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An Operations Manual to Replicate a Playground Program for Children with Special Needs in Global Regions

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Professional Administrative Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Public Administration

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Abstract

Physical disabilities restrict children’s motor abilities, affecting their participation in physical activities and play. But play area equipment can give children a way to participate in play regardless of their disability. The purpose of the study was to explore the need for an operations manual for nonprofit organizations when designing and developing inclusive play areas for children with special needs worldwide. The research question examined what processes during the design and development of inclusive play areas could be standardized with an operations manual. Interviews were conducted with two members with historical and operational knowledge of the organization. Transcribed data were coded, separated into themes, then categorized by the organizational process. Three primary themes outlined the critical results of the analysis: general information, design and development operation, and financials. An operations manual was created using the information and documentation from the organization. The client received the Table of Contents for the manual with some sections completed; however, due to confidentiality, the client chose to include additional documents after the delivery of the operations manual. The positive social change implications of the study include the operations manual helping streamline a process, maximize personnel and resource usage, and increase flexibility in the organization. An operations manual can reduce the organization’s timeline when designing and developing global play areas for children with special needs.

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Dedication

I dedicate this accomplishment to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I am blessed with the strength to make it through this process. I want to dedicate my doctoral study to my mother, Deborah C. Richard. Words cannot express the appreciation and love I have for my mother. I would also like to dedicate my doctoral study to all those who encouraged me and pushed me to keep going when I wanted to quit. I could never pay you back for all you have done besides finish this journey.

Acknowledgments

I have invested many hours in my Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) journey. Without my strong support network of friends, family, and faculty members, I would not have made it through this process. A special thank you to my family and friends for believing in my ability to achieve this goal. I acknowledge my mother, Deborah C. Richards, for pushing me to succeed and supporting my entire educational journey from an associate's degree to my doctorate. I want to thank Kristina for her unwavering support and encouragement. Thank you to Ivey, Keith, and Cepeda for your support. I love you all.

A special thank you to Dr. Linda-Marie M. Sundstrom for your dedication to ensuring I survived and completed this journey. Your patience when things looked dark, and you continued to encourage me. Thank you for never giving up on me. I would also like to thank committee member Dr. Augusto Ferreros. I am forever grateful for the level of commitment by the university faculty to ensure that I succeed.

Lastly, a special thank you to Ms. Tiffany Harris and Marnie Norris for their continued support as I walked down this road. We continued to stay synced through deployments, COVID, and scheduling conflicts and worked together to complete this process. I am forever grateful for your time and patience.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

The purpose of this research was to create an operations manual to assist in creating play areas for children with disabilities. The research focused on a West Coast organization that operates as a local and an international nonprofit. This nonprofit fosters a bias-free world for children with disabilities by creating playgrounds and educational programs. The organization will be referred to as a nonprofit organization (NPO) for this research.

In 2000 donors, other families, and friends joined together to create the first playground in the western United States that removed the social seclusion of children with disabilities. The playground encourages social interaction between children of all abilities through play. They are removing the physical separation of children's recreational activities and introducing an environment revolving around sharing the same space simultaneously. The NPO has grown into a worldwide network of 75 inclusion playgrounds. They are fostering social inclusion where children with disabilities play with their peers instead of being cared for by them. The NPO has expanded to five continents with locations in Mexico, Israel, Russia, Argentina, and South Africa.

Since its inception, most organization members have brought diverse skills with them. With the departure of any member, there is a loss of organizational knowledge. The manual will capture organizational knowledge as a living document, provided to the incoming member of the team as an operations manual or a succession document. The organization currently builds an inclusive playground worldwide. However, it can benefit from a written standards manual when the organization experiences a loss of personnel. The social impact is increased inclusion for special-needs children, removing social barriers, and overcoming environmental restrictions. The potential positive social change of this study is providing special-needs children inclusion in everyday play to foster healthy relationships.

Problem Statement

Physical disabilities restrict children's motor abilities, restricting them from physical participation and ultimately limiting their physical activities and play (Badia et al., 2013).

Internationally

Approximately 150 million children live with a disability worldwide (Their World, 2021). In the Netherlands, about 3.5% of children aged 0–18 have a disability, or between 109,000 and 129,000 children (Bloemen et al., 2021). Globally, over 1 billion people, or 15% of the global population, experience some form of disability. Further, one-fifth of the estimated global total, or between 110 million and 190 million people, experience significant disabilities. Disability prevalence is higher in developing countries. Persons with disabilities are more likely to experience adverse socioeconomic outcomes such as less education, poorer health outcomes, lower levels of employment, and higher poverty rates (World Health Organization, 2022).

Nationally

In the United States, children with disabilities increased from 12.8% in 1994 to 26.2% in 2006 (Gortmaker et al., 2010). In 2005, the United Nations Children's

Fund (UNICEF) estimated the number of children with disabilities under age 18 at 150 million. The Global Burden of Disease estimates that 93 million (5.1%) children ages 0–14 experience “moderate or severe disability,” and 13 million (0.7%) children experience severe difficulties (World Health Organization, 2011). Children with disabilities are widely believed to be less likely to attend school or access health care and more vulnerable to poverty. There is currently little large-scale or internationally comparable evidence to support these claims. This exclusion is likely to have a long-term deleterious impact on their lives unless services are adapted to promote their inclusion (Hannah Kuper, 2014).

Disabilities Defined

“Disability” is a term with different specialized meanings, each developed for the particular policy or program that uses it. The criteria for judging people to be disabled has likewise fluctuated over time and across different social and cultural contexts (Francis & Silvers, 2016). Everyone defines disabilities differently and within the different contexts of what that person is trying to address. Regardless, people with disabilities, whether it is injury-related, disease, or by birth, have to deal with restrictions in their life and exclusion from participation in their communities. (Krahn et al., 2015).

The World Health Organization places disabilities into three categories: impairment, activity, and participation restriction (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). Impairment can be in a person’s body structure or function or mental functioning; examples of impairments include loss of a limb, loss of vision, or memory loss. Mobility impairment, however, is described as any difficulty limiting functions of moving or having motor abilities. These impairments range from being permanent, intermittent, or temporary. Activity limitation involves difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, or problem-solving. Participation restrictions in normal daily activities include working, engaging in social and recreational activities, and obtaining health care and preventive services. Common disabilities with mobility usually range from musculoskeletal impairments such as partial or total paralysis, amputation, spinal injury, arthritis, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, and traumatic brain injury. Some can even result from an aggressive disease that has taken over their body.

Inclusion Defined

A person's environment significantly affects the experience and extent of the disability. Due to physical and social barriers, disabled children and their families frequently find accessing play sites challenging; therefore, they cannot experience many of the benefits play in this setting provides (Jeanes & Magee, 2012). Areas where the physically disabled are limited to movement and participation cause barriers between them and their peers. Removing these barriers allows a child to see past their disability and immerse themselves in the environment (World Health Organization, 2022). Inclusion creates a culture and environment that recognizes, appreciates, and encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness. For instance, accessible surfacing, such as rubber tiles rather than gravel or sand, is impossible for especially wheelchairs to traverse (Akpinar et al., 2010). Studies also show that physically disabled children and their families experience prejudices and negative behavior from their community and environment (Akpinar et al., 2010). Negative interactions like a prejudiced approach, exclusion, and disdained are constant obstructions in their lives, and physically disabled children are not accepted by their peers and families (Akpinar et al., 2010).

Helping Through Inclusion

Evidence shows the mental and physical benefits of inclusive physical activity for children with disabilities and their peers in increased support, friendships, and motor performance (Arbour-Nicitopoulos et al., 2018). A physically active lifestyle for children with physical disabilities helps improve their motor skills, social and cognitive development, and overall health (Shephard, 1995). Several studies indicate that inclusive physical activity improves social skills and reduces social bias (Jones, 2003). Some research suggests that social network inclusion and playground engagement are two important social outcomes for children with disabilities (Frederick et al., 2019). Play is a critical component of social participation for children, providing opportunities for physical and social development and a sense of competence; playgrounds provide the context for play opportunities (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993).

Global organizations such as UNICEF often consider children with disabilities and special needs are the most marginalized and excluded group from society (UNICEF, 2013). A person’s environment significantly impacts the experience and extent of disability and that inaccessible environments create disability by creating barriers to participation and inclusion (World Health Organization, 2011). Today, some organizations continue to grow to a robust network with over 75 inclusive play areas for children with physical disabilities. The

NPO has successfully established and developed a global presence in Mexico, Israel, Ecuador, and Russia.

Inclusive playgrounds and activities are becoming more common (Diaz-Granados, 2017). However, people who think they are designing an inclusive playground based on inclusion standards are only designed to the minimum requirements and could be missing a huge need in their community (Together We Play, 2020). Children and their families frequently find accessing play sites challenging due to various physical and social barriers (Jeanes & Magee, 2012).

Organizational Challenges

The growth of an organization brings about change in personnel and creates a shift in organizational norms. In those times, an operations manual, or standard operations procedure (SOP) manual, can help a growing organization. Organizations can use these manuals as training devices to help bring their new staff up to speed on operating in organizational norms (Keenan, 2020). The absence of an operations manual is a gap in organizational knowledge. A few unplanned departures could significantly impact multiple facets of the organization (Wood, 2016). Departures result in a loss of institutional knowledge—a loss in the knowledge that could hinder inclusion operations globally.

The Have

I found that some NPOs have operations manuals by division. It can be assumed that some if not all, divisions may have a rough document outlining some but not all of their operations. Some processes, like when the playground development process overlap with the program development processes and the best way to begin and continue fundraising for the project, are contained in an operations manual.

The Need

Organization leaders agreed that there is a need and benefit of having a living document covering the operations and assisting in succession planning. In addition to this identified need, the leaders realized that although the organization is successful at its mission, it is inevitable that someone would have to continue in future builds. Though the organization may have refined its processes, there is a need to assist in onboarding new members into the organization and provide them with operational knowledge. The information resides in project and program documents, but a centralized manual that identifies the process from A to Z would be beneficial.

The Intent

The organization's succession planning shows evidence that guidelines in the organization were understood but not always written and that the organization would benefit from establishing an operations manual. The leadership believes that the manual could assist individuals with understanding organizational procedures and practices while adhering to organizational standards and guidelines. There is a shared need to create an operation manual to provide social change both in and outside the organization. Inside the organization, building the manual could allow its members to provide input on what processes work and which ones need to be changed or removed to streamline the program's processes. On the outside, the manual allows a seamless transition from one process to another. The manual can identify multiple organization members who interface with the stakeholders instead of the same individuals every time. Sharing the information and responsibilities throughout the processes could allow the organization to avoid overusing individual members giving them some recovery time between program builds and avoiding individual burnout.

Purpose

The qualitative study aimed to create an operations manual to design and replicate a worldwide playground program for children with special needs. Using interviews, historical documentation I will be able to build and provide an operations manual for the organization's use. The potential benefit of the operations manual is the streamlining of a process, efficient use of time and resources, and a training manual for onboarding new members to the organization.

Nature of the Administrative Study

This study involved a qualitative approach to address the research questions using a semi structured, single case study design. This study included an initial interview with a senior vice president of the organization and additional interviews with other key organization members. Additional document analysis of operational procedures was also provided by the organization. The potential limitations and challenges may include incomplete or hesitance to provide exact data, vague memories, and failure to build trust between the organization and myself.

Significance

This study is significant because an operations manual will provide a standardized approach for playgrounds of inclusion for children with special needs and save time, money, and resources. An approach developed by an operations manual can benefit the organization’s members by giving them an idea of operational planning and providing a look at the design and development process. The approach can assist in increasing inclusion locations for children’s play areas while decreasing development time. The operations manual could cover tasks by position, points of contact, financial planning, resources sustainment, support requirements, and design options.

The study can further contribute to organizations whose mission is to build an inclusive environment for children with special needs, families with limited resources, or locations with environmental limitations globally. The growth of inclusion play areas for children with special needs can provide awareness and education in socially inept areas to handle those particular needs. A development and design operations manual can provide a mechanism to rapidly equip communities globally with the tools and education to make their area inclusive.

Summary

This qualitative study addressed the need to create an operations manual to design and develop inclusive playgrounds for children with special needs. This study illustrates that working with an operations manual creates a shared understanding of operations, saves time, money, and resources, and allows customization of the playground for different global regions (Power, 2013).

Section 2: Conceptual Approach and Background

The study addressed the operational time, money, and resources used in replicating a playground program for children with special needs worldwide. The purpose was to create an operations manual to replicate a playground program for children with special needs worldwide. The research question to address this purpose was “What replicated processes can be standardized through every playground design and create a basic design for worldwide applications?”

Concepts, Models, and Theories

An operations manual is a set of step-by-step instructions compiled by an organization to help workers carry out routine operations (World Health Organization, 2018). Operation manuals aim to achieve efficiency, quality output, and uniformity of performance while reducing miscommunication and failure to comply with industry regulations. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) are operational policies and procedures required when specific circumstances arise; they are focused on achieving quality, safe operations, and security (Professional Solutions, 2020). An operations manual provides a blueprint for building, creating, and executing a project or mission with consistency. A manual can serve as a standard guideline for local community leaders, political figures, and developers to design and develop a playground that will meet all children’s and their families’ needs.

The manual can be used to develop a universal design and a sense of ownership and inclusion, promoting acceptable behavior and improving balance, hand-eye coordination, and motor skills. The design and development of a playground of inclusion should have a basic design manual to meet the needs of the children. A playground design can be easily modified to enhance the children's play and involvement.

Further, an operations manual for designing and developing an inclusion playground could be applied globally in various regions. A manual is an excellent tool for new employees to learn the organization's operating procedures. It will also serve as a growing document when employees depart the organization or discover efficient design methods. Lastly, an operations manual could assess, improve, or build on the competence level of the playground design and development teams. A standard operations manual helps with compliance, reduced work, improved quality, understanding, credibility, and legal defense. The manual also provides a written outline of the design and development process and proves cost-effective during budget and hiring constraints by region or community. A manual provides items that guide an operator with basic knowledge to perform without supervision. The manual highlights safety aspects by describing warnings and cautions (Cao et al., 2019; Hurst, 2012; Hopkins & Unger, 2018; Kallman, 2006).

Importance

An operations manual is essential to defining day-to-day operations, staff development, and training (Bower, 1997; Power, 2013; Zipf, 1999).Creating a standard operating manual is an integral part of a quality system. Managers see creating a manual to provide them with the information that facilitates consistency and enables timely decision-making (Kallman, 2006). A manual is critical because it provides efficiency, a training aid for employee onboarding, and allows the organization to capture the parts of the process that works and modify the pieces that do not. The manual also helps the organization, the project lead, and the design and development team quickly identify and mitigate risk, legal complications, potential design issues, and project benchmarks before starting the project. An operations manual for playground design can ensure that the safety considerations for all children, including those with special needs, are identified and implemented in the design. This manual also addresses those individuals who may mandate additional equipment for children based on their unique needs (i.e., doctors who may prescribe helmets).

Relevance to Public Organization

The organization has developed a pattern for its inclusion of playground design and development phase. An operations manual will help standardize their engagements from beginning to end. A build team uses the manual. It continues with a seamless process of fundraising, organizing community focus groups, grant writing, and guidance on the grand opening (Rubin, 2006). An operations manual helps the organization break into untapped locations and regions. The military develops standard operating procedures (SOPs) to support an organization. An operations manual shows organizational flexibility while providing a standard of consistency and competence.

During previous builds, there has been communication between different community members, build teams, and developers. The previous processes could be more streamlined when the organization builds inclusion playgrounds with a universal design. Recommending the organization establish a written standards manual and use it as a living document to be updated whenever there are advancements in operational methods (Schmidt & Stanton-Chapman, 2019).

Organization Background and Context

The global operations identified the organization's need for the study with the installations of playgrounds, reproduction of processes, and procedures during these playgrounds' design and development phase. The organization has expressed the desire to enter other avenues to serve the community and children with special needs. The study will give them a manual to present to future clients, showing compliance with government regulations and environmental standards.

The organization's mission is to provide a play area and education system of inclusion. An operations manual will assist them in providing a rapid and flexible design for their mission, ensuring their strategic vision is supported and established worldwide. The organization has grown since its inception, and through its success, they find that succession and member departures are inevitable.

Role of the DPA Student/Researcher

As a DPA student and researcher, it is possible to duplicate the environment using standard operating procedures (SOPs). These manuals outline the primary method of establishing an environment globally with minimal sticking points and versatility. My role was to review and identify duplicated processes in designing and developing inclusion playgrounds. I constructed a draft operations manual for the organization.

After working with other organizations specializing in children with special needs, I learned a lot by playing buddy baseball, buddy soccer, or buddy basketball. All events where members of my organization team up with children with special needs and spend the weekend playing sports help them feel included (Fayetteville Cumberland Parks and Recreation, 2021). My motivation is to provide a way to simplify the establishment of inclusion areas. I am biased regarding needing and having standards manual for repeated processes. I took steps to overcome this bias by focusing on the benefits to the children by the safe and rapid design and development of an inclusion area for them, their friends, and their families. I also journaled any bias-induced thoughts I may have had during the research process.

Summary

Most organizations use a level of standards for a repeated process. Not all are documented, possibly causing duplication of efforts. A standard manual for a playground for children with special needs will lessen duplication and add to the process of speed and flexibility while illustrating a base design and development model. With the organization’s assistance and staff, processes can be standardized to accomplish the strategic vision of worldwide inclusion for children with special needs.

Section 3: Data Collection Process and Analysis

The study addressed time, money, and resources in replicating a playground program worldwide for children with special needs. The organization strives to provide playgrounds of inclusion around the world. Their vision is to ensure that children with special needs have a place to play with other children, their friends, and their families—a vision furthered by using a standard manual to standardize the design and development of inclusion playgrounds.

Practiced-Focused Questions

The organizational problem is that it will not reach children with special needs at an intended rate without a standard manual. This manual can ensure that succession in the design and development of inclusive playgrounds is successful. Thus, the practice-focused question was "What replicated processes through playground design can create a basic design and be standardized in global regions?" The study aimed to create a standard manual for a basic design of a playground program for children with special needs in global regions to simplify the process and save time, money, and resources.

Sources of Evidence

There are different methods to collect data. In order to collect non-numerical data, the qualitative research collection methods were interviews, notes, and a review of organization archives.

Interviews

I used unstructured interviews with open-ended questions to better understand the organization and its operations. An unstructured interview uses an open-ended questioning method geared to the research topic (McLeod, 2014). In contrast, a structured interview contains questions with predefined answers and includes questions given to each interviewee. I used a semi structured interview method to allow the interviewees to go into detail with their answers using open-ended questioning. The semi structured method followed questions found in Appendix A (see Longhurst, 2016). Open-ended questioning allowed the interviewees to respond in a detailed manner in their own words. It also allowed me to ask follow-up questions like “How do you define inclusive?” (see McLeod, 2018).

Published Outcomes and Research

The databases used were the Ebsco, ProQuest, SAGE Journals, and other databases provided in the Walden Library. Some key search terms include *Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)*, *standards manuals*, *guides*, *guidebooks*, and *protocols*. Others include *playground, inclusion, playground build standards*, and *federal regulations*. I searched for journals and other academic documentation extensively to find related studies using standards and operation manuals. I also searched articles and other literary documentation to explain the need for an operations manual regardless of the problem or profession. The search covered different organizations and multiple occupations to show that standardization is needed and accomplished using a standards manual.

I also requested previous build documents from the organization to identify duplicated processes. Information from the previous builds and periodic status reports presented by the team will be a part of the historical data. The presented data to stakeholders, community members, and political leaders are valid in the design and development process. However, there were some limitations in the data gathering due to employees' vague memory, incomplete data, hesitance to provide exact data, and potential breaches of administrative copyrights.

Once approved, I spoke with the organization representative about gaining access to the archived data for the study if a non-disclosure agreement is needed to ensure the organization that the researcher is there to increase the organization's efficiency. After reaching an agreement and any legal securities have been met. I continued to move forward with the evidence gathering. Historical and legal documents were used as sources to identify documents commonly used per project. Historical data was the best source because it showed a pattern or trend in different locations and environments worldwide. Both documents showed duplication of processes if and when those items are used multiple times during a new project, such as multiple non-disclosure agreements that could be combined into one to cover the entire build.

Evidence Generated for the Administrative Study

Participants

I interviewed organization members to discover a pattern of duplicated processes to create an operations manual. I used semi structured interviews to foster an open discussion with interviewees. For example, I interviewed the senior vice president of programs, who gave me a clear overview of program operations and identified unwritten standards. I also spoke with other organization members recommended by the senior vise president during their interview. I asked questions about the design and development process and other organizational processes.

Procedures

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling is a technique used in qualitative research to identify and select individuals or groups that are knowledgeable about or experienced in the phenomenon of interest (Duan et al., 2015). I conducted a purposeful sample because this enabled me to interview members of the organization who are experienced in the operations and administration relevant to the study. I was open to the opportunity to interview members of the organization who were experienced in project executions of the organization.

Snowball Sampling

Snowball sampling is when the initial interviewee recommends or invites other acquainted members to participate in the study (Neil, 2006). After completing the initial interview, I asked the interviewee if there was anything else to add to the study or if there was anyone else who could add to the study. I also used snowball sampling if the interviewee and I agreed that another member of the organization may be a better fit to answer one or more of the interview questions and then request to speak to them for the benefit of the study.

Data Collection

I set up times and dates to interview the vice president using Zoom, ensuring that both our calendars were free and that my space was quiet and free from distraction. I then sent the interviewee a consent form outlined and a list of interview questions after setting up a date and time for the interview. The meeting length was no more than 60 minutes, and I did not need to request a second meeting.

I requested consent to record the interview. I assured the interviewee that it would be solely for the study. After gaining written and verbal consent to record, I used the Zoom video software to conduct the interviews and store the recording on their computer in a folder designated for this study and the organization’s data. I prepared to manually record their responses if I did not receive consent to record. I then organized the data by type and references as interviews and historical or operational data. I explained the goal of the interview and encouraged open dialogue and trust.

I asked questions to establish a pattern to identify processes or repeated actions in designing and developing playgrounds. Understanding that the interviewee may not answer all interview questions, I asked if another team member could contribute to the study. I was prepared to ask a closing question and request to speak with the interviewee at a later time if I had reached the 90-minute interview limit identified in the consent form.

I asked questions from the following categories: Introduction and Overview, Administration, Staffing, Budget, Coordinating Instructions, Host Nation/State Support, External Contractors, Service Support, Equipment Procurement, and Staging Location Close-Out. The origin of the questions comes from 24 years of experience in project management, military operations, and nonprofit program lifecycle and execution. The operations include multiple field problems, movements, and programs established in different countries. The military noticed that the buildup and establishment of civil support, military operations, and social programs were consistently repeated and wanted an efficient way to provide a baseline of actions in preparation for program, project, and mission execution. Appendix A provided some questions by category often asked during these times for interviewing organization members.

I remained courteous and professional throughout the interview process. The interviewee was reminded that they can stop at any time during the interview. I asked the interviewee if they believed the organization could benefit from an operations manual. I asked would the interviewee like to discuss something not previously covered or if there was anyone who the interviewee recommend that would benefit the study. I asked for a few minutes to examine the answers to see if I received all the needed information. With no gaps found I stopped recording and closed out the interview. I thanked the interviewee for their time and patience through the process and logged out of the meeting room.

I noted the time and downloaded the recording for storage. The recording was stored and played back to ensure completeness. I stored the recordings and documents in a password-protected folder. I backed up the recording and documents to a password-protected external storage device to ensure integrity for the research purpose. I am the only one who will access the study data. Once the study is complete, the recordings and received documentation will be destroyed after 5 years.

Protections

All participants must give written and verbal consent to the interview and its recording. I stated that it would only be used for the study and to create an operations manual. The participants' information and documentation are used only for creating the operations manual and this study. The data received through interviews will be kept confidential. I will only access the interviewee's information. I did not release the interviewee's information or organization's documents to any organization other than the participating organization in a manual after the study.

I stored the answers in a password-protected folder on the used system. I backed up the recording and documents to a password-protected external storage device to ensure their integrity for the research purpose. I am the only one to access the study data. I will destroy all received information after reaching its required time of 5 years for retention at the end of the study.

Analysis and Synthesis

I used Thematic Analysis to code the interview responses into categories that fit themes that will help build the manual. I transcribed and printed off the recordings of the interview.

Thematic Analysis

I used codes to group the information, then used those codes to put the information into categories and identify associated themes in the categorized data. The identified themes are linked to the raw data received for later analysis (Guest, et al., 2012). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns across data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Using thematic analysis allowed me to see a collective or shared meaning in the information. It allowed me to identify what is familiar from the view of others and make sense of the commonalities.

Coding

I printed the transcript of the recorded interview and read each interview thoroughly. The printed transcripts gave me an understanding of the context of the transcript and allowed me the chance to highlight or outline information significant to the study. Assigning alphanumeric designators to the participant's responses allowed for a timely correlation between their responses and transcripts. For example, I assigned the alphanumeric code P1 to the first participant and P2 for the second participant's transcript data. I continued the coding pattern as needed.

I separated and set it aside the identified information, ensuring to label it with the participant's alphanumeric code. I identified the participant transcript for reference if I had to go back for further analysis or clarification. Once all items were separated and coded, I began categorizing the coded information into duplicated ideas or themes beneficial to the study.

Categorizing

I moved the coded data into category groups. These categories were based on similarities, mirrored ideas, or duplicating data. Examples of the potential categorization of the coding phase stemmed from administration, financial, and personnel selection actions.

I used the interviewee data to label and place them into groups that will assist in building the manual. Some of the data points resulted in the commonalities of personnel used, contracted organizations, personnel accommodations, sight survey, and site selection criteria. The labels help make sense of the recorded date and identify its usefulness or lack thereof to the study. I used the categories supplied by how the questions are broken down in Appendix B and looked for subcategories or similarities within those categories to understand the retrieved information.

I looked for duplicate processes or procedures identified by the interviews replicated across multiple projects. I used project commonalities to begin the outline for the standard manual. Categories outlined include team members and team selection, fundraising, zoning and permits, and committee engagement. I established an outline, separated the information, and distributed interview responses across selected categories. Potential categories are listed below to illustrate the thematic analysis.

Theme 1: Administrative

The project or program administrator can be considered one of the most critical pieces of any project. They look at the travel, lodging, and foreign country travel requirements for the team. In a world of the pandemic, they must look at vaccination requirements and waivers for the non-vaccinated. I asked several questions in this study to answer the administrative obligations to the project and program.

Theme 2: The Team

I looked for commonalities in selecting the team leader, project location, team members, and other variables for team consideration. A specific team leader may function better than others in some parts of the world. For example, suppose a team leader is well-versed in a country's language and culture. The organization may want them to continue to work in those areas. That would produce a commonality and, in turn, cause me to want to document the specifics about that team leader.

What good is a team leader without their team? I looked for commonalities across the use of the same team members and if they were used in like locations or sporadic team selection. I used this information to find commonalities and potential cause for a snowball interview process.

Theme 3: Financials

This theme found commonalities in the organizations' financials of their builds. The theme had the capability and potential to grow into subcategories if found necessary. I looked at how funds are raised and were there similarities in who is used to fundraise for a project. For example, if I found that they use one organization in several builds globally and that organization is usually very responsive to the request of fundraising. Then I saw that commonality as a need for documentation and suggested looking for that organization first for assistance when going to new locations.

Although these are examples of the study, I used subject outlines in Appendix A to start the thematic process and scaled it down to categories needed to create a granular look at the organization. The categories made it easier for me to understand how the organization conducts business. It highlighted missing data components and allowed a comprehensive look at the data collected.

Theme 4: Miscellaneous

This theme was used to add the procedures identified through the interview but not explicitly referenced. Anything added to this theme was separated into different categories. This theme also held the ability to contribute to preexisting primary or subcategories. If none exist, then it would contribute to creating a new category.

For example, when the interviewee was asked what would benefit the study not previously asked, they identify an event, process, or organization used in the design and development process. The mention was noted and added to the various procedures category, potentially growing into a labeled category. Although not explicitly referenced in the questions, the inability to predict answers leaves the chance of discovering useful information that should be identified and tagged for future categorization.

Summary

All data and interviews are confidential and destroyed after the recommended 5 year holding period. Data is not shared or given to any organization. All data was safeguarded on a minimum of two devices and used only for this study.

I provided the organization with a recommendation in the way of an operations manual. to the manual can be used to increase efficiency and facilitate an inclusive environment for children worldwide.

Section 4: Evaluation and Recommendations

The organization strives to provide play areas and education systems of inclusion around the world. Their vision is to ensure that children with special needs have a place to play with other children, their friends, and their families. The study addressed the need for an operation manual when replicating a playground program for children with special needs worldwide. The study aimed to create an operation manual for a basic design of a playground program for children with special needs in global regions to simplify the process and save time, money, and resources. The study involved the collection of non-numerical data through interviews, notes, and a review of organization archives.

Findings and Implications

The study revealed that although some areas may be documented, the organization's leaders had knowledge of operations that would be beneficial if documented. The participants in the study identified the organization's desire to document its institutional knowledge and build a manual for use in its succession planning. The participants noted that individual divisions might have documentation of their operations; however, there is a lack of documentation of how the division operations overlap and interact.

As agreed between the organization and me, I sent the representative a copy of the potential interview questions to approve and have an idea of the information I would be gathering for creating the operations manual. The interview questions (Appendix A) were attached to the invitational email and the interviewee consent form.

Each participant received and agreed to the interview and its recording. I conducted semi structured interviews with two of the NPO's senior leaders. The data collected in the interview were consistent with the interview questions (Appendix A). Each interview remained within the 90-minute timeline and took place via Zoom in a quiet and secure location. After the interview, the recordings were saved and later transcribed via Microsoft Word for further analysis. To keep the participants confidential, they will be referred to as P1, P2, P3, etc. Table 1 represents the participant interview data, and the interview recordings provided the data for this study.

Table 1

Participants Interview Data

Participant	Date	Time (min)	Pages	Word Count
P1	08/11/2022	58:59	11	9,793
P2	08/22/2022	53:17	47	8,996

Collection

Interview Setup

I sent the invitational email to participate in the study to P1 and P2 for their review. Once I received the concurrence, we exchanged two or three emails to solidify a date and time that would be best for the interview. We had to be thoughtful of each other's time, seeing that we were in different time zones. We settled on a morning call before their day got busy and after I completed much of my work for the day.

On the day of the interview, I ensured that I was complete with all other tasks and that I was in a quiet place to give my full attention to the process. I then opened the Zoom room, set it to where participants would have to request access to the room, and then ensured that I could be seen and heard through systems check. Once I received the alert that someone was in the waiting room of the Zoom call, I verified that it was the participant and allowed access to the Zoom room.

Once P1 entered the room, I welcomed them and thanked them for taking the time to speak with me. I did not start the interview immediately. Once things seemed relaxed after about 5 minutes of conversation, I asked if the participant was ready to begin. I informed them I was about to begin recording so we could begin the interview. Once I hit record, I introduced myself to the participant. I told them the nature of the study, the school that I am attending, and that this interview would be used for the study to complete my doctoral research. In addition, I informed them that they could ask to end the interview at any time, and I would immediately stop recording and conclude the interview. I then assured them that the data received would only be used for the study, that the school would receive the public administrative study documentation, and that their organization and only their organization would receive the operations manual constructed from the study. After all this was explained, I asked if they would like to continue with the interview and thanked them for agreeing to participate in the study.

After asking the participant the interview questions (Appendix A), I asked if there was anything that I may not have covered that they believed would be beneficial in the study. I also asked if there was anyone they believed that I could speak with that could add to the study. After reviewing the gathered data, I thanked the participant again and stopped recording. I thanked them and expressed my appreciation for their support in this process and that I look forward to working with them in the future.

Interview 1

I started this interview by asking some questions about the participant that would give me more information about them and their involvement in the process. These questions can be found in the Introduction and Overview sections of the interview questions. During the interview, I tried to ask the questions in ways that would allow them to build off one another, making the interview seem more of a conversation than a question-and-answer session.

The participant has approximately 20 years of service with the NPO and is the senior vice president of programs. The participant has been involved in overseeing the program for over 10 years. The participant identified inclusion as a way of taking what you do, looking at community diversity, and designing a program in a universal way that engages all populations. P1 closed with a quote in their training that rings true to them: "Diversity is a fact. Equity is a choice. Inclusion is an action. Belonging is an outcome."

Interview 2

I received the response from P2 by email that they were willing to interview for the study and concur with being recorded. The participant entered the waiting room on the Zoom call, and I granted them admittance. I started with a casual conversation to ease some tension and create an area of comfort. I thanked the participant for their time because we have had multiple scheduling challenges.

I hit record and explained the reason for the interview, the organization, and that it could be stopped at any time. I asked the participant about their role in the organization. They were the Co-Founder and CEO of the NPO. They have been with the organization since its inception, roughly 25 years. The participant shared that they have taken on the responsibilities of the Global Project Development senior vice president since the previous vice president retired during the COVID outbreak. I asked the participant their role was in the organization. The participant shared that they typically interface with the director of Project Development. That director works with communities from conception through completion of the project. The participant defined inclusion as seamlessly welcoming everyone without caveats and boundaries..

The voice of the children and their parents is critical when considering a build. The stakeholders, educators, municipality, and community leaders play a large part in the program’s success in their community. The participant expressed their knowledge of the Global Project Development before taking over as the senior vice president. The participant identified that their knowledge is all institutional knowledge but not all documented.

Interview Conclusion

I asked questions that identified organization specific information. The participants were willing to give me the information needed for the study. I ensured them that I would not violate their wishes in keeping their organizational information confidential.

I gained the information to produce an operations manual, understanding because they have not been documented that there will be gaps in the manual initially.. I made a formal request to get the information that was not readily available to fill gaps in the manual. The participants provided historical data and institutional knowledge for the construction of the manual. The participants were willing to provide additional documents needed for me to build and design an operations manual.

Analysis

Software was not used for coding in this study. I recommend if there are more than two participants software should be used to keep the participant’s responses separate and to understand its significance to the study. I noticed three significant themes: general information, design and development operations, and financials emerged in the study. These themes identified the need for an operation manual and highlighted the knowledge gaps when the organization looked at its strategy for succession planning.

With the documentation received and through interviews, I realize the operations manual will have sections that have to be filled by the process owner. For specific portions of the manual the process owner has internal institutional knowledge, but nothing is written. Sections of the operations manual are specific to the organization and must be addressed using confidential documentation.

Operations Manual Content

Using the received data, I was able to complete much of the operations manual. Due to confidentiality, the client chose to include documents for the incomplete sections after the delivery of the manual.

General Information

This section of the operations manual was created using the organization's documentation. This section contains subsections titled division overview, project references, authorized use permission, and points of contact. Most subsections are completed using federal regulation and organizational documentation; however, the organization will complete the remaining sections with confidential documentations and institutional knowledge.

Design and Development Operations

Community Engagement. The community engagement subsection of the manual was completed information on how the organization identified the needs of the community and program stakeholders. I asked how the organization decided on the play area's design. The participants identified another organization member who would be able to answer how the organization selects the design of an play areas. The participants explained how they encouraged the community to guide and influence the design of the play areas. The participants also explained that the community plays a huge role in the theme of the play area. Parts of the design will not change, no matter if it is an Aztec Heritage themed or a theme local to the community.

Design. The design section and its sub-sections were completed using the interview results and data gathered. I asked what processes were standardized across the play area builds. The participant explained that every build is standardized with some variants. I learned that a community's need is different and dropping the same playground everywhere is impossible. The build restrictions, irrigation, and sustainment add complexities. Appendix B shows a draft operations manual table of contents highlighting the design and development process.

Develop. I was provided information on how build teams are established. I received information and completed this section of the operations manual. Due to confidentiality, the client chose to include the distributor's names after the manual's delivery.

I asked about the equipment selection and its use for the play areas and participants shared that they work with a professional advisory board to select the equipment that could be used to satisfy multiple ability levels. Working with child psychologists, physical and occupational therapists, and other professionals help the organization to create play areas., A design matrix was created and is used in every build in addition to their collaboration. Participant gave an example of how they would use the matrix to identify a piece of equipment that solves five needs and that piece of equipment with that ability allows the organization to maximize the budget for the build and impact to the community.

I asked were there standardized items throughout the building of their play areas. The participants responded that the use of accessible swings, rubberized surfacing, wheelchair ramps, and noodle swings are standard across play areas. The participants identified that they had an equipment manufacturer that they worked with for over 20 years.

Financial

In budgeting I found that fundraising and budgeting are and could always be separate matters. The outcome of fundraising has to do with the community as much as the organization. When I asked about fundraising, I found that some communities come with funding in place, so the organization continues to help them grow their funds. For others, the organization ask questions to help the community and other stakeholders generate ideas to raise money. The fundraising questions tied to information about site selection and design. Though two separate operations, they work dependently upon each other and the community. Appendix B shows a draft operations manual table of contents, highlighting the financial process, including budgeting and fundraising.

It was identified by the participants that the budget for a project could be separate from the fundraising for the project. Due to confidentiality, the client chose to include these documents after the delivery of the manual. I found that the community and project stakeholders are heavily involved with the fundraising for the project. I used previous fundraising documents and reports to complete this section.

I asked the participants if there were anything they would like to discuss that they believed would be beneficial in the completion of the study and the construction of the operations manual. The participants responded in the negative but expressed their willingness to engage as much as needed to complete the operations manual.

I used the information given to create an operations manual in word format for ease of edits. Word allows the document to be published in a collaboration platform and edited by the process owner. I presented the manual in word so it can be easily printed and stored digitally for revisions and edits as processes improve or become obsolete. The operations manual creates flexibility and ease of use for future revisions and is a living document..

Recommendations

The recommendation is to create an operations manual using organizational processes and living documents to identify, outline, document, and control changes in the organization’s operational processes. The manual outlines policy, operations, and standards used in the organization’s operational processes and assist in its succession planning.

Succession Planning

Succession planning is the strategy used by most, if not all, businesses to ensure the business continues to grow and be successful without interruption due to the departure of key members of the organization. The planning involves cross-training, skill, and knowledge development and can be long-term if found successful. (Kenton, 2022)

Organization leaders have the task of identifying key positions and tasks that must continue for the organization to continue to be successful. Apart from this, planning is to identify critical positions and forecast potential vacancies and replacements. (Washington, 2022)

Operations Manual

An operations manual is documentation that provides standards and guidelines on the day-to-day operations of a team, section, or organization. It guides members of the organization on performing a task or a combination of tasks and the associated factors to those tasks needed to continue with a successful outcome. (Law Insider, 2022)

P2 mentioned the desire to build an organization manual but knew that time and resources were unavailable and that operations do not stop long enough to chronicle and document procedures. The recommended implementation of the operations manual is not a quick and straightforward task. The operations manual should be treated as a living document to streamline processes, bring efficiency to a growing organization, and serve as a source of information for new members. The manual should be evaluated after implementation to verify its effectiveness in the organization’s succession planning and operational execution.

Strength and Limitations

The strength is using critical members of the organization that have been in the organization for multiple builds or several years. Experienced members provide a well-rounded look at the organization and its processes. The weakness was using members of the organization who had unwritten institutional knowledge. Without documented operational data, the participants recognized the potential break down their operational succession planning.

I recommend future studies address similar projects using similar methods. Future researchers should look to all staff directors and senior leaders of the organization. The additional member participation would thoroughly examine how the organization operates, evaluating their processes and where each process may overlap.

Section 5: Dissemination Plan

I will disseminate the summary and recommendations of my findings to the NPO in the way of an executive summary. I will give a brief overview of the practical problem, a recommended solution, and the operational benefits of the recommended solution. In addition to the white paper, I will provide, at the minimum, a draft operation manual that the organization can use to structure their organizational manual and possible use in their succession planning.

The white paper and study outcome should also be disseminated to a broader audience who may be experiencing similar gaps in knowledge or difficulty planning for succession and may want to look at streamlining their organization's operational processes. Items specific to the NPO will remain confidential to the NPO. The lessons learned and the outcome can be prepared so CEOs, COOs, division heads, team leads, and operation cells can use them to build or amend their operations manual and encompass their documentation used in succession planning. These documents can be prepared and shared through published documentation, organizational leadership development sessions, and collaborative tools to gather multiple members' input and control the document's versioning.

Summary

This qualitative study aimed to create an operation manual for the NPO's operations in designing, developing, and replicating a playground program for children with special needs worldwide. The study included the views and experiences of two participants with a minimum of 20 years in the organization. In the study, the organization leadership indicated that an operations manual would benefit the organization in both program development and succession planning. A manual captures operational tasks within the organization's leadership structure, aids in onboarding new or promoted individuals, and provides a documented knowledge base on how the organization conducts business. A successful operations manual is fluid and adjusts as processes are outdated. An organization with an operation manual can create a solid base for succession planning, minimize training time, and leverage organizational resources to support organizational growth. Thus, a manual can contribute to the organization's ability to maximize the design, development, and implementation of a play program for children with special needs worldwide.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Introduction and Overview

1. Do you consent to be recorded in this session?
2. Please state your name and position for the record.
3. How long have you been with the organization?
4. What is your role in the organization?
5. How long have you been in this role?
6. What are your duties for the organization?
7. What part do you play in building an inclusive play area?
8. What defines an inclusive play area?
9. How do you define inclusive?
10. How long does a typical build take?
11. Whom do these areas help?
12. What disabilities do they accommodate?
13. Do you build play areas specifically for vision or mobility impairment?
14. How does the organization decide the accommodations of the play area?
15. What is the core structure of building an inclusive play area?
16. What items are shared across builds?
17. What processes are standard across builds?
18. How is the process started?
19. What drives the build timeline?
20. How many site visits are conducted throughout the project?
21. Who is involved with the process?

Administration

22. What documents are needed for the build?
23. Are they the same documents for all builds?
24. In what cases do the documents change?
25. Are there MOAs or MOUs for every build?
26. Who handles the client administration and paperwork for the build?
27. Who handles the organizational administration and paperwork for the build?

Staffing

28. What is the deciding factor of members per project?
29. How many members are on the initial site survey team?
30. Are these the same members for each site survey?

31. What members are essential to the site survey team?
32. Are the members for an international site survey the same as those for a CONUS build?
33. Is the site survey team the same members on the ground throughout the competition of the process?
34. How many staff members are involved with the builds?
35. What drives the size of the teams?
36. Are there defined sizes to team requirements?
37. How is the workforce for the build selected?

Budget

38. What is the process of establishing a project budget?
39. What are the types of ways used to fund the projects?
40. What is the process for fundraising?
41. Who is involved in fundraising?
42. Who are the fundraiser counterparts?
43. Do the fundraiser and community engagement teams cross?

Coordinating Instructions

44. Who coordinates travel for the initial site survey?
45. Is this the same person who will arrange travel for future trips?
46. Who coordinates lodging for the survey team?
47. Is this the same person who will arrange lodging for future trips?
48. What is the process for per diem for the members?
49. If needed, who handles the need for travel documents? (ex. visas)
50. How often are they needed?
51. What is the process to obtain them?
52. Who coordinates country clearances and other documents needed for international travel?
53. If required, who handles the medical screening for the team?
54. Is this on an individual basis?

Host Nation/State Support

55. What is the reception and integration process when working in foreign nations?
56. How many members interact with the host nation/state for support?
57. Do the number vary by nation or state?
58. If so, how do they vary?
59. What are the critical state holders from the host nation/state?
60. Are they the same in every location?

61. Do these stakeholders change by location?
62. If so, how are the stakeholders identified?

External Contractors

63. How do you select what contractors to use?
64. Is the selection process the same for every project?
65. Does the organization have a set list of contractors to use?
66. Do these contractors vary when operating internationally?
67. How are international contractors selected?
68. Is the selection process the same per international location?
69. If not, what are the determining factors for selection?
70. What are the significant contractors used during the process?
71. Are they the same contractors for all projects?

Service Support

72. Who provides system support for the builds?
73. Who provides service support (i.e., water, food power)?
74. How are these support measures sourced?
75. Is there a preferred service contractor for national builds?
76. What is the process for support selection internationally?
77. Is this process the same for all international builds?
78. If not, what are the differences in the selection process?

Equipment Procurement and Staging

79. How is it identified what material is needed for the build?
80. How is the decision made for material sourcing?
81. Where does the funding come from for the build and purchase?
82. Is the material sourced for the entire build at once?
83. Is the material staged on-site?
84. How is the material safeguarded at the sites?
85. How are the teams safeguarded at the sites?
86. Are the security requirements the same for all projects?
87. How is the security sourced for the teams and sites?

Location

88. How do you select, finalize or confirm a location?
89. What is the required land size?

90. How do you get community buy-in on the project?
91. How is the workforce selected?
92. Is the workforce selected locally?
93. If so, what is the process of their selection?
94. Do you have someone who works with the community?
95. Do you have the same one on community engagements?
96. What is the process for obtaining building permits and zoning requirements?
97. Is this process the same regardless of location?
98. Do you have someone to work this process?
99. Are they on staff, and are they the same person every time?

Close Out

100. How do you feel a standards manual will affect the organization?
101. What processes not previously questioned that are replicated for multiple builds?
102. Would you like to identify a member of your team who can help add depth to this study?
103. Would you like to discuss anything not previously mentioned that could benefit the study?
104. Do you have any questions regarding the study?

Appendix B: Operations Manual

OPERATIONS MANUAL

Project or System Name

Organization Name

Month, Year

Revision Sheet

Release No.	Date	Revision Description
Rev. 0	5/30/00	Operations Manual Template and Checklist
Rev. 1	6/13/00	Additional text in subsection 3.2.x
Rev. 2	4/10/02	Conversion to WORD 2000 format

Operations Manual
Authorization Memorandum

I have carefully assessed the Operations Manual for the (System Name). This document has been completed in accordance with the requirements of the HUD System Development Methodology.

MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATION - Please check the appropriate statement.

______ The document is accepted.

______ The document is accepted pending the changes noted.

______ The document is not accepted.

We fully accept the changes as needed improvements and authorize initiation of work to proceed. Based on our authority and judgment, the continued operation of this system is authorized.

______________________________	____________________
NAME Project Leader	DATE
______________________________	____________________
NAME Operations Division Director	DATE
______________________________	____________________
NAME Program Area/Sponsor Representative	DATE
______________________________	____________________
NAME Program Area/Sponsor Director	DATE

OPERATIONS MANUAL

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