

2021

# The Pertinence of Risk Management in Behavioral Healthcare Organizations

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Mary Darden-Robinson

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects, and  
that any and all revisions required by the review  
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2021

Abstract

The Pertinence of Risk Management in Behavioral Healthcare Organizations

by

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MS, Norfolk State University, 2009

BS, Old Dominion University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Psychology in Behavioral Health Leadership

Walden University

May 2021

## Abstract

The role of risk management in healthcare settings addressing physical issues has been a focus for scholars since the 1950s. Researchers have demonstrated that effective risk mitigation in physical healthcare settings can decrease medical errors, poor patient care, and litigation. Although there has been a significant focus on the implications of risk management in these settings, there is less research related to this relationship within the context of behavioral healthcare. The purpose of this study was to explore risk management processes in the setting of a midsized for-profit behavioral health organization on the East Coast of the United States. The Baldrige Excellence Framework was used to guide this qualitative case study. Data collection included semistructured interviews with three organization staff, a review of relevant academic and professional literature, and a review of select documents from the organization. Four themes representing potential opportunities related to improving the organization's risk management strategies were identified through content analysis of the data: the importance of shared risk-management responsibility, policy, communication, and ongoing risk monitoring. Recommendations to address these opportunities included development of a quality-improvement program, implementing risk-management training, and enacting a quality council. This research may contribute to positive social change by serving as an example of how to strengthen a behavioral health organization's approach to managing risk, thereby enhancing organizational ability to sustain delivery of behavioral health services to communities in need.

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## Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to offer my sincerest thanks to the Lord my God for all of HIS grace and blessings throughout my life. Secondly, I would like to thank my committee for their unwavering support throughout this challenging but rewarding journey. Without your guidance and encouragement, I would never have been able to complete this capstone project: Dr. Fredericka Hendricks-Noble, Dr. Eugene Meyer, and Dr. Scott Friedman, thank you for challenging me to meet and exceed my potential.

My completion of this project would not have been possible without the owners of Agency ABC entrusting me with providing an ethically sound project. Furthermore, I want to recognize my parents, Mr. Harold Darden, Sr. and Mrs. Teresa Darden, for instilling in me the importance of education. I also want to recognize those that have always supported my dreams regardless of how ridiculous they may seem. To my parents; husband, Nicholas Robinson; sister, Jacquelyn Darden; and brother, Harold Darden, Jr., we did it!!!!!! I also owe a very special thank you to Ms. Angie BerryFields, who has always been willing within an instant to offer her support throughout my academic career. Lastly, a very special thank you to Ms. Sarah Foster, who has been a great lifetime friend throughout the years!!!!!!

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## Section 1a: The Behavioral Health Organization

### **Introduction**

Agency ABC (a pseudonym) is a private, for-profit, limited liability company, S corporation behavioral healthcare organization (BHO) located on the East Coast of the United States (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). According to the BHO's website, the agency provides clinical and supportive intervention to youth, adolescents, adults, and families with daily functioning difficulties. Agency ABC's clients have diagnoses of developmental disabilities, mental health issues, and/or substance use disorder (SUD). The clinical and supportive interventions provided are based on the organization's commitment to promoting holistic wellness (Agency ABC brochure, 2019).

Agency ABC's vision is to see "individuals and families thriving physically, spiritually, and mentally leading to healthier communities and societies" (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). Their mission is "serving families and communities with quality services that promote wellness, aid recovery, and enhance mental health using a holistic approach" (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). Additionally, Agency ABC defines its values as "health/wellness, family, service, professionalism, and excellence" (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). This capstone study explored risk management's implications for the organization with this mission, vision, and set of values in mind.

### **Practice Problem**

BHOs are accountable for a multitude of responsibilities and services, including implementing and monitoring strategies that ensure management of liabilities (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). Briner and Manser (2013) described the concept of management of liabilities within the behavioral health setting as clinical risk management. Additionally, BHOs are responsible for implementing and monitoring practices that promote patients' safety and well-being while promoting sustainability (Ross & Bibler Zaidi, 2019). Such implementation and monitoring practices allude to the importance of risk management and align with the capstone practice problem, which was to understand risk management within Agency ABC (IRB approval number 10-16-20-0977208).

Considering the impacts and burdens associated with mental illness, which is responsible for about one-third of the world's disability and carries with its high socioeconomic costs, this public health issue has been studied at length (Anderson & Jane-Llopis, 2011). In the United States, there has been a drive to improve healthcare quality while simultaneously reducing costs (Furrow, 2012). As a result, the federal government has focused on service providers, including BHOs, and the quality of service they deliver to this vulnerable population. In this context, BHOs would benefit from an ongoing evaluation of their processes and practices, including how they contribute to managing risk and liability.

Balancing the mitigation of risk and cost is imperative. To address these areas of operation effectively, Mendelson and Johnson (2010) identified four pillars that guide the risk-management process, which must be transparent, accountable, evidence-based, and

must incorporate health information technology (HIT). Their research suggested transparency consists of communicating openly about costs and the quality of data.

According to Mendelson and Johnson's (2010) research, the evidence-based pillar refers to assessing and identifying areas of opportunity and weakness and creating a plan to address these issues. Last, the concept of HIT brings together the other three pillars by noting organizations' responsibility to collect data on service delivery, ensure cost-effective payment, and communicate the processes implemented that support and validate ethical and appropriate service delivery (Mendelson & Johnson, 2010). By utilizing these pillars to guide risk management, a BHO can begin the process of mitigating risk effectively.

Agency ABC has identified improving risk-management processes as an organizational goal (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Personal communication with Agency ABC's senior leadership indicated they prioritized this goal because of the agency's insurer advising that their insurance premiums would increase if prioritizing this goal did not occur. A second reason to improve risk-management processes is efficacy. Briner and Manser's (2013) research addressed the correlation between risk mitigation and service delivery, demonstrating that clinical risk management (CRM) most often led to improved service delivery. Similarly, Moskowitz's (2018) research, which built upon Briner and Manser's 2013 study, suggested service delivery could be impacted negatively if an organization failed to enact proper risk management procedures, as individuals and families could see a decrease in service effectiveness and accessibility. Thus, this capstone project explored the following

research question: What is the impact of risk-management mitigation on a behavioral healthcare organization?

### **Purpose**

This capstone case study examined Agency ABC's relationship with risk management using the Baldrige excellence framework (National Institutes of Standards & Technology [NIST], 2017), which guided the exploration of whether the organization is performing to and reaching its maximum potential, how this performance can be gauged, and areas and opportunities for growth. A case-study approach was used and included data gathered through a document review, interviews, and a review of the academic and professional literature. Examples of documents reviewed to inform the identified problem include the agency's policy and procedure handbooks, audit and strategic-planning documents, and insurance policy. Structured interviews with Agency ABC's leaders also provided insight into the problem. The focus of the interviews was on the leaders' perspectives and understanding of risk management's impact on the BHO. In sum, this case study's purpose was to explore risk management within Agency ABC's behavioral healthcare setting.

### **Significance**

This study may identify risk-management improvement opportunities for Agency ABC. Another potential benefit of this research is that it can guide leaders in developing competencies that promote effective risk management and support active risk "leaders" (Simpson et al., 2019). For example, Simpson et al. (2019) observed that to determine if one is a "good risk leader," one must consider the following four components: (a)

competencies, (b) critical experiences, (c) personal qualities, and (d) derailers. Third, this research could be beneficial in providing information that suggests alignment or misalignment among the agency's mission, vision, values, and practices.

This capstone research contributes to effective BHO practice and leadership. A case study of Agency ABC's risk-management practices can serve as a model for other BHOs to use for improved risk management. Alam's (2016) research indicated that emphasizing avoidance of negative consequences through proactive risk-management planning is an effective way to institute risk mitigation.

This study also holds several implications for positive social change. Mental illness is responsible for approximately one-third of the world's disability and results in high socioeconomic costs (Anderson et al., 2011). Bloom et al.'s (2011) research built upon this concept, indicating two types of costs to the community: direct costs, including expenses related to accessing treatment for mental health issues, and indirect damages, defined as costs that align with one's ability to contribute actively to the community. Considering the impact mental health has on the public, implementing improved risk management processes can result in experiencing less assessed damage. Further, risk mitigation may result in healthier outcomes for patients, improved social health, and real social change (Moskowitz, 2018).

### **Summary and Transition**

Overall, Section 1a has explored the BHO in the study and the practice problem, purpose, and significance of the study. This section has also brought the benefit of understanding the impact that risk mitigation has on BHOs. Next, Section 1b explores

Agency ABC's organizational profile, critical factors, and regulatory background and context.

## Section 1b: Organizational Profile

### **Introduction**

Agency ABC is a private for-profit BHO owned by a husband-and-wife team. This capstone project explored the implications of risk management on the BHO's practices. The following section reviews the agency's profile and key factors of strategic importance for the organization. This review provides a context for understanding the practice problem.

### **Organizational Profile and Key Factors**

According to Agency ABC's chief executive officer (CEO), the BHO has 43 employees, including full-time, part-time, and contractual individuals (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). The BHO's ownership categorizes its staffing into one of three roles: administrative, management, and direct care. The agency's workforce includes counselors, therapeutic sports specialists (including former professional sports figures), parent mentors, and other behavioral specialists. Personal communication with Agency ABC's ownership indicated that to provide oversight for mental health and substance use services, Agency ABC employs a full-time bachelor's level office administrator who is responsible for daily operations. Within this role, the office administrator performs standard administrative duties such as maintaining office equipment, scheduling appointments, organizing and tracking payments, monitoring accounts receivable and employee timesheets, and collecting referrals for prospective clients (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Additionally, she is

responsible for routing these referrals to the appropriate program manager for assignment.

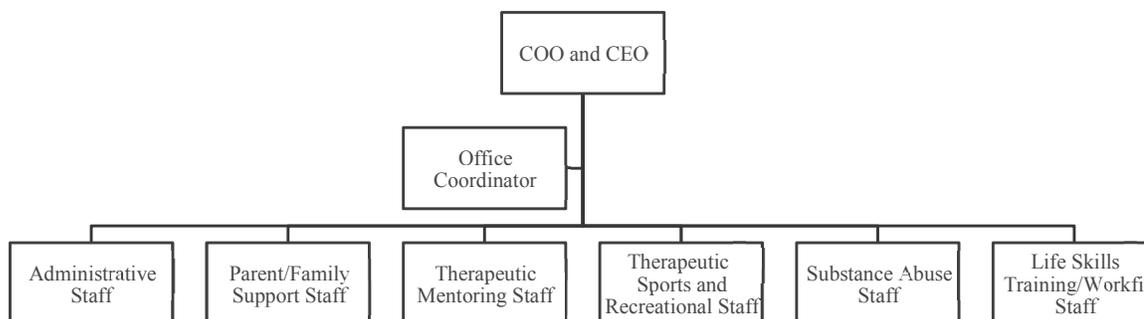
The administrative staff works closely with the management team, which consists of five employees (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Agency ABC's ownership also disclosed that the BHO employs a bachelor's-level program manager who guides supervisors; evaluates service activity; identifies program quality improvement; assesses programs' overall sustainability; and gathers, prepares, and reports on service-delivery progress and barriers to the master's-level CEO (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Further, the BHO's organizational chart (2019) notes that there is a full-time bachelor's-level clinical service supervisor responsible for monitoring daily clinical tasks as assigned, and a master's-level chief operations officer (COO) oversees daily operational and administrative tasks. A part-time quality assurance specialist reviews and audits clients' documentation and files for accuracy and compliance with state and federal guidelines.

The following graduate-level providers on staff serve in direct-care services: two contracted psychologists, one full-time master's-level senior family support counselor, seven contracted master's-level family support counselors, one part-time master's-level licensed professional counselor, and three contracted master's-level licensed outpatient therapists. The following bachelor's-level providers also serve in direct services: four contracted substance abuse counselors, one family support counselor, seven therapeutic sports specialists, five positive behavioral specialists, and one master gardener. Finally, direct-care staff include one high-school-educated therapeutic sports specialist, four

paraprofessional drivers, and three high-school students identified as other (or junior) staff. Figure 1 displays Agency ABC’s structure.

**Figure 1**

*Agency ABC's Organizational Chart*



*Note.* Adapted with permission from “Agency ABC’s Organization Chart”, by Agency ABC, 2018.

Services are funded by several sources, including the Comprehensive Services Act, a state law enacted in 1993 that includes funding for youth and family support services (Cohen et al., 1999). These funds are managed by an integrated treatment team responsible for connecting and monitoring service delivery provided to youth and families. According to Agency ABC’s brochure (2019), the BHO accepts payments from individual insurers including Anthem, Aetna, Tricare, United Healthcare, Optimum, Magellan, Cigna, and Medicaid. Moreover, the state Juvenile Community Crime Control Act of 1995 provides funding for services “to establish a community-based system of progressive intensive sanctions and services that correspond to the severity of offense and treatment needs” (Department of Juvenile Justice [DJJ], 2020). This funding is

designated for youth involved with the state DJJ. Similarly, AMIkids is a funding source that coordinates community-based services with the same population. Last, Agency ABC provides a self-pay option.

Referrals for services are received from an array of agencies for its youth and family services, including the Department of Social Services (DSS), juvenile court systems, community service boards, public health agencies, local schools, and prevention services. Youth and families may also self-refer for mental health, substance use, and developmental disability services. The agency brochure (2019) notes that the primary offerings and services are divided into two categories: (a) sports and recreation; and (b) supportive counseling services, which consist of mental health and substance use assessments, nutritional services, parental capacity assistance, fitness support, expressive therapies, and other treatment services. Agency ABC's approach seeks to promote overall wellness, which is believed to result in healthier communities.

The BHO appears to maintain a positive reputation within its competitive environment, indicated by the BHO's online presence, which displays articles and interviews published in local newspapers. Agency ABC's reputation is also conveyed through client, family, and referral satisfaction surveys. Moreover, the agency's positive status can be discerned by the fact that it has expanded its service delivery recently. In April 2020, Agency ABC was granted a conditional license as an intensive in-home service provider. Additionally, the BHO expanded the services it offers on the state Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) website. Thus,

Agency ABC communicates its positive reputation through its online presence, satisfaction surveys, and recent expansion.

During its strategic-planning sessions in July 2019, the agency's investment and commitment to building upon its reputation and position became apparent. A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis was completed by a hired consultant; it suggested the BHO's community outreach and service quality, and variety are strengths, which align with Agency ABC's mission of assisting families and communities (*Agency ABC Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). The analysis also indicated that Agency ABC's potential to invest in its partnerships was a significant opportunity for exploration. Subsequently, external relationships are prioritized as the most important.

### **Key Factors**

Key factors are abundant within Agency ABC's holistic approach, which emphasizes treatment based on a four-quadrant model (Agency ABC website). This model is defined by the idea that to accomplish holistic wellness, one must address physical, nutritional, spiritual, and cognitive well-being (Agency ABC website). The website indicates that the first quadrant of the model addresses physical wellness through team sports and recreational programs. Recreational programs include baseball, basketball, bowling, boxing, cheer and dance, football, golf, martial arts, physical fitness training, skateboarding and BMX, soccer, swimming, and track (Agency ABC website). Furthermore, the agency website suggests that implementing such activities addresses

behavioral, mood, substance abuse, and cognitive disorders. The agency's owners assign benefits to using fitness activities rather than psychotropic medication.

Similarly, Linke and Ussher's (2015) review of literature indicated exercise-based activities result in overall positive health effects and impacts on SUDs, psychological, and behavioral issues.

The second quadrant of Agency ABC's approach is a correlation between spiritual connection and holistic wellness. The agency defines the term *spiritual* as "gaining emotional control of oneself through introspection and change" (Agency ABC website). This connection is guided through a sense of belonging, as well as accomplishing completeness and harmony. Agency ABC nurtures spirituality through individual and group art therapy, community-service engagement, gardening, kitchen therapy, music mentorship, and substance abuse support services. Yoga is also utilized to foster self-regulation.

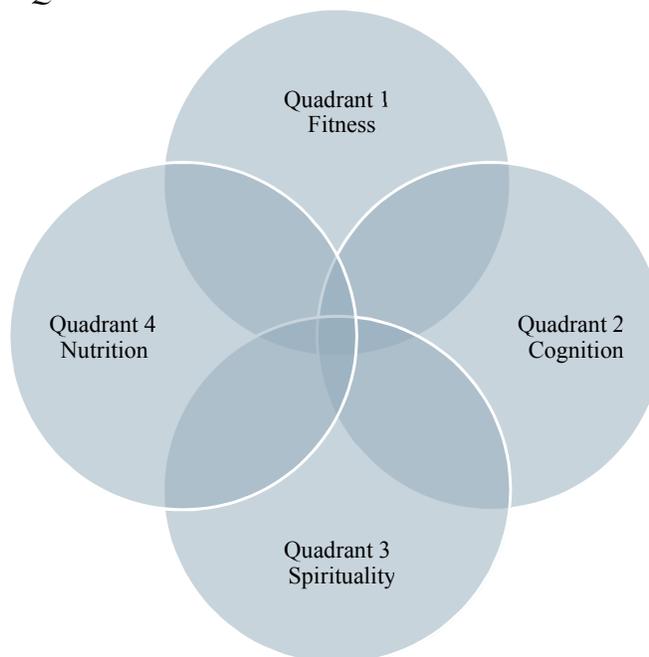
Third, Agency ABC focuses on the importance of cognitive health as it relates to accomplishing holistic wellness. This quadrant's framework is based upon the belief that exploring, replacing, and challenging negative thinking results in behavioral improvements, such as improved judgment and decision making, and promotes effective conflict management and decreased stress and anxiety. Services that support cognitive functioning include family support services, afterschool programming, outpatient counseling, and substance use counseling.

The last component of the four-quadrant foundational approach is nutritional.

According to the agency's website, this quadrant focuses on the correlation between food choice, mental health functioning, and substance use. To address nutrition, clients are introduced to the many benefits associated with gardening, caring for plants, and adding nutritional snacks into their diets. Figure 2 demonstrates the four quadrants of health as defined by Agency ABC's *Strategic Plan 2019-2024* (2019).

## Figure 2

*Agency ABC's Wellness Quadrants*



*Note.* Adapted with permission from “Agency ABC’s Strategic Plan 2019-2024”, by Agency ABC, 2019.

To promote overall wellness, Agency ABC continues to evolve as it expands. In 2011, Agency ABC established a nonprofit organization responsible for creating the Community Give Back Garden (CGBG). This garden strives to provide fresh produce to

a local community that may not have access to such resources otherwise. In 2013, one of the owners once more expanded upon Agency ABC's mission with the creation of Organization 123, which emphasizes the family component of addressing mental health issues, SUD, and other disabilities. Since family wellness is Organization 123's priority, the website provides information about activities, recipes, exercises, meditations, and yoga routines, all of which can be practiced by the unit. The organization's blog also shares this information and its benefits, as well as suggested therapeutic aids and toys, games, and other coping skills that can be utilized to address the needs of those with mental illnesses, special needs, and sensory challenges (Organization 123 website). Agency ABC continues to expand its mission and vision, as indicated by its commitment to establishing additional interventions to meet the needs of the communities it serves.

Agency ABC possesses several assets the Baldrige framework (NIST, 2017) describes as major facilities, equipment, technologies, and intellectual property. These assets consist of vehicles, equipment, technology, and a workforce (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Agency ABC's owner indicated the BHO utilizes vehicles to transport participants to and from supportive clinical services. At the same time, equipment is instrumental to recreational and other daily activities. For example, balance beams and basketball nets are vital to engaging participants in their related activities (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Moreover, technology offers the BHO ways to access, store, and report information pertaining to service delivery. Reportedly, Agency ABC has a large secure data server that supports the use of cellphones, tablets, desktop computers, a fax machine, a smart television, and a

projector (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Additionally, the BHO utilizes two electronic health records (EHR) systems for recordkeeping: Agency ABC uses one, while Organization 123 uses the other. Further, these two EHRs are instrumental in communicating and collaborating within the agency and with referents and referral sources alike (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019).

Agency ABC also employs the CGBG, which is an asset based on its response to a community need the cofounders identified while providing mental health and substance use services within the community. Youth and families the organization serves are largely low-income and had limited access to healthy foods due to the inaccessibility of the nearest grocery store. This lack of access low-income people experience is based on the geographic distance to healthy foods, referred to as a “food desert” (Block & Subramanian, 2015, p. 2). Allcott et al.’s (2019) research built upon this concept and identified a correlation between income and nutritional inequality, indicating that exposing low-income communities to the same healthy options as high-income communities reduced nutritional inequality by about 10% (Allcott et al., 2019). As a result, the organization worked to remove this barrier by planting and maintaining a community learning garden behind the local DSS, which provided support services to the same community. According to Organization 123’s website, the crops grown in the garden are provided to community members and Agency ABC’s clients. Additionally, the garden serves as an example of the benefits of healthy eating through learning activities presented to the greater community that improve overall health and positively impact symptoms associated with mental health and substance use. The garden’s creation

in 2014 was an example of two cofounders acting as social change agents within their community.

Agency ABC maintains office space at one location; however, fitness and other supportive services are offered on-site at sporting and recreational settings (Agency ABC website). The BHO utilizes a website to advise the community, potential referral sources, and clients of community functions and activities being offered (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Moreover, the owners indicate they use their website to describe their approach to mental health and substance use treatment, and they provide testimonials and videos introducing service delivery. Management of daily operational activities, including billing and payroll functions, is also completed through the website.

Bryson (2018) described strategic planning as a process that assists “leaders and managers of public and nonprofit organizations to think, learn, and act strategically” (p. 2). More specifically, this process ensures agencies can meet the vision, goals, and mission they have established. The strategic-planning process also provides support for future organizational growth. This capstone project explored the implications of this process for Agency ABC. To assess its external and internal environment, Agency ABC engaged in a four-session strategic-planning retreat in July 2019. Awareness of these environments supports the BHO’s ability to assess its competitive pressures, risk, and threats to accomplishing its goals (Cingoz & Akdogan, 2012). The outcome of Agency ABC’s strategic-planning retreat emphasized the following areas of opportunity: (a) retaining clients; (b) developing new products, services, and partnerships; (c)

diversifying funding; (d) improving organization and development of resources; and (e) providing staff professional development and credentialing (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). Upon discovering these areas of opportunity, Agency ABC's strategic plan assigned tasks aligned with each goal. Additionally, percentages were assigned to prioritize task completion (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019).

Although Agency ABC identified institutional development, including staff professional development and credentialing, as a tertiary priority, research suggests a relationship between staff development and service delivery. Kilbourne et al. (2018) indicated a significant correlation between workforce training and capacity for quality improvement. Subsequently, Agency ABC plans to implement strategies that include selecting curriculum, developing training presentations, and establishing partnerships with certified trainers that can educate their team on identified topics (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). Although they are interested in external trainers, Agency ABC's strategic plan also indicates an interest in identifying employees who possess specialized training in the aforementioned areas. This consideration demonstrates Agency ABC's willingness to promote from within its own organization.

Agency ABC is responsible for continuously assessing the efficacy of its strategies to ensure it meets clients' needs within the framework of its established mission, vision, and goals (Agency ABC website). The strategic-planning process is vitally important to accomplishing this goal, as mental health issues, intellectual disabilities, and SUD continue to present public health concerns (Agency ABC *Strategic*

*Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). Table 1 displays Agency ABC's strategic-planning framework.

**Table 1**

*Agency ABC's Strategic Plan Framework*

Priority Goals	Description	Importance Ranking
External Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain and increase relationships with referral sources by 15% by 2024</li> </ul>	28%
Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage three additional locales by providing outpatient intensive in-home and mental health skill building by 2024</li> </ul>	27%
Institutional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase revenue by 25% by 2024</li> <li>Hire an additional doctor and three licensed clinicians by 2023 utilizing grant funding</li> <li>Provide additional staff development opportunities</li> </ul>	24%
Organizational Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase revenue by 25%</li> </ul>	15%
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess and enhance current infrastructure by 2024</li> </ul>	5%

*Note.* This table is adapted with permission from Agency ABC's strategic-planning framework, defined in Agency ABC's *Strategic Plan 2019-2024* (2019).

To ensure effective governance, the Baldrige excellence framework (NIST, 2017) suggests exploring the following categories: accountable strategic planning, transparent operations, and independent and effective internal and external audits. Agency ABC's leadership is invested in the strategic-planning process, and to promote success within this area, the COO, one of the owners, is responsible for overseeing and implementing

the established goals (*Agency ABC Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). First, the COO assesses and evaluates the ongoing progress and challenges experienced throughout the strategic-planning process, providing annual updates on new and altered trends and business stability to the leadership team to promote transparency and awareness (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). According to one of the owners, information about strategic-planning goal completion is stored in the FreedCamp project management system. Second, the COO facilitates transparency in operations as a leadership approach to ensure responsible governance (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019).

The Baldrige framework defines transparency as “the operations of one’s governance system,” including internal controls (NIST, 2017, p. 8). Transparent operations are maintained through data collected in semiannual surveys. Agency ABC’s owner advised that senior leaders assign daily auditing and review of service delivery to the administrative team for internal controls to ensure effective governance. External audits consist of data collected through semiannual surveys and through the DBHDS granting Agency ABC a conditional license to provide intensive in-home counseling (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). In sum, Agency ABC’s leadership governance approach addresses accountability for strategic planning, transparency in operations, and independence and effectiveness of internal and external audits.

### **Organizational Background and Context**

Agency ABC's senior leaders report that their liability insurance coverage has increased significantly due to increased risk-management concerns, which have also been identified as a systemic organizational issue (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Per personal communication in June 2019, the agency has been instructed to update its policies and protocols as a result of this risk-management issue. The BHO's risk management team has recommended that the agency engage staff through training in high-risk areas, also identified as threats to sustainability.

Considering the risk-management team's directives, Agency ABC benefitted from this capstone project, which may guide them in areas of opportunity related to risk mitigation within the competitive behavioral healthcare setting. Completion of this capstone project was beneficial to Agency ABC because it provides insight into an array of risk-management strategies that could inform organizational change while improving risk-mitigation activities. Briner and Manser's (2013) research suggested risk management is essential for building safe health systems. Subsequently, this capstone project aimed to explore the impact of risk management on Agency ABC.

Buchanan et al.'s (2013) research defined an organization's institutional context as being accountable for strengthening organizational characteristics and continuity. According to Buchanan et al. (2013), the institutional context addresses the following six dimensions: (a) history of the service, (b) the contemporary business of healthcare, (c) governance, (d) regulation, (e) finance, and (f) the role of the media. Understanding this framework suggests BHOs must comply with industry regulations and guidelines.

Subsequently, a lack of attention to risk mitigation could be detrimental to Agency ABC's overall sustainability and success. Further, continued exploration of risk management will ensure the BHO remains relevant within its competitive environment.

As previously mentioned, Agency ABC is located on the East Coast of the United States and provides mental health, developmental disability, and substance use services to youth, adolescents, families, and adults. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2019), 69.4% of the state in which Agency ABC is positioned is White, with 19.9% identifying as Black or African American, 6.9% as Asian, and 9.8% as Hispanic. In comparison, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) noted that 60% of White residents had access to and utilized mental health services in 2017, while only 28.5% of Blacks or African Americans, 1.1% of Asians, and 6.7% of Hispanics had access to and utilized the same services. These data suggest a gap in service utilization within the communities in which Agency ABC operates.

The communities Agency ABC serves present a significant need for mental health intervention. In these communities, 130,000 children and adolescents have been identified as living with a severe mental illness, while other data suggest only one in five of these children receive the care and services they need (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2020). Moreover, the National Alliance on Mental Illness (n.d.) notes that approximately 1.1 to 1.5 million adults in the state where Agency ABC practices are living with a mental health condition. These data suggest there is a significant need, and Agency ABC must ensure its service delivery adheres to state and federal laws.

Additionally, Agency ABC must remain informed of regulatory and standard changes DBHDS and the Department of Medical Assistance makes related to mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities. These entities guide accreditation and staff certification requirements related to services rendered.

It is important to note that DBHDS, the state governing body for provision of such services, recently approved Agency ABC as an intensive in-home care provider for Medicaid patients (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). DBHDS guidelines set the state standards for risk-management licensing requirements. These guidelines address rules, directions, and protocols for community mental health providers to address risk-management issues as indicated by the DBHDS Agency. ABC's leadership is responsible for managing and mitigating risk to ensure the BHO's sustainability.

The mental health field is incredibly competitive, and this competition is based upon the variety, quality, and quantity of mental health services provided, as well as the strides and approaches BHOs utilize to meet the community's changing needs. Considering this competitive climate, organizations must implement proactive procedures to stabilize their products and improve service delivery. Agency ABC's investment in proactive strategies is directed at sustaining the organization and addressing its competitive environment, which is evident by its foundation on the unique premise of holistic wellness. Agency ABC describes holistic wellness within the confines of four quadrants, which have previously been identified as fitness, spirituality, cognition, and nutrition. In addition to founding the agency on a unique premise, Agency

ABC has made strategic planning a priority, and this includes strategies for competing in the industry. In the last year, the organization embarked on an earnest strategic-planning journey. The outcome of a SWOT analysis completed by a hired consultant indicated that the fourth priority ranked just below trends, insurers' changes, and employee turnover. Considering the impact of the competitive environment, Agency ABC has identified expanding services; collaborating with other agencies; creating and establishing a marketing strategy: increasing its use of technology, business principles, and decision-making skills to evaluate trends in service supply and fulfillment; and engaging in the political environment as opportunities to stabilize and expand the organization's success.

Like the opportunities identified, recent research has identified six strategies Agency ABC might employ to address competition. The results demonstrate the benefits of collaborative efforts, expanding upon services to include specialized care, providing higher-quality service, being flexible with staffing, establishing and reinforcing partnerships, and investing in success (The Keys to Staying Competitive, 2016). Planning strategically with these goals in mind will support and promote Agency ABC's stability and future success.

Agency ABC's CFO plans and manages the BHO's fiscal resources by facilitating monthly meetings with the organization's certified public accountant to discuss and explore trends, expenditures, line-item expenses, and other critical fiscal matters. Additionally, the CFO manages the agency's billable activities in concert with a professional biller for insurance-based services. For services requiring purchase orders and invoices, the CFO maintains a spreadsheet of authorizations and completes invoices

monthly, adjusting the spreadsheet following each submitted invoice and received payment. Agency ABC adheres to the compliance requirements of each payor and governmental entity. Behavioral healthcare policy does not appear to affect the agency's fiscal matters other than to help identify which services are viable for the agency to undertake based on reimbursements and payment processes (see Figure 3).

**Figure 2**

*Agency ABC's SWOT Analysis*

Strengths		Weaknesses	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four-quadrant approach</li> <li>• Quality of services and variety of services</li> <li>• Use of technology/automation</li> <li>• Communication loops</li> <li>• Staff (seasoned)</li> <li>• Online training offerings</li> <li>• Community outreach</li> <li>• Resources (intellectual property)</li> <li>• Health and wellness opportunities for staff and clients</li> <li>• Competitive pay</li> <li>• Location/space size limitations</li> <li>• New staff screening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location/space size limitations</li> <li>• New staff screening</li> <li>• Limited geographical area</li> <li>• Funding diversification</li> <li>• Continuing education and training opportunities</li> <li>• Inability to accept all insurance types</li> <li>• Portal glitches</li> <li>• Staff adopting agency philosophy in personal lives</li> </ul>		
Opportunities		Threats	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social</li> <li>• Electronic/gaming addictions</li> <li>• Opiate addictions</li> <li>• Obesity</li> <li>• LGBTQ issues</li> <li>• Partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAM services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trends/conditions</li> <li>• Changes in Medicaid/MCO regulations</li> <li>• Transitional nature of staff: employee turnover (strength)</li> <li>• Competitors</li> <li>• When others adopt agency model</li> <li>• Political climate</li> </ul>	
Opportunities		Threats	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment community office of services</li> <li>• Schools and churches</li> <li>• Utilizing/expanding current community partnerships</li> <li>• Relationships to the BHO</li> <li>• Marketing</li> <li>• Podcast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased quality of professionals who refer clients</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local, regional, and national trends effect the state</li> <li>• High turnover rate with referral agencies (i.e., CSB, DSS)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insurance's demand higher qualifications for providers but do not provide higher payments</li> </ul>

- 
- Technical
  - Increase web-based services
  - Attract nonregional talent/customers
  - Economic
  - Outpatient Medicaid consultation services
  - Speaking engagements
  - Hosting charitable events
  - Grants
  - Missing funding opportunities (court, substance abuse, state/local, SWAM registry, website)
  - Political
  - Increased civil engagements locally and national advocacy
  - Mental health issues
- 

*Note.* Adapted with permission from “Agency ABC’s SWOT featured in the Strategic Plan 2019-2024”, by Agency ABC, 2019.

### **Summary and Transition**

Section 1b has described the organizational profile for the agency targeted in this study. This section provided insight into the capstone project by examining Agency ABC’s principal factors, organizational background, and context. Ashton’s (2015) research suggested the organizational context can be defined as the cultural, social, political, and economic environment associated with an organization such as Agency ABC. Furthermore, the organizational context addresses the operating environment’s internal and external factors (Pojasek, 2015). Subsequently, the organizational context’s role informs this capstone study and must be considered before implementing strategic planning to ensure that the BHO meets the needs of its unique community. According to the Baldrige excellence framework (NIST, 2017), this section of the project is the starting point of organizational assessment. It uncovers gaps in valuable information, can be utilized for a self-assessment, and identifies the BHO’s uniqueness. Section 2 includes a review of the relevant academic and professional literature on the practice problem. Additionally, information is also provided regarding Agency ABC’s leadership, strategy, and clients.

## Section 2: Background and Approach–Leadership Strategy and Assessment

### **Introduction**

This section of the capstone project explains the relevance of the practice problem, which consists of exploring the implications of risk management for Agency ABC. In addition to exploring the relevance of this practice problem, Section 2 introduced the project’s approach to examining Agency ABC’s leadership structure and the organization’s position in its competitive environment. Moreover, the adopted analytical strategy and the project’s purpose are explored. The purpose of this case study is to explore risk management within Agency ABC’s behavioral healthcare setting.

### **Supporting Literature**

A literature review provides depth and validates the need for continued research on a topic. According to Maggio et al. (2016), a literature review also “provides context, informs methodology, maximizes innovation, avoids duplicative research, and ensures that professional standards are met” (p. 298). Completion of this capstone project required the utilization of an array of scholarly sources. To further inform this study and validate the ongoing exploration of the designated practice problem, the concept of risk management was explored. This exploration occurred through internet searches and the use of the following Walden University databases: PsycINFO, PsycArticles, SAGE Journals, and Thoreau Multi-Database. The following keywords related to risk management were used in the literature search process: *risk management*, *risk management in behavioral health*, *organizational change*, *leadership*, and *behavioral*

*health*. Defining specific search parameters helped me ensure the articles were scholarly. Subsequently, only peer-reviewed and relevant articles published were considered.

The concept of risk management has been well-studied. The DBHDS website describes this concept as including “activities to standardize, improve, and monitor the quality of care in state facilities and community programs which are coordinated and integrated into primary functions of the organization” (para 1). This definition guides the function of risk management within behavioral health settings. Research as early as the 1960s mentioned the importance of risk management (also known as “risk control”) and behavioral health, which was responsible for and emphasized upholding patient safety (Slemon et al., 2017).

More recently, Kilbourne et al.’s (2018) research expanded upon this idea and indicated the importance of implementing tools, such as risk-mitigation processes, to ensure positive safety outcomes. Kilbourne et al. (2018) suggested that effective risk management consists of measuring the quality of care and identifying critical barriers to service delivery. Additionally, they offered recommendations to improve and validate the quality of care, measure patient-centered outcomes, and ensure quality improvement using risk-management approaches. By shedding light on the benefits of risk management, which suggests improved outcomes and quality, this information can inform BHOs’ sustainability and suggests why risk mitigation is imperative.

In contrast, Muchtar and Qamariah (2014) explored risk management from a leadership perspective. Rather than emphasize why risk management was imperative, this research evaluated which parties are responsible for the ongoing assessment of risk

mitigation. Muchtar and Qamariah's (2014) study addressed the role of transformational leadership in organizational culture and innovation, noting that implementing this leadership style resulted in increased performance and competitiveness. A positive consequence associated with transformational leadership is that its implementation results in empowering teams to engage in proactive behavior driven by an BHO's goals.

Likewise, Chassin and Loeb's (2013) research expanded beyond the importance of individual leadership styles, indicating that practical risk-mitigation approaches correlated with the engagement of a BHO's stakeholders and policymakers, and that safety culture and process improvement resulted in effective risk mitigation. A three pronged approach recognized the impact of a collaborative and integrative risk management approach. This theme appears to align with the methods Agency ABC implements when it gathers feedback on service delivery from stakeholders and utilizes it to assist with strategic planning, as indicated in the agency's strategic-planning activities.

BHOs are responsible for ensuring clients' safety and appropriate treatment, which alludes to the importance of assessment by paying immediate attention to client complaints, grievances, and the quality-assurance process they implement (Reader et al., 2014). Upon researching effective methods and protocols applied to resolve client complaints, there does not appear to be a consensus regarding best-practice approaches; instead, there seems to be an array of practices utilized across BHOs (Mirzoev & Kane, 2018). Huang et al. (2018) expanded upon this idea, emphasizing the benefits of using patient satisfaction surveys to mitigate risk, improve patient safety, and inform strategic planning. Similarly, data presented by the World Health Organization (2012) noted that

patient safety increases with a four-step CRM process that includes identifying the risk, assessing the risk's frequency and severity, reducing or eliminating the risk, and assessing the costs saved by reducing the risk.

Another topic that has gained interest in the BHO setting is exploring the relationship between organizational sustainability and effective risk management. Schell et al. (2013) defined sustainability as “the ability to maintain programming and its benefits over time” (p. 1). St. Pierre's (2013) research alluded to this concept in suggesting a correlation between effective risk-management processes and “low costs in financial stability” (p. 1). Likewise, Richter's (2011) research suggested that a proactive approach to risk management can support sustainability. Reportedly, the links between these concepts are based upon a causal relationship. For example, this study indicates that a proactive approach to risk management can improve a BHO's competitiveness, thus enhancing its sustainability. Subsequently, one can confirm sustainability results from improving risk-management processes.

Although there is significant research to suggest that poor risk management and patient care can be detrimental to a BHO's overall sustainability and negatively impact risk mitigation, there is also research that challenges this perspective by suggesting there can be a positive correlation between the two variables (Slemon et al., 2017). Deering et al. (2019) referred to this concept of “helpful risk management” as a risk-management process that emphasizes patients' role in mitigating risk. This idea suggests patients' active engagement and transparency can decrease risk in the mental health setting. Similarly, Brown and Calnan (2016) built on the idea of relationship by expanding its

importance, noting there is a benefit in building trust related to mitigating risk. This capstone study provides insight into Agency ABC's risk mitigation practices.

### **Sources of Evidence**

Collecting and reviewing structural and operational data was imperative to exploring this capstone research's practice problem adequately. The secondary data sources reviewed in this study included, but were not limited to, Agency ABC's strategic plan, policy and procedure handbook, audits and surveys, and insurance documents. Review of such data provided a fundamental understanding of the practices and processes utilized to guide service delivery. Additionally, secondary data provided insight into Agency ABC's daily practices. Research suggests collecting and analyzing secondary data is beneficial based on cost, accessibility, and availability (Cheng & Phillips, 2014).

To complement the use of secondary data, collected primary data were explored to further expound on this practice problem. Structured interviewing was utilized to provide the context for processes associated with the BHO's risk-mitigation approaches. Once this information was collected, coding and pattern matching were implemented to identify and explore common themes that occurred across the interviewing experience. Thus, the use of primary and secondary data supported the execution of the capstone project.

### **Leadership Strategy and Assessment**

Agency ABC is committed to service delivery for its clients and community. The agency's focus on holistic wellness has resulted in developing several therapeutic

supports and interventions that promote health for all (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). The CGBG is one such intervention, as the garden was created for teaching clients and families about the benefits of introducing healthy foods into one's diet and providing family-oriented activities (Organization 123 website). Additionally, Agency ABC's leaders emphasize providing community outreach activities that showcase its clients' talent and teach the fundamentals associated with holistic wellness (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Moreover, Organization 123's website notes that these community outreach events teach healthy living as it applies to the body, mind, and spirit. Such activities can be credited with eliciting a collective community response to public health.

In the spring of 2019, Agency ABC's executive leadership team participated in a strategic-planning process facilitated by a consultant over five sessions. The agency and consultant together identified the following themes: (a) client retention; (b) development of new products, services, and partnerships; (c) funding diversification; (d) improvement and deployment of organizational resources; and staff professional development and credentialing (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). The executive leadership team and the consultant completed an organizational review to explore these themes, which examined the BHO's vision, mission, service population, and organizational values and included an environmental scan and SWOT analysis. Although the strategic planning process will occur every five years, this session was reportedly the first vital planning practice since Agency ABC was founded (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019).

The COO monitors the strategic-planning process closely for progress and challenges Agency ABC might encounter (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Per ownership to implement the strategy, the executive leadership team and consultant brainstormed, created, and prioritized five key areas, identifying goals and specific strategies to reach those goals to gauge progress toward meeting each of the assigned targets. A collaborative project-management tool is being implemented at Agency ABC to monitor the established milestones (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Moreover, ownership indicated that the results from the collection and completed semiannual surveys would also be used in this process. The action steps correlate with Agency ABC's assigned goals and normal business operations (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Considering the complexities of the identified goals, Agency ABC leaders identified several strategic challenges, although the consultant provided recommendations for mitigating them (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). The recommendations have been adopted from the Agency ABC's *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*.

### **Clients/Population Served**

According to the BHO's brochure, Agency ABC provides a comprehensive array of therapeutic sports and artistic activities that support physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Similarly, the website notes that youth 18 years and younger with mental health and developmental disabilities are introduced to the benefits of physical and competitive sports offered, including baseball, basketball, football, and soccer. According to the organization's website, these sports promote effective decision

making, sportsmanship, teamwork, and following directions. Per the agency website in addition to competitive sports, Agency ABC engages youth in artistic activities. For example, dance and cheer are utilized to encourage creativity and self-esteem (Agency ABC website). Reportedly, youth also engage in boxing, track and field, skateboarding, BMX biking, and gymnastics. These activities are used to teach and practice commitment, dedication, discipline, coping, and frustration tolerance skills. Further, the website indicates that yoga is provided to decrease muscle tension, increase concentration, and relieve stress.

Agency ABC's brochure (2019) reports that the BHO also offers supportive clinical counseling services to youth, including assessments for mental health and substance use services, nutrition, parental capacity, fitness support, expressive therapies, and other treatment services. By providing these services directly, Agency ABC can promote holistic wellness within the communities it serves. Overall, these comprehensive counseling services emphasize the correlation between mind and body.

Agency ABC also focuses on providing assessments, as well as clinical and supportive services to adults 18 years and older. According to the agency's brochure (2019), Agency ABC provides family and parent support services. Employees in this position provide support and assistance to the family utilizing education about effective interventions and parental rights and responsibilities. Additionally, family support providers assist with transportation; teach, model, and practice parenting techniques; and offer emotional support (Hoagwood et al., 2010). Assessments and evaluations of parents' parental quality and ability, known as parental capacity evaluations, are also

conducted when ordered by the court and monitored by the Departments of Social or Human Services. Moreover, adults are engaged in service delivery as active participants in clinical services offered to their children. Further, outpatient clinical services are provided to this population to address mental health and substance abuse.

Semiannual patient satisfaction surveys are utilized to obtain insight into the client experience at Agency ABC. Jenkinson et al. (2002) noted that such studies seek to represent client attitudes towards care. Similarly, Mohan et al. (2011) suggested the polls alluded to a client's "emotional, feelings, and perception" of service delivery received (p. 15). The COO reviewed and utilized the data gathered to assess and improve overall service delivery and client experiences.

Service and relationship building are essential aspects of Agency ABC's framework (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). One way the BHO serves its communities and builds relationships is through technology. Agency ABC provides monthly podcasts that include interviews with professional athletes, mental health professionals, and parents (Organization 123 website). The BHO also maintains a blog that introduces and provides information regarding the therapeutic benefits of the four quadrants of health (Organization 123 website). Additionally, the CGBG is utilized to teach horticulture skills and support relationship building with individuals and families through learning opportunities, as indicated on the website. Service and rapport building appear vital to the BHO, so this area is assessed on an ongoing basis, as indicated by the organization's commitment to the consistent exploration of innovative strategies to engage clientele (Organization 123 website). For example, the agency website indicates

that a wellness store is coming soon. This store is expected to provide natural products to treat mood and anxiety disorders.

### **Analytical Strategy**

This capstone project took a qualitative approach to gathering and exploring information about the impact of risk management on Agency ABC. Aspers and Corte (2019) have described the qualitative research process as an “iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied” (p. 140). Palinkas’ (2014) research indicated that applying a qualitative approach is beneficial to the study of mental health services because it provides a process for researchers to explore how a program or intervention operates.

In the current study, primary and secondary data sources provided insight into Agency ABC’s risk-mitigation processes and protocols. Subsequently, structured interviews were conducted with each participant with permission and at the discretion of ownership. Data from these interviews were recorded, transcribed, and edited. Upon completion of transcription and editing, the pattern-matching analytical approach was implemented. Pattern-matching is described as exploring captured data through the lens of patterns and themes (Suter, 2012). Then the data collected were uploaded to NVivo, a computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software, which is defined as “software packages that are developed, especially to support qualitative approaches to qualitative data” (Lewins & Silver, 2007, p. 34). NVivo supported the exploration of identified themes and patterns.

Moreover, the use of coding informed the interpretation of the data collected from the completed interviews. Coding is the interpretation of narrative data collected during the interviewing process, which alludes to communicated similarities and differences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Additionally, coding supported the ability to categorize and explore theories about the information gathered during interviews (Saldaña, 2016). Also, a review of the following secondary data sources was conducted: the BHO's policy and procedure manual; audit documents; and client, family, and stakeholder satisfaction surveys. Overall, a review of the BHO's strategic-planning documents and insurance policy provided further insight into the practice problem.

Agency ABC's owners and senior leadership were instrumental in the completion of this capstone case study. Data surrounding the organization's operations and strategic development, as well as implementation, were requested. The office administrator and COO were instrumental to providing further insight into the agency's organizational profile, background, and approach. The senior leadership team provided access to the agency's five year strategic plan, semiannual satisfaction surveys, and brochure. Each of these items helped clarify the organization's values, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This information was obtained through the CEO, who approved and permitted the exchange of the discussed items.

### **Participants**

In the data-collection phase of this doctoral study, three structured interviews were conducted with the permission of Agency ABC's senior leaders: the agency's CEO, COO, clinical supervisor, program manager, and office coordinator. Prior to engaging in

the interview process, the participants were required to complete consent forms. Upon completion of the consent forms, I provided participants with an interview protocol that informed them of the purpose and process to be followed throughout the study.

Bolderston's (2012) research suggests the protocol consist of the following components: (a) a description of the research questions, (b) the personnel involved in the study, (c) the process to be followed by the interviewer, (d) confidentiality and informed consent, (e) the questions to be asked, (f) examples of probes to assist in expanding upon answers provided, and (g) a thank-you statement.

To ensure confidentiality, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to be utilized throughout the study. The individuals identified to be interviewed were engaged in the capstone case-study process to help discern themes and patterns related to Agency ABC's risk-management processes across programs. The collection and exploration of such data provided insight into trends related to information transfer and knowledge and understanding the BHO's risk-management processes and expectations.

### **Summary and Transition**

Section 2 examined Agency ABC's background and approach to leadership, strategy, and clients. Additionally, this section alluded to the benefit of understanding Agency ABC's objectives and leadership intent, which provides insight into why there is or is not a match among the identified variables. Uncovering such information will advise Agency ABC's future service delivery. Section 3 addresses Agency ABC's workforce, operations, measurement, analysis, and knowledge-management component.

### Section 3: Workforce, Operations, Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge- Management Components of the Organization

#### **Introduction**

Section 3 of the capstone project addresses Agency ABC's measurement, analysis, and knowledge-management components. According to the Baldrige framework, this section's outcome guides improvements, innovations, and organizational competitiveness (NIST, 2017). Considering these aspects, the practice problem was risk management implications for Agency ABC. The practice-focused questions included the following: (a) How are risk-management policies and procedures developed? (b) How are risk-management concerns identified and reported? (c) What process is utilized to investigate allegations or complaints to assist in reporting findings? Who conducts these investigations and what is their training? (d) Who is responsible for responding to such allegations? (e) After a complaint has gone through the organization's process, what type of follow-up is completed? (f) How is this information used to inform continued risk management efforts?

Several sources of evidence were accessed to complete this capstone project. Structured interviews served as a primary source of evidence, and secondary sources included Agency ABC documents. The combination of both types of evidence provides an understanding of Agency ABC's daily operations and processes. Moreover, access to the primary and secondary sources of data were provided and guided by Agency ABC's CEO.

### **Analysis of the Organization**

Recruiting and retaining employees is a critical responsibility. Some research indicates that although it is an indirect correlation, there is nevertheless a relationship between BHOs providing training programs, proactive supervisory support, high-quality services, and increased job satisfaction (Fleury et al., 2017). According to Agency ABC's *Strategic Plan 2019-2024* (2019), providing quality patient care and continuing education and training opportunities for staff is imperative as both areas have been explored and assessed to determine Agency ABC's present state in conjunction with the BHO's competitive environment and future.

Agency ABC's workforce is recruited utilizing a variety of techniques. Per ownership, one way Agency ABC recruits its workforce is by placing announcements for open positions in job-search engines, including Indeed, Zip Recruiter, Simply Hired, and city government websites (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Additionally, the agency's website advertises open positions. Ownership further reported that once potential employees apply for a position, they are screened by human resources (HR) business partners and complete an interview. Upon being selected for a role at Agency ABC, the chosen candidate is referred to the prescreening process, which includes completing a two-step background check, submitting a professional license, retrieving motor vehicle records, and confirming a valid driver's license. Moreover, the candidates are connected to an IT staff administrator who assists with establishing a new email account, per Agency ABC's CEO (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020).

According to the agency's CEO, after being connected to the IT administrator, new staff are actively engaged in the orientation process, which takes place during the first 8 weeks of their employment (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). The orientation process begins with the completion of an online program. Per Agency ABC's CEO, the components for the first 2 weeks consist of an agency overview and fitness and nutrition training, while Week 3 provides an orientation on cognitive, spiritual, and emotional service-delivery areas. Week 4 covers basic first aid to ensure clients and families can receive lifesaving care if they encounter emergencies. The remaining weeks focus on bloodborne pathogens; preventing slips, trips and falls; defensive driving; and safety training. Further, employees are required to complete clinical documentation and task dream training (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Overall, personnel orientation and training are fundamental to achieving high-quality care, as Kilbourne et al. (2018) have documented.

As noted in Agency ABC's *Strategic Plan 2019-2024* (2019), the BHO has invested in ongoing training opportunities in which employees are required to participate annually. According to the CEO, these trainings provide a refresher to support best practices and review the four-quadrant approach to holistic wellness. Upon completing the training modules, "employees must complete comprehensive quizzes with a minimum score of 80%" (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Completion and passing records for each module are kept in each employee's personnel file to document that the training plan "reinforces Agency ABC's commitment to safety, wellness, and professional development" (HR business partner, personal communication,

2015).

Although the training plan is a valuable part of orientation and ongoing professional development for Agency ABC's employees, there does not appear to be a formal process for evaluating its effectiveness. Nonetheless, with counseling trends ever changing, the agency has continued to explore and implement evidence-based training (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). For example, the five-year strategic planning document identifies a training need for trauma-informed care and opiate abuse. Purkey et al.'s (2018) research noted that the implementation of such an approach acknowledges adverse childhood experiences are often the foundation for conditions such as mental health issues and substance use, which Agency ABC addresses daily. In 2017, data collected for the state in which Agency ABC serves youth and families, 27.4% of adults engaged in substance use behaviors, more specifically binge drinking (SAMHSA, 2019). Since opioid abuse was declared a national public health crisis in 2017, there has been a significant emphasis on addressing substance use globally and within individual communities. To address the overall holistic wellness of its youth and families, Agency ABC reportedly plans to begin offering opiate abuse-focused training. Moreover, the BHO began to offer trauma-informed training in March 2019, when it hosted a three-hour paid training event that provided insight into implementing a trauma informed approach to engage those involved with the justice system.

Agency ABC's supervision approach is two-pronged. First and foremost, supervisors aim to guide practice and service delivery. During monthly supervision

sessions for full-time staff, difficult clients and appropriate interventions that support and promote wellness are discussed (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Secondly, according to Agency ABC's CEO, supervision is provided to increase competence and decrease stress related to learning, support, and quality practice, all of which are critical components for mental health professionals (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020; see Borders et al., 2014). To explore the idea of supervision, it is first essential to define the activity. For the purposes of this research, supervision is described as a one-to-one process in which a supervisor assists a supervisee in developing professional skills (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2009).

Providing supervision for Agency ABC's staff is a significant responsibility because staff supervision has been directly correlated with risk-management issues and BHOs' overall success. Some research suggests supervision improves competence and decreases stress within the work environment (Pignata et al., 2017). Other research alludes to additional benefits, including improving service-delivery and supervision quality, as well as supporting collaboration among professionals involved in an individual's care. Moreover, it is through the supervision process that staff members' performance is also addressed. As per Agency ABC's leadership, on an annual basis, each staff member's performance is reviewed and assessed to explore alignment with the agency's mission, vision, values, and goals. Staff recognition is demonstrated through employees of the month. Considering the supervision functions, BHO leaders surmise

that this process is a fundamental part of staff members' professional development (Reiser, 2012).

Agency ABC's approach to clinical supervision is bilateral. Per senior leadership, direct-care staff, which include employees responsible for providing care to the agency's clientele, are required to attend weekly group supervision and monthly individual sessions (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). While group supervision sessions intend to provide a platform for discussion about global agency protocols and service-delivery needs, individual supervision sessions support each employee's exploration of their development plans through an assessment that addresses their professional growth as it relates to their roles and responsibilities. Further, Agency ABC hosts a monthly management team meeting that encompasses organizational updates; task assignments; progress; and issues encountered in meeting the agency's goals, vision, and mission.

Agency ABC's leaders appear to prioritize communication among clinical teams, which is evident through their conscious effort to emphasize an organizational value of professionalism. Professionals are defined in the five-year strategic-planning document as staff who are skilled, knowledgeable, and competent, and who demonstrate effective communication and respect in all interactions (*Agency ABC Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). Communication and respect have been researched as they relate to functionality and effectiveness.

There has been ongoing research and exploration pertaining to the mitigation of risk and individuals that are responsible for this task. Within this research, there appear to

be two approaches to mitigating risk: taking a collaborative approach at risk-management mitigation versus the path that only senior leadership is responsible for this process. Research completed by Braumann (2018) suggested the importance of the collaborative approach. It indicated the benefits of employees' self-awareness and the impact of their actions on potential risks associated with an organization. Such a system of risk management alludes to enterprise risk management (ERM) as defined by Viscelli et al. (2016) and described as a "holistic approach" to risk mitigation. Considering the concept of a "holistic approach," it appears that Braumann built upon her initial research by expounding on this idea. Braumann et al. (2020) found that senior leadership's perception of risk management, also described as "tone," impacted the team's response to risk mitigation. Additionally, this research suggested that the evaluation and utilization of the organization's budget and "performance measures" decreased risk-management issues (Braumann et al., 2020).

Contrary to this research, Meulnroek (2002) emphasized the risk-management function of senior leadership. Although these are two separate concepts, it appears that Agency ABC aligns with the idea that risk management is the responsibility of senior leadership and each team member. I thoroughly explored the role of senior leadership within this premise as it relates to Agency ABC. It appears that the BHO has committed to and implemented a collaborative approach in the process of risk mitigation. The commitment to a collaborative approach is evident in the policies and procedures established. Luthra and Dahiya's (2015) research validated the effectiveness of the collaborative approach to risk management, indicating that effective leadership consists

of operating with transparency and being interested in the thoughts of others, especially related to improvement. This conclusion suggests the importance of two-way communication, which Agency ABC's senior leadership appears to value.

To promote the effectiveness of the team, Agency ABC gathers information semiannually from its staff using a survey that explores the employee experience (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). This exchange of ideas supports the leadership team and the identification of areas of opportunity and challenges. In addition to the employee survey, Agency ABC elicits insight and feedback from its teammates during meetings and training sessions, as indicated on its agendas (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Research completed by Schmutz and Meier (2019) suggested BHOs can find value in focusing on maintaining and improving teamwork efforts. To support and promote a culture of teamwork and commitment to its employees, Agency ABC prioritizes identifying ways in which to offer growth opportunities to its team (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Per ownership, Agency ABC keeps this key driver at the forefront by collecting, analyzing, and using the survey results for future strategic-planning activities.

The BHO's five year strategic-planning document mentions that one theme it explored during the process was staff professional development and credentialing (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). After the leadership team explored this theme, they decided that the use of online and in-service platforms focused on "major areas of industry concerns" by 2020, including opioid addiction, treatment of the LGBTQ+ population, and health and trauma, would benefit their employees as they work

to improve service delivery (*Agency ABC Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). Reportedly, the 2019 *Strategic Plan*'s strategies that will be implemented to support this goal consist of exploring and selecting curriculum, developing training presentations, and establishing partnerships with certified trainers who can educate the team on the topics noted.

Although there is interest in external trainers, Agency ABC indicated an interest in identifying employees that possess specialized training in the aforementioned areas.

Established policies guide Agency ABC's daily operations. An organization's operations consist of administrative and maintenance activities (Kenton, 2020). With this guidance, Agency ABC's policies are based upon guidelines and standards established at the state and federal levels, where entities outline expectations across the continuum, from the number of visits required to promote wellness to organizations' expectations to minimizing risks and protecting patients (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020).

Agency ABC's operations are monitored by administrative staff. Research completed by Davis et al. (2019) suggested that protocols or scripts guide staff performance, which also includes administrative support and follow-up. An additional study also noted the benefits of a four-pronged workflow, which consists of identifying, engaging, and transitioning; providing treatment services; monitoring; and adjusting care as indicated. Implementing such a workflow provides additional oversight and supports safe and ethical clinical treatment.

Between March 29 and June 24, 2019, Agency ABC engaged in five targeted sessions to create a five year strategic plan (*Agency ABC Strategic Plan 2019-2024*,

2019). They ultimately chose to focus on improving staff professional development and credentialing, retaining clients, developing new products and services, engaging in partnerships, diversifying funding, and improving organization and deployment of resources. During this process, the leadership team revisited the agency's mission, vision, goals, and strategies and established action-planning steps. The strategic-planning process is a significant improvement effort to ensure an agency or organization meets its goals and objectives. In sum, the outcome of the strategic-planning process prioritized the following five goals (*Agency ABC Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019):

- Increase programming by expanding service delivery to include outpatient, intensive-in home, and mental health skill-building
- Establish four additional funding sources
- Relocate to a new building that meets the needs of the agency
- Increase clientele by 15%
- Assess and enhance the agency's infrastructure

### **Knowledge Management**

During this capstone project, the senior leadership of Agency ABC, which is considered the second tier of supervision that directly reports to ownership, provided me with several policies pertaining to the BHO's mitigation of risk. The policies consist of the BHO's monitoring and evaluating service quality, abuse, and neglect, as well as quality risk-management policies. Per Agency ABC's risk-management policy, the plan's purpose is to ensure the "identification of a process to monitor reduce and





June 20, 2020). Moreover, the office administrator works directly with the supervisor to forward the completed service data to respective referents every week. The outcomes of this monitoring are discussed with the leadership team (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Knowledge sharing occurs during monthly administrative meetings that include senior leadership. Additionally, these meetings address business practices, client care, and progress in areas of opportunity for Agency ABC (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020).

To monitor patient experience, there is a process that informs the agency's risk management policy. The knowledge-management process related to mitigating risk consists of two steps. According to Agency ABC's policy, Step 1 is defined by the completion of a systematic risk assessment. The risk assessment addresses the following five components:

- the environment of care
- clinical assessment or reassessment processes
- staff competence and adequacy of staffing
- use of high-risk procedures, including seclusion and restraint
- a review of serious incidents

This information is adapted with permission from Agency ABC's Policy on Risk Management (2013).

Also, on an annual basis per the risk management policy, Agency ABC is required to have a safety inspection of any and all sites they utilize to provide therapeutic and clinical services (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). The purpose of

this inspection is to ensure that there are no potential safety risks present on any of the properties at which the BHO provides services (Agency ABC Policy on Risk Management, 2013). Such an inspection suggests a proactive approach to risk mitigation. To address risk mitigation across both areas, Agency ABC uses a quality assurance survey. The quality assurance survey is collected from youth, families, adults, and referents by their counselors. Thereafter, program supervisors compile and review the surveys quarterly, along with senior leadership (Agency ABC Monitoring & Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013). These surveys are used to monitor and evaluate service delivery. Moreover, Agency ABC's CEO reviews the documentation and data annually and creates a corrective action plan when necessary. The collected data is also used to establish goals and objectives for strategic planning.

It is important to note that according to the 2013 Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, which was revised in 2019, Agency ABC has a quality improvement process that includes the use of the Ishikawa, or Fishbone effect diagram, to measure areas of quality improvement. Per the policy, these data are to be monitored by the HR business partner. Reportedly, the HR business partner is also required to conduct a root cause analysis (RCA), which is described by Uberoi et al.'s 2007 research as "a tool for identifying prevention strategies and a process that is part of the effort to build a culture of safety and move beyond the culture of blame" (p.1). Moreover, the policy indicates that Agency ABC has a council that meets quarterly to review adherence to goals and objectives set by senior leadership (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013). Additionally, during the council meetings, the minutes are

documented and the BHO's program supervisor is required to chair the meeting (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013).

The policy also outlines steps to mitigate risk. Agency ABC's risk-management approach consists of a two-tier process. The first tier consists of staff monitoring risk management, while the second step addresses supervisors and administrators' responsibility (Agency ABC Risk Management Policy, 2013). The abuse and neglect policy requires supervisors and administrators to provide oversight by visiting each program monthly. Additionally, per the policy, these two entities must keep a record of their visits and survey the environment during visits. Such practices allow the supervisors and administrators to be proactive should a risk management issue occur at the programs. To support such risk mitigation, these individuals are required by the agency to avoid visiting within predictable timeframes and ensure that the staff operate and behave in congruence with the established policies and protocols (Agency ABC Abuse and Neglect Policy, 2013). Should a risk-management issue arise, the staff must immediately report this to their immediate supervisor, and an incident report must be immediately completed (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Afterwards, the risk management data are brought to senior leadership's attention and explored within the purview of the leadership team (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). Although Agency ABC only began the strategic-planning process within the past year, the five-year strategic plan suggests that once a concern is identified and explored, goals and strategies are created, and the progress is monitored and reported by the COO (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019). As indicated by senior leadership, the

newly identified goals are monitored in real-time, utilizing the FreedCamp online management system.

Considering the identification of risk management and its impact on the agency, senior leadership has most recently prioritized two risk areas that their insurer brought to their attention: client transportation and providing one-to-one clinical service (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). Subsequently, the BHO was advised to explore whether to continue to provide these services considering increased premiums (Participant B, personal communication, June 23, 2019). As previously mentioned in this capstone project, this consequence can impact the agency's overall sustainability.

As a result of risk management's importance, the state governing body, DBHDS, who most recently provided provisional approval to the BHO to provide intensive in-home counseling, provides guidance to promote and support evidence-based and appropriate risk-management processes and protocols (Participant B, personal communication, June 20, 2020). According to the governing body, there are nine best practice steps to mitigate risk (DBHDS website). The first step includes identifying a risk manager. This individual is "responsible for the risk management function, conducting investigations, root cause analysis, and data analysis" (DBHDS website). Secondly, the guidance indicates that BHOs must implement an incident-reporting system that consists of requirements for reporting and employee training to promote best practices (DBHDS website). The governing body also emphasizes the importance of completing a risk assessment, monitoring, and data analysis, in conjunction with an RCA as outlined on its website. An RCA is defined as a policy and procedure for evaluating all severe incidents,

including “adverse reactions” to clients, which results in “permanent impairments of the individual” (DBHDS website). Furthermore, BHOs must have an established risk management plan, complete life-safety inspections, and conduct mortality reviews to support best practices and mitigate risk (DBHDS website). Lastly, completion of and management of documentation are identified as critical functions that promote effective risk management. To further support BHOs, the governing body provides an example of a risk-management plan that can be utilized as a blueprint to assist them in the development of this fundamental responsibility.

### **Summary and Transition**

Section 3 of this capstone study consisted of an analysis of Agency ABC and explored knowledge management, including how the BHO manages its information and assets. Synthesizing this information allows Agency ABC to transform service-delivery data into usable findings, which is incredibly important as it can provide direction for organizational quality improvement and decision making. Agency ABC’s use of policy, surveys, and strategic-planning processes assists with accomplishing this goal. In sum, the Baldrige excellence framework indicates Section 3 informs how Agency ABC “reviews findings to improve its performance and how the BHO learns” (NIST, 2017, p. 12). Thus, the review and analysis of performance measurement, analysis and evaluation, and improvement are essential aspects of this case-study research.

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

### **Introduction**

This capstone study identifies and explains the risk-management approach Agency ABC has used to mitigate organizational risk. To analyze the BHO's risk management approaches effectively, it is imperative to consider the purpose of administrative policy. According to Amadei (2016), administrative policies and systems provide organizations with a directional tone. Second, organizations implement such policies and systems to establish a process for assessing their present state and considering how they can move from their current state to the desired state. Third, policy helps leaders of agencies like Agency ABC ensure a continued match across the BHO's mission, vision, goals, and values. Overall, understanding the importance of policies benefits the BHO because it allows them to follow a process and direction and promotes ongoing organizational growth and development.

Considering the role of policy, one can infer that the risk-management process incorporates the practical and everyday use of established procedures. Agency ABC's CEO alluded to these procedures when she indicated she makes a conscious effort to ensure that on a daily basis, she and her team are intentional in carefully ensuring they do "not contribute to risk" (Participant B, personal communication, October 23, 2020). This comment suggests that Agency ABC prioritizes the risk-management process, as noted in the previously mentioned strategic-planning document (*Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019).

Presently, Agency ABC uses the following policies and organizational documents to guide their risk-management practices:

- *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*
- 2020-2021 Policy Document
- Office Workflow
- Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality
- Quality Assurance Survey
- Policy on Risk Management
- Employee Performance Evaluation
- Discharge Form

All the aforementioned documents were reviewed and analyzed for this capstone study.

Additionally, these policies have been transformed into processes that guide ongoing organizational development. Two examples of these processes include the RCA and the fishbone diagram. Agency ABC has reported adopting both processes to aid in risk mitigation (Participant B, personal communication, October 23, 2020). The RCA is described as a “systematic approach aimed at discovering the causes of close calls and adverse events to identify preventative measures” (Spath, 1999, para. 1). Further, the fishbone diagram “seeks to understand the many potential causes contributing to the quality-of-care problem and focus improvement efforts” (Harel et al., 2016, p. 4). These two approaches complement one another, as the RCA informs problems and solutions, while the fishbone diagram emphasizes causes and effects related to organizational issues (Harel et al., 2016).

## Interviews

Semistructured interviews were completed with selected leaders of Agency ABC to obtain their perspectives on the organization's risk-management strategies. Interviews were completed with three participants including the CEO, program supervisor, and HR business partner, respectively referred to as Participants A, B, and C. To promote continuity and transparency across the interviews, I utilized Bolderston's (2012) research and approach as a guide for collecting qualitative data for this study. Bolderston (2012) suggests that prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher should provide the participants with the following information:

- A description of the research questions
- The personnel to be involved in the study
- The process to be followed by the interviewer
- Confidentiality and informed consent
- The questions to be asked
- Examples of probes to assist in expanding upon answers provided
- A thank-you statement

Moreover, for confidentiality purposes, each participant in the study was assigned a pseudonym to be utilized throughout. Each participant was asked a series of five questions about the organization's risk-management processes. The first three questions explored policies and procedures for mitigating risk, while the remaining two questions identified those responsible for carrying out risk-management processes. The following five questions were asked:

1. How are risk-management policies and procedures developed?
2. How are risk-management concerns identified and reported?
3. What process is utilized to investigate allegations or complaints to assist in reporting findings? Who conducts these investigations, and what is their training?
4. Who is responsible for responding to such allegations?
5. After a complaint has gone through the organization's process, what type of follow-up is completed? How is this information used to inform continued risk-management efforts?

### **Theme Identification**

I used a three-step process to analyze the data collected from the conducted structured interviews. Initially, the data collected were organized and entered into an Excel sheet, which provided an opportunity to view the data from each interview collectively. After organizing this information, I transferred the data, also referred to as a code, into the NVivo qualitative database for analysis. This approach is referred to as coding. Saldaña (2008) defines coding as “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). I considered triangulation to synthesize the data from the interviews, organizational documents, and an academic and professional literature review. This methodology resulted in four core themes: an organization-wide shared responsibility for risk management and mitigation, policy, communication, and follow-through.

**Theme #1: Shared Risk-Management Responsibility**

The data analysis uncovered a theme of shared risk management across the organization, suggesting that risk management is a collective effort. Melecky's (2013) research acknowledges the benefit of engaging those that are impacted and exposed to the risk in the risk-mitigation process. Subsequently, this research emphasized the importance of collaboration among those affected, which can include direct-care staff and those who are ultimately responsible for the management of risk, such as senior leadership (Melecky, 2013).

Similarly, Rogan et al.'s research suggests that risk management is "a professional duty of care" assigned to mental health professionals (Rogan et al, 2007, p. 11). This research does not prioritize one particular party responsible for the risk management process; instead, it identifies the importance of utilizing a partnership approach to such mitigation. Moreover, Rogan et al.'s research expands beyond simply considering the internal risk and acknowledges external risk that can impact the organization's clientele. Subsequently, the partnership consists of those receiving care and their caregivers and healthcare professionals, as well as other organizational stakeholders. Thus, one can discern that as previously noted, the mitigation of risk management can be defined as a shared responsibility.

Data collected from Participant A indicated that although staff usually identify risk-management concerns, the actual management of such instances is handled and finalized by the CEO and owners. This notion was validated as the participant stressed that senior leadership informs the risk-management approach. Thus, one can discern that

members of Agency ABC look to senior leadership for direction pertaining to the mitigation of risk.

To address such direction, Stevenson's (2010) research suggests the importance of leaders' attitude and activities during the risk-management process. Within this research, emphasis is placed on leadership to ask the right questions, act with integrity, and seek the opinion of others when addressing risk mitigation (Stevenson, 2010).

Agency ABC's program manager alluded to such engagement. On a monthly basis, the executive leadership team, which consists of senior leadership and the agency's owners, participate in a collaborative meeting that consists of "assessing possible concerns which may be encountered within its programs" (Participant A, personal communication, October 22, 2020). Although Participant A denied that policies are created during these meetings, it appears discussion surrounding areas of opportunity and possible threats to effective risk management occur.

On the other hand, Participants B and C's responses to the exploration of the risk management process within Agency ABC focused on the perspective of shared responsibility while prioritizing individual roles. Both participants mentioned that although staff was initially responsible for identifying risk-management issues, the CEO and HR business partner are ultimately responsible for the finalization of risk mitigation, suggesting that one's responsibility in the risk-mitigation process is dictated by his or her role. Responses collected during the semistructured interviews validated this point. When asked about who is responsible for creating policies, Participant B stated, "We complete policies" (Participant B, personal communication, October 23, 2020). She

described herself and the HR business partner as “we.” Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that the risk-management issues that resulted in policies were initially identified by “staff” but developed by senior leadership and the DBHDS. Although the data gathered from the three participants addressed the process from different angles, there appeared to be a strong reflection of the importance of shared responsibility for risk mitigation.

The identified theme of shared responsibility is also present among Agency ABC’s risk-informed policies. During the data analysis process, four of the eight policies reviewed suggested the risk-management process encompasses the entire organization (see Appendix A). As noted in the appendix, the reviewed policies clearly depict required risk-mitigation activities to be completed and the responsible parties assigned to such activities.

The analysis of Agency ABC’s policies resulted in findings that support the literature’s findings of a relationship between shared responsibility and risk management. Of the eight agency documents reviewed, the Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy (2013) aligns most closely with the theme, placing emphasis on each team member’s responsibility to be actively engaged in risk-management activities. More specifically, the policy indicates that this responsibility supports the BHO’s ongoing organizational development and improvements. The Risk-Management Policy complements the secondary theme mentioned above, as it specifies the CEO’s overall responsibility for risk mitigation. However, this policy takes an in-depth look at the level of responsibility and acknowledges it is shared with the HR business partner. Although

Participant A did not make this connection, the other two participants alluded to it.

In sum, there are several implications for findings in the shared responsibility theme. It appears that Agency ABC has a strong foundation of leadership alignment with risk-management planning. However, there is some discrepancy between the shared vision for planning and actual team implementation, meaning that Agency ABC is at risk for a lack of consistency in risk management implementation among staff. Additionally, this lack of consistency can lead to increased risk, subsequently resulting in increased liability concerns.

### **Theme #2: Policy**

Agency ABC is positioned with the strategic-planning process supporting its ongoing program development. More specifically, the BHO's clear investment in managing risk is an example of an area of development that has been prioritized. In addition to hiring a consultant to discover goals and strategies to meet the agency's needs, the BHO has also established three policies to guide risk mitigation. Moreover, Agency ABC has noted the benefit of the oversight of a council.

Councils and boards alike have critical responsibilities as it relates to risk mitigation. According to Viscelli et al.'s (2016) research, these responsibilities include assessing and giving approval for the management process assigned to ERM evaluation and identification of risk mitigation. Further research acknowledges that senior management's involvement in this process is crucial (Beasley et al., 2015). Recognizing this critical relationship is another example of Agency ABC's strength.

Data collected from the interviews shed light on leadership's perspectives on risk management. During an interview with the CEO, she mentioned Agency ABC prioritizes risk-management policy. As a result of prioritizing risk management, she indicated her investment in ensuring that the team does not engage in actions that increase risk (Participant B, personal communication, October 23, 2020). Although risk mitigation is reportedly prioritized, there appears to be a difference in opinion pertaining to the accessibility of agency policy that guides practices and strategies, alluded to during the first conducted interview.

Research suggests that creation and implementation of a risk-management policy is critical for agencies like Agency ABC (NEJM Catalyst, 2018). NEJM Catalyst's (2018) research implies this importance, indicating that "the Risk Management Plan becomes the guiding document for how an organization strategically identifies, manages and mitigates risk" (p. 7). Moreover, other research indicates that formal risk management policies are imperative to the following strategies:

[A]dherence with recognized professional practices, promote compliance with regulations, statutes, and accreditation requirements; reduce practice variation; standardize practices across multiple entities within a single a health system; serve as a resource for staff, particularly new personnel; and reduce reliance on memory, which, when overtaxed, has been shown to be a major source of human errors or oversights. (Irving, 2014, p. 3)

Although Agency ABC's risk-management policy was consistently mentioned across the interviews, there appeared to be some difference of opinion regarding policy

access and implementation. Participant A described herself as “a policy person,” validating her investment in adhering to policies established to promote risk mitigation. She further indicated that she preferred referring to policy when encountering a challenge in her role as a program supervisor. Furthermore, Participant A explained that her staff have asked her questions pertaining to risk-management expectations and she has been unable to produce the policies requested. On the other hand, Participant B noted that she has shared the policy with her team via email. Additionally, she advised that along with the policy, staff are forwarded documentation to complete verifying they have reviewed the policy. Similar to Participant B, Participant C shared that she partnered with the CEO to create and establish risk-management policies for Agency ABC. The policies are reportedly maintained within the employee handbook. However, it is important to note that she did not proffer any insight regarding the manner in which the handbook was disseminated.

In sum, the data collected and analyzed suggests there is not a shared common understanding of Agency ABC’s risk-management policies. Although risk-management policies are provided, there appears to be a difference of opinion regarding access to the policy and training efforts implemented by ownership and the HR business partner to ensure proper understanding of the policies. Subsequently, the implications are that without a shared and understood consistent vision, planning, and agency-wide training pertaining to risk management, Agency ABC is at risk for fragmented implementation of related procedures.

### **Theme #3: Communication**

Communication is an important component of the risk-management process, such that in the early 2000s, the term “risk communication” began to gain recognition (Georlandt et al., 2020). Risk communication is defined as “communication and consultation” activities associated with the risk-management process that result in the promotion of risk awareness and understanding (Trevena, 2014). Goerlandt et al. (2020) analyzed this definition further and acknowledged that risk communication supports “governance and informed private decision-making” (p. 1).

Additionally, research on risk communication notes that with risk management, communication is not limited to one way, suggesting that to address risk management, organizations would benefit from not only providing guidance on risk mitigation but also being receptive to receiving information from others about services rendered. This form of communication is referred to as two-way communication and is valued within the risk management field (Spencer et al., 2014). Agency ABC’s policies appear to support the premise of two-way communication. The BHO’s policy and collected information from the interviews note that areas of risk can be identified by anyone, while the final response to risk-mitigation threats is managed specifically by senior leadership. Upon concluding the investigation and creating a plan to guide practice and promote protection of the BHO in the future, the CEO creates guidance to be distributed throughout the agency.

Moreover, Trevena’s (2014) research recognizes the benefits of this form of communication, indicating that to address risk management, the practitioner and client benefit from exchanging information. Subsequently, Agency ABC utilizes its quality

assurance survey annually to gather such information and inform its risk-management protocol. Likewise, other research expands upon the benefits of two-way communication as it emphasizes the communication from the perspective of stakeholder communication for societal risk governance (Trevena, 2014). The present study hints to the perception of internal risk, such as within patient care, versus external risk, which incorporates stakeholders' perceptions; both are critical points to consider within the risk-management process.

Agency ABC hosts a diverse workforce and service continuum, indicated in the fact that the agency employs full-time positions, part-time positions, students, volunteers, and contractors to promote its mission. Considering Agency ABC's wide reach, it can be somewhat difficult to engage all staff in the traditional face-to-face manner. Therefore, technology is utilized to promote communication.

Upon exploring Agency ABC's communication process, Participant A mentioned that throughout the agency, technology-supported transparency is evident, as "typically a lot of information is disseminated that allows everybody to stay in the loop and be on top of things." Participant B offered similar insight into risk mitigation, sharing that the follow-up process for responding to risk mitigation is extensive. Upon responding to a risk-management issue, senior leadership provides "trainings and makes everybody aware of what may go on depending on the extent of the situation" (Participant A, personal communication, October 22, 2020). For example, Participant B explained that upon encountering a required policy adjustment pertaining to the number of clients that can be safely transported in the agency vehicle, the staff, identified as both needing to

know about and impacted by the policy adjustment, were advised via email of the changes in the future transportation protocol. Additionally, it was communicated that leadership also spoke with staff, and the policy was addressed in new-hire orientation thereafter. This example suggests that educational sessions, emails, and instant messages are utilized to share valuable risk-mitigation information. Although there appears to be significant communication across Agency ABC's team, Participant A presented little information regarding the entity behind the established and implemented risk management policy.

This point was noteworthy since Participants B and C mentioned such information. According to Participant B and C, risk-management policy was collaboratively established and implemented by the CEO and human resources business partner. Per these individuals, DBHDS and other governing bodies are responsible for guiding the creation and evaluation of risk policies. Thus, the findings from Theme 3 pertaining to a full awareness of navigation of the risk-management policies are inconsistent. The implications are that without awareness and familiarity with the BHO's policies, Agency ABC is at risk of an inability to continue to expand and compete within its environment.

#### **Theme #4: Ongoing Risk Monitoring**

The fourth theme identified across the interviews was that of organizational follow-through related to the risk-management protocol. This concept is referred to within the literature as risk monitoring, which has been described as considering and creating a plan that identifies risk monitoring, risk-response decisions, and risk-response

measures (Gantz & Philpott, 2013). The completion of such a plan supports an ongoing risk management process. Lele's (2012) research takes the perspective that in addition to a risk assessment, organizations benefit from monitoring and reviewing the assessment's findings, communicating with and involving the team in the risk-management process, and conducting continuous monitoring of risk-management concerns.

Matan and Hartnett's (2011) research specified the importance of organizations implementing processes that support understanding and cohesion of risk mitigation. One such process is referred to as staffing risk. According to this research, organizations should, on an ongoing basis, create and review employee handbooks with teammates; assess and review hiring, disciplinary, and termination processes; and ensure that job descriptions note areas of responsibility for risk-management processes to address staffing risk (Matan & Hartnett, 2011). Addressing staffing risk in this matter may further inform risk-management assessment.

Agency ABC's Monitoring and Evaluating Service Policy, which addresses health and safety management areas, informs the established risk-management protocol. This policy was established "to ensure a risk management plan is in place to identify, monitor, reduce, and minimize risks associated with harms and risk of harm, including personal injury, infectious disease, property damage or loss, and other sources of potential liability" (Agency ABC Risk-Management Policy, 2013, p. 1). By definition, this policy emphasizes Agency ABC's approach to proactive risk mitigation as indicated by its reference to potential liability. Moreover, the policy presents the following five steps to be implemented to address risk mitigation:

- The HR business partner conducts investigations and completes RCA.
- Agency ABC uses the Failure Mode Effect Analysis to evaluate risks, identify potential causes, score, and create an action plan to delegate assignments for the tasks identified.
- Agency ABC facilitates a systemic risk analysis on an annual basis.
- Agency ABC annually conducts and documents a safety inspection with recommendations noted and implemented.
- Agency ABC documents injuries of its staff, contractors, students, volunteers, and visitors that occur during service delivery.

In addition to identifying the required risk-management steps to be taken, the policy directly identifies the persons responsible for these steps as noted above. To further inform the risk-management protocol and fully understand the agency's approach at risk mitigation, the Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy was reviewed as well. The policy calls for the creation of an independent entity to monitor and assess service quality and effectiveness, as well as make programmatic recommendations and improvements (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013). This entity is referred to within the policy as the Quality Assurance Council, which serves as a part of the quality-improvement program. The Quality Assurance Council's purpose is "to identify, monitor, and evaluate clinical and service quality and effectiveness on a systematic and ongoing basis" (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013, p. 1). The policy requires that the members of the council consist of employees at each leadership level. Additionally,

the council is required to be chaired by Agency ABC's program manager (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013). Moreover, this council is required to meet quarterly, monitor quality assurance surveys, and provide recommendations for service improvements (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013). Although Agency ABC's policy notes the establishment of the council, evidence of its creation was absent throughout the data-collection efforts. Upon being asked about the council during the interviews senior leaders of Agency ABC denied its implementation, suggesting an area of opportunity.

The most significant implication for the findings regarding this theme is that of responsibility to follow through on the established policy. Even though the agency already has an established plan to further inform risk, it appears that the creation of the identified council has been overlooked. This lack may account for increased internal vulnerability. Furthermore, there appears to be a calculated approach toward risk management, as the agency has assigned both annual reviews and reviews to be conducted upon encountering a risk-management issue, rather than utilizing the ongoing approach as indicated by a council. Subsequently, Agency ABC may not have the opportunity to respond in a timely manner to trends within its environment, resulting in its inability to compete within its competitive environment.

### **Strengths and Limitations of the Study**

It is important to note that there are limitations of the case-study research methodology. One area of concern is "reproducibility of the findings", which refers to whether a research study's outcomes can be generalized as a proper "representation of

the phenomena studied” across other settings (Anderson, 2010, p. 3). Although future researchers can mirror this qualitative approach to studying risk-mitigation policies implemented within BHOs, it is plausible that they may encounter difficulty reproducing the perceived results because of the BHO’s structure or its competitive environmental influences. This difference could be further influenced by the agency’s clientele.

A second limitation of case-study research is the small sample size of data sources. For example, the sources of evidence used, and the number of interviews conducted represent a small percentage of the overall data and staffing at Agency ABC, thus presenting some difficulty in assuming the same results would occur if the study was repeated. Faber and Fonseca’s (2014) research on sample sizes indicated that small sample sizes could cause a future researcher to operate under a false premise related to the relationship between risk management and a BHO.

However, case-study research is also associated with specific methodological strengths, which were applicable to this study. First, the data were collected within the actual setting being studied, allowing for exploration of the risk-management phenomenon specific to Agency ABC and the established practice problem. Additionally, this research approach provides rich data, which “allows a lot of detail to be collected that would not normally be easily obtained by other research designs” (psud43, n.d., p. 1). Ultimately, although the identified limitations should be kept in mind, the specific practice problem for Agency ABC was best addressed using the selected research methodology.

### **Summary and Transition**

Section 4 analyzed and explored the risk-management processes implemented by Agency ABC. The case-study approach presents strengths and challenges alike. While this capstone research was conducted within the actual study environment, the number of people engaged in providing the data for this study was limited. Another limitation of this study is its generalizability. Overall, this section of the capstone project included the data analysis and preparation of the findings. Understanding these areas helps recommend improvements to the BHO's leadership, strengthening its risk-management approach. Section 5 addresses recommendations for Agency ABC and concludes the study.

## Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

### **Overview**

A case-study approach was used to identify and evaluate the risk-management practices of Agency ABC. Data were collected from structured interviews, a literature review, and a review of select organizational documents. The following section integrates the findings with the literature and offers recommendations based upon the analysis of study data.

### **Recommendations**

Agency ABC participated in strategic planning within the last year. According to the agency's strategic plan, the purpose of this activity was to "position the organization to reach new heights of excellence in the field of mental health for individuals and families" (Agency ABC *Strategic Plan 2019-2024*, 2019, p. 4). During this capstone project, there were several practices noted that support effective risk mitigation.

In addition to its dedication to excellence, Agency ABC's willingness to prioritize risk management as an identified area of focus assigned by the strategic-planning process is an organizational strength. Another practice that strengthens the BHO's approach to risk-mitigation policy identifies individuals responsible for risk mitigation and required practices to guide the process throughout the organization. Furthermore, the CEO's openness to receiving and exploring information about risk from its liability insurer also suggests a desire to improve risk-management practices (Participant B, personal communication, October 23, 2020). While this study identified healthy risk-management

activities currently implemented by Agency ABC, opportunities were noted for the BHO to work toward continued risk-management improvement.

**Recommendation #1: Further Development of the Agency's Risk Management Program**

Agency ABC's Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy suggests the BHO would benefit from a dedicated quality-improvement program to aid in risk mitigation. According to the policy, such a program would utilize measurable goals and objectives; identify, monitor, and evaluate clinical and service quality and effectiveness on a systematic and ongoing basis; and report on statewide initiatives (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013). To further support effective risk-management program development, I propose allocating a dedicated staff position to lead the quality-improvement program.

Although the BHO has acknowledged the importance of addressing risk, further development and implementation of a formal, structured quality-improvement program that is solely responsible for risk-management planning can ensure it remains prioritized on a consistent basis. In the organization's present state, the CEO and HR partner work collaboratively to address risk management, meaning that risk management must compete for attention among the many other high-priority tasks managed by people in these roles. This competition may result in a reactive approach being taken to risk management, as proactive planning and preparation falls lower on the CEO and HR partner's daily priority list. Subsequently, Agency ABC would benefit from considering

the costs and benefits of having a dedicated quality-improvement/risk-management staff position to limit and manage risk exposure.

The first step to further expanding the risk-management program consists of allocating a trained risk-informed individual to lead the program. The identified individual should be knowledgeable of best practices and evidence-based risk mitigation. The responsibilities of this program leader could consist of ongoing risk assessment and monitoring, establishment of risk-informed policies and procedures, and continuous development of the risk-management program. Additionally, the program leader would collaborate with senior leadership on all areas that align with risk mitigation. The implementation of such an approach to minimizing the BHO's areas of risk would address the improvement opportunities noted in the results section under the themes of policy, communication, and ongoing risk monitoring.

### **Recommendation #2: Risk-Management Training**

The implementation of risk-management training would complement the development of a risk-management program. As risk management continues to be studied, research has emphasized the importance of building a risk mitigation culture (Jaspal, 2011). The benefit of creating a risk culture supports BHOs' use of best practices. Jaspal's (2011) research acknowledged that leadership's responsibility is to "continuously train, educate, and communicate with employees" to be within the scope of best practice. One of the discovered areas of opportunity is risk awareness and management training. This theme was noted in Participant A's comments, which suggested that although there are policies for risk management, she has not had the

opportunity to independently review the guidelines due to issues surrounding the procedures' accessibility (Participant A, personal communication, October 22, 2020).

Lack of accessibility to policies can have a significant negative impact on risk management efforts and compromise patient care and safety (Irving, 2014).

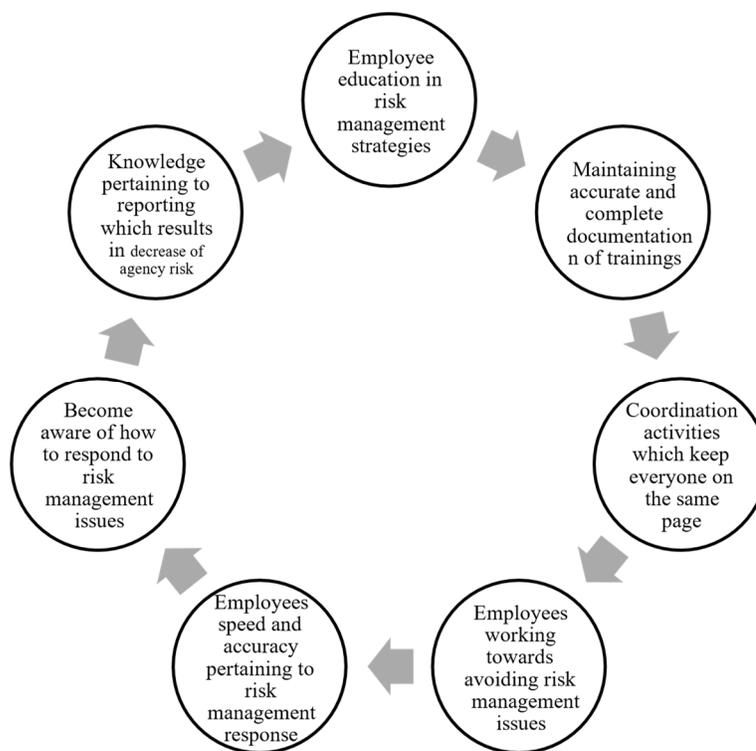
Having no or limited access to risk management policies prevents staff from complying with strategies and approaches defined by risk-mitigation guidelines, which can result in increased organizational risk. Secondly, it is imperative to note that the training theme can be discerned within the monitoring and evaluating service quality policy. This policy identifies senior leadership and the Quality Council's responsibility in the ongoing risk-mitigation processes, suggesting that Agency ABC's engagement in proactive training on risk management would be beneficial. It is of importance to note that although the Quality Council is mentioned in the BHO's policies it has not been established as of yet.

Eickhoff-Shemek et al.'s (2009) research noted that risk-management training must be prioritized to increase the safety of those who receive services. This idea implies the previously mentioned relationship between risk management and patient safety. Furthermore, Eickhoff-Shemek et al.'s research suggests team members should receive ongoing training on risk management based on their roles and responsibilities. Eickhoff Shemek et al.'s (2009) study emphasized the benefit of training being offered during a staff member's initial training and on an ongoing basis after that. Additionally, Eickhoff-Shemek et al.'s (2009) research suggests that in addition to training, it is beneficial for BHOs to implement observations of the taught risk-management procedures to ensure

understanding (Eickhoff-Shemek et al., 2009). Similarly, Moskowitz's (2018) research indicated that staff proactive risk management is limited without adequate training. As a result, it is recommended that the BHO address training within the scope and collaboration of the aforementioned risk-management program. Moskowitz's research further provides a seven-step process that can inform activities of a risk-management program while emphasizing the training aspect, as indicated in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Moskowitz's Proactive Risk Management Strategy*



*Note.* Adapted from “The Importance of Healthcare Risk Management”, by D.

Moskowitz, 2018, *Investopedia*,

<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/personalfinance/072315/importance-healthcarerisk-management.asp>.

In sum, the implementation of risk-management training can be used to address the themes of shared risk-management responsibility, policy, communication, and ongoing risk monitoring.

### **Recommendation #3: Implementation of a Quality Council**

Another recommendation that could positively impact the risk-management process utilized by Agency ABC is the implementation of a Quality Council. Agency ABC's Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy (2013) recommends the formation of a Quality Council to monitor "systematic and continuous actions that lead to measurable improvement in the services, supports, and health status of the individuals receiving services" (p. 1). The policy notes that the Quality Council would meet quarterly and make recommendations for program improvements (Agency ABC Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality Policy, 2013, p. 2). Although the policy recommends a Quality Council be established, Agency ABC does not appear to have followed through with the council's implementation.

Similar to councils, some BHOs have established advisory boards that support their risk-management needs. Much like councils, these advisory boards are responsible for offering strategic-planning input, identifying performance objectives, making appointments, and providing management oversight (Brown et al., 2009). Considering

these responsibilities, Kiel and Nicholson's (2002) research emphasizes the importance of these bodies reviewing and informing risk management policies, practices, and performances.

The Quality Council would work closely with the risk management program lead to ensure a robust approach to organization-wide risk management. There are many ways to establish the roles, responsibilities, and workflow between the program lead and the Quality Council. The primary goal is to ensure that the two entities work closely together with a shared vision and strategy for developing and implementing risk-management efforts across the organization.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

There are a few recommendations for future studies to be considered. The mitigation of risk within the behavioral healthcare setting is a critical responsibility ultimately assigned to senior leaders. According to Stephenson's (2010) research, a leader's approach to addressing risk management is directly related to a BHO's success upon encountering challenges within its competitive environment. Subsequently, a recommendation for future research is to explore leadership styles and their impact on risk mitigation within the behavioral healthcare setting. Such analysis can help identify matches between leadership styles and effective risk-management practices. Another research recommendation would be exploring barriers to use of standard risk management tools, such as the RCA and the fishbone diagram among small and midsized BHOs. Tools such as the RCA and fishbone diagram can help BHOs better understand

and prioritize risk-management activities. It could be helpful to understand the most common barriers to use of such best-practice tools among small and midsized BHOs.

### **Summary**

In sum, three recommendations are offered that could positively impact Agency ABC's risk-management efforts. The first recommendation consists of creating a dedicated risk-management program. This action will improve communication, resource allocation, and proactive actions taken related to managing organizational risk. Ensuring the development of comprehensive risk-management training as part of the new program will ensure a shared risk-management approach and empower employees to actively participate in risk mitigation. Lastly, the implementation of a Quality Council will improve risk oversight and provide diverse perspectives regarding Agency ABC's overall risk strategies. In addition to the aforementioned recommendations, opportunities for further research on barriers to risk management in BHOs were identified.

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## Appendix A

Source	Statement	Responsible Party
Monitoring and Evaluating Service Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of Agency ABC staff will be responsible for monitoring and evaluating service quality and effectiveness in making program improvements.</li> <li>• Agency ABC counselors or contractors shall ask the service recipient, parents, or her or his legal authorized representative, and the referral source to complete the attached quality assurance survey.</li> <li>• The Agency ABC program supervisor shall be responsible for compiling the results of the service of the surveys quarterly.</li> <li>• The result shall be reviewed in the staff meeting and means of improving service delivery shall be discussed.</li> <li>• The HR business partner will conduct a root cause analysis.</li> <li>• Be chaired by the agency ABCs services program manager.</li> <li>• Be compromise of staff members from each level of the organization.</li> <li>• Accept and consider comments and/or suggestions for improvements from any staff member, service recipients, or referral source.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff</li> <li>• HR Business Partner</li> <li>• Service Recipient, parents, or her or his Legal Authorized Representative</li> </ul>
Policy on Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The HR business partner (Six Sigma Greenbelt Certified) is the designated person responsible for the risk management function at agency ABC.</li> <li>• The HR business partner will conduct investigations and complete root cause analysis when necessary.</li> <li>• Agency ABC shall conduct systematic risk analysis annually to identify and respond to practices situations and policies that could result in the risk of harm to individuals receiving services. The risk assessment review shall address the environment of care, clinical assessment or representation process, staff competence and adequacy of staffing, use of papyrus procedures, including seclusions and restraints, and a review of the serious incidents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Business Partner</li> <li>• Agency ABC</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This process shall incorporate uniform risk triggers and thresholds as defined by DBHDS.</li> </ul>	
Agency ABC Quality Assurance Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please rate the quality of the service you are receiving from your counselor.</li> <li>• Is the service being provided flexible enough to meet your needs?</li> <li>• • Are you treated in a professional manner? Do you fully comprehend the goals set forth in the individual service plan. Would you recommend agency ABC to a friend or family member? Why or why not?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service Recipient, parents, or her or his Legal Authorized Representative</li> </ul>
Agency ABC Employee Performance Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Section B-staff developmental needs Individual Development Plans (IDPs) can include methods such as on-the-job training, cross functional assignments, mentoring or coaching, participation in professional associations, self-study, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Member</li> </ul>