism from members of the program team supervised by the former VP. Two of the five participants (Participants 3 and 4) had provided temporary leadership to the affected program team. Each of them noted a high degree of resistance among team members; they both also mentioned the loss of an external vendor due to poor follow-up from the project team, which the leaders attributed to internal conflicts among team members.

Zander (1950) defined resistance to change as "behavior which is intended to protect an individual from the effects of real or imagined change" (cited in Dent & Goldberg, 1999, p. 34). The process of change is ubiquitous within any functioning organization. Employee resistance is a critically important contributor to the failure of many well-intended and well-conceived efforts to initiate change within an organization. Participant 3 reported, "My fear moving forward would be losing our contract, which is renewable every year for the next five years, due to the overarching amount of resistance we are currently facing." When an organization's culture is its unwillingness to adapt to change, the business is likely headed for trouble. Participant 5 stated,

> We've done our best to maintain our standards of leadership, keeping in mind that no two leaders are the same. The loss of our VP of clinical operations has left us with tremendous shoes to fill. We want to be sure that the person we hire to continue her leadership role has the same or close to the same leadership style that she had as an effort to prevent resistance from the teams she oversaw.

Quite commonly, effective change management represents a critical organizational competency; however, most change efforts fail to reach their intended objectives (Beer, 2003). Feedback from all five of the participants concluded that the organization had suffered quality setbacks, decreased employee morale, and a change in the overall organizational climate, which they attributed to leadership change resistance.

Without a succession plan, decisions made during a crisis situation could lead to suboptimal operation and a drop in accountability (Stephens, 2016). Data I retrieved from employee files indicated that two of seven members from the affected program team had

been in continuous disagreements and had filed complaints against each other. Organizational atmosphere can be at risk when leadership loss occurs. Morale is damaged greatly when the organization does not have anyone to fill the position who the staff knows and trusts, and this is especially true when the leader lost has proven him or herself repeatedly.

Theme 4: Leadership support. The fourth theme that emerged from participants' responses was leadership support. The most frequently mentioned words in this node by theme were *lack*, *increased*, and *need* (see Table 6). Leadership support at work is recognized as a key resource that can reduce employee strain and increase well-being across multiple stress models (Sianoja et al., 2019). Mitchell et al. (2012) state that leadership support increases the outcome for organizational readiness for change. Participant 5 supported this statement in saying, "We have recognized that since the loss of our clinical operations VP, there has been an increased amount of negative feedback regarding the lack of leadership support."

Table 6

Word Frequency Related to Leadership Support

Word	Frequency of use
Lack	7
Need	9
Power	4

According to Participant 4, "The organization acknowledges the interruption of leadership has increased the need for communication as it relates to expected changes." Reviewing data contained in employee files allowed me to uncover the frequency of

complaints from internal staff that were associated with a lack of leadership support (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Internal employee complaints.

Leadership is explained as the process of influencing people to complete a mission, inspiring their commitment, and improving the organization (Cherry, 2019). A supportive leader communicates effectively with his or her subordinates/colleagues and understands his or her own individual role and responsibility to the company and those he or she leads. Supportive leaders should also maintain open relationships between themselves and their team members. Having an open relationship gives team members a sense of ownership and provides close alignment between them and their team objectives.

Participants in this study were able to describe their leadership styles and how they contributed to their positions and the employees they led. Participants 1 and 2 both explained their styles as autocratic; autocratic leaders are known to provide clear expectations for what needs to be done, when it should be done, and how it should be

done. Historical research demonstrates that decision-making tends to be less creative under autocratic leadership (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1939). Participants 3 and 4 both identified as transactional; transactional leaders perceive the leader-follower relationship as a transaction.

By accepting a position as a member of a project team, an employee agrees to work under the guidance of that team's leader. In most cases, this centers on the employer-employee relationship. One of the main focuses of this leadership style is that it creates clearly defined roles (Hussain et al., 2017). Participant 5 noted his or her leadership style was situational; situational leadership is influenced by the environment and the situation of leadership.

Though leadership styles varied throughout interviewing, I discovered that all the participants shared the organization's vision and maintained that he or she was led by it. Participant 5 commented, "When individuals come into the office to be interviewed for new opportunities, I ask them if they have had an opportunity to research our organization. If they respond 'Yes,' I ask them if they support our vision and why." Participant 3 said,

> One of our biggest hurdles to overcome is to diminish the power struggle that is taking place among one of our project teams and getting the team members to understand the need to work together and rebuild a supportive work atmosphere.

Responding to the interview question, "What, if any, strategies does your organization currently have in place for leadership change?" Participant 5 stated,

> We do not have a formal succession plan written. Quite honestly, until now it has not been warranted. I have always kept a database of qualified candidates, which is sorted by job position. Unfortunately, the most recent loss has come at a time where we were onboarding a new contract and program team.

Theme 5: Work environment. The fifth and final theme that emerged from participants' responses was work environment. The most frequently mentioned words in this node by theme were *environment*, *stress,* and *work* (see Table 7). A healthy work environment provides employees with a sense of safety, as well as physical and mental capabilities to perform their daily responsibilities (Halil, 2012).

Table 7

Word Frequency Related to Work Environment

Word	Frequency of use
Environment	5
Stress	3
Work	4

Participant 5 shared that the organization assures its employees feel a sense of security in the workplace and recognizes employees for various jobs well done. As a result of the positive working environment, the organization has maintained its nomination for the Best and Brightest Award for three consecutive years. According to Participant 5, "We do not offer any incentive for the employees to participate in nominations for the Best and Brightest Places to Work Award. Our work environment is one that is supportive of our employees' personal and professional goals." Participant 1 stated, "My goal was to create an atmosphere that employees feel the warmth of home. I am guided by the values of family and strive to treat employees as such."

When employees communicate effectively with each other, productivity improves because they spend less time complaining and more time focusing on job completion (Quilan, 2001). Participant 3 shared the loss of leadership changed the BHOA work environment: "The work environment became difficult at times to manage, as we had to address employees that were grieving, a program team that had become disassembled, and internal stress of trying to identify a successor where there was no plan."

Consumer-Focused Results

To identify areas of improvement and monitor client satisfaction, BHOA administers quality surveys that assess three program "areas": the EAP, the Offender Success Program, and all other service/program areas combined. Surveys are generated two ways: Consumers receiving services in-house (directly from BHOA) receive automated email surveys, while consumers who receive services through an affiliate provider receive mailed surveys. Mailed surveys are sent with a stamped return envelope and are typically mailed surveys within five days after services are provided. Once the consumer completes the survey, he or she returns it to the affiliate provider, where data is categorized, entered into a spreadsheet, and transferred electronically to BHOA. Both survey versions are identical in content, but the mode and timing of administration differ.

All clients in the Offender Success Program receive services in-house; thus, they receive email-generated surveys. To administer the surveys, the company uses a program called Gainsight PX, survey software that uses program analytics combined with the ability to segment users so surveys are administered at the right time of service to get a true sense of customer sentiment (Gainsight PX, 2019). These surveys are generated 24

to 48 hours after the client receives a service. This automated survey approach allows for efficiency and flexibility in administration.

The Offender Success Program is the only program restricted from being serviced by affiliate providers. Because the Offender Success Program is part of a government contract, only employees that have been lien-cleared by the Department of Corrections have the authority to serve clients under the program. Clients in EAP and the other programs combined may receive services in-house or through affiliate programs. Clients that receive services in-house, such as those in the Offender Success Program, are provided the email-generated survey, and those that receive services through an affiliate are provided surveys through the mail.

Data from all returned surveys are manually entered into an Excel spreadsheet by a member of BHOA's member services department. It should be noted that despite any organization's best efforts to monitor and control for data integrity, the more complex a survey process (i.e., multiple modes of administration, multiple points of data entry, manual data entry and data synthesis), the greater the threat to data validity and reliability. In this instance, while the data from these surveys are informative and likely sufficiently valid to identify gross trends, there are several limitations that should be noted for interpretation purposes:

- Multiple modes of data collection can affect validity and reliability of responses (Bowling, 2005).
- Timing of when a survey is completed relative to the point of service can be a factor in reliability and validity of survey data (Crow et al., 2002).

- Manual data entry without multiple quality assurance checks in place may increase the likelihood of data entry error.
- As with all surveys, potential issues related to missing data and response rates (in the survey as a whole and for specific questions) should be considered during interpretation.

The survey consists of five program-related questions on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 5 being *strongly agree*. It also allows the program participant to give his or her individual suggestions for improvement. Although the qualitative survey data were not reviewed for this study, BHOA should review consumer comments to examine the extent to which they support this study's interpretations. For each program, 300 surveys are sent to randomly selected clients from EAP, the Offender Success Program, and all other programs combined that have received services over a six-month period. For this study, survey data from the six months prior to the loss of the VP and six months following this loss were analyzed (see Table 8).

Table 8

Survey Return Rates

Program name	Preloss surveys mailed	Postloss surveys mailed	Preloss surveys returned	Postloss surveys returned
Employee assistance	300	300	250	200
Offender success	300	300	278	245
Other programs	300	300	285	254

As noted in Table 8, the return rate of the surveys varied across time and programs. Additionally, for the two time periods evaluated, there may have been data missing for one question for EAP and other programs combined. These missing data are not thought to have significantly affected the interpretations offered in this paper due to the small amount of data missing and categories affected. The recorded data are significant to the organization because they compare information both before and after leadership loss, which may highlight shifts in organizational performance. As explained by Participant 4, the lower consumer survey scores coincided with the increase in internal staff complaints during the time following the loss of leadership for the affected programs.

Client satisfaction surveys are instrumental for the organization, and data retrieved provide insight for improving business and ensuring consumer retention. While there is a wealth of data available in BHOA's consumer surveys, this study focused specifically on a visual interpretation of data for the Offender Success Program in comparison to EAP and other programs combined. This specific focus was expected to provide the most salient insight into the potentially negative effects of a sudden loss of leadership and the subsequent absence of a succession plan. The sudden loss of the VP left the Offender Success Program with no direct senior or mid-management leadership, while EAP still had a program manager and the VP played less of a role for other programs combined. Additionally, while the VP certainly had responsibilities throughout the organization, the Offender Success Program had recently received a significant grant with the VP as the primary director of that funding.

Examination of BHOA's consumer survey data suggests that the loss of leadership and subsequent lack of a succession plan had a negative impact on the Offender Success Program. Three questions from the survey were used for analysis: satisfaction with the service provider's professionalism, likelihood of returning for future services, and likelihood of recommending the service others. These questions were selected due to the anticipated effect leadership absence might have on the quality of the program and services provided. Table 9 lists the three questions selected for analysis, the response scale, and the average response score per evaluation period for each program.

Table 9

Consumer Survey Questions Analyzed and Average Response Scores

Program	Q1 pre-loss survey avg.	Q1 post-loss survey avg.	Q2 pre-loss survey avg.	Q2 post-loss survey avg.	Q3 pre-loss survey avg.	Q3 post-loss survey avg.
Offender Success	3.60	2.38	3.53	2.73	3.79	2.60
EAP	3.73	3.66	4.07	4.13*	3.70	3.40
Other Programs	3.07	2.73	3.19	2.63*	3.22	2.89

Q1: How satisfied are you with the professionalism of the service provider?

Q2: How likely are you to return for future service?

Q3: How likely are you to recommend our service to others?

Note. Responses are based on a 1-5 Likert scale, where 1 means "very unsatisfied/unlikely" and 5 means "very satisfied/likely."
*Data may be missing for this question, as the "very unlikely" category was blank.

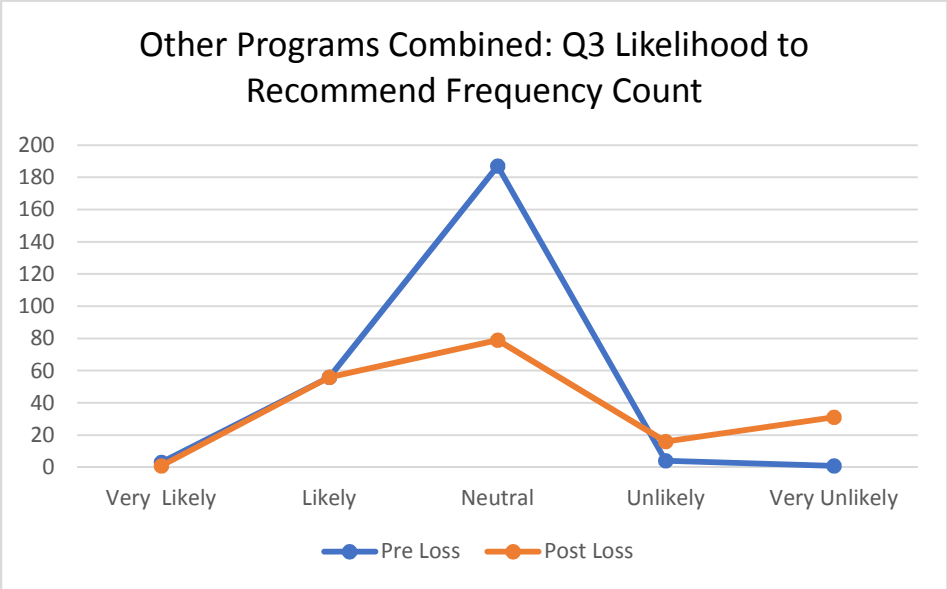

Figure 5. Response shift for likelihood to recommend (other programs combined).

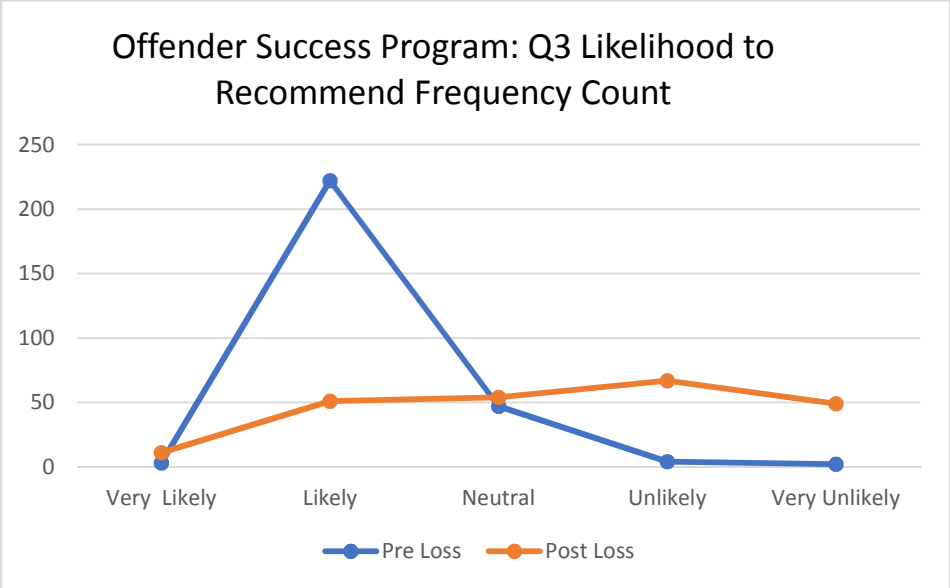

Figure 6. Response shift for likelihood to recommend (Offender Success Program).

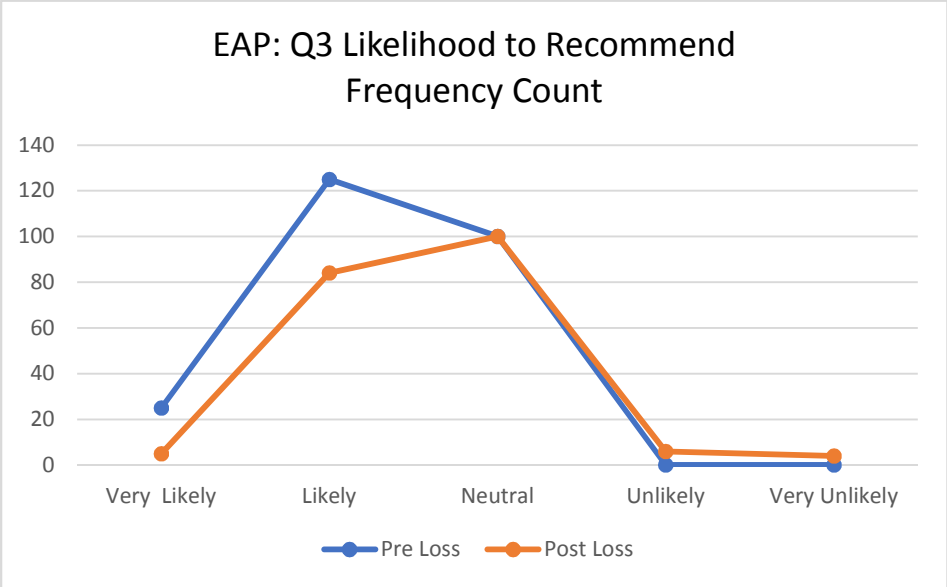

Figure 7. Response shift for likelihood to recommend (EAP).

When visually comparing the average response to each question for each program immediately prior to and immediately following the loss of the VP, it is clear that the Offender Success Program results showed the biggest drop in averages. The advantage of comparing relatively large sample response averages from a small scale is that the averages are fairly stable (not affected by small or random data shifts). In order to supplement this visual analysis of averages, it is helpful to look at the shift in response volume across the Likert scale. Figures 5-7 highlight the shift in responses across the five-point Likert scale for all programs on the question related to likelihood to recommend the service. The response shift between the pre- and post-loss survey data for the Offender Success Program suggests that the difference in rating averages can most likely be attributed to a real shift in how consumers felt about the program.

Offender Success Program. BHOA's Offender Success Program holds an annual returning citizen session designed to provide newly released parolees with resources to

assist them in rejoining their communities. Individuals are required to sign in at the beginning of the session, and after the session ends a BHOA representative secures the attendance documents and manually records the number of attendees for tracking purposes. The annual session did operate under the direction of the VP of clinical operations, and data collected from attendance audit reports indicated a decline in attendance between 2017 and 2018. Data for 2016 occurred prior to the leadership loss, while data recorded for 2018 and 2019 occurred after the leadership loss. Accordingly, Participant 4 indicated that the program was experiencing grief from the loss of its leader, documented resistance among the program team, and concerns for the future of their program.

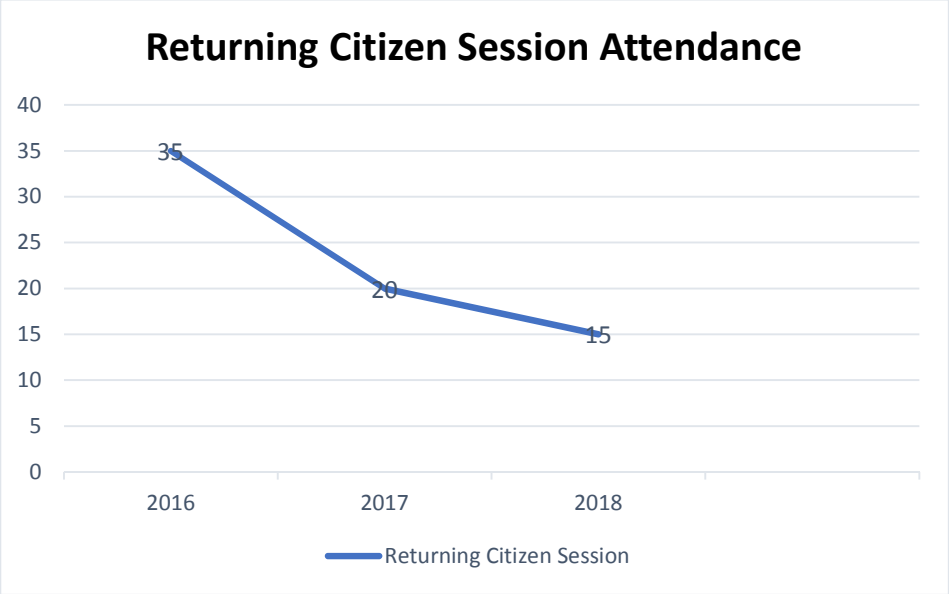

Figure 8. Annual attendance at returning citizen session.

Participant 4 also reported that a breakdown in communication among the program team delayed notices being sent out to parole officers who would refer returning citizens to the annual session.

Workforce-Focused Results

A supportive work environment plays a significant role in the establishment of an employee's learning process (Attiq et al., 2017). BHOA's website states that, one of their values is the designation the organization receives as one of the Best and Brightest Places to Work. Work environment and external social work environment are noted sources of critical influence on employee innovation (Cokpekin & Knudsen, 2012). Information about the organization's workforce environment was found by reviewing the organization's website and interviewing organizational leaders.

Participant 1 revealed that BHOA follows its vision and is guided by core competencies for public health professionals so that it can deliver quality services via a dedicated and qualified workforce. Core competencies are a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for practice as a health professional (Center for Leadership in Public Health Practice, 2013). According to Participant 2, BHOA has identified the following core competencies:

- Diversity and culture,
- Leadership,
- Public health biology,
- Professionalism,
- Program planning, and
- Systems thinking.

To maintain a qualified workforce, BHOA follows what Participant 5 referred to as a standard workforce cycle of engagement (see Figure 7), stating, "We are truly vested

in the success of our employees, which is why we offer and encourage our employees to take advantage of professional development and tuition reimbursement opportunities." Work/life balance enables an employee to adjust his or her schedule to accommodate other aspects of life.

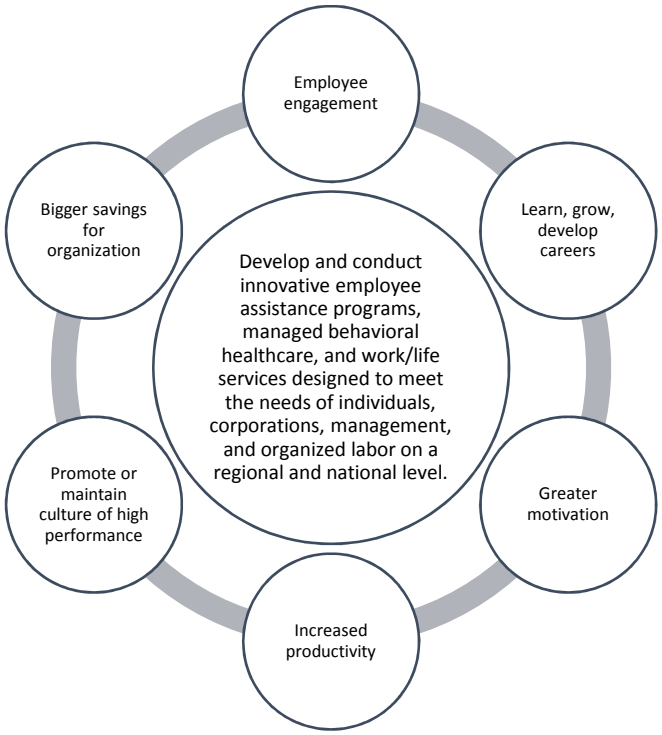

Figure 9. Workforce cycle of engagement.

Employee Development and Training

BHOA provides tuition reimbursement for higher learning and professional development opportunities by reimbursing employees as an annual benefit. Each employee is eligible for up to $1,200 a year for graduate programs; $900 per year for professional development programs, trainings, and seminars; and $1,900 a year for doctoral study. Professional development is a broad, albeit vaguely defined, construct that

underlies an employee's education and training and is intrinsic to professional functioning, or professionalism, throughout an employee's career (Elman, Illfelder-Kaye, & Robiner, 2005). BHOA's staff development and training process uses organizational structures and procedures to facilitate access to education and training.

Trainings are offered on-site and off-site trainings are approved with the stipulation that they are related to the employee's position. The policy aims to provide staff with an avenue to enhance and acquire new skills and knowledge to make a more effective contribution to the organization. According to Participant 5, the responsibility for and coordination of staff development and training falls to the director of human resources, who ensures maintenance of all employees' staff development and training records, a coordinated and organization-wide overview of staff development and training, and the effective implementation of staff development and training through the organization's development and operational plans.

Staff are able to allocate educational funds for various trainings, seminars, or educational programs of their choice annually with the approval of their department manager. According to Participant 5, seminars and continuing education are the most common forms of professional development BHOA employees utilize. An empirical study conducted in a major midwestern hospital found that organizational commitment and organizational support were correlated with employee satisfaction and career development. The study also suggested that when organizations develop their employees, the employees become more committed to the organization (Tansky & Cohen, 2002).

During the interview with Participant 5, he or she revealed that the organization has no formal succession in place for either expected or unexpected departures. The participant clarified BHOA does engage in an informal process for position vacancy. BHOA utilizes the following standard process for planned succession:

1. Identify position vacancy.
2. Identify timeline for change.
3. Identify capabilities for key areas and position.
4. Identify interested employees and external candidates and assess qualifications.
5. Initiate transition.

Participant 5 also mentioned that the organization seeks to advance from within before seeking external candidates, stating,

> It is our first choice to promote from within, which is why we cross-train our employees. However, in some cases we have to extend our search beyond internal candidates and hire externally….Our most recent loss of leadership came at a time whereas the program was new and we had not had the opportunity to establish the program, outline position descriptions, or prepare to train a successor.

The examination of 100 employee files revealed an unexpected finding of several qualified staff that were not in key positions that could benefit the organization. Participant 5 disclosed that employee files are updated with certifications and degree status changes, but until internal opportunities arise, position status remains the same.

Employee files also contained data demonstrating that employees often resigned due to better external opportunities (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Employees' reasons for resignation.

These data are helpful for BHOA to identify gaps in employee development and advancement. When employees recognize there is a lack of advancement or development opportunity, they become less invested in their jobs and seek alternative employment (Krausz, 2002). Participant 2 confirmed the process of how BHOA receives its nomination for being one of the best and brightest companies to work for: "The nomination for best and brightest is an achievement we pride ourselves in. We have managed to maintain this nomination for the past three years and we owe it to our employees."

Employees are asked to complete a survey from the Best and Brightest Companies to Work For program. The survey rates their experiences working with BHOA through questions like the following:

- Would you recommend this company as a good place to work?
- How would you rate the company's leadership?
- How would you rate the working environment?

The results of the survey could not be reviewed as it is conducted by a source outside of BHOA, but the benefit of receiving this award is that BHOA is provided is with access to ratings comparing itself to other behavioral health organizations in the region and nationwide (Best & Brightest, 2019).

Leadership and Governance Results

The board meets annually for strategic planning and new program development. Data analysis was performed on the organization's current and historical meeting minutes, aiming to analyze what was discussed during the meetings. Of particular note was that the organization pays close attention to consumer retention and feedback. The CEO and the board of directors meet biannually unless there is an organizational emergency. Meeting minutes and attendance summaries mentioned that the CEO does not regularly attend strategic planning meetings.

The company's VP divulged that he meets with the CEO and the CFO in a private meeting to propose new business and discuss pending internal changes; then, he determines if his attendance is needed at the actual strategic planning meeting. Data from 2017, 2018, and 2019 annual strategic planning meetings listed areas of discussion as including priority issues, innovation and transformation, advocacy, new business, and training goals. Meeting minutes with senior management and program directors provided data that relate directly to the research topic, including the following points:

- Talent acquisition
- Program leadership
- Employee turnover
- Program needs
- Quality and improvement

The organization is CARF-accredited and operates under the licensing requirements of the state's Bureau of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs. To maintain CARF accreditation, the organization must ensure employees receive annual trainings on HIPPA, leadership and management, personal development, and team building (CARF, 2019). To maintain compliance with the Bureau of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs, the organization must also ensure all of its state-licensed employees adhere to the state's licensing requirements, as well, which requires each employee to renew his or her individual licenses in a timely manner annually. Moreover, licensed clinicians must maintain a clean criminal background, possess a valid driver's license, and complete the necessary continuing education credits each year.

Financial and Marketplace Performance

BHOA reports its fiscal year as October 1-September 30. BHOA's CFO is responsible for the preparation and distribution of all annual financial statements. Aside from the annual strategic planning meeting, the CFO holds an annual meeting with BHOA's VP, directors, and consultants. The following items are included on meeting agendas:

- Current financial status to date

- Proposed changes
- Impact of changes
- Recommendations
- Open discussion

BHOA's 2018 report showed growth that was primarily attributed to the new Offender Success Program in 2017 (see Figure 9). Financial growth increased its value to shareholders and allowed BHOA to invest in service delivery, which provided the opportunity to build a resilient program. The present value increased due to new programs and an increased usage of EAP benefits.

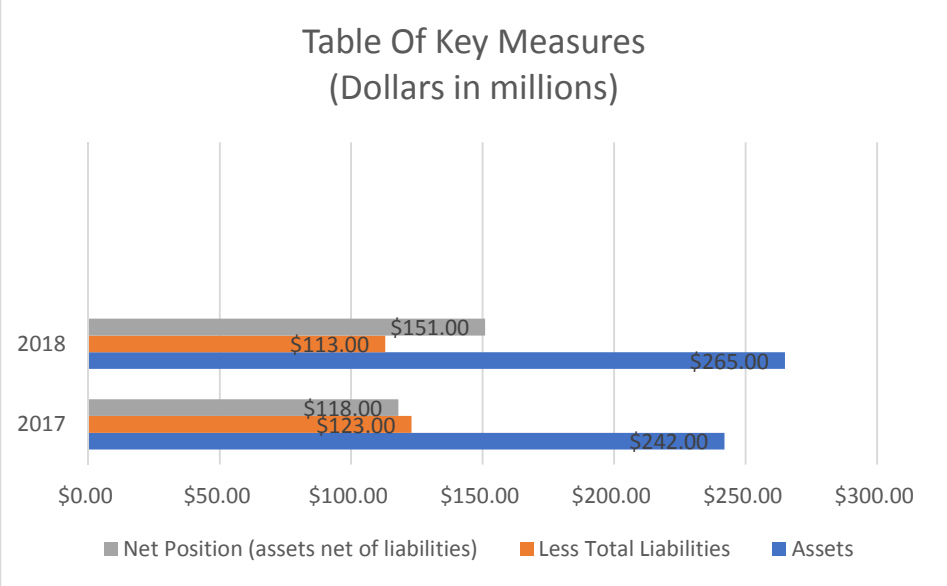

Figure 11. Financial growth.

Organizational Implications

The Offender Success Program operates under a set of key performance measures that primarily consist of recidivism and successful enrollment. The Offender Success program served 570 parolees from 2017 to 2018. BHOA's EAP reported serving over

1,000 employees and families in 2018. Both Offender Success and EAP must assess and evaluate whether they are providing the best care possible and produce client satisfaction reports to support their ratings. BHOA also uses the following outcome measures to gauge the impact of EAP services provided:

- Mental health improvement
- Physical health improvement
- Improvement of social relationships
- Improvement of health status
- Improvement of level of daily functioning

Bridging health improvement status outcomes with elevated productivity and decreased job loss provides evidence of the benefits of EAPs to clients, communities, workplaces, and organizations' financial bottom lines (Selvick et al., 2004). Data from service records showed a decline in service for the Offender Success Program from the May 2018 to November 2018. According to Participant 3, the decline in service was attributed to the sudden loss of leadership over the program:

> We began to receive vendor complaints about the change in communication between our vendors and our program staff. There were also several parole agents that communicated to us that they were not sending their parolees to the program without proper leadership in place.

EAP service records reported an increase in services from May 2018 to November 2018 compared to the same service period in 2017 (see Figure 12). During this time of

leadership loss, the EAP services department continued to operate under the leadership of the clinical manager, who had been leading the department for 12 years.

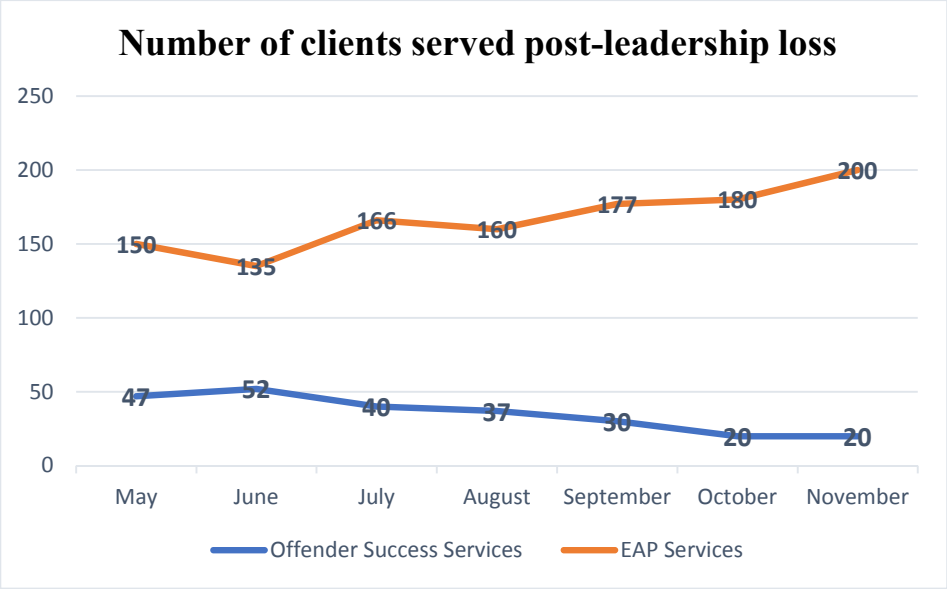

Figure 12. Clients served per program after leadership loss.

Implication for Positive Social Change

Implications for social change provide for a cohesive work environment and a broader reach for providing healthcare services to the community that are consistent in quality and held to the highest standards of care. Leadership development in behavioral healthcare contributes to positive social change (Booker, Turbutt, & Fox, 2016). In the past, it was believed that EAPs were mandated to address employee problems of drug use, alcohol use, and other issues affecting job performance (Merrick, Hodgkin, Hiatt, Horgan, & McCann, 2010). Through increased awareness of mental health, EAPs have evolved.

Exploring strategies for succession employed by behavioral health leaders of other organizations could assist BHOA in developing a plan to improve the visibility and

growth of future leaders across this organization. The organization could explore how similar organizations plan for change and improve their visibility and growth. Capla (2014) claims that integrating business performance with leadership development could motivate talented lower-level leaders to improve organizational productivity. Findings from this study of BHOA reveal that there was no written succession plan at the time of the leadership loss. Findings also support that to transition employees and leaders into new positions, the organization relies on internal mentorship between existing leaders and staff. Quintana, Ruiz, and Vila (2014) state that organizations with an ineradicable philosophy built on employee engagement and leadership promote talent retention to sustain corporate productivity.

Data Organization Techniques

I coded and recorded data from each participant interview. I identified and documented themes and outliers within the data using an Excel spreadsheet to track and color-code themes. I transcribed verbatim responses from each participant for each question and derived coded themes from those responses. Chiang, Hsu, and Shih (2015) recommend using coding of individual participant interview transcripts to identify themes and subthemes. I used a reflective journal to document emerging themes. Researchers use reflective journals to question, document, and address personal assumptions and emotions and assist with producing unbiased analysis and coding (Gabriel, 2015).

According to Clark and Veale (2018), qualitative data are typically represented through words, so researchers use journals, notes, and other documents to code information into themes. For the purposes of this study, all documents related to

participant interviews and analysis are kept on a single zip drive that I will permanently delete after 5 years.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Limitations are characteristics of a research study that constrain transferability of results to a larger population (Simon & Goes, 2013). Research should be designed, conducted, and reported in a transparent way, with honesty and without any deviation from the truth (Simundić, 2013). There are numerous ways bias can be introduced during the data-collection period of research. Limitations of this specific research study presented as the researcher's dual roles of employee and data collector. To maintain integrity and remove potential bias regarding research data collected, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and returned to interviewees for member checking.

Unexpected Limitations or Outcomes and Impact on Findings

During the research period, BHOA experienced several changes in leadership, which created limitations in gathering additional data that could enhance the findings. Lack of succession planning created heavier workloads on existing leadership, which created less time to contribute to interviews for data collection.

Summary and Transition

In this qualitative case study, I explored how the unexpected loss of leadership affected a behavioral health care organization without a written plan for succession. The results of this study were discussed, including the identification of themes that aligned with the existing literature, such as communication, staff development, employee resistance, leadership support, and work environment. The organization's workforce-focused results

demonstrated how the organization strives to provide a supportive work environment for employees. A supportive and stable work environment in turn, enhances the quality of services during a phase of leadership change. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the study were highlighted and discussed. Section 5 provides recommendations for action and for further study. The section also provides a brief reflection of my experiences as I navigated this doctoral capstone process.

Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to identify how the lack of succession planning affects a behavioral health organization during a period of unexpected leadership loss. If used, the study's findings can provide the organization with recommendations that may aid in their successful leadership transition during times of loss, position vacancy, and change. In the next section, I provide recommendations to assist BHOA in implementing a business succession plan in the event of an unexpected leadership loss.

Recommendations for Action

Create a Written Plan for Succession

Transitioning from one leader to another can affect the harmony of an entire organization, including stakeholders and other leaders. Organizations that lack structured leadership succession plans often fail to identify and align qualified employees within business strategies to promote leadership continuity (Bowen, Botero, & Fediukl, 2014). The results of this study provide evidence of the impact of loss on a behavioral health organization without a succession plan and the importance of succession planning within that organization. Based on the themes that emerged through a semistructured interview process and the presentation of data from participants' responses, the following recommendations may be useful in implementing a business succession plan.

Based on CARF's standards, succession planning is defined as one of the most critical responsibilities of a board of directors. The succession plan not only needs to

guide the seamless continuity of services when a transition in senior leadership occurs, but it also needs to be pliable in the face of ever-changing times and shifting market demands. My first recommendation is that BHOA create a succession plan that prepares the organization for contingencies and allows it to build bench strength. The value of succession planning is well-supported throughout both academic and professional literature.

There are many resources from which BHOA can choose to guide its efforts to improve its current succession-planning process. Figure 13 provides a snapshot of recommendations from the Treasury Board of Canada (2012) that may be especially helpful to BHOA. It includes the following five steps to consider for succession planning:

1. Identify key areas and positions.
2. Identify capabilities for key areas and positions.
3. Identify interested employees and assess them against capabilities.
4. Develop and implement succession and knowledge-transfer plans.
5. Evaluate effectiveness.

Step 1. Identify key areas and positions: Key areas and positions are those that are critical to the organization's operational activities and strategic objectives.
1. Identify which positions, if left vacant, would make it difficult for the business to achieve current and future business goals. 2. Identify which positions, if vacant, would be detrimental to the operation of the organization.
Step 2. Identify capabilities for key areas and positions: Establish selection criteria, focus employee development efforts, and set performance expectations. Determine the capabilities required for the key areas and positions identified in Step 1.
1. Identify the relevant knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies needed to achieve business goals. 2. Use key leadership competencies profile. 3. Inform employees about key areas and position requirement capabilities.
Step 3. Identify interested employees and assess them against capabilities: Determine who is interested in and has the potential to fill key positions.
1. Discuss career plans and interest with employees. 2. Identify key areas and positions that are vulnerable and the candidates who are ready to advance or whose skills and competencies can be developed within a required time frame.
Step 4. Develop and implement succession and knowledge transfer plans: Incorporate strategies for learning training, development, and the transfer of corporate knowledge into the succession planning and management.
1. Define the learning, training, and development experiences that the organization requires for leadership positions and other key areas and positions. 2. Link employees' learning plans to the knowledge, skills, and abilities required for current and futures roles. 3. Discuss with employees how they can pass on their corporate knowledge.
Step 5. Evaluate effectiveness: Evaluate and monitor your succession planning and management efforts to ensure the following:
1. Succession plans for all key areas and positions are developed. 2. Key positions are filled quickly. 3. New employees in key positions perform effectively.

Figure 13. *Success Planning and Management Five-Step Process*

BHOA should also align itself with the best practices for succession planning, including assessment of key figures, identification of key talent, assessment of key talent, generation of development plans, development monitoring, and review. When an organization creates a viable succession plan, employees become focused on their long-

term futures and become more aware of the havoc that an unwelcome departure can create. Having a succession plan also gives clients and customers confidence in the organization because they know the organization will continue to provide products and/or services without interruption (Coonan, 2015).

Aligning Succession Planning With Strategic Planning

My second recommendation is that the organization align succession planning with its strategic plan. Leadership and human capital can often ascertain a successful organization from one that is not. To develop a strong workforce, many organizations focus exclusively on hiring and training without regard for succession planning, which is a mistake (Coonan, 2015). Aligning the organization's approach to its overall strategy and achievement will help leaders craft a succession plan that is effective and reflects the organization's culture.

The organization's strategic plan should align with the company's overall goals and take the company's resources into consideration. The organization should also involve and train its human resources department and other employees instrumental to the design of an appropriate and viable succession plan. For this process to be successful, the organization should focus on items that can be measured and researched and can assist in the development of a realistic and implementable succession plan. Identifying, assessing, and monitoring the following data is critical to developing a succession plan:

- Number of senior-level managers who are eligible for retirement in the next 2 to 5 years.
- Upcoming promotions that might leave the organization with talent gaps.

- Employees who are ready to transition to next-level management if key leaders were to leave unrepentantly.

After addressing the above points, the organization should compare the data with the organization's strategic plan. The final step is to address the following questions:

- Does the organization have any top-level managers who are eligible for retirement at a time when the organization is expecting to expand?
- Has the organization identified any potential employees who will be ready to step into leadership positions?

Being able to address these questions will assist BHOA in ensuring its strategic plan and succession plan are in alignment, which should make them both more effective.

Developing Leaders

The third recommendation is for the organization to focus on and support leadership development for potential leaders in the organization. BHOA should pair incoming leaders with existing senior leaders to provide mentorship within the first year of employment. A mentor can provide more opportunities for experiential learning with the mentee and allow those experiences to be individualized to the new leader's talents and developmental needs. This suggestion aligns with the overall recommendation for succession planning, which will extend deeply into the organization and provide new leaders a better view of the organization as a whole.

Tracking Career Development

The fourth recommendation is for the organization to align itself with best practices in professional development, the benefit of which is that the organization may

be able to retain employees, positively impacting the organization and the overall quality of its services. The organization should conduct regular audits of employees' professional goals, professional trainings, certifications, licensing, and educational achievements. It would also benefit the organization to employ a technology to track employee performance goals and accomplishments and that will provide spreadsheets that are simple to track, download, and share with management. High levels of quality are essential for a company to achieve its business objectives (Manghani, 2011). A company's employees are recognized as a resource for the improvement of quality.

A business should create a cascade of metrics and targets, ranging from top-level strategic objectives to the daily activities of its frontline employees. Managers should continually monitor these metrics and engage regularly with their teams to discuss their progress (Manghani, 2011). Tracking and managing performance should be aligned with the organization's strategy, practices, and policies. Creating a performance management system will play an integral role in retention and succession management, and it can also improve the organization's overall performance (Manghani, 2011). For an organization to properly harness the full power of data collected, it must also value the accuracy and integrity of the same (Cotton, 2014).

Data accuracy is a vital component of succession planning. Without it, insight is lacking, and the decisions it influences are likely to be poor as a result (Cotton, 2004). Using career development tracking to highlight the importance of data-driven processes and decisions, the organization should consider using a technology that will track employee performance goals and accomplishments, which will provide

spreadsheets that are simple to track, reliable, and downloadable so they can be shared with management. The organization could also employee the same type of technology-driven data-collection method to perform data tracking for their consumer satisfaction surveys. Data inaccuracies can quickly escalate from a minor oversight into something that compromises time, work, and effort. In essence, reporting inaccurate data can cause real detriment to a business and its bottom line.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine how the lack of succession planning affected a behavioral health organization during a phase of abrupt and unplanned leadership loss. The findings were limited to the participants' responses, which were based on individual opinion and perceptions. Although the study provided robust qualitative data regarding the effects of loss without a succession plan, there were limitations.

First, the case study was conducted at a single site organization with a known lack of succession planning during a time of unexpected leadership loss. Thus, I recommend that future research extend further than one organization, providing a larger sample size to improve the replicability and reliability of results and more extensively generalize the applicability of determined solutions. Second, the sample size consisted of five senior-level participants. A larger pool of respondents would broaden the variability of responses and create a stronger case for the consistency of responses and identifiable issues. The study, which also considered other peer-reviewed work published during the past 5 to 8 years, found only a limited number of points of convergence relative to the

lack of succession planning during a period of sudden loss. Outcome data regarding the effects of a lack of succession planning across the few available studies were scarce. There were minor implications for practice discussed, which solidifies this recommendation to conduct further and more extensive research.

Reflections

As I evolved through this doctoral process, my experiences changed, especially as I transitioned from student to researcher to data collector. I accumulated knowledge on the importance of having a succession plan and being prepared during a time of unexpected loss from a leadership perspective. Before conducting this study, the only information I had was observed firsthand as a member of the program team that was affected by the unexpected loss of leadership. As I embarked on this study, I maintained awareness of my own personal biases and refrained from making known my personal beliefs, which could have jeopardized the validity of the research.

The findings of this case study presented multiple themes that concluded with the research question. I had no advanced knowledge of coding and transcribing data, but I had a full understanding limiting interview question which extends the coding process. I have a better understanding of the importance of succession planning and I am optimistic that the recommendations from this study will assist the organization and other top-level executives in identifying the need to create and incorporate a succession plan that is in alignment with their strategic goals. As I conducted the interviews, I felt a sense of respect for the participants I interviewed and their willingness to participate in my doctoral capstone research. Completing this research was challenging, rewarding, and

exciting. The leadership program has provided a structured approach built upon instructors that have a zest for student success.

Conclusion

The business concept of succession planning is a vital process in behavioral healthcare institutions (Rosenthal et al., 2018). Now more than ever, it is vital for healthcare organizations to have succession planning for leadership (Smith, 2019). According to the American College of Healthcare Executives, there was an increased rate of CEO turnover of 18% in 2014 and 2015 (Smith, 2019). At turnover rate, succession planning is imperative. According to Smith (2019), despite the noted trends, two-thirds of healthcare organizations lack an existing program or have one that is less than comprehensive.

The purpose of this study was to provide an assessment and analysis that highlighted the current gaps in succession planning during a phase of unexpected leadership loss. The use of methodological triangulation presented an opportunity to collect a set of data through multiple sources. I used semi-structured interviews to gather data through the use of open-ended questioning of five senior-level leaders. Next, I examined human resources policies, employee files, digital data, and other corporate current and historical documents.

Data validity was insured through member checking. Themes that emerged were aligned with the existing literature and highlighted communication, staff development, employee resistance, leadership support, and work environment. This study's findings are important to senior leaders, corporate board members, and CEOs as they seek to identify

the need for succession planning and identify the gaps created as a result of the lack of succession planning. Overall, this study's findings align with the study's purpose and the analytical framework. The information presented in this study can have a positive social impact in the behavioral health community and be used to improve leadership development and support succession-planning implementation.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How do you think any abrupt change in your organization can affect your work? Please elaborate.
2. Sometimes an employee can become accustomed to a certain kind of leadership. Do you think the abrupt change in such leadership can affect employees? Please elaborate.
3. How best do you think the management should manage change in an organization and why?
4. Would you prefer the status quo in an organization or constant changes and why?
5. How has the shift in leadership affected the program team?
6. How does the loss of leadership impact the quality of care?
7. What if any strategies does your organization currently have in place for leadership change?
8. Has this organization ever suffered unexpected loss of leadership? If yes, how was it handled?
9. How is the success of your program measured?